Using the theoretical frameworks of Freud, Todorov, and Bahktin, this book explores how American writers of the late 20th century have translated the psychoanalytical concept of »the uncanny« into their novelistic discourses. The two texts under scrutiny – Paul Auster’s »City of Glass« and Toni Morrison’s »Jazz« – show that the uncanny has developed into a crucial trope to delineate personal and collective fears that are often grounded on the postmodern disruption of spatio-temporal continuities and coherences.

Petra Eckhard (Dr. phil.) teaches American Literature at the University of Graz (Austria).

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Introduction

Visitors to Rachel Whiteread’s sculptures and installations always come across something strange: a village of old, illuminated doll-houses that suggest a living presence inside, a vast concrete rectangle with walls of books and double doors that both face inwards – the latter being the Holocaust Memorial at Vienna’s Judenplatz constructed in 2000 to commemorate the deaths of about 65,000 Austrian Jews killed by the Nazis between 1938 and 1945. The estrangement that radiates from Whiteread’s sculptures is rooted in the tension that is produced when inner spaces are physically turned inside out and thus are made visible to the public eye. Her best known work, entitled “House” (1993) is the concrete cast taken from the inner spaces of an abandoned late-Victorian row house in which Whiteread used to live. For her, the negative double of the house functions as an architectural exposure of the empty ‘home’ – an inverted intimate inside that materializes personal histories, feelings of memory but also absence, forgetting, and loss. The private and the imaginary, suddenly, become the physical objects of the public gaze.¹

In “Space-Time and the Politics of Location,” Doreen Massey rightly argues that the ghostliness of “House” results from the disruption of our traditional conceptions of time and space:

[“House”] worked this disruption, first and most obviously, in a predominantly temporal sense. It set a familiar past in the space-time of today; it made present something which was absent; it was the space of a house no longer there. Secondly, however, it worked spatially: it turned the space inside-out. The

¹ For a more elaborate discussion of Whiteread’s work, see Anthony Vidler, Warped Space, 143-149.
private was open to public view [...] the intimate was made monumental and yet retained its intimacy. (49)

The dialogic interactions between the past and the present and the private and the public that are captured in Whiteread’s monumental art create in us a feeling of unease or obscurity, not only because the familiar turns into something strange but also because forgotten history takes on physical shape. In “House,” Whiteread gives material form to the personal narratives of different people who once inhabited the old Victorian house; with the Holocaust Memorial, she reminds us of the uncountable and inaccessible traumatic memories of death and destruction that the holocaust left behind. Thus, architectural space becomes allegoric for the workings of the human mind and, more specifically, for the unveiling of subconscious processes. Analisa Violich Goodin argues that Whiteread’s Holocaust Memorial captures the trauma and the impossibility of its representation in that it “implicitly signals not only that one sculpture is inadequate to the task, but that even an entire library could never tell the story” (49).

Whiteread’s works are uncanny. They trigger in us uncertainty, disturbance, and doubt as the boundaries between the living and the dead are heavily blurred. They challenge rational modes of knowledge because they confuse the spatial (inner/outer) and temporal (past/present) dimensions of reality. More specifically, they echo the Freudian understanding of the uncanny, according to which “everything that was intended to remain secret, hidden away, [comes] into the open” (“The Uncanny” 132). In other words, Freud believes that the uncanny manifests itself when the repressed aspects buried in our unconscious suddenly return.

What is even more important, though: Whiteread’s sculptures mark the emergence of a postmodern uncanny in the 1990s which is largely

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2 Throughout this paper the reference entry for Freud’s essay “The Uncanny” will be abbreviated with U.

3 While the uncanny has been a dominant motif in Western art and culture ever since the Gothic revival in the eighteenth century, it is not avant Freud that it is put into direct relation with the workings of the human unconscious. However, Freud’s analysis was not significantly expanded any further until the 1970s, when it reemerged in the post-structuralist studies of Hélène Cixous and Jacques Derrida.
concerned with the collapse of fixed spatial categories and the end of linear temporality. As a visualization of postmodern tropes such as homelessness, restlessness, and memory, Whiteread captures the spirit of the 1990s—an age in which virtual realities, cyberspace, avatars and other products of the new communication technologies start to confuse fixed categories of time and space and thus make the familiar strange. The 1990s have also seen the emergence of trauma studies and the re-emergence of memory discourses, a phenomenon that Andreas Huyssen attributes to the “globalization of Holocaust discourse” (Present Pasts 13). For him, “the recurrence of genocidal politics in Rwanda, Bosnia, and Kosovo in the allegedly posthistorical 1990s” (ibid.) signal a repetition of historical trauma on a global scale. Trauma discourses are characterized by a radical destabilization of time, space, and identity, resulting from the mere impossibility of a coherent representation of personal or collective catastrophes. Therefore, representations of trauma are created along the lines of temporal and spatial paradox as they have to rely on the stylistic translation of the involuntary revisiting of past times and spaces.

As a result of the renewed interest in trauma and memory discourses in the 1990s, various academic disciplines devoted their interest and research to the uncanny. Hal Foster’s Compulsive Beauty (1993), Anthony Vidler’s The Architectural Uncanny (1994), Jacques Derrida’s Specters of Marx (1994), Terry Castle’s The Female Thermometer: 18th Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny (1995), or Mladen Dolar’s “I Shall be with You on Your Wedding-Night: Lacan and the Uncanny” (1991), are only the most important scholarly works that prove that the uncanny, as Martin Jay has rightly argued, was “the master trope” (20) of the 1990s. Also in American popular culture the uncanny reemerged in the top-selling horror fictions of Stephen King and in the vast number of vampire-themed movies which sprung from this period. Among the most notable examples being Coppola’s Dracula (1992), Tarantino’s From Dusk Till Dawn (1996), Carpenter’s John Carpenter’s Vampires (1998) or Norrington’s Blade (1998).

In After the End of History, Samuel S. Cohen classifies the 1990s as “a time between wars” (6), a period that was framed by the end of the Cold War and the beginning of new wars, such as the culture wars, or the war on terror. Although the last decade of the twentieth century saw the demise of Communism, thus soothing the fear of nuclear
bomb attacks, in the USA new anxieties were fuelled by the Bush administration and its manipulation of the mainstream media. Social and economical pathologies, acts of home-made terrorism, such as the Oklahoma City Bombing in 1995 and the rise of supremacist hate groups were the main symptoms that led to a growing distrust in the federal government and a deep sense of insecurity towards the nation’s global future.

However, the late twentieth century signified not only an era of political and cultural fears but also the era of a more philosophical crisis. When, in the 1980s, Baudrillard noted that Western societies are experiencing “the death of the real,” induced by the new media and simulated spaces such as Disneyworld, he already signaled that information technologies producing copies, clones, and cyborgs were to become a major threat not only to empiricism but also to humanity in general. Postmodern subjectivities and realities, indeed, seem to be uncontrollable and indefinable. The postmodern world, as Maria Beville suggests, has become horrific also because “the absolutes of reality and self are not representable but suggestable” (29). The renewed interest in conspiracy theories in the 1990s concerning a ‘New World Order’ which signified the attempt of anti-globalizers to unveil and expose ‘the truth’ about the workings of political leadership and the global market also pays tribute to the fact that the threat of unseen forces operating behind the scenes (and screens) was among the key-concerns of late twentieth century culture. Films like The Truman Show (1998) or Dan Brown’s The Da Vinci Code (2000) confirm that the hermeneutics of suspicion also stimulated the discourses in popular culture.

The uncanny, as we have seen, is deeply concerned with all that is unrepresentable. For Freud, it is death or our own mortality that cannot be represented. For Derrida, it is the original presence of an object that cannot be signified. In Specters of Marx (1994), Derrida introduces the term hauntologie, which he directly relates to his concept of différence, denoting the notion that the meaning of signs (or words) is never fixed but always deferred. In other words, the true origin of a sign is always spectral. More broadly speaking, Derrida’s hauntologie – a combination of the Heideggerian and Freudian uncanny – concerns the notion that living in the present is always affected by (ghosts of) the past. Thus, hauntologie also covers the spectral presence of cultural traumas (such as the Holocaust or 9/11) – unpleasant,
shocking experiences that we repress and choose not to articulate. Derrida’s Gothic idiom also indicates that the uncanny shares many conceptual similarities with postmodern theory. These similarities concern the problematization of a reality in which categories of time and space have become unstable. In “The Contemporary Gothic,” Steven Bruhm explains that the reemergence and popularity of the Gothic genre in the late twentieth century can be attributed to the loss and fragmentation of all that which once constituted stable meaning, truth, and identities:

We need [the Gothic] because the twentieth century has so forcefully taken away from us that which we once thought constituted us – a coherent psyche, a social order to which we can pledge allegiance in good faith, a sense of justice in the universe – and that wrenching withdrawal, that traumatic experience, is vividly dramatized in the Gothic. (273)

Ultimately, it is via the Gothic, or its subcategory of the uncanny, that the unrepresentable finds its most accurate representation. And it is postmodern techniques which help us to understand and (mentally) visualize the horrors of postmodernity. Self-reflexivity, pastiche, intertextuality or the blurring of fact and fiction not only can serve the purpose of metafictional play or stylistic radicalization (as exemplified by Charles Moore’s Piazza d’Italia or the fictions of early postmodernists such as William Gass or John Barth) but can also generate highly uncanny effects. Deconstructed forms are a priori disquieting because they do not fulfill our expectations as readers or observers. Los Angeles’ Bonaventure Hotel, for example, has become a landmark of postmodern architecture because its visitors are confronted with a collection of signs that mainly serve the purpose of disorientation and spatial estrangement. Most of its guests prefer not to stay but only to witness the confusion for a little while.

In art and architecture, however, making the familiar strange is not a distinctively postmodern phenomenon but has been a leitmotif ever since modernism. Brecht’s ‘alienation effect’ or Duchamp’s ‘ready-mades,’ for example, clearly express a negative ‘cast’ of what once was familiar. Also Jo Collins and John Jervis argue that the uncanny captures the spirit of modernity because “a reflexive ‘defamiliarization’ [is] central to its programmes for artistic reinvention and renewal” (4). They continue: “‘[M]aking the world strange’
prepares the way for its inevitable return in disturbing, unrecognized form, in turn a central theme in Surrealism, along with its fascination with the dream, poised uncertainly between sleeping and waking’ (ibid.).

Interestingly, it was Freud who also associated the readability of the unconscious mind with the readability of the city. In his lectures on psychoanalysis, he compared monuments in London or the epochal history of Rome’s architecture to the trauma history of his patients. Freud often claimed that the work of the psychoanalyst resembles the work of an archeologist and/or detective, because the latter also investigate and reveal all that is inconspicuous and hidden (Zinganel 49). However, it was not before Walter Benjamin’s work on modern urbanism that the scholarly work on the uncanny was significantly developed further, since it “extract[ed] the unheimlich out of its purely psychological or aesthetic context, and ma[de] it into a category with larger social and cultural implications” (Jay 22). Benjamin’s *magnum opus* entitled *The Arcades Project* locates the uncanny in the Parisian arcades of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a space that for him was populated by ghosts of the past. Also the glass and marble architecture of the arcades were seen by Benjamin as a ghostly new space of inbetweenness – a transitory zone where interior and exterior space merge into one. For Benjamin, modern city life was *a priori* phantasmagoric, because the vast number and juxtaposition of visual signs such as commodity goods displayed in shopping windows, or the anonymous, heterogeneous crowd made the urban experience dreamlike and ghostly. Benjamin generally attributes this ghostliness of the city to the multiplicity and juxtaposition of spatial and temporal markers. In *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin quotes Ferdinand Lion, who vividly illustrates this point:

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4 For an extensive study on the uncanny in surrealism, see Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*.

5 One of the numerous references to spectral presences can be found in the section entitled “The Streets of Paris” in which he writes: “The name of the ‘Chateau d’Eau,’ a former fountain that is no longer there, still today haunts several city quarters” (643).
The most heterogeneous temporal elements thus coexist in the city. If we step from an eighteenth-century house into one from the sixteenth century, we tumble down the slope of time. Right next door stands a Gothic church, and we sink to the depths. A few steps farther, we are in a street from out of the early years of Bismarck’s rule […], and once again climbing the mountain of time. Whoever sets foot in a city feels caught up as in a web of dreams, where the most remote past is linked to the events of today. One house allies with another, no matter what period they come from, and a street is born. (M 9.4, 435)

Also in sociological terms, the modern city has always been an expression of class and ethnic heterogeneity which resulted in the formation of social dichotomies, including the private subject and the anonymous mass, or the self and the other. The social reality of the modern city is characterized by a complexity that involves the convergence of social norms and lifestyles and therefore runs counter to objectifiable regularities. In this non-totalizable, unordered space, as Julian Wolfreys asserts, also the subject “remain[s] indefinite, provisional in his or her identity, and thus subject to the uncanny arrival of some other” (172).

In “The Metropolis and Mental Life” (1903), Georg Simmel has noted that the estrangement of the urban subject can also be contributed to the ‘lived’ sensory experience of the city, i.e., “the intensification of nervous stimulation which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli” (13) that people do not experience when living in rural areas. Simmel goes on:

With each crossing of the street, with the tempo and multiplicity of economic, occupational and social life, the city sets up a deep contrast with small town and rural life with reference to the sensory foundations of psychic life. The metropolis exacts from man as a discriminating creature a different amount of consciousness than does rural life. Here the rhythm of life and sensory mental imagery flows more slowly, more habitually, and more evenly. Precisely in this connection the sophisticated character of metropolitan psychic life becomes understandable - as over against small town life which rests more upon deeply felt and emotional relationships. These latter are rooted in the more unconscious layers of the psyche and grow most readily in the steady rhythm of uninterrupted habituations. (ibid.)
Here, Simmel clearly establishes a connection between urban space and the workings of our psyche that is spatio-temporal. The modern city produces psychic disorders because processes of everyday life take place in an environment that is marked by high density (space) and acceleration (time), or rather, as many spatial theorists (among them Lefebvre, Bachelard, and Sassen) have noted, by a multiplicity of changing temporalities. Urban space becomes temporalized, and thus the city has to be viewed as an entity constantly in motion. Similarly, urbanity provides a multiplicity of ever-changing localities so that the modern subject experiences an overload of spatial possibilities. Richard Lehan rightly states that “the flaneur [sic] is discontented because the city offers more experiences than he can assimilate. He always feels that he is missing out even in the process of experiencing: his state of mind is restless dissatisfaction, aimless desire” (74).

This notion of restlessness and disillusion, engendering estrangement, has been captured by many modernist writers in the USA (such as Fitzgerald, Miller, Dos Passos) and also recurred, in more excessive form, in postmodern urban novels such as McInerney’s *Bright Lights, Big City* or DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis*. To many urban dwellers, as Benjamin has observed, the overstimulation with urban signs resulted in ‘shock’ and subsequent trauma, neuroses, or paranoia. Often the damaging effects of ‘shock’ were coupled with the notion of homelessness since, in the ever-changing and culturally diverse metropolis, a stable conception of ‘home’ or ‘dwelling’ was thrown into question.

Interestingly, it was the literary imagination that revealed the uncanny as a specifically urban phenomenon. From the early urban detective fictions of Edgar Allen Poe we know that the uncanny was expressed, as Anthony Vidler rightly notes, through “the contrast between a secure and homely interior and the fearful invasion of an alien presence” (*The Architectural Uncanny* 3). Vidler also quotes Marx, who claims that the urban bourgeois way of life, and in particular the invention of the rent system, rendered traditional notions of domestic security obsolete. The urban subject, Marx argues, “finds himself in someone else’s house, in the house of a stranger who always watches him and throws him out if he does not pay his rent” (qtd. in ibid. 5).

Many modernist writers such as T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, Alfred Döblin, F. Scott Fitzgerald or John Dos Passos continued to articulate
this uncanny quality of the modern city in their works. Their writings depict the city as an ungraspable, often monstrous, entity that the modern subject has to face and try to comprehend. Most of the literary accounts are dark and nightmarish, because the city emanates a spatio-temporal dynamism that tremendously affects the protagonist’s cognition. Dispersed narratives mirror the character’s dispersed minds and a reality that is menacing, because space evokes the sudden emergence of the ‘other,’ and because time no longer follows the laws of nature but those of (invisible) mechanical and industrial forces.6

When we move on to the mid-twentieth century, many literary accounts of the uncanny are still built upon modernistic city chronotopes. While the fear of the ‘other’ and the fragmentation of place, time, and self continue as popular themes in postmodern works, it is the postmodernist acceptance of the unreal that best marks the distinction from its modernist counterparts. Postmodern authors, in general, are no longer interested in solving epistemological dilemmas but accept the fact that illusions, specters, and unconscious forces constitute their reality. According to Jean-Francois Lyotard, postmodernist science “is changing the meaning of the word knowledge, while expressing how such a change can take place. It is producing not the known, but the unknown” (60). This destruction (or deconstruction) of modernist conceptions of reality and knowledge also makes necessary a reappropriation of the urban uncanny in literature.

It was Washington Irving who, in his satirical Salmagundi Papers (1807), first applied the word ‘Gotham’ to Manhattan and its inhabitants, whom he regarded as ‘wise fools.’ Irving’s association is based on a legend according to which the population of a village in Nottinghamshire named ‘Gotham’ faked madness and stupidity in order to hinder King John from taking up residence there. Accordingly, Gotham was associated with a city of tricksters long before it became associated with Batman’s crime-ridden city in which secret evil forces and moral corruption endanger the lives of the citizens. In one of the Batman comics, Gotham City is depicted as a dark place “full of lost souls and human garbage which in other cities are hidden in the shadow and never come to light” (Gardner 7).

6 See also Jo Collins and John Jervis, Uncanny Modernity: Cultural Theories, Modern Anxieties.
Even though Gotham’s etymological history proves that there is no direct relation to the Gothic as such, the city’s myths of origin, legends, and tales reveal that the people of Gotham seem somehow to be connected to a cultural discourse of the ‘hidden.’ In *ConspiraCity New York* (2009), Antje Dallmann has found that a considerable amount of contemporary New York City fiction concentrates on tropes and motives that are connected to conspiracies and urban paranoia:

New York is often imagined as the center of conspiracies but also as the focal point of international networks, which seem to be cosmological in their implications. What is thus invoked is a cultural imaginary, which conceives of [New York] as the (hidden) center of the world – a city that is marked by secret connections. (133, my translation)7

In other words, the threat emanates from secret or encrypted forces that reside beneath or behind the city’s surfaces. This intensified preoccupation with the hidden dimensions of the urban most likely results from New York’s role as a global city, a city which, according to Saskia Sassen, is one of the strategic centers from which international financial markets and global trade flows are controlled. However, the horrific or uncanny nature of these invisible economic and political forces has not only been captured in postmodern literary discourses but also was most forcefully brought to our consciousness with the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11.

It is a commonplace that New York is not only a global city in terms of finance and commerce, but also in terms of its influential role as a major immigrant gateway. It is indeed because of its ethnical and cultural heterogeneity that the Gotham uncanny must not be generalized but instead has to be examined along the visible and invisible cultural traces and histories that Europeans, but also Native Americans, Africans, Asians, West Indians and many others, have left on New York City’s soil. New York City’s uncanny discourses are,

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7 “New York wird sehr häufig als Zentrum geheimer Verschwörungen, aber auch als Dreh- und Angelpunkt von Weltzusammenhängen vorgestellt, die kosmologisch in ihren Weiterungen zu sein scheinen. Es wird ein kulturelles Imaginäres, ein *urban imaginary*, aufgerufen, das diese Stadt als (verdeckten) Mittelpunkt der Welt sieht, die durch geheime Verbindungen gekennzeichnet ist.” (Dallmann 133)
thus, always both global and local. Consisting of various models of urbanity, New York’s heterogeneous urban fabric must always be regarded as a product of constantly changing processes of assimilation, acculturation, intercultural translations and thus also of territorial terrors.

Not much criticism has been devoted to the postmodern uncanny and its relation to the urban. Among the most recent works about the uncanny, which also have provided valuable theoretical backup of this study, are Nicholas Royle’s book *The Uncanny* (2003), Jo Collins and John Jervis’ *Uncanny Modernity: Cultural Theories, Modern Anxieties* (2008), and Maria Beville’s *Gothic Postmodernism: Voicing the Terrors of Postmodernity* (2009). However, although they put the uncanny in a postmodern (literary) context, they do not explicitly relate the urban to the uncanny. Still, when dealing with postmodern urban novels one can, amidst (or because of) all metafictional play, detect a conspicuous number of stylistic devices that clearly follow the structural principles of the uncanny. For example, most of the city fictions of Don DeLillo, Thomas Pynchon, Paul Auster, Toni Morrison, or Jay McInerney aim at establishing uncanny effects in that they diffuse spatio-temporal categories and establish ambiguous narrative devices. While most commentaries and analyses have focused on post-structuralist readings of these texts, narratological traces and effects of the uncanny have largely been ignored. Yet, these fictions raise many interesting questions when viewed through the lens of the uncanny: What does the contemporary rhetoric of the urban uncanny reveal about national trauma and collective memory? Why are stylistic devices of the uncanny so appropriate for articulating postmodern fears? Did the transformations of spatio-temporal relations in the age of postmodernity also transform the uncanny as a concept? In what ways does the postmodern uncanny in literary texts affect readerly reception?

*Chronotopes of the Uncanny* not only demonstrates that the uncanny takes on a prominent role in late twentieth century urban fiction. It also points to the fact that the postmodern affinity with space, signaled by the topographical turn in the humanities, has also...

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8 Here, mention must be made of Julian Wolfreys’ article “The Urban Uncanny: The City, the Subject, and Ghostly Modernity,” published in Collins and Jervis, *Uncanny Modernity*, which is an exception.
tremendously affected the way in which writers conceive of and articulate the uncanny. More specifically, I seek to put forward a definition of the uncanny along the lines of spatio-temporal relations characteristic of the postmodern period. In a further step, I want to explore how these relations construct feelings of uncanniness and estrangement in the implied reader. The method employed is the close reading of two pertinent novels written at the end of the twentieth century. In particular, this book presents an analysis of the story-oriented as well as the discourse-oriented narratological patterns and investigates how and why these novels exhibit traces of the uncanny. Mostly, the literary analyses are structured along chronotopic motives (the labyrinth, the ruin, etc.) that explicitly reveal the uncanny to the reader. These motives are relevant for two reasons: First, they establish a direct link between New York’s postmodern urban fabric and the uncanny. Second, they point to postmodern fears and phenomena that are built around a chronotope that allows the haunting presence of history or a subject’s positioning in simulated or illusionary lifeworlds.

Furthermore, I conceive of the uncanny also as a cultural imaginary which has to be read along the most basic parameters of race, class, and gender. Therefore, the uncanny must not be viewed as a mere subcategory of contemporary Gothic, but rather as a literary tool that, more often than not, articulates subjective post-traumatic experiences which, however, can also point to larger, national memory discourses. For example, D. H. Lawrence considered American culture as a priori haunted, as David Mogen writes, “by the ghosts of subdued Indian cultures, ghosts which either induce madness or enter into our awareness in ways we cannot comprehend” (qtd. in Lloyd-Smith 86). The uncanny, therefore, is always subjective and culturally specific.

The first part of this study, entitled ‘Orientations,’ deals with the theoretical and historical framework that is essential for understanding the complexity that shapes the notion of the uncanny. I begin by highlighting the difficulty in defining the uncanny as a concept, arguing that, at its very core, it signals the crisis of binary opposition. This section also juxtaposes Freud’s and Todorov’s definitions of the literary uncanny and shows why their accounts are highly contradictory and, at times, unconvincing. The intent of this chapter is to develop an understanding of the Freudian implications of the uncanny in literary discourse, but also to point to its limitations and potentialities. Therefore, this book does not advocate a purely psycho-
analytic approach but rather makes use of the general idea of ‘the return of the repressed’ and its spatio-temporal relevance that Freud articulated in his 1919 essay ‘The Uncanny.’ In the chapter entitled ‘Chronotopoetics,’ I apply Bakhtin’s concept of the *chronotopos* to the Gothic genre, identifying the timespaces of eighteenth century Gothic fiction (*Schlosszeit*) and tracing their development to the timespaces emerging in Gothic-postmodernist works (*Stadtzeit*). My main argument in this chapter is that whereas the uncanny emerging from *Schlosszeit* is constructed through clearly defined and differentiated notions of time and space, the uncanniness produced by *Stadtzeit* is characterized through the loss of ordered and continuous chronotopic structures.

The second and main part of this study looks at specific literary representations of the postmodern uncanny, showing how two distinguished American novelists writing in the late twentieth century – Paul Auster and Toni Morrison – have effectively translated the postmodern uncanny into their New York fictions. As an example of metafictional Gothic, Paul Auster’s *City of Glass* (1985) tells the story of a detective fiction writer-turned-‘real’ detective who, during his investigation, ‘falls’ into the state of homelessness and, finally, disappears in the vast urban fabric of New York. From the very beginning we learn that it is the trauma of the death of his son Daniel that has initially triggered the uncanny ‘architextures’ that the protagonist creates and experiences. In this postmodern anti-detective story, in which the clues do not help to solve the mystery, many of the Freudian motifs of the uncanny, e.g., the *Doppelgänger* or the mechanical doll, are repeated on the story-oriented as well as on the discourse-oriented levels. Also for the reader, the story opens up a bottomless abyss into which all certainties fall, and the search for meaning and significance becomes a never-ending journey into the very depths of the protagonist’s subjectivity.

9 The neologism ‘architexture’ can be attributed to Bernd Herzogenrath, who introduced the term in his study *An Art of Desire: Reading Paul Auster* in 1999. Derrida’s *archi-écriture* (arch-writing) bears resemblance to the term ‘architexture’ as applied in this study of the postmodern uncanny. For Derrida, *archi-écriture* denotes the process of original writing or the inscription of the trace that always brings forth *différence* and thus the endless deferral of meaning (*Of Grammatology* 62).
My analysis of Toni Morrison’s novel *Jazz* (1992) shows how Morrison’s highly disruptive narrative stylistically mirrors the personal hauntings of her main characters. Set during the colorful and culturally productive era of the Harlem Renaissance, the novel establishes an urban aesthetics that is built upon the dialectics of dream and nightmare. Morrison blends the urban spectacle of the Jazz Age with the haunting presence of African American histories of loss and trauma, thus highlighting the importance of cultural memory. The uncanny not only makes itself felt in the city’s decaying architecture but also through the processes of musical and verbal storytelling that powerfully conjure up ghosts of the past.

The choice of the two novels was prompted not only by the goose bumps both generated during the initial reading process but, more significantly, by their potential for exploring contrasts. The most obvious dichotomy between the two texts results from the cultural and historical frame of reference which, in Morrison’s example, captures the African American experience and an African American genealogical belief system. In contrast, Paul Auster’s novel depicts a white, middle-class Jewish American context and worldview. Yet, in both texts the protagonist’s dreams and illusions are radically destroyed, and none of the main characters is able to read and make sense of the ambiguous signs of the city. In both novels, it is a criminal act that drives the plot forward. However, the laws of rational logic or empirical truth do not help the protagonists understand and come to terms with their traumatic experiences. Rather, it is an understanding and appreciation of the numinous, of “that which transcends the rational, that which by human definition lies beyond our conception of morality and reason” (Aguirre 3), that enables an understanding of and coming to terms with the wounds the past has left in the character’s psyches. The two texts under scrutiny follow the same stylistic principle as applied in Rachel Whiteread’s uncanny sculptures. In both texts, the “interior entrop[ies]” (McGrath/Morrow xxi) of the characters are externalized and made visible in public urban space.

Ultimately, the analyses of the two texts show that the uncanny and the postmodern urban experience are inextricably linked and require further attention, also because of the fact that our future will be urban. Approximately half of the world’s population is living in cities, and demographical forecasts reveal that urbanization rates will rise considerably in the future. Accordingly, uncanny confrontations
between the real and the unreal will more and more find their expression in an urban way of life in which the hidden – in the form of wireless data connections or virtual identities – determines our daily experience. This forecast shows that the uncanny is a timeless phenomenon that we will constantly have to face and need to remystify.