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wirklich unheimlich witzig.
Notes on the Uncanny, the Joke,
and a Real of History

I. Mostly Repetition

The »uncanny« has become familiar. 101 years since its inscription into the literature of psychoanalysis have come with such a plethora of citation, repetition, and reappraisal that at least for some scholars, writers, or psychoanalysts the most imposing fear in relation to *das Unheimliche* might be the fear of tedium. Always the same, it seems, is feared. Beneath the semblance of sameness, beneath the worries over the perennial, neither truly dreadful nor really exciting, the uncanny itself slips away. For it is »itself« where its best hiding place is to be found. It's where it isn't; repression by over-inscription; a cover of hyper-exposition via quotation. Bringing to the fore, time and again, the coming forth of the uncanny allowed what had become, with Lacan, the prime manifestation of the logic of anxiety and thus of affect in general to recede somewhere from where it could never have escaped. Thin air. As if an annoying pun repeated *ad nauseam*, not yielding any new combination of letters: *unheimlich* is a joke in reverse—or some other contortion.

What did become uncanny is *familionaire*. The prime example of psychoanalytic *Witz* logic—a joke made by a fictional character for Heinrich Heine given, to be commented on, by Kuno Fischer to be pulled out from him by Sigmund Freud and then expanded and at once condensed by Jacques Lacan, not to mention uncountable references to it (count this one in)—opening language to its own disappearance, *this* joke has received, and keeps receiving as if by metonymy, a historic blow the repercussions of which cannot leave its narration and formalization untouched and render uncanny their repetition. History has introduced into the joke and its self-mockery of Jewish stereotypes the anti-Semitic traits

in such a way that, with the fact, the memory, and the oblivion of destruction, laughter recedes into suffocation, the joke can't breathe. We are neither familiar nor unfamiliar with both the millions and the uncounted ones that perished by the hands of something and some ones that keep coming to light—of course that shouldn't have, but do we still dare to qualify them as »uncanny«? The object of Schelling's definition, appropriated by Freud—»*Unheimlich*« is the name for everything that ought to have remained ... secret and hidden but has come to light—has become widened to an extent that puts to test the word's plasticity. But more uncanny remains its enunciation.

Family and money don't seem uncanny to us, they rather serve us well as we keep domesticating the »uncanny,« and the joke that combines them—familiarily—in a social figure is both screen memory and part and parcel of history: the other uncanny of history, its senseless configuration of contingency, repetition, names, and marks. History's shit storm.

Funny to think of it: The idiomatic use of »*unheimlich*« in current German colloquial speech is hard to translate: often, it is used as an amplifying adverb, like »really« or »truly«, »*unheimlich gut*« being used in the sense of »really good«. An uncanny verbal vicissitude. And yet quite common. And a familiar breakdown of translation.

Let us pose that there is a strange chiasm of the joke and the uncanny, interrupted by history, everyday, inscribing itself as interruption. The joke as the most social and the uncanny as the most fictional and literary of the manifestations of the unconscious meet as life goes on and death doesn't stop, to interact with one another in ways both difficult to trace and too obvious to miss. Whereas the uncanny lays bare underneath and within affect the work of fiction as much as the joke exposes language to the possibility of a momentary annihilation of itself as well as of the social, their meeting and meshing sketches the uncertain figure of a manifestation the only dimension of which is what simply keeps happening—and a name of which might be »psychoanalysis«. Psychoanalysis as the *doppelgänger* of History. Uncanny, but not really, a joke, but not really, it doubles history with nothing much. With the worst. With the best. With the undoing of these

categories, in sweat, shiver, tears, laughter. Silence. Noise. Psychoanalysis—if it were not there nothing would change, being there it can change everything. Infinitely precarious, psychoanalysis is impossible. Not power, not science, not religion, not fiction, not anything—it should have stayed hidden. But it didn't. It doesn't.

A patient says: »*es war wirklich unheimlich witzig gestern Nacht* [it was really very funny last night].« Everything is there, in this string of words: the real, the uncanny, the joke, the past, the night. And yet, nothing is said. The work goes on. Work, *Arbeit*—this terrible word. Goes on, *weitergehen*, *weitermachen*—these terrible exhortations. All going on, working through repetition. »Really?« »Really very funny?«. »*Wirklich?*« »*Wirklich unheimlich witzig?*« Silence, a sudden laughter, tears. Session ends. Reminding of the difference, minimal and enormous, between going on and repeating, their finite doubling *ad infinitum*.

The real in the game of chiasm could be psychoanalysis: a schematism—of the fleeting speech taking shape—, a specific form—in the shape of appearances losing themselves in friction—, and some history—of frictions forming and falling apart as text. *That* psychoanalysis, Freud's, is volute. In it, history itself takes on a peculiar form, it inscribes itself as letters that repeat themselves, displace themselves, obliterate themselves, remember themselves, forgetting themselves in extroversion, sometimes in the shape of words.

The joke of the uncanny is cast in form, the schematics of its inscription outside. The uncanny of the joke is found—and finds you—in history, encounters with the lost, with the names that stopped speaking, the names that ceased being called, played with, kissed being said, the names that keep being shouted, the unsent letters received everywhere and nowhere.

II. Almost Doubling

With a patient, the same verbal battle after decades, inside of her, so much that she appears at times as nothing but the battlefield. I witness the same tedium of conditionals. »When I see a father picking up his daughter, treating her like a princess, I get enraged,