1. Introduction

1.1 Outline:

In this paper, I build on Mark Fisher's idea that eeriness is distinct from other modalities of strange experience such as uncanniness and weirdness (2017). His account is tentative, exploratory, and somewhat underdeveloped in the details. My aim is to provide an original analysis of the concept such that we can isolate a distinctive modality of strange experience, determine the sorts of phenomena which trigger such experiences, and explicate the phenomenological character of those experiences.

I propose that eeriness is a complex, phenomenological state in which the subject's "horizon of object-ivity"—the phenomenological frame through which subjects make sense of objects *as such,* and of themselves as a lived-bodily object *with* other objects—is disturbed. These disturbances are catalyzed by situations in which some object, or objects *come to loom out at us as oddly underdetermined in appearance.* Hence, there is an immediate rupture in our 'normal' phenomenology of objects: usually objects do not appear as individuals but holistically. That is they appear through their mutually constituting relations with other objects, immersed in a rich web of existential salience. I will draw upon Heidegger to think through this phenomenological rupture. Why this rupture occurs will be a complex function of experiential tensions within the situation the subject finds themselves; this will be discussed in due course. Nevertheless, and crucial to my account of the distinctiveness of eeriness, even as objects loom out at us, their *appearance* is characterized by *spatial, and/or temporal, under-determination*.

This rupture operates as a destabilization of the phenomenological frame of experience as such: the frame of appearances within which the subject's subject-object relations are coordinated. Hence, a state of eeriness experience *begins* with a rupture within appearances, characterized by some object's appearing to loom apart from its soundings, yet where that looming is characterized by spatiotemporal under-determination. Pursuing this thought by way of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, this under-determination comes to undermine the subject's sense of having a well-formed (spatio-temporal) grip on the object-world itself. Indeed, during states of eeriness, we experience a subtle, queasy suspension, or limbo, in which our very sense of the uniform determinateness of space and time, within which we and the objects about us are nested, trembles. Eeriness intimates the unliveable experience of not quite being situated in a determinate space and time. So, from a subjective point of view,

eerie experiences are *a state*: they are a period of time in which subjects find themselves in a *situation* of object-ive destabilisation.[1]

This will require unpacking, explaining, and justification. To help ground the idea, consider the following examples: the contours of a landscape smudged and obscured by mist might instigate a state of eeriness; occasions in which the sky and the sea appear the same colour, merging to present infinite grey formless voids on the horizon. In these cases, whatever else might be strange, the world appears somewhat de-formed in the sense of being 'not-quite-manifest', i.e., under-determined in appearance. This appearance of de-formation operates as a kind of sinkhole in the integrity of our object horizon, sending a disruptive reverberation through the subject's being-in-the world as an object with other objects.

1.2 Method:

I cannot prove the view outlined above. The proposal is speculative and will be convincing, I think, to the extent that it isolates a distinctive mode of experience, with its own phenomenological profile, and which resonates with the reader's own experience of the "eerie". Methodologically, I develop this viewpoint by reflecting on culturally recognized instances of "eeriness." Taking such experiences as exemplar material, I analyze those experiences for common features. In so doing, I have at least isolated a distinctive kind of experience: a disturbing experiential state in which the transparency of our everyday experience of objects as forming a seamless, relational web of objects, breaks down such that some object or objects appear(s) to loom out at us, but in a way that is (spatio-temporally) under-determined; this leads to a much more general disturbance in our experience of the (object) world around us, and our place within it. I propose labelling these states "eerie", because that seems to correlate well with our everyday eerie-talk. I accept that everyday use of the term "eerie" will likely extend beyond the use determined here. That said, to the extent that we can finesse our language of strangeness theoretically, insofar as it can be indexed to distinctive phenomenological states, I think the method of phenomenological analysis offered here is valuable.

2. *Distinguishing 'the strange': uncanniness, weirdness and eeriness.*

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[1] This paper provides an extension, and reformulation of an account of the eerie, I developed elsewhere with Jana Cattien (2022). I would like to thank her for initial collaboration, for encouraging me to continue working on the project, and for help formulating this paper. I would also like to thank the reviewers of this journal whose careful, and constructive feedback, have made for a much better paper.

Strange phenomena—e.g., uncanniness, creepiness, weirdness, and eeriness—are inherently elusive. The subtle disturbances and disorientations we experience when faced with 'the strange' are as compelling as they are slippery. When trying to articulate strange experiences, we feel this slipperiness in the strain on our theories, and on our concepts. Very often, perhaps as a descriptive short-cut, we are inclined to use these terms as synonyms. This is fair enough—especially in everyday talk.[2] As strange experiences are opaque to ourselves, it is unsurprising that this opacity should be reflected in a loose conceptual framework. Nevertheless, 'strange' phenomena have received analytic treatments. Perhaps the most famous are Freud's uncanny (2003), and, arguably, Kant's (1987) and Burke's (1998) accounts of the sublime. In each case there is some kind of phenomenological disturbance in the smooth-running of aesthetic experience[3] such that we might say: that's strange! Or: I feel strange; something odd just happened; my stomach just lurched. The specifics, at least in terms of eeriness, will be clarified and finessed in due course. But for now, let's treat as 'strange' a broad family of aesthetic experiences in which we feel somewhat 'odd'.

Recently, Windsor revisited Freud's seminal account of the uncanny, providing an updated view without its psychoanalytic accoutrements. Notably, when explicating uncanniness, he reached for the vocabulary of the strange mentioned above. Indeed, for him, uncanniness *is* "weird" and "eerie" (2019: 51). This may suggest, analytically, that these concepts are semantically and/or pragmatically tied to uncanniness, either in synonymity, adjectivally, or as a sub-set of kinds of uncanny experiences (Ibid: 52). It may also suggest that the affective and phenomenological dimensions of experience invoked by these concepts are identical. Or, if that is too strong, form a resembling set constituting something like an experiential kind. This is despite the fact that the phenomena which instigate experiences of the uncanny seem very different to each other (Ibid: 60-2).

While these considerations are not problematic in themselves, two immediate issues arise. Firstly, if we approach this proposition as a semantic and linguistic claim, how does it hold up when considering matters of translation and etymology, particularly given that Freud's original analysis was deeply rooted in language? Specifically, how do we best grasp the

[2] I will not deal directly with horror here. I am aware that eeriness may be subsumed under horror as either a kind of horror or a synonym. What I say here will resist this subsumption implicitly. It is worth noting that to the extent whilst the concept of eeriness has been deployed to explore horror (e.g., Carroll, 1990: 15; Classen, 2017: 92 & 349), an account of eeriness has not been offered in that context, or an analytic justification for that deployment.

[3] Here I do not mean "aesthetic" *qua* art, but "aesthetic" as it concerns the way the world appears to us.

seeming antonyms "heimlich" and "unheimlich," typically translated as "canny" and "uncanny," rather than their literal equivalents of "homely" and "unhomely"? “Canniness” has its origins in Scottish: ‘wise, cautious, judicious’; “uncanniness” in its original meaning concerned ‘mischievousness and maliciousness’. Clearly the translation decision is to emphasize the threatening character of *unheimlich* with the negative connotations of “uncanniness”. Of course, Freud goes on to explain that threat psychoanalytically. If Windsor wants to drop this psychoanalytic explanation, and opt for elaboration in terms of “eeriness” and “weirdness”, how does that resonate with Freud’s original analysis?

This is immediately problematic for “eeriness” as there is no direct semantic analogue in German. Its closest terms are probably: *spukhaft* which would probably be translated as “spooky”; and *gespenstisch*, which is ghostly or spectral—or just *unheimlich*. Crucially, “eeriness” is distinctive in English—a middle-English word—and is explicated by the OED in terms of fear: a gloominess, and a vague, superstitious uneasiness. As for the weird, the German is *seltsam* which Freud uses once to talk about an “odd”-looking table: *ein seltsam geformter Tisch mit holzgeschnitzten Krokodilen* (1919: 317). Again, this table is not taken to be uncanny by itself. Rather, the sense of things being *gespenstisch* in the house is what is taken to point *towards* the uncanny.

I do not think there is anything decisive here. However, I think it is worth noting that if one wants to run together “eeriness” with *unheimlich*, Freud does not even have semantic resources for keeping these distinct. Nevertheless, he does distinguish *unheimlich* from *spukhaft* explicitly in the essay, suggesting that spookiness does not really capture the precise problematic of the uncanniness of death even as they are often run together (Ibid: 315). And whilst he does make use of *Gespenst/gespenstisch*, it is to draw our attention to how what is *heimlich* (in the sense of *heimelig,* or homely) can become *unheimlich* precisely because *das Heim* is a place where ghosts are found (Ibid: 302).[4] However, again, this is not say that *das Unheimliche* may be understood *as gespentisch*, but that the ghostly is a step to rethinking homeliness. A final semantic reason to keep uncanniness and eeriness apart is that the connotational values of “eeriness” in its English origins does not seem to speak to notions of defamiliarization as much as fear associated with perceptual vagueness—and my account will directly speak to this specific idea.

[4] […] *die Bedeutung des Versteckten, Gefährlichen, die in der vorigen Nummer hervortritt, entwickelt sich noch weiter, so dass heimlich den Sinn empfängt, den sonst unheimlich (gebildet nach heimlich 3, b) sp. 874) hat […]”* (Ibid: 302)

Furthermore, if we are able to track distinctive experiences, this suggests that the sorts of moves found in Windsor's paper are too quick, and do not properly take account of the variegated richness of our phenomenology. Nevertheless, treatments such as Windsor's are common in the literature: "the strange" is often coordinated around uncanniness as a kind of master concept. Uncanniness is considered in very different ways, with different emphases, capturing an enormously heterogeneous array of object phenomena. For example, Royle's study returns to many of Freud's original triggers—doubles, corpses, being buried alive, *déjà vu*—extending the theoretical foundations of the uncanny to involve the ghostly, "the flickering sense of the supernatural"; it involves "uncertainty" and a "peculiar regarding [of] reality". He suggests that it is a "critical disturbance of the proper", and a "crisis of the natural", before coming to settle on something like Freud's original formulation: "a commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar" (2003: 1).[5] As much as Royle's analysis roves about its material, there is no one line of thought or application of the concept. Indeed, the uncanny has been purposed to a host of theoretical ends: exploring memory (Trigg, 2012: 33-8); angst (Ibid: 299-307; Heidegger, 1996: 176-8); psychosexual anxieties about gender (Creed, 2005: 25-6); Lacanian subject formation (Dolar, 1991: 13-15); architectural modernism (Vidler, 1994: 1-14); and tonal effects in composition (Cohn, 2004: 286-7).

The point of all this is just to gesture at the many different ways that uncanniness gets pulled—quite plausibly, I might add. After all, if Freud was basically right, that the uncanny is a slippage in the familiar homeliness of the world as the cradle of experience, openness and elasticity of the phenomenon is to be expected (2003: 132). Nevertheless, as uncanniness is stretched out over various dimensions of the human condition, strangeness gets more or less exhausted in analyses of uncanniness. It is then unsurprising that in all of these treatments, terms such as "eeriness" and "weirdness" are invoked as inflections, synonyms, or rhetorical shades of uncanniness.

The question is: granting such a broad conception of the uncanny, and all the possible directions this might take us, is there conceptual and phenomenological room for conceptualising eeriness and weirdness as modalities of the strange in their own right? Anticipating this question, Mark Fisher (2017) offered bespoke accounts of both.[6] Methodologically,

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[5] Windsor argues that we don t get a clear sense of necessary and sufficient conditions from this account (2019: 58). I am inclined to agree.

[6] Bearn has argued that eeriness is the *opposite* of uncanny, thereby distinguishing between the two: absence when there ought to be presence in the case of eeriness; presence where there ought to be absence in the case of uncanniness (1993:

Fisher begins with various kinds of cultural material (books, films, music, etc.), considers what is distinctive about our experiential responses to such material, or what kinds of experiences this material captures and represents, and what might be triggering these responses. He then mobilizes this material as a theoretical foundation for coordinating our vocabulary of the strange. Following Fisher, I think that by paying attention to our phenomenology, and the material that instigates certain experiences, I think we have good reason to think that there are strange experiences which are distinct from uncanniness, and which can be usefully analyzed in terms of 'weirdness' and 'eeriness'.

Fisher argues that weirdness is an event consisting in a conjunction of two or more individually non-weird phenomena which cannot be explained by normal means (2017: 15). So, in *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (Cohen and Cohen, 2000) George Clooney's character gazes, baffled, at a cow standing on a roof. There is no obvious reason for its being there, or how it might have arrived on the roof. If there was a crane next to the cow, we would have a clear abductive basis for inferring how, and why, it is on the roof. But the weird obtains when no such (ordinary) explanations are available, and yet the presentation of the event is 'as if were normal'.[7] Whatever is weird is not a defamiliarization of the content of experience, or even of its constituent parts, but an oddness borne out of whatever is strangely conjoined. As Hitchcock demonstrates in *The Birds* (1963): a single crow in a children's playground is ordinary, but hundreds of crows swarming the playground is decidedly weird. If it were just a chance event, this would not be weird. But the birds' behaviour counts as a strange, 'new normal. It is worth noting at this point that such an experience might *also* be uncanny. It may also be 'scary' because we know that the birds have become deadly. However, I think we must be careful not to assume an analytic and metaphysical reduction of weirdness into uncanniness due to weirdness and uncanniness often attending each other.

32-3). To exemplify this, he offers the image of a gym hall that *ought* to be full of the bustle and business of a gym, but is instead empty. He suggests this is eerie. I am not convinced by this distinction simply because it is not obvious to me that the defamiliarization which constitutes uncanniness must consist in presence rather than absence. Indeed, the example he offers, if not for his stipulative definitions, seems to me to be paradigmatically uncanny, and subtly weird granting Fisher's analysis. As he does not argue his case further, returning immediately to discussion of uncanniness—which is his primary interest in the paper—it is hard to pursue his position dialectically. Nevertheless, just to be clear about the differences between mine and his accounts: he takes eeriness to be normative; I do not. Where I speak of elusiveness, say, this is to do with the well-formedness of appearances as such; it is *regardless of whatever object it is*, and it does not involve the absence of objects insofar as that absence confounds *normative expectations*. Normative content is much more appropriate to uncanniness and weirdness--see below for more on weirdness.

[7] Thanks to David Faraci for pointing out that weird events must present as though 'normal', and so consistent with 'normal explanations' where no such explanations would help.

Following the analysis above, how might Fisher keep these two phenomena distinct even as they appear together? One way to maintain the distinction is between the uncanniness of *repetition* as such, on the one hand, and that it is a *repetition of crows* on the other. Repetition itself has often been noted to produce uncanny effects, and that repetition may also serve to defamiliarize what is repeated—the *appearance* of the crows in this case.[8] What is weird, however, is not simply the repetition, or even what appears in that repetition. Weirdness is normative: *crows* don't *normally do* that kind of thing. Something is happening that does not fit the normal pattern of things given whatever is involved in that happening. Hence the *abnormal* conjunction of *a hundred crows as normal* is weird. It is clear that weirdness points to limits in our knowledge and understanding; it is a situation in demand of an explanation that is not readily available. Indeed, standard explanations would suggest that the happening is highly unlikely, perhaps tending towards the impossible. The crows are behaving very weirdly, and that weirdness is made possible by a repetition which is uncanny in its own right. The scenario itself may be uncanny insofar as we find the world unhomely in that moment, gesturing towards the deeper existential reach of uncanniness that we find in Heidegger (1962: 176-177). However, if this is right, uncanniness and weirdness are not the same thing even as they correlate.

3. The Eerie

3.1 Gateways to the Eerie: object-ive ruptures in experience, and spatio-temporal indeterminacy

In Fisher's analysis of eeriness, he provides a number of different glosses of the notion, yet it remains enigmatic. Variously, the eerie is: "fundamentally tied up with questions of agency…What kind of agent is acting here? Is there an agent at all?" (Fisher, 2017: 11); "[involved with] questions to do with existence and non-existence" (Ibid: 12); and "between presence and absence" (Ibid: 61). Furthermore, the eerie "entails disengagement from our current attachments" (Ibid: 13). These are very different; it is unclear how all of this is to cohere as a theory of the eerie. There is some thematic resonance across these conceptual gestures, but no clear territory.

Fisher considers the following cliché: the "eerie" cry of some unknown creature in a forest at night (Ibid: 11). He considers that it might be eerie because we do not know what the

[8] See, for example, Windsor, 2019: 56, and Royle, 2003: 1-2 concerning repetition.

animal is. But it is clearly not right to say that something is eerie just in virtue of being unknown, otherwise we would be constantly assailed by the eerie—something he later notes (Ibid: 104). Maybe it is eerie because it is the cry of a dangerous animal. But this seems more frightening than eerie. Say we know what animal it is: the cry of a bird in a forest. We may not fear the bird, nor be in any doubt that it is bird that made the cry. And yet such epistemic clarity does not attenuate the eeriness: this strange cry is nevertheless somehow disturbing. There is something "eerie" in this situation, but what exactly?

To answer this, pre-theoretical phenomenology can provide detailed material for theory and analysis. It seems to me that what gives the goosebumps is something more specific about the experience: the sonic behaviour of the cry as it stands out from the seeming dead/dread silence of the forest. Indeed, I do not think we are talking about just any cry, in any forest. If I am standing next to a tree with a bird in it, and the bird makes a sound, I doubt there is likely to be anything eerie about this. I may not perceive exactly where it is, but I have a rough idea. Assume that it is a clear day, and I have a good view of my surroundings; regardless of wherever the bird cry is precisely situated, its rough situation appears consistent with the general soundscape within which I'm immersed. In such a situation, I may not even notice the cry. Eerie cries emerge under much more specific circumstances: it is night, I am in my tent, and I have a much-reduced frame of reference within which I can situate the world around me. Perhaps the forest is in a valley, and so sounds have a tendency to echo. In such a scenario, the bird cry echoes haphazardly, dislocated from a particular source. Moreover, against the relative silence, and the sense of the forest as a void beyond the sanctuary of my tent, the bird cry looms out at me. I try to determine its position, craning to follow it, but it is elusive and vague; it glides in a pool of reverberations about the forest, blooming strangely as it bounces through the valley.

In this way, the cry stands out to me, appearing oddly ambiguous: *strangely situated in time and space*. This speaks to Fisher's idea that the eerie involves a sense of absence and presence. Nevertheless, thinking about the ambiguity of presence in terms of *the appearance of objects in space and time* provides the basis for a much more precise account of the eerie. Furthermore, this formulation hones the idea of absence and presence as an issue of appearances as such. It concerns the fundamental aesthetic dimension of an object appearing as an object at all. The object, *whatever it is*, appears ill-situated in time and space. Absences and presences may also be weird and/or uncanny, but in those cases it will con-

cern normative tensions involving the normality or familiarity of those objects and their expected behaviours. Hence, there is already a categorical distinction in experiential kinds between eeriness on the one hand, and weirdness and uncanniness on the other.

Yet, there seems to be more to the eerie than just the strange way some object, or objects, *appear*. In such moments, we try to follow the sound, attempting to determine its location. But as its strange dislocation persists there is a much more general, subtle transformation of our experience, of *our situation* as such. The general sense of our environment as fixed and stable loosens somewhat. As the cry slips and slides about the environment, the forest and valley beyond my tent seems more fluid, ebbing and flowing with the sound of the cry. In such moments my sense of being-in-the-world is transformed; I feel somewhat tense, suspended, and without realizing it, I have been holding my breath.

Taking the above as material for theorizing, let us hypothesize that experiences of eeriness are *instigated* under complex experiential situations whereby object-appearances *loom* out of the environment, *appearing indeterminately situated either spatially and/or temporally*. This breaks the smooth, holistic transparency of everyday experience.[9] Before unpacking the details of the phenomenology involved here, instigation needs some attention; it suggests that eeriness has an internal structure. It is not a *simple moment*, exhausted in an instant, but a *complex* experiential state *that unfolds over time*. It *begins* with a breakdown in the everyday, resulting in the strange experience of a looming object which appears spatio/temporally indeterminate. However, as the strangeness of the eerie blossoms into something much more generalized, the analysis will have to theorize and track the complex phenomenological transformations which constitute eeriness, not just the beginning. In the next section, I want to theorize the main phase, as it were, of eeriness as a subtle, yet profound shift in our being-in-the-world in which the object-ive horizon of appearance takes on a generalized sense of indeterminacy.

For now, I want to consider indeterminacy as it obtains in the appearance of an object—the gateway to the eerie. The formal integrity of an object of experience, as a well-formed object at all, requires a determinate impression of its spatio-temporal location. Moreover, this determinate impression is usually a complex function of the integration of that object's appearance with other objects. Indeed, through this integration, as will be discussed in detail below,

[9] I am working with a conceptually thin notion of the term "object" operating in the work of Heil (2003: 172). Objects are bearers of properties. Hence, we might speak of a table as an object, or a sound as a (sonic) object.

well-formed objects of experience recede into a holistic, relational web of appearances. In this way, we do not normally attend to discrete objects, but are immersed in a world coordinated by complex lattices of existential salience, or meaningfulness. Indeed, as Heidegger argues, that *the way we are*, generally speaking, is immersed in a kind of "averageness" or "everydayness" (Heidegger, 1996: §§43–44). In this way, the ontic furniture of the world "never show themselves initially by themselves[…]; a totality of useful things is always already discovered before the individual useful thing." (Ibid: §68). As such, the gateway to the eerie, as an object, is therefore already a rupture in normal experience. Heidegger mobilizes the useful term 'obtrusiveness' [*Aufdringlichkeit*] to signify the way an object looms out in appearance as its existential opacity with other objects is shattered (Ibid: §73). As such eeriness arises during sensuous experiences in which objects come to *obtrude* from everyday, 'normal' experience, *appearing 'de-formed' in the process*.[10] Again, this is not 'de-formed' in terms of what sort of object it is, and what sort of normative expectations we might have about the shape of such objects, e.g. a wonky-looking apple. Rather, this is de-formation in the sense that *any object's form*, such that it is a well-formed object of experience, is a function of its spatio-temporal determination. Hence, eeriness might arise whenever the determinateness of an object in time and/or space appears ambiguous; when objects appear somehow neither quite (spatio-temporally) present, nor quite absent.

To understand this idea better, consider again the bird cry in terms of the appearance of its spatial locatedness. A valley forest makes for a particularly diffuse canvas off of which sounds may echo. The result is that reverberating echoes have a sonic tendency to fragment: *one* cry comes apart and seems to bounce around in *many* locations. The result is the appearance that one sound is in many different places; it does not have a clearly defined sense of spatial location despite the fact that objects qua objects (normally) appear determinately positioned in just one spatial location.

In addition to spatial indeterminacy, there is also a temporal ambiguity in the appearance of the bird cry. The echoes smear the sound in time, giving the impression that the same sound is intermittently present and absent. This repetition of the sound creates a sense of uncertainty about when it is occurring. Although echoes can be scientifically explained, the direct

[10] I suspect, given the parameters of object under-determination (space and time) visual and aural faculties are likely to be the only sense modalities through which we can experience eeriness—although I could be wrong, and I am not going to argue for this claim here.

experience of an echo is that it lacks a clear temporal location. The sound of a “hello” echoing down a tunnel is a gateway to eeriness.

There are other temporal effects to note here as well. A singular burst of sound has a temporal envelope which defines its structure over time: an attack, and decay; sometimes, a sustain, and release, which is then situated sonically by reverberations in its environment. However, its repetition alters its temporal structure as its sonic energy dissipates. Over time, an echo has less attack, a quicker decay, and its reverberations become ‘darker’ (less upper range frequencies). Hence its temporal imprint is changing over time, which adds to the experiential effect of its becoming less present. Again, there is a correlation between uncanniness and eeriness. There is a *repetition* of the sound such that the *familiarity of the original sound becomes defamiliarized* as it morphs over time. However, to emphasize, these characteristics are distinct from its seeming to appear in different places and at different times.

So, the gateway to eeriness is characterized by this indeterminacy in appearance of some object. However, as already implied, this is necessary, but not sufficient for eerie experiences to emerge; it provides the phenomenological character and blueprint for eeriness, but more is needed to instigate eeriness. As suggested above, what is also necessary is that this indeterminacy *stands out*, arresting our attention upon it. This is something about experience, not just the contents of experience. Following Heidegger, that the indeterminacy of some object’s appearance *obtrudes* will be a consequence of a complex of experiential factors. In the example above, the experiential context involves a bifurcated sensory field: I can hear beyond what I can see. Moreover, there is darkness; this not only reduces my ability to make things out, it also augurs all the semiotic and existential richness of horror. As such, I am ‘on my guard'. It is also night, so it is unusually quiet. All of these factors contribute to a heightened awareness of my surroundings. I am readied for an experience of eeriness. What is this readiness? On the one hand, I am avidly attending to what appears clearly: the rhythmic sound of my breathing; under my torchlight, there are the rich folds of colour of the tent offset against shadows. Yet when I hear the bird cry, it is spatio-temporally unclear; it appears phenomenologically *inconsistent* with the other contents of my experience. Indeed, due to its under-determined appearance as discussed above, the bird cry is not a properly integrated part of my experience. It obtrudes as a discrete, if ill-formed, sonic *object* apart from me and the rest of my field of experience. This inconsistency returns as a point of threat precisely because my desire for existential security involves the stability of experiential coherence.

Whilst these particular experiential conditions might be necessary for providing an experiential context within which I experience the *bird cry* as eerie, they are not thereby necessary features of eeriness as such. The point is that what is necessary, in addition to the indeterminacy of the appearance of an object, is a rich, complex *experiential context* which heightens my attention to the contents of appearance as contents, i.e., as discrete objects. In such a dissonant context, the bird cry, in its strange indeterminacy, suddenly *obtrudes*. Experientially, there is something happening here that is akin to Heidegger's well-known example of the hammer. Normally, whilst hammering, I do not pay attention to the hammer as a hammer-object in everyday experience. The hammer, as ready-to-hand, is an extension of myself and my practical activity; it recedes into the complex, relationality of object-ive experience of which I, as a body, am also a part (Heidegger, 1996: §§69 - 70). Indeed, it does not *appear* to me even as a distinct, *discrete object*. However, when I hit my thumb rather than the nail, the transparency of normal experience within which the hammer is submerged is ruptured. Suddenly the hammer is very much an alienated object, some-*thing* my hand is holding, and that has hurt me. Normal experience is fractured: it has lost its transparency; the embedded, cohesive relationality within which the contents of experience are normally integrated, is broken. It *obtrudes* in experience "as a hammer".

Likewise, in eerie experience the smooth running of experience is disturbed. But this disturbance results from a tension *between the contents of experience*, such that one appearance, as if by expulsion through its tension with the rest of the experiential context, looms out of its context as a somewhat alienated, discrete object. Such ruptures are commonplace, and not necessarily themselves eerie, even if they are necessary for under-determined appearances to have their eerie effects. Precisely because the particular contexts of eeriness will be contingent, I do not think that any specifics can be theorized in advance. However, reverse engineering the phenomenology, it is possible to say something like the following: it is necessary that the experiential context of the indeterminacy of the object's appearance (its gateway eeriness) is such that, in the moment, there is an unavoidable tension in the normal transparency of experience. It is in virtue of this experiential tension that some under-determination in an object's appearance stands out as such. In short, these two levels of necessity—tension between the contents of experience, and under-determination in some portion of appearances—are sufficient for instigating eeriness.

It is worth noting that glossing the sufficiency in a way that involves tensions *throughout* the contents of experience, involving not just appearances but also the rich existential and semiotic salience of those contents, will result in a much more historical and cultural inflection of the eerie. That which is eerie-inducing about some experience will not just be the function of a universal, transcendental phenomenology; rather, it will also involve the myriad ways in which we find the world around us existentially salient. As such, my account results in an eeriness that is responsive to socio-cultural, historical, and even political states of affairs. As Heidegger puts it, the handiness of everyday objects, and thereby also their obtrusion, is nested within the richer, existential context of the lived-world, or, in his terms, the *worldliness* [*Weltlichkeit*] of the world (Heidegger, 1996: 86).

This point speaks to Robert MacFarlane's interesting analysis of the peculiar aptness of the British landscape for producing eeriness. Firstly, my account speaks to and adds precision to his general idea that "eerie art deals often in glimpses, tremors and *forms of failed detection or observation* [italics added]" (MacFarlane, 2021: 9). He goes on to propose that the appearance of the British landscape as such is rendered under the genre and semiotic idiom of the 'pastoral'. The pastoral is precisely the cultural expression of the homeliness of the countryside (Ibid: 10). The traumatic defamiliarization of the countryside, returning it as uncanny, may arise due to its rupturing in appearance. Whilst he tends to run together modalities of strangeness, an analytic representation of his view seems something like the following: an uncanniness might arise from eeriness. This seems plausible. Yet what is particularly interesting about his treatment of eeriness is his claim that this kind of eeriness tends to arise in times of socio-political and economic crisis. That, in effect, such times ready the subject for experiences of eeriness, and that that cultural context will provide particular kinds of saliences which will then inflect culturally specific forms of eeriness (Ibid: 10). Indeed, I think it would be interesting to think through particular cases of eeriness precisely because it is in those details that rich, cultural specificity will likely emerge.

It is clear that any experience of the eerie is going to be particular in the details, even if a shared, formal profile can be provided. Working through such particularities, I think, nevertheless helps understand the scope of the formal analytic being provided. For example, the case above is an auditory gateway; now I want to consider a visual situation. On a soggy day in Edinburgh, whilst reading Fisher's book, I came across the castle—see Fig.1. It was

disappearing in the fog under low, grey light. Crucially, it was unclear where it met the ground, how far back it might extend, or where its walls/edges were. On the one hand this does suggest an epistemic dimension to eeriness: the lack of clarity amounts to some lack of knowledge. However, the fact that it is knowledge-involving does not entail that eeriness is essentially an epistemic phenomenon—as canvassed above, weirdness has a much better claim to being epistemic. What is important here is not that I am epistemically unclear about the boundaries of the object, but more fundamentally, that the castle *appears* unclear. Eeriness concerns mere *appearances* of objects, and how certain kinds of ambiguous appearances destabilize the world of appearances. The castle was manifest certainly, but the envelopments of mist spirited away a clear sense of its spatial extension. What was left was a soft smudge of a building, washed out colours, and an object that seemed slightly less than real. At this point, I'm at a liminal moment between a normal experience of objects, and a strange, eerie experience.

Fig. 1. Richard Stopford, *Edinburgh Castle in mist,*
Photograph.

The first thing to note when considering the strange indeterminacy of the castle as a gateway to a state of eeriness is that I did not feel frightened by this: I was not in any danger. Hence, fear is not essential to the experience of eeriness. Furthermore, the castle did not suddenly disappear in a fog that, as it were, "appeared from nowhere"; this would be *weird* and definitely very disconcerting. As with the crows in the example above, *I know that* fog "just doesn't do that"; it does not appear from nowhere. Indeed, if Lovecraft is paradigmatic of

weird fiction, he is the purveyor of a kind of existential dread in which things *are* not quite *as they ought to be*. In this way his imaginary worlds are weird and disconcerting whatever else they are. On that day in Edinburgh, there were (thankfully) no 'weird' meteorological events: fog comes in, the sky is grey and cloudy, colours are muted, and quite naturally, as it were, the spatial contours of the castle dissolve, pitch, shift and move. Plausibly, the scene is uncanny. I have seen the castle before, but as the familiar building begins to de-form before me, it becomes less familiar, the scene less homely. But the uncanniness in this situation depends on a prior familiarity with certain kinds of objects, as Trigg points out, and a history that I have with the place (2012: 1-3). The uncanniness is a suspension in my existential sense of being-at-home in the world.

Apart from its uncanniness, the scenario of the castle presents another peculiar aspect: it lacks a clear sense of spatiality. When I observe my feet and hands, they are clearly and distinctly perceived. However, as I shift my gaze towards the castle, this clarity and distinctness fade away. According to Trigg, one way to understand this strangeness, drawing from Merleau-Ponty's analysis of Cézanne, is that we become aware of the castle's sheer materiality, independent of its identity as a castle (2019: 88). This existential destabilization of the normativity of experience, which typically gives coherence and meaning to the material world, closely aligns with the specific strangeness I am discussing. However, I believe there is a strangeness that directly pertains to the objects in the scene, not only in terms of their materiality but also in their *distinctness*. The eeriness stems from the instability of objects in appearance, rather than the instability of normative schemata that categorize objects as certain types. In the spatial dimension, the castle's apparent form remains unclear or under-determined.

Does this mean that the specific identity of the object, such as being Edinburgh Castle, becomes irrelevant? I don't believe so. As discussed above, what is also crucial is the wider experiential context against which this under-determined appearance of the castle comes to obtrude. Again, not every kind of under-determination operates as a gateway to eeriness. A crucial part of the story is cultural. As with most castles, Edinburgh castle dominates its surroundings. The urban organization of Edinburgh is coordinated around the castle, and as such it commands our attention. Whilst the castle does not normally obtrude *as an object*, it stands out in its rich socio-cultural, historical and semiotic salience. Of course, nothing about this salience entails a rupture in normal experience: the castle *appears*, in relation to its

surroundings, perfectly normal. Nevertheless, this kind of rapt attention is a perfect phenomenological context for the eerie to emerge. As the city draws me to some part of itself, for that to sink away from me into the gloom, there is no escaping the allure of eeriness. Hence the rupture of eeriness involves a normative context, even if eeriness as such is not characteristically normative. During states of eeriness the castle stands out *as an object*, albeit one that appears brutely and strangely indeterminate in the wash of mist. It is precisely this interplay between our focused attention and the elusiveness of the appearance that compels us towards the eerie experience.

3.2 Eerie 'situations': object-ivity and phenomenological destabilizations in the horizon of appearances

The proposal thus far is that experiences of eeriness are characterized by the appearance of an object as spatio-temporally under-determined. Furthermore, the obtrusion of some object or objects' appearance(s) is/are already a function of the breakdown in our normal phenomenology. Following Heidegger, phenomenological salience does not operate quantitively over objects, as it were, but under the relationality of ready-to-handness, which is itself nested in the complex, existential context of our lived-word (Heidegger, 1996: 86). Objects *qua objects* are submerged in the relational horizon of object-ivity as such—this horizon will be discussed in depth below. The possibility, then, of that breakdown will itself be a complex function of the particulars of some experience inter-relating in such a way that some object's or objects' appearance(s) cease to fit seamlessly in the normal horizon of object-ive experience.

Nevertheless, more theory is needed. First, the notion of under-determination of appearances does not do enough to clarify the phenomenological character of eeriness. I will consider the 'hiddenness' of objects as another form of under-determination, demonstrating the difference between such cases and eerie ones—even assuming the conditions of an experiential context for eeriness are met. Crucially, however, this difference helps to establish eeriness proper—not merely gateways to it. Whilst we are drawn into the realm of eeriness by under-determinations in appearances obtruding from their experiential context, eeriness itself is characterized by two features. On the one hand eeriness is just the *persistence* of our attention on whatever 'gateway' appears under-determined. However, eeriness blooms into a fully-fledged phenomenological state when that localized under-determination comes

to infect, as it were, our sense of object-ive horizon of appearances as such. Indeed, I suggest, eeriness is not merely *the persistence of a local disturbance amongst appearances*, a disturbance which involves informal, socio-cultural context as well as being characteristically formal in terms of object appearance; rather, eeriness as such is *just formal* (spatio-temporal): it is a *destabilization of the horizon of object-ive experience within which we make phenomenal sense of objects at all*—including ourselves as an object with them. Indeed, in an eerie situation, ourselves and the world about us appear eerily *situated*. As such, eeriness involves a disturbance *within* the horizon of object-ivity, which comes to form a disturbance *of* the horizon of object-ivity as such.

To understand how local under-determinations of an object's appearance result in a destabilisation of object experience as such, I consider the phenomenology of "hiddenness." Objects are considered “hidden” in appearance when we cannot fully see or hear them. This is a form of under-determination. For example, visually, it means not being able to see what is behind an object while standing in front of it (assuming no mediating technology). The partial hiddenness of a sound is a bit more complex. It refers to the inability to hear all the ways a sonic object appears or sounds from various perceptual positions. These examples highlight the common observation that certain parts of objects remain "hidden" to us due to the inherent limitations of our subjective perspective.

Does this make the back of my cup a pathway to eeriness? I do not think so. I think that hiddenness may well be a source of strangeness, or horror: what is under the bed as a child plays on hiddenness in this way. Nevertheless, the under-determination I am drawing upon here is not functional of hiddenness. To see how, and to further focus on the phenomenological character of eeriness, I want to assume some standard Husserlian phenomenology. Husserl argues that perception is both relational and modal:

> The possible system of locations or system of orientations is of one type for each body, and, according to the various dimensions of the qualities having this peculiarity, every location of each body is thus comparable with every other one, and thereby each body is also situated and oriented in relation to all the others.
>
> (Husserl, 1997: 254)

The appearance of an object—as a discrete object at all—depends on its bearing a coherent (spatio-temporal) relationship in appearance to other objects. Indeed, we have already considered this idea in 3.1 when considering more broadly the experiential context out of which eeriness emerges. We can explicate that coherence subjunctively: I cannot see the back of

my computer right now; however, I could walk around my desk and look at the back of it. I do not do this precisely because I do not need to: the *actual appearance* of the computer already, in some sense, involves this *non-actualized possibility* in order that the computer appears to me as a well-formed object at all (Ibid: 44). Note that the non-actualized possibility of moving around to view the hidden part of the computer involves a coherent spatio-temporal *relationship* between my computer and *other objects*: the desk, and the rest of my office (Ibid: 180). Together they provide *a well-formed, phenomenological horizon of object-ivity* within which individual objects appear as perceptually intelligible objects (Ibid: 262).

The under-determination of objects in situations of eeriness concerns the *available, i.e. non-hidden,* form of objects. Whilst this clarification distinguishes the under-determination involved in eeriness from hiddenness, it does raise other problems: are all objects in semi-darkness always eerie? No: as we have seen in section 3.1, for the spatio-temporal under-determination of the available form of an object to instigate eeriness, it must be in tension with other appearances within this horizon of object-ivity. In the case of darkness, there is a *coherent* appearance of under-determination of the boundaries of objects. By contrast, there is a dissonance between the blurred appearances of the castle and its immediate surroundings, and the relative appearance of clarity of my immediate surroundings. And that this operates within a rich cultural context within which my attention is already fixed on the castle. Nevertherless, the photo shows the formal dissonance in spatial appearances between clarity of appearances in the foreground, and indistinctness of the castle in the mid-distance.

There is a complex effect happening here that extends how spatio-temporal under-determination is operating. Indeed, whilst eerie experiences are instigated by these gateway phenomena, and which are the continued focus of attention, the horizon of object-ivity within which objects are being experienced comes under pressure. The castle and its immediate surroundings seem to meld. But this only counts for some portion, as it were, of my visual field; other parts involve proximate objects that are completely distinct. As such, the under-determination at hand involves *a formal, spatial tension* within my complete visual field between determination and under-determination. That is not to say that objects in the distance or periphery also instigate eeriness. The indistinctness of the contents of experience as a function of distance or peripheral vision, say, are normal functions of the relationality and modality of perceptual experience (Ibid: 193).

There is no inherent sense of perceptual discord simply from observing objects at a distance or in our peripheral vision. When an object appears to us from far away, its ambiguous form, boundaries, extension, and location are consistent with other objects at a distance, as well as with nearby objects that are visually distinct. Formally, eeriness revolves around the juxtaposition of perceptually distinct and indistinct objects in close proximity. Thus, eeriness disrupts the usual perceptual structure of object-ive appearances. I am aware that the indistinct appearance is caused by the fog and lighting conditions. Moreover, my knowledge about the object's form is limited due to this under-determination. However, as discussed earlier, eeriness is concerned with how objects appear to me, rather than the knowledge I have about what appears, how it appears, and why. As we will see in the next section, the affective dimension of eeriness is grounded in how appearances make me feel, and not whatever I know in virtue of those appearances.

Indeed, this tension between determination and under-determination takes us to the heart of the eerie. What appears under-determined puts phenomenological pressure on that which appears distinct—after all what is distinct still bears some spatio-temporal relationship to what is indistinct. So, it is not simply that there are under-determined 'portions' of appearances which obtrude in normal experience. The strangeness of the under-determined appearances mediates *the determinateness* of what clearly appears. Indeed, it seems possible that if enough is under-determined in this way, then perceptual clarity itself may be disrupted as the 'normal' mode of experience. Eeriness, as a situation affecting how the object world appears to us, is a profound disturbance in the coherence of the horizon of object-ivity within which objects are nested as objects at all. The focus of an eerie experience might be a castle, or a bird cry. However, in finessing the distinctiveness of the phenomenology, eeriness is *a tension in the coherent (spatio-temporal) horizon of object-ivity within which objects appear as well-formed objects at all.*[11] It is a situation in which nothing appears quite right, where that 'not-quite-rightness' is a function of the pressure exerted on the coherence of object-ivity due to some object(s) appearing strangely under-determined.

[11] There are two other ways that I can think of in which objects may appear under-determined: impossible objects and vagueness. I have not spent time on these here as clarifying the difference between such cases and eerie under-determination does not further the analysis of eeriness. Nevertheless, an impossible object such as the Penrose triangle/tribar is *indeterminate between determinate* Euclidean coordinates in 3D space. This is a weird under-determination rather than the eerie kind canvased here. As for "vague" objects, where vagueness is ontological rather than phenomenological—e.g., the vague boundaries of clouds?—this vagueness is not decisive their being eerie. Whatever the ontological under-determination in the extension of a cloud, this need not *appear* under-determined relative to the rest of the objects in one's field of vision, say. And so need not be eerie. Clouds are likely to contribute to eerie effects only insofar as they disrupt the relational boundaries of objects; this has nothing to do with them *being* "vague", but rather that they contribute to the appearances of under-determination in the manner proposed.

3.3 Eerie states: eerie situations and their affects

In 3.1, I have focused the analysis on the under-determination of objects in appearance, and the experiential context of that under-determination. This provided an account of the gateways or catalysts of eeriness. In 3.2, I clarified this under-determination, suggesting that eeriness is a 'situation' which involves a strange tension in object experience as such, destabilising how the object world appears to us. In this section, I want to complete my analysis of the phenomenology of eeriness by exploring how states of eeriness consist in being in an eerie situation which has a distinctive affective profile.

Reflecting on the phenomenological analysis generated so far, squaring that with my own experiences of eeriness, I suggest that states of the eerie are affectively complex and peculiarly conflicted. On the one hand, such states involve a strange, suspended curiosity towards those objects which remain under-determined in experience, i.e, those objects which drew us into eeriness in the first place. In that sense, eeriness is a way that we are lured back towards the world, even as it recedes from us in under-determination. On the other hand, states of eeriness endure to the extent that strange under-determination of appearances persist; this imbues appearances with a generalized sense of instability. Moreover, insofar as the frame of object-ivity within which objects as such are presented involves ourselves as an entity within the object field, the tension in under-determination and determination implicates our own sense of being. In this way, the eerie is a form of unhomeliness in the world: the phenomenological character of that existential dis-ease is one of being adrift, a kind of loss of object-ive grounding. The overall affective structure of eeriness is a complex kind of existential queasiness as we are both drawn towards the world and simultaneously destabilized by it.

First, I want to explore the affective character of experiencing these gateways to eeriness. When reflecting on my own experiences of eeriness, it is not quite clear to me what I feel—indeed, there is a kind of affective ambiguity. Taking the example of the castle above as exemplar: I wasn't scared; I didn't get goosebumps; or, feel repulsed. Whilst it didn't make me feel "good", it wasn't straightforwardly negative either. I would be more inclined to say that it was *intriguing*: I was intrigued by the appearance of the castle. There was something about the castle that was compelling in a subtle, yet slightly strange, way.

Reflecting back on what has been said so far, a somewhat ambiguous emotional response seems apt. We definitely feel something towards eerily obtruding objects, but plausibly the affect is inflected by the indeterminacy that instigates it. The ambiguity of the appearance piques our attention, most likely as we are inclined to try to grip that in appearance which seems to be slipping away from us. Indeed, when we hear the bird cry, or see the trees shifting in the mist, we "lean in", as it were. As some object appear to both loom and recede in appearance from our experiential grasp, we are intrigued by it. In this light, I am not sure the affective response is so focused, simple, or as strong as: I feel x about *y*. Rather, given the sense of intrigue—drama, even—instigated by the unusual appearance of such looming objects, we feel a subtle kind of excitement, or arousal of our attention. However, this need not give rise to feelings grounded in our knowledge *about the object*—even a negative one. To see the distinction here: eeriness involves an intrigue concerning *this (object's) appearance;* uncanniness is a foreboding sense of the strangeness of *this doll.* In other words, the affective response in the case of eeriness is purely aesthetic, concerning appearances, and not epistemic as in the case of uncanniness—defamiliarization being an epistemic state of affairs.

Whilst I have maintained that eeriness is not essentially epistemic, it might be thought that this notion of curiosity brings eeriness into the realm of epistemology: we are excited *to know* the object better/or, again. I do not think this is right, and to see why we need more phenomenology. Eeriness involves an inhabited, tactile, *bodily curiosity*, functional of our body's relationship to those objects that appear under-determined. In a sense, what we feel is the sense of our bodies being set in motion towards certain objects as an object. Again, as discussed in 3.1, this emergence of the object qua object in appearance is already abnormal. In other words, our relationship to the object-world is not normally configured in terms of objects, as if we are a member of a set of objects. Regardless, in the case of the eerie, the aim of this motion is to recuperate the availability, as it were, of the object in appearance for our own sense of bodily stability.[12] It is an attempt to reach out and assimilate the obtruding presence back into the transparency of normal object-ive experience. So, the affect is complex: eeriness involves a strange, affective suspension or limbo as we attempt to recuperate in appearance the object in order to restabilize the horizon of object-ivity.

[12] Indeed, this idea is in line with Merleau-Ponty's idea, which I will be discussing shortly, that we aim at a "best grip" on the world (Carman, 2008: 109; Merleau-Ponty, 2013: 289-90)

Merleau-Ponty argues that our *lived-body* is the key to understanding both subjectivity and objectivity—as these are existentially and phenomenologically paired. Indeed, I think this idea of the body, and its relationship to the objects about it, is very useful for understanding the affective and phenomenological dimensions of the eerie. Consider the following:

> The relations between things or aspects of things having always our body as their vehicle, the whole of nature is the setting of our own life, or our interlocutor in a sort of dialogue. […] To this extent, every perception is a communication or a communion, the taking up or completion by us of some extraneous intention or, on the other hand, the complete expression outside ourselves of our perceptual powers and a coition, so to speak, of our body with things.
>
> (Merleau-Ponty, 2013: 373)

The rhetoric of 'dialogue' and 'communion', even coition, is an effort by Merleau-Ponty to emphasize the intimacy of the relationship between ourselves, as bodily entities in the world, and the object-world around us. Objects' identities already presuppose our own just as the identity of our own body bears an intimate relationship with them. Indeed, his phenomenology revolves around the idea that our lived-body is the condition upon which object-ive reality is itself experienced as coherent and systematic. In other words, the experience of our own bodily coherence, and the affordances of that lived body for engaging with the world, is the condition of what we call (object-ive) reality (Ibid: 349).

When I sit at a table, I experience the table as a coherent, intelligible, consistent totality—the sort of qualities I might expect of an object that is part of the object-ive world. The table manifests such that its spatial and temporal behaviour is consistent with the smooth seamlessness of my own spatio-temporal locatedness; it is thereby also consistent with other objects with which it shares its spatio-temporal relations. This coherency as an object is a function of my bodily experience of it; its object-ivity is a function of how objects behave *with* my body: "The synthesis of the object is here effected, then, through the synthesis of one's own body, it is the reply or correlative to it." (238) Such that: "In so far […] as I know the relation of appearances to the kinaesthetic situation, this is not in virtue of any law or in terms of any formula, but *to the extent that I have a body, and that through that body I am at grips with the world*." (352 - 3; italics added).

This grip is not merely a consequence of material extension in spatial terms but also in temporal terms. In other words, location, which is both the nest and the complex of relations

which situate an object as a discrete entity and its relationship to other entities, is *in time*. Following the trajectory of Merleau-Ponty's analysis of objectivity as a function of our own lived bodies, time also takes our own lived body as its medium of coherence and intelligibility.

> It is in my 'field of presence' in the widest sense—this moment that I spend working, with, behind it, the horizon of the day that has elapsed, and, in front of it, the evening and night—that I make contact with time, and learn to know its course. The remote past has also its temporal order, and its position in time in relation to my present, but it has these in so far as it has been present itself, that it has been 'in its time' traversed by my life, and carried forward to this moment. When I call up a remote past, I reopen time, and carry myself back to a moment in which it still had before it a future horizon now closed, and a horizon of the immediate past which is today remote. Everything, therefore, causes me to revert to the field of presence as the primary experience in which time and its dimensions make their appearance unalloyed, with no intervening distance and with absolute self-evidence.
>
> (Ibid: 483)

What it is for objects to be temporally located—that is, to be in time—is to be situated according to the horizon of intelligibility charted by the temporality of our own bodily practices. So, to be an object is to be extended in space and time in such a way as to appear existentially legible according to our lived body's own spatio-temporal coherence. What is crucial, therefore, in this picture of perception, and its existential richness, is this intimate spatio-temporal relationship between the body and the objects of perception. And that we make sense of objects, always and already, through our experience of our own bodies. Moreover, because of this intimacy, the sense and integrity of our own bodies is borne through our experience of objects.

Bringing together the eerie as discussed above with this phenomenological and existential account of the (lived) body, we can much better understand the idea of bodily curiosity. If an object's extensional integrity is secured not merely by a 'looking on', but by a co-constituting relationship between our own bodies and the bodies of objects as we experience them, then it makes phenomenological sense that a recession of objects in appearance during eeriness will instigate some sense of change in our own lived-bodily experience. It also seems plausible to me that some of that change could be understood as a kind of bodily curiosity insofar

as our bodies reach out, as it were, to eerie objects in order to recuperate what is lost in appearance. If experience is a kind of embrace between our bodies with objects, eeriness is both the loss of that embrace, and the desire to recuperate that relationship through bodily curiosity.

This idea may be pushed much further, however. As discussed above, eeriness, instigated by the destabilization of objects in appearance, involves *a destabilization of the horizon of object-ivity as such*. If it really is the case that the significance, intelligibility, and coherence of objects is a function of the coherence of our own subjectivity as it underwrites perception, a perceptual experience of an object that elides the logic of a stable object-ive reality must implicate the stability of our own (bodily) subjectivity. To the extent that the eerie is a suspension of the well-formed logic of a subject-correlated reality, it would make sense that this slippage is affectively experienced by the subject as also a creep in its own bodily stability and its sense of being-in-the world.[13]

As such, it seems that eeriness involves a shift from a transparent, "normal" way of being and seeing, to a form of existential mood, characterized by the various phenomenological affects characterized above. A mood is a way to think of the experiential frame, as it were, of how the world appears to us as a condition of it appearing any particular way at all.[14] Hence, it seems a very useful way to think about eeriness. As I have explored at length above, the (spatio-temporal) de-formation of objects in eerie experiences produces a destabilization in the general conditions of possibility for the coherent presentation of objects in experience. In this way, eeriness infects, as it were, experience itself with a generalized sense of destabilization. Once we experience a gateway to eeriness, we feel curious about it on the one hand, but it also sends a destabilizing reverberation all the way through to our experience of objects as such. *We* are destabilized. As such, I think the mood of eeriness is a general sense of queasiness: something like a generalization of the bodily dis-ease we experience when sitting on a rocking boat. I think this may be extremely subtle depending on how we got to the mood, or it might be seismic. But, subtle or strong, eeriness is a shaking of our being-in-the-world. It is worth noting that a kind of recoiling from the world is often thought to attend a loss of existential homeliness. This recoil is a standard of angst, for

[13] If in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology objects are correlated to subjects, the rupture in this correlation instigated by the eerie is also an intervention into any phenomenology that depends on that correlation. Here I think there is fruitful work to be done in thinking through the eerie for theories of anti-correlationism (Morton, 2013: 60; Meillassoux, 2008: 7 &128), and for Adorno's shudder of the non-identical (2002: 245-6 & 269)

[14] See Heidegger, 1996: §§134-39 & Ratcliffe, 2009: 354-5, for more on moods [*Stimmung*].

example.[15] However, I have suggested that eeriness is characterized by a leaning into the object world. Even as under-determinations in the horizon of object-ivity within which appearances manifest disrupt our sense of homeliness, eeriness throws us towards the source of our lost homeliness, rather than away from it. In that sense, whilst eeriness is certainly queasy, it is not straightforwardly negative either. It is a kind of gentle, irresistible rapture, as we glimpse the object-world coming apart before us.

6. Conclusions

Through considering example experiences and their triggers, which we tend to call eerie, I have provided an account of eeriness. I have suggested we treat it as a disturbance in the structures of perceptual experience, instigated by objects which appear as spatio-temporally under-determined relative to other objects. Furthermore, this looming is a functional effect of a rupture in everyday experience in which our attention is drawn to these under-determined objects due to an experiential dissonance between them and the rest of the field of appearances. In terms of taxonomy, I have treated it as a kind of strange aesthetic and phenomenological state. I have argued that it is distinct from other modalities of the strange—weirdness and uncanniness. Nevertheless, such differing modalities often obtain simultaneously, no doubt inflecting the complex qualities of strange experiences. I have further suggested that eeriness instigates a sense of destabilization in the subject attended by a sense of subtle queasiness.

I definitely want to suggest that there is a distinctive modality of (strange) experience being emphasized here. Furthermore, given the phenomenological qualities of candidate experiences of eeriness, their experiential triggers, pre-theoretical intuitions about eeriness, and our everyday use of the term, it seems pragmatic to think that this distinctively strange experience being identified is eeriness. Crucially, I think that this clarity delineates a concept which can then be mobilized in the rich socio-political analyses of eeriness of the kind we find in MacFarlane's work. Indeed, if eeriness is a distinctive kind of crisis of being-in-the-world, it would be interesting to situate such crises in cultural situations, and their inflections in our art-making practices. For example, how do we understand the differences between the British eerie as discussed by MacFarlane, and the ravaged, monolithic eeriness of Polish artist, Zdzisław Beksiński?[16] Indeed, eeriness might prove to be an important resource for thinking through the particularity of cultural crises—crises in which the very possibility and

[15] See Withy, 2015: 52; Heidegger, 1996: §§184-192.

[16] See Cattien and Stopford (2022) for an extended treatment of one of Beksiński's painting.

coherence of our spatio-temporal being-in-the-world comes under pressure from socio-political conflict.

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