

Annotated Bibliography

Books:

- Julia Kristeva - Powers of horror: An Essay on Abjection
- Sigmund Freud - The Uncanny
- Mark Fisher - The Weird and the Eerie

Documentary:

- Steven Cantor - What Remains: The Life and Work of Sally Mann

Kristeva, J., 1982. *Powers of horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Translated by L.S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press.

In *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva introduces the concept of abjection. The abject can be defined as experiencing a feeling of fear, horror or disgust (physical) caused by something threatening our sense of self or societal norm. The abject does not respect borders, rules or positions – it jeopardises our understanding of reality, it lives in the liminal space. Examples include bodily fluids, rotten food, corpses, decay and other forms of physical or symbolic impurity. These phenomena are able to provoke reactions of disgust, horror or even fascination because they shed light on the uncomfortable fragility of humanity and our social structures. Kristeva stresses that the abject is not just an object, but a lived, physical or emotional sensation that confronts the humanity with our own weaknesses and mortality. I will explore Kristeva's analysis through the lens of two other concepts, Ontology and Phenomenology. Ontology, provides the solid investigation into what is real, whereas Phenomenology, focuses on body based reactions to our reality as individuals.

Kristeva also discusses the role of abjection in literature, art, and culture revealing how authors and artists illicit feelings of horror and discomfort to explore the instability of identity and life's meaning. By examining the intense and affective intricacies of disgust, her work allows for an understanding into how humans fight the tension between attraction and repulsion or the self and other.

Freud, S., 1919. *The Uncanny*. Translated by A. Strachey. London: Hogarth Press.

Freud dissects the psychological phenomenon of the uncanny (unheimlich), which is defined as the eerie feeling which occurs when something familiar becomes oddly or uncomfortably alien. He explains that the uncanny derives from the return of repressed thoughts and unconscious feelings or desires from childhood, particularly fears related to death, gendered psychosexuality and narcissism. Freud relates this concept to a range of literary examples such as E.T.A. Hoffmann's "*The Sandman*". Freud investigates how themes like doubles, reflections (mirrors), repetition and animation of the inanimate (dolls, mannequins) evoke unsettling sensations or physical reactions. The essay solidifies the uncanny as both a psychological experience and an aesthetic category, greatly influencing Gothic literature, contemporary art, and theories of horror in film and interactive games - especially those that fall into the "uncanny valley". Freud's analysis remains key for understanding how suppressed desires and repressed memories will resurface to disturb our conscious experience.

This concept coincides with Kristeva's analysis on abjection - though they are often confused with one another they are not the same. Abjection can arise through something being uncanny e.g viewing a corpse (the body of someone/thing familiar) breaks down borders and evokes fear through it's uncanniness.

Fisher, M., 2016. *The Weird and The Eerie*. London: Repeater Books.

Within this book, Mark Fisher investigates two ways that culture and art can unsettle or disturb our reality. He describes 'The Weird' as what doesn't belong, something alien or exists outside of our comprehension. In particular, Fisher uses the example of H.P Lovecraft's cosmic horror writing, *Call of Cthulhu* in which unfathomably large, hideous creatures whose very existence, breaks the minds of those who observe them. Or the surreal, dreamlike work of David Lynch who expertly merges slightly uncanny normalcy with in your face, mind bending strangeness. 'The Weird' is shocking, whereas 'The Eerie' derives from haunting absence or strange presence, it's an unease that suggests hidden forces are at play. Andrei Tarkovsky's, *Stalker* is discussed as reference, it emphasises mystery and silence to make reality feel off. Though Fisher uses these concepts for cultural criticism of capitalism, I will focus on how Fisher's general analysis links with my

research into ontology and phenomenology. The Weird and the Eerie but emphasis on physical and emotional awareness by revealing breaks in reality, moments when the ordinary feels strange or distant. Fisher also discusses the link with sound, and how haunting music arrangements or vocals can elicit physical sensations (goosebumps) or indescribable, consuming emotion. Therefore, as part of my essay I will use this book to deconstruct how art can challenge normality and evoke feeling.

Cantor, S., 2005. *What remains: The Life and Work of Sally Mann*. [Film] USA: HBO Documentary Films.

This documentary is an intimate portrait of American photographer, Sally Mann. Cantor shows the evolution of her work from the provocative portraits of her young children and to her 2003 series *What Remains* in which Mann was given access to a forensic facility, where bodies were exposed to nature then observed to better understand decay. The documentary is primarily filmed on her farm in Virginia, showing how her environment affects her process. Mann uses a selection of antique, large format cameras and dark room equipment to create collodion wet plates (glass). Her goal with the wet plate negatives is to allow imperfection to take over and create something beautiful. Within the film Mann, is very reflective on the ethical, emotional and philosophical aspects of her work. During the capturing of the *What Remains* series, graphic images of real decomposed bodies are shown, mostly in silence, allowing the weight of this project to show decay as something contemplative rather than grotesque. I am interested in how this documentary visualises Kristeva's theory of the corpse as the ultimate form of abjection, contrasting with Mann's reaction to said corpses, and passive attitude toward her own coming death . I am drawn to how Mann's fascination with decay becomes a way of accepting mortality, turning what is often feared into something poetic as well as often abject. I will use this documentary to connect with my own practice, particularly in how it explores the relationship between fascination, grief, nature and the acceptance of death, and how that feels.