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The Visual, the Invisible and Blindness: The Uncanny in Self-landscape Relations

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Karis Jade Petty is a Lecturer of Social Anthropology at the University of Sussex, UK. She has conducted ethnographic research examining the sensory experiences of the English countryside amongst walkers who have impaired vision over the last decade. Petty's work examines themes including perception, landscape, walking, the more-than-human, the senses, the body, and the imagination. She is currently writing her first monograph based on this ethnographic research.

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The Visual, the Invisible and Blindness: The Uncanny in Self-landscape Relations

This article examines experiences of the uncanny within woodlands of Southern England amongst walkers who have impaired vision. It proposes that uncanny experiences disrupt assumptions that humans actively perceive a passive landscape by approaching the landscape as an actant provoking uncanny experiences that shift senses of self-landscape relations. Optical tropes have pervaded notions of both the uncanny and conceptualisations of self-landscape relations in contemporary European intellectual thought. Here, attention to the case study of blindness reconfigures these understandings and reveals the slippery nexus of the visible and the invisible in uncanny experiences. Motifs of vision are refracted in the experiences of "phantom vision" through which people who have non-congenitally impaired vision might "see" in their "mind's eye". The palpable, felt, multisensorial senses of the uncanny are revealed with the presences of trees and visceral nature of darkness. Uncanny landscapes are characterised by presences, the unknown, and disjunctures, in which notions of familiarity and strangeness, known and unknown, collide.

Keywords: senses, landscape, vision impairment, blindness, uncanny

...Silently the birds
Fly through us. O, I, who long to grow,
I look outside myself and the tree inside me grows
(Rilke 1914)

Landscape jumps forth, scattering wild seeds in the imagination, sun and leaf conspire to cast shadow, and in our human searching, the deep earth continues to hold the hidden and conceal the unknown. Never comprehended, consistently felt, the voice of the land is heard in the creaking ewe tree and memory's images flicker with the rattling body of the beech hedge in autumn winds. When the uncanny pounces, claws against your chest, one is shunted from the inertia of habitual mundanity. Uncanniness foxtrots upon dead notions of a compliant landscape, human-centrism, and under its dancing paws, senses of 'self' and 'landscape' are crushed like snail shells.

Studies of landscape have in recent years shifted away from an objectifying view of landscape as representation, symbolism, iconography, or as a backdrop upon which humans live and act (for discussion see Macpherson 2005 and Hirsh 1995). That view of landscape carried the ocularcentric legacy within Western European thought, characterised by classical object-subject epistemologies that assumed a pregiven reality mastered by an independent subject (Wylie 2007, 59). Hirsh attributed this ocularcentrism to representational aesthetics of European landscape painting, describing how the relationship between seeing, painting and the landscape instigated perspectival techniques of viewing the landscape (1995, 2; Cosgrove 1985; see Macpherson 2005 for further commentary). Picturesque movements were particularly influential, displaying panoramic spectacles from vantage points (Darby 2000, 58-59) that conjured the aesthetics of "feeling through the eyes" (53) whilst unimpeded by kinaesthetic or haptic sensations of walking (Ingold 2000, 58-59). As art critic and philosopher John Berger mused, "the visible world is arranged for the spectator, as the universe once thought to be arranged for God" (2008, 16).

Over the last two decades, there has been increasing concern with reconfiguring perspectival landscape relations, with an emphasis on the sensuous ways in which people engage with materialities (e.g. Abram 1997, Hamilakis 2014, Tilley 2004, Wylie 2005). Ingold's work has been at the forefront in examining the "perception of the environment", drawing on Heideggerian notions of the "lifeworld" and "dwelling" to situate the "practitioner" in "active engagement" with the environment (2000, 5). In this approach, the landscape is no longer conceptualised as a distanced backdrop or cultural symbol but rather an "environment" with "affordances" for potential actions of an enskilled practitioner (Ingold 2000). The environment is conceptualised to have an inherently available materiality in our being in the world. Perception of the environment is conceptualised as inherently participatory, a "commingling" of perceiver and the mediums through which they sense the environment (Ingold 2007, S29). Abram drew on similar phenomenological and Heideggerian philosophy to articulate this as a "coupling" of the "perceiving body and that which is perceived" (1997, 57), calling for a recognition of the "animate earth" with which we are reciprocally and sensuously engaged (1997, 22).

Uncanny experiences can invert the characterisation of humans actively perceiving the environment and instead expose a sense of being *perceived by* an animated environment[1]. Less a "medium" of perception, the environment is a presence that is *met* in the uncanny. Experiences of the English woodlands amongst walkers who have impaired vision[2] reveals an environment that is not consistently available for the perceiving human, not a reliably participatory medium of perception, rather it is often elusive and ambiguous. Even when present in its materiality, the environment may be perceptually absent, unpalpable or overwhelming in its omnipresence. Uncanny experiences within English woodlands that will be described in this article unsettle notions of humans moving through the landscape as a bounded subject entity, but also problematise "commingling" (Ingold 2007, S29) or "coupling" (Abram 1997, 57) as inherent qualities of perception. Instead, this article calls for attention to the ways in which we might think of landscape as actant or agent.

Posthuman and postphenomenological approaches to landscape have decentred the human subject in human geography (e.g. Idhe 2003, Wylie 2006, Ash and Simpson 2016, Rose 2006). Rose invited us to consider the landscape as a "thing in itself", explaining that

> instead of approaching the landscape as a nut to be cracked, what if we explored the landscape as a thing in itself: that is, as something that solicits and provokes, initiates and connects, as something that engenders its own effects and affects? The inclination to mine the landscape for meaning has, in my opinion, kept us from being truly open to the possibilities of landscape and from creatively exploring not 'what' but 'how' the landscape is (2006, 542).

Uncanny experiences pose keen opportunities to demonstrate the landscape as actant by examining the ways that landscape "solicits and provokes, initiates and connects", as Rose (2006, 542) described. Actor-network theorists have reimagined the material landscape as subject rather than object, ascribing agency, though not intentionality to the non-human (see Latour 2005). Yet as Trigg imparted, "having literally come alive before our eyes, nature assumes an undecipherable voice, felt only through a sense of the uncanny" (2012a, 146).

The human subject, classically 'the perceiver' in landscape studies, is reimagined in post-phenomenological approaches. Assumptions that perceptual experience is afforded to a "pregiven subject" are unsettled (Wylie 2006, 521; Idhe 2003) and instead consideration is

placed to how the subject comes into being in or through experience (Ash and Simpson 2016, 49). The subject is thus not distanced (as in perspectival epistemologies of landscape relations) or singularly bounded (as in phenomenological inquiries), but hierarchies of human and non-human are dismantled by approaching the "affective bloom-space" of relations within a material-agential world through which the body-subject is in constant processes of "affectual composition" (Seigworth and Gregg 2010, 3). Yet this article demonstrates that it is in the shifting *senses* of 'self' relational to the 'landscape' that uncanny experiences emerge. Whilst the 'uncanny' is a human notion and experience, it is through this that something of the agency and presence of the landscape is revealed.

Case study amongst people who have impaired vision is important as whilst there have been significant endeavours to readdress historic ocularcentric legacies of landscape, posthuman approaches examining landscapes as actant have been critiqued for retaining an overriding emphasis on the visual and visuality (see Morris 2011, 334). Visual motifs of seeing, metaphors of vision, blindness, being seen, doubling, reflection and other optical tropes have also been fundamental to notions of the 'uncanny' (Rahimi 2013; Royle 2003, 108). The term was popularised by Freud in the early twentieth century, who described the uncanny as fundamentally concerned with that "concealed, kept from sight" (Royle 2003, 108). Freud referred to Hoffman's folktale 'The Sandman' in articulating the uncanny (2003, 135-144), describing the night terroriser "who tears out children's eyes" to carry them off to the half-moon as food for his children who sit in a nest with hooked beaks like owls (136). Freud went on to describe childhood fears of losing one's eyes and going blind, comparing this through psychoanalytic interpretation to Oedipal castration (2003, 140). Further, he noted the "uncanniest and widespread superstitions is fear of the 'evil eye'" (Freud 2003, 146). Eyes, eyelessness and optics were at the heart of Freud's conceptualisation of the uncanny.

Etymologically, the 'uncanny' stems from the German word *unheimlich*, as the negative of *heimlich* which denotes familiarity and homeliness. Yet *heimlich*, is also "something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed" (Freud 2003, xlii). The uncanny is therefore that which is familiar yet hidden or "concealed, kept from sight", made uncanny when brought to light (Royle 2003, 108). Rahimi pointed to how both the canny and uncanny are always associated with and in reference to the 'self',

> since heimlich stands for that which is familiar, is, belongs to, or is associated with the self, the uncanny, unheimlich, comes already bundled with references to the self […] Unheimlich, in other words, is not simply that which is not homely: it is that which is familiar, of the self and known to the self, yet supposed to remain hidden from the self, but has become apparent, has become visible to the self (2013, 459).

Uncanniness, Rahimi suggested, reveals a "hidden truth" about the self: "the illusoriness of the ego" and "its lack of unity and cohesion in any grounded or permanent manner" (2013, 472). This is interesting when juxtaposed alongside Seigworth and Gregg's (2010) posthuman description of the "affective bloomspace" of the body-subject in constant processes of "affectual composition" within a material-agential world (3). Both theorisations diffuse attempts to embolden a bounded, integral, continuous human subject with an obvious quality of 'self'. This article sits at the hinge of this interstice to pursue two lines of inquiry. Firstly, when the landscape with which we are entangled generates or triggers uncanniness, what are the *senses* of 'self' and 'landscape'? This is particularly relevant to the practice of the English country walk given that Romanticist notions of the walker were characterised by a "rational" cartesian independence of the body from landscape, in which thoughts and contemplation regarding the 'self' was understood to be fundamentally ground in two levels of objectification: from the landscape as a physical environment and objectification of 'self' (Ingold 2000, 246). Secondly, how do these relations configure among people who have impaired vision, specifically those who have no anatomical vision? This is particularly significant given that discourses of landscape relations have been long been characterised by vision.

Uncanniness is an experiential affect, a felt sense of disturbance and strangeness (Trigg 2012b, 27). This might be felt as an atmosphere, presence, absence, the unknown, disjuncture, but also a sense of the extraordinary. This article challenges distinctly visual notions of the uncanny by demonstrating it as a multisensorial experience. Darkness, for example, is shown to not be uncanny in its visual obscuration but its palpable, sensuous presence. The ethnography examined contributes to our understandings of the 'visual' nature of the uncanny in various ways. From Freud's (2003) reading of Hoffman's 'Sand Man', canny is seeing with the anatomical eyes but blindness or eyelessness is uncanny – yet the notion pervades that the 'uncanny' is manifest through that which was concealed or hidden now being brought to light, establishing a clear dynamism at the crux of the seen or unseen. Uncanniness was often at this hook of the invisible becoming visible for my companions. This is recounted through the

spectral landscapes of the past alive in memory, now seen as the current landscape through the experience of "phantom vision". Further, how the very nature of the visual may transfigure in the deepening of blindness as that previously invisible becomes cannily visible, such as seeing sound. Significantly, these visual experiences are triggered by the landscape, which slips in as an 'internal' visual experience in ways that trouble static configurations of the landscape outside of the subject. This has wider implications for thinking about experiences for people who do not have impaired vision, including daydreaming and imaginations stemming from landscape.

This article presents ethnography of Elen, Karl and Amanda with who I walked the woodlands of the South Downs one to one, as their sighted guide, between two to seven years[3]. English woodlands have long been a potent symbol of wildness and non-human territory in Celtic and European mythologies and folktales, casting images of isolated humans in more-than-human realms (see Schama 1995). Woodlands and forests have been instrumental to the historic formations of 'Englishness' in both individual and national identities (see Darby 2000). Historically, woodlands have been dynamic sites for both the migration of the poor in the context of land scarcity induced by rising populations and indulgent hunting grounds for the monarchy and aristocrats (Theis 2009). Theis tracks the palpability of the forest in early modern literature, describing Shakespeare's evocations of the forest as "a moving target", how we "never get to the heart of the forest itself; its material, symbolic, and theatrical qualities invite but then reject any clarifying and unifying vision" (2009, 95). This complexity and ambiguity of 'the forest' distinguishes it as a site embodying tensions of wider politics but also the place of the human betwixt conceptions of 'nature' and 'culture'. Forests and woodlands have a long association with the non-human, the mythic, the sublime and the eerie realms of the haunting supernatural amongst the gloom. This imbues the European cultural imagination through literature, myth but also popular representations such as horror genres.

Elen, Karl and Amanda explained that they are "blind" because they have no vision perception, yet whilst Amanda is congenitally blind, Elen was "fully sighted" until losing her sight overnight in her mid-twenties and Karl had "partial sight" before his sight deteriorated in his later teens. The visual memories that Elen and Karl still "see" in their "mind's eye" are significant in their uncanny experiences of woodlands, as will be described. Whilst my

companions enjoyed recreational country walks in the woodland, much of their experience of woodlands had been during their childhood and they had relatively limited opportunities to walk with a necessary "sighted guide". I acted as a sighted guide during our walks, through which my research focus on sensory perception brought attention to our shared and differentiated sensorial experiences in ways that emphasised intersubjective and intercorporeal qualities of walking rather than the individualised phenomenological subject that characterises much anthropology of landscape perception.

Three themes arising from the ethnographic analysis form the structure this article: presence, the unknown, and disjuncture. The first, *presence*, examines experiences of *being in* and sensed by a living landscape, with an emphasis on the interspecies relationality with trees. The second, *unknown*, considers the ways in which woodlands were associated with what I term 'horizontal' and 'vertical' presences, which whilst familiar, remained hidden, illusive or became strange. The third, *disjuncture*, tracks the experiences of seeing memories and visions of landscapes in blindnesss, in which the experience of woodlands transcend linear time and a distinct place in one's own biography. This is followed by a discussion to synthesise what the experiences of the uncanny for Amanda, Elen and Karl contribute to our understandings of landscape as a living and agential entity, self-landscape relations, the sensorial nature of the uncanny, and wider implications.

Presences

Elen, Amanda and Karl spoke of the woodlands as a living and animated landscape, amongst which each tree had an individual beingness within the mass of the wood. This livingness was experienced as "eerie" by all my companions at various points. During our first walk together on a cold afternoon in late February, Elen exclaimed how "eerie" the wood was. When I asked why she described the wood as "eerie", she explained that "it feels like the trees are marching towards you, making the space feel smaller and smaller – like it is coming to you. That is exactly how it feels". Similarly, Amanda described how she often felt that she was being "watched" by the woodland itself, a sense that Klee evoked when describing "in a forest, I have felt many times over that it was not I who looked at the forest. Some days I felt that the trees were looking at me" (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 63 in Trigg 2012a, 144). Sheldrake described hunters feeling that they were being looked at by wild animals (2005, 11); whilst Berger

described himself as "less present than the corner of the landscape which was watching me" (2005, 29). The sense that the woodland was animated, alive, but also *sensing* one's presence sparked uncanny feelings.

Jentsch described that "among all the psychical uncertainties" which might cause "uncanny feeling", a particularly potent one is "doubts whether an apparently living being really is animate and, conversely, doubt as to whether a lifeless object may not be in fact be animate" (1997, 11). Interestingly, Jentsch followed this point with the example of a traveller sat on a tree trunk in an ancient forest, which to their horror suddenly shows itself to be a giant, writhing snake (ibid.). The uncanniness, he explained, is that a lifeless mass suddenly reveals an inherent energy (Jentsch 1997, 11) – akin to the trees marching and omnipresence of their watching. This is not an anthropomorphic conceptualisation but a sensuous feeling of being *perceived by* an animated woodland. This both inverts and complicates typical anthropological studies of the human perception *of* the environment, to the sense of being perceived *by* the environment. The mirroring of one's human agential capacities as shared by trees evoked an eerie strangeness, even more so with the feeling of being watched whilst having no vision to see. This marks the visibility of one's body, "visible by right, it falls under vision that is both ineluctable and deferred" (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 137), whilst that which watches is hidden in illusive invisibility through blindness.

There was a sense of being *within* the body of the sensing, living woodland; one's small human body tucked within the sylvan folds of its great rambling expanse. Walking through the wood, above soil yet below leafed canopy, the felt textures evolved as we moved through it. Entering a "much denser, darker area", that might then "open up", my companions described the "density", "pressure" or "atmosphere". This was sensed as temperature, micro-climates, intrusion of weather from outside the tree canopy, and "atmospheric pressure". "Atmospheric pressure" was felt as a physical presence, as Elen described –

> Elen: I find the English woodland very eerie.
>
> Karis: In what way? Is it because of the connotations or the actual presence?

Elen: No, it is the actual presence. It is because it becomes very claustrophobicy – no, claustrophobic is too strong a word – it is very closed. The actual atmospheric pressure around you, you can feel it building, you can feel it on your skin.

Karis: What? a physical pressure? Enclosed air?

Elen: *Yes!* Absolutely that is why I said to you, oh, is it getting dark in here? And it was because I felt I was being enclosed. Like a big canopy overhead, like a tunnel of branches.

This sense of "enclosure" and "pressure" was a sensation of physical presence. Invisible yet felt, the presence of the woodland was sensuously heavy. Elen associated this with darkness, asking whether it is "getting dark". This came much to my surprise given that it was daylight, to which she explained, "well, you won't see it is dark, but that is how I am sensing it. It is very closed, very eerie, very ghost-like". Given that Elen has no light perception, this darkness is *felt* rather than seen. As Elen explained, it "feels dark" *because* it feels "very closed in".

Darkness is a palpable texture of the woodland, a medium within which one is immersed, a felt presence resting upon the skin. As Morris described, darkness is a "presence rather than absence" (2011, 335), not a site of ghostly omission and emissions as Royle (2003, 109) described. Darkness has textures rather than a singular quality. Looking within darkness, there may be qualities of light, for example, in narrating a woodland encounter, Wylie described that there was "enough light to make it clear that beyond *this* tree, *these* branches, a tangle of wood and leaf extends in all directions" (2005, 238). But darkness is also something fundamentally seen – not an absence of seeing (Sorensen 2008). This visual apprehension of darkness was fundamental to Freud's notion of the uncanny, as that which is "concealed, kept from sight" is made uncanny when brought to light (in Royle 2003, 108). Royle explained that despite recurring reference to darkness in his definition of the uncanny, Freud did not elucidate the uncanny nature of darkness "itself" (2003, 109). The uncanniness of darkness was not in the visual concealment or obscuration for my companions, but the darkness as a *visceral presence*. This was a porous presence within which we were immersed. The uncanniness of this presence was multiple. Firstly, the palpable sense of a dense darkness within the hours of the day, inducing a topsy-turvy temporal disturbance or displacement. Secondly, darkness was a felt, familiar and recognisable presence that transformed – and subsumed – the sense of place as *it* became the predominant presence. It was an inhabitant of the wood that swarmed with the thickening trees, the air growing dense with its smother. Thirdly, for Elen and Karl who are

non-congenitally blind and have seen darkness came older childhood associations of being "in the dark" (Sorensen 2008).

Unknown

Whilst darkness, as a visual experience, has been associated with the hidden, which is unveiled in light (Royle 2003, 108), touching can function as a beam of light within that visual darkness characteristic of blindness[4]. Karl and Amanda were keen to touch the trees along our routes, often using bodily language such as "skin" (bark) and "arm" (branch) in narrating their experience[5]. The term "reach touch" refers to that perceivable through the touching body (Hull 1990, 156-157). Whilst most readily associated with the hands, this includes the full presence of the dynamic, stretching and reaching body, from head to toe. Horizontal presences within the landscape, which the body can move towards are potentially within "reach touch", whilst vertical presences above the stretching body are beyond "reach touch" (without tools).

Karl described how through touching trees their "complexity", "detail" and "three-dimensional" qualities are felt. Yet, getting an overall sense of a tree – furthermore a woodland – was almost impossible. As Amanda explained, "when you can't see, you have to focus on the things at hand", which are in "parts", "sequential" and "bitty". Keller evocatively recounted such a feeling when describing an unfamiliar space as "a collection of object-impressions which, as they come to me, are disconnected and isolated", that "fingers cannot, of course, get the impression of a large whole at a glance; but I feel the parts, and my mind puts them together" (2009, 7). Comparing touching to seeing, Gibson described how "the eyes can encompass the closed contour of a very large object (depending on its distance) while the hands can explore only the surface of an object of limited span" (1962, 488). The full breadth size of a tree and the sense of the greater woodland remained "out of reach" and often "unknown".

The illusive heights of trees intrigued Karl and Amanda, which they described to have a "presence" and "wisdom". As Karl and I stood in the late March morning sun, he described,

> they have got a kind of presence, haven't they? To me, they seem very wise, depending on how big the tree is, that's it's wisdom. The bigger it is, the more it has seen, you know […] This

> tree's been here for – I don't know how big it is – maybe tens and tens, if not hundreds of years. But it's seen so much […] It is something we want to touch, we are not touching the grass, or the flowers or the branches, we want to touch the bark. Maybe there is something significant about that.

The immensity of tree heights, which are out of "reach touch", evoked curiosity and awe. Often looking up at the trees they touched, Karl and Amanda regularly asked me to estimate the height using their bodies as measure. The undiscoverable, unknown, unpalpable height of the tree had an uncanny presence in that they could not be be*held* or grasped by sight nor hands. The immensity of trees was not readily "perceived", their heights were not an 'affordance' consistently available. This imbued a sense of the omnipresence of the trees and the vastness of the wood they formed above and beyond us that felt extraordinary.

The sheer immensity of the tree heights was experienced by Karl when a tree had fallen in an area of the woodland well known to him in early spring. He decided to investigate the tree. As he explored a branch with his fingertips, I told him that there were "around six branches" like the one he was touching. Karl was overwhelmed – he had assumed that he was touching the trunk due to the size – exclaiming

> it's massive, isn't it?! Incredible! That's incredible, isn't it? That's the things we miss really – the sheer scale. They are so big, aren't they – and you can't really get it all in context. Do you know what I mean? You can't imagine it all at once. Like I said to you, it is all sequential. It is hard to picture everything in its entirety. Is this just a branch? – Oh my god!

Macnaghten and Urry described how "certain trees can be seen as awesomely unnatural in the landscape" (2000, 168). The opportunity to touch and explore the sheer scale of a tree's height as it lay fallen on the ground revealed a landscape that was incredible to Karl, that epitomised his experience of a vertical landscape "out of reach". Karl, Amanda and Elen described this elusive absence and unknowability of *what* is there, despite its presence. Vertical presences were like an unseen, unknowable secretive strata of the woodland that hung heavy and huge over us. Uncanny in its immense looming presence that was distant and mysterious.

That within reach also had the potential to feel "unknown" or elusive, felt as sensations and textures but unidentifiable. When I handed Karl a bud that had fallen from a tree, he asked what it was. When I told him, he quite poignantly replied, "I wish I knew all these different

things". There was a familiarity in the everydayness and feeling of natural objects, but a strangeness in the illusivity of identifying them. An intimacy of touching, yet a sense of distance or the unknown in the indeciherability[6]. Touching was therefore sometimes experienced as a distant-intimacy. This felt like a withholding landscape – something remaining concealed, uncanny in its tactile presence and impenetrable in attempts to identify it. Whilst my companions relied on the felt textures of distinctive trees as our significant landmarks, this was not reliable. Bark changed with season and weather; limbs and foliage cut, dying or growing. When the masses of fungi at the base of the 'Fungi Tree' died, Karl was astounded that it had "just disappeared" and a familiar, often visited tree, had become strangely unrecognisable to him. That which was 'known' and familiar might quickly become unknown – fundamentally ephemeral and uncanny in its morphing.

Disjuncture

"Seeing in the mind's eye" has been described as a "phantom vision" experienced by those who have non-congenitally impaired vision (Menon et al 2003, Schultz and Melzack 1991). It is an experience of seeing visual imagery without current anatomical eyes, enabled by seeing with the anatomical eyes of the past through visual memory. "Seeing in the mind's eye" can be intentionally created or "triggered" by the landscape[7]. Crows caw, sunlight's warmth, had the potential to spontaneously "trigger" visual imagery for Elen and Karl. Landscape stepped in, slipped through, seen as 'interior'[8] visual experience.

One still spring morning, Karl and I stood chatting beneath the thickset woodland canopy. As he stepped forward, Karl entered a column of sunlight that had made its way between the tangled trees, exclaiming that he could see a photograph he had taken aged fifteen, over thirty years earlier. This was a photograph of the sun breaking through trees in his school woods, which he now saw in his "mind's eye". He described that it was taken from a seventy-five degrees angle of the ground and how the sun's "full shape" was obscured – that it was "more misty, more sort of vague". The sensations of the sun's warmth pooled within the coolness of the shade had "triggered" this visual memory. The imagery seen in the "mind's eye" was initiated by the landscape, as Karl explained, "I may hear a branch click, so I see it". The presences of the landscape sprang as visual imagery into the "mind's eye". The landscape

was not a distant, passive backdrop, but conjured imagery and memory through one's embodied engagement within its sensuous animation.

Rahimi stated that "doubleness and duplication are the fundamental common ground where the concepts of selfhood, vision and the uncanny converge" (2013, 456). The duplication – the reverberatory[9] imagery of a photograph from over thirty years earlier, catalysed by the experience of associated sensations – sparked disjunctures of familiarity estranged in time and space. Seeing with "phantom vision" and imagery of the past revealed hidden, old landscapes of times passed alive in memory. Hill described the enduring capacities of places to "haunt", disrupting senses of presence and absence in a way that "unsettles linear time, disturbing our sense of place and self the arrival of haunting memories" through a notion of "spectrality" (2013, 381). This autobiographical visual memory was conjured by the woodland – a mergence of landscape and self's memories. Crucial to this is the recognition of the landscape in instigating and triggering this experience. Often quoted, Schama posits that "landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock" (1995, 7). Schama went on to explain that "landscapes are culture before they are nature; constructs of the imagination projected onto wood and water and rock" (1995, 61). Such a constructionist approach risks deadening the generative capacity of landscape to engender its own effects and affects.

The visual imagery of "seeing in the mind's" eye often alters over time as the clarity of visual memory fades. In this fading, the visuality of landscape took unfamiliar and strange forms. Elen described that when the woodland feels "closed in" and "dark", she sees this darkness but also "sees sounds". The sounds that she consistently saw were bird song and the dinging bell attached to her guide dog, Charles's, collar. Whilst the sounds of the bell were silver, the bird song was gold. She saw these are a "pressure" wave in the air, as she explained,

> Elen: To me, the images I get are very haunting. Unless it's a very bright day –
>
> Karis: The images you get are very haunting?

Elen: Yes

Karis: Like what?

Elen: Like this, for example, I have the picture which comes to mind: a very dark, dank, ghostly, eerie wood. But I don't actually see the trees, I know they are there. Charles's bell is like a burst of colour.

Elen went on to describe a "myth" that "if you ring a bell, it scares away bad spirits", adding that having Charles's bell "makes the whole thing more comfortable". Whilst invisible trees are made visible, their presence is visualised as darkness rather than forms recognisable as trees. Sounds that were previously invisible are made visible, as coloured "pressure waves" in the air. Paul de Man proposed that " 'to make the invisible visible is uncanny' " (1986, 49, in Royle 2003, 108). This idea is compelling from a theoretical point of view, but these experiences of "seeing in the mind's eye" and the shifting configurations of the forms that visibility took *felt* uncanny in this estrangement. Estranged from a world of visuality once seen, to that where these presences took alterative, more ephemeral forms. The woodland, for Elen, was "eerie", "haunting" and "ghostly" in its visible darkness during daylight. The familiar is made strange as the landscape emerges in a kaleidoscope of visual configurations that avert notions and associations of the landscape as it was previously experienced visually and merges memories of the 'self' now seen as the landscape.

Uncanny Landscapes

Delving into the 'uncanny' experiences with landscape across the three themes examined – presence, the unknown and disjuncture – brings to the surface a landscape that "solicits and provokes, initiates and connects, as something that engenders its own effects and affects", as Rose (2006, 542) described. In exploring not 'what', but 'how' the landscape is (ibid.) for my companions, it shows varied qualities of experience. It is *through,* or at the interstice, of shifting senses of self-landscape relations that the uncanny emerges. Uncanniness congregates in feelings of being watched by trees without eyes; the tactility of a palpable, swarming darkness in daylight; the paradoxes of the unknown and distant wood that hovers just above the head whilst held firmly in the hand; extraordinary scales; and a landscape that is revealed in

blindness, visualised in strange forms that make it almost unrecognisable and diminishes notions of distinct, isolated landscapes in linear biographical time.

Humans are fundamentally entangled within the materialities of the landscape. For this reason, Wylie considered that the landscape "might be best described in terms of the entwined materialities and sensibilities *with which* we act and sense" (2005, 245), describing that different subjectivities and senses of 'self' emerge as we move within and are affected by the material world (2005, 2006). As Trigg, drawing on the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, lucidly put it:

> no longer is the world an inert bulk of materiality for me to experience passively. Instead, the flesh of the world is to be understood as folding into me, in the process discerning itself as the medium by which all possible relations are possible (2012a, 144).

Landscape is at once the entwined materialities with which we sense and act, but also a presence that is *met* and agential. It is a living presence independent of humans that has capacities to move us, invoke feelings such as awe, impede or impose, and that we are inside as much as entwined with. Landscape is not simply an 'affordance', a medium of perception in a participatory sense or an end 'product' of perception within the environment as Ingold described (2000). It is a dynamic, emerging and an immense presence.

Senses of 'self' and 'landscape' are not given nor static but "differentiated configurations" (Wylie 2005, 236). These emerge from, ellipt, and reconfigure in what Seigworth and Gregg described as the "bloomspace" of "affectual composition" with an "ever-processual materiality" (2010, 3). This is compelling when juxtaposed with Rahimi's proposal that the uncanny reveals the "hidden truth" about the self as "the illusoriness of the ego and, specifically, its lack of unity and cohesion in any grounded or permanent manner" (2013, 472). Uncanny experiences described are not instigated by a sense of the 'self' as illusory, but in shifting senses of the landscape relational to the 'self' and vice versa. The apparent role of the landscape in catalysing these shifts problematises notions of autonomous subjects actively perceiving a passive landscape that is backdrop to experience. The ethnographic examples of being *within* a body of the wood and the conjuring of visual imagery described draws to the fore the shuffling senses of being 'inside' and 'outside' the landscape, and the landscape being

inside or outside the psyche. This occurs in the palpability of the darkness upon the body or the landscape seen *as* one's own memories. As Royle described, the uncanny "has to do with the strangeness of framing and borders, an experience of liminality that disturbs any straightforward sense of what is inside and what is outside" (2003, 2).

Visual motifs have stalked notions of the uncanny: being seen, doubling, reflections, mirrors, metaphors of vision and associations of darkness with that hidden. Experiences of the uncanny for my companions elude conventional notions of 'vision' (canny) and 'blindness' (uncanny) that figure in traditional Freudian notions of the uncanny. Royle described how "blindness can be an especially powerful kind of seeing. The sense of a word changes to its opposite: blindness is seeing, the canny is uncanny" (2003, 108). Experiences of "seeing in the mind's eye" illustrates that blindness is not oppositional to seeing. It is in the metamorphosis of the changing forms of the visual as that which was previously invisible *becomes* visual that the uncanny emerges, such as seeing sound. Jean Luc Nancy traced the point of the threshold between the visible and the invisible, pointing to the engagement of senses attendant to the invisible or unseen, and the invisible particles and waves (including light and sound) in the visibility of images (Janus 2016, 93-94). The multisensoriality of the uncanny is evident in Freud's description of a synesthetic scene in which a voice can bring "light" to the darkness of childhood night times (in Royle 2003, 210). The ethnography presented demonstrates palpable, multisensorial, felt senses of the uncanny. I anticipate that multisensorial experiences of the uncanny are not restricted only to my companions who describe themselves as "blind" but people who are sighted too. This case study encourages us to think through the optical tropes of the uncanny further by examining visuality in memory, the transfigurations of the 'visual' in sensory reorientations, and invisibility as visual, which might be relevant in a broader context of what my companions called "the sighted world".

How do we move beyond a notion of landscape that is resigned to a human orientated "medium" of perception – even if we recognise our perceptual mutuality as the "flesh of the world… unfolding into me" as Merleau-Ponty described (in Trigg 2012a, 144)? What is landscape beyond a cultural "construct", ecological "medium" and "product" of perception? What does a consideration of the 'agency' of landscape imply and what are the limitations of this if it does not include intentionality? Attempts to identify *what* we refer to through the

notion of ‘landscape’ can be ambiguous: the ‘parts’ or ‘totality’, whether humans and other species inhabit or are an aspect of it, attributions of consciousness or sentience to some beings and aspects but not others. Virtanen illustrated this when explaining that the concept of “environment” as a bounded autonomous entity was “foreign” to the Apurinã in Southwestern Amazonia and that “for them, animals and plants are not separated from the sphere of sociality and rationality” (2016, 56). Euro-American approaches have discussed ‘landscape’ or the ecological conception of the ‘environment’ as if it is a consistent category of ecological materiality. We need to consider whether notions and experiences of ‘landscape’ or ‘environment’, particularly when considered agential and animate, are universally consistent to the extent that these terms sustain their relevance or continue to be useful. This is particularly the case if we acknowledge the experience of “sentient landscapes” in aboriginal contexts, for example (see Peterson 2011 for overview). Further, there are inherent implications in the origins and histories of these terms, alongside too the notion of the “uncanny”, which etymologically stems from European origins.

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1 This paragraph begins with a continuation of Ingold’s (2000) use of the term ‘environment’ to respond directly to his theorisations, at the end of this paragraph I use the term ‘landscape’, which is then used consistently unless engaging Ingold’s ideas specifically. Whilst ‘landscape’ is a notion characterised by an ocularcentric tradition in Western thought, the notion of the ‘environment’ is much associated with Ingold’s ecological approach to perception that problematises a notion of ‘culture’. Given that culture is significant in exploring uncanny experiences, I choose to use the term landscape as this article engages with both the ocularcentric legacy and the relevance of culture in approaching ‘uncanny landscapes’.

2 “Impaired vision” is a generic term that includes “blindness”. I use the term “blind” when referring to my walking companion’s experiences as this is their preferred term. This is significant to them as it distinguishes their sensory experience (specifically the current absence of sight) from other people who have “impaired vision” but might have “partial sight”.

3 Significantly, this article uses a person-centred case study approach and does not seek to generalise an ‘experience of blindness’. This article focusses on experiences in the woodlands surrounding Stanmer Park in East Sussex, UK.

4 The relationship between blindness, touch and sight in both spatial imagery and the sensorium is particularly significant given that this has continued within philosophical debate since the eighteenth century, centred around the so-called ‘Molyneux question’ (for outline see Paterson 2006).

5 Elen associated “touching” with a stereotype of “being blind”, explaining “just because you are visually impaired, people expect us to want to do the same thing. I am not interested in touching, feeling, you know?!”.

6 For discussion on the comparisons of knowledge gained through touch and the eye(s) see Paterson (2006, 232).

7 See Sack’s (2010) for further discussion of “seeing in the mind’s eye” for people who have impaired vision and the diversities of this experience.

8 The notion of ‘interiorities’ has been used to refer to experiences including the imagination (Hogan and Pink 2010).

9 In Bachelard’s terms, reverberation “becomes the figure of transportation, guiding disparate images from one place to another” (Trigg 2012b, 40).

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