

What

is

hidden ■

Felipe González Cabezas

Opleiding Scenografie van
De Theaterschool Amsterdam (AHK) 2013

Bachelor-essay geschreven in het kader van het afstuderen van:

Felipe González Cabezas

<http://felipegonzalezcabezas.com>

15 mei 2013



de Theaterschool
Amsterdamse Hogeschool voor de Kunsten

INDEX

	page
1. Introduction.....	
1.1 Sigmund Freud 'Unheimlich' (uncanny).....	6
2. René Magritte.....	8
3. Visual focus.....	9
4. Michaël Borremans. Automats and familiarity.....	10
5. Connection with reality.....	13
6. The space.....	14
6.1 Giorgio de Chirico and the shadow.....	14
6.2 Hans Op de Beeck.....	18
7. Associative capacity: fantasy and imagination.....	21
8. Robert Wilson. The visual focus.....	22
9. Yourself: Another One.....	25
10. Conclusion.....	39
11. Biography.....	40

1. Introduction

From birth we are exposed to millions of new external impulses that forge our way of perceiving things. Since my childhood, in order to understand what the world was made up of, I would try to analyse it through my own eyes, seeing and interpreting the world as a collection of images.

I grew up in a family who were rather shy to express or verbalise their positive feelings, therefore my eye became more trained in a more thorough way to try to capture the small signs or gestures that were hiding the deeper message, in search of the acceptance or confirmation. In the constant exercise of seeking, sometimes to decipher the indecipherable, life led me down the path of darkness, of which I had no explanation for at first. As a result I could feel my identity being molded together with my fascination for the mysterious and indecipherable.

At the age of 13 years old I discovered *The Black Paintings* of Goya¹ and was immediately captivated by his mysterious images. My class folder was wrapped up with paintings of Goya like this:



The Fates, 1819-23. Francisco de Goya. Oil on Canvas

There is a predominance of a black colour, with figures which are both naturalistic and fantastic, I was immediately invited to ask the questions: what are they doing?, why are they gathering together in a landscape? It triggered in my mind the mechanism of fantasy. From then on, all of the unknown struck me. For example, the world of music: since the visual component is not present, it became more abstract and therefore more mysterious for me. Like I pointed out before, it was in my nature to try to understand everything visually. Therefore, finding something I did not understand, caused an intriguing satisfaction in me, instead of associating it with a negative feeling. It became just a part of me. I realise now that I have turned around the problem of my family's lack of communication into a positive thing. The visual and auditory challenges became a source of pleasure. The brain, despite being overwhelmed by the incomprehensible, was swayed as if wanting to be identified with the unknown. It seemed to take me to another dimension of understanding; an impulse that perhaps I always needed.

When I was a child, I connected another activity with the unknown or mysterious. This came from my father. My father is a pharmacist and he sat me down for hours in his lab. There I observed how he prepared certain medicines. I did not understand the meaning of

¹ Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes (30 March 1746 – 16 April 1828) was a Spanish romantic painter and printmaker regarded both as the last of the Old Masters and the first of the moderns

his actions -I was too young for that-, but I felt that it was about searching, about creating something, and the most important feeling that I perceived in his actions was the calmness, stillness and concentration that such actions required. An introspective concentration. Immediately I have to refer this to the paintings of Vermeer².

“Vermeer’s paintings largely evade a verbal description. Beyond the more objective iconography and iconology lays the intangible world of visual fugues and poetry in scenes of human interaction - a subjective, private, inner psychological universe experienced both by the novice and by the informed viewer.

The viewer observes the quiet everyday events represented, often scenes of calmness and introspection through identification with the personality of the individual. Vermeer subject matter, which stresses stillness, sensitivity and introspection.

Vermeer’s storytelling is nearly always subdued, evasive and ambiguous. In his scenes only an enigmatic, obscure, minor part of a story is presented. Content and meaning are partly conveyed through the formal composition, the other, perhaps even greater communicative elements of transmission are colour and the style of painting – the effects working under the skin, triggering in our mind not a conscious and verbal response but an individual psychological response based upon personal inferences”³.

We can see here two examples: a photo taken by me and a painting of Vermeer. Here is the concentration of certain daily actions accompanied by the apparent calmness of an interior, that indeed activates our curiosity about something that seems to be hidden and what we cannot decipher. If we look at the two pictures below, we see that the concentration is enhanced because of the contrast with the calmness that seems to come out of those spaces. The focus that is showed by the gaze of the characters of these two pictures, can easily guide our attention to the observed object. By the simple action of looking through their eyes -thus identifying ourselves with the characters-, we feel a connection with the action.



Untitled, 2007. F.G.C.⁴

2 Johannes Vermeer (1632 – December 1675) was a Dutch painter who specialized in domestic interior scenes of middle-class life

3 Dr. Kaldenbach, Kees. *An essay on Vermeer; brain channels, neural stimulus, visual perception and art appreciation*, July 17, 2011. <http://kalden.home.xs4all.nl/verm/vermeerperception1.html>

4 Felipe González Cabezas



Woman Holding a Balance, circa 1664. Jan Vermeer

This psychological burden and the mystery that an image can awake in us connects perfectly with the concept that I will use as the basis of my essay: *The Uncanny* of Sigmund Freud⁵.

1.1 Sigmund Freud 'Unheimlich' (uncanny)

"It is called 'unheimlich' everything which must remain secret, hidden ... however has revealed himself " Sigmund Freud refers in his essay 'Unheimlich' about the world of aesthetics and says:

*"It is only rarely that a psychoanalyst feels impelled to investigate the subject of aesthetics Even when aesthetics is not merely understood to mean the theory of beauty, but the theory of the qualities of feeling. He works in other planes of mental life and have little to do with those emotional activities which ... usually we furnish the materials for the study of aesthetics "*⁶

From this quote can be concluded, how perception (necessary action to assess and evaluate the aesthetics of things) exists within a high psychological burden through these feelings and emotional activities, that I will consider in my research. I will use the term 'uncanny' when analysing the world of images, both the theatre and the arts in general. I will ask the next questions: What can be hidden behind an image? What is Freud specifically referring to? How does it manifest itself? More so, does it have to be

5 Sigmund Freud (6 May 1856 – 23 September 1939) was an Austrian neurologist who became known as the founding father of psychoanalysis

The concept of the Uncanny (unheimlich in German) was elaborated and developed in his 1919 essay *The Uncanny*

6 Freud, Sigmund, *The Uncanny*, First published in *Imago*, Bd. V., 1919; reprinted in *Sammlung*, Fünfte Folge. [Translated by Alix Strachey.]

manifested to become 'umheimlich'?

The perceptual world is greatly adhered to our experience, of which Freud talks about:

*"The German word unheimlich is obviously the opposite of heimlich, heimisch, meaning 'familiar', 'native', 'belonging to the home' and we are tempted to conclude that what is 'uncanny' is frightening precisely because it is not known and familiar. Naturally not everything which is new and unfamiliar is frightening, however, the relation cannot be inverted. We can only say that what is novel can easily become frightening and uncanny, some new things are frightening but not by any means all. Something has to be added to what is novel and unfamiliar to make it uncanny. "*⁷

Certainly, as Freud rightly says, not everything that is unfamiliar is sinister or mysterious, and the most important subject for my research (when stating the opposite): it is not true that everything familiar to us can never become uncanny. But what is clear in both cases, is that something has to be added to achieve the effect of this subject matter. Also the text of de Oliveira and Oxley refers to the familiarity of the uncanny, as follows:

*"Sigmund Freud extends the term uncanny beyond alienation, aligning it with a vengeful familiarity that returns to haunt the individual. The uncanny, then, addresses both the lack of fixity in the world -not being able to call it a home- and the compulsive repetition of what remains unresolved."*⁸

How does the familiarity become uncanny? Does it only happen in our imagination? In other words, can you suggest a situation that through associative thinking makes it happen? Or to make the uncanny be revealed, how much should this be displayed through a physical act?

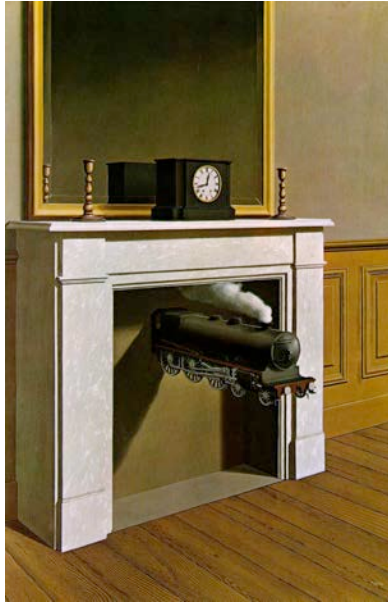
There are different levels, as I shall analyse later, by which you can generate this suspense or mystery. From the subtlest of scenarios, where the spectator's associations complete everything, or even the most direct ways to cause strangeness.

7 Freud, Sigmund, *The Uncanny*, First published in *Imago*, Bd. V., 1919; reprinted in *Sammlung*, Fünfte Folge. [Translated by Alix Strachey.]

8 De Oliveira, Nicolás and Oxley Nicola, *Hans Op de Beeck On Vanishing*, Mercatorfonds-Xavier Hufkens, 2007

2. René Magritte

Sometimes are the most common items (familiar objects) the ones who cause this visual strangeness or mystery. It all depends on the way they are combined. This is the painting of the Belgian artist René Magritte⁹



Time Transfixed, 1938. René Magritte. Oil on canvas, 147 x 98.7 cm

According to the text of the article *Time Transfixed* of the Art Institute of Chicago: “René Magritte believed that all beings and objects are mysterious. Unlike the other Surrealists of his time, Magritte found mystery not in fantastical imagery, but in everyday reality. *Time Transfixed* is a perfect example of the mystery that can be found when ordinary, yet incompatible objects collide. Magritte believed that the conscious combination of contradictory objects could reveal similarities that are often overlooked. In *Time Transfixed*, we find the surprising juxtaposition of a locomotive coming out from a fireplace. In explaining the painting, Magritte said: “*I decided to paint the image of a locomotive....In order for its mystery to be evoked, another immediately familiar image without mystery -the image of a dining room fireplace- was joined*”. In this work we also find another device that Magritte frequently used, modification of scale. Here, the locomotive has been shrunk to a non-traditional size to fit inside the fireplace. It is in the surprising juxtaposition and shift of the scale of these common and unrelated images that mystery, magic, and humor merge. Magritte situated the train in a fireplace vent so that it appears to be emerging from a railway tunnel. The tiny engine races out into the stillness of a sparsely furnished dining room, its smoke neatly floating up the chimney, as if to suggest smoke produced by a fire”¹⁰, says the authors of this article. So, what we find here is a formally number of elements- even though misplaced from the logic of space- that connect the fireplace with a train: the smoke, the tunnel-shaped exit of the chimney, and the vertical tube of any fireplace that always connects the inside of the house with the outside, not to be seen in the image but to be clearly associated,

⁹ René François Ghislain Magritte (21 November 1898 – 15 August 1967) was a Belgian surrealist artist. He became well known for a number of witty and thought-provoking images that fell under the umbrella of surrealism. His work challenges observers' preconditioned perceptions of reality

¹⁰ Wulf, Cori and Hanson, Abigale *Time Transfixed 1938 by René Magritte*, The Art Institute of Chicago, 2001

connecting spatially the outer element (the train), with the interior of the room. The article also says: "A mirror, a clock, and two candlesticks are placed strategically on the mantel. Magritte felt that mirrors provide mystery in the sense that they are a false reflection of reality, and thus he often included mirrors in his paintings. The rest of the room, do not appear in this mirror which, strangely, it becomes just a dark empty space"¹¹, althus Cori Wulf.

From this I can conclude that, as result, the brain accepts the image as something feasible, welcomed by our imagination to be raised into another level of reality. This image has achieved its goal: the illusion has defeated the rational. Almost with no time to ask yourself why.

3. Visual focus

'*Time Transfixed*' serves as a perfect example of Magritte's interest in de the Italian Metaphysical painter Giorgio de Chirico¹². Magritte admired de Chirico's use of dislocation, the combination of incompatible objects of reality. The combination of the train and the clock is reminiscent of de Chirico's work *The Philosopher's Conquest* (1914). Here I would say, that the focal point gets lost when we compare this painting of the Chirico to Magritte's painting. This is one of the key points of my interest to discern in this essay: how can you attract on the best possible way the viewer's eye to enhance the 'unheimlich'. Comparing the two paintings, it is undeniable that De Chirico's painting contains more formal elements. In this case the image becomes almost a rebus, a visual poem or a fragmented story, told in one static frame. Imaginative play is not produced, in my opinion, so directly as in Magritte's painting. The hidden truth or the mystery becomes more diffuse. Later on in this essay I will use other paintings of De Chirico, where through using an emptier space, the hidden enigma is less forced, by which, on the contrary to what it may seem, makes the hidden enhanced.



The Philosopher's Conquest, 1914. Giorgio de Chirico

¹¹ Wulf, Cori and Hanson, Abigale *Time Transfixed 1938 by René Magritte*, The Art Institute of Chicago, 2001

¹² Giorgio de Chirico Volos, (July 10, 1888 – November 20, 1978). He was a Greek-born Italian artist. In the years before World War I, he founded the scuola metafisica art movement, which profoundly influenced the surrealists

Referring to the importance of visual focus needed to reveal the 'unheimlich', I will talk about these two photos taken by myself as an experiment:



Untitled, 2013. F.G.C.

In these two pictures it can be seen how you can manipulate the viewer's attention. Before analyzing the transformation from one photo to the other, I will analyse what the photo represents.

As a viewer, the appearance of 'the human being element', is for me essential to get identified with the image. Failing that, it is necessary to include something that gives the scale or shows any reference to that element. From the most common moments of daily life, there can be images produced that in themselves tell hidden or indirect stories. In this picture are formal elements that are causing some strangeness: Two tables placed over a radiator; the characters portrayed giving their backs to the viewer; a slightly reflection of their faces in the window; an exterior view showing virtually the same space from which you are looking.

In this case, by means of light (higher contrast which merges the image) and a slight desaturation of the color, you avoid the details that are distracting from the fact described above, strengthening it. Once the anecdotal details are minimized, the vision focuses on the visual message that is taking place between the lines.

The untreated photo on the left could be compared with the painting *The Philosopher's Conquest* of De Chirico, where due to the proliferation of loose objects, the attention gets distracted from the evocative power that the picture may have.

4. Michaël Borremans. Automatons and familiarity

Freud says in his essay from the words of Ernst Jentsch (the German psychiatrist):

"In proceeding to review those things, persons, impressions, events and situations which are able to arouse in us a feeling of the uncanny in a very forcible and definite form, the first requirement is obviously to select a suitable example to start upon Jentsch has taken as a very good instance "doubts whether an apparently animate being is really alive; or conversely, whether a lifeless object might not be in fact animate"; and he refers in this connection to the impression made by wax-work figures, artificial dolls and automatons"¹³.

13 Freud, Sigmund, *The Uncanny*, First published in *Imago*, Bd. V., 1919; reprinted in *Sammlung*, Fünfte Folge. [Translated by Alix Strachey.]

I would like to introduce Michaël Borremans¹⁴.



The Constellation, 2000. Michaël Borremans. Oil on canvas, 100 x 120 cm

When man becomes an object, it produces strangeness. We identify ourselves with the vulnerability of our bodies, and in this painting the body is presented as if it was an element of mass production. It could remind us of death, to the ephemeral nature of our existence. So that is why, I immediately associate this image with death, more than being born or being created. In this image, uniformed men in an indefinite and lugubrious space, help to generate the necessary to create the atmosphere of mystery. It invites us to fantasize more about this representation of this event. The strangeness of seeing ourselves as automatons, makes that we see ourselves in another way, so it generates another story. In that way movement or gesture is charged with another meaning than that one of the everyday life. Repetition and doubling are two other important elements which Freud refers to produce that atmosphere that hides something:

“The theme of the ‘double’ has been very thoroughly treated by Otto Rank¹⁵. He has gone into the connections the “double” has with reflections in mirrors, with shadows, guardian spirits, with the belief in the soul and the fear of death.”¹⁶

“The ‘double’ has become a vision of terror, just as after the fall of their religion the gods took on daemonic shapes.”¹⁷

In relation with the doubling and the uncanny, De Chirico says:

“It seems to me that surprise, that sense of disquieting astonishment which certain works of genius provoke in us, is owed to an interruption, albeit momentary, of life—or rather, of the logical rhythm of the universe... Under the shock of such a surprise, all

¹⁴ Michaël Borremans (1963, Geraardsbergen, East Flanders), Belgian painter and filmmaker.

¹⁵ Otto Rank (April 22, 1884 – October 31, 1939) was an Austrian psychoanalyst, writer, and teacher. Born in Vienna as Otto Rosenfeld, he was one of Sigmund Freud's closest colleagues. Freud refers here to the book of Otto Rank called *Der Doppelgänger* (*The Double*), 1914

¹⁶ Freud, Sigmund, *The Uncanny*, First published in *Imago*, Bd. V., 1919; reprinted in *Sammlung*, Fünfte Folge. [Translated by Alix Strachey.]

¹⁷ Idem

*our senses and cerebral faculties lose track of human logic, of that logic to which we've become accustomed since childhood, or to use another word, they forget, they lose their memory, all life comes to a stop, and in that suspension of the living rhythm of the universe the figures we see before us, without changing material form, offer themselves to our gaze in the guise of ghosts. The ghost is that uncanny double of the living being, the object brought back to life."*¹⁸

It's exactly like De Chirico said; "without changing material form" is the most important point in my research. It is about emphasizing the idea that from the manipulation of the known or familiar - the 'heimlich' - you can achieve that state, very well described by De Chirico. Interestingly what he says over "that logic to which we've become accustomed since childhood" for me is different. Since my childhood, I got used to search for the surprise; the sense of 'disquieting astonishment'. The fact of being used to that did not mean that I did not perceive the strangeness, but in the way of a sublime feeling.



The skirt (2), 2005. Michaël Borremans.
Oil on canvas, 40x 50 cm



The skirt, 2005. Michaël Borremans.
Oil on canvas, 70x 60 cm

In this succession of images is clearly showed Borremans' obsession with observing the human being as an object. There is no distinction between the skirt and the girl who wears it. Moreover, the body of the girl ends where the table starts, the legs have lost their function.

On the subject of the mysterious, the artist responds to the following question:

Your work has often something mysterious. Is it your intention to leave the viewer in the limbo?

*"You can call it 'mysterious'. My images can not be defined. With the images in the media is that the fact, they serve to clarify something. I deliberately let some references open, so that way the viewer does not always know how to interpretate my work. Thereby it remains visible in the mass images out there."*¹⁹

From this quote I conclude that Michael Borremans is one of those artists who provoke the mystery based on reality, or recognizable elements of it. Here it is appropriate to

¹⁸ De Chirico (1920), cited in Baldacci, (74). Rothman, Roger. *Between Böcklin and Picasso: Giorgio de Chirico in Paris, 1909-1913*. Bucknell University, 2006

¹⁹ <http://www.schamper.ugent.be/481/> "ik-probeer-te-streven-naar-kwaliteit-op-lange-termijn-is-dat-beter-voor-iedereen"

emphasize the concept of 'image that can not be defined', leaving the rest to the free interpretation of the viewer. Does Michael Borremans refer to the formal definition, or to its meaning? Interestingly, within its rather realistic capacity of painting, – in his own words, reminiscent with Diego Velázquez for example- he consciously leaves elements literally "outlined" in his images. In my opinion to reach a greater contrast with the realism and through this, to make the strangeness of the outline more credible. This can be seen in the painting I showed above, about the human construction chain process.

5. Connection with reality

On the subject of how a storyteller can cause strangeness, depending on the degree of connection with reality, says Freud in his essay "Unheimlich":

"The story-teller can also choose a setting which, though less imaginary than the world of fairy tales, does yet differ from the real world by admitting superior spiritual entities such as daemonic influences or departed spirits. So long as they remain within their setting of poetic reality their usual attribute of uncanniness fails to attach to such beings. The souls in Dante's Inferno, or the ghostly apparitions in Hamlet, Macbeth or Julius Caesar, may be gloomy and terrible enough, but they are no more really uncanny than is Homer's jovial world of gods. We order our judgement to the imaginary reality imposed on us by the writer, and regard souls, spirits and spectres as though their existence had the same validity in their world as our own has in the external world. And then in this case too we are spared all trace of the uncanny. The situation is altered as soon as the writer pretends to move in the world of common reality. In this case he accepts all the conditions operating to produce uncanny feelings in real life; and everything that would have an uncanny effect in reality has it in his story. But in this case, too, he can increase his effect and multiply it far beyond what could happen in reality, by bringing about events which never or very rarely happen in fact. He takes advantage, as it were, of our supposedly surmounted superstitiousness; he deceives us into thinking that he is giving us the sober truth, and then after all oversteps the bounds of possibility. We react to his inventions as we should have reacted to real experiences; by the time we have seen through his trick it is already too late and the author has achieved his object; but it must be added that his success is not unalloyed. We retain a feeling of dissatisfaction, a kind of grudge against the attempted deceit; I have noticed this particularly after reading Schnitzler's Die Weissagung and similar stories which flirt with the supernatural. The writer has then one more means he can use to escape our rising vexation and at the same time to improve his chances of success. It is this, that he should keep us in the dark for a long time about the precise nature of the conditions he has selected for the world he writes about, or that he should cunningly and ingeniously avoid any definite information on the point at all throughout the book" ²⁰

This last sentence speaks of not showing everything, not forcing a conclusion, not figuratively speaking, putting a face to that monster.

And Freud concludes with:

"Speaking generally, however, we find a confirmation of the second part of our proposition—that fiction presents more opportunities for creating uncanny sensations than are possible in real life".²¹

For me this last reasoning of Freud gives the ultimate meaning to art: it is the ability to transform reality into another parallel one. Even assuming that the art did not exist, would

20 Freud, Sigmund, *The Uncanny*, First published in *Imago*, Bd. V., 1919; reprinted in *Sammlung*, Fünfte Folge. [Translated by Alix Strachey.]

21 Idem

be our associative ability based on our experience of our environment, which, through our imagination, would generate this art, understood as fiction.

What I find interesting is the midpoint between reality and its transformation: leaving the bases, or create a scenario that aids or abets the fantasy of the viewer. Without imposing anything, without doing everything obvious. And let the viewer fill in the rest. In my opinion, the obviousness end with the work of art. It becomes anecdotal and temporary. Great works of art, like life itself, always remain a mystery, an endless source of reflection and research.

6. The space.

6.1 Giorgio de Chirico and the shadow.

Before I go into the analysis of how space and time works -as sequence of images- in the generation of the mysterious. I would like to start at first with images where the space is the main element.

I will reflect to the work of Giorgio de Chirico. I will start with a quote from De Chirico himself on an essay he wrote about his beloved artist Arnold Böcklin:

“Every one of his works gives that sense of surprise and unease that one feels when finding oneself con-fronted with an unknown person, but one whom one seems to have seen before, without being able to remember the time or the place, or when one enters a strange city for the first time, and finds a square, a street, a house in which one seems to have been already”²².

The sense of having seen that before, of having already experienced it in the past, was for de Chirico the explicit theme and intentional subject-matter of Böcklin's work. And if this experience of the uncanny repetition demands that one, in a sense, both remember and forget at the same time, the one ought to find in de Chirico's assessment a particular attention paid to this peculiar dynamic of remembering-and-forgetting²³.



The Lassitude of the Infinite, spring 1912. Giorgio de Chirico. Oil on canvas, 44 x 112 cm

As we read above, in de Chirico's paintings can be seen that recognizability through the

22 De Chirico, “Arnold Böcklin” [originally 1920], in Massimo Carrà, ed.,
Metaphysical Art .trans. Caroline Tisdall (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), 139

23 http://www.academia.edu/1557753/Between_Böcklin_and_Picasso_Giorgio_de_Chirico_in_Paris_1909-1913

use of archetypal architecture, mostly classic arches, which play with this familiarity that attracts us, but that also provokes in us strangeness. And as Freud describes in his essay, the best way to get the mystery is build on a recognizable reality. That strangeness is generated through the use of perspective, light and shadows. I will start explaining about the shadows:

'The Shadow'²⁴ as a subject of arts has been inextricably linked to the history of Western art, his intent has been fundamentally naturalistic, emphasizing the credibility of the represented.

Although the first shadows in art date from the fourth century BC-linked then to theater scenographies and shaded-relief objects, the shadow makes its true appearance in the Renaissance. During the fifteenth century it is produced an empirical approach to the shade while a century later, its use and closely linked with the perspective.

The eighteenth century was also the birth of new aesthetic concepts as "sublime", and the shadow began to be valued for its narrative qualities, eminently for the negative ones. Gradually attends the appearance of a true "aesthetic of the uncanny", some of whose most prominent examples are founded in the work of Francisco de Goya, Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbein, Joseph Wright of Derby, Adolf Menzel, Jean-François Millet, William Holman Hunt, Jean-Paul Laurens, Gioacchino Toma and Emile Friant.

Symbolism, by departing from the naturalistic representation of reality, exalted the subjective vision as the axis of the visual representation. The mysterious and gloomy awakened creativity of writers and artists, symbolized by, among other things, by the shadow.

In the early twentieth century the shadows were virtually discarded by Cubism and the subsequent abstract movements, faithfully attached to the two-dimensionality of the picture. It was not until Giorgio de Chirico and the "return to order" in the twenties for the shadow to reach a new importance. It was the birth of the New Realism.

In De Chirico, while denoting fictional verisimilitude, the shadows give the scene an air of nightmare; in reference to the dark and the deformation of the human anatomy. Such an antinomy between the plausible and fiction is typical of much of the twentieth century's realism, where the uncanny coexists with a false appearance of a stable order (the order caused by the formal "realism" to which we referred before about plazas, architecture and sculptures).

"Mystery" is the most familiar word to de Chirico. He wrote:

*"There is more mystery in the shadow of a man walking on a sunny day, than all the world's religions."*²⁵

The shadow on the human figures causes the effect of the 'double' to which Freud referred as an essential ingredient of the 'uncanny'. The human figure is literally doubled. Also in this painting above the shadow causes a higher conception of space. A mostly empty space that evokes loneliness and therefore also strangeness; the strangeness of a half-empty space at the daylight. Curiously that strangeness and the lugubrious shadows are in contrast with the warmth of a very warm light tone, almost noon. However, by the inclination of the shadows it seems late in the afternoon, closer to a sunset. Here we see how the artist strengthens the perspective through setting the point of view of the spectator at a bird's eye view, and the ground seems to be placed on a steep slope, probably to show the shadows as much as possible.

In this and other paintings, de Chirico uses slanted and clear frames that determine the way we perceive the scene. First he places two architectural elements, almost like twins, on both sides of the canvas. They break this symmetry only through the use of the lights. In the small space that he shows us from the horizon, a train appears, breaking the silence and the calmness with a trail of smoke that betrays its speed. He uses hereby another contrast that invites to create the atmosphere of mystery.

24 Information about the shadow collected from <http://www.thecult.es/Arte/la-sombra-en-el-museo-thyssen/All-Pages.html>

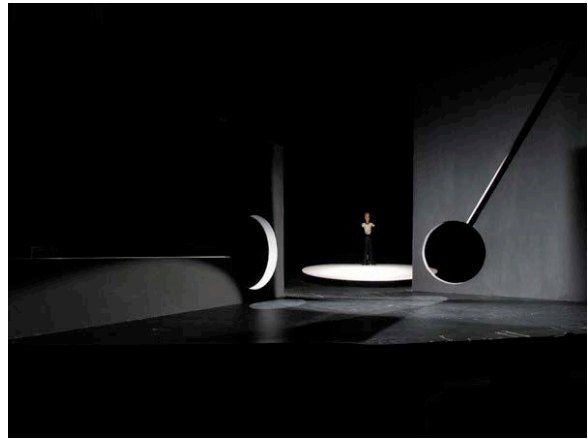
25 http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pintura_metafisica

I will show another painting of De Chirico where he uses this framing. On both sides using a similar architectural element; one in the shade and the other one enlightened. I will compare it with one of my scenographies.

The drawing which I will display next named *The Clock of Time* has also similarities with this artist, despite it is made ten years ago, when I did not even know the artist. But let's start with the scenographies:



Autumnal Meditation, winter 1911-12.
Giorgio de Chirico. Oil on canvas, 53 x 70 cm.



Passages, 2012. F.G.C. Model of the
scenography for the Music-Theatre piece *Megalopolis*

As de Chirico pointed out, the Metaphysical was not some airy space beyond the earth, but rather the human capacity to imagine and construct the existing world. This capacity was exemplified for de Chirico by acts of transformation brought about by particular framings, such as the multiple picture frames which cascade through the space of several of his early canvases.²⁶ In these examples we can see how the spatial tension is generated by using walls through which it is suggested a hidden space. It seems to invite us to look curiously like a voyeur looking through a peephole as it were. Central, a human figure (in the left picture a sculpture) that offers a clearer scale reference.

I will use other examples of my scenography for the music-theatre piece '*Megalopolis*' to exemplify the use of reframing in theater, created by light and the elements in the set. Again it is about showing and hiding and the use of the long shadows as a dramatic element:



Passages, 2012. F.G.C. Scenography for the Music-Theatre piece *Megalopolis*

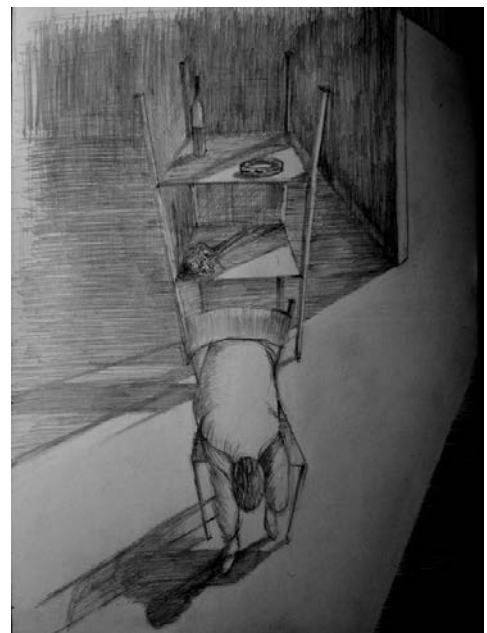
²⁶ Jewell, Keala. *The Art of Enigma: The De Chirico Brothers & the Politics of Modernism*. The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, PA., 2004.



Passages, 2012. F.G.C. Scenography for the Music-Theatre piece *Megalopolis*



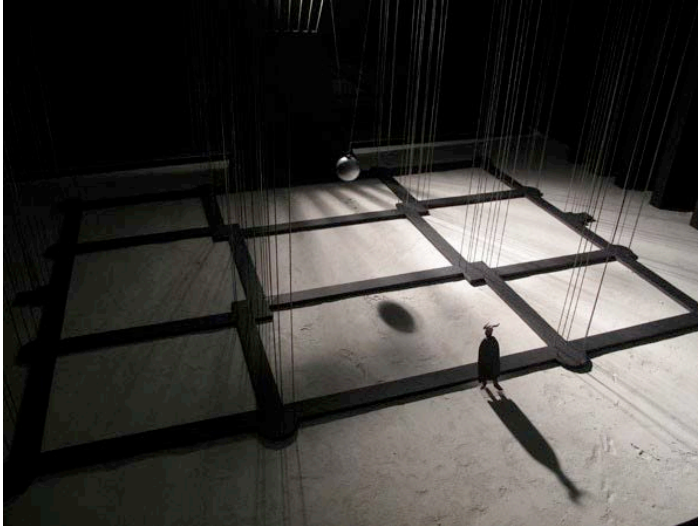
L'énigme d'un jour, huile sur toile, 1914.
Giorgio de Chirico, 83 x 130 cm



Untitled, 2012. F.G.C.

In these two examples (left De Chirico, right mine) we can see similarities in the use of sharp shadows accented by a high point of view of the spectator. The human figure, central in the composition, has his back to the public. In both cases everyday objects are used: in the left picture recognizable elements from the architecture, a fireplace and a tower; and in the right picture household elements, furniture with everyday objects. Just like a still life. In both cases is played with an indoor-outdoor concept. Through the way the light is used, appears a curious play between the exterior and interior. Although the image of De Chirico clearly shows an exterior and the one of mine an interior, the use of a bright light makes a clear hint that it is a light that comes from the

outside. In that way it guides us and suggests the presence of an outside. Because in the example of De Chirico the point of view of the spectator is high and placed between two walls, we have almost the impression of looking through a window. Therefore, we can suggest the existence of an interior. This justifies as well how the use of perspective -by the positioning of the viewer- can manipulate the observer in a game of visual associations. This effect is enhanced by using clear frames that creates a more focused scene.



Model of the scenography for *Hoofdscenes*, 2010. F.G.C.



The Clock of Time, 2003. F.G.C.

6.2 Hans Op de Beeck

I would like to further investigate how space affects perception, and coming one step beyond, I want to look closely at some reflections about the work of Hans Op de Beeck²⁷. I would like to point out that it would be a step further than de Chirico, because here disappears the human representation in the spaces that the artist creates, whether in models, drawings or installations. But as we shall see in some examples, we as viewers, will become the human elements that are missing from his work, through the interaction with the space; when it is about paintings, through looking; when it is about installations, through the physical presence.

Beforehand a brief introduction to his work:

Thematically, the work concentrates on our laborious and problematic relationship with time, space and each other. Op de Beeck shows the viewer non-existent, but identifiable places, moments and characters that appear to have been taken from contemporary everyday life, aiming thereby to capture in his images the tragicomic absurdity of our postmodern existence. Key themes are the disappearance of distances, the disembodiment of the individual and the abstraction of time that have resulted from globalisation and the changes to our living environment that developments in media, automation and technology have brought about.

Hans Op de Beeck sometimes calls his works "proposals"; they are irrefutably fictional,

²⁷ Hans Op de Beeck (Turnhout, 1969) is a Belgian (Flemish) artist who lives and works in Anderlecht (Brussels). His work consists of sculptures, installations, video work, photography, animated films, drawings, paintings and writing (short stories)

constructed and staged, leaving it up to the viewer whether to take the work seriously, as a sort of parallel reality, or immediately to put it into perspective, as no more than a visual construct. His work is nourished by an interest in social and cultural reflection. The artist also questions the difficult relationship between reality and representation, between what we see and what we want to believe, between what is and what we create for ourselves in order to make it easier to deal with our own insignificance and lack of identity. The visual output of that investigation often produces slumbering, insidious, melancholy and astonishing images.²⁸

In this way the work of Hans Op de Beeck is also close to that of Borremans or Magritte; that means based on a reconstructed reality. His work is concerned with how to represent the reality, in order to tell the "hidden" story and leaving it open for the interpretation of the viewer.



Location 1, 1998. Hans Op de Beeck. Sculptural installation, mixed media, 10x12x5 metres

In the book *Hans Op de Beeck On Vanishing* Oliviera & Oxley point out that the spectator enters a darkened space, in which a large model of a crossroads can be viewed at chest height. The work represents an icy, nocturnal intersection in winter. The crossroads are deserted, the trees are bare, and the canals are frozen over. The only activity comes from the traffic lights; the coloured lights switching on and off. The entire scene is bathed in a soft blue moonlight.

For the artist, the work is "about representation, an empty stage", coupled with his belief that "artificial spaces are capable of evoking a credible experience of time". It's very emptiness invites us to complete the image, to connect it to the world, but we remain unable to do so.

The artist invokes narrative by selecting spaces that suggest what might be beyond their boundaries, what is elsewhere. Desirous of novelty, of the next space, of the next view or image, nothing is forthcoming; we remain where we are, trapped by the image that

²⁸ Information compiled from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans_Op_de_Beeck

promises so much but refuses to deliver. Samuel Beckett's²⁹ play *Waiting for Godot* is set in a comparable landscape, described as "A country road. A tree. Evening". The place is exceptionally unremarkable and, similarly to *Location 1*, conforms to neither a place of arrival nor one of departure. We simply pass through; we are caught in-between two states, neither here nor there. The play foregrounds immobility as the act of waiting is never over. Nothing is completed because nothing can be completed. The circularity of the dialogue and of the action provides a palpable interpretation of Friedrich Nietzsche's³⁰ concept of eternal return: "Let us consider this thought in its most fearful form: namely existence as it is, without sense or a goal, but inevitably returning- without a finale- into nothingness."^{31 32}

This concept would also be another way to understand the uncanny, but more subjective. Or as Nietzsche says 'the fearful form'. Or how to generate this form through the use of transit or waiting spaces. Also to be found in those spaces intended to be used by humans, but represented as empty ones. This creates a tension as we observe them, as if the stage would have taken on another role. It is like paying more attention to the container (space), because normally we seem to have paid more attention to the content (the human being). The absence in the settings of everyday life is an element that could awake in us the anguish of the unknown: an empty street, an empty amusement park... You could say that our imagination would easily come up with the image of the full or used space. It may even put sound in our head to the silence of the empty space, which we now could see as a stage. It is not for nothing that in the spaces of reflection, silence is required; like in religious worship spaces or libraries for example. Imagine yourself located in the central point of an empty soccer stadium. The field can be a very daunting scenario. Nothing happens but the space can be overwhelming, perhaps more than a full stadium and with the bustle of the people. A simple change of an element of the recognized reality, as we have concluded from Freud, can create the anguish of the 'uncanny'. Or as another example: yourself in a full stadium, and in a second of time all the people of the stadium remaining motionless and in silence. Something would be then dislocated from his context and it would produce the same feeling I described earlier with the empty space. Strangely enough, in the well known theater location of an empty warehouse, the strangeness would happen the other way around. Since we are accustomed to see the space empty, it might be stranger to see it in full operation with the staff and machinery working. Something familiar becomes uncanny when circumstances -or the way they are presented- change, or when the expectations of the audience is not fulfilled.

Speaking of this topic says Nicolas de Oliveira & Nicola Oxley in the book about Hans Op de Beeck *Hans Op de Beeck On Vanishing*:

"Hans Op de Beeck elaborates models removing the human presence entirely. In doing so, the urban fabric is highlighted and simultaneously rendered functionless- and therefore problematic. After all, general experience teaches us that the city, in its many guises, is made in our image, for our use. Furthermore, the absence of human representation allows the viewer to take possession of the stage, the event that is proposed by the models."

"Although the lack of social, historical and geographical references is a feature in the artist's work, it is perhaps the absence of temporality that marks these models as non-

29 Samuel Barclay Beckett (13 April 1906 – 22 December 1989) was an Irish avant-garde novelist, playwright, theatre director, and poet

30 Eternal return (also known as "eternal recurrence") is a concept that the universe has been recurring, and will continue to recur, in a self-similar form an infinite number of times across infinite time or space. The concept of "eternal recurrence" is central to the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche

31 Friedrich Nietzsche, trans. from *Werke*, Karl Schelchta ed., 3 vols, 2nd edn, Munich 1960, vol. 3, p. 853.

32 De Oliveira, Nicolás and Oxley, Nicola, *Hans Op de Beeck On Vanishing*. Mercatorfonds-Xavier Hufkens, 2007

places or nowheres. Time is essentially expressed in the relationship between one subject and another. Without a subject's actions we are left outside of time, in the realm of objects. Michel de Certeau³³ defines the difference between place and space, arguing that the former "is determined by objects (being there of something dead) ", while the latter relies on actions of subjects. Place, therefore, is always specifically located, while space expands and contracts depending on our actions. For De Certeau, the act of viewing can be construed as just such a spatial action related to and dependent upon a dead object, or indeed location."³⁴

According to De Certeau, our act of looking would become a spatial action, incorporating the time in our visual interaction with the object in matter. It is like when we see a landscape and we mentally project ourselves in it. This is possible due to the decontextualization to which is referred above. One way to do it, is representing the reality through a model, as Hans Op de Beeck does in *Location 1*.

The question now would be, does this happen with any model or miniature? The answer is obviously no. What is important here, is not the way or the medium used to represent reality, but what is actually the collected reality and how it is presented or taken out of the context.³⁵ In this case how to stage the model, together with the absence of human beings is what causes that effect on us while observing, as we have justified above.

There are also other components attached to the concept of the 'uncanny' for me, such as silence, darkness and loneliness. These are added to the atmosphere of *Location 1*. The only element that marks the time reference is the rhythm of a light traffic. The representation of reality thus becomes, through that signal, into something more lively and therefore more recognizable. Emphasizing that cyclical element to which Nietzsche meant, by the concept of *eternal return*. Here he describes that there is no beginning or end (sense of waiting), which causes us anxiety about our own existence, to life itself. The traffic light becomes a poetic element, from the context to which it belongs, but taken to another level of reality. Just like what happens with Magritte's train coming down the chimney, but even further, more subtle, since the train is taken out of his context and the traffic light not. Hereby I answer the question I posed at the beginning of my essay on whether it is necessary that the uncanny must be suggested through a physical act or not. Of course, both the train and the traffic light are two 'physical acts', perceptible by our eyes. But with the traffic light, the uncanny-act connects with us in a more intrinsic way, namely, with our psyche; while the train is more based on our associative ability; based more on a game of forms that we connect with our perception. This associative act happens almost immediately, hence the 'trap' to the eye. Before we ask ourselves what it is about the image that works so well, it has 'deceived' us.

7. Associative capacity: fantasy and imagination

The associative logic is extrapolated to any narrative, whether in the theater or in those arts in which the succession of images become the medium that is used. Also in literature, where the images come in our minds through the sequence of words and phrases.

Emphasis should be placed on static images, such as paintings or photographs, where the factor time does appear, but statically in a 'frozen moment'. It is maybe because of this, that in these cases, the fantasy can possibly be more extensively completed by the spectator, since the information is incomplete. Something similar can be said of literature where, finding itself free of images, it is our brain who fills in the narrative images and situations described therein. A more extreme form of abstract art is music, where images,

33 Michel de Certeau (17 May 1925 – 9 January 1986) was a French Jesuit and scholar whose work combined history, psychoanalysis, philosophy, and the social sciences.

34 De Oliveira, Nicolás and Oxley, Nicola, *Hans Op de Beeck On Vanishing*. Mercatorfonds-Xavier Hufkens, 2007

35 Concept of postmodernism: the means serve the idea, and not vice versa.

ideas or concepts could be less directly associated with it. That is of course not counting with sounds of nature or with other recognizable elements, where the association comes up immediately. This also happens with music that clearly belongs to certain moods, or for instance to cinema or television.

Here it should be necessary to emphasize imagination and fantasy concepts, to better understand the associative games.

"In the cognitive approach of art the concept of imagination prevailed as a faculty immediately detainer of truth. different and perhaps superior to reason and understanding, often seen as a unique and special gift of the artist. Imagination is both creative and revealing of nature and what lies behind it: romanticized vision of Kantian transcendental idealism, which ascribes the form of experience configurating the ability of the mind. A. W. Schlegel, Blake, Shelley, Hazlitt, Baudelaire and many others spoke of imagination in similar terms. Coleridge, with his famous distinction between imagination and fantasy, provided one of the most complete formulations: Fantasy is a "memory mode", which operates associatively to recombine the basic data of the senses; the imagination is the "unifying power" that dissolves and transforms the data and creates novelty and the resulting quality."³⁶

This text also speaks of the 'hidden' from what is perceived, not necessarily giving it the epithet of uncanny, simply called 'what lies behind nature' or 'the truth'. This last term is very subjective because, according to this thinking, it becomes something that we build in our minds, through our experience, imagination and fantasy. It is therefore not only a gift specially exclusive to the artist, but also to the viewer. It is a dialogue in which the artist has to have the capacity to introduce or encourage us to perceive and associate in the search for something that is not fully defined. It is a truth that depends most on feelings and on the personal experience of everyone. But there is something that I have tried to justify throughout this essay, namely that there is a common feeling with the occult or what is hidden. Alfred Hitchcock³⁷, someone who reached a majority audience, also based on the suspense, talks about this in a reasonable and clear way:

"Fear isn't so difficult to understand. After all, weren't we all frightened as children? Nothing has changed since Little Red Riding Hood faced the big bad wolf. What frightens us today is exactly the same sort of thing that frightened us yesterday. It's just a different wolf. This fright complex is rooted in every individual."³⁸

The human needs to anticipate to events, it is nothing more than a defense mechanism by which the body prepares itself for what will happen. We perceive as primary need to imagine what will happen next. That's where the mechanism of fantasy starts. This associative capacity is based on the experience accumulated during our lives on our environment. It is thus found naturally in all of us.

8. Robert Wilson. The visual focus

In any case, to make us perceive the uncanny in the best way possible, the focus is an element key for me. So far we have analyzed 'static' images, demarcated in one single frame. We should also analyze later on how a sequence of events influences our associative ability to reach an uncanny feeling. I will talk first about the visual focus in the

³⁶ C. Beardsley, Hospers John, *Estética. Historia y Fundamentos*, Ediciones Cátedra, 1997

³⁷ Filmmaker 13 August 1899 – 29 April 1980

³⁸ <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/35960-fear-isn-t-so-difficult-to-understand-after-all-weren-t-we>

work of Robert Wilson³⁹.

I would say that the perfect combination to get the public focused is through the composition in space, the sound, the movement of performers or objects and the light that defines what you see and what you do not have to see. The combination of these factors determine the time. Time, as Robert Wilson says, is just a plastic component. I could not agree more:

"... The time in the theater is different from the rest of the time. It's a plastic time: I can stretch it, or compress it."⁴⁰

Sometimes time is even determined by the dramatic narrative. A silence in combination with a static image after a moment of visual impact (visual change) can seem an eternity. We are here talking about the tempo. This is why the tempo determines the time or perception. The tempo treated as the rhythm at which things happen on a stage, in all its aspects.

In the scenographies of Robert Wilson, everything is measured, nothing is random, as if it was a mathematical study of composition. To say that the sets of Wilson are not well thought is like saying that *The Nightwatch* by Rembrandt is a random graffiti. Each movement narrates, from where to where it occurs, at what speed, in combination with which element, et cetera, et cetera. More than a director, Robert Wilson is rather a choreographer of the mise-en-scene.

He says about it:

"It's all architectural to me. It's construction and time and space, how to support this line of attention. Sometimes it can be something in contradiction and it makes more attention on the space, and sometimes it's not. They're aesthetic decisions that are made in a construction in time and space, so sometimes one can see, maybe, a movement on stage that's slower or different tempi than the music. Or it's an internal rhythm of the music; sometimes it can be quicker and sometimes it can be exactly in the tempi of the music. To me it's boring if all the walking and all the movements are exactly in the tempi of the music, so sometimes there's someone walking slower, someone quicker, someone with the music. It makes a denser work, a more complex work. It also relates more to the energy of the public. You find that some people are in different mental rhythms in the audience".⁴¹

Under this vision and his way of making theater, I identify myself with it. But we could also say that that is what all theater is about, so, we could ask ourselves more critically where resides the originality of Robert Wilson. Precisely in bringing the visual composition so far that it gets an equal weight with the text or music. Robert Wilson is eminently that type of visual director, like Alfred Hitchcock was.

Hereby some quotes from both directors where it is clear the importance they spend on the visual message:

"I think I could take away the music and I'd just look at the lights and at the movements, and hopefully it could stand on its own, yeah. Architecturally it's conceived that way."⁴²

"I can't read fiction without visualizing every scene. The result is it becomes a series of pictures rather than a book."⁴³

"If it's a good movie, the sound could go off and the audience would still have a perfectly clear idea of what was going on."⁴⁴

"Dialogue should simply be a sound among other sounds, just something that comes out

39 (Robert Wilson (born 4 October 1941) is an American avant-garde stage director and playwright who has been called America's — or even the world's — foremost vanguard theater artist

40 <http://www.bruceduffie.com/wilson.html>

41 idem

42 idem

43 <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/393852-i-can-t-read-fiction-without-visualizing-every-scene-the-result>

44 <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/a/alfredh141870.html>

of the mouths of people whose eyes tell the story in visual terms. It is advisable to make use of them when there is no other choice, since we have a rectangular screen in a movie theater to fill in, and not filling in pages and pages on a typewriter."⁴⁵

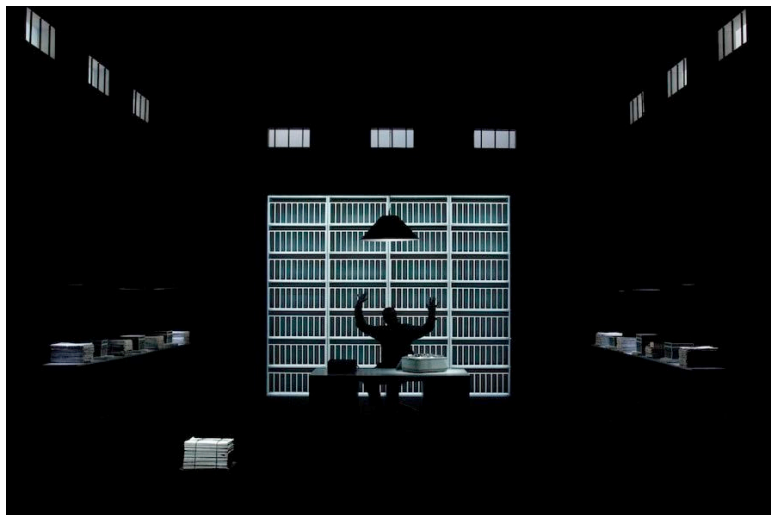
When thinking about the works of Wilson, I think of a 'whole', in such a way combined to produce a clear universe, as if it was a 'Gesamtkunstwerk'⁴⁶. And explaining it in a clear language, it is important to recover these words of Robert Wilson:

*"And I think that to make a theater play, you need to see the totality quickly, because the theater has to be about one thing first, just one, for afterwards to be able to cover everything else. And if it not about that one thing in the beginning, it becomes too complicated"*⁴⁷

He talks further about the same subject in another interview:

*"Like Susan Sontag said in her essay Against Interpretation that "the mystery is in the surface." And I think that's true, that somehow the surface of a work must be mysterious and accessible. Whether one's doing Shakespeare or Gluck's Alceste, there must be something very simple about it. One must be able to tell one's self, if one is an actor or a director or author, the work is about this, something, very simple. Then it can be about many things."*⁴⁸

In my opinion, Robert Wilson is here using the same bases that support Freud's theory of the need for the familiar and recognizable -'heimlich'- that makes the viewer recognize himself in a situation, in order to better manipulate his perception and take it to another state of reality -'unheimlich'-. Not always something literally dark has to come out of this theory, but that occurs frequently with the sets of Wilson. Here's an example:



Production *Krapp's Last Tape*, Spoleto, 2009. Robert Wilson

It is unavoidable to comment an observation made by a reporter in an interview with Robert Wilson, "When I think about the staging of your works, I remember always black,

⁴⁵ http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Alfred_Hitchcock

⁴⁶ Gesamtkunstwerk (translated as total work of art, ideal work of art, universal artwork, synthesis of the arts, comprehensive artwork, all-embracing art form or total artwork) is a work of art that makes use of all or many art forms or strives to do so. The term is a German word which has come to be accepted in English as a term in aesthetics.

⁴⁷ <http://vestirlaopera.wordpress.com/entrevista-a-robert-wilson/>

⁴⁸ <http://www.bruceeduffie.com/wilson.html>

dark ...⁴⁹

Getting back to the subject of the associative, the use of images that Robert Wilson makes, provokes in the viewer countless associations, with the final goal to leave the viewer confronted with his own interpretations.

The ultimate significance of Wilson's works can be summarized in his own words:

"We make theater for the public. The best performer is one who performs first for himself, but we always have in mind that we're doing it for the public. We perform for ourselves, and we invite them to come and experience what we have made for them. My theater is not a theater of interpretation, so therefore it differs from most other theater that we see today, or work by other directors and authors. For me, interpretation is not the responsibility of a performer or the director or designer; interpretation is for the public. That's why we make the work, and we invite the audience to come in to see this. When we present this work to them, we present it with a question. We say, "What is it?" And the reason we ask this question is to have the audience there, and they can say what it is. We try not to say what something is, but to ask a question, and that's the reason to have people in the forum — to have an exchange."⁵⁰

9. Yourself: Another One

To conclude my analysis of the uncanny, I will use my independent project *"Yourself: Another One"* as an example. It took place in the *Amsterdamse Hogeschool voor de Kunsten* 24, 25 and January 26, 2013.

I will do a review of the decisions made in a process that, in my opinion, summarizes very well how I interpreted all that research for the mysterious widely discussed in this essay.



Untitled, 2012. Sketch for Yourself: Another One. F.G.C.

I will start resuming a quotation from René Magritte: "I never had an idea. I've only thought of the image."⁵¹ The origin of my installation-performance also starts out from an image.

⁴⁹ <http://vestirlaopera.wordpress.com/entrevista-a-robert-wilson/>

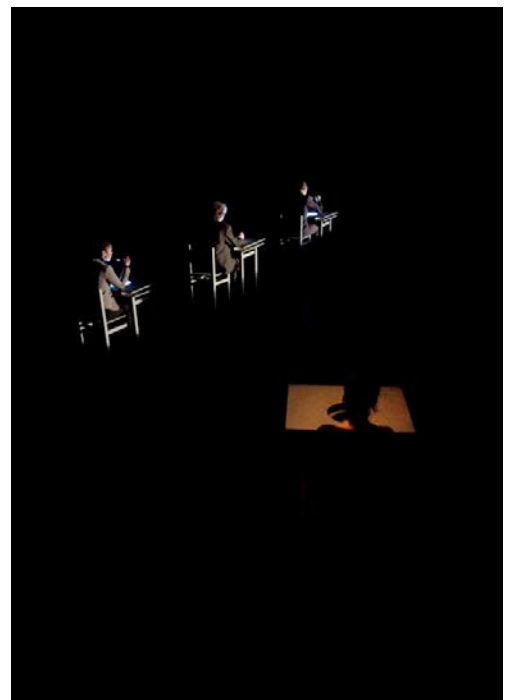
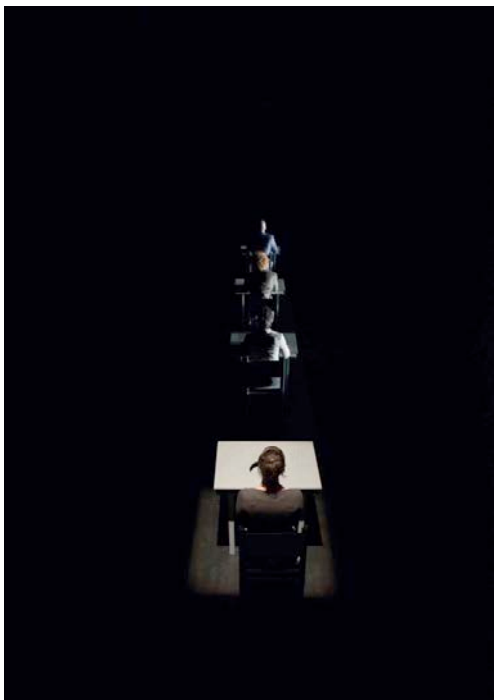
⁵⁰ <http://www.bruceduffie.com/wilson.html>

⁵¹ Magritte Museum, Brussels

An image that comes from a common situation, namely a cafe where I was sitting once. In Freud's terms, from the most 'heimlich' or familiar situation possible. Sitting at a small table, being part of a row of other small tables.

I was sitting alone at the end of the row, and looked at the back of the other people who were also sitting by themselves. At that intimate, introspective moment, I had a deep sense of loneliness despite being as I said, accompanied by other people, strangers though.

The feeling of being one of many in the multitude. The mystery of belonging to a complex and enormous world, of being not at all important in the whole, but at the same time very aware of looking around from my little world, locked in my own self. This sparked my imagination and, I in my head, I made the tables turn that were in front of me. For two reasons: one out of curiosity to see the faces of those who were with me and to maximize the fact to stay really on my own. Turning the tables according to a pivot point located at the farthest table, I would remain alone:



Yourself: Another One, 2013. F.G.C. Photo-shoot, Robert van der Ree

From that moment on, that image stayed recorded and stored in my memory. If I was able to generate that calmness, the stillness; the effect of turning the tables would provide a strong visual impact, particularly believable, despite the 'fantastic'. Precisely because of this staging based on a 'real' and recognizable situation. From that time on I cared to think about how to reproduce it on a stage, and in which context. Would it be as an image itself? Or as a starting point for a narrative in pictures perhaps? Into which theatrical form would it turn? Nor was clear the emotional and visual effect that this would cause when seeing it physically happening. That means, the translation from imagination to realization. This is an interesting point that kept me occupied during the creation process, on how to materialize an image, about which Michaël Borremans said in an interview:

"...I don't want to perform that, in real. I like the fact that it stays with an idea. I like it like that. I'm not that bruiser that wants to manifest himself in that way, who wants to make the work all concrete. The idea and the dream and the aspect that you can imagine, I always find richer than when something is performed. With respect to that, I am very

reluctant. I would be a very bad architect. I would say: "Yes it is okay, but we are not going to perform it, imagine that someone is bothered by that!" (laughs). One should come with heavy arguments before I really would do that, or should think about that. Because it is a bit like: then you lost the dream, you know. And you have to be sure to cherish that as an artist.

I also saw an interview with an Italian car designer of sports cars, like Pininfarina or something, and he told about that, and he said he always had a very tragic feeling, when a car was built. Because it was all much nicer before. It is so much nicer to dream about it".⁵²

At the beginning of my study, I agreed with Borremans' opinion. Developing myself in the Theatre School, has precisely helped me to investigate in the direction of materializing. Just like Borremans I also use drawing as a tool to create. How to translate these ideas; these sketches into reality, is what took me the most time at the beginning of my project Yourself: Another One. So in order to counter what Borremans says, I became interested in trying to put his work in a performative space, not literally, but as inspiration. Doing this, it would be put together with an element that does not exist in the paintings, which is the tempo. The tempo determines the time, as I assumed above commenting on Robert Wilson.

To materialize or translate something into a performative space, has for me as much to do with the material to be used, as with -almost more important- in which moment and in what context an image is brought. This aspects which determinate the tempo, as I pointed out before, are missing in the static image; namely the speed and the rhythm whereby a scene happens in space. This actions will consequently make the perception of time appear. It is more a 'fictitious time' than a 'real time'.

When we hear Borremans talking about the materialization of a dream, it sounds like something negative, as if something that becomes tangible has to be shut down necessarily. For me, it would be like that, if it was simply about turning it into an object, usually recognizable as a sculpture. The trick is to manipulate the image and the way the audience has to look at it to make it interesting, intriguing, exciting and uncanny. As I said, it has not much to do with the material which is used. That is the advantage of the 'medium' theater, along with the fact of the physical proximity of the public to the events that happen there; ultimately, due to sharing the same space.

Is interesting to cite Alfred Hitchcock when talking about manipulation:

"I was directing the viewers. You might say I was playing them, like an organ".⁵³

Hitchcock is less interested in reality than in how reality is perceived. To achieve this, you have to manipulate reality; from materialization to its staging. Always in balance with the credibility based in the 'familiar events' to which Freud was referring.

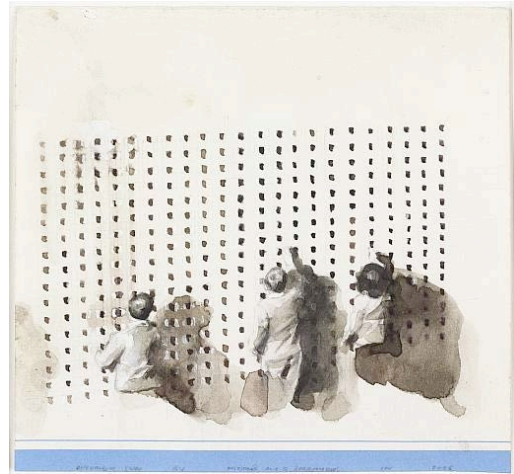
52 <http://hildevancanneyt.blogspot.nl/2009/09/beide-kunstenaars-verwittigen-me-op.html>

53 <http://sensesofcinema.com/2000/6/psycho/>

These are two images of Borremans that I used as inspiration for my work *Yourself: Another One*.



The journey (True Colours), 2002. Michaël Borremans.
Pencil, watercolor, white and black India ink, and varnish
on book cover, 17x24.7cm



December, 2006. Michaël Borremans.
Pencil and watercolor on paper, 13.8x14.7 cm

These images of Borremans have something hidden and mysterious. They actually show the same for me: they are about men watching men. These last are represented as a building. Here the building is represented as a manifestation of human existence, a tangible icon of our life in society; and we as observers of the picture, are looking at the observer. Here occurs the known and above mentioned phenomenon *mise-en-abyme* 'placement within an abyss', that can denote an (almost) endless sequence. In this case, the act of looking places us in perspective with ourselves. We are all part of one world, centered and dominated by us as a mass and where our role as individuals often can be seen as negligible.

I found this theme fascinating; the fact of being quite unnecessary as individuals in relation with the multitude. To be one of many, but fully aware from our perception that we are locked in ourselves. Limited in small cells from which we observe everything. The figures that turn their backs to us, always have mystery about them. They literally hide something; their face, their expression. The facial expression disappears and that generates curiosity. And in these cases, moreover, we become almost co-observers; kind of voyeurs, when looking in the same direction as the figure does. We are allowed to look, because we are not 'discovered' by the other who we observe. The act of looking becomes more exclusive, so we pay more attention.

My image of the tables of the restaurant that rotate, were somehow connected with the image of Borremans' building. At the beginning of the process I could not describe what the connection was, but I felt it with my intuition. But before being able to analyse the connection between the two images, I need to explain well what is the situation in those tables regarding to the public, during the performance-installation.

In the lobby of the theater, the audience is welcomed by a waiter. This personage is clarified within his role by wearing a smoking, with a menu in one hand and a napkin hanging from his forearm. He walks among the small number of people (21), quietly, watching them. He asks a random person chosen by him, if he wants to wait with him, and then asks the rest of the public to enter the theater.

The public enters a space where they sit on a platform. There is a wall with a little window per chair, through which the performance will be seen. At first these windows are closed but they will be opened from the other side at the beginning of the performance.

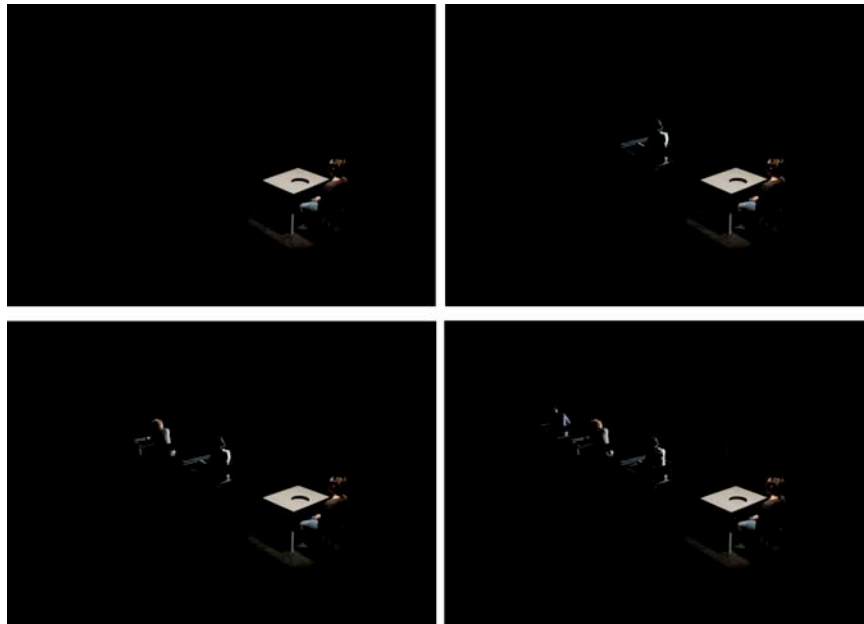


Yourself: Another One, 2013. Audience setting. F.G.C. Photo-shoot, Robert van der Ree



Yourself: Another One, 2013. F.G.C. Photo-shoot, Robert van der Ree

Back to the comparison between the image of Borremans and the one of the tables and in order to find the connection between them, I must say that there is in both images a clear distinction between the individual who observes and 'the other' who is being observed. In one image is the 'other' represented by a building and in the other image by a row of people sitting at tables; individually but as part of a whole. In the beginning of the installation-performance I introduce the tables with the character to the spectator one by one; from the closest table to the viewer to the more distant, in a progression or addition. Therefore suggesting that the row could attempt to continue growing, like multiplying, thus returning to the idea of the individual as a part of that mass.



Yourself: Another One, 2013. F.G.C. Photo-shoot, Rober van der Ree

The intriguing fact of Borremans's image, in which the character looks at the model of the building, is to imagine what the character thinks or does to it. Regarding to the use of scales and models Borremans says:

*"By playing with different scales, you provoke a kind of anarchy in the image. In the drawings I use that a lot and make references to models. In our society we use models to try things, to test things; scientists use models. The model as a metaphor for our actions is very appealing to me."*⁵⁴

It is just in the other image, in which there are three children, where a physical interaction with the object happens. Despite a certain abstraction of the image, I associate this with the image of the model. It seems as if the children were opening windows in a building made to scale.

I assume, as I said earlier, that the building is a metaphor or representation of, let's say, our society or the 'human' as the mass. When leaving the model in the hands of the children, they can do what they want with it; testing or trying things with it, as Borremans says, gives an innocence and a fragile poetry to the picture. To me, the fact of leaving it in the hands of children, gives innocence, arbitrariness, fragility, and some unconsciousness; and talking in the terms of the metaphor we described before, we could see this acting with the model as if we didn't really know what to do with our destiny. We as a society, managed by our free will, a little bit unconscious and fragile. I interpret these images in this way. We, left alone to our own luck. Metaphorically represented in my installation by the waiter, who chooses who comes in, and serves us. At the moment that one person of the public is sitting at the table, he lets himself, as it were, in his hands. And the rest of the audience co-participates from the same surrender to destiny -metaphorically speaking- through the identification with that chosen person of the public.

This also happens when we are at the doctor, in a plane, on a bus, on the train ... we leave ourselves in the hands of another. But in my opinion, it is with food, which we can identify ourselves with easily, because it is an everyday experience; it becomes easily recognizable.

The rest of the audience watching through the wall gets identified with the person of the

⁵⁴ <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/features/michael-borremans/2/>

public who has been seated at the table. The personal experience thus becomes a collective experience. Something that also fits well together with my concept of the 'self' and the 'other'.

My intention with the image of the restaurant was suggesting the fact of being really there with the least possible elements. Making from a common situation something uncanny. We may ask ourselves, what makes this situation somewhat uncanny?

The answer lies in the manipulation. And of course, in the staging of the elements: the waiter that welcomes us, with his serious face, the fact of choosing someone in the audience, making the spectator seem to have lost his will. The setting in a totally dark space, where the tables appear from the darkness, the sound of spoons against plates enhanced by speakers, tables in gray with gray dressed characters suggesting uniformity and promoting the concept of mass versus individuals. The tables have a peculiar feature: they were made with a double layer, to make a hole that would simplify and suggest a plate.

As counterpoint and to bring more naturalness or normality to the scene, I chose a soft, quiet easy listening music or muzak.

The contrast between manipulated elements, the apparent normality and the stillness, suggested that something could happen at any moment. The uncanny was present and the tension was about getting to know how would it physically be materialized. In this case, through the movement of the tables after a while. Before that would happen, small events would unfold, which maintained the viewer guessing and kept in suspense. As Freud says in his essay: "the uncanny would always be something in which one finds himself, as it were, bewildered, lost."⁵⁵ Lost in a situation where despite familiar, it was also manipulated. In that way comes the surprise or strangeness.

The waiter activates the music and movement of diners with a gesture. This would suggest that as a quintessential case of the uncanny, arose "The doubt that an apparently animated being, is indeed living, and conversely; that an unanimated object is animated in some way, claiming that purpose, the impression that the wax figures awake, 'wise' dolls and automata"⁵⁶. The diners would develop that automaton character, making more exciting the moment of turning the tables, where the faces would eventually be seen. In one of the gestures of the waiter, where he is triggering or stopping events, he brings up a video screen in front of the tables where the image is showed of the waiter receiving a line of people, directed to the entrance of the building. The people are dressed in grey costumes just like the diners of the tables to suggest that they are part of the same mass. The building refers to the entrance of the restaurant, but at this point the public does not know this yet.

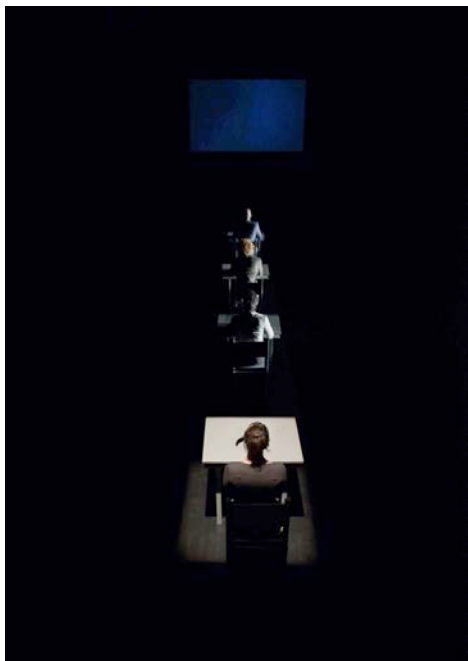
As the setting becomes silent, people stop eating and everyone looks at the screen, almost like a propaganda-action-image for the 'mass'. The image is reproduced with a high-pitched shrill, contrasting with the soft background music that sounded before the video appears. The background music continues again once the video ends.

The contrast with the shrill music of the video clarifies the different layers of reality, the first more real and the other more fictional. Here I began to jump from recognizable reality to fictitious strangeness, that will develop through the performance. Before this happens there is a fact that also belongs to a fictional reality, namely the actions of the waiter when setting all operations with a simple hand gesture. This purported acceptance of this 'magical' action of the waiter becomes more believable, through his defined and clear character as a waiter, who has been formerly accepted as something 'real'. It is through the fact of having come in contact with the public in the 'real world' on the entrance of the theater. In this way the jump to the 'magical moment' of the gestures becomes accepted. The character begins outside the theater, as it were, 'reality' (behind de scenes) and then we see him in the setting of the carefully modified reality. This added to the fact that we see him through a hole -literally in another space where we don't have access to-, turns

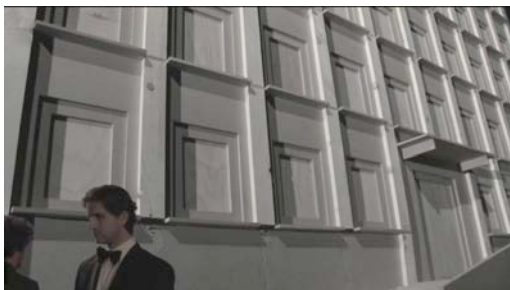
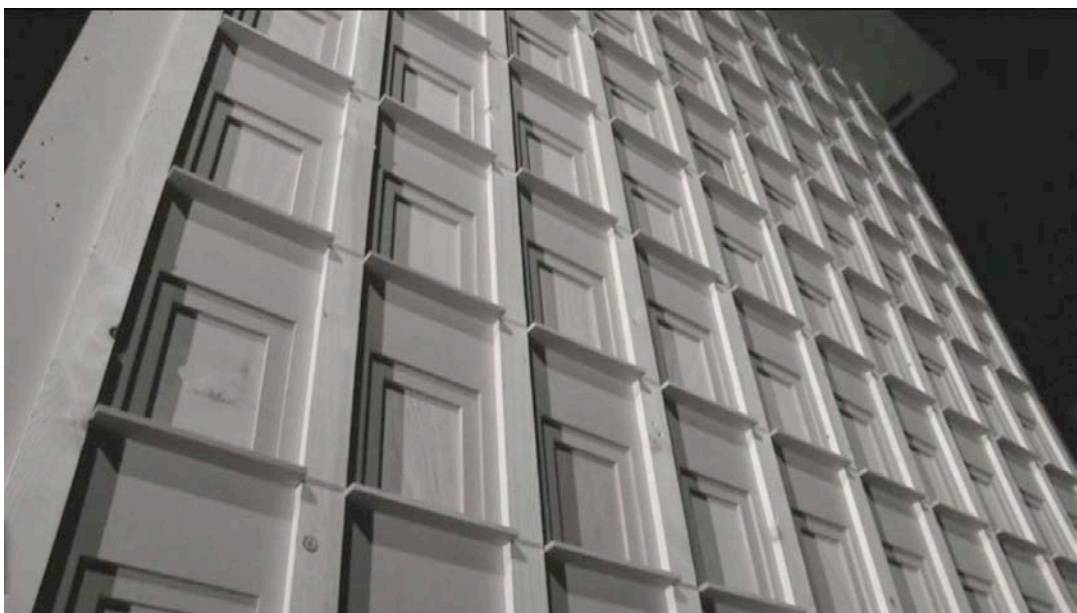
⁵⁵ Freud, Sigmund, *The Uncanny*, First published in *Imago*, Bd. V., 1919; reprinted in *Sammlung*, Fünfte Folge. [Translated by Alix Strachey.]

⁵⁶ idem

the restaurant space in a more magical place.



Yourself: Another One, 2013. F.G.C. Photo-shoot, Robert van der Ree



Yourself: Another One, 2013. Stills of the video *Gebouw*. F.G.C. Duration: 37 sec.

This video is intended to associate the entrance of the building with the public entrance to the theater hall. Something I had not commented yet- and it suits better to discuss it now referring to the building-, is the fact that the first thing you experience as public when you sit, is listening -in total darkness- to the sound of the atmosphere of a deserted town in the middle of the night; representing the typical slight murmur with a car passing by the place. This is heard in crossfade with stepping sounds of people walking up stairs. While steps are heard, you hear a layer above higher in volume, which is the sound of the footsteps of a person walking more slowly. Once the sound of people walking up the stairs stop, you still hear that parsimonious walk of that one person. At the end, the sound of a door closing with a nasty bang. Thus showing that the scene starts in an outside and moves to an inside. This to suggest that the waiter is guiding people to their places and closing the door after him. Even more, a part of the public had to walk up to a higher floor by a stair to be able to enter in their cubicles. Thus being able to associate the sounds of the beginning with their own experience in getting to their seats.

Another 'trick' I used, to look for surprise during the turning of the tables, was not through adding something strange to the diners, but to the table. They just ate with a spoon, with normal gestures that correspond to such action. The surprise was the light that came from the hole from which they ate.

It should be mentioned here that the photo shown above of the turning of the tables does not match with the light used during the performance, where the only source of light came from the hole, so that neither the tables nor the chairs were visible.

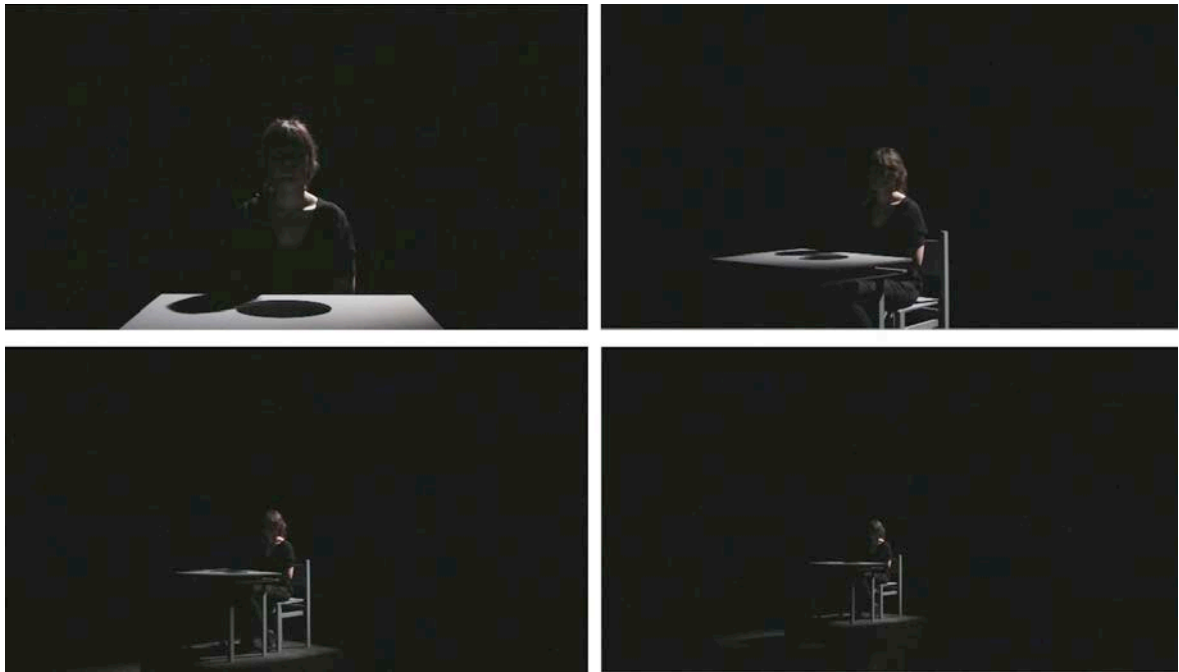


Milk, 2003. Michaël Borremans. Pencil and watercolor on paper, 17.5 x 23.5 cm



Yourself: Another One, 2013. F.G.C. Photo-shoot, Robert van der Ree

Despite not to have used this picture of Borremans (showed above) as an inspiration for the light of the tables, it causes a similar effect on me. Namely, an effect based on the suggestion of the existence of a gap produced when using a light source through a frame; as an indefinite space. Consequently the food and the dish become something undefined, or, at any rate, from a dish or meal, to something spatial and open to interpretation; and that will be linked to the end image of the performance, that I will comment later on. The tables once they turn, disappear on the horizon, in the dark, by dropping a black cloth on which will be projected the image of the person in the audience sitting in the table and that is left behind. This image is recorded from the perspective of the last table that rotates and has gone together with the other tables. With this change of perspective and flashback in time, metaphorically enhances the concept of being left alone. Seeing yourself from the point of view of the other, gives a point of relativity to our (irrelevant) role as a individual within the mass.



Yourself: Another One, 2013. Stills of the video *Tafel*. F.G.C. Duration: 2 min. 18 sec.

Once left alone, the waiter appears again, approaching the table, but this time it is a boy, also dressed in smoking and looking like the former waiter.

This transformation seemed necessary to me to introduce the poetry of the building and therefore another reality. The building makes its appearance from the darkness of the back of the room, getting closer to the spectators, when the black curtain gets opened under the gesture of the waiter. When approaching the viewers a subwoofer sound is heard, as if it was an earthmoving. This sound was also added to the movement of turning the tables, to connect those two moments. Here befalls another element that Freud defined as uncanny, which occurs when the inanimate comes to life, in this case caused by the movement of the building. At that point I had to confirm that the appearance of such an object becomes credible. The object, due to its smooth motion in combination with sound, seems to be transformed into a living fact. I remember its entrance on the scene as something shocking and surprising. It is an unexpected element especially after having seen it in the video, where it seems, by the prospect and its relationship to the characters, a real size building. At this point I had to remember the huge objects typically used by Robert Wilson with autonomous movement in his entries on stage (like the train of *Einstein On The Beach*).



Einstein On The Beach, 1976. Robert Wilson, Philip Glass

By transforming the element of the waiter, like I mentioned before, it is showed that we are in another 'reality', or rather, in an other transformation of reality. We associated the first waiter to the reality of the anteroom of the theater, then in the theatre hall. The child, however, appears for the first time and we get to know him in the space with what is left from the 'restaurant'. This other reality is even more apparent when the child stops in front of the model and observes it. At the same moment the sound atmosphere of the restaurant is played through the speakers, helping us to understand what we are seeing through the child. The ambient sound changes here with respect to the initial one (where the only sound was the sound of cutlery), when adding murmur of people, we are pretending to be looking in that moment at the mass, understood as a greater whole. The only sound that has not appeared yet is the background music.



Yoursel: Another One, 2013. F.G.C. Photo-shoot, Robert van der Ree

The experience of looking at the boy who is looking at the model and at the scene, together with the sound of the crowd, made my experiment based on the image of Borremans, in my opinion, stronger. I had the impression of being looking at two parallel realities, while in the drawing of Borremans, both the character and the model, seemed to come from the same world. This happens to me thanks to the context of the performance and to the fact that we are all looking from the same physical space, even though within different reality levels. It is just because of that -through the layering- that the building becomes further separated from our reality. It was our world -along and through the boy-, watching the world that was going on in the building. The picture became for me richer

than the original, due to giving it a spatial value -the medium theater- and a context in a very associative and open story, so that those characteristics were not lost over the original paintings of Borremans.

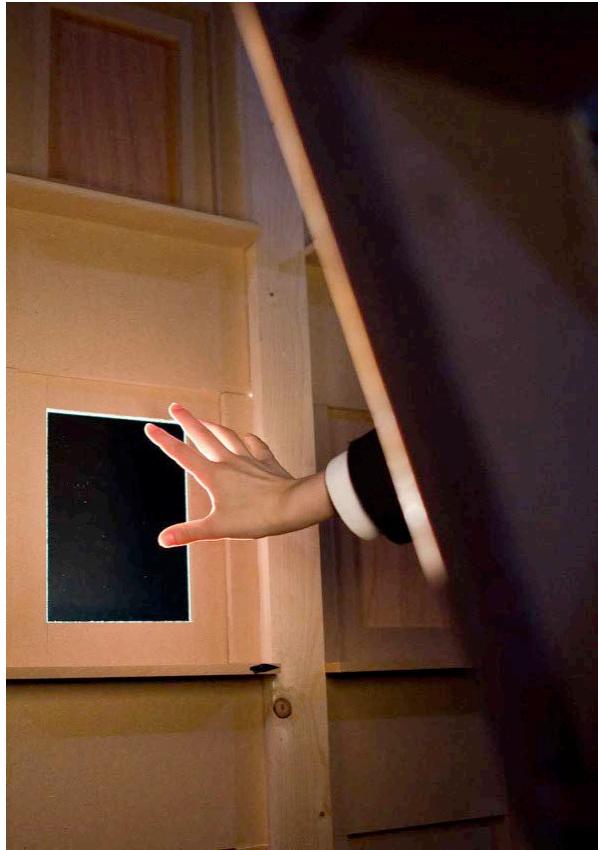
Certainly for those who looked through the holes in the walls, reality tripled. As a very important element in the development of this performance, is the fact that the public looked through a window. It would associate the physical space where they were looking from, with the building; as if a mirror was put in front of them.

“A parallel world is a mirror image”.⁵⁷(Michael Borremans)



Yoursell: Another One, 2013. F.G.C. Photo-shoot, Robert van der Ree

⁵⁷ <http://d-sites.net/english/borremans.htm>



Yourself: Another One, 2013. F.G.C. Photo-shoot, Robert van der Ree

The child places a ladder near the model and randomly starts opening some windows. At the time when this happens the viewer perceives and remembers the beginning of the performance, when they got also their window open. And just like what happens with a landscape: that when we see a landscape in the distance, we project ourselves into it (as I said in an earlier chapter). Hereby some viewers almost literally projected themselves on the windows of the building, waiting somehow to see their faces when the windows were opened. However, what came out of the windows was light. I aimed to create the illusion, without that it physically had to happen. It becomes clear that the child doubts about which window to open, what refers to the choice made by the adult waiter with someone from the audience at the beginning of the performance.

This emphasized to me the randomness of the act and the unimportance of the individual in relation to the mass. Here the server acts as a sort of 'destiny' or the often random course of events. At the moment that the hatches get opened, the restaurant music is played again. By changing the situation during the performance, the music seems to take another feeling, from the most banal, almost comic scene from the beginning, through the feeling of loneliness and melancholy of the video, to the more poetic character of the final image.

The whole performance had become for me an associative puzzle of repetition of situations but transforming the elements in time, space and form. Using a nonlinear time, but circular, which brings us back to Nietzsche's concept of the 'eternal return', bathed in a hidden force or uncanny that I tried to let it come forth through the whole performance, and through the events and changes in the different 'realities'.

At the end of the performance, while the child is opening the windows of the scaled building, the windows of the public were slowly closed, leaving so the story literally unfinished and enhancing the feeling of an infinite loop, that fascinates me so much about life itself.

10. Conclusion

Throughout this essay I have already been responding to essential questions raised at the beginning about the uncanny. The hidden feeling which even so, it still appears. Quoting myself at the beginning of the essay:

“How does the familiarity become uncanny? Does it only happen in our imagination? In other words, can you suggest a situation that through associative thinking makes it happen? Or to make the uncanny be revealed, how much should this be displayed through a physical act? There are different levels, as I shall analyse later, by which you can generate this suspense or mystery. From the subtlest of scenarios, where the spectator's associations complete everything, or even the most direct ways to cause strangeness.”

Whichever the way is to generate this mystery, from the most subtle way, as the example of *Location 1* by Hans Op de Beeck, till the strange combinations of objects of Magritte or Robert Wilson, mystery may never be definite completely, because it is closely linked to our private experiences, personal feelings and emotional activities. That is what makes it interesting. And what is more important: by definition, mystery will always remain unresolved, and I will always be trying to find it. In this way I answer the question of whether it has to manifest physically. The feeling will always speak, and it would always start from a physical situation, because we need to confront ourselves with a physical fact in order to let it be revealed in us.

Returning to enumerate briefly the elements that cause that tension in us : the darkness, doubles figures and repetitions, the inanimate that comes to life, as described by Freud in his essay. I would add: emptiness, silence and stillness, as I described in my section on space. Also the human visual reference, basic to identify ourselves with the scene.

Looking through the eyes of another. Especially looking at the man taking actions that require a certain concentration, as the characters of the famous paintings of Vermeer. The beauty of theater lies for me in the vast possibilities that this medium offers to create something exciting and mysterious, as I have tried to describe in my chapter on Yourself: Another One. The importance of the physical presence of the elements sharing space with the public and the visual impact that that generates: the space as unifier of experiences.

The trick is in the course of an act, the staging, the way to capture the viewer's attention as much as possible, with small doses of suspense, little mysteries shown on the way, that may intrigue you to make you wonder how the history could finally be unleashed. There are two basic elements that I have mentioned largely along this essay: one is to depart from a recognizable and familiar reality, and the other to fully capture the viewer's attention.

As example I would name the spatial tension and the manipulation of time that is brilliantly used by Robert Wilson, to set the foundations of -to my view- a fascinating way of guiding our view. The composition of the elements tempo (= time), space and movement understood as a whole.

I could also assert, that every unfinished story has something uncanny. But at the same time, not every story that stays open will leave us a taste of mystery. The stories which will have more options to get this effect on us, are those that more closely match with mostly existential issues, the most intrinsic to the human being: what is hidden.

11. Biography

- C. Beardsley, Hospers John, Estética. Historia y Fundamentos, Ediciones Cátedra, 1997
- De Chirico, Arnold Böcklin [originally 1920], Massimo Carrà, ed, Metaphysical Art. trans. Caroline Tisdall (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971)
- Dr. Kaldenbach, Kees. An essay on Vermeer, brain channels, neural stimulus, visual perception and art appreciation, July 17, 2011. <http://kalden.home.xs4all.nl/verm/vermeerperception1.html>
- De Oliveira, Nicolás and Oxley Nicola, Hans Op de Beeck On Vanishing, Mercatorfonds-Xavier Hufkens, 2007
- Freud, Sigmund, The Uncanny, First published in Imago, Bd. V., 1919; reprinted in Sammlung, Fünfte Folge. [Translated by Alix Strachey.]
- Gioni, Massimiliano/Michaud, Philippe-Alain/Sardo, Delfim, Michaël Borremans. Weight. Hatje Cantz, 2008
- Jewell, Keala. The Art of Enigma: The De Chirico Brothers & the Politics of Modernism. The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, PA., 2004.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich, Werke. Karl Schelchta ed., 3 vols, 2nd edn, Munich 1960, vol. 3, p. 853.
- Rothman, Roger. Between Böcklin and Picasso: Giorgio de Chirico in Paris, 1909-1913. Bucknell University, 2006
- Wulf, Cori and Hanson, Abigale Time Transfixed 1938 by René Magritte, The Art Institute of Chicago, 2001
- <http://www.schamper.ugent.be/481/ik-probeer-te-streven-naar-kwaliteit-op-lange-termijn-is-dat-beter-voor-iedereen>
- http://www.academia.edu/1557753/Between_Bocklin_and_Picasso_Giorgio_de_Chirico_in_Paris_1909-1913
- <http://www.thecult.es/Arte/la-sombra-en-el-museo-thyssen/All-Pages.html>
- http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pintura_metafisica
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans_Op_de_Beeck
- <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/35960-fear-isn-t-so-difficult-to-understand-after-all-weren-t-we>
- <http://www.bruceuffie.com/wilson.html>
- <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/393852-i-can-t-read-fiction-without-visualizing-every-scene-the-result>
- <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/a/alfredhitc141870.html>
- http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Alfred_Hitchcock
- <http://vestirlaopera.wordpress.com/entrevista-a-robert-wilson/>
- <http://www.bruceuffie.com/wilson.html>
- <http://hildevancanneyt.blogspot.nl/2009/09/beide-kunstenaars-verwittigen-me-op.html>

<http://sensesofcinema.com/2000/6/psycho/>

<http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/features/michael-borremans/2/>

<http://d-sites.net/english/borremans.htm>