THE DOMESTIC VEIL:

EXPLORING THE NET CURTAIN THROUGH THE UNCANNY AND THE GOTHIC

CAROL ANN QUARINI

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Abstract

This research aims to develop original creative practice, using the net curtain to reconsider the domestic, through the lenses of the uncanny and the gothic. The net curtain, hanging in the liminal space between the public and the private, is used to embody Freud's 1919 definition of the uncanny, as the point of slippage between the homely and the unhomely. Also central to this research are ideas about the gothic and gendered domesticity, in particular, the gothic fiction of the mid-nineteenth century that critiqued the idea of 'separate spheres'.

This interdisciplinary, practice-based research covers several wide areas of study (the uncanny, gothic and domestic), but focuses on the small area where they overlap, and builds on their nineteenth-century expression, to comment on the domestic. The methodology incorporates historical research and analysis of both mid-nineteenth century fiction and contemporary art to produce fine-art textile responses, using the medium of the net curtain. Although there has been a resurgence of interest in the uncanny and the gothic in academia, novels, film and art; textile responses to these themes in the domestic environment are under-developed, which is where this research aims to make an original contribution to knowledge.

The net curtain is an appropriate medium for expressing the ideas embedded in this research because it evokes domesticity yet speaks of veiling, obfuscation, claustrophobia and secrecy; elements integral to the uncanny and the gothic. Aspects of the net curtain are represented by the chapter headings, and mirror the tropes of gothic novels. 'Transparent boundaries' discusses the importance of interiors in the nineteenth century and shows how women became conflated with their homes. 'Sanctuary and prison' discusses the idea of home, the development of the separate spheres ideology, and women's equivocal experience of home. 'The unquiet voice' considers women's dual literacy in stitch and text, subversive stitching and coded communication. 'Silent witness' considers domestic decay, the development of the haunted house and the net curtain as silent witness. 'The complicit curtain' considers how the curtain acts anthropomorphically within the uncanny home.

The research revisits the uncanny and the gothic in the domestic environment by extending existing research, as well as making new connections. The outcome is the creation of fine-art textile practice that re-considers the domestic, and a thesis that includes an exegesis of the practice and research, as well as a review of other contemporary textile responses to the theme.

Keywords: net, lace, curtain, uncanny, gothic, domestic, Victorian, fiction, stitching

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Preface

This research developed from a love of lace and the seemingly magical properties of its creation. Starting with nothing more than a reel of thread and a needle, the lacemaker can fashion the most astonishingly beautiful, gossamer-like fabric; a process akin to spinning straw into gold. Where others see net curtains as drab, greying, fly-blown nets hanging abjectly at the window, I see exquisite panels of Nottinghamshire lace, created by Victorian ingenuity and machinery, winning prizes and acclaim at the International Exhibitions of the nineteenth century.

This interest in the ingenuity of the Victorians extends to their domestic life and literature. In a period of great change, especially for women, they managed the constraints placed upon them, simply using pen and paper to weave narratives that critiqued the ideologies of the day. Like the Victorian readers of these gothic novels, I am captivated by uncanny notions of the familiar becoming strange and the homely unhomely; the idea that things are not what they seem and that appearances can be deceptive.

The present research allowed me to study lace, the uncanny, the gothic and the domestic, and to weave threads between them to produce a fabric of meaning. In particular to show that lace, used within a practice-based research framework, can be a valid medium for academic research. The results are the establishment of the Lace Research Network as a centre for the study of lace at UCA, Farnham, and this thesis, which although it may not spin straw into gold, weaves research into practice.

Acknowledgements

Author's declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed

Dated

1 Introduction

The net curtain, languidly moving in the breeze from the window, teases us as it alternately conceals and reveals what lies in the home behind it. It seems to beckon us, then twist away coquettishly as we approach. Its pristine, white appearance indicates purity, innocence and guilelessness, but as this research will show, appearances can be deceptive. It beguiles us and we yearn to discover what secrets lie behind this domestic veil.

Mary Douglas reminds us that 'all margins are dangerous' (1966:150), but surely this flimsy, delicate cloth lying at the margin of the home can pose no danger and cause no harm. It speaks of an ordered home, maintained and cherished by 'the angel in the house'.[1] It seems a place of comfort and familiarity, unsullied by the strangeness of the uncanny or the cobwebs and secrets of the gothic. However, this research will show how the uncanny and the gothic creep into a home, subtly, unseen, one small step at a time, until the familiar becomes strange and the homely is rendered unhomely.

This practice-based research considers the domestic, through the lenses of the uncanny and the gothic, and questions how the net curtain can be used to embody these ideas in the home. The outcome is a written thesis and a body of practice which together explore this question.

1.1 Inception

Although there has recently been a resurgence of interest in both the uncanny and the gothic in print, film, exhibitions and conferences, textile responses to these themes in the domestic environment are under-developed. This seems curious when one considers that textiles are so redolent of home and comfort, that subverting them would seem an ideal way of expressing the idea of the homely becoming unhomely, a key element of the uncanny effect. Textiles are also important in the historical representation of the gothic, particularly in the trope of veiling, but are seldom used

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[1] 'The angel in the house' is the title of a poem by Coventry Patmore, first published in 1854, which celebrated his wife as the ideal, virtuous, middle-class Victorian woman; the idea is discussed further in Section 3.2.

in contemporary gothic art. The lack of material culture general in gothic research has been noted by several researchers, including Catherine Spooner (Spooner and McEvoy, 2007:2). Although recent exhibitions of the domestic uncanny, such as *The new décor* at the Hayward Gallery (2010) and *Walls are talking* at the Whitworth Art Gallery (2010) did use domestic furniture and wallpaper, respectively, to express ideas about the uncanny home, they were lacking in textiles. The time is ripe for textiles, and specifically the net curtain, to contribute to the debate.

This research began with a study of Freud's theory of the uncanny, in particular the idea of the familiar becoming strange and the homely becoming unhomely. As a textile artist I wanted to express these ideas in a material form. I decided to use the net curtain to express these uncanny dualities, as it lies in the liminal[2] space of the window, at the point where the homely shades into the unhomely and thus embodies the uncanny. Linking the net curtain, in its role as domestic veil, with the uncanny, inexorably expanded the research to include domestic gothic tropes, such as claustrophobia and confinement. These themes are explored in many British gothic novels of the mid-nineteenth century, which critique the prevalent gendered domestic ideology of separate spheres and woman's moral guardianship of the home. This led to a study of mid-nineteenth-century, British, middle-class domesticity.

Gothic novels have been extensively researched, individually and collectively, by many scholars, but there are few studies linking them to material culture, particularly textiles and stitching. I therefore decided to study mid-nineteenth-century gothic novels, for reference to these themes and as inspiration for contemporary fine art textile practice. Classifications of the gothic novel are fluid and contested,[3] but the novels I study fall broadly into three groups: female gothic novels, critiquing the ethos of separate spheres, such as fiction by the Brontë sisters; sensation novels, dealing with property and legal issues, for example those by Wilkie Collins; and realist novels by authors such as Charles Dickens and George Eliot. Reading these novels led to research into the social history of the nineteenth century, to provide a historical background and context for the events and themes contained in them.

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[2] Liminal comes from the Latin *limen* meaning boundary or threshold. It was first used by the anthropologist Arnold van Gennep in 1909 to describe the stage between adolescence and adulthood, but has since been used in other contexts to represent indeterminate boundaries (van Gennep, 1960).
[3] These contested definitions are discussed in Section 2.1.4 of the Literature review.

The narrative structure of the novels, describing the development of the heroine as she reaches maturity, also suggested the framework of the research, which follows the developmental journey of the net curtain, from a simple furnishing in the home to a complicit actor in the terrors of the uncanny gothic home. It also influenced the narrative style of the text. The net curtain develops from a transparent barrier at the window, to become an accomplice of the heroine, a silent witness, and finally a force within the uncanny home. This sequence also represents the development of the home from a haven, to a gothic gendered site of separate spheres, and finally an uncanny haunted house. Story telling has always been a means of organizing and understanding experience, and I use this mode in the same way as gothic novels; in a textile form for the practice and a literary form for the thesis. I also exploit the literary constructs of metaphor and metonym, for example within the metaphor of home as sanctuary and prison, I use the net curtain, pins, needles and stitching metonymically, to enrich and expand these themes.

The novels, and the historical research, also reveal that for women in the mid-nineteenth-century gendered home, stitching became a duty, but could also be an expression of pleasure, subversion and release. That confirmed my initial decision to use subversive stitching,[4] in conjunction with the net curtain, to express ideas about the home as an uncanny conflicted site. I realise that I am not alone in using the net curtain, domestic textiles or indeed the domestic, to generate fine art and that my work fits into an established body of research and practice, which Gill Perry has described as a 'turn to the domestic' (2013:17). However, as already noted, this extant practice has not yet brought together textile practice with the gothic. Throughout the thesis, I refer to contemporary artists using these themes, to provide a context for my work, and to show that I am using the net curtain in a novel way, to embody ideas about the uncanny and the gothic in the domestic environment.

1.2 Definitions

For the purpose of this research, the uncanny is defined as the feeling that occurs when the familiar becomes strange and the boundary between the homely and

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[4] 'Subversive stitching' is a term coined by Rozsika Parker in her groundbreaking feminist analysis *The subversive stitch: embroidery and the making of the feminine* first published in 1984.

unhomely is blurred (Freud, 1919). Ideas about the uncanny have been developed by many authors since Freud's original essay, and as the contextual review shows, the work of Anthony Vidler (1992) on the uncanny home has been particularly influential in my work.

The gothic, like the uncanny, encompasses many definitions, and is not merely a space of black, tattered gowns, bats and cobwebs. The contextual review shows that, like many current academic writers, such as Andrew Smith (2007) and David Punter (2000), I approach the gothic from a literary point of view, and consider various tropes within the genre, including claustrophobia, confinement, subversion, transgression, decay and defamiliarisation, as they relate to the uncanny and the domestic (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000; Spooner, 2006). In this research I define the gothic as a confining, claustrophobic, domestic space, enveloped by ambiguous permeable boundaries, enclosing menacing secrets and repressed violence.

Both the uncanny and the gothic are wide fields of research, but I am considering the narrow area where they overlap in the home, which provides a fertile area for research into ambivalent domesticity. The precedent for linking the uncanny and the gothic is well established as they have been intertwined since their reconfiguration in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment,[5] and Freud also used examples from gothic stories to illustrate his iconic essay on the uncanny (Freud, 1919).

In this research, the domestic is defined as the homely and familiar, based on the origins of gendered domesticity that developed in nineteenth-century Britain, and which are described by Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall (1987) among others. I also consider the ideology of the gendered separate spheres, which developed at this time, and was critiqued in many mid-nineteenth-century gothic novels.

The net curtain is used in this research as a general term for all translucent curtains, whether fabricated from net, lace, muslin or voile. In many cases I embellish the net curtain with subversive stitching (Parker, 1984) or lace.

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[5] This link between the uncanny and the gothic is discussed more fully in Section 2.1.1 of the Literature review.

1.3 Developing the research questions

When considering which domestic textiles to use to subvert the idea of the homely, the net curtain was chosen for several reasons. It is the most enigmatic fabric in the home. It lies in soft, quiet folds at the window, promising transparency yet rendering opacity. Its white, pristine appearance suggests cleanliness and purity, yet it traps memories, dust and secrets within its folds. It epitomises conformity and integrity, but open the window slightly, and it will ripple into the street, breaching domestic boundaries. It can neither be trusted nor contained.

The net curtain, as a fickle boundary in the home, seems an appropriate textile with which to re-consider the uncanny, the gothic and the domestic, which are all concerned with boundaries and their unstable, permeable nature. It lies on the boundary of the home, in the liminal space between the home and not-home, where the homely shades into the unhomely, and in this way materially embodies the dichotomy of Freud's uncanny.

Metaphorically and materially the net curtain also acts as a veil covering the eyes, or windows, of the home, and as such, can be used to disguise and conceal what lies behind it. In its role as domestic veil, it seems appropriate as a metonym for the gothic, as many gothic novels use veiling as a concealing device. The net curtain is also an appropriate metonym for Victorian women, because they were conflated with cleanliness, purity, morality, domesticity and the furnishings of their homes. The net curtain can be considered as a delicate, feminine furnishing or a barrier to light and the outside world, and thus represents the duality of home as sanctuary and prison. It also divides the public from the private in the same way as the separate spheres ideology divided the mid-nineteenth-century home from the world.

Analysing the main themes of the uncanny, the gothic and the domestic, at the point in the mid-nineteenth century where they overlap, led me to define four questions about the ways in which the net curtain could be used to reconsider those themes in the home, using fine art textile practice.

- How can the net curtain be used to represent the duality of sanctuary and prison in the home?

- How can the net curtain provide the trapped woman's only voice?
- How can the net curtain act as silent witness in the home, recording what it has seen and overheard?
- How can the net curtain become a complicit actor in the terrors of the uncanny gothic home?

How the net curtain could be used as a trap or sieve at the window was another question I considered. However, I decided that this aspect could be combined with that of silent witness in the home, therefore I used the idea of the curtain trapping whispers and dust as part of that recording process.

In deciding on the four questions I was conscious of the need to produce a defined research plan that could be completed in the time frame of the doctoral research. I considered many interesting questions, but concluded that the four I chose were the most relevant to a study of the net curtain in the uncanny gothic home for the following reasons. The net curtain, at the window, forms a transparent boundary to the outside world, but a barrier none the less, and therefore epitomises the duality of sanctuary and prison. Clean, white, dust-free net curtains are a marker of cleanliness and taste in the home and as such are a suitable representative for nineteenth-century women whose identity was based on overt housekeeping duties and their pure unblemished reputation. From this developed the idea that the fabric of the curtain could be the only surface on which the trapped heroine could stitch or express her thoughts, often hidden within coded communication. Like all textiles, the net curtain can absorb the atmosphere of the home, both physically and metaphorically, and retains a memory of what it has encountered, therefore it is a silent witness to events in the home. As well as trapping light, the net curtain, like all nets, can be used to trap the physical and the metaphorical: dust, dirt, secrets and memories. The net curtain is a physical boundary, but an enigmatic one. By giving it agency and allowing it to become animate it can become complicit in the uncanniness of the haunted house.

I also wanted the four questions to show a progression, in the same way as the gothic heroine progresses from innocence to maturity as she moves through the novel. My

aim was to reveal different aspects of the net curtain, and in this way show how the home could degenerate from a domestic haven to a gothic place of dust and decay, and finally to an uncanny home.

1.4 Scope

The approach used in this research is to develop fine art textile practice through the application of a theoretical investigation and, in this way, to link the theory of the uncanny, the gothic and the domestic through textile practice. The theory is a framework for thinking about the concepts and is used to consider, filter and refract ideas in order to generate new meaning from them.

Although this study covers several wide areas of research (the uncanny, the gothic, and the domestic) it focuses on the precise definition of these terms given in Section 1.2. It considers the narrow area where they overlap, and builds on their development in the nineteenth century, to interweave material culture, historical research and theoretical research, to comment on the home, using the net curtain.

As well as the main areas of research I also study the domestic life of mid-nineteenth-century, middle-class, British women, insofar as it relates to my theme. I consider what is meant by home and the domestic, and how these ideas developed in the nineteenth century and led to the ethos of separate spheres in the gendered home. I discuss how women became the moral guardians of the home and how their effectiveness was measured by domestic duties, to such an extent, that they became conflated with their homes. This involves a study of those aspects of cleanliness, curtains and domestic advice literature that link to the theme.

The gendered homes of mid-nineteenth-century Britain were contained by many boundaries, both seen and unseen. Much mid-nineteenth-century gothic fiction critiques the ideology of separate spheres and reveals that many women considered home as a dual site of sanctuary and prison. It also gives contemporary descriptions of women stitching in the home and I consider how they could use needlework subversively, and as a means of communication, and link this to contemporary practice.

The uncanny, the gothic, the domestic and the net curtain are all concerned with unstable boundaries. The boundary, as a concept within cultural theory, has been approached in many different ways: I have accessed it, and the associated idea of liminality, through the theoretical discourse of Mary Douglas and Julia Kristeva. In particular, I explore Mary Douglas's anthropological theory concerning margins becoming dangerous (1966), and use this to consider the uncanny potential of the net curtain as a boundary veiling the windows of the home.

Veiling the person is a fascinating subject that I have resisted studying in detail, although I allude to it through using the net curtain as a domestic veil, and acknowledge that the veil is another gothic trope. Many other beguiling themes have, like siren voices, tried to tempt me away from the core of this research. I have resisted, at least for the time being, those themes of feminism, madness, style and class. Although I touch on all of them, I have not researched the wider theory associated with them.

The aim of this research is not to critique the lives of Victorian women. I realise that the distance in time and place between me and these women, precludes me speaking directly for them, and that, in any case, their thoughts would not have been subsumed into one voice. Rather, I am using ideas developed from this research to produce textile art, in the same way that mid-nineteenth-century novelists produced gothic fiction. Their novels, like my net curtains, are discourse not facts. They are designed to draw parallels and provoke discussion rather than faithfully represent one point of view. Similarly, I am not aiming to produce replica Victorian curtains or to illustrate particular uncanny or gothic novels. This research considers the ideas that brought about the development of the uncanny and the gothic in the home, which came together in mid-nineteenth-century Britain, and uses them to generate fine art textile works in early twenty-first century Britain. I am using this historical material, and the way it was critiqued at the time and since, to produce fine art work that has as much to say about life today as it does about Victorian domestic life.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

The thesis begins with a review of both the literature and practice relevant to this study, contextualising the proposed research. It continues with a discussion of the

validity of practice as research, and considers the research methods used in this study. The body of the research follows the net curtain from innocence to maturity, mirroring the development of the gothic heroine. Each chapter weaves together ideas from the uncanny, the gothic and the domestic and incorporates analysis of both literature and contemporary fine art practice, to reveal the inspiration, genesis and relevance of my practice, which is analysed cumulatively in each of Chapters 4-7.

The scene is set in Chapter 3, which positions the research in the mid-nineteenth-century, middle-class home and connects the boundaries of the uncanny, the gothic and the domestic. Chapter 4 questions how the net curtain can be used to represent the duality of sanctuary and prison in the home. It considers the gendering of domesticity and the development of the theory of separate spheres, the validity of which, and its use as a basis for practice, is discussed. Chapter 5 deals with the question of how the net curtain can provide a voice for the 'unquiet' domestic heroine. Based on the idea that most women were dually literate in stitch and text, it discusses how novelists used this knowledge to describe character and how I use it in my practice. In Chapter 6 the question of how the net curtain can record domestic events and act as a silent witness in the home is considered. Chapter 7 questions how the curtain can become a complicit actor in the uncanny gothic home with reference to Anthony Vidler's extension of the uncanny to include the 'familiar turning on its owner' and the house becoming complicit in the 'secret intrusion of terror' (1992). The Conclusion in Chapter 8 provides a critical review of the research and assesses the original contribution to knowledge.

Images of the practice will be referred to at first mention in the text and Appendix I lists and provides thumbnail images of all the practice completed during the course of this doctoral research. The complete body of work will be exhibited at The Crypt Gallery, St Pancras, London, in September 2015. Appendix II shows where the research has been disseminated thus far, including exhibitions, published papers and conference papers given. Appendix III provides an overview of the historical research undertaken on the history and development of the net curtain, only a fraction of which has been used directly in the thesis, and which will form the basis for future research.

1.6 Originality

By using practice-based methods[6] to reconsider research on the uncanny, and the gothic in the home, using mid-nineteenth-century literature and contemporary fine art, I approach the subject in an original way. Traditionally, research into the disciplines I study has had a different focus, for example much work on the uncanny lies within cultural studies with links to psychoanalysis; most research in the gothic focuses on literary criticism; and much work on nineteenth-century domesticity is rooted in social history. My practice-based interdisciplinary approach is quite different from all of these and this may allow it to make new connections between them, in particular by linking references to stitching in mid-nineteenth-century gothic fiction with contemporary textile practice.

My 'practice as research' approach also provides a different focus from text-based research, for example it allows the parallels between lives in the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries to be alluded to in what Estelle Barrett describes as 'embodied vision' (Barrett, 2007:145). Expressing the connections between the uncanny, the gothic and the domestic in a material form allows insights to be experienced in a sensory rather than a text-based way. As the discussion of methodology in Section 2.3 shows, many authors consider that expressing ideas visually enhances research beyond the written word.

My aim in this interdisciplinary enquiry is to build on existing research into the uncanny and the gothic in the domestic environment and link it to contemporary fine art textile practice. Using this research I aim to redress the lack of fine art textile practice relating to the uncanny and the gothic in the domestic environment. By weaving together these strands of theory, research and practice I aim to make an original contribution to knowledge using both text and stitch.

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[6] These methods are discussed in Section 2.3.

2 Context and methodology

Like all interdisciplinary research, this study did not progress seamlessly from one topic to the next; it involved investigations into both written sources and practice that are relevant to the subject of my enquiry, and was subject to diversions, retracing and circumlocutions. However, in order to place this research in context it has to be woven into a semblance of order for the reader. It therefore begins with a review of the literature, followed by a review of the practice, although, in reality, they intermingle and were co-dependent in the development of my research. This is followed by an analysis of the methods used to carry out the research.

The aim of the literature and practice reviews is to position my research in the wider research field. Therefore, they consider the main ideas I am researching and focus on the most important sources for these themes; supplementary sources are referred to in the subsequent chapters.

This research began with a study of the uncanny and its expression in textile practice. In his iconic 1919 essay, Freud uses gothic literature to illustrate various aspects of the uncanny. Following his example, I began linking the gothic and the uncanny and found this a fruitful combination for practice. However, I was surprised to find that few scholars of the uncanny, or the gothic, have linked material culture to these ideas, although some have noted this dearth of non-literary responses; in particular Catherine Spooner (Spooner and McEvoy, 2007:2). Responding to this gap in the research field, I decided to develop practice-based research that linked Freud's theme of the uncanny home, to the gothic literature of the mid-nineteenth century that critiqued the idea of domesticity. The most appropriate way to do this seemed to be by using a domestic textile as the basis for practice and thus the idea of the net curtain as domestic veil was conceived. The following pages will show that this research journey with the net curtain has swept me through gendered Victorian homes, gothic domestic novels, and uncanny haunted houses. It has resulted in a body of practice that incorporates memories, whispers, coded communication and subversive stitching.

2.1 Literature review

In the same way as the literature and practice reviews were conducted simultaneously, the literature review did not proceed in a linear fashion, therefore a somewhat artificial order has been imposed on it to form a cogent narrative for the reader. It begins with a discussion of the theory of the uncanny, as this was the original inspiration for the research, and shows how the uncanny and the gothic are entwined. This leads to a discussion about the net curtain as a metonym for the uncanny and the gothic in the home and its history in the nineteenth century. That discussion slips neatly into a consideration of domesticity more generally in the mid-nineteenth century, encompassing the idea of separate spheres, the importance of interiors, and the use and subversion of domestic needlework. This leads to a review of the gothic tropes covered by this research and the mid-nineteenth-century gothic novels used as inspiration. The review considers how these gothic novels critiqued the ideology of home and leads into the practice review, which analyses the work of other contemporary practitioners dealing with these themes.

2.1.1 The uncanny

Any study of the uncanny has to begin with Freud's 1919 essay *The uncanny*[7], although Freud, reluctantly, acknowledges that his starting point was a paper by Ernst Jentsch (1906), and throughout the essay he uses Jentsch's literary reference to the works of ETA Hoffmann, including his gothic story *The Sandman* (1815). However, the uncanny was not invented by either Freud or Jentsch. Freud acknowledges that it is a universal human experience, but as the philosopher Mladen Dolar notes, the examples Freud uses indicate its reconfiguration in the Enlightenment at the end of the eighteenth century (Dolar, 1991). Before then, the uncanny had a place as part of religion and the sacred, but following the rationalism of the Enlightenment, the uncanny entered popular culture, in part, as gothic fiction (Dolar, 1991). The uncanny and the gothic have been inextricably linked ever since, which is why they are intertwined in this research.

This origin of a certain mode of the uncanny and the gothic in the eighteenth century is accepted by many scholars, including Fred Botting, who, writing in *A companion*

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[7] Throughout this thesis all page references to Freud's uncanny refer to the 2003 Penguin translation of *The uncanny* by David McLintock.

to the gothic edited by David Punter, states 'The Enlightenment, which produced the maxims and models of modern culture, also invented the gothic' (2000:3). The feminist critic, Terry Castle, in *The female thermometer* argues convincingly that the uncanny is a product of the Enlightenment. She notes that the eighteenth century desire to systematize knowledge led to an 'estranging of the real' (1995:9) because the boundaries between the explicable and the inexplicable were defined and anything falling into the latter category was deemed uncanny.

Jentsch suggests that the uncanny is a feeling of intellectual uncertainty about whether something is alive or not (Jentsch, 1906). In particular, he cites uncertainty about Olympia, the doll in Hoffmann's story *The Sandman*, which the hero Nathaniel thinks is alive and listening avidly to his poetry, but which his companions realise is an uncannily realistic automaton. However, Freud disregards Jentsch's definition of the sense of the uncanny as a feeling based on intellectual uncertainty and links it to the role of the Sandman who steals children's eyes:

> 'the sense of the uncanny attaches directly to the figure of the Sandman, and therefore to the idea of being robbed of one's eyes – and intellectual uncertainty, as Jentsch understands it, has nothing to do with this effect' (Freud, 1919:138).

In her analysis of Freud's essay, Hélène Cixous (1976:529) asserts that Freud appropriates Jentsch's example of the literature of ETA Hoffmann by implying that Jentsch 'did not know how to make proper use of it' (Cixous, 1976:532) and continues by showing how Freud rewrites the story of *The Sandman* to shift the focus from whether Olympia is animate or inanimate (Jentsch's focus) to concentrate on the themes of eyes and castration (Cixous, 1976:533). Michiel Scharpe, writing in a special issue of the online journal *Image & Narrative* on the uncanny, also suggests that Freud rewrites the story from Nathaniel's point of view, thus denying the multiple perspectives in the original story that give it its intellectual uncertainty, and reducing the uncertainty about Olympia (Scharpe, 2003).

I, like many scholars, consider that the feeling of intellectual uncertainty is necessary to engender an uncanny experience. In his study of the uncanny, Adam Bresnick states that 'intellectual uncertainty is in fact essential to the experience of the uncanny' (Bresnick, 1996:114). He notes that at the end of *The uncanny*, Freud asks

'are we after all justified in entirely ignoring intellectual uncertainty as a factor?'[8], to which Bresnick replies 'the answer is, certainly not, for Jentsch was right all along' (Bresnick, 1996:116). Nicholas Royle, in his comprehensive study of the uncanny, also considers that uncanniness entails a sense of uncertainty and suspense, however momentary and unstable (Royle, 2003:1).

As well as intellectual uncertainty about the experience of the uncanny, there is also uncertainty about its definition. Freud defines two ways of studying the uncanny: through the semantics of the German word *unheimlich*; and by studying anecdotal uncanny experiences. However, rather than sticking to his two defined methods, he then broadens the study to include literary criticism, autobiography and psychology.

Freud begins by analysing dictionary definitions of the term 'uncanny', but finds that many languages do not have a word for the uncanny or use a phrase or circumlocution to describe it, such as '*mal a son aise*' in French ('ill at ease'). After comparing dictionary definitions, Freud discovers that *heimlich* can mean what is familiar and agreeable, as well as what is concealed and kept out of sight. *Unheimlich* is used as the opposite of the first definition of *heimlich* but not the second, leading to the case where the idea of the hidden and dangerous coincides with that of the homely. In Freud's words:

> 'among the various shades of meaning that are recorded for the word *heimlich* there is one in which it merges with its formal antonym, *unheimlich*, so that what is called *heimlich* becomes *unheimlich*' (Freud, 1919:132).

Freud concludes '*heimlich* thus becomes increasingly ambivalent, until it finally merges with its antonym *unheimlich*' (Freud, 1919:134). In this way, the uncanny or unhomely becomes part of the familiar or homely (Freud, 1919:134). This idea of the unhomely being hidden and repressed is reinforced for Freud by a definition given by Friedrich Schelling in Daniel Sanders' 1860 dictionary *Wörterbuch:*

> '*unheimlich* applies to everything that was intended to remain secret, hidden away, and has come into the open' (Freud, 1919:132).

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[8] In David McLintock's translation this phrase reads 'can we completely discount the element of intellectual uncertainty?'(Freud 1919:153).

Freud's lexicographical analysis of the words *heimlich* and *unheimlich* therefore shows how the meanings of the words are subtly transformed, yet remained linked, so that something unhomely can develop out of something that seems homely. I use this idea in my practice, by using the homely net curtain to make manifest the unhomely truths, revealed and concealed by the domestic veil.

The cultural critic Barbara Creed, gives a clear explanation of Freud's linguistic terms and explains that:

> *'unheimlich* can be used as the opposite of *heimlich* only when the latter signifies the homely. When used as a separate term, *unheimlich* means 'eerie, weird, arousing gruesome fear'' (Creed, 2005:5).

She emphasises that:

> 'the double meaning of heimlich is important … as it underlines the close association between these two concepts: homely/unhomely; clear/obscure; knowable/unknowable' (Creed, 2005:4).

Other definitions of the uncanny have been discussed by scholars such as Anthony Vidler (1992), Elizabeth Wright (1984), and Hélène Cixous (1976), but Creed's (2005) analysis seems the most succinct for this research.

Although Freud gives numerous definitions of the uncanny in his essay, the one used in this research is the dichotomy between the *heimlich* and the *unheimlich*, or the feeling that occurs when the homely becomes unhomely and the familiar becomes strange. Anthony Vidler's *The architectural uncanny* (1992) has also influenced my work by linking the theme of unhomeliness to the idea of the home becoming complicit in its changing state; a theme explored in Chapter 7. However, I consider intellectual uncertainty is required to invoke the feeling of the uncanny, as Jentsch (1906) proposed, in particular his suggestion that the uncanny is engendered when there is uncertainty over the inanimate appearing animate. Many writers on the uncanny reinstate this element of uncertainty that Freud initially rejected. Therefore, although my definition of the uncanny is based on Freud's writing, like many others, I build on his ideas and use them creatively as the basis for my practice.

Royle suggests that Freud was probably the first to define the uncanny as something strangely familiar, rather than merely weird or mysterious (Royle, 2003:2). Royle's

book contains a poetical description of the uncanny, which links to the gothic, and has been an important inspiration for the present research (Royle, 2003). He suggests that the uncanny is a 'peculiar commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar' and describes it as a liminal experience, linked to the strangeness of framing and borders (Royle, 2003:2). This was the key idea that led me to use the net curtain as a metaphor for the uncanny and the gothic in the home. The net curtain occupies precisely that uncanny liminal space between the homely and the unhomely, both physically and metaphorically, and therefore it materially embodies the uncanny and the gothic in the home.

I agree with Royle when he suggests that the success of Freud's essay lies, not in defining the uncanny, but in providing a new way of thinking about and analysing everyday life in the light of the uncanny (2003:7). This new way of thinking means that ideas about the uncanny will inevitably change and develop as everyday life and society change. Siegbert Prawer writing in *Caligari's children* (1980) agrees with this idea, by noting that monsters are also culturally relevant and change with time, depending on popular prejudices, as do gothic themes (Cavallaro, 2002). Anneleen Masschelein, introducing a special issue of the online journal *Image & Narrative* (2003) on the uncanny, quotes Martin Jay[9] who suggests that 'the uncanny has become a master trope available for appropriation in a wide variety of contexts'. The universal appeal of the uncanny, and the reason I use it in my practice, is that it can be used to subvert common cultural practices, order and stability, and in this role it can be used to comment on what is hidden within the conflicted site of the home.

2.1.2 The net curtain as domestic veil

The fabric that literally hides the home from outside observation is the net curtain, in its role of domestic veil, at the windows of the home. We have seen how the net curtain embodies the duality of the uncanny home, lying as it does, in the liminal space between the homely and the unhomely. However, veiling is also a gothic trope. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's research on the veil in eighteenth-century gothic fiction considers the sexual function of the veil (1981), but my research into nineteenth-century novels focuses on its symbolism of personal enclosure, and stifling

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[9] Jay, M. (1995) 'Forcefields: The Uncanny Nineties' *Salmagundi,* pp.20-29.

confinement. It is a boundary that simultaneously conceals and reveals. In nineteenth-century fiction, veiling masks people's intentions or character, literally and figuratively, for example Magdalen Vanstone in Wilkie Collins' *No name* (1862) veils herself so that she can gain entrance to her enemy's home unrecognised. As the literary theorist, Julian Wolfreys, reminds us, the veil in gothic fiction also has the potential to reveal something terrifying (2002:91). The feminist critics, Sandra M Gilbert and Susan Gubar, describe the veil as 'an image of confinement that endows boundaries with a transitory and ambivalent fluidity' (2000:468). This idea of boundaries being fluid and unstable, links to the anthropological work of Mary Douglas in her groundbreaking book *Purity and danger,* in which she states 'all margins are dangerous' (Douglas, 1966:150); a concept that will be discussed further when we consider visible housekeeping.

Gilbert and Gubar note that many nineteenth-century women writers used 'houses as primary symbols of female imprisonment' as well as other female accoutrements such as domestic furnishings and veils (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000:85). This conjunction, found in many gothic novels, suggests that the net curtain, in its guise of domestic veil, is an ideal metonym to embody confinement in the home. It also links to Charlotte Borie's analysis of the use of curtains as concealing and revealing devices, sometimes framing the scenes in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* as shrine or stage (Borie, 2009). For example, concealing her at the beginning of the novel as she hides from John Reed (Brontë, 1847:41) or framing her as she nets a purse after dinner at Thornfield Hall (Brontë, 1847:203).

Having decided to use the net curtain to embody the uncanny and the gothic in the home, a study of the materiality and history of net curtains was undertaken to inform the research. The quantity of material accumulated about the development of the net curtain precludes its full inclusion in this thesis. However, a brief summary of the research is given in Appendix III and it will form the basis of future research.[10] In the present research I have used this detailed study to inform my creative practice. Although my point of reference for this study is the nineteenth-century development of the net curtain and the domestic, with its links to the uncanny and the gothic, I am

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[10] I have already carried out some preliminary research into net curtain design in the Lace Archive at Nottingham Trent University.

not trying to replicate Victorian net curtains because the ideas I am considering about the nature of the domestic are as relevant in the twenty-first century as they were in the nineteenth century, and this is why I also frame my practice within a contemporary context.

2.1.3 The domestic

The net curtain became fashionable in nineteenth-century Britain as ideas about the home and the comfort to be found there gained importance. Industrialisation, the expansion of the urban environment, and increased urban density throughout the nineteenth century, encouraged the use of net curtains to ensure some privacy from the street.

The nineteenth-century home was considered the basis of social stability, morality and a sanctuary from the public sphere (Nead, 1988). It became the repository of virtues and a 'good' home was considered to have a good moral influence on its inhabitants (Forty, 1986). This research concentrates on nineteenth-century, British, middle-class domesticity, because that is the society critiqued by the gothic novels used as inspiration in this research.

Several histories of the nineteenth-century home, such as those by Judith Flanders (2004, 2014), Linda Nead (1988), and Bonnie Anderson and Judith Zinsser (1988), reveal that many of the modern features of domesticity are an invention of the nineteenth century. Christopher Reed notes that domesticity is 'a product of the confluence of capitalist economics, breakthroughs in technology, and Enlightenment notions of individuality' (1996:7). It would therefore seem that the bourgeois home was a product of, among other things, the Enlightenment, as were the uncanny and the gothic. This common origin for three of the themes of this research suggests that useful ideas may develop from the folds that lie between them.

Separation of the spheres

As the nature of home developed so did women's place within it. Using nineteenth-century documents, Eugene Black in *Victorian culture and society* (1973) shows how the role of women changed in the nineteenth century. In *Housewife* (1974), the feminist historian Ann Oakley shows how the development of industrialisation

affected women's lives because jobs that women had done in previous centuries now became inaccessible to them. Although I owe a debt to much feminist scholarship from the 1970s, which has provided a useful basis for this research, present day feminism is not the focus of this research. Davidoff and Hall, in *Family fortunes* (1987) provide a comprehensive review of the factors affecting family life from 1780 to 1850 by focusing on documents relating to James Luckcock of Birmingham and his extended family. The development of gendered areas and separation of the spheres they describe, placed women firmly in the home, where they became responsible for the morality, social aspiration, taste and integrity of the home, while men dealt with the 'rational' world of work (Sparke, 1995:4).

This separation of the spheres led to middle-class women being unrealistically idealised as 'the angel in the house'; a term taken from the poem by Coventry Patmore (first published in 1854). This portrayal and the ideology of separate spheres have been debated by many scholars and their arguments are explored in Chapter 4, as is the rationale for my use of the theme. For many women, the ideology of separate spheres resulted in the home becoming a dual site of sanctuary and prison (Nead, 1988); a key theme in this research. This gendering of roles was legally reinforced by the laws of marriage, property and inheritance, which are the theme of many gothic novels of the time, in particular Anne Brontë's *The tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), which strongly critiques the idea of separate spheres.

Nead (1988), among others, shows that the separation of the spheres rendered women dependent on men and instituted the idea that women were less mentally stable than men. In *The female malady,* the cultural historian Elaine Showalter (1987) provides an excellent overview of how psychiatric problems became gendered and medicalised. They also became the topic of many gothic novels, for example Charlotte Perkins Gilman hauntingly depicts domesticity as claustrophobic and a threat to sanity in *The yellow wallpaper* (1892), based on her own traumatic experience of confinement as a cure for depression. Dana Gliserman Kopans (2006) provides a good overview of madness in novels and medical literature, in her thesis on what she calls 'the English malady'. Several gothic novels deal with the plight of

the 'mad woman in the attic'[11] (the archetype being Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*), the reason why she is incarcerated, and whether she is mentally deranged or just an inconvenience to her husband. Although these ideas of mad women informed my research, through their narratives of confinement, both physical and mental, madness in the nineteenth century is not the focus of the present study.

Visible housekeeping

In the nineteenth century, the identity of middle-class women became heavily dependent on the results of good housekeeping, which encompassed both tastefulness and cleanliness. Lara Baker Whelan (2010) and Elizabeth Callaghan (2009) show that the respectability of the home depended on women performing this role successfully. However, Kate Ferguson Ellis suggests that women's most important role in maintaining the integrity of the home was not only dependent on performance but also on surveillance and vigilance (Ellis, 1989). This not only encompassed checking and regulating the appearance and behaviour of one's home, family and servants but also assessing those of one's neighbours for any deviation from respectability. However, Whelan notes that this was difficult because appearances could be deceptive (Whelan, 2010); a theme explored in sensation novels and built on in my practice.

Interiors were important because they were conflated with the inhabitants of the house, and in particular the mistress of the home (Gordon, 1996). This relationship can be seen in nineteenth-century advice manuals, newspapers and popular literature (Rubinstein, 1974). It was often used to reveal character in fiction, for example, in Charles Dickens' *Great expectations* (1860-1861) Miss Havisham's decaying home and desiccated appearance are used to illustrate aspects of her personality as a woman jilted on her wedding day. Anthony Vidler (1992) expands this link to domesticity by suggesting that the repressed secrets of the family become part of the fabric of the home, in an uncanny expression of the home being conflated with its inhabitants; a theme I explore in my practice.

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[11] Sandra M Gilbert and Susan Gubar use this phrase as the title for their feminist reading of women writers in the nineteenth century *The mad woman in the attic* (2000, originally published in 1979).

The conflation of interiors and possessions with their owners led to the idea of 'taste'. Callaghan shows that taste revealed respectability because it combined class, financial and moral issues (2009). Mary Douglas (1996) and Penny Sparke (1995) have both written extensively about taste. Douglas considers taste from the standpoint of 'the other', linking it to class divisions, while Sparke takes a gendered viewpoint, both of which have provided useful background information for this research. The importance of taste led to a proliferation of advice in manuals and periodicals. *The grammar of ornament* by Owen Jones (1856) was extremely influential and concentrated on the 'honesty' of materials. Furniture that disguised its function or the materials from which it was made was considered dishonest (Forty, 1986:111). Likewise, the social historian Deborah Cohen, in *Household gods: the British and their possessions* (2006) shows that possessions were believed to have moral qualities and revealed the owner's character. These references all emphasise the idea of appearances being deceptive and objects having agency; both themes I exploit in my practice.

By the 1870s there were numerous magazines and books, aimed at different consumers, advising them how to furnish and decorate their homes. Information on the social history of taste has been found in various nineteenth-century sources.[12] Many manuals also provided advice on housekeeping. However, the sociologist, Elizabeth Shove (2003), shows that what constitutes good housekeeping and cleanliness changes with time, place and culture. The concepts of purity and cleanliness are discussed by Mary Douglas in *Purity and danger* (1966) and built on by the philosopher, Julia Kristeva, in *Powers of horror* (1982). Douglas approaches the subject from an anthropological viewpoint and Kristeva considers it psychoanalytically. Both approaches have been influential in the present research. Douglas's idea that 'all margins are dangerous' and that 'any structure of ideas is vulnerable at its margins' (Douglas, 1966:150) has revealed the danger of the liminal. In this research I consider the liminal as a place where neither the rules of inside or outside apply; a place out of time, where misrule can fester. I also build on Douglas's idea that margins are sites of power and creativity.

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[12] Kay Boardman's thesis (1994) on mid-Victorian women's magazines provided a useful overview of the sources available. Those I found useful included *Suggestions for house decoration* by Rhoda and Agnes Garrett (1876), Lucy Orrinsmith's *The drawing room: its decoration and furniture* (1878) and Charles Eastlake's (1872) *Hints on household taste in furniture, upholstery and other details*.

Kristeva's work on abjection considers systems that define the proper and the clean and distinguish them from the improper and the unclean and, in particular, the breaching of these boundaries (Kristeva, 1982). She notes that abjection is caused by 'what disturbs identity, system, order' (Kristeva, 1982:4). This reinforces Douglas's idea that margins are the sites where systems are tested, and, importantly for this research, considers these ideas in terms of female links to purity and cleanliness. Kristeva also links the abject to 'the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite' (1982:4), which has led the gothic scholar, Jerrold Hogle, to suggest that the gothic depicts abjection, because it deals with that which lies 'betwixt and between' (2000:296). However, I agree with the art critic Gilda Williams that there are distinct differences between the abject and the gothic: 'the abject is neglected, the gothic refined; the abject is filthy, the gothic merely cobwebbed and dusty' (Williams, 2007:14). It is this aspect of the gothic being cobwebbed and dusty, yet refined, that I consider in the present research because it seems more suited to comment on the domestic environment than the outright neglect and filth of the abject.

Physically maintaining the margins of the home was hard work in the nineteenth century, as described in the household manuals referenced above and by Victoria Kelley in *Soap and water* (2010) and Caroline Davidson in her history of housework (1982). Douglas defines dirt as 'matter out of place' (Douglas, 1966:44), thus linking it conceptually to Kristeva's systems and boundaries. Jake Kennedy suggests dust is the abject of the domestic space (2005:2) and is uncanny because it is simultaneously of the home and not of the home (Kennedy, 2005:7). These subtle differences between dust and dirt are discussed in Chapter 6, where dust is considered as silent witness in the home, and used as a basis for practice, referencing its uncanny and gothic origins.

The removal of dust and dirt through efficient housekeeping was signalled by the appearance of pristine white net curtains at the window. The use of white as a symbol of cleanliness and purity is discussed in Chapter 3. It is for these associations, and because white is another boundary, liminally balanced between cleanliness and dirt, and painfully susceptible to breaching, that I use it in my practice.

The opposite of white, purity and cleanliness is darkness; another gothic trope linked to the haunted house that I exploit in my practice. Darkness denotes the forbidden and alludes to dust, foul deeds and hidden secrets. Dani Cavallero suggests that 'darkness is simultaneously obfuscating and illuminating' (2002:25) and I use it to obfuscate meaning and aid complicity in the home.

Haunted house

The haunted house brings together the domestic, the uncanny and the gothic; the three main themes of this research. I consider the haunted house to be a place of discomfort, disintegration, unresolved memories, whispers and secrets. It is the ultimate gothic representation of failed domesticity, and epitomises Freud's uncanny, where the home has become distinctly unhomely and the familiar has become strange.

Curtis describes the haunted house as a place 'marked by … failed rituals of order and maintenance' (Curtis, 2008:31), linking it directly to dysfunctional domesticity and the work of Kristeva (1982) and Douglas (1966). Like Henriette Steiner, who combines research into architecture and literature, I consider this disintegration of the home into a haunted house as both an uncanny and a gothic trope (2010:133) and that it can be used in the same way to comment on contemporary domesticity (2010:136).

In a reflection of Vidler's idea of the home becoming complicit, Barbara Creed posits that the haunted house 'contains cruel secrets and has witnessed terrible deeds, usually committed by family members against each other' (1993:55). Curtis also notes that 'the idea that objects and places can retain the memory of traumatic events is an ancient one' (2008:35). In my practice, I combine these ideas and suggest the net curtain is a silent witness in the home, retaining these domestic memories and secrets.

Curtis links notions of homes retaining memories, to the development of spiritualism in the nineteenth century, when messages from the spirits became linked to the animation of furniture (Curtis, 2008). Patricia Pringle (2010), a lecturer in interior

design, describes how the idea of furniture having agency became the theme of Victorian entertainments. This animation of furniture links to Freud's idea of the uncanny and Victorian stories of animate artefacts, such as James Fenimore Cooper's *Autobiography of a pocket handkerchief* (1843). Deborah Cohen reinforces the idea of furnishings having agency when she notes that 'the suspicion that domestic objects were not entirely under human control lingered well into the twentieth century' (Cohen, 2006:165). These ideas influenced the present research by suggesting that the net curtain could be endowed with agency and be used to trap secrets and memories in the home.

Subversive stitching

Victorian furnishings might have agency, but what of the women trapped in the home? Rozsika Parker's *The subversive stitch* (1984) has been influential in validating my use of subversive stitching to represent the idea of women trapped by domesticity. I also agree with the historian, Maureen Daly Goggin, that stitching 'has … been a significant cultural practice of meaning-making' (Goggin, 2002). The feminist critic, Michelle A Massé (1992), discussing the reaction of gothic heroines to suppression, considers aggression and subversion of the 'cultural expectations of femininity' (1992:240) as possible responses. I have chosen to use subversive stitching as my response to the gothic trope of confinement, because stitching played such a large part in the lives of Victorian women confined to the home.

Christine Bayles Kortsch's feminist ideas about the dual literacy of Victorian women in both text and textile (2009) (discussed in Chapter 5) also encouraged me to use stitching to construct narratives, in a complementary way to the texts of gothic novels. The idea that stitching is more than rhetorical discourse and can be viewed as a coded form of communication (Pristash et al., 2009:15), in conjunction with Andrew Radford's observation that one of the main features of Victorian sensation novels is solving puzzles (2009), inspired me to integrate coding and puzzles into these narratives.

2.1.4 The gothic

Freud's analysis of the gothic story, *The Sandman*, forms the basis of his essay on the uncanny (1919). Gilda Williams also suggests that the gothic is best expressed

through literary examples (Williams, 2007:17). Therefore, a study combining both subjects justifiably starts with literary sources.

Gothic fiction originated as a literary-historical movement in the eighteenth century (Jackson, 1981) and the first gothic novel is considered to be Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). Ann Radcliffe's novels, including *The mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), were important in developing Walpole's themes of distressed heroines, gothic castles and brooding villains. However, the gothic has always been a knowing genre marked by excess and parody, most notably in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1818) in which Catherine Morland's love of 'horrid novels' leads her into several misunderstandings.[13] In the early nineteenth century, the Romantic poets, including Lord Byron and Percy Shelley, embraced the gothic, and their famous stay in the Villa Diodati, resulted in the production of two of the most influential gothic novels: *Frankenstein* (1818) by Mary Shelley, and *The vampyre* (1819) by John Polidori.

Since then the gothic has proliferated to include many different subtypes, defined by their location, plot or country of origin. For example *The Routledge companion to the gothic,* covers gothic traditions, locations, concepts and media in over 280 pages with the help of 26 authors. Similarly, David Punter in *A companion to the gothic* (2000), provides an overview of the subject in 24 separately authored chapters. However, despite this wealth of research there is little practice-based research in the gothic. Regarding visual and material culture and art practice, *The gothic: Documents of contemporary art* edited by Gilda Williams (2007) provides a useful overview of the field as does Catherine Spooner's *Contemporary gothic* (2006). Encouragingly, for this research, Spooner notes that 'non-literary media is one of the most neglected areas of Gothic research' (Spooner and McEvoy, 2007:2). This omission of material culture from gothic research and practice is something I aim to redress in the present study by considering the gothic through textile practice.

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[13] There are seven 'Northanger horrid novels': *Castle of Wolfenbach* (1793) by Eliza Parsons; *The necromancer* (1794) by Ludwig Flammenberg; *The mysterious warning* (1796) by Eliza Parsons; *Horrid mysteries* (1796) by the Marquis de Grosse; *Clermont, a tale* (1798) by Regina Maria Roche; *The midnight bell* (1798) by Francis Lathom; and *Orphan of the Rhine* (1798) by Eleanor Sleath. As well as these, Catherine Morland reads *The mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797) both by Ann Radcliffe.

The present research deals with the gothic of the mid-nineteenth century in which the site of terror moved from the ruined castle to the domestic environment and critiqued the idealised Victorian home and the ideology of separate spheres. This research considers the gothic literature and related theory that exposes the contradictions buried in the idea of home. In particular it focusses on the gothic tropes of claustrophobia, confinement, subversion, transgression and defamiliarisation, as they relate to the domestic uncanny. For the purpose of this research I define the gothic as a confining, claustrophobic, domestic space, enveloped by ambiguous permeable boundaries, enclosing menacing secrets and repressed violence.

Transgression is a recurring trope in the gothic and Fred Botting, Professor of English literature, describes the gothic as a writing of excess and transgression (1996:20). Patrick McGrath writing in *Gothic: Transmutations of horror in late twentieth century art* reinforces the idea that the gothic celebrates transgression (1997:158), while Dani Cavallaro in *The gothic vision* notes that the gothic exploits 'fascination with the violation of cultural boundaries' and combines this with 'anxieties bred by the possibly dire repercussions of transgression' (2002:8). In my research, I link this idea of transgressing cultural boundaries with the domestic boundaries of cleanliness and integrity.

Another key gothic trope, highlighted by Punter (1996), is ambivalence and an association with things that can be sensed but not seen. This coexistence of opposing feelings is also linked to the idea of ambiguity and double meanings. I consider ambivalence and ambiguity are central to the idea of the gothic in the same way that Jentsch's 'intellectual uncertainty' (1906) is central to the uncanny.

The gothic can be viewed through many theoretical lenses, however, I am studying it with a focus on the Freudian uncanny, with links to historical criticism and feminism. Researchers studying the gothic from a feminist standpoint include Sandra M Gilbert and Susan Gubar (*The madwoman in the attic*, 2000, originally published in 1979), Kate Ferguson Ellis (*The contested castle*, 1989), Terry Castle (*The female thermometer*, 1995), and E J Clery (*Women's gothic*, 2000). Historically the gothic has been considered escapist literature, but Cavallaro emphasises that in fact 'its

tales are culturally, historically and economically relevant to a very tangible social reality' (2002:9) and I consider that the novels I study have a basis in social history.

An aspect of the gothic that makes it such a fruitful area for contemporary research is that it provides 'a language and lexicon through which anxieties both personal and collective can be narrativized' (Spooner, 2006:8). Jacqueline Howard takes a Bakhtinian approach to the gothic and notes that 'the meanings and significance of texts change continually as they are read in new contexts' (1994:4). She suggests that the indeterminacy and open structures of the gothic mean that its 'propensity for multiple discourse is highly developed' (1994:16). Other authors, including Punter (1996) and Cavallaro (2002), also describe the cultural relevance of the gothic and how it changes with time. Williams remarks on 'the Gothic's remarkable ability to update itself perpetually according to current tastes, politics and fears' (2007:14). Helen Hanson writing about gothic in film suggests that:

> 'The gothic possesses the ability constantly to renew itself, to assert its relevance in distinct socio-cultural eras, to find new expressions and outlets in evolving cultural forms and productions' (Hanson, 2007:34).

This ability of the gothic to reinvent itself, and resonate with contemporary culture, in the same way as the uncanny, is a reason why I derive inspiration from it.

However, Spooner warns that researchers 'should be careful of assuming that gothic simply reflects social anxieties in a straightforward manner' (2006:8). Andrew Smith also notes that reading the gothic historically allows the texts to be related to the historical context in which they were written, but notes the researcher should be wary of over simplification because history is subjective (2007:7). Bearing these warnings in mind, I base my research on those gothic novels of the mid-nineteenth century that critique the idealisation of domesticity and the ideology of separate spheres. By using the gothic to defamiliarise the domestic I create practice that embodies the uncanny definition of the homely becoming unhomely.

Gothic novels and narrative

Discussing mid-nineteenth-century gothic fiction, Botting notes that previous tropes 'give way to terrors that are much closer to home' (1996:113). Kate Ferguson Ellis in *The contested castle* (1989), Avril Horner in *The handbook to gothic literature*

(1998), and Andrew Radford in *Victorian sensation fiction* (2009), show how these gothic novels were used to critique the Victorian domestic ideal of separate spheres.

The main categories of mid-nineteenth century gothic novels are realism, the female gothic, sensation novels and ghost stories[14] and I draw on many examples in this research. However, although the categorisation of gothic fiction into subtypes is a useful way of combining similar novels for research and discussion, it is an artificial process carried out in retrospect. It should also be borne in mind that these subtypes blend into one another and overlap, and the specific categorisation of gothic novels is not the focus of the present research. However, a brief review of the different subtypes and the use I make of them is given here.

Steven Earnshaw in *Beginning realism* notes that the novel was an emerging form in the nineteenth century and that many novels depicted reality, but novels classified as Realist tend to be published after 1840 and be concerned with social issues (Earnshaw, 2010:73); examples are the novels of Charles Dickens and George Eliot's *The mill on the Floss*. I agree with Elizabeth Callaghan when she suggests that many nineteenth century novels should be read as part of the realist tradition rather than, or as well as, gothic or sensation fiction (2009:2). Audrey Murfin gives a good explanation of how the gothic becomes incorporated into realist literature in this period by showing how it loses its supernatural element, moves into the domestic arena, and reimagines the gothic through metaphor (2011:2). The literary critic, Vineta Colby, also points out that although Victorian authors incorporated the daily life of ordinary people into their stories, novelists were not reporters 'they were creative artists, they also selected, filtered and arranged their detail to serve their … purposes' (1974:39). This reflects the way I use material in this research, both as metaphor, in the sense of Murfin, and creatively, as described by Colby.

Several of the novels I am studying could be described as female gothic. This term was first coined by Ellen Moers in *Literary women* (1976) to describe gothic novels

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[14] Andrew Smith gives a good overview of the ghost story in *The ghost story 1840-1920* (2010). Despite the Freudian nature of ghosts as the returning dead, I have not specifically studied ghost stories in this research. This is mainly because the themes of ghosts and their links to visibility and invisibility in the nineteenth century were closely related to the perceptions of money, banking and capitalism, and these are not the focus of this research.

that considered the entrapment of women in the domestic environment, as well as worries about childbirth. However, as Smith writing in *Gothic literature* notes, the term has developed to describe 'a subtle, or understated, mode of feminism in which its heroines strive for some version of a better, more emancipated life' (2007:31). In *Victorian demons*, he elaborates further by noting:

> 'The female gothic is a form of writing which, in its focus on anxieties relating to women's experience of domestic tyranny and response to patriarchal plots, examines the limits of patriarchal experience and the possibility of female empowerment' (Smith, 2008:71).

Carol Margaret Davison explains that what distinguishes the female gothic is its focus on:

> 'a young woman's rite of passage into womanhood and her ambivalent relationship to contemporary domestic ideology, especially the joint institutions of marriage and motherhood' (Davison, 2004:48).

In 2004, a special issue of *Gothic Studies* (vol 6 issue 1) dedicated to female gothic, attested to its relevance and complexity. Laura Bonikowsky (2001) shows how gothic novels written by women allowed them to criticise patriarchy and reveal how the legal system undermined women. Alexandra Warwick, writing in *The Routledge companion to the gothic*, notes the importance of the novels of the Brontë sisters in critiquing the domestic (Warwick, 2007:30). Evelyn Shockley (2002) suggests that gothic novels are linked to the fear of failing to perform 'ideologically assigned societal roles' properly. I build on these 'female gothic' ideas of entrapment and tyranny in the domestic environment. Although this work takes its starting point as the confinement of women in the mid-nineteenth century, I consider these themes to be timeless and as relevant today as they were in the nineteenth century, although diffused through the prism of contemporary life. Also from the female gothic I take the idea of the rite of passage and I use this as the frame for my practice. The thesis is structured as a fictional development of the net curtain from ornamental furnishing fabric to a more sinister, complicit actor, with agency in the home, much in the same way as circumstances force Lady Audley in *Lady Audley's secret* (Braddon, 1861-1862) or Magdalen Vanstone in *No name* (Collins, 1862) to develop from innocent young women into avenging angels.

If female gothic challenged the ideology of Victorian domesticity, the sensation novels that followed it exploded the perceived role of women as 'angel in the house'. In *Victorian sensation fiction* Andrew Radford provides an extensive review of the history of the sensation novel and the various ways in which it has been studied (2009). He also suggests that a theme of sensation fiction was the fear that the 'angel in the house' might secretly be a devil (Radford, 2009:85). Andrew Mangham, the editor of *The Cambridge companion to sensation fiction*, notes 'it is difficult to know where sensation fiction begins and ends' (2013:1). Janice M Allan, in the same volume, notes that the term sensation novel 'was, from the start, applied both loosely and inconsistently' (2013:91), which indicates the fluidity of these categorisations of the gothic.

It is often claimed that Wilkie Collins' *The woman in white*[15] (1859-1860) was the first sensation novel although the term 'did not assume a prominent place in the British critical vocabulary until 1862' (Allan, 2013:89). However, Radford, summarising the origin of the sensation novel, reports the views that Dickens was the first sensational novelist in the 1830s or that the Brontë sisters, particularly Charlotte were the originators of female sensationalism (2009:20). Alexandra Warwick agrees with the latter when she suggests that *The tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) by Anne Brontë is a precursor to sensation fiction (2007:31).

The three novels that are generally considered to have established sensation fiction are Wilkie Collins' *The woman in white* (1859-60), Ellen Wood's *East Lynne*[16] (1860-1861) and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's secret*[17] (1862). Their common feature is the blurring of fiction and realism (Smith, 2010:50), thus suggesting that their plots of double dealing over issues of money, class and gender (Smith, 2007:75) could penetrate into the respectable middle-class home. Alison Case and Harry E Shaw summarise the genre well when they note that sensation fiction 'gained its particular thrills by imagining terrifying truths seething behind the peaceful surface of British middle-class domesticity' (2008:157). It is these seething currents that I exploit in this research.

[15] Serialised in Charles Dickens's weekly periodical, *All Year Round*, from 26 November 1859 to 25 August 1860.
[16] Serialised in W H Ainsworth's *New Monthly Magazine* from January 1860 to September 1861.
[17] Serialised in the *Sixpenny Magazine* from January to December 1862.

Winifred Hughes suggests that the sensation novel defamiliarised the home to such an extent that:

> 'Characters and readers could no longer take it comfortably for granted: instead they were forced to become increasingly suspicious of whatever looked most familiar and ordinary' (Hughes, 2002:263).

Lara Baker Whelan in *Class, culture and suburban anxieties in the Victorian era* shows how:

> 'the sensation novel worked in tandem with the more 'realistic' domestic novel to establish middle class norms of behavior; domestic fiction gave a straightforward behavioral model, while sensation fiction helped readers identify that which did not belong in middle class spaces' (Whelan, 2010:12).

She relates this to the new suburbs as liminal sites where middle-class identity could be threatened by transgressive characters such as Lydia Gwilt in Wilkie Collins' *Armadale* (1864-1866). These themes of defamiliarisation and appearances being deceptive are ideas I use in my practice.

Among others, Allan notes that 'the public demand for sensation was read by many critics as a worrying sign of cultural degeneration' (2013:87).[18] As well as dangerous women, sensation novels also revealed unstable and porous class boundaries (Radford, 2009:6). Many novels, such as *Lady Audley's secret* combined both, as the eponymous heroine changes her status from governess to become the mistress of Audley Hall through a bigamous marriage. The ease with which class boundaries could be blurred is also revealed in Wilkie Collins' *No name* (1862), in which the heroine, Magdalen Vanstone, persuades her maid to swap roles with her by reassuring her how easy it will be. She says:

> 'Shall I tell you what a lady is? A lady is a woman who wears a silk gown, and has a sense of her own importance. I shall put the gown on your back and the sense in your head' (Collins, 1862: Kindle Loc 8758).

I build on the aspects of the sensation novel that develop from its gothic origins, such as confinement, but also embrace the sensational tropes of double standards,

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[18] W Fraser Rae was not being complimentary when he noted that Mary Elizabeth Braddon 'may boast, without fear of contradiction, of having temporarily succeeded in making the literature of the kitchen the favourite reading of the drawing room' (Rae, 1865:204).

double meanings, and the blurring of boundaries, both domestic and personal, which result in appearances being deceptive.

Novels used in this research

In this research I have studied a wide range of mid-nineteenth-century gothic novels that critique the idea of separate spheres and women's place in the home. Some might be classified as female gothic and others as sensation or realist fiction. However, they have all been chosen because they are contemporary sources that speak of the lives of Victorian women. I find them a fertile area for my practice, both for their references to the duality of home as sanctuary and prison, and because they provide an insight into the practice of stitching and how it can be used to produce coded communication in a form of dual literacy.

The six novels that particularly inspired this study are: Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), which highlights the problems of single working women in the mid-nineteenth century, based on her own experience; Anne Brontë's *The tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), her critique of separate spheres, gendered education and property laws; *The woman in white* by Wilkie Collins (1859-1860), which criticises the legal position of married women; *Lady Audley's secret* by Mary Elizabeth Braddon (1861-1862), which considers the transgression of social borders; George Eliot's *The mill on the Floss* (1860), which deals with domestic dispossession; and *Great expectations* by Charles Dickens (1860-1861), which highlights dysfunctional domesticity and includes one of the most iconic gothic figures, Miss Havisham. Many other novels are referred to throughout the text, but these six represent my core sources.[19] Between them they deal with ideas of claustrophobia and confinement, separate spheres, sewing, deceptive appearances, domestic decay, and the haunted house.

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[19] Critics who have been useful in studying individual novels in this research include the scholars of the gothic mentioned above, as well as Gilbert and Gubar for their iconic feminist reading of nineteenth century novels *The madwoman in the attic* (2000 originally published in 1979), Alison Case and Harry E Shaw for *Reading the nineteenth century novel* (2008), Juliet Barker for her authoritative biography of *The Brontës* (1994), and W A Craik for insights into *The Brontë novels* (1971). Various papers in *Brontë Studies* and *Gothic Studies* have also been illuminating.

It could be argued that the authors of these novels have used story telling as a way of organising and understanding experience. I use their experience in my work and, like them, I find that using narrative is also a way to express ideas in fine art textile practice. By writing gothic fiction, these authors are producing the uncanny, in the same way that I fabricate the uncanny in my practice. Not only do I use story telling as a source but also as an outcome.

The literary critic, Ann Cvetkovick, writing about the uses of the gothic/sensation novel notes that:

> 'the sensation novel, and sensationalism more generally, makes events emotionally vivid by representing in tangible and specific terms social and historical structures that would otherwise remain abstract' (Cvetkovick, 1992:23).

Abstract ideas can also be made tangible and 'emotionally vivid' by expressing them materially, which is why I use the net curtain to represent these themes. Discussing the use of illustration in early sensation novels, in *The Cambridge companion to sensation fiction*, Mary Elizabeth Leighton and Lisa Surridge suggest that this visuality was important in developing the reader's ideas (2013:34). They note that many of these illustrations dealt with threshold imagery (2013:41), such as windows, as do my net curtains. Although my practice does not aim to illustrate particular gothic novels in this way, it does use the idea of image as a powerful medium with which to express ideas.

The curator, Gareth Williams, in *Telling tales: fantasy and fear in contemporary design*, references the work of Walter Benjamin to show 'that story-telling and making objects are aspects of the same activity' (2009:12). Trevor Keeble builds on this reference, in the catalogue for the *Walls are talking: wallpaper, art and culture* exhibition, to describe the domestically inspired work of Catherine Bertola, which he suggests 'offers both an imaginative and reflective 'opening' to the viewer' (2010: 121). In a similar way to Bertola, I aim to provide the viewer with a reflective opening into the domestic using narrative textiles.

2.2 Practice review

In this practice review I consider recent exhibitions that reference the uncanny, the gothic and the domestic, in order to contextualise my practice. I discuss why many artists reference the Victorian period and how this links to the use of 'women's work', subversive stitching and text-based practice. I conclude by considering practice that uses furniture and furnishings, including the net curtain, to comment on the domestic.

Considering the house in contemporary art, Gill Perry, Professor of Art History, notes that a 'turn to the domestic' which she defines as 'an engagement with the activities, spaces, materials and tropes of the home' has been identified 'as a distinguishing feature of the practice of many women artists working in Britain at the turn of the twentieth century' (Perry, 2013:17). My practice therefore fits within this framework, but by linking it to the uncanny and the gothic and concentrating on textile responses, it aims to bring new insights to the field.

Several recent major exhibitions attest to the continued interest in the uncanny in the domestic environment. They include *Psycho buildings* (2008) at the Hayward Gallery, London, *Subversive spaces* (2009) at the Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, the *Surreal house* at the Barbican (2010), *Walls are talking* at the Whitworth (2010), and *The new décor* at the Hayward (2010). There have also been some smaller exhibitions focusing on the uncanny in the domestic environment, such as *The uncanny room* (2002) curated by Tessa Peters and Janice West in Pitshanger Manor, *Deviants* (2009) at Worcester Art Gallery, and *Home sweet home* (2009) at the Hub Gallery, Sleaford. However, despite the large number of exhibitions referencing the uncanny domestic, remarkably few artists use domestic textiles to explore this subject.[20] This is surprising, when one considers domestic textiles are so redolent of the home and the comfort and security to be found there, that subverting them would seem to be an effective way of evoking the uncanny in the home; an omission that the present research aims to redress.

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[20] In contrast, several artists use clothing to reference the uncanny including Louise Bourgeois in *Cell (Clothes)* (1996) and Alison Marchant, who used her mother's petticoat hanging on a washing line in a derelict house in *Kingsland Road, London – East* (1987) to reference maternal loss and home as a trap for women (Rugg, 2005).

Of the exhibitions mentioned above, the one that resonated most with my practice was *Walls are talking,* in which wallpaper was used in a similar way to my use of the net curtain. Writing in the foreword to the exhibition catalogue, edited by Gill Saunders, Maria Balshaw, the Director of the Whitworth Art Gallery, describes the role of wallpaper in the following words:

> 'By misbehaving as art object and domestic decoration the works in this show expose themselves and critique the social and cultural mores of the society within which they are produced. … these wallpapers seduce and challenge in equal measure' (Saunders, 2010:7).

This encapsulates the way in which I use the net curtain. The curtains are attractive domestic decorations, so appear seductive, but also critique social mores by misbehaving as art objects.

Some of the exhibitions listed above considered the uncanny through the lens of Surrealism. The Surrealists were interested in many of the themes I explore in this research, in particular the uncanny and the liminal. David Lomas, the curator of the *Subversive spaces* exhibition notes that many Surrealist and contemporary female artists have seen the bourgeois home as a constricting claustrophobic space (Lomas, 2009:22), in the same way as many Victorian women did, and as many people still do today. He also notes that 'A number of contemporary women artists' criticise 'the patriarchal family' by exposing 'dark secrets hidden behind a façade of normality' (Lomas, 2009:16). An example is Louise Bourgeois who uses the domestic to consider personal psychoanalytical aspects of the uncanny. However, this contrasts with my practice which considers the wider theme of the homely becoming unhomely.

The link between the uncanny and Surrealism is well established, but Brian Dillon writing in the catalogue for the *Surreal house* also establishes gothic links when he notes that 'Surrealism also acquires from the gothic an obsession with doors, portals and hallways' (Dillon, 2010:55). The window and the idea of the house being alive were key metaphors in that exhibition, as they are in my research, in which they are represented by the domestic veil of the net curtain.

The only recent exhibition specifically referencing the gothic was *Terror and wonder: the gothic imagination* at the British Library (2014).[21] This exhibition and the many events associated with it established the currency of the gothic, but also reinforced that gothic research is mainly literature based, and there is little fine art or material practice associated with it. This gap is one the present research aims to redress, proposing fine art textile practice as a novel field for academic gothic research. Catherine Spooner notes that the gothic has 'never been solely a literary phenomenon' (Spooner and McEvoy, 2007:195), it was originally expressed in illustrations and magic lantern shows, and more recently by film, music, television and video games. She concludes that 'gothic remains an incredibly fertile and diverse cultural form' (Spooner and McEvoy, 2007:196). Spooner, in *Contemporary gothic* (2006), Grunenberg, in *Gothic: Transmutations of horror in late twentieth century art* (1997), and Williams in *The gothic: documents of contemporary art* (2007) all provide overviews of contemporary gothic practice. Encouragingly, Spooner has noted that currently 'non-literary media is one of the most neglected areas of gothic research' (Spooner and McEvoy, 2007:2); an oversight this research aims to rectify. Tracy Fahey, a researcher in the gothic, writing on the *Gothic imagination*, a blog run by Stirling University, reinforces Spooner's comment that fine art 'practice is still under-represented within gothic criticism'.[22]

In the absence of an established body of gothic contemporary practice, Williams suggests that:

> 'in the end 'gothic' in contemporary art is necessarily a partial term which serves mostly to identify a peculiar, dark sensitivity shared by the artist and the observer who has chosen to respond to the work in this manner' (Williams, 2007:13).

My practice resonates with that of other artists using gothic themes of haunting and imprisonment in their work, although they may not label their work as gothic. Francesca Woodman is such an artist. She uses photography in a gothic and uncanny role in her domestic photographs, in which she appears to be emerging from, or

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[21] Encouragingly, as this thesis was being completed in May 2015, an exhibition *Gothic in Birmingham* was held at Birmingham Library, which included some alternative readings of the gothic. Although there were no fine art textiles, my research is situated within this wider approach to gothic studies.
[22] www.gothic.stir.ac.uk (Accessed on 29.09.13).

dissolving into, the walls of the house (Townsend, 2006). In this way she becomes part of the fabric of the house, which resonates with the idea of women becoming one with their homes (Gordon, 1996).

Catherine Bertola, like Woodman, also considers the narratives of domestic spaces. Much of her work is concerned with the surfaces referenced by the Surrealists, such as walls, floors and windows. She evokes layers of memory in the home with her wallpaper pieces, a recent example of which was *If walls could talk …* (2002) (Figure 2.1) exhibited in the *Walls are talking* exhibition (2010). She cut round the leaf pattern of wallpaper, allowing the shapes to bend into the room, to suggest that the wallpaper was taking on a life of its own and invading the empty space; practice which could be considered both gothic and uncanny and which resonates with my use of the net curtain.

2.1 Bertola, C. *If walls could talk* … (2002) exhibited in *Walls are talking* at the Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester (2010). Photo: C Quarini.

Much of Bertola's practice, like my own, deals with domestic Victorian themes. Marie-Luise Kohlke reviewing the recent exhibition *Victoriana: The art of revival* and seeking to explain the current fascination with the Victorian, finds many:

'present day artists engaging with the nineteenth century via varied modes of inspiration, adaptation, homage, re-visioning, re-inscription and transformation' (Kohlke, 2013:91).

Writing in the journal *Neo-Victorian Studies*, Mark Llewellyn suggests that the neo-Victorian 'tries to bring together the discussion of the contemporary with that contemporary's engagement with the earlier historical moment' (2008:176) and cites the examples of Sarah Waters' novels, such as *Fingersmith* (2002). Jessica Gildersleeve suggests that this neo-Victorian gothic fiction 'does not constitute a desire to remember the past so much as to respond to it' (2013:101). This feeling is borne out by Melissa Feldman and Ingrid Schaffner, the curators of *Secret Victorians. Contemporary artists and a 19th-century vision* (1998) at the Hayward Gallery, London, who link the resurgence of interest in the Victorian to 'women's work' of the nineteenth century:

> 'The current artistic revival of interest in women's work and personal content reaches beyond feminist art of the 1960s, to the journals and hobbies of the nineteenth-century woman' (Feldman and Schaffner, 1998:10).

These ideas epitomise the way I use mid-nineteenth-century gothic and domestic references; as a response to ideas of claustrophobia and confinement rather than as a record of the past, often using 'women's work' to do so.

The textile artists, Dierdre Nelson and Caren Garfen, both use 'women's work', in particular cross stitch, to take a wry look at the domestic through subversive stitching. Nelson, in her 2005 exhibition *The dangers of knitting and sewing,* takes a humorous look at written domestic warnings. While Garfen produces domestic textiles, containing cross stitch messages, often with a subversive meaning, to highlight domestic stereotypes (Hemmings, 2008). Like Nelson and Garfen, I build on the legacy of text-based narrative art in my practice, to express ideas that often appear humorous but also have a serious underlying message. In many cases, I use them to reference and subvert the idea of cross-stitch samplers and homilies, produced to decorate the Victorian home, while in others I reference the memories seeping from the walls of the gothic house.

Many artists use furniture to comment on the domestic. Tony Oursler literally gives furniture a voice, by linking it to video and audio equipment. An example is the sofa

in *The most beautiful thing I've never seen* (1995), exhibited in *Subversive spaces* (2009). Oursler disrupts the domestic space, by placing the sofa at a strange angle and allowing it to comment on the home. I use the net curtain in a similar way, sometimes linking it to video and images, to comment on the domestic environment.

Any artwork based on furniture or furnishings references the body and considers the relationship between the two. Rebecca Fairman used this link in *Cold comfort* (2009), a child's white iron bedstead covered with small, ceramic, 10 cm square 'cushions' impressed with lace patterns, laid out to resemble a quilt (Figure 2.2). The work subverts the idea of the child's bed materially and experientially; the comfort here is not only psychologically cold it is also hard, cutting and dangerous. At first glance, the piece seems beautiful until one considers the damage it could do and the suppressed feelings it embodies. This aesthetic appearance linked to suppressed violence is something I also express in my practice.

2.2 Fairman, R. *Cold comfort* (2009) exhibited in *Home sweet home* at the Hub Gallery, Sleaford (2009). Photo: C Quarini.

Mona Hatoum (Bell, 2008) also uses furniture to defamiliarise the domestic. Edward Said, talking about her work, says that she transforms domesticity into 'menacing and radically inhospitable objects whose new and presumably non-domestic use is waiting to be defined' (Said, 2000:15). Hatoum's hospital cot *Incommunicado*

exhibited at the *Subversive spaces* exhibition suggests 'an omnipresent threat or actuality of cruelty and violence or even torture, lurking within the homely and poisoning it' (Lomas, 2009:26). This bed and that of Fairman, both suggest the 'threat of physical pain' (Bell, 2008:67). Writing in the catalogue for *The new décor* exhibition, Ralph Rugoff quotes Hatoum saying:

> "We expect furniture to be about giving comfort and support to the body. If these objects become either unstable or threatening, they become a reference to our fragility" (Rugoff, 2010:13).

A technique often used by Hatoum to highlight the uncanny nature of domestic furniture and equipment is to make her objects oversized. I use this technique in some of my practice. Mundane, everyday objects seen in this way take on a menacing, overbearing nature and reveal that they can no longer be contained by the boundaries of normality.

Doris Salcedo (2000, 2007) also subverts furniture to unsettle ideas of the home. She often fills the negative spaces of furniture, such as wardrobes, with concrete and scraps of clothing. For example in *La casa viuda I* (1992-4) lace fabric merging into the seat of a chair is pushed into a tall narrow door, referencing the absent female presence, in the same way I use the net curtain to reference the absent heroine in the uncanny gothic home. Salcedo also stitches pieces of furniture together with cloth, thread and hair to suggest troubled lives and stifled voices; ideas I try to express with my net curtains. Rachel Whiteread, like Salcedo, fills the spaces in furniture, as well as rooms (*Ghost* 1990) and entire houses (*House* 1993) to comment on ideas about memories, voids and loss. Both Salcedo and Hatoum use furniture to make political statements, whereas Whiteread comments on the domestic.

Discussing the use of furnishings in this way, Perry notes that:

> 'When displaced or transformed, simple everyday objects can evoke feelings of uncertainty or confusion. … Salcedo's seats metamorphosing into doors lose their comforting associations and become a source of puzzlement and discomfort' (Perry, 2004:255).

Writing in the foreword to the catalogue for *The uncanny room*, Adrian Forty notes that this desire to make uncanny objects 'may seem suspect, not to say perverse. … life is quite disturbing enough without making things worse with objects that are

calculatedly unsettling' (Forty, 2002:9). However, many artists use the uncanny, as I do, because it allows them to draw attention to the mundane and the overlooked, by making the audience reconsider accepted normality. In the catalogue for Susan Hiller's recent exhibition (2011) at Tate Britain she describes her fascination with the quotidian saying:

> 'There is something elusive, uncanny, fascinating, beneath the surface of what at first seems easy to understand, or ordinary, or banal. I like to work with materials that have been culturally repressed or misunderstood ... I particularly like the way the mundane becomes special as soon as you pay attention to it' (Gallagher, 2011:11).

I also like to work with the overlooked and the everyday and consider such materials are particularly relevant when referencing the domestic, which is often thought of as a place of boring everyday rituals of cleaning and maintenance and, as such, is often dismissed.

In the same way that Susan Hiller makes the mundane special, Bertola enjoys the idea of turning dust, which is considered worthless, into a work of art, and in that way making it valuable.[23] Much of Bertola's work is site specific, often using the material of the site itself in the form of dust to produce 'wallpaper' and 'rugs'.

In *Everything and nothing* (Figure 2.3), the wallpaper Bertola made for the *Out of the ordinary* exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, in 2009, she used material that had been swept up from the floor of the Museum, applied to paper and cut into a floral repeat pattern that was displayed as flocked wallpaper in the Museum. Bertola is interested in the rituals and history of cleaning and the 'endless and futile cycles of trying to remove traces' and considers dust a forensic material.[24] In contrast, the present research considers that while dust has obvious associations with the domestic and cleanliness, it also has gothic associations as the manifestation of decay in the home, and uncanny resonances as 'matter out of place' (Douglas, 1966:44).

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[23] Bertola made these comments as part of a presentation she gave at the *Unravelling the manor* symposium in Brighton in 2010.
[24] Bertola *Unravelling the manor* symposium, Brighton, 2010.

2.3 Bertola, C. *Everything and nothing* (2009) site specific work for *Out of the ordinary* at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (2009). Photo: C Quarini.

Several artists use the net curtain to reflect prosaic ideas about domestic privacy and class. For example, Andrea Stokes has used net curtains to explore the tensions between conformity and working-class aspiration. In *Butter net* (2003-2005) she pushed butter through a net curtain stencil, to leave a greasy print on a window as part of *Arttextiles 3* (2004). To the viewer, the curtain initially appeared to be fabric, until the smell of the butter disclosed its presence. Stokes says that she finds net curtains both attractive and repulsive and she equates them with Englishness, conformity and class issues.[25] For the *interLACE* exhibition at the Thelma Hulbert Gallery in 2013, Stokes organised a group of women to produce a collaborative drawing that created the illusion of net curtains at all the gallery windows, to consider the labour of the working-class women who would have produced these decorative items (Figure 2.4).[26]

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[25] www.andreastokes.com (Accessed on 10.09.14).
[26] Reviewed by Ciara Healy in *Textile* 2014 12(3): 378-383.

2.4 Stokes, A. *Net curtains* (2013). Site specific work for *interLACE* at the Thelma Hulbert Gallery, Honiton (2013). Photo: C Quarini.

In contrast to the ephemeral curtains of Andrea Stokes, Amy Houghton produced porcelain *Net curtains* (2007), as a site specific piece for the *Lost, found, imagined* exhibition in London. From a distance, they appear decorative, light and frilly, but in contrast they are sharp, solid and heavy and trap the curtains at a moment in time. They deny the soft textural nature of the net curtain and render it sharp and menacing, like Fairman's quilt. In contrast, I use the gauze-like texture of the net curtain to beguile and veil its menacing nature.

In *Home from home* (2002), Catherine Bertola screenprinted net curtains on to PVC, and installed them in the windows of public houses in Newcastle. In doing so, she brought stereotypical female decorative homemaking into the male environment of the working man's public house in order to contrast the two. Bertola is also referencing the idea of the pub as a home from home for the man of the house in certain cultures. In the same stereotypical way, I use lacemaking to represent women and to comment on their position in the home. However, rather than using images of lace, I am using handmade 'women's work', both lacemaking and stitching, to comment on the domestic.

Nina Edge in *Nothing is private* (2007) used the mechanical drawing abilities of the Schiffli machine[27] to produce a net curtain showing how redevelopment near her home led to the loss of privacy for residents (Miller and Hill, 2007). The curtain contained four lines of repeat patterns, resembling a typical lace trim across the curtain, referencing housing development and building equipment. She displayed the curtain at a window in a room overlooking the street. As people passed a light was triggered, to reveal the images, emphasising the idea of the loss of privacy even behind net curtains, which traditionally veil the view into such properties. Her work is similar to mine, in that we both use embroidery on net to depict images and text, but my use of handmade 'women's work' suggests the work has been constructed in the home and links to neo-Victorian practice. However, we both use the idea of the net curtain concealing and revealing its message, depending on the illumination provided, and that the net curtain can be used to convey a message about the domestic environment.

These artists working with net curtains reference some of the ideas I utilise, such as the distinction between the public and the private, but none use the net curtain in the same way as I do to bring together ideas about the uncanny and the gothic in the domestic environment.

This review has shown that my practice lies within an established body of fine art practice dealing with the uncanny in the home, although it differs from much other work in its use of textiles. There is little fine art textile practice in the gothic and my work therefore forms part of an emerging body of practice in that field. My practice is also part of the recent 'turn to the domestic' discussed by Perry (2013:17) and resonates with the work of some other artists using 'women's work', subversive stitching, text-based themes, dust, and neo-Victorian sensibilities.

The contextual review has not revealed any previous use of the net curtain to express ideas about the uncanny and the gothic in the domestic environment. In fact there is little fine art textile practice related to the uncanny or the gothic in the home. This

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[27] The Schiffli machine was used to produce embroidery on cloth and net in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The machine used in Edge's work is based at Manchester Metropolitan University.

research aims to fill these gaps by building on research into the uncanny, the gothic and the domestic and developing fine art practice from it. Textiles are ideally placed to subvert the idea of the domestic by making the familiar strange, but are seldom used in this role. I consider that the net curtain is an ideal textile to embody the uncanny, the gothic and the domestic, in its role as domestic veil, in the liminal space between home and not-home. This research will show how the net curtain can be used to reconsider the uncanny and the gothic in the domestic environment, in a fine art context, to remedy the lack of fine art textile interpretations of these themes.

2.3 Methodology

The present study covers several wide areas of research, but focuses on the small area where they overlap, and builds on their expression in the nineteenth century, to comment on the uncanny gothic home, using the net curtain to produce fine art textile practice. The theoretical framework of the research is described in the literature review (Section 2.1) and the practice is contextualised in the practice review (Section 2.2). The methodology interweaves the threads of the uncanny, the gothic and the domestic, in both the written and practice elements, to produce a new fabric of meaning. This interdisciplinarity allows new connections and practice to be developed; as the artist and researcher Estelle Barrett suggests, 'the generative capacity of creative arts research is derived from the alternative approaches it employs – subjective, emergent and interdisciplinary' (2007:3).

As well as weaving the research themes together, the practice, research and theory are woven together and inform each other. The practice and evaluation are exegetical and help to analyse and interpret each other. They are mutually reflexive and are both creative research practices. One does not explain or describe the other; their relationship is one of correspondence. As Barbara Bolt, an artist and researcher who has written extensively on the visual arts, notes:

> 'Rather than just operating as an explanation or contextualisation of the practice, the exegesis plays a critical and complementary role in revealing the work of art' (Bolt, 2007:31).

The practice is a method of externalising and disseminating the ideas developed from the research, and the research is in turn developed through the medium of the

practice. Thus, the research and practice are interrelated and iterative, resulting in reflective practice and the development of a body of fine art textiles.

Using textiles as a means of expressing the research brings a different perspective to the work compared with research that uses the written word as its primary method of dissemination. Kortsch uses the term 'dress culture' to describe the dual literacy of Victorian women in print and textiles, a term that extends to all types of stitching as well as fashion (Kortsch, 2009). This bilingual ability to understand the language of the printed word and the language of textiles allowed women to express themselves in either medium. Appropriately, the present research uses both the written word and fine art textiles to express ideas about the domestic environment, in media that would have been as well understood in the nineteenth century as they are today. This linking of text and stitch also reflects the way in which the theory and practice are expressed through a narrative framework, appropriated from gothic fiction.

2.3.1 Practice as research

Practice-based research is a relatively new approach to academic research in the UK, although it is growing rapidly.[28] Estelle Barrett describes the linking of practical art experience, practice and theory as 'embodied vision', which she claims produces 'situated knowledge' which 'operates *in relation* to established knowledge and thus has the capacity to extend or alter what is known' (Barrett, 2007:145). She emphasises that for practice to be considered academic research the author must locate themselves 'in the field of theory and practice in the literature review' (Barrett, 2007:140). They must also articulate 'the rationale for methodological and conceptual frameworks' (Barrett, 2007:140) and 'assess the work in terms of the way in which it has extended knowledge' (Barrett, 2007:139). Other important features of doctoral research are that the outcome should be an original contribution to knowledge and a specific research question should be addressed. All of these have been done in the present research.

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[28] A study of the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) website revealed that in 2006 9% of AHRC funded PhDs were in the fields of art and music; in 2012 these figures had increased to 9% in music and the performing arts plus 10% in the visual arts, design and media.

Ideas about practice-based research in academia are in an early stage of formation and developing rapidly. Within these shifting ideas, I have found certain strands of thinking particularly useful. For example, Graeme Sullivan (2005:174) who has studied practice as research extensively, argues that 'the aim of research in the visual arts is to provoke, challenge and illuminate, rather than to confirm and consolidate', as would be the case in scientific research. He also suggests that:

> 'The purpose [of art practice as research] is to achieve understanding rather than explanation and in the process we construct meanings' (Sullivan, 2005:49).

The researchers Tom Barone and Elliot W Eisner agree that arts-based research should open up possibilities rather than converge upon a single correct and true answer to a question or a solution to a problem (2012:18). They suggest that arts-based research aims to provide insights not answers (Barone and Eisner, 2012:3). James Haywood Rolling Jr in his book *Arts based research primer* (2013) argues that arts-based research is neither quantitative nor qualitative, but overlaps and extends both types of research. He suggests that arts-based research is:

> 'best at addressing questions that can neither be measured with exactitude nor generalized as universally applicable or meaningful in all contexts' (Rolling, 2013:8).

Professor Paul Carter, who studies the theory and practice of creative research, claims that what distinguishes practice-based research is that it decontextualises and recontextualises information and mediates this process materially (Carter, 2007). I have used this process of recontextualising and constructing meanings by producing outcomes that are literally material. Carter also notes that 'invention begins when … what means one thing, or conventionally functions in one role, discloses other possibilities' (2007:15). I have used the net curtain in this way by subverting its traditional role to disclose other possibilities. This also builds on the suggestion by Carole Gray and Julian Malins, in *Visualising research*, that the role of the artist is to make the 'invisible visible' and to transfer knowledge between the worlds of practice and research (Gray and Malins, 2004:105).

There are several terms to describe research that involves practice, including practice-based research, practice-led research, and practice as research. Linda Candy (2006) suggests that practice-based research focuses on creative practice, while

practice-led research occurs when practitioners reflect on their own practice (Candy, 2006:3). I situate myself as a practice-based researcher, whose insights develop from a combination of practice and theoretical research, rather than a practice-led researcher, whose reflections on technique and practice lead to the development of research. However, the terms are often used interchangeably. My work could equally be labelled as research-led practice, a term used by Hazel Smith and Roger T Dean in their study of practice in the creative arts, to suggest that academic research can also lead to creative practice (Smith and Dean, 2012:7).

Several authors consider that expressing ideas in a visual form has a value beyond, and in addition to, that of the written word. Douglas et al. (2000) writing in the online journal *Working Papers in Art and Design* consider that artworks can 'embody knowledge more efficiently and appropriately than text alone' (2000:4). While Jane Webb (2000), writing a history of academic study in the same journal, considers how theoretical academic researchers traditionally spend time alone in their ivory towers publishing their research in specialised research journals. This suggests to me that artistic practice research has the potential to be more widely disseminated, via exhibitions, photographs, websites and cultural media, than written academic research alone.

There is more to art research than the final product; the process is as important as the results. As Barbara Bolt contends 'it is art as a mode of revealing … not just the artwork, that constitutes creative arts research' (2007:34). This idea of art as a method of revealing is borne out by Professor Colin Renfrew. Discussing the link between contemporary art and his discipline of archaeology, Renfrew suggests that the 'visual explorations' of contemporary art 'offer a fundamental resource for anyone who wants to make some sort of sense of the world and of those very different worlds of communities in the past' (Renfrew, 2003:7-8). He goes on to explain how Richard Long's artistic interventions in the landscape have helped him understand archaeological material remains and thus changed his research approach (Renfrew, 2003:49).

In a similar way, Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz, formerly lecturers at the Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology at the University of Manchester, note that

working with artists and other creative people sharpens anthropological sensibilities (Grimshaw and Ravetz, 2005: Kindle Loc 83). They note that: 'The commitment to what cannot be easily seen but which nevertheless needs to be looked at is common to both anthropology and art' (Grimshaw and Ravetz, 2005: Kindle Loc 361). The curator Rachael Thomas suggests that Catherine Bertola's work 'renders us conscious of seeing, and in doing so we begin to see motifs that explore the lingering between the archaeology of daily life and past existence' (Thomas, 2005:9). Although not undertaking archaeological or anthropological research, this mode of revealing and consciousness of seeing is something I try to encapsulate in my own practice.

2.3.2 Developing practice ideas

The present research is qualitative and considers the interconnectedness of many ideas, using a form of 'bricolage' to develop new interpretive meanings. The term bricolage was originally developed by the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss (1966) and has since been used by artist and theorists; I find Robyn Stewart's use of the term particularly useful for my practice. Stewart studies practitioner-based research and describes the bricoleur as one who:

> 'travels between various research disciplines in an attempt to build the most appropriate bridge between aesthetics and experience through processes of production, documentation and interpretation' (Stewart, 2007:128).

This describes how I am building bridges between several research areas, in an attempt to link them together to generate new insights.

Various artists have tried to explain the process of developing practice ideas from theory. For example, Annette Iggulden notes that by 'blurring the boundaries between the conscious and unconscious' the 'creative process allows the silenced utterance to be spoken' (2007:74). Robyn Stewart describes this process as rearranging truths to create texts (2007:130), while Guy Claxton (2006) describes the idea of 'thinking at the edge', based on a therapeutic practice called 'focusing'. In this process the gradual emergence of an idea allows it to be refined piece by piece over time. He suggests that 'An intuitive feeling of rightness (or wrongness) guides the process' (2006:357) in which various ideas are tried out until the artist intuitively

feels the work is right. All of these processes have been used in the current research, but I think the quotation that best sums up my own approach comes from Stewart:

> 'My research practice continues as a process of continuous discovery, filled with correspondences and contradictions, intuition and surprise, serendipity and discipline' (Stewart, 2007:124).

In this study, practice was developed from the theory by unpicking the theoretical ideas and reconstructing them through discussion, writing, drawing, photographing, and creating textiles using a reflexive methodology. For example when producing the series of work entitled *Marking time*, the theoretical ideas about home as sanctuary and prison were considered, written about and discussed. Ideas and thoughts were then played with in the sketchbook, and a series of photographs taken of blocked up windows. This led to ideas about prisoners and the marks they made to mark time. Thinking about how women confined to the home might make similar marks, led to the development of the idea of using pins and needles, and a series of samples were made and photographed at various selected sites. Considering how to express the voice of such women led to the idea of subverting a needlework sampler, and this led to research into the use of computer programs to produce a 'virtual' sampler, and research into the use of needlework by Victorian women, both in historical works and gothic novels.

Barbara Bolt notes that what is central to practice-led research is that the 'theory emerges from a reflexive practice at the same time that practice is informed by theory' (2007:29); this iteration is also crucial to my practice-based research. Gray (1998) notes that practice-led research is generative and reflective; and I contend that this is also a feature of practice-based research. In the present research, the ideas developed from the theory and practice are iterative and build on each other to deepen and develop meaning.

Metaphor and metonymy have been used in this research to help visualise and interpret the theory. Sullivan suggests that visual metaphors 'help transform meanings by illustrating similarities and helping to make connections' (Sullivan, 2012:53). I use them to aid understanding, for example, I use the idea of home as sanctuary and prison as a metaphor and within that, the net curtain, pins and lace act metonymically, to represent the uncanny, the trapped seamstress and the bars of

claustrophobia. Net curtains are also used metaphorically as the boundaries of the home and to represent the liminal state of the uncanny, and the gothic veil in the home. In some cases they are also given anthropomorphic qualities, to enable them to comment on the domestic environment, which links to the anthropomorphic use of furniture in Victorian literature (Pringle, 2010). In other cases the net curtain is personified and given a voice, allowing it to comment on the story.

An important step in developing practice ideas is reflection. In his study of reflective practice, Donald Schön (1995) argues that it can provide a bridge between practice and research. He notes that reflection in action and reflection on action are important to maintain objectivity. The former allows one to determine why certain decisions were made and the latter allows one to look back and assess with the benefit of hindsight. The formal reflective process created for the present research includes annotated reflective sketchbooks and a tutorial report file and it is through analysing, selecting and evaluating, that further creative connections and interpretations have been made. Because this research is so specific, dealing with particular aspects of the gothic, domestic and uncanny, evaluation and analysis have been used at all stages to ensure that the research remains focused.

2.3.3 Research process

Various books on researching through practice were consulted in the initial stages of this research.[29] They all provided helpful insights and validated the use of practice as research. I found *Visualizing research* the most helpful in formulating a research methodology (Gray and Malins, 2004). The authors suggest a five stage research process comprising: organization and research planning; data acquisition and generation; information management; information evaluation; and finally synthesis, presentation and dissemination. I have used these five broad stages to structure my research, with the addition of another stage describing the practice methods used, which I felt was necessary to provide a complete picture.

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[29] They included: *Practice as research: Approaches to creative arts enquiry* (Barrett and Bolt, 2007), *No guru, no method? Discussions on art and design research* (Strandman, 1998), *Visualizing research* (Gray and Malins, 2004), *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action* (Schön, 1995), *Art practice as research: Inquiry in the visual arts* (Sullivan, 2005) and *Practice-led research, research-led practice in the creative arts* (Smith and Dean, 2012).

Planning

The review of the literature and practice, examined the historical and contemporary context of the uncanny and the gothic in the domestic environment and was used to reveal absences in the research fields. It identified that textile interpretations of the uncanny and the gothic in the domestic environment had been under researched.

A concept map highlighted possible areas of research and identified questions. This resulted in four main areas of overlapping research: the uncanny, the gothic, the domestic and the net curtain and led to the development of four questions asking how the net curtain could be used in practice: to represent the duality of sanctuary and prison in the home; to provide the trapped woman's only voice; to act as a silent witness in the home; and to become a complicit actor in the uncanny home.

A research plan was developed and a flow chart and time schedule produced. Possible ethical issues were considered but none was identified.

Acquiring information

Much of the research involves reading primary and secondary literature, theses, gothic novels, websites and blogs, which are described more fully throughout the text. Feeds to blogs and alert services for primary journal updates have been set up to keep up to date with the relevant literature. Many useful exhibitions, symposia and talks have been attended. The most relevant exhibitions are discussed in the practice review and throughout the thesis. Relevant symposia and conferences included *Telling tales: Fantasy and fear in contemporary design* at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2009; *Unravelling the manor* in Brighton in 2010; *Gothic: culture, subculture, counterculture* at Strawberry Hill in 2013; the Histories of Home Subject Specialists Network fifth annual conference, at the Geffrye Museum in 2013; the *Subversive stitch revisited* conference in London in 2013; and the *Gothic study day* linked to the *Terror and wonder* exhibition at the British Museum in 2014.

Managing the information

The research material has been organised and managed in various ways. Much of the research involves reading and most of this information is stored in hard copy and computer files in the form of written notes, photocopies and pdfs. A Refworks

account has been set up and maintained to record all the references and generate bibliographies.

Visual data, either primary or secondary sources, including drawings, diagrams, photographs and contextual references, such as other artists' work, postcards and cuttings, have been collected in sketchbooks. The sketchbooks have also been used to document studio work, develop ideas, and to reflect and analyse (Figure 2.5). They also contain notes and technical information about processes.

2.5 Quarini, C. Sketchbook pages (2014). Photo: C Quarini.

Kay Greenlees (2005) in her research on the use of sketchbooks notes that they provide a library of responses to experiences and information. They allow personal evaluations and analyses, identification and resolution of problems, clarity of vision, refinement, simplification, fluency of thought and understanding. They are also a place where the development of imagination and ideas can occur. As Gray and Malins (2004) note, in a discussion about Leonardo da Vinci, his sketches or *pensieri* are his thoughts made visible by drawing and annotation, and this is the way sketchbooks are used in the present research. The ideas and analysis in the sketchbooks help to 'make the invisible visible, the implicit explicit, and creatively envision that which we cannot yet see or fully understand' (Gray and Malins, 2004:124).

Analysing and evaluating information

Analysis involves examining something in detail to understand it and discover its meaning while evaluation is used to ascertain value. The formal reflective process created to analyse and evaluate this research includes annotated reflective sketchbooks and a tutorial report file (Figure 2.6).
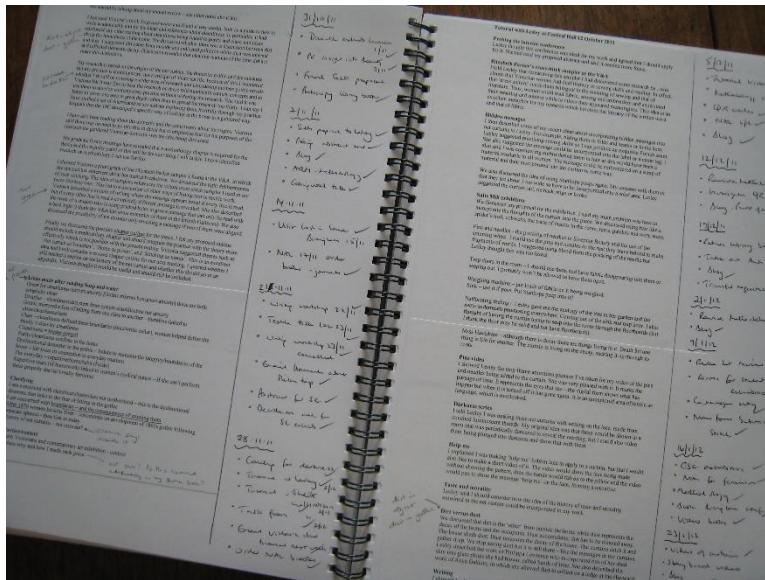
2.6 Quarini, C. Tutorial report pages (2014). Photo: C Quarini.

The data collected and generated were evaluated for their potential significance by using reflexive methods such as collating information and writing about specific topics and developing ideas in the sketchbook. The reliability of the information was assessed by recording its provenance, researching the authors and discussion with experts and peers.

The sketchbooks document work in progress, reflect on the development of ideas and practice, and aid problem solving. They also allow analysis and evaluation of the work in progress. They are a repository of ideas. Mind maps have been useful in this evaluation process to sort, structure and group the different threads of the research, in order to discover patterns, connections and gaps. They showed, for instance, that feminism and madness, were interesting minor aspects of the research rather than the core of it. Initially, triangulation (Gray and Malins, 2004) was used to discern the core of the research and to determine where the main elements of the uncanny, gothic and domestic overlapped.

Gray and Malins note that a reflective journal:

> 'captures the dynamic and reflexive nature of practice for planning (reflecting for action), capturing action (reflecting in action), describing and evaluating (reflecting on action)' (2004:113).

Following their suggestions, the dated tutorial log used in this research reflects on tutorials, presentations and exhibitions, to assess failures and successes and to identify future paths of research. It also includes a weekly diary of actions and targets. Regular reviews of the research are also undertaken and documented in the log. This information is kept in one file, separate from the sketchbook, so progress and gaps can be easily identified.

Presenting conference papers and giving talks has been a useful experience because it requires defining the topic and representing arguments in a coherent form. The feedback generated was also useful because it highlighted areas of the research that required further elucidation. Exhibiting at several venues has also elicited useful feedback in the form of reviews, both published and verbal, and personal analysis and evaluation of these events also led to new research ideas. I also maintain a blog (www.lacethread.blogspot.co.uk) in which I review exhibitions and events I attend or take part in and discuss ideas relevant to my practice. I have used this to refine my thoughts and to analyse and evaluate exhibitions and events and to encourage me to write on a regular basis.

Practice

I have added this category to those suggested by Gray and Malins because it is central to my research. All the practice in this research is based on net curtains and it is described in more detail throughout the thesis. Most of the net curtains are handmade, others have been bought and modified. Many are embellished with handmade lace. The techniques used to produce the handmade lace are bobbin lace, made with thread weighted by bobbins and made on a lace pillow, and tambour lace, made by looping thread with a special hook through cotton net.[30] Information about

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[30] There are numerous books providing basic instructions for both these types of lace, two of the most useful are Underwood (1988) and Dudding (1979).

lace techniques was obtained through personal knowledge and research at the Lace Guild library.

The links between the centuries in the theoretical research are also reflected in the way I combine modern technology with traditional craft techniques. Examples are the use of images and DVDs to produce narrative elements, for example in *The dark room.* The basics of the Moviemaker film programme and the Illustrator graphics program had to be learnt as both have been used in the production of the fine art practice. Illustrator was used to produce the virtual sampler, and Moviemaker to make the stop frame series of 700 images of the pins and needles being added to the curtain, for the *Marking time* installation. Recent work on QR codes also required research into their use and construction. I have also attended workshops on the Arduino programming system and smart interactive textiles, with a view to incorporating them in future work, for example to link the curtains in *The dark room* to a timed or audience-reactive lighting system.

Some of the practice involved working with other practitioners. For example, I am developing the idea of the QR codes into augmented reality technology with Marie-Therese Gramstadt. I commissioned and worked with The Electric Egg Company to produce a small video to add a narrative element to the *Help me* (2012) curtain and I also collaborated with the photographer Steve Smith to produce large images for the installations at Salts Mill and The Crypt Gallery.

Synthesis, presentation and dissemination
At the end of the research period, a critical synthesis of the research will be made and included in the thesis conclusion (Chapter 8). The research will be disseminated formally through a written dissertation, conference presentations and exhibitions of practice, and more informally through my blog, website (www.carolquarini.com) and articles for the general press. A final exhibition of the practice will be shown at The Crypt Gallery, St Pancras, London, in September 2015, and documentation of interim exhibitions will be included and analysed throughout the thesis. Comments from press reviews will be incorporated in the thesis, but future press reviews and comments on blogs will also help to disseminate the research. It is anticipated that

the research process will be as important as the final exhibition of practice and that the research will have generated new areas of study.

Regarding the transferability of this research, it is hoped that it will provide a stimulus for future practical and theoretical research into the uncanny, the gothic and the domestic, using textiles and other media. The historical information on the development and style of net curtains will also form the basis of further historical textile research.

3 Transparent boundaries

This chapter considers boundaries, both seen and unseen. It positions the research within the boundaries of the mid-nineteenth-century, middle-class, British home as a prelude to the narrative of the net curtain which begins in Chapter 4. The net curtain, domesticity, the uncanny and the gothic are all related to boundaries. Net curtains lie on the boundary of the home, in the liminal space between the home and not-home, and in this way materially embody the dichotomy of Freud's uncanny, which deals with the boundary between the homely and the unhomely. Domesticity is concerned with the boundaries of cleanliness and dirt, purity and impurity, taste and class, while the gothic deals with the boundaries of light and dark, the seen and the unseen. They are all fluid boundaries and I am using the transparent boundary of the net curtain to embody them in the home.

The net curtain became fashionable in nineteenth-century Britain as ideas about domesticity, the home and the moral and social comfort to be found there gained importance. This chapter begins by showing how domestic interiors in the nineteenth century came to reflect morality and how women became conflated with their homes, to such an extent that descriptions of interiors were used in fiction to illustrate character. I build on this link between women and their homes, using the net curtain as an embodiment of the heroine trapped in the gothic home. Gill Saunders in the catalogue for the *Walls are talking* exhibition at the Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, describes how Robert Gober uses wallpaper as a 'convenient shorthand to describe 'home'' (2010:33), and I use the net curtain in a similar way, as a metonym for home.

The chapter continues by showing how women's identity became enshrined in the trope of 'the angel in the house' and came to depend on domestic roles and housekeeping duties. This leads to a discussion of some of the boundaries to be found in the Victorian middle-class domestic environment such as those of taste, class, purity and cleanliness and how these were important for maintaining the integrity of the home. This maintenance was the responsibility of 'the angel in the

house', however, the chapter concludes by discussing the fluidity of boundaries and the consequences if they are blurred or breached.

3.1 Importance of interiors

The association of women with their homes, which developed throughout the nineteenth century, became so ingrained that by the beginning of the twentieth century, the writer and interior designer Elsie de Wolfe was expressing a common sentiment when she noted that 'It is the personality of the mistress that the house expresses' (de Wolfe, 1914:5). The historian Beverly Gordon notes that:

> 'between about 1875 and 1925, the connection between women and their houses in Western middle-class culture was so strong that it helped shape the perception of both' (Gordon, 1996:282).

Rooms in the middle-class Victorian home were gendered, with the drawing room being a female preserve (Flanders, 2004:xxv). The appearance and cleanliness of this room became an expression of the housewife's character and appearance. The drawing room was also the site where the private and public aspects of the home interacted, and it had high status as the reception room where visitors were received, and where the taste and class of the home were expressed for public consumption. Overtly linking this room and its mistress, several advice manuals suggested women should decorate the rooms of their home using colour schemes that matched their complexion, for example Owen Davis says:

> 'Is she a blonde? Then let there be a modicum of pale blue within her bower … rose will detract from a fair skin, pale turquoise would be preferable but it will not suit a fresh complexion … We prefer simple harmony here making the lady the concentration of the scheme' (O Davis *Instructions for the adornment of dwelling houses: interior decoration* London 1880:25 In: Kirkham, 1996:18).

Similarly, in *The art of beauty* (1878), Mary Haweis advises using the same fabric for clothes and furnishings. This ensured the mistress of the house blended with the decoration of her home, forming a pleasing picture, but it meant she was in danger of becoming part of the furnishings and disappearing like a chameleon within her own home. In fact, this effacement is encouraged by Haweis in *The art of decoration*, in which she states 'A beautiful woman reclining on a sofa becomes for a time part of the sofa and the sofa part of her' (Haweis, 1881:269).

The choice of fabrics and furnishings for the home reflected the housewife's taste and morality, which were crucial markers of class and integrity. For example, in *From kitchen to garret: Hints for young householders*, Jane Panton writes:

> 'Dirty large patterns or pretentious curtains show the vulgarian, the slattern, while the soft madras or delicate lace indicates an artistic mistress with whom I know I shall spend many pleasant hours' (Panton, 1890:94).

In the same volume, Panton 'recommended white muslin curtains (with lace edging and inserts), to protect the room from the gaze of passers-by' (In: Flanders, 2004:154). She also links the dress of the housewife with her curtains, in the same way as Haweis, when she says:

> 'No house can possibly look pretty where white curtains are conspicuous by their absence, any more than a girl can look pretty if she has neither nice frilling or spotless collar and cuffs' (In: Flanders, 2004:154).

Furnishings were, therefore, used to personalise the home but also to conform to the conventions of a social group, and perhaps more importantly to distinguish oneself from other social groups (Douglas, 1996). The increasing number of consumer goods on the market place during the eighteenth century, initiated a concern about 'taste' that lies beneath the practices of the following century. As the researcher Elizabeth Callaghan notes, taste was a clear marker of respectability, combining economics (dependent on class and finances) and morality (dependent on the probity of the housewife); both elements that created anxiety in the Victorian home (Callaghan, 2009:128).

As the anthropologist Mary Douglas notes '...taste is best understood by negative judgements' (Douglas, 1996:50) and is always defined in relation to 'the other', for example Panton's 'dirty large patterns' mentioned above may have been the housewife's 'bold exciting patterns'. Douglas shows that this aspect of taste reflects cultural alignment. Maintaining the boundaries of taste was therefore important for maintaining the class system.

The social historian, Judith Flanders notes that taste in the mid-nineteenth century was not a measure of the housewife's personal choices but a test of her conformity to a set of rules sanctioned by society (Flanders, 2004:xxxiv). Taste was an expression of the family's adherence to these rules and indicated the respectability of the house

and those inhabiting it. Flanders notes that because good taste was considered to be a product of 'education, hard work and application' its lack indicated 'moral turpitude' (Flanders, 2004:135).

Throughout the nineteenth century, possessions were used to define individuality (Cohen, 2006:xi), but because artefacts were seen to possess moral qualities, their choice was important. A 'tasteful' item would raise the moral tone of the household while something tasteless 'could exert a malevolent influence' (Cohen, 2006:x). As Chapter 7 will reveal, many furnishings were also considered to have agency, for example, Freud references a short story about a table metamorphosing into a crocodile in his essay on the uncanny (Freud, 1919:151).

This link between morality and furnishings also led many to condemn the popular fashion for imitations; either imitation finishes or furnishings that concealed their function (Flanders, 2004:135). By the end of the nineteenth century, furniture that disguised the way it was made, or the materials from which it was made, was considered dishonest[31] and to be avoided (Forty, 1986:111). The advice in *Our homes and how to make them healthy* edited by Shirley Murphy is quite clear:

> 'Shams of all kinds are to be objected to. … If you are content to teach a lie in your belongings, you can hardly wonder at petty deceits being practised in other ways' (In: Murphy, 1883:356).

In other words, those who lived surrounded by deceit became used to it and accepted it in their daily life. That acute observer of society, Charles Dickens, plays on this dishonesty of shams by naming the *nouveau riche* family in his novel *Our mutual friend* Mr and Mrs Veneering (Dickens, 1864-1865: Kindle Loc 115). His readers would have understood the reference to shams at once, and would not be surprised to discover that everything in the Veneering's home is 'bran new' (Dickens, 1864-1865: Kindle Loc 115) including their friends and, in particular, their pedigree.

This link between identity and environment is borne out by contributions in *Interior design and identity,* edited by Susie McKellar and Penny Sparke (2004), which

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[31] ANW Pugin originated these ideas of constructional honesty. His ideas were taken up by many including Henry Cole and Owen Jones whose *The grammar of ornament* (1856) was hugely influential in the reformation of nineteenth century taste and design.

considers that individuals create spaces and their identities are a response to these spaces, suggesting that the process is reciprocal, and that places affect people as much as people affect places. The interior of the home was therefore important because it both developed and illustrated character. These affinities between people and their homes were, and still are, exploited in fiction to describe character. For example, in Charles Dickens' *Great expectations* (1860-1861), Miss Havisham lives surrounded by the decay of her life. The hero of the story, Pip, describes the room in which Miss Havisham's wedding breakfast is spread out in the following way: 'I dare say [it] had once been handsome, but every discernible thing in it was covered with dust and mould, and dropping to pieces' (Dickens, 1860-1861: Kindle Loc 1262); words which could as easily be used to describe Miss Havisham herself.

The concern about pretence in furniture reflected a social dilemma about class fluidity and the ease with which one could disguise one's origins. Examples abound in mid-nineteenth-century literature of characters who either move from one class to another, such as Lady Audley, who changes her status from governess to lady through marriage, or those who disguise themselves to infiltrate the home such as Magdalen Vanstone pretending to be a lady's maid. If appearances could be so easily deceptive, this dissimulation 'cast doubt over the whole system of judging acquaintances' (Flanders, 2004:136). This theme of things not being what they seem, not only links to mid-nineteenth-century gothic literature, but also epitomises the uncanny feeling of the familiar seeming strange, which pervades this research.

The idea that nothing should be deceptive, combined with women being conflated with their homes, resulted in women themselves becoming the epitome of good taste rather than just influencing others by their good taste (Davidoff and Hall, 1987:191). This meant that women had to appear 'feminine' in looks and behaviour, and their virtue became dependent on their containment. Davidoff and Hall compare women's virtue to a potted plant 'limited and domesticated, sexually controlled, not spilling out into the spheres in which she did not belong nor being overpowered by 'weeds' of social disorder' (1987:192). This theme of confinement within the home and within a patriarchal family setting is discussed in Chapter 4.

Anderson and Zinsser suggest that although:

> 'the wife and mother made this cosy bourgeois life in the parlour possible. …
> In the process however, she sometimes vanished as a person and almost
> became one with the home she was so identified with' (1988:163).

This idea of women becoming one with their homes reinforces the previous quotations from advice manuals in which women were encouraged to blend with the colour schemes of their homes. I see this idea of women being conflated with their homes and their domestic furnishings as a rationale for using home furnishings to embody women and their homes. Women are linked to textiles, their production, maintenance and cleanliness and are conflated with the soft texture of fabrics and their fluidity. I use this idea of women becoming absorbed within the structure of the home in my practice (Chapter 4). In many cases my net curtains embody the woman herself, represent her thoughts, and occasionally are all that is left of her presence within the home. Chapter 5 describes and discusses my practice linked to this idea of the net curtain being the trapped woman's only voice or means of expression. The idea that interiors illustrate character is also important in Chapter 6 where I use the net curtain to reflect or report on events in the home and in Chapter 7 where it menaces the home.

This section has shown the importance of interiors in representing women's characters and justified the use of domestic furnishings, such as the net curtain, to represent the position of women within the home. However, women were not only conflated with the taste, morality and furnishings of their home, the following sections will show that they were also conflated with the cleanliness and integrity of the home.

3.2 The angel in the house

The physical conflation between women and their homes was mirrored by a moral conflation between the two. The historian, Lynda Nead shows that women and the integrity of their homes became reciprocal:

> 'woman's moral and sexual purity guaranteed the home as a haven and a
> source of social stability, and, in turn, feminine purity itself was ensured
> through the shelter and protection of the domestic sanctuary' (Nead,
> 1988:33).

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This led to the situation noted by Anderson and Zinsser that 'women had a role 'housekeeping' society at large' (1988:166) and thus became the guardians of the nation's morality. This is borne out by a quote in the *Quarterly Review* of 1869 bemoaning the immorality of industrial society, which intentionally links the role of women to cleaning processes by eliding women and disinfectant:

> 'Let us make use of the engine God has placed in our hands. Pour into the corrupted stream the pure, healthy disinfectant of English womanhood' (*Quarterly Review* 1869 126:478 quoted in Burstyn, 1980:31).

This idea of womanly purity as disinfectant is used by Charlotte Brontë in *Shirley*. The heroine confides her worry that she has been bitten by a mad dog to her lover Louis Moore, who replies:

> "I doubt whether the smallest particle of virus mixed with your blood: and if it did, let me assure you that – young, healthy, faultlessly sound as you are – no harm will ensue" (Brontë, 1849:402).

Louis is confident that Shirley's feminine purity alone will protect her from viral disease.

Ideals of purity and womanhood, originating in the Evangelical movement at the end of the eighteenth century, were influential in the later development of domesticity and gender roles in the nineteenth century. Vineta Colby shows that many of these ideas were spread by the moral stories published in cheap tracts (1974). The Evangelical reformer Hannah Moore was a popular author of these works, but even more successful was Mary Martha (Butt) Sherwood who based her tales on 'the domestic life of the upper middle classes' (Colby, 1974:159). Colby reports that a poll taken in 1900 of prominent men, showed that Sherwood's *The Fairchild family* (1817) had been a dominant book in their formative childhood years. George Eliot and the Brontës were also brought up in Evangelical families so would have read these tales in their youth and probably been influenced by them (Colby, 1974:202).

Following Evangelical principles, the model family became one in which the husband went out to work and the wife stayed at home; in contrast to previous centuries when workplace and home had often been on the same site. This separation of the spheres (discussed more fully in Chapter 4) resulted in middle-class women concentrating on their roles of wife, mother and housekeeper (Flanders, 2004:xxix).

However, the lack of outside opportunities for women also resulted in women becoming more dependent on men. In the words of Sarah Stickney Ellis, writing in *The wives of England, their relative duties, domestic influence and social obligations*:

> 'It is quite possible that you may have more talent [than your husband], with higher attainments, and you may also have been generally more admired; but this has nothing whatever to do with your position as a woman, which is, and must be, inferior to his as a man' (Ellis, 1843:17 In: Flanders, 2004:xxx).

Women's domestic role in the home was idealised in Coventry Patmore's poem *The angel in the house* (first published in 1854 and later expanded).[32] English literature scholar, Nina Auerbach, describes it well, when she states that its 'title is so much more resonant than its content' (Auerbach, 1982:66). The title became 'a convenient shorthand for the selfless paragon all women were exhorted to be' (Auerbach, 1982:67) and resulted in 'angel' and 'house' 'becoming virtual synonyms' (Auerbach, 1982:69).[33]

Patmore's opinion of women as angels appears to have been widely held in the nineteenth century. Charlotte Brontë, in her novel *Shirley,* written in 1849, before the publication of the poem, discussed men's perception of women as angels, in the words of the heroine:

> "If men could see us as we really are, they would be a little amazed; but the cleverest, the acutest men are often under an illusion about women: they do not read them in a true light: they misapprehend them, both for good and evil: their good woman is a queer thing, half doll, half angel; their bad woman almost always a fiend" (Brontë, 1849:278).

Charlotte Brontë herself was criticised in a review of *Shirley* by George Henry Lewes in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1849 (Barker, 1994:612). He began the review with the words 'The grand function of woman … is, and ever must be, maternity'.

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[32] *The angel in the house* is a lengthy narrative poem describing the author's courtship of his wife. The full text can be found at www.victorianweb/authors/patmore/angel/ (Accessed on 15.09.2012).

[33] Although Patmore eulogised his wife's femininity, he did not allow her 'the liberty of arranging her heavenly domain, bought with her fortune' (Cohen, 2006:94). Although women were expected to provide the moral furnishing of the home it was common for men to purchase and choose the material furnishings in the mid-nineteenth century. It was only as the century progressed that women became responsible for the choice of purchases in the home. One reason for this was that married women could not contract debts in their own name, although they could pledge their husbands' credit. This resulted in tradesmen only dealing with women they knew to be credit worthy (Cohen, 2006:91). Women did not gain the right to contract debts in their own name until the 1930s (Cohen, 2006:91).

Having criticised Brontë as a failure as a woman because she was childless he continued by criticising her as a novelist (Barker, 1994:614).[34]

Brontë's supposed lack of proper femininity was also criticised in a review of *Villette* (1853) in the *Christian Remembrancer* of 1853 which insinuated that a quiet woman writer must have 'some disadvantageous occult motive for a retired life' (Barker, 1994:734). When she replied saying she lived a retired life because she had to look after her father, the October issue of the publication included a note from the editor saying 'We now learn with pleasure, but not with surprise, that the main motive for this seclusion is devotion to the purest and most sacred of domestic ties' (Barker, 1994:734). Brontë was vindicated as an 'angel' rather than condemned as an unnatural 'fiend'.

Despite being a feted novelist, Brontë still had to show that she was at heart 'an angel in the house'. For many ordinary middle-class women with no literary talents, their home and their personal appearance was their only means of expression and many became conflated with their home, its taste, purity and cleanliness. This is another reason why using home furnishings, such as the net curtain, is a valid metonym for these women.

3.3 Cleanliness is next to Godliness

Sociologist Elizabeth Shove shows that there are no absolutes regarding cleanliness; what cleaning entails and for whom, changes over time (Shove, 2003). Theories about cleanliness changed throughout the nineteenth century as scientific theories about dirt and hygiene developed. In the mid-nineteenth century, disease was thought to occur in stagnant air so allowing ventilation in to the home was thought to prevent disease. However, by the end of the century, germs had been identified as carriers of disease, therefore removing dirt became the focus of disease prevention (Forty, 1986).

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[34] Charlotte Brontë was particularly upset by this review because she had corresponded with Lewes under her pseudonym of Currer Bell and considered him a friend. He used this review not only to criticise *Shirley* but also to reveal that Currer Bell was in fact the daughter of a clergyman living in Yorkshire. He did not actually name Charlotte but gave enough clues to reveal her identity (Barker, 1994). Ironically, Lewes is probably best known for his unconventional domestic arrangements as he later became the unmarried partner of George Eliot.

In *Purity and danger* (1966), the anthropologist, Mary Douglas, describes the origins of ideas of purity and cleanliness. She links dirt to disorder (Douglas, 1966:2) and considers it is 'matter out of place' (Douglas, 1966:44),[35] themes discussed further in Chapter 6. Julia Kristeva builds on the work of Mary Douglas in her discourse on abjection (Kristeva, 1982). She comments:

> 'It is not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite' (Kristeva, 1982:4).

Cleanliness is thus seen as a maintenance of borders or boundaries. In the nineteenth century, the disorders of dirt, disease and political sedition were 'seen as the inevitable outcome of dirty and unhygienic living and working conditions' (Nead, 1988:118). Therefore cleanliness was used to maintain social identity and to control the boundaries between the classes (Kelley, 2010:1). Thus, the middle-class housewife, ensuring the cleanliness of her home, was playing her part in maintaining the boundaries of class and propriety, and in this way upholding the identity, order and morals of the nation.

Those daily rituals of cleaning and domestic maintenance were the subject of numerous magazines and advice manuals in the nineteenth century, beginning in the 1840s and increasing in number until the end of the century. All this advice tended to arouse feelings of anxiety and guilt about dirt (Forty, 1986). For example, Phillis Browne, writing in *Our homes and how to make them healthy*, encourages the housewife to make more of an effort, by conflating cleanliness and purity:

> 'When dirt has been driven out, purity and enlightenment have found a congenial home; and it has always been found that to become clean is to take the first step in becoming good, wise and great' (Browne, 1883:869).

In this way cleanliness was transformed from a physical problem into a moral one (Forty, 1986; Flanders, 2004:78) and cleaning became a moral duty (Davidson, 1982:117). The deep rooted association of cleanliness and spiritual purity draws on the Judaeo-Christian tradition (Davidson, 1982:117) and was expressed in the

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[35] Judith Flanders in *The making of home* notes that this definition of dirt as 'matter in the wrong place' originated with Lord Palmerston (Flanders, 2014: Kindle Loc 3520).

aphorism 'Cleanliness is indeed next to Godliness' by John Wesley.[36] This begs the question: if cleanliness is next to Godliness, what does uncleanliness open the home to? These consequences will be discussed in Chapter 6.

During the nineteenth century the identity of middle-class women became more dependent than ever before on the visible results of housekeeping, although the housekeeping activities themselves remained invisible as they were carried out when male observers and outsiders were absent. The requirement to maintain a pristine home, through invisible housekeeping, resulted in women's work being undervalued, as it was unseen; although the pressure to keep a meticulously clean house remained. The prevailing idea of separate spheres for men and women (discussed in Chapter 4) rendered the private and the domestic the province of women, and the public arena the place for men. This domestic management gave women some authority in the home, but it was associated with the pressure to maintain an ideal home and to maintain the conventions or boundaries of society on behalf of the family.

In the nineteenth century, cleanliness became an indication of respectability and propriety and a marker of familial care and social display (Kelley, 2010). Cleanliness was often used as symbolic shorthand for ordered domesticity and sexual purity (Kelley, 2010:37). In fact, the link between cleanliness and virtue was so ingrained that Francis Kilvert, the Victorian clergyman and diarist, was surprised to find a married couple who had once lived 'in sin', inhabiting a scrupulously clean cottage; he had naturally expected it to be dirty (Kilvert, 1973).

Housekeeping was hard work in the nineteenth century. In the major towns, housewives had to cope with dirt from coal smoke and smuts, as well as coping with the physically hard and time-consuming tasks of making coal fires, waste disposal and laundry (Davidoff and Hall, 1987). In *Our homes and how to make them healthy*, Robert Brudenell Carter, an ophthalmic surgeon at St George's Hospital, London, dryly notes that 'If a room is generally dark that room will also be dirty. Given

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[36] John Wesley quoted this phrase in a sermon in 1778, but the original quote is said to have come from 'the writings of Phinehas ben Yair, an ancient rabbi' (Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable 14th edition 1992).

ordinary housewifery, darkness may be used as a synonym for dirt' (Carter, 1883:386).

I use these ideas about maintaining the integrity of the home to comment on its disintegration (see Chapter 6), in the same way as gothic novels critique the position of women in the home (see Chapter 4). I use the net curtain as a silent witness trapping dust and memories to represent the idea of dysfunctional domesticity and the ingress of the 'other', breaching the boundaries of the home and turning it from a site of purity and cleanliness to a gothic site of uncanny unhomeliness. I also explore the idea of darkness, as another margin or boundary, allowing the net curtain to become complicit in the uncanny gothic home (Chapter 7).

3.4 Pure white

As we have seen, the physical presence of dirt was linked to the morality of the home and ultimately became associated with the woman of the house. Discussing the Victorian home, Penny Sparke has said that it was at this time that the colour white took on a special significance as the ultimate symbol of cleanliness (Sparke, 1995:79), which became linked by association with its existing symbolism with purity. As Gilbert and Gubar note 'The angel in the house is a woman in white' and as such is 'passive, submissive, and unawakened' (2000:615).

As well as being the colour of feminine purity, white is the gothic colour of 'doomed, magical, half-mad or despairing women' (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000:617). Miss Havisham's yellowing white wedding dress reflects her despair, while Anne Catherick's clothing in Wilkie Collins' *The woman in white* indicates her vulnerability. White is also the colour of ghosts, spirits, and shrouds. I use this association between white diaphanous material and net curtains in my practice to link ideas about the gothic and the domestic.

Gilbert and Gubar consider whiteness in terms that suggest net curtains. They note that although 'whiteness implies an invitation' it simultaneously 'suggests a refusal' (2000:616). This dichotomy suggests that virginal whiteness provides a blank canvas that invites the viewer to leave their mark or sully it, but in its nun-like purity and simplicity it also transcends the world and rejects any interaction. This reflects the

idea of the net curtain tantalising yet withdrawing as it wafts in the breeze, revealing and concealing in its role as domestic veil.

Clean white net curtains were signs of a well-kept home. This use of white artefacts mirrored the working-class practice of whitening the front door step.[37] The step was cleaned daily with soap and water and then buffed up with a layer of white chalky paste, but as soon as the step was walked on the whiteness became dirty and returned to dust. The white step, like the white net curtain, was a symbol of cleanliness. The whiteness of the step was a marker that the step had been cleaned, although the actual cleansing had been effected by the soap and water. The architectural and cultural theorist Mark Wigley, writing about the Modernist home, notes that white surfaces traditionally mark cleanliness rather than bring it about and merely form a surface layer (Wigley, 1995:5). This links to the idea of appearances being deceptive, encountered at the beginning of this chapter. The white surface is not necessarily clean, but the fact it is white makes us think it is clean by association. The lecturer, Kathleen Connellan, from the University of South Australia, agrees with Wigley that white is only a surface layer and that 'when that surface is cloth … then the surface and its whiteness become one' (2012:9). This recollects the idea of women being conflated with their homes and merging with their furnishings.

This idea of whiteness being vulnerable is one of the reasons why I use it in my practice to represent those who are vulnerable in the home. The pristine whiteness of the net curtain is painfully vulnerable to the slightest mark, which immediately robs it of its status as domestic icon. Whiteness is a finely balanced liminal state between cleanliness and dirt. I consider that whiteness is a boundary, in the same way as the net curtain, the domestic, the uncanny and the gothic are boundaries. It is the unstable boundary between cleanliness and dirt, which can be breached in a moment in the dysfunctional home.

3.5 All margins are dangerous

The net curtain, the uncanny, the gothic and many aspects of the domestic, such as purity, taste and cleanliness, are concerned with boundaries and margins. Many

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[37] In some homes the front step was reddened rather than whitened to indicate the cleanliness of the home, but this research considers white steps.

household maintenance tasks that preserve the integrity and status of the home are dependent on maintaining these boundaries, and, as we have seen, in the nineteenth century, the task of maintaining these boundaries fell to women.

The literature on boundaries is extensive, however, I focus on the ideas of Mary Douglas and Julia Kristeva on unstable margins and fluid boundaries, respectively, as their ideas relate to the domestic and the gothic. In her groundbreaking work, *Purity and danger*, Douglas notes that:

> 'all margins are dangerous. If they are pulled this way or that the shape of fundamental experience is altered. Any structure of ideas is vulnerable at its margins' (Douglas, 1966:150).

She suggests all margins are dangerous because of their instability. She is referring to the fact that danger lurks at all boundaries whether they are physical, such as a threshold like a door or window, biological events such as birth, childhood or death, or social occasions such as marriage or moving to a new home. All margins are dangerous because they are the place where entities are at their most fluid and this can allow the 'other' to slip in to disrupt the normal order. This links to Kristeva's discourse on abjection quoted in Section 3.3, in which the idea of the in-between and the ambiguous disturbing identity and order, reinforces Douglas's idea of vulnerable margins.

Many societies have rituals to protect and cleanse these boundaries or liminal transition points. For example Dinah Eastop has studied how coins and garments have been found deliberately concealed in the thresholds of British buildings as an apotropaic device to ward off evil (Eastop, 2006). Sheila Paine's extensive research on amulets, also reveals how in some societies, reflective clothing is used to avert the evil eye from children and brides, to keep them safe at transitional points in life (Paine, 2004).

Margins are also linked to the gothic, as Barry Curtis, writing in *Dark places: The haunted house in film,* notes 'The gothic sensibility thrives on margins – the places where the law is at its weakest and destruction and reconstruction is in progress' (2008:120). He also links these boundaries to the abject and domestic themes of dirt and cleanliness, when he suggests that the boundaries of the haunted house are

'disturbingly porous and prone to the invasion of parasites and predators' (Curtis, 2008:83).

Net curtains, the domestic, the uncanny and the gothic all deal with unstable boundaries and the idea of boundaries being dangerous sites is one of the key elements of my research. The net curtain is a dangerous margin for several reasons. It appears to be a flimsy inadequate boundary that can easily be torn or blown aside, but it is also dangerous because it is a silent witness in the home retaining a memory of what it has encountered; its folds and creases conceal hidden depths. However, margins are not just dangerous because they are flimsy and can disintegrate, they can also become rigid, claustrophobic and containing. The veil as a gothic trope suggests personal enclosure, whether for privacy or confinement, and this is mirrored in the domestic veil. The net curtain may also be a barrier to light and the outside world and, as such, is a metaphor for the duality of home as sanctuary and prison, which represents the way in which many women experienced the home in the nineteenth century, and the way many authors wrote about it in gothic novels. It also represents an uncanny domestic boundary, lying as it does in the liminal space between home and not-home.

The following chapters will show how and why I use the net curtain to embody the duality of sanctuary and prison in the home (Chapter 4); how it can be used to provide the trapped woman's only voice (Chapter 5); how it acts as a silent witness in the home, recording what it has seen and overheard (Chapter 6), and how it becomes a complicit actor (Chapter 7) in the terrors of the uncanny gothic house.

4 Sanctuary and prison

In Chapter 3 we saw how women became conflated with their homes in nineteenth-century Britain. Many women were content with this arrangement but others, including several authors of gothic novels, were not, and critiqued the idea in their fiction. Depending on the viewpoint taken, the home can therefore be seen as either a cosy sanctuary or a claustrophobic prison, and often a combination of both. This chapter will reveal how the net curtain can be used to represent the duality of sanctuary and prison in the home.

Gendering of domesticity led to the development of the 'separate spheres' ideology; a discussion of the validity of this concept, and its use as a basis for practice, introduces this chapter. That debate leads to a discussion about the definition of home and how some artists have responded to that theme. This is followed by an overview of the uncanny home, defined as a site where the familiar becomes strange and the homely shades into the unhomely. These ideas of the home becoming unhomely and its duality as sanctuary and prison mirror several gothic novels of the mid-nineteenth century, in which their writers subtly criticised the idea of separate spheres. The chapter concludes by exploring my practice as a response to the question of how the net curtain can represent home as sanctuary and prison.

4.1 Separate spheres

The idealisation of the woman of the home as 'the angel in the house', and the separation of work and home, which began in the eighteenth century and gathered pace in the nineteenth century, led to the development of the concept of 'separate spheres', in which women became particularly associated with the home (Davidoff and Hall, 1987:29). This development of gendered areas, theoretically relegated women to the domestic, where they became responsible for the morality, taste and integrity of the home. In her doctoral thesis, the historian, Jane Hamlett (2005) shows how gendered identities were constructed and negotiated in the nineteenth century. In theory, this separation of the spheres in the middle-class home protected the woman from male aggression, but it also placed her under the control of her father or husband.

Some authors have questioned to what extent the ideology of separate spheres reflected lived experience (Berry, 2006:171). In particular, Amanda Vickery (1993) has suggested that women did not always adhere to or internalise these ideas. Despite originating the idea of 'separate spheres', Davidoff and Hall qualify it by noting that the 'public was not really public and private not really private' (1987:33). The private home was in fact a place of continual activity with servants and delivery men as well as social visitors coming and going. This is reinforced by Flanders who states that 'In reality homes were both the private face of public life and the public face of private life' (Flanders, 2004:254). Davidoff expands on this idea of the division between the two states being complex and notes that their 'instability and mutability' should be borne in mind (Davidoff, 1998:165). For example, wives had an important role in maintaining the social life of the family by providing hospitality in the home and by making social visits to other households. Flanders notes that the 'spheres' were routinely permeated and to suggest otherwise 'is comparable to believing that a nation's borders are a painted line on the ground' (2014: Kindle Loc 1550).

The social historians Margaret Beetham and Kay Boardman discuss the idea of separate spheres by considering representations of femininity in mid-Victorian women's magazines (Beetham, 1996; Beetham and Boardman, 2001). Their research shows that women's magazines of the time acknowledged the ideology of separate spheres and that social life was based on sexual differences, but, in her doctoral thesis, Boardman suggests the idea of 'a totally monolithic dominant ideology is not really sustainable and does not do justice to the complexity of both the period and its textual representations' and that the ideology of separate spheres was 'constantly being contested' (Boardman, 1994:34).

Moira Donald (1999) points out that although the Victorian middle-class home has been idealised as a sanctuary of physical and mental shelter for women away from the masculine world, it was a working environment for most women. Middle-class women had to manage their homes, with working-class women working for them as servants. The home may have been a tranquil haven for the master of the house to relax in after a day at work, but for the mistress of the house it was a workplace and an all-consuming responsibility. The servants had to be managed, organised and

paid, as did the tradesmen and outworkers who serviced the home, such as the laundry service. Wives were also morally responsible for those in their care, including the servants. Lynda Nead (1988) shows that many women were content with this arrangement, but the home could also be the site of conflict, claustrophobia and confinement and for many young women in particular, such as unmarried daughters, governesses and female servants, it could be both a sanctuary and a prison.

I acknowledge the arguments surrounding the ideology of separate spheres and the fact that it may not have completely reflected daily life. However, I agree with Victoria Kelley when she says that the concept of separate spheres is still useful once it is 'acknowledged that there were many varieties of experience that did not necessarily fit into the archetypal pattern' (Kelley, 2010:62). I also agree with Judy Attfield when she suggests that despite the danger of stereotyping, the concept of separate spheres is still a useful analytic device for interpreting class and gender cultures and for comparing the private and public domains (2000:179). I use the idea in my practice, mainly because restricted gendered roles were a concern for many women in the nineteenth century, as reflected in their writing. For example, in *Jane Eyre*, the heroine, in a soliloquy to the reader when she arrives at Thornfield Hall, says:

> 'Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags' (Brontë, 1847:141).

As this example shows, the ideology of separate spheres not only rendered the home a gendered site, it also affected the upbringing and expectations of men and women. Many middle-class boys were sent to boarding school to be educated, while girls remained in the sheltered environment of home and received little formal education, apart from painting, music and sewing. Despite women's lack of education, as wives, they were expected to maintain and manage a home and were responsible for the integrity and morality of that home.

Anne Brontë used her novels to criticise mid-nineteenth century patriarchal society and the legal system that undermined women. She vehemently opposed the ethos of separate spheres, particularly the different education and upbringing of boys and girls that it entailed. Professor Marion Shaw writing in *Brontë Studies* notes that:

> 'It is the notion of the separate spheres that Anne opposes, of patterns of conduct imposed on girls and boys with the purpose of producing men and women very different from each other, intellectually, physically, and, perhaps of most importance to Anne, morally' (Shaw, 2013:331).

In *The tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), Anne Brontë critiques the idea of separate spheres, more forcibly then her sister Charlotte does in *Jane Eyre*. It describes the marriage between Helen and Arthur Huntingdon and her illegal flight from the marital home to shield their son from his father's dissolute behaviour. A J Drewery, writing in the same issue of *Brontë Studies* as Shaw, considers that the novel was 'an enormous attack on Victorian social and legal structures' (2013:346) and an 'accurate portrayal of the position of women in the early nineteenth century' (2013:340).

The theory of separate spheres continues to frame analysis of the Victorian home. For example, at the *Home intimacies* conference at the Geffrye Museum in 2013,[38] several papers linked the ideas of the Victorian home and separate spheres. The keynote speaker, Jane Hamlett, a lecturer in modern British history at Royal Holloway, London University, noted that the idea of separate spheres still structures analysis of the Victorian home and that few alternative theories have been suggested. In her paper she suggested that the focus should be on intimacy rather than privacy. However, my research is not into the idea of separate spheres, but is linked to mid-nineteenth-century gothic novels that critique the idea of separate spheres. Thus separate spheres is a useful concept for the present research.

In the mid-nineteenth century, women's lives were constricted not only by the idea of separate spheres but also by law. Shaw notes that it was a time of change for the whole family (Shaw, 2013:334). Hannah Gavron in her book *The captive wife: Conflicts of housebound mothers* gives an excellent overview of the historical, legal and political changes that took place during the nineteenth century. She describes the

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[38] The conference was organised by the Histories of Home Subject Specialists Network.

changes and amendments that were made through laws concerning married women's property, the guardianship of children, and divorce (Gavron, 1966:4-12). For example, before 1839, fathers had absolute rights over their children, and it was not until the 1886 *Guardianship of Infants Act* that the mother was allowed to be sole guardian of her children on her husband's death (Gavron, 1966:5). These legal changes are also summarised concisely by Flanders (2004:196).

In the nineteenth century, the idea of separate spheres was maintained by advice manuals, magazines and many novels, other than those gothic novels that critique it. One of the most influential magazines was *The Englishwoman's domestic magazine*[39] which aimed to provide:

> 'a fund of practical information and advice tending to promote habits of industry and usefulness, without which no home can be rendered virtuous or happy' (White, 1970:44).

It reinforced the idea that women were the moral superiors of men, but their physical and intellectual inferiors (Beetham, 1996:64). Another example was *The magazine of domestic economy* which began in 1835 and was aimed at the middle-class woman. It took the idea of separate spheres as given, saying:

> 'A woman gives up her worldly possessions in exchange for a determinate station; for protection, for support … she gains station … she gains protection' (*The magazine of domestic economy* I (1835-6) 66:7 (1841-2) 271. In: Davidoff and Hall, 1987:187).

Other titles providing domestic guidance included *The ladies home journal* (1890), *Woman at home* (1893), *Home notes* (1894), *Home chat* (1895) and the *Home companion* (1897) (White, 1970:74). All these titles reference home, but what exactly is meant by home will be explored in the next section.

4.2 The enigma of home

House and home are often conflated. In English usage, a house is the building in which one creates a home, but a home is not always a house, as homes can be created in flats, tents or boats. Writing in *The making of home*, Judith Flanders notes that the earliest distinction between house and home in English was in a poem of

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[39] Published by Samuel Beeton from 1852, it had a circulation of 50,000 when the first series ended in 1860 (White, 1970:46).

1275 (Flanders, 2014: Kindle Loc 193). However, Flanders notes that although this distinction between house and home is made in English[40] 'speakers of Romance and Slavic languages have one word for both meanings' (Flanders, 2014: Kindle Loc 197). However, this research takes as its starting point mid-nineteenth-century Britain, and most Victorians would have agreed with the reformer John Ruskin that:

> 'home was not a place but a projection of the feminine, an encircling, encouraging, comforting aura that was there to protect a husband and children from the harshness of the world' (Flanders, 2004:xxxi).

Sarah Stickney Ellis writing about the ideal home notes that it must be neat, clean, peaceful, happy, elegant and beautiful (1843:26). It should also be a place where 'strict integrity is maintained' (Ellis, 1843:26) and she concludes in words that emphasise the fluid boundaries of the home discussed in Chapter 3:

> 'Not only must an appearance of outward order and comfort be kept up, but around every domestic scene there must be a strong wall of confidence, which no internal suspicion can undermine, no external enemy break through' (Ellis, 1843:26).

The home is therefore more than a place for living, rather it is an idea or a feeling. In their overview of home, Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling describe home as 'imbued with feelings' (2006:2). They define home as 'a place/site, a set of feelings/cultural meanings, and the relations between the two' (2006:2). The feminist critic, Iris Marion Young, identifies the four values of home as safety, individuation, privacy and preservation, emphasising the idea of home as sanctuary (Young, 2005:151-154). She writes from personal experience of being homeless and highlights the idea of home as a dwelling space, in opposition to Martin Heidegger's privileging of building over dwelling in his classic essay *Building, dwelling, thinking* (Heidegger, 1993). Philosopher Gaston Bachelard considers that the home is an essential place for intimacy, security and the creativity of human life (1994:72), while historian Witold Rybczynski considers that the elements of home are privacy, domesticity, intimacy and comfort (1988).

Rybczynski proposes that the modern idea of domesticity developed in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century. He suggests that the fastidious cleanliness of

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[40] The distinction is also made in Hungarian, Finnish, Estonian, German, Dutch, Swedish, Danish and Norwegian.

the Dutch interior defined the boundary between home and the public sphere, and identified the home as a separate, private place (1988:66). Defining the home in this way, recalls both the ideology of the separate spheres of private and public spaces, as well as the idea of the uncanny distinguishing between the homely and the unhomely. Of domesticity, Rybczynski says:

> 'domesticity has to do with family, intimacy and a devotion to home as well as with a sense of the house as embodying – not only harbouring – these sentiments' (1988:75).

Here the house embodies domesticity in the same way that women and their homes were conflated in the nineteenth century.

Several social histories of nineteenth-century Britain, such as that by Bonnie Anderson and Judith Zinsser (1988), reveal that many of the modern features of domesticity are an invention of the nineteenth century. In particular, Davidoff and Hall show that 'the sexual division of labour within families' was one of the major factors behind the development of capitalism, which brought with it new ideas about middle-class domesticity including the idea of separate spheres (Davidoff and Hall, 1987:13). Flanders suggests that the development of domesticity in nineteenth century Britain was a result of Evangelical ideals of family life, combined with improved mortality and increases in disposable income, which resulted in the survival of more children and the means with which to care for them (2004:xxi). Similarly, the art historian Christopher Reed states that domesticity was 'a product of the confluence of capitalist economics, breakthroughs in technology, and Enlightenment notions of individuality' (Reed, 1996:7). It would therefore seem that the bourgeois home was a product of the Enlightenment, as were the uncanny and the gothic.

The home and domesticity are gendered sites; as Chapter 3 revealed 'the angel in the house' became conflated with her home. Also at this time, the home became lauded as a tranquil haven and a sanctuary from the outside world of work and industry (Nead, 1988:33). This idea of home as a sanctuary is common in many poems and household manuals of the time and attests to the universality of the idea (Davidoff and Hall, 1987:178). It also reinforces the idea that the home is a place of security, emotions and feelings. These are generally considered to be feelings of intimacy and

belonging but, in contrast, may be feelings of fear, violence and alienation (Blunt and Varley, 2004). Many feminist writers and critics consider that home is a site of oppression for women as it can be for other groups:

> 'A house environment may be oppressive and alienating as easily as it may be supportive and comfortable as shown by domestic violence, 'house arrest' and home detention as alternatives to prison, experiences of poverty and poor housing conditions, and the alienation often felt by young gay men and lesbians in parental homes' (Blunt and Dowling, 2006:10).

Gill Perry writing about the work of Louise Bourgeois describes the house in terms that also describe the home and the ambivalence to be found there:

> 'the house can evoke multiple meanings and symbolic associations: it can symbolically provide shelter from trauma, but also imprison and control that trauma; it can protect the body but also damage it. … it can also hide abuse or private misery' (Perry, 2004:263).

It is because the home is so wrapped up with the ideology of comfort, safety and emotional belonging, that when instead it affords only violence or alienation, it is so unsettling and disturbing. Many mid-nineteenth-century gothic novels expressed this idea of the duality of home as sanctuary and prison, particularly in relation to the place of women in the home. Although many came to idealise the home as a sanctuary, others came to fear it as a claustrophobic prison, and that view of home is discussed in Section 4.4 on the gothic home.

I consider these conflicting ideas about the home, domesticity, sanctuary and prison in my practice. Many artists reference the home and domesticity in their work. Rachel Whiteread's *House* (1993) and Michael Landy's *Semi-detached* (2004) both deal with homes but in subtly different ways. Whiteread sprayed the inside walls of a house with concrete and then removed the outer walls, creating a monumental sculpture, with opaque windows, that renders the private public, the empty solid, the inside out and the absent present, but there is little sense of the domestic lives of the individuals who lived there. In contrast Landy's work is a replica of his family home, a typical three-bedroom semi-detached suburban home and all its contents. It considers his father's domestic confinement following an accident and concentrates on images of the personal contents of the home. One of these works deals with the house and absence and the other with home and the domestic, albeit a masculine domesticity. Interestingly, neither title invokes home; Whiteread's sculpture is titled

House and Landy's *Semi-detached* indicates a distancing or detachment from the idea of home.

As Section 2.2 showed, many artists, including Mona Hatoum and Doris Salcedo, reference domesticity in their work, generally to draw attention to its fragility and the memories held in the home; many of them unpleasant. They often use furniture to comment on domesticity and disturbed homes. Catherine Bertola is another artist whose work deals with domesticity. She often uses ideas of cleanliness and domestic intimacy in her work, sometimes incorporating the dust found in buildings into 'carpets' and 'wallpaper' to produce site-specific work, which are discussed more fully in Chapter 6 when dirt and dust are explored.

Trevor Keeble, writing in the catalogue for the *Walls are talking* exhibition notes that the work of Bourgeois, Salcedo and Whiteread tends to render the home:

> ''uncanny', causing it to become potentially alien, displaced, disoriented. This is a strategy in marked contrast to that employed by Bertola whose art never works 'against' its subject. Bertola's art works within the rhetoric and materiality of domesticity, not in order to undermine it but to search out its subtleties and deepen the viewer's relation to it. It does this through a materialized narrative' (Keeble, 2010:121).

In my practice I aim to produce work that renders the familiar unfamiliar and the homely unhomely, to make the viewer reconsider the duality of home as sanctuary and prison and its uncanny nature. Unlike Bourgeois, for example, I use homely pins and needles to embody ideas of prison marks instead of the oversized needle she uses in *Needle* (1992) to dominate the room and pierce the floor. Bourgeois is dealing with the sharp pain of abuse, while I focus on the dull ache of claustrophobia. Like Bertola, I use a more subtle approach, but my work considers ideas of claustrophobia and containment rather than the memories and remembrance on which Bertola focuses.

4.3 The uncanny home

Freud extended the ways in which home can be considered in his study into the uncanny, by considering the dichotomy between the *heimlich* and the *unheimlich,* or the feeling that occurs when the homely shades into the unhomely and the familiar becomes strange (Freud, 1919).

This unhomeliness may develop in many different ways. In this research, I consider several uncanny aspects of the home that are associated with the gothic and the domestic. The dichotomy of home as sanctuary and prison is a common theme of mid-nineteenth-century gothic novels, and links to the uncanny idea of the home appearing both homely and unhomely concurrently. In fact the home may slip from one state to another, as the sanctuary and prison are coterminous. In the same way as the sanctuary and prison of home are concurrent, the heroine's response to them reflects this duality. In the fiction woven into this research, I assume that her only tools are her pins, needles, threads and fabric, so she uses these to express her views. The subversive stitching she fabricates reveals her plight in a coded form of communication.

Appearances are deceptive in the uncanny home. Nothing is as it seems. Domestic decay may subvert the net curtain into a claustrophobic barrier clogged with the dust of failed domesticity, or render it as brittle as tissue paper. The net curtain, as silent witness, may sift the memories of the home through its net like threads. Some will escape and float away, others will be trapped. They may be happy thoughts of laughter and joy, or secret threats, whispered behind the veil of the obscuring net curtain. The uncanny home may also degenerate into a haunted house, allowing the secret intrusion of terror. Furniture and furnishings may become animate within this uncanny space and pursue their own agenda. As Vidler suggests, the home and its furnishings may become complicit in these changes (1992). Darkness may conceal or reveal these activities. These aspects of the uncanny home are revealed in subsequent chapters.

4.4 The gothic home

If the uncanny home is a place where the homely shades into the unhomely and the familiar becomes strange, the gothic home is more like a prison; a site of domestic claustrophobia and containment. Freud developed his definition of the uncanny from an analysis of the German words for homely and unhomely. The gothic home is also a product of literature, this time, the representations of home in gothic novels. In the eighteenth century, the typical gothic home was an isolated and fortified castle, but by the mid-nineteenth century the gothic home was represented in fiction by the

claustrophobic, bourgeois middle-class home that enshrined the ideal of separate spheres (Botting, 1996).

Chapter 2 showed that many mid-nineteenth-century, gothic novels critique the idea of separate spheres and domesticity and consider the duality of the home as sanctuary and prison. Gilbert and Gubar note that this criticism of patriarchal society was not overt, but hidden within the acceptable guise of fiction (2000:77). Avril Horner, a professor of English literature specialising in the gothic, sums up how gothic novels became a metaphor for domestic repression:

> 'The heroine's attempts to escape [from the gothic prison] indicate a desire to subvert a domestic ideology which was beginning to tyrannize the lives of middle-class women within a capitalist, newly industrialized society; in such a society the bourgeois home was becoming uncomfortably like the castle or prison of the gothic text in the way it constrained its female inhabitants' (Horner, 1998:116-7).

Gilbert and Gubar point out that 'almost all nineteenth-century women were in some sense imprisoned in men's houses. …' and suggest that it is therefore unsurprising that images of enclosure and escape pervade much contemporary literature (2000:83). They summarise the situation well:

> 'Literally confined to the house, figuratively confined to a single 'place', enclosed in parlors and encased in texts, imprisoned in kitchens and enshrined in stanzas, women artists naturally found themselves describing dark interiors and confusing their sense that they were house-bound with their rebellion against being duty bound' (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000:84).

Many nineteenth-century women writers depicted domesticity as claustrophobic and a threat to women's autonomy and sanity. For example, Florence Nightingale railed against the claustrophobic life of a middle-class woman in her novel *Cassandra*.[41] The novels of the Brontë sisters, published between 1847 and 1857 are all concerned with the position of women in society. In fact, Charlotte Brontë encouraged the idea that the novels were based on the authors' experiences, and Mrs Gaskell reinforced that idea in her *Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857) (Barker, 1994:xviii). There is evidence from magazines and from amateur writers in diaries, letters and memoirs that these literary women were not a small unrepresentative group. The theme of

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[41] *Cassandra* was originally written in the 1850s but Nightingale revised it several times and it was not published until after her death in 1925.

domestic claustrophobia certainly fascinated Victorian writers and their readers, for example in Wilkie Collins' *The woman in white*, and has continued to do so in many periods since, for example in *Rebecca* by Daphne du Maurier (1938), *The handmaid's tale* by Margaret Atwood (1987) and Sarah Waters' *Fingersmith* (2002); it is one of the themes I explore in my practice.

The monotony and claustrophobia of female middle-class lives is summed up by Charlotte Brontë in *Shirley*, in a scene in which the heroine Shirley Keeldar asks her friend, Caroline Helstone: 'don't you wish you had a profession – a trade?', to which Caroline replies:

> "I wish it fifty times a day. As it is I often wonder what I came into the world for. I long to have something absorbing and compulsory to fill my head and hands, and to occupy my thoughts … successful labour has its recompense; a vacant, weary, lonely, hopeless life has none" (Brontë, 1849:179).

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's story *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892) describes the results of extreme confinement. She relates the experience of a woman confined to a garret room by her doctor husband for a complete rest cure for suspected post-natal depression. She is not allowed access to her child or pen, paper and books in case these excite her, and by medicalising her condition in this way her husband oversees her deterioration. She starts to see another woman imprisoned behind the yellow wallpaper of the room in which she is confined, and tears off the paper in an effort to reach her alter ego as she descends into madness.[42]

Gilbert and Gubar note that although much female nineteenth-century literature uses 'houses as primary symbols of female imprisonment', other 'paraphernalia of 'woman's place'' is also used to reference enclosure and escape (2000:85). The long list they provide includes domestic furnishings and ladylike veils (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000:85). I consider that my use of the net curtain as domestic veil to embody sanctuary and prison in the home follows in this tradition

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[42] Carol Davison (2004) provides an excellent literary critique of *The Yellow Wallpaper* and its links to the female gothic. The book was also the theme of a contemporary art exhibition curated by Tom Gallant entitled *The Yellow Wallpaper* in 2012 at Danson House, Bexleyheath.

4.5 Sanctuary and prison in practice

Gothic novelists of the mid-nineteenth century subtly used their fiction to critique themes of patriarchy and the dominant ideology of separate spheres. In a similar way, I wanted to question how the net curtain could be used to consider ideas about the duality of home as sanctuary and prison in a nuanced way that reflected the gendered aspect of this problem. Writing was an acceptably feminine medium with which Victorian women could express themselves; as was stitching. The tools that women had to hand would therefore have included pins and needles as well as pens and nibs. I therefore decided to combine sewing equipment with net curtains to consider the duality of home. In this way I am using the net curtain metonymically, within the metaphor of the home as sanctuary and prison. My use of pins and needles is also part of the same metaphor, but I use them in a metonymic chain to represent, the trapped seamstress, bars at the window, and the passing of time.

The idea of women being trapped by the claustrophobia of conventions and the ideology of separate spheres, led me to produce *Marking time* (Figure 4.1). It comprises a net curtain pierced with pins and needles in the traditional tally pattern of counting units of five (Figure 4.2), and reflects the idea that the trapped gothic heroine is using the tools available to her to record her plight. It alludes to a prisoner marking time, but the misuse of feminine sewing equipment suggests a subversion of the domestic. It reflects the claustrophobia of living behind bars, however small and feminine they might be, and the longing for escape from the conventions of the day.

I first exhibited this work in the James Hockey Gallery, Farnham, as part of the exhibition *Concept & context in practice* in 2011 (Figure 4.3). This was a white cube space, but I also photographed the curtain at various sites, in an attempt to produce a more gothic and uncanny feel to the work. This was most successful in an old house with high windows, which emphasised the effect of imprisonment and confinement (Figure 4.4).
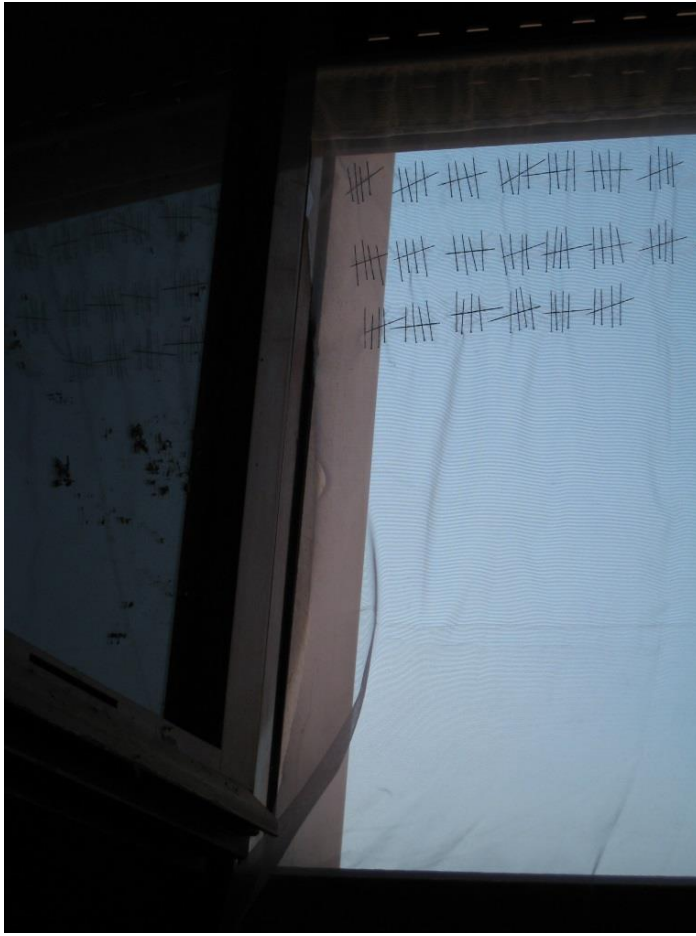
4.1 Quarini, C. Detail of *Marking time* (2011) curtain at the window, showing the pins and needles. Size: 100 x 130 cm. Materials: nylon, pins and needles. Photo: C Quarini.
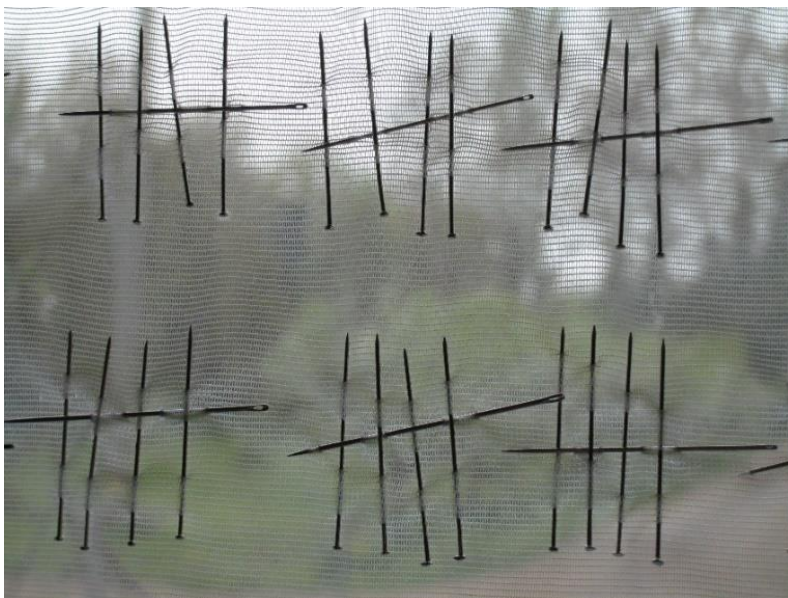
4.2 Quarini, C. Detail of *Marking time* (2011) showing the pins and needles in the tally pattern used for counting. Size: 100 x 130 cm. Materials: nylon, pins and needles. Photo: C Quarini.

4.3 Quarini, C. *Marking time* in the James Hockey Gallery, Farnham, as part of the exhibition *Concept & context in practice* in 2011. Size: 100 x 130 cm. Materials: nylon, pins and needles. Photo: C Quarini.
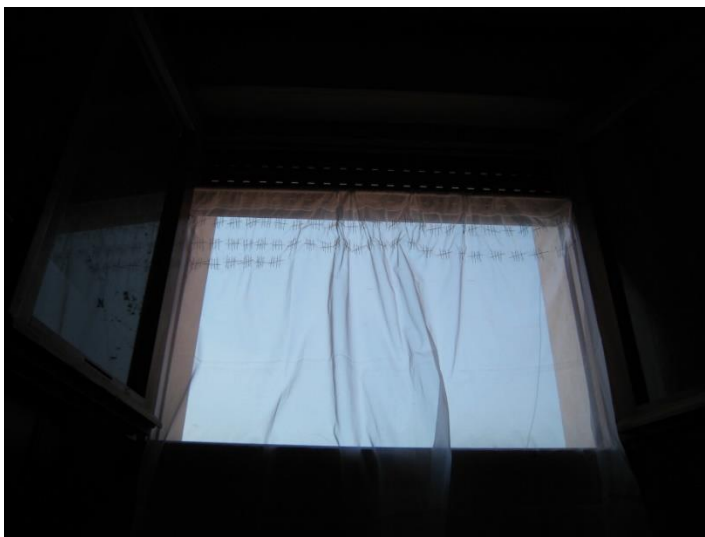
4.4 Quarini, C. *Marking time* (2011) photographed in an old house with high windows. Size: 100 x 130 cm. Materials: nylon, pins and needles. Photo: C Quarini.

I developed this work to produce a site-specific installation for the *Cloth and memory* exhibition at Salts Mill, Bradford, in 2012. On my first research visit to Salts Mill I was struck by the atmosphere of the room that had been allocated to me for the exhibition, in particular the huge windows and the layers of peeling paint, whispering of hidden stories embedded in the fabric of the walls. The main features of the room were three large windows (each approximately 3 metres high and 1.5 metres wide) along one wall and three large window-shaped recesses, of the same

size, on another wall, at right angles to the first. When I first saw the room, the window nearest the door encased dusty glass panes, the next window had its lower half boarded up and the third window was completely blocked up (Figure 4.5). The three window-shaped recesses at the end of the room maintained the same shape and dimensions as the windows, but were fashioned from brick rather than glass. The room was gloomy and, despite its size, claustrophobic, as little light entered through the dim glass. The windows and the recesses suggested a gradual progression of glass being replaced by brick, in a sequence around the room. This made me consider that the room was gradually closing in on itself and its memories.

4.5 Quarini, C. State of four of the windows at Salts Mill on the first research visit in 2011, showing their appearance of gradually blocking up. Photo: C Quarini.

I imagined a young woman sitting in the corner of the room, sewing, and the installation began at this point, by the first window, with her vacant chair and embroidery frame, which trapped a piece of cloth with the letters h and e depicted in red cross stitches (Figure 4.6). The viewer was left to wonder where she had gone and whether the letters formed part of a message (such as 'help' or 'he poisoned me') or were just part of her embroidery pattern. At the window, behind her chair, hung a huge net curtain obscuring the window, pierced by tallies of pins and needles (Figure 4.7). These marks suggest a prisoner marking time (Figure 4.8). As Catherine Dormor notes in her review of the exhibition in *Textile* 'needles and pins

pierce the net, referencing the prisoner and negating notions of domesticity as safe and secure' (2013:92).

4.6 Quarini, C. *Marking time* installation at Salts Mill in the *Cloth and memory* exhibition (2012), showing the empty chair, half-finished needlework and curtains. Photo: C Quarini.

4.7 Quarini, C. The curtain at the first window of the *Marking time* installation at Salts Mill in the *Cloth and memory* exhibition (2012). Size: 300 x 70 cm (each). Materials: cotton, pins and needles. Photo: C Quarini.

4.8 Quarini, C. Detail of the *Marking time* installation at Salts Mill (2012), showing the tally marks in pins and needles that suggest a prisoner marking time. Size: 300 x 70 cm (each). Materials: cotton, pins and needles. Photo: C Quarini.

A similar net curtain hung at the second window, but the lower half of this one was applied to cardboard, giving the impression that it was gradually solidifying and becoming stiff. The curtain had lost its airy transparent nature and was becoming hard and opaque (Figure 4.9). The pins and needles were becoming embedded in the board. In the third window, the solidification progressed, with the fabric of the net curtain disintegrating and being absorbed into the cardboard (Figures 4.10, 4.11). The tally marks appeared to be metamorphosing into chalk marks on board. The succeeding 'windows' showed the card being gradually turned into brick and the tally marks seeping into the walls, until by the sixth window they had disappeared completely. The gradual entombment was literally petrifying. No trace remained of the net curtain, the pins, the needles or indeed the seamstress herself.

The installation suggested that the windows were insidiously becoming blocked up, as cloth turned to stone, sanctuary became prison, and the woman, curtain, pins, needles, and the memories they held, became part of the fabric of the room. The size of the room, and the gradual solidification of the net curtain from window to window, allowed the viewer time to reflect on the possible fate of the seamstress as they walked round the space. The large size of the room, rather than reducing the feeling of claustrophobia, also emphasised the overwhelming size of the windows and their unhomely nature.

4.9 Quarini, C. The curtain at the second window of the *Marking time* installation at Salts Mill in the *Cloth and memory* exhibition (2012), showing the window partially blocking up. Size: 300 x 70 cm (each). Materials: cotton, cardboard, pins and needles. Photo: C Quarini.

4.10 Quarini, C. The curtain at the third window of the *Marking time* installation at Salts Mill in the *Cloth and memory* exhibition (2012), showing the cloth turning to card and the pins and needles metamorphosing into marks on the surface. Size: 300 x 150 cm. Materials: cotton, cardboard, pins and needles. Photo: C Quarini.

4.11 Quarini, C. The first three curtains of the *Marking time* installation at Salts Mill in the *Cloth and memory* exhibition (2012), showing the progression of the blocking up of the windows. Size: 300 x 70 cm (each curtain). Materials: cotton, cardboard, pins and needles. Photo: C Quarini.

I also produced a time lapse DVD of the pins and needles being added to the curtain, one by one, to convey the relentless monotony of the process. The DVD includes 700 images from the first (Figure 4.12) to the last pin (Figure 4.13), representing the number of pins and needles used to make it. However, the entire installation at Salts Mill required 3000 needles and over 12,000 pins.

The DVD was shown as part of the installation at Salts Mill, reflecting the meditative nature of the process (Figure 4.14). In the seminar, held in association with the exhibition, there was some discussion about the sensuous and tactile nature of this process, and its depiction on the screen. Several viewers found that watching the addition of the pins and needles to the curtain brought home to them the time-consuming nature of the process.

4.12 Quarini, C. Image from the *Marking time* DVD (2012) showing one of the first images of the time lapse DVD of the pins and needles being added to the curtain. Size: 70 x 90 cm. Materials: silk organza, pins and needles. Photo: C Quarini.

4.13 Quarini, C. Image from the *Marking time* DVD (2012), showing the final image of the time lapse DVD of the pins and needles being added to the curtain. The DVD includes 700 images. Size: 70 x 90 cm. Materials: silk organza, pins and needles. Photo: C Quarini.

4.14 Quarini, C. The *Marking time* DVD (2012) at Salts Mill as part of the *Marking time* installation in the *Cloth and memory* exhibition (2012). Photo: C Quarini.

During the site research for the Salts Mill exhibition I had taken photographs of part of the disused mill, and was inspired by the physical layers of peeling paint and broken windows, and the metaphorical layers of memory embedded there (Figure 4.15). I decided that these should be referenced in the installation, to enhance the narrative, so I spent two days on site with a photographer[43] and some curtains, fabric, pins and needles, taking photographs in situ. Nine of these images were printed on 100 x 66 cm aluminium and used in the installation.[44]

4.15 Quarini, C. Photograph taken on my first research visit to Salts Mill in 2011, showing a disused area with peeling paint and broken windows, used as inspiration. Photo: C Quarini.

Three of the images are linked to the *Marking time* curtain and show a progression of the narrative. They were exhibited as a series in the *Cloth and memory* exhibition. In *The domestic bars of claustrophobia* (Figure 4.16), the curtain is seen hanging at the window as if trying to escape. It is seen through broken glass, another metaphor for subverted domesticity. However, escape is impossible as the curtain is still attached to the home by its curtain rail, in much the same way that Victorian women found escape through reading gothic novels an illusion rather than a reality. Next comes

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[43] With many thanks to Steve Smith from Steve Smith Photography Ltd.

[44] The images taken at Salts Mill in 2012 are: *I never laid a finger on her – proclaiming innocence or concealing guilt?; I can see through you – obscuring the view; Appearances can be deceptive – sanctuary or prison?; Pinned down; The domestic bars of claustrophobia; The illusion of freedom; The scars remain; The thread that binds;* and *Embedded memories.* They are referred to individually where they are most relevant in the thesis.

4.16 Quarini, C. *The domestic bars of claustrophobia* (2012). Photographic image showing broken window with *Marking time* at Salts Mill. Size: 100 x 66 cm printed on aluminium. Photo: Steve Smith.

The illusion of freedom (Figure 4.17), showing the curtain appearing to escape through the window. However the final image, *The scars remain* (Figure 4.18), reveals that even though the curtain has managed to escape, it still bears the pins and needle tally marks. Showing that the scars remain, even when the illusion of freedom is attained and the thread that binds is loosened.

4.17 Quarini, C. *The illusion of freedom* (2012). Photographic image showing *Marking time* escaping through a broken window at Salts Mill. Size: 100 x 66 cm printed on aluminium. Photo: Steve Smith.
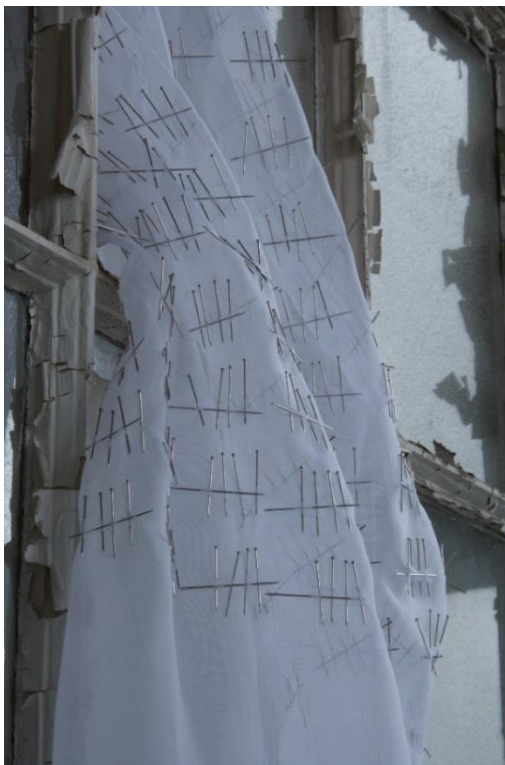
4.18 Quarini, C. *The scars remain* (2012). Photographic image showing a close up of *Marking time* escaping through a broken window. Size: 100 x 66 cm printed on aluminium. Photo: Steve Smith.

I extended this idea of escape from domesticity in a small installation I exhibited at The Crypt Gallery in St Pancras, London, in July 2013. I combined the large curtain pierced with pins and needles from the Salts Mill exhibition with *The illusion of freedom* image and titled this piece *Escaping* (Figure 4.19). In this installation, the curtain has finally broken away from its rail, appears to be animated and seems to be flying away from its prison, but whether it can find another sanctuary remains elusive.

4.19 Quarini, C. *Escaping* (2013). Installation combining photographic image of *Marking time* at Salts Mill (2012) and curtain from the *Marking time* installation at Salts Mill exhibited at The Crypt Gallery, St Pancras, London (2013). Photograph size: 100 x 66 cm, printed on paper. Curtain size: 300 x 70 cm; materials: cotton, pins, needles. Photo: C Quarini.

The curtains incorporating pins and needles therefore form a sequence, in the same way as a novel. They can be seen as chapters in a continuing narrative, from the initial marking of the pins and needles in the DVD, through the pierced net curtains to the final escape from imprisonment. However, they show that the scars of imprisonment remain even when freedom is achieved, and that freedom itself may not be the final answer.

Having used pins and needles metonymically to reflect the trapped seamstress, I used them to produce another series of images, as an expression of my wider practice. These were also exhibited at Salts Mill. *The thread that binds* (Figure 4.20), depicts three pins with white thread wrapped round them and *Embedded memories* (Figure 4.21) shows a red thread hanging from one of the three pins. They were exhibited as a pair and reflect the idea of the seamstress being tied to the home, in its dual aspect of sanctuary and prison, and how even when these ties are broken, a blood tie remains, like the scars in the previous images, that cannot be denied. Reflecting on this idea, I decided to reference this theme in the exhibition, so I incorporated a tiny installation of three pins and thread at the far end of the room, in the final window embrasure (Figure 4.22). Overlooked by many, in its hidden corner, this mini installation was appreciated by the few visitors who discovered it.

4.20 Quarini, C. *The thread that binds* (2012). Photographic image of white thread wrapped round 3 pins at Salts Mill. Size: 100 x 66 cm printed on aluminium. Photo: Steve Smith.
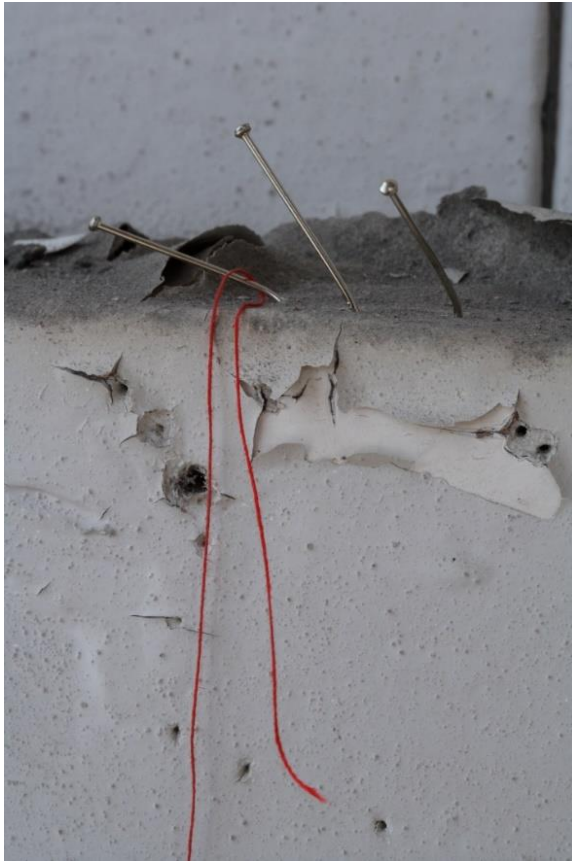
4.21 Quarini, C. *Embedded memories* (2012). Photographic image of red thread hanging from one of three pins at Salts Mill. Size: 100 x 66 cm printed on aluminium. Photo: Steve Smith.

4.22 Quarini, C. Mini installation of three pins and thread in the final window embrasure at Salts Mill as part of the *Cloth and memory* exhibition (2012). Size: 2 x 3 cm. Materials: pins, thread. Photo: C Quarini.

Pinned down (Figure 4.23) depicts a needle, armed with red thread, stabbing a piece of cloth and pinning it to the window frame. It reflects the way the seamstress is trapped like a specimen butterfly. However, it may also attest to her frustrated rage as she stabs a ripped fragment of her unending needlework into the window frame that traps her.

4.23 Quarini, C. *Pinned down* (2012). Photographic image of needle with cloth and red thread at Salts Mill. Size: 100 x 66 cm printed on aluminium. Photo: Steve Smith.

I reprised the idea of net curtains marked by tallies in another uncanny site, this time the bed and breakfast (B&B) holiday accommodation. The curtain entitled *Wish you were here* (Figure 4.24), was exhibited at the Oriel Davies Gallery in Powys as part of an installation referencing the B&B, in the 2013 exhibition *Be our guest* curated by Alex Boyd Jones. The entire gallery was turned into a fictional B&B, resembling a stage set, with a reception area, dining room and bedrooms. My curtain hung in the bedroom (Figure 4.25) and contained a line of pins and needles in the tally pattern, which at a distance mimics a lace trim across the curtain.

4.24 Quarini, C. *Wish you were here* (2013). Detail of curtain showing the tally marks. Size: 120 x 100 cm. Materials: silk organza, pins, needles. Photo: C Quarini.

The right to publish this image has not been granted.

4.25 Quarini, C. *Wish you were here* (2013) at Oriel Davies Gallery, Newtown, Wales, in the *Be our guest* exhibition (2013). Size: 120 x 100 cm. Materials: silk organza, pins, needles. Press image by Neil Fowler (2013).

The B&B is an ambiguous uncanny site because it is the home of the owner, but a place in which the 'guest' is an intruder. It represents home but isn't quite home, in a similar way to Freud's definition of the familiar becoming strange. For the guest, it represents the cosy fabric of home and is a reminder of home, but this feeling is tinged with the occasional sharp reminder that it is not really home. This duality of

cosiness and sharpness is embodied by the net curtain pierced with pins and needles. To show that the duality of home as sanctuary and prison, while based in the nineteenth century, is still relevant today, I envisaged the curtain hanging in the room of a worker living away from home, missing their loved ones and counting the days until they return home. The tally method of marking the days references the passing of time as well as the small sewing kits often supplied in B&Bs for the use of visitors. The guest is counting the days with the tools he or she has to hand, in the same way as a prisoner marking time or the seamstress from Salts Mill. As well as referencing the passing of time, the misuse of pins and needles suggests the sharpness and pain of separation and a subversion of the cosy homeliness of the B&B.

In a review of the exhibition in the online contemporary arts magazine *This is tomorrow*, Billie Tilley says:

> 'Carol Quarini's 'Wish you were here' (2013) neatly suggests its role as temporary home to itinerant workers. Peering at the lace trim on a bedroom's net curtain reveals sewing pins arranged in gated tallies of five. Someone has been counting the days till they can leave. Someone has felt like a prisoner here' (Tilley, 2013).

Imprisonment, claustrophobia, and containment have bound this chapter. It has revealed the role of the net curtain as a transparent surface in the home conflicted by the duality of sanctuary and prison. This opening sequence in the narrative has shown the net curtain providing a surface for the pins and needles of its owner. It is inert and has not yet attained the agency it will develop later in this tale. For the present, it is merely acting as a blank surface for the marks of the seamstress. However, as well as representing the idea of the home as sanctuary and prison, the net curtain can also be used to represent the voice of those trapped in the home, as we will see in the next phase of the story in Chapter 5 on the unquiet voice.

5 The unquiet voice

Freud notes in his essay about the uncanny that 'the negative prefix un- is the indicator of repression' (Freud, 1919:151). As it is in the uncanny, so it is in the unquiet. The unquiet voice suggests an insistent voice that will not be suppressed, however much it is repressed. This chapter will show how stitching can be an important medium for the unquiet voices of those trapped in the home, and how the net curtain can provide the trapped woman's only voice.

Chapter 3 described how important interiors were in real and fictional nineteenth-century homes. In particular, they were seen to embody the values of the mistress of the home and express her character, and she therefore became conflated with her home. However, Chapter 4 revealed that this conflation and the ideology of separate spheres led to the home becoming a conflicted site, expressing the duality of sanctuary and prison. In that chapter, we saw the trapped gothic heroine using her sewing tools, her pins and needles, to express her incarceration through the net curtain. In this chapter, we will see her using her practical sewing skills to convey her message, through hidden text and subversive stitching on net curtains. This chapter will show how the net curtain can be used to embody the thoughts and feelings of the gothic heroine trapped in the mid-nineteenth-century home.

Many women in the nineteenth century used textiles in the home to maintain ideas about taste, cleanliness and class, and much of their time was spent in needlework. As the textile historian, Christine Bayles Kortsch, explains in her book *Dress culture in late Victorian women's fiction*, women understood the language of textiles just as well as the language of print (Kortsch, 2009). This chapter begins by considering the idea that most mid-nineteenth-century women were dually literate in words and stitch. This knowledge of stitching was used by male and female novelists to describe character and develop plot lines in their fiction, but in subtly different ways. The language of stitch could also be subverted by women in practice, and in fiction, to express their thoughts covertly. This expressive use of stitch continues today in many forms of contemporary subversive stitching, including the practice in the present research. Using traditional feminine domestic crafts to produce net curtains

with an unconventional element is a core part of this research, because it subverts domesticity using stitching as an alternative form of discourse. The chapter ends by considering the use of coded stitched communication in meaning making.

5.1 Dual literacy

The textile historian, Thomasina Beck, notes that in the nineteenth century practically all British girls learnt to sew, and for many, this meant producing samplers, which allowed them to practise reading, writing, spelling, counting and sewing (Beck, 1995:109). Eliza Farrar writing in the magazine *The Young Lady's Friend*, in 1837, was expressing a common view when she said 'A woman who does not know how to sew is as deficient in her education as a man who cannot write' (In: Kortsch, 2009:10). It was a time when women of all ages and classes stitched, whether working in a sweat shop[45], mending in the parlour, or embroidering in the drawing room. The social reformer, Harriet Martineau, writing about Charlotte Brontë after her death, sought to compliment her by noting that 'She was as able at the needle as the pen' (Barker, 1994:776). That such an influential novelist is described in terms of her stitching abilities, shows how important the ability to sew was considered for all women, whatever their other accomplishments.

This universal knowledge of stitching resulted in Victorian women becoming 'literate' in what Kortsch terms 'dress culture'. By this she means 'the wearing, producing, purchasing or embellishing of clothing and textiles, and the regulating and interpreting of both women's and men's garments' (Kortsch, 2009:4). The historian Judith Flanders notes that women, at this time, 'read' clothing to determine status and identity (2004:255). This was an important skill, because, as she says, 'In a society with permeable class boundaries, clothes were important: every nuance was examined and decoded' (Flanders, 2004:255). Appearances could be deceptive, and detailed knowledge was required to maintain the boundaries of propriety.

Kortsch proposes that many Victorian girls became dually literate in the languages of cloth and the printed word (Kortsch, 2009:4). By this she means their understanding

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[45] This type of work was criticised by many at the time as little more than slave labour, and was immortalised in Thomas Hood's 1843 poem *The song of the shirt*, which includes the lines 'sewing at once with a double thread, a shroud as well as a shirt'.

of the language of cloth and print was such that they could 'read' cloth as well as they could decipher the printed word. She indicates that this particularly feminine knowledge could be used 'as an alternative to mainstream, patriarchal discourse' (Kortsch, 2009:4-5). She suggests that this gave women a private gendered language, while also conforming to traditional stereotypes of femininity, in such a way that it functioned as an alternative discourse and a traditional one concurrently (Kortsch, 2009:13-14). For example, in this research, a traditional lace trim on a net curtain is seen by most people as simple decoration, however those who are dually literate may discover the message hidden within its pattern.

Throughout the nineteenth century, most girls, whether at a private, public, or charity school, would have been taught reading and sewing through the use of samplers (Kortsch, 2009:6). From 1800 onwards most middle-class girls would have been taught at home or in small private schools, such as Cowan's Bridge, attended by the Brontë sisters during the early nineteenth century, and depicted in all its horror as Lowood School in *Jane Eyre*. The Brontë Parsonage Museum at Haworth, Yorkshire, has examples of samplers made by the sisters, their mother and aunts. These are described in Averil Colby's seminal history *Samplers: yesterday and today* in which she describes and dates them (Colby, 1964:219).[46]

Stitching was therefore an accomplishment most women acquired at home or at school. Knowledge of stitching would have been a bond between women of all classes whether it was used as a private language or not. Knowledge of stitching was certainly used by novelists to reveal character, class and age and to develop the plot of novels. The historian Kathryn Ledbetter summarises this well in her book *Victorian needlework*:

> 'The flick of a knitting needle or frantic attention to an item of plain sewing can subtly signify plot development, character motivation, or nuances in emotions or relationships. The places where a character works can also be suggestive, as well as the room's lighting or the view from a nearby window. Her body position, concentration and speed and the conversation or attitudes of other characters in the room may also become part of the plot' (Ledbetter, 2012:124).

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[46] The one I saw on a visit in 2013 was by Anne and was exhibited in Exhibition room 11.

The character's class could be determined by the type of work she undertook. Various types of embroidery were considered middle class, while plain sewing and mending were the preserve of the lower classes. In fact, samplers of the period show this distinction. Those of middle- and upper-class girls are colourful with patterns and improving verses and those of the lower classes concentrate on plain stitching, which includes numbers and the alphabet as well as darning and mending; all skills that would make them useful servants.

This linking of class and type of stitching could also be inverted to show how a character had fallen on hard times. For example, Maggie Tulliver in *The mill on the Floss* (Eliot, 1860) and Margaret Hale in *North and South* (Gaskell, 1854) both resort to plain sewing when their economic circumstances decline. When Maggie is asked why her sewing is so skilled when she 'used to dislike that sort of work so much in the old days'. She replies:

> "It's a mystery easily explained, dear … Plain sewing was the only thing I could get money by, so I was obliged to try and do it well" (Eliot, 1860: Kindle Loc 5648).

The fact that both characters take up sewing so cheerfully, despite the embarrassment of their families, also reveals their strong moral characters.

Some types of stitching could be used to reveal the time in which events were set, for example Berlin woolwork was new and fashionable in the early nineteenth century but after 1860 was considered old fashioned. In *The tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) Anne Brontë explains that the story takes place when 'the mania for Berlin wools had not yet commenced' (Brontë, 1848: Kindle Loc 409).

Elizabeth Gaskell often used needlework to reveal character, for example in *Wives and daughters* (1864-1866) Mrs Gibson is described as at her 'everlasting worsted work frame' (1864-1866:251). She uses embroidery as a weapon to impose her authority and control her environment, for example by reproving her daughter, Cynthia, and step-daughter, Molly, for talking because they hindered her counting her stitches, but in reality to stop them confiding in each other. Gaskell also contrasts the characters of the two girls in the following terms:

> 'unlike Molly, who excelled in plain sewing, but had no notion of dressmaking or millinery, she [Cynthia] could repeat the fashions she had only seen in passing … as she turned and twisted the ribbons and gauze' (Gaskell, 1864-1866:255).

This description indicates to the reader that Molly is sensible and dependable, while Cynthia appears to be flighty and unreliable; character traits that are borne out in the story that follows.

Many novels reveal how women use the practice of needlework to manipulate their domestic environment. For example, in *Lady Audley's secret* (1861-1862), Mary Elizabeth Braddon describes the heroine as 'settling herself to a large piece of Berlin woolwork entitled The Olden Time at Bolton Abbey' (1861-1862:130). This allows Lady Audley to move away from her nephew towards the window, where the work is held in an embroidery frame, and gives her an occupation, while she avoids his questions and having to look him in the eye. Similarly, in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*, (1849) the eponymous heroine does not like sitting still and sewing, but she 'plied her needle' (1849:397) to make herself seem more feminine and approachable to Louis Moore, the tutor who is her admirer. Shirley is also of a higher class than Louis so sewing also allows her to appear submissive, with her eyes lowered, and allows him to stand while she sits at a physically lower level than him, although their social levels are the reverse of this (1849:397).

In another of Charlotte Brontë's novels, *Jane Eyre* (1847), the heroine sits unobtrusively in a corner netting a purse while she observes Mr Rochester and his guests in the drawing room after dinner (1847:203). This allows her to sit quietly with her eyes lowered, seeing all that passes, but enabling her to hide her feelings of love for Mr Rochester. She says:

> 'I try to concentrate my attention on those netting needles, on the meshes of the purse I am forming – I wish to think only of the work I have in my hands … whereas I distinctly behold his figure and I inevitably recall the moment when I last saw it' (Brontë, 1847:203).

Thus, although, in the words of Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock, the practice of embroidery 'was marked by the constraints it imposed on women's lives and it acted

as a restraining force' (1981:65), it often allowed girls to negotiate the constraints of social occasions, as in these examples.

Interestingly, before Charlotte Brontë was named as the author of *Jane Eyre*, and while there was still speculation in Victorian society whether the writer of the novel was male or female, Harriet Martineau was convinced the author was a woman, because she noted that 'a certain passage in *Jane Eyre* about sewing on brass rings, could have been written only by a woman or an upholsterer' (Barker, 1994:620). This is a good illustration of dual literacy as it demonstrates Charlotte Brontë's knowledge of sewing and that of her female readers.

Male authors also used stitching to embellish their plots, but not in the same way as female authors with their tacit knowledge of stitching. In *Great expectations* by Charles Dickens (1860-1861), Mrs Joe wears an apron 'stuck full of pins and needles' (Kindle Loc 139), which the hero Pip (her younger brother) perceives as a danger and a threat. His sister cuts bread for the family by holding the loaf against her apron, and Pip notes 'it sometimes got a pin into it, and sometimes a needle, which we afterwards got into our mouths' (Kindle Loc 169). In this example, Dickens views needlework tools as female weapons, rather than as aids to a calming pastime, and uses them to express the violent and frustrated character of Mrs Joe.

In the same way that mid-nineteenth-century novels provide needlework clues to represent character and develop the plot, in my practice I produce stitched work that suggests a hidden narrative linked to the trapped gothic heroine. Many gothic novels of the mid-nineteenth century critiqued the prevalent ethos of separate spheres, which theoretically relegated women to the home and its maintenance. This was a task that, despite its importance and the physical work involved, took place behind the scenes. Women were expected to perform the housekeeping effortlessly, without discussing it with their family (Flanders, 2004:174), so were effectively silenced. As Flanders notes:

> 'If women spoke of what they did all day, then it would have to be acknowledged that this private sphere was just as much a place of work as the public sphere. The artificiality of the dichotomy would be exposed' (Flanders, 2004:174).

As well as being expected to perform their role unobtrusively at home, it was difficult for women to express themselves in public due to the prevailing patriarchal ethos of separate spheres. As we have seen, this led many women to critique these ideas, covertly and subtly, in their writing, both personal and published. However, I suggest, that because of the dual literacy women possessed, which made them as literate with the needle as with the pen, stitching is an equally valid medium in which to express these thoughts.

5.2 What has she but her needle?

'What has she but her needle?' Is a quote from the novelist and first-wave feminist, Olive Schreiner. In her novel *From man to man*[47] she uses sewing metaphorically to describe women's inability to express themselves in the public world, saying:

> 'The poet when his heart is weighted, writes a sonnet, and the painter paints a picture, and the thinker throws himself into the world of action; but the woman who is only a woman, what has she but her needle? … Has the pen or pencil dipped so deep in the blood of the human race as the needle?' (Olive Schreiner *From man to man*. London Virago 1982 Ch XI. In: Parker, 1984:15).

A dramatic example of a woman having nothing but her needlework skills with which to express herself is Philomela in Ovid's *Metamorphoses Book VI*. Raped by her brother-in-law, Tereus, she threatens to denounce him, and as a result he cuts out her tongue, imprisons her, and tells his wife, Procne, that her sister has died. Philomela, literally having no voice, is obliged to report her story in the only way she can, by producing a tapestry explaining what has happened to her and where her sister can find her. When Procne receives the cloth she understands its meaning, saves her sister, and wreaks revenge on her husband[48] (Barber, 1994:232). Shakespeare clearly understood the power of needlework. In his play, *Titus Andronicus*, the hero's daughter is raped, but her assailants cut off her hands as well as her tongue, to prevent her depicting her story in the same way as Philomela.

In the introduction to *Women and the material culture of needlework and textiles 1750-1950* Maureen Daly Goggin suggests that stitching is an alternative site of

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[47] Schreiner began writing *From man to man* in 1873 but it was not published until 1926, after her death.

[48] Rather gruesomely she kills their son, cooks him and serves him to his father at a feast (Barber 1994:232).

discourse for those who are denied access to the 'dominant ma(i)nstream discursive spaces', whether because of their gender, class, or race (Goggin, 2009a:6). In the same volume, Heather Pristash and her colleagues go further, suggesting that needlework should not be considered 'an alternative to discourse but as a form of discourse; that is, we think of the needle as the pen' (Pristash et al., 2009:14). Although Pristash et al. see the needle as the pen, it would seem that it is mainly women who can read the script. Therefore, as Goggin suggests, stitching does seem to be more of an alternative form of discourse than a general one; in keeping with Kortsch's idea of female dual literacy.

The sampler by Elizabeth Parker in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, is a powerful example of the needle as pen.[49] The continuous red text on a plain background describes Parker's unhappy life in service and her desire to end her life. It is all the more poignant for the neat and controlled way in which these emotional revelations are revealed, in forty-six lines of exquisite cross stitch. It describes how she lived with her ten siblings until the age of thirteen, when she went to work as a nursery maid. A year later, against the advice of her family, she went to work as a housemaid for Lieutenant G, who 'treated her with cruelty too horrible to mention', which is thought to suggest he sexually assaulted her. She managed to leave this position, and went to work for Colonel P as a kitchen maid, but seems to have had a nervous breakdown as a result of her previous bad treatment, she says 'my reason was taken from me'. Her mistress treated her kindly, called the doctor and returned her to her parents, but she then became severely depressed and obviously considered suicide. The sampler ends with the words 'What will become of my soul' followed by blank space.[50]

Parker's sampler raises many questions. Why did she commit her story to needlework? Why did she find the needle mightier than the pen? The sampler begins with the words 'As I cannot write'. There has been speculation as to what this means. She could mean 'I cannot write well' or 'I do not have pen and paper for

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[49] Images of the sampler can be seen on the Victoria and Albert Museum website (www.vam.ac.uk/collections/textiles/stories/sampler/index.html).

[50] The story ends well however as Elizabeth Parker later became a schoolteacher and lived until her 70s. She never married but adopted one of her sister's children. This information was discovered by Maureen Daly Goggin and is available on the Victoria and Albert Museum website (www.vam.ac.uk/collections/textiles/stories/sampler/index.html).

writing' or that she is imposing silence on herself. These questions are considered in great detail in various publications (Goggin, 2009b; Goggin and Tobin, 2009; Kortsch, 2009; Pristash et al., 2009), but are not the subject of this thesis so will not be discussed in detail here. The interesting point for the purposes of this thesis is that this young woman chose to use stitching to tell her story.

As the present research constructs narratives in the same way as gothic fiction we will assume that she chose stitching because it was an acceptable medium for a girl to use and she was using the tools and materials she had to hand; after all 'what had she but her needle?' It may also have proved a cathartic exercise and been therapeutic. Another reason for using sewing as her medium may have been that stitching was an acceptable pastime for young women, and thus the work could be hidden in plain view and stitched while others were in the room, without revealing what she was sewing.

Although Elizabeth Parker may not have had access to pen and paper this cannot be the reason why contemporary Australian textile artist Janice Appleton chose to produce a sampler at a traumatic moment in her life. She reproduces, again in tight controlled red cross stitches, the moving letter her husband wrote her just before his sex reassignment operation that ended their heterosexual marriage. She says she deliberately chose the style of the traditional sampler for this work entitled *Janice my love I am sorry* (2005) 'because of the historic connection between women and this form of textile and the cultural role of the sampler in educating for rigid sexual roles' (Schoeser, 2012:358).

This section has shown women using the needle, rather than the pen, as the only suitable means of expression open to them, because they have no other means of communication or because they feel stitching is the most suitable medium for their message. In the following section we will see how this dual literacy presents itself in the form of subversive stitching.

5.3 Subversive stitching

The feminist critic Michelle A Massé, writing about the options available to the gothic heroine silenced by patriarchal society, recommends a subversive rather than

an aggressive response (1992:250). She notes that while aggression 'alerts the dominator' to the resistance, subversion 'gradually erodes domination' (Massé, 1992:250). She says:

> 'Subversion, unlike aggression, seeks to undermine domination from within. Its mutinies are quiet: no warning salvoes mark the opening of its well-behaved rebellion' (Massé, 1992:250).

An elegant description of subversion is given by Teleri Lloyd-Jones writing in *Crafts* 'it's a beguiling word, that speaks of change, of rogue agents and unstoppable undercurrents' (2014:64).[51] The beauty of subversion is that while mimicking the behaviours society expects, in the present case diligently stitching with eyes lowered, the unstoppable undercurrents it harbours have 'a secret knowingness' (Massé, 1992:250). Therefore, in plain view of the dominator:

> 'The dominated, invisible to him, knows herself to exist and, with luck, also knows the signs by which to recognize those self-effacing others who are her community' (Massé, 1992:250).

As the critic William Day notes 'The passivity and acceptance we see in the [gothic] heroines is not a surrender to their situation but a style of resistance and self-assertion' (Day, 1985:20).

This idea of conforming while subverting, is something Victorian female authors exploited by critiquing the ideology of separate spheres in their fiction. Gilbert and Gubar note that many of these authors produced multi-layered 'palimpsestic works' the surfaces of which concealed or obscured 'less socially acceptable levels of meaning' (2000:73) in the guise of fiction. If stitching is considered a form of female communication, it is an ideal medium through which views unacceptable to the dominant patriarchal society can be subtly or even secretly expressed.

I was inspired by ideas of subversive stitching and dual literacy to produce *Help me* (Figure 5.1). This net curtain with a simple bobbin lace trim (Figure 5.2) is easily overlooked, hanging at the window. The decoration on the curtain appears to be a simple lace pattern until the viewer moves their head to read the vertical words hidden in the pattern saying 'help me'. The narrative behind this work is that the

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[51] Lloyd-Jones was reviewing the exhibition *Subversive design* at Brighton Museum and Art Gallery in 2014.

trapped gothic heroine has nothing but her needlework skills with which to communicate to the outside world, so she incorporates her message calling for help within her work. Sitting quietly and submissively at her lace pillow, she appears to be the ideal 'angel in the house' attending to her domestic duties. However, while acting conventionally she is in fact undermining the domestic, by producing lace with a subversive message, and communicating with the outside world. Most viewers will see a simple lace curtain trim, which conventionally would not include text. However a lacemaker, with her knowledge of dual literacy, would realise that the lace pattern had been worked vertically (Figure 5.3), although it is attached to the curtain horizontally, and in deciphering the pattern would easily be able to read the hidden message.

5.1 Quarini, C. *Help me* (2012). Size: 60 x 50 cm. Materials: silk organza with cotton bobbin lace. Photo: C Quarini.

5.2 Quarini, C. *Help me* (2012), detail showing bobbin lace trim. Size: 60 x 50 cm. Materials: silk organza with cotton bobbin lace. Photo: C Quarini.

5.3 Quarini, C. *Help me* bobbin lace being worked vertically (2012). Photo: C Quarini.

To enhance the gothic narrative aspect of this work I produced a short DVD to accompany this net curtain. The scene depicts a lacemaker busy at her work[52]. The camera focuses on the nimble hands of the lacemaker as she repetitively moves her bobbins and sets up the pins in the pattern. Suddenly her hands fall to the side and lie

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[52] I acted the part of the lacemaker and was filmed by The Electric Egg Company.

lifeless beside the pillow. The camera then pans up to read the message 'help me' worked into the lace. The viewer is left wondering what has happen to the lacemaker. She clearly realised she was in danger but what has become of her? The lace on the curtain remains the only evidence. It was the only medium through which the lacemaker could express herself.

No discussion of subversive stitching would be complete without referring to Rozsika Parker's groundbreaking book, *The subversive stitch* (first published in 1984 and revised in 2010). She notes that embroidery was an ideal instrument for maintaining the separate spheres because it was the perfect proof of gentility. It showed that the husband had the income to support a leisured woman and provided material evidence of the value and virtue of his wife, particularly in a time when domestic feminine skills were conflated with taste and morality (Parker and Pollock, 1981:61). In the mid-nineteenth century, embroidering became correct drawing room behaviour and the content of the work was expected to convey the good taste of the embroiderer (Parker, 1984:152).[53] However, Parker quotes one subversive sampler which reads 'Polly Cook did it and she hated every stitch she did in it' (Parker, 1984:132).[54]

In the spirit of Polly Cook, I produced a virtual sampler using the Illustrator computer program. I sourced a tool that produced small crosses, which when repeated next to each other resemble embroidered cross stitch work. The *Virtual sampler* is made up of a four-sided border composed of 'stitched' hearts and crosses, and three layers of text. When superimposed, the three layers read 'I sew a long seam and my pins and needles help me for sometimes the thread escapes me' (Figure 5.4) but the three layers fade in and out slowly to reveal the phrases 'help me' (Figure 5.5) and 'I long for escape' (Figure 5.6) hidden within the main text, reflecting the concealed thoughts of the seamstress. My aim was to devise a sentence that read like the typical homily that often appears on samplers, praising the traditionally female tools of pins and needles, and also emphasised the Victorian

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[53] In reality, in middle-class homes, much embroidering took place in the privacy of the dining room, when it was not being used for meals (Flanders 2004:223), but public embroidery took place in the drawing room in the presence of guests.

[54] Unfortunately, Parker provides no reference for this sampler, so we do not know any more about Polly Cook.

stereotype of the winsomely helpless female. However, it actually hides her true feelings of despair about her claustrophobic life and her desire for escape.

5.4 Quarini, C. 'Virtual' cross stitch sampler, with the full wording 'I sew a long seam and my pins and needles help me for sometimes the thread escapes me' (2011). Image produced using text and graphics in the Illustrator program. Photo: C Quarini.

5.5 Quarini, C. 'Virtual' cross stitch sampler, with the hidden words 'help me' (2011). Image produced using text and graphics in the Illustrator program. Photo: C Quarini.

5.6 Quarini, C. 'Virtual' cross stitch sampler, with the revealed words 'I long for escape' (2011). Image produced using text and graphics in the Illustrator program. Photo: C Quarini.

This sampler was exhibited as part of the *Marking time* installation at Salts Mill, Bradford, in 2012 (Figure 5.7) in association with the curtains pierced with pins and needles blocking up the windows of the Mill. The use of the *Virtual sampler* in that space, subverted the idea of Victorian samplers used to promote the domestic ideal of separate spheres and critiqued the idea of domestic bliss.

5.7 Quarini, C. Two images from the 'virtual' sampler (2011) as part of the *Marking time* installation at Salts Mill, Bradford, in the *Cloth and memory* exhibition (2012). Photo: C Quarini.

Although Polly Cook hated stitching, for many women sewing, then and now, was a source of pleasure and power. While women gave the appearance of subjugation, bending over their sewing, for many their silence and concentration allowed them a break from the daily grind and a time to think their own thoughts. One of the reasons why gothic literature and stitching were attractive to women in the bourgeois home may have been because it gave them a means of escape, even if only temporarily, from their narrow existence. Discussing stitching, in the journal *Rhetoric Review*, Goggin notes that:

> 'For women of all stations in life and all socioeconomic classes, needlework has been both a domestic and domesticating labor, both a tool of oppression and an instrument of liberation, both a professional endeavour and a leisure pastime, both an avenue for crossing class boundaries and a barrier confirming class status. It has been constructed and pursued as a religious duty and a secular pleasure, as a prison sentence and an escape, as an innocuous pastime and a powerful political weapon. … Reviled and celebrated, it has nevertheless been a significant cultural practice of meaning-making' (Goggin, 2002:309).

As Goggin suggests, stitching has a tangled history, both loved and hated, repressing and releasing. This has resulted in it becoming both 'a source of constraint and a weapon of resistance' for women (Parker, 1984 (foreword to new edition 2010):xix). That it remains a significant site of resistance is attested to by the numbers of delegates and speakers at *The subversive stitch revisited: the politics of cloth* conference, held in London in November 2013. Many of the speakers described how subversive stitching is being used as a political weapon in ethical and social debates and how it is challenging structures of power. In confirmation of this use of stitching as political weapon, the recent *Disobedient objects* exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (2014-2015), displayed several stitched pieces, including a series of arpilleras[55] produced by Chilean women documenting the violence of the Pinochet regime.

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[55] 'Arpilleras is the term used for the colourful pictures made in many parts of Latin America by appliqueing scraps of fabric onto a hessian background. During the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile they became politically significant since working class women used them to depict the reality of life under military rule. As these arpilleras escaped the scrutiny of the male-dominated regime, they provided women with a means of recording events as well as obtaining an income from abroad.' (Collins Spanish Dictionary 8th edition 2005).

The subversive stitching in this section, both in *Help me* and the *Virtual sampler*, showed messages hidden in plain view. Anyone can read these statements if they take the time to look carefully and discover them. However, messages of a more explicit or overt nature, which the stitcher wants to keep hidden from the dominator, can also be incorporated into patterns and codes, as we will see in the following section on coded communication.

5.4 Coded communication

Pristash et al. extend the idea of needlework as rhetorical discourse by suggesting it can be considered as coded communication (Pristash et al., 2009:15). They say:

> 'Using coded forms of meaning allowed women to make the statements that they needed to make to the people they wanted to talk to while hiding their intent from other, potentially hostile, audiences; it also enables them to present harsh truths in a socially acceptable fashion' (Pristash et al., 2009:15).

Many sensation novels contain secrets about identity, claims to fortunes or hidden evidence, and require puzzles to be solved (Radford, 2009:6). Information is often dripped into the narrative to reveal these secrets slowly and subtly, an example being the true identity of Pip's benefactor in *Great expectations* (Dickens, 1860-1861), which is slowly revealed throughout the novel. Information is withheld in this way to build up the drama of the plot. I use this gothic trope of withholding in my practice, to allow the viewer to construct and piece together the narrative, and to retain an air of the unknown and the mysterious, for example the combination of the petrifying curtains and the *Virtual sampler* in the installation at Salts Mill allowed the viewer to piece together the story for themselves.

Using coded forms of communication also resonates with the uncanny and the gothic, where appearances are deceptive, and things are not always quite what they seem. It also subverts the idea, prevalent in the late nineteenth century, that ornament and furniture should not deceive the eye, which was discussed in Chapter 3 and will be considered more fully in Chapter 6. Codes, like surfaces, can hide deeper layers of meaning, both in the gothic novel and in textiles, and they are the ultimate form of dual literacy, which can only be deciphered by those with the key to read them.

A good example of stitching being used as coded communication is described by the artist Astrida Berzina, talking about Latvian textiles in an interview for *Cloth & culture now* (Berzina, 2007:91). She describes how various textile patterns were used in her country to convey nationalist sentiments, in opposition to the communist occupying power in the 1950s. In Latvian culture, traditional patterns denote specific places and villages and if seen in the wrong context would indicate to the knowledgeable viewer that some meaning was being hidden. This coded communication was not detected by the Soviet censorship rules because the patterns were considered to be purely decorative.

Another example of stitched coded communication is the sampler produced by Major Alexis Casdagli, during his imprisonment in Germany in 1941, which was exhibited at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, in the *Power of Making* exhibition (2011) (Figure 5.8).

The right to publish this image has not been granted.

5.8 Sampler made by Major Alexis Casdagli during his imprisonment in Germany in 1941. Exhibited at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, in the *Power of Making* exhibition (2011).

Although the stitcher in this case is male, and the context is military rather than domestic, the Major was confined, in much the same way as the gothic heroine, and used the same techniques to subvert his incarceration. Apart from the subject matter of guns and ammunition, his sampler appears quite conventional. However, it includes a border of dots and dashes, which spell out in Morse code the words 'God Save the King' and 'Fuck Hitler'. The Major's captors were so impressed with his handiwork they put it on display, and showed it proudly to visiting dignitaries, unaware of the coded message it concealed within its dual literacy.

Taking the idea of coded information literally, I have been working with quick response (QR) codes on net curtains. These square, bar codes are composed of a series of small square elements containing coded information that can be read by a smart phone with the relevant app installed. Clicking on the QR code takes the viewer through to another layer of information. In this way the barrier of the net curtain can be breached by opening a portal into another space of communication. The net curtain is no longer a barrier, it has become a liminal surface.

I produced the QR codes using a computer program and they can be linked to wording, images or even entire websites. However, the complexity of the code increases as the amount of information it stores increases. The smallest code I have used is 21 x 21 blocks in size and links to the words 'help me'. The largest I have produced is 47 x 47 blocks in size and links to the wording 'light through net breaches the transparent boundary illuminating hidden transgressive darkness revealing that which was concealed while trapping the gaze'. I have not stitched this large code as the size would be too unwieldy to fit on to a net curtain. Interestingly the QR code that links to my website only requires 25 x 25 blocks because the data is saved in a compressed form (Figure 5.9).

5.9 Quarini, C. QR code (2013) for my website www.carolquarini.com in black cross stitch. Size: 3 x 3 cm. Materials: black cotton on evenweave linen. Photo: C Quarini.

The codes are designed to be produced in print with firm clear edges to the component squares, therefore rendering them in stitching techniques requires some adaptation. I tried using various techniques to produce them including filet crochet, needlelace and bobbin lace, but the most efficient was cross stitch on firm evenweave canvas, so the squares were not distorted and retained their rigid shape. Techniques that employ a non-continuous thread, such as cross stitch on canvas, were more successful than those using a continuous thread, because the thread not in use is hidden behind the canvas, rather than remaining within the work, as in bobbin lace and crochet, which confuses the image for the smart phone.

Insider information (Figure 5.10) conceals and reveals many coded messages. It contains a QR code made up of black cross stitches (Figure 5.11) as well as the words 'Help me' sewn in human hair. In its use of cross stitch and hair it references Victorian domestic needlework, in particular samplers and mourning brooches, which often contained hair cut from the dead as a memorial.[56] The neatly embroidered QR code suggests patient, ordered stitching, like that of Elizabeth Parker, yet it conceals a hidden message. The stitching in human hair contains the DNA of the seamstress as well as conveying her written message. The veil of the net

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[56] For example some of Emily Brontë's hair was cut off when she died to be used in mourning jewellery (Barker 1994:578).

curtain hints at concealment. Together the elements produce a narrative about the domestic, which, in a suitably gothic fashion is only available to those with the keys to unlock the codes.

5.10 Quarini, C. *Insider information* (2013), detail showing 'help me' embroidered in human hair and cross stitch QR code linked to the text 'Escape while you can'. Size: 100 x 150 cm. Materials: nylon, human hair, black thread on evenweave linen. Photo: C Quarini.

5.11 Quarini, C. Detail of *Insider information* (2013) showing cross stitch QR code linked to the text 'Escape while you can'. Photo: C Quarini.

The QR code used in *Insider information* leads through to the text 'Escape while you can'. The viewer is left wondering whether this is a threat or a warning, and whether the QR code was devised by the owner of the hair or a previous occupant of the room. Another question hovers over the identity of the owner of the hair. This is a query that can be answered by analysing the DNA, another code, hidden within the hair. The viewer is left with many questions, and perhaps a slightly uneasy feeling that something untoward has happened in this cosy domestic space.

To extend the narrative of this net curtain, I produced a companion piece entitled *Unheeded warning* (Figure 5.12). This curtain appears similar to *Insider information* but has a sharp tear down it and a different QR code in black cross stitch (Figure 5.13).

5.12 Quarini, C. *Unheeded warning* (2014), detail showing torn curtain and cross stitch QR code linked to the text 'I warned you'. Size: 95 x 105 cm. Materials: nylon, black cotton thread on evenweave linen, white cotton bobbin lace. Photo: C Quarini.

The viewer is left to decide whether the tear is accidental, a warning, or the result of a domestic dispute. This time the code reads 'I warned you'. Again, the viewer has to judge whether this is a friendly comforting remark from a well-wisher or an

aggressive threat, which was disregarded, and has led to an unpleasant result. Linked to the torn fabric, the message suggests trauma and domestic strife. Together, the two curtains form a domestic narrative (Figure 5.14).

5.13 Quarini, C. *Unheeded warning* (2014), detail showing cross stitch QR code linked to the text 'I warned you'. Materials: nylon, black cotton thread on evenweave linen, white cotton bobbin lace. Photo: C Quarini.

5.14 Quarini, C. Installation of *Insider information* (2013) and *Unheeded warning* (2014) at the *Digital encounters* exhibition (2014) at the Herbert Read Gallery, Canterbury. Photo: C Quarini.

Looking through (Figure 5.15) is another net curtain in the same series, which can be considered part of the same story. This one bears two QR codes, separated by a ribbon, with Morse code embroidered along its length, spelling out the code SOS, the common shorthand for a distress call (Figure 5.16). This use of Morse code, like that of Major Casdagli, is a form of dual literacy, linking the code, the alphabet and stitching. In *Looking through*, one QR code is in cross stitch, but the other is made in bobbin lace. I tried two different techniques for producing bobbin lace QR codes, neither of which was particularly successful, as the definition of the small black squares was not sharp enough to be decoded reliably by a smart phone. In the first code, I worked the lace diagonally from one point of the square to the opposite one, but this caused distortion of the code and it was not clear enough to read. The more successful attempt (used on the curtain) was made using a technique devised by Deborah Robinson (2009) to produce bobbin lace in the style of filet lace. Filet lace is composed of darned net squares and Robinson's technique weaves worker threads across the passive threads in bobbin lace to create the same effect.

5.15 Quarini, C. *Looking through* (2013) exhibited in *Lace effects 2* (2014) at Calais Lace Museum. Size: 95 x 105 cm. Materials: nylon, cotton thread, satin ribbon. Photo: C Quarini.

5.16 Quarini, C. *Looking through* (2013), detail showing two QR codes (one in cross stitch, the other in bobbin lace, both with bobbin lace surrounds), separated by a ribbon, with Morse code embroidered along its length, spelling out the code SOS. Photo: C Quarini.

The bobbin lace QR code used in *Looking through* (Figure 5.17) leads to the message 'Help me' and the cross stitch QR code leads to 'It's our little secret' (Figure 5.18). Ironically, because the bobbin lace QR code is unreliable to read, the message 'Help me' is difficult to decode, so the secret is more likely to be kept, because it is hard to decipher the cry for help. The band of ribbon separating the two codes, with the embroidered Morse code SOS message along it also serves the purpose of imprisoning the bobbin lace QR code in the corner of the curtain, in the same way as the lacemaker is trapped in the home.

5.17 Quarini, C. *Looking through* (2013), detail showing bobbin lace QR code linked to the text 'Help me'. The QR code is made in 'filet style' bobbin lace. The surround is traditional Bedfordshire ninepin lace. Photo: C Quarini.

5.18 Quarini, C. *Looking through* (2013), detail showing cross stitch QR code linked to the text 'It's our little secret'. The surround is traditional Bedfordshire ninepin lace. Photo: C Quarini.

These pieces, with their coded information, combine subversive stitching and dual literacy to produce a narrative about the domestic. Like the palimpsestic gothic novels, they reveal layers of meaning beyond their surface appearance.

In the previous chapter, the gothic heroine was reacting to the claustrophobia of home, by measuring the days of her confinement. In this chapter she has become more active. She is still using the tools at her disposal, but is now using subversive stitching and dual literacy to assert her unquiet voice, and communicate with the outside world. So far in this story, the net curtain has developed from a passive embodiment of claustrophobia and containment in the home (Chapter 4) to become a site of witness for the words and stitches of the trapped heroine. It has proved a useful ally to the heroine and has experienced the power of stitched coded communication and subversive stitching. In Chapter 6, the net curtain will use the knowledge it has gained, to become a more active witness in the home. In this role as silent witness it will sift, sort and store the secrets of the home.

6 Silent witness

The material effects of disintegration of the home seep throughout this chapter, beginning with dysfunctional domesticity in the house, which leads to the home becoming an uncanny haunted house, and ending with a murmur of silent whispers and a pile of gothic dust. As we saw in Chapter 3, the respectability of the Victorian home depended on the purity of its mistress, and her housekeeping ability maintained the integrity of the home. This chapter will show how female anxiety clustered round this responsibility, especially as women had little formal power to enforce morality in the home, and few legal rights. We will see how dysfunctional domesticity, including the failure to protect the family from social dangers outside its boundaries, and the failure to perform the correct gendered roles, can lead to the development of the unhomely.

As has been demonstrated many times in this research, the concerns of the day were often mirrored in mid-nineteenth-century fiction, and the historical reality of losing one's home through bad management, bad judgement or bad luck was used by some authors to comment on and critique the social events that led to such calamities. Many mid-nineteenth-century gothic novelists, such as Charlotte Brontë in *Jane Eyre*, use the motif of the haunted house to comment on dispossession, class and domesticity. In this research, I consider the haunted house to be a place of discomfort, disintegration, unresolved memories, whispers and secrets, and as the literary representation of failed domesticity, rather than as a place haunted by ghosts. This chapter will question how the net curtain can act as silent witness to this decay and how the decay is physically manifest in the gothic trope of dust.

I will show how as well as trapping light, the net curtain also traps dust, dirt, secrets and memories. These ideas are developed in practice, to show how the net curtain acts as silent witness in the home and how it records domestic decay, acting like a sieve, trapping some things, but allowing others to seep through. The net curtain, like the gothic heroine, is often ignored, overlooked and disregarded, yet it absorbs all it hears and sees. It is a dangerous repository of the secrets of the home; liable to unfurl and reveal what it knows at any moment.

6.1 Dysfunctional domesticity

Chapter 3 revealed that during the nineteenth century, the identity of British middle-class women became dependent on maintaining respectability. Women became not only angels, but also guardians, of the home and of domesticity.

Mary Douglas tells us that 'all margins are dangerous' (1966:150) and Julia Kristeva that 'decay, infection, disease … stand for the danger to identity that comes from without' (1982:71). The edges and borders of any system, including the home, are where it is at its most vulnerable, and thus, maintaining borders is essential for maintaining the integrity of the whole. All boundaries therefore require maintenance, especially those of the respectable home, which include boundaries of taste, morality and cleanliness. The breaching of the integrity of the home and domesticity, by inadequate or dysfunctional guardianship, may allow the forces of 'the other' to enter the home through the vulnerable margins. Domestic failure or the dysfunctional domestic home therefore opens the home to outside threats.

Constant vigilance was required to hold back the tide of unsettling forces trying to penetrate the home. As the architectural researcher Henriette Steiner notes:

> 'In the early nineteenth century, the appearance of the culture of the interior can be seen as a cultural effort at making the home or the house impermeable' (Steiner, 2010:140).

Net curtains hanging in the liminal space of the window can be seen as an attempt to enforce this impermeability, both physically by keeping out dirt and the gaze of passers-by, and socially by reinforcing ideas about taste, cleanliness and propriety. It is the failure of this ability to ensure the integrity of the home that leads to its degradation into the unhomely.

Despite the repercussions of domestic failure, women were supposed to maintain the boundaries of the home by moral power alone. The historian Margaret Beetham in a study of women's magazines notes that:

> 'Despite the narrow range of their activities, the moral power attributed to women was such that enormous anxiety was generated by the possibility of their failure' (Beetham, 1996:28).

As Elizabeth Callaghan points out in her doctoral study on domestic topographies, an important source of anxiety for many middle-class Victorian women was that they were responsible for the integrity and respectability of their homes yet they did not have the legal authority to ensure either (2009:210). For example, until 1883, when *The Married Women's Property Act* came into effect, a wife had no civil status apart from that of her husband and all her property and money passed to him on marriage (Davidson, 1982:197). It was therefore almost impossible for women to leave their husbands, however objectionable they might be, as the women had no resources to finance another home.

In Anne Brontë's *The tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), the abuse that the heroine, Helen, suffers at the hands of her husband, Arthur Huntingdon, is revealed by the domestic boundaries he breaches. These include complaining about her management of the household and the food she provides for him (Chapter 30), arguing and fighting in the drawing room (Chapter 31), committing adultery in the home with the wife of a friend (Chapter 33), and encouraging their young son to swear and drink alcohol (Chapter 39). Helen takes the bold, and illegal, step of leaving her husband and taking her son with her to the remote Wildfell Hall, where she hopes to bring him up anonymously, away from the influence of his father.

Helen had naively assumed that her husband's wild behaviour would end when they married, because she had been brought up to believe in the idea of separate spheres and the innate ability of women to civilise men and bring morality into their lives. As A J Drewery writing in *Brontë Studies* notes, this certainty of her influence over Huntingdon derives from the 'angel in the house' ideology in which:

> 'The Victorian girl, regarded as physically, emotionally and intellectually man's inferior, was given carte blanche in just one field – the moral. She was considered morally indomitable … and, as such, was expected to assume responsibility for the upkeep of moral standards' (Drewery, 2013:340).

The novel highlights the fact that women were responsible for the integrity of their homes, husbands and families. Helen feels she is a failure and unwomanly because she cannot civilise her husband. She is also irked to find that his mistress, Lady Lowborough, can stop him drinking to excess, but she cannot, inverting the idea that

the moral wife can instil respectability in the home. As Lady Lowborough points out:

> "Have you not observed the salutary change in Mr Huntingdon? Don't you see what a sober, temperate man he is become? You saw with regrets the sad habits he was contracting, I know: and I know you did your utmost to deliver him from them, but without success, until I came to your assistance. I told him in a few words that I could not bear to see him degrade himself so, and that I should cease to – no matter what I told him but you see the reformation I have wrought, and you ought to thank me for it" (Brontë, 1848: Kindle Loc 4251).

In this case, the immoral woman has the power to curb the excesses in the home while the moral wife (the angel in the house) cannot. This suggests that she is deficient in some way, as she is not performing her gendered role effectively.

The social historian Lara Baker Whelan notes that a woman who could 'not sufficiently demonstrate mastery of domestic behaviour' could not be considered respectable even if she acquired 'all the trappings of middle class culture' (Whelan, 2010:83). Callaghan explains that to maintain middle-class gentility and status required a house in which to live and the means and ability to turn it into a home, by participation in a respectable home life (Callaghan, 2009:127). On its own the income of the household was not sufficient to establish a middle-class identity; it had to be established by the woman of the home performing the proper consumption and display of suitable and tasteful household goods (2009:127). Callaghan notes that in the mid-nineteenth century:

> 'an unstable economic climate coupled with increasing pressures to maintain and display a respectable home worked together to create an environment where the threat of losing one's home was omnipresent' (2009:128).

The loss of the home meant not only the loss of a place to live but also resulted in the inability to perform the processes of middle-class identity, such as housekeeping and making social calls on other middle-class families (Callaghan, 2009:130). But more importantly it indicated a loss of respectability, the very bedrock of middle-class identity (Callaghan, 2009:131).

The experiences of Maggie Tulliver, the heroine of *The mill on the Floss,* clearly show how middle-class respectability depended on the gendered identity provided by

a home. The Tullivers' loss of home, following an expensive law suit undertaken by Maggie's litigious father, results in them losing their household possessions in an auction carried out by the bailiffs. The thought of her monogrammed silver and textiles being bought by strangers proves especially upsetting to Maggie's mother:

> "I should be so loath for 'em to buy it at the Golden Lion," said the poor woman, her heart swelling, and the tears coming, - "my teapot as I bought when I was married, and to think of its being scratched and set before the travellers and folks and my letters on it, see here E D, and everybody to see it." (Eliot, 1860: Kindle Loc 3197).

The Tullivers' loss of domestic status also affects the way their friends and neighbours treat them, as without a suitable home of their own in which to reciprocate hospitality, they struggle to participate in middle-class behaviour. Mr Tulliver finally decides to work for Mr Wakem, the man who has ruined him, in an effort to save his family from social ostracism:

> 'Here was an opportunity for Mr Tulliver to provide for his wife and daughter without any assistance from his wife's relations, and without that too evident descent into pauperism which makes it annoying to respectable people to meet the degraded member of the family by the wayside' (Eliot, 1860: Kindle Loc 3859).

As we saw in Chapter 5, Maggie's needlework also changed to reflect her altered status; instead of embroidering 'fancy work' she stitches useful garments for which she is paid. Throughout the novel, Maggie rails against middle-class standards and the way in which they imprison and confine women, but she comes to see that although the home seems a prison, without it women have no freedom at all. She realises that unless she marries she will be condemned to work as a teacher or rely on the charity of her friends and family.

Many nineteenth-century, gothic sensation novels mirror the fear of domestic dispossession and the loss of home as a result of inadequate maintenance of its boundaries. In her doctoral thesis, Callaghan studies the threat of domestic dispossession for Victorian women in three novels (Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, George Eliot's *The mill on the Floss*, and Thomas Hardy's *Jude the obscure*) (2009:123). Other gothic novels of the mid-nineteenth century in which the loss of home is a key part of the narrative, include: Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) which involves repeated losses of the homes of the female characters

(Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange); *The woman in white* (Collins, 1859-1860) in which Laura Catherick loses her home and her identity when her husband commits her to a mental institution; *Lady Audley's secret* (Braddon, 1861-1862) which involves the heroine's unintentional bigamy to secure a home for herself after her first husband leaves her; and, as already noted, Anne Brontë's *The tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) in which Helen Huntingdon feels she has no alternative but to leave her home and abusive husband.

The new suburbs growing up around cities epitomised middle-class domesticity. They were supposed to promote respectability by providing privacy and distance from the working classes (Whelan, 2010:2), thus maintaining the necessary boundaries of taste, class and cleanliness. However, because the only requirement for living in the suburbs was financial,[57] and middle-class respectability depended on much more than money, the suburbs became:

> 'a constantly shifting, and economically unstable, socially heterogeneous space where once respectable middle class neighbourhoods could become working class refuges within ten years and full blown slums within forty' (Whelan, 2010:2).

This meant that householders had to be constantly vigilant about their surroundings and any changes in them, and move on if they appeared to be deteriorating. An example would be if landlords started renting homes to more than one family and thus changed the nature of the area from middle class to the multi-occupancy homes of the working classes (Whelan, 2010:15). Kate Ferguson Ellis, in her study of gothic novels and domesticity, suggests that women's most important role in maintaining the integrity of the home was in surveillance and vigilance (Ellis, 1989:219). However, Whelan notes that middle-class women could not always carry out this domestic surveillance effectively because appearances could be deceptive (Whelan, 2010:91).

Whelan notes that one of the defining aspects of the middle-class home was privacy, which screened the women of the house from 'the public' (2010:15). This was manifest in the use of net curtains to screen the home from the gaze of those on the

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[57] The range of income that defined a person as middle class was wide; Whelan estimates a range from £100 to £1000 per annum (Whelan, 2010:33). However, there was considerable overlap between upper working-class incomes and those at the lower end of the middle-class scale.

street. However, Whelan suggests that the main threat to the suburban ideal was blurred boundaries (2010:56). At a time of fluid social change, relying on outward appearances to reveal class or character could be misleading. One of the worst types of invasion into the middle classes, according to Whelan (2010:68), was that of the reformed prostitute, such as Laura Catherick's mother in *The woman in white* (Collins, 1859-1860), who, having made a tidy sum from the proceeds of 'sin', masqueraded as a respectable widow living comfortably in the suburbs. The historian, Linda Nead, notes that prostitution was seen as a subversive system (1988:110) and an invisible danger that transgressed social boundaries (1988:121). By presenting a respectable façade, the reformed prostitute allowed the moral and physical dirt of the street to enter the respectable homes of the middle classes unknowingly (Whelan, 2010:68).

Pristine net curtains at the window were therefore no guarantee of domestic gentility. They could be hiding a myriad of unspeakable problems within the home. As I have shown many times in this research, appearances can be deceptive. This fluidity of the suburbs, and their liminal role between the classes, made them ideal settings for gothic novels concerned with anxieties about boundaries and their transgression, and in which the identities of the protagonists are multilayered.

The novels of Wilkie Collins epitomised the gothic sensation fiction that absorbed mid-nineteenth-century readers, and dealt with issues of identity and women's legal status. In his fiction, Collins shows that the 'social ambivalence' of the suburbs was linked to the disintegration of boundaries (Whelan, 2010:138). In his study of Victorian sensation fiction, Andrew Radford suggests that for many readers, one of the thrills of sensation novels was that they suggested that personal and class identity were unstable and fluid (Radford, 2009:71).

Discussing gothic literature and its links to the early Victorian suburbs, Whelan notes that Wilkie Collins attempted to show in his novels that 'morality as an institution, otherwise known as respectability, was no longer sufficiently powerful to maintain social, moral or cultural boundaries' (2010:138). It seems that morality alone was not enough to maintain the boundaries of the respectable home and prevent it disintegrating into the gothic trope of the haunted house.

6.2 The haunted house

The haunted house brings together three of the main themes of this research: the domestic, the uncanny and the gothic. I consider the haunted house to be a place of discomfort, disintegration, unresolved memories, whispers and secrets. The haunted house is also the ultimate gothic representation of failed domesticity, and it is here that dysfunctional domesticity manifests itself. The haunted house is also the epitome of Freud's uncanny where the home has become unhomely and the familiar has become strange. Indeed Freud notes that in some modern languages, 'the phrase *ein unheimliches Haus* ['an uncanny house'] can be rendered only by the periphrasis 'a haunted house' (Freud, 1919:148).

Steiner in an analysis of the unhomely home, links the three themes of the present study:

> 'the haunted house, an absolutely central motif in, for example, Victorian gothic literature can be emphasised as a prime topos for the nineteenth century uncanny' (Steiner, 2010:133).

Discussing the haunted house in film, Barry Curtis identifies it as 'a troubled place marked by neglect, strange habits and failed rituals of order and maintenance' (Curtis, 2008:31). Many of these rituals, as we have seen, depend on maintaining the boundaries of cleanliness, morality and taste described by Douglas (1966:150) and Kristeva (1982:4).

Steiner discusses the idea of the 'fundamental porosity and permeability of the home' (2010:135), which is something I try to capture in my practice by focusing on the transparent permeable net curtain at the window. She notes that 'the house or home is destabilized' by 'the constant vacillation between the homely and the unhomely' (Steiner, 2010:133). This suggests a pictorial image of the net curtain drifting to and fro at the window, sometimes blocking the window then wafting aside to allow the entry of 'the other' in the form of dirt. This vacillation also brings to mind Douglas's flimsy dangerous margins that allow the other to seep into the respectable home, rendering it uncanny. The idea of the home becoming porous to malign influences through neglect also has direct links to the work of Douglas about margins and borders (1966:150).

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The net curtain as a domestic boundary is unstable because it is flimsy and can easily be swept aside but also, as Chapter 4 revealed, because it can become claustrophobic and containing, and as this chapter will show, because it can trap dirt, dust, memories and secrets.

Steiner considers, as I do, that studying the haunted house can shed light on modern domesticity (2010:136), in the same way that mid-nineteenth-century writers used gothic novels to comment on separate spheres and domesticity. Domestic concerns still revolve around the duality of home as sanctuary and prison and feelings of claustrophobia and containment, which can be expressed in practice to facilitate discussion and debate. Writing in the journal *Gothic Studies*, Melissa Edmundson notes that many female gothic writers of the nineteenth century[58] used the motif of the haunted house to comment on property, class and economic issues (Edmundson, 2010:51). In these tales of 'uncomfortable houses', ghosts often communicate a message to the inhabitants, revealing secret or hidden information often of a beneficial nature. I use the idea of the haunted house revealing secrets through the medium of the net curtain, but generally to reveal past troubles and unhealed memories rather than to provide financial benefits.

Evelyn Shockley, in her doctoral thesis, entitled *The tyranny of domesticity,* suggests that haunted houses are the literary representation of the failure of domestic ideology to protect the family from the dangers lurking outside (2002). I suggest that this dysfunctional domesticity also fails to protect the family from the dangers lurking within. For example, the dangers lying within Thornfield Hall, the home of the heroine's employer, Mr Rochester, in *Jane Eyre* (Brontë, 1847) are a result of dysfunctional domesticity. The house is haunted from within by the presence of Bertha Mason, Rochester's estranged mad wife, and by the myriad secrets that he keeps from Jane about his past life, as well as the whispers and subterfuge of the staff. There is no respectable female figure in control of the house and the master is often absent, leaving the staff without supervision.

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[58] She discusses the novels of Charlotte Riddell and Margaret Oliphant.

Barbara Creed suggests that the haunted house is horrifying 'because it contains cruel secrets and has witnessed terrible deeds, usually committed by family members against each other' (1993:55). Such a mid-nineteenth-century house haunted by memories is the home of Miss Havisham in Charles Dickens' *Great expectations* (1860-1861). She lives surrounded by the memories of the day she was jilted. The table is laid for the wedding breakfast, now decayed and covered in dust. Pip, the young hero of the story, recalls his first visit to the house with the following description:

> 'I began to understand that everything in the room had stopped, like the watch and the clock, a long time ago. … Without this arrest of everything, this standing still of all the pale decayed objects , not even the withered bridal dress on the collapsed form could have looked so like grave-clothes, or the long veil so like a shroud' (Dickens, 1860-1861: Kindle Loc 904).

Pip sees that Miss Havisham wears her wedding dress, no longer pristine white but faded to dirty yellow by the passage of time:

> 'I saw that everything within my view which ought to be white, had been white long ago, and had lost its lustre and was faded and yellow. I saw that the bride within the bridal dress had withered like the dress' (Dickens, 1860-1861: Kindle Loc 871).

Miss Havisham's home is a tangle of cobwebs and threads of lost hope: a suitable setting for a woman who, like a spider spinning a web, tries to entrap others and weave their lives together.

I have shown how dysfunctional domesticity and the inability to maintain the margins of the home leads to the entry of 'the other' and results in an unhomely or haunted house. It develops and disintegrates into a dysfunctional home of secrets, hidden memories and whispers. The following section will show how the memories and whispers of the haunted house are trapped within the net curtain in practice. The final section will reveal how the domestic decay of the haunted house is made manifest by the net curtain.

6.3 Silent witness in the home

Interiors retain memories. Curtis notes that 'the idea that objects and places can retain the memory of traumatic events is an ancient one' (2008:35). Like all textiles, the net curtain can absorb the atmosphere of the home, both physically and

metaphorically, and has a memory of what it has encountered. For example, the curtain as a physical boundary can absorb and retain the smells of the home, such as cigarette smoke, but also more evocative and personal reminders such as a lingering perfume. A scrap of cloth can bring back poignant memories of garments, furnishings and the atmosphere of the events they recall. Referring to stains, marks and stigma of violent attacks, the critic Jenni Sorkin notes 'Cloth holds the sometimes unbearable gift of memory' (Sorkin, 2001:77).

This chapter has shown that the haunted house becomes a site of whispers, memory and decay. I used the idea of cloth retaining memories, combined with the notion of the net curtain acting as a sieve at the margins of the home, to produce a series of net curtains embellished with text, suggesting that they have absorbed phrases they have overheard in the home. Combined in groups of two or three, entitled *Whisperings,* these curtains form a narrative and comment on the events in the home (Figure 6.1).

6.1 Quarini, C. *Whisperings* exhibited at The Sunbury Embroidery Gallery (2009). It includes the curtains *Mind your own business, Its our little secret* and *Just turn a blind eye*. Size: each curtain is 60 x 50 cm. Materials: silk organza with cotton tambour lace. Photo: C Quarini.

In this series I considered the net curtain as silent witness in the home, and subsequently found that the textile artist, Maxine Bristow, has also written about textile as silent witness in a more general sense (Bristow, 2011). She considers

textile objects with which we have daily contact, such as the padded surfaces on public transport, and material forms, like handrails and light switches, and suggests that these material forms communicate through an embodied, non-discursive, tactile process (Bristow, 2011). In contrast, I consider the net curtain to be trapping retained memories and whispers in a non-tactile process.

In a similar way, Gill Saunders refers to wallpaper as 'silent witness in the home' noting that 'walls not only have ears they also have eyes' (Saunders, 2010:84). She notes that wallpaper 'is a silent witness to the secrets of domestic life' and retains 'the forensic evidence of our daily domestic routines' (Saunders, 2010:57). Saunders curated the *Walls are talking* exhibition at the Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, in 2010 and clearly considers that wallpaper has agency in the home, in the same way as the net curtain develops agency in Chapter 7.

The curtains in the *Whisperings* series manifest the dysfunctional secrets of the home, for those who take the time to read them. They have absorbed what they have heard in the home, and they can be seen as mutely recording it, or purposefully repeating it, in the same way as servants might relate what they have overheard. One of the ways in which the boundaries of the Victorian home could be breached was by the servants, 'the other' in the heart of the home, gossiping and revealing domestic secrets, thus breaching the surveillance that was so much a part of the privacy of the middle-class home (Flanders 2004:115). In her 1863 novel *Aurora Floyd*, Mary Elizabeth Braddon wrote about servants from the kitchen eavesdropping:

> 'Your servants listen at your doors, and repeat your spiteful speeches in the kitchen, and watch you while they wait at table, and understand every sarcasm, every innuendo, every look … Nothing that is done in the parlour is lost upon these quiet, well-behaved watchers from the kitchen' (Braddon, 1996:177-8).

I consider the net curtain has the same role in the home. It is an ever present, quiet watcher that absorbs all it hears. Whether it uses this information for good or ill remains to be seen.

The net curtains in the *Whisperings* series consist of groups of handmade net curtains with tambour lace embellishment (Figure 6.2). The curtains are handmade from silk

organza and all of the same size so that the viewer's attention is focused on the words they bear, rather than discrepancies in the shapes of the curtains. The technique chosen to record the messages is tambour lace on cotton net. The idea was to produce a lace trim across the curtain which was fine, white and lace-like and blended in to the curtain. Tambour lace is a technique that allows the formation of freely flowing designs such as lettering, but is quicker to produce than bobbin or needle lace. It is based on a form of chain stitch through net, produced using a fine hook, similar to a crochet hook (Figure 6.3). Any beginnings and ends in the lace have to be knotted off carefully otherwise the lace design may unravel, hence the continuous writing style chosen for the wording. This style of lettering was also chosen because it appears simple, rounded, child-like and naïve, to suggest that the curtain is a guileless reporter of events, rather than promoting its own agenda about the events it is reporting (Figure 6.4).
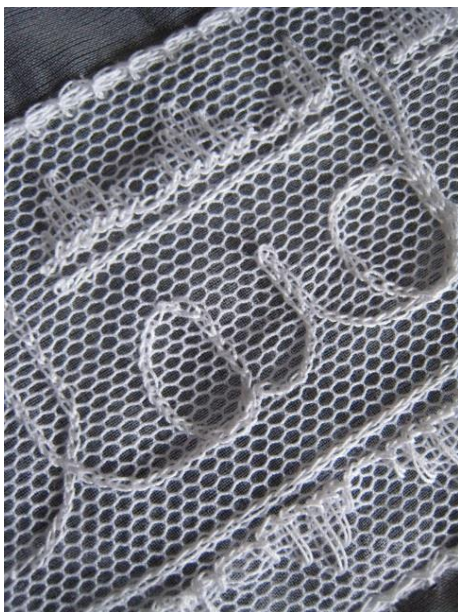

6.2 Quarini, C. *Just turn a blind eye* (2009), detail showing tambour lace text. Size: 60 x 50 cm. Materials: silk organza with cotton tambour lace. Photo: C Quarini.

6.3 Quarini, C. Tambour lace being worked on a frame, showing cotton net, pattern and tambour hook (2009). Photo: C Quarini.

6.4 Quarini, C. Detail of tambour lace showing chain stitch (2009). Photo: C Quarini.

The 'secrets' recorded in the lace were selected to produce ambiguous phrases with multilayered meanings. For example, 'I can see through you' (Figure 6.5), obviously refers to a physical property of the net curtain, but conceals a more subtle meaning of 'I can see what you're up to, and you can't hide your unpleasant secrets from me, however hard you might try'. The curtains in the series can be displayed in different arrangements to produce different narratives and imply different meanings. I have chosen three arrangements here to show how they interrelate.
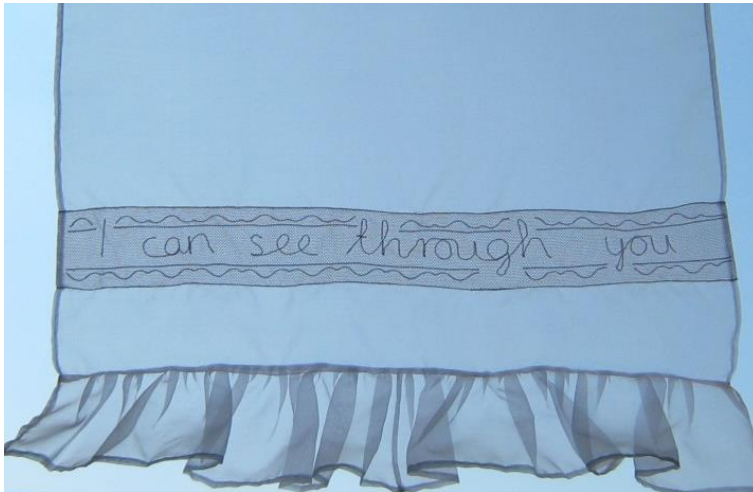
6.5 Quarini, C. *I can see through you* (2010) curtain at the window. Size: 60 x 50 cm. Materials: silk organza with cotton tambour lace. Photo: C Quarini.

Whisperings I consists of *I can see through you* and *Appearances can be deceptive* (Figure 6.6)*.* As we have seen, *I can see through you* has a double meaning. I often use *Appearances can be deceptive* as an indicator in a group of curtains to show that the obvious meaning of the other curtains should be reconsidered. The phrase also speaks of the role of the net curtain in so many homes to 'keep up' appearances, which can often be deceptive. It also suggests that the delicate, pristine, white net curtains are not the innocent furnishings they appear to be at first glance. *Whisperings I* suggests hidden agendas, obfuscation and blurring of the facts.

6.6 Quarini, C. *Appearances can be deceptive* (2009). Size: 60 x 50 cm. Materials: silk organza with cotton tambour lace. Photo: C Quarini.

Whisperings II combines *What are you looking at?* and *Mind your own business* (Figure 6.7). *What are you looking at?* can be considered as a straightforward question or as an aggressive demand, questioning the viewer's interest. It can also be used as a prompt in a group of curtains to suggest the viewer reconsiders the scene in front of them and considers what they are actually looking at, as it may not be what their first impression suggested. *Mind your own business* could be a friendly suggestion or an aggressive piece of 'advice', followed by a physical threat. The viewer has to piece together the narrative and come to their own conclusions. *Whisperings II* hints at hidden secrets and veiled aggression.

6.7 Quarini, C. *Mind your own business* (2009). Size: 60 x 50 cm. Materials: silk organza with cotton tambour lace. Photo: C Quarini.

Whisperings III links *What are you trying to hide?* (Figure 6.8), *It's our little secret* and *Just turn a blind eye*. *What are you trying to hide?* suggests some secret has been discovered. *It's our little secret* is the phrase associated with the paedophile trying to cover his tracks and *Just turn a blind eye* is the too common response to any type of domestic abuse from those who do not want to involve themselves in their neighbours' troubles, but it also references the physical effect of the net curtain as a screen at the window obscuring the view. *Whisperings III* therefore speaks of troubling scenarios and hidden domestic secrets.

6.8 Quarini, C. What are you trying to hide? (2010). Size: 60 x 50 cm. Materials: silk organza with cotton tambour lace. Photo: C Quarini.

All the curtains in the *Whisperings* series hint at Creed's definition of the haunted house as a place of family secrets (1993:55), resulting from dysfunctional domesticity. They also reflect the role of the net curtain as silent witness in the home, absorbing all it hears, and recording messages that may return to haunt the speakers.

I extended this idea of the curtain as silent witness in the home by producing a net curtain entitled *Whispering* (Figure 6.9), which included several 'conversations' combined in one piece. I designed a traditional lace trim[59] for the curtain (Figures 6.10, 6.11) to reflect the ordered behaviour of a Victorian house party, which begins decorously with polite conversation, but after a while, degenerates into a babble of voices, confidences and gossip. This is reflected in the lace, which changes from a defined pattern to free embroidery on net. The threads leave their rigid pattern, becoming a series of different embroidered conversations (Figure 6.12). The formal lace pattern is subverted to become a tangle of whispers, innuendo and hidden conversations.

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[59] I describe the technique used for designing the bobbin lace in Quarini (2010).

6.9 Quarini, C. *Whispering* (2014) exhibited at Waddesdon Manor as part of the *Imagine* exhibition (2014). Size: 100 x 150 cm. Materials: silk organza with white cotton bobbin lace and embroidery. Photo: C Quarini.

6.10 Quarini, C. *Whispering* (2014), showing detail of white cotton bobbin lace. Photo: C Quarini.

6.11 Quarini, C. Bobbin lace for *Whispering* (2014) being made on the lace pillow. Photo: C Quarini.

6.12 Quarini, C. *Whispering* (2014), detail showing point where bobbin lace changes to embroidery. Size: 100 x 150 cm. Materials: silk organza with bobbin lace and embroidery. Photo: C Quarini.

Nine 'whispers' are trapped in the curtain (Figure 6.13): Have you heard what she did?; It's our little secret; Are you thinking what I'm thinking?; I did not fall down the stairs; Keep out it's not your business; He says she's not herself today; What are you hiding, you know I'll find out; What did you expect, you got what you deserved;

and He frightens the life out of me. They reveal that all is not the comfortable veneer we assumed to start with. There are some hidden whispers and cries for help under that formal pattern.

6.13 Quarini, C. *Whispering* (2014), detail showing the embroidered lace messages. Size: 100 x 150 cm. Materials: silk organza with bobbin lace and embroidery. Photo: C Quarini.

The whispers are deliberately jumbled and not designed to form a narrative sequence. The viewer has to piece them together to make a narrative, like a gothic story, from the snippets of information provided. Some of them appear to have been 'trapped' during the house party, while others seem to have been collected before the guests arrived. A sub-narrative is whether the curtain is acting merely as a silent witness or whether it has agency and is manipulating the information it is presenting to us for a purpose of its own; perhaps in the same way as a servant reveals what goes on in the privacy of the home.

Writing about film, Curtis explains that the haunted house allows the past to comment on the present (Curtis, 2008:180). This is a theme I develop in the *Whispering* series, which also recalls the palimpsest-like nature of the gothic novel. In this work, the present layer is the innocuous net curtain and the past is the trapped speech, which compromises the traditional domesticity of the curtain and undermines it. This allows the everyday and the familiar to become estranged, enabling their reassessment.

6.4 Domestic decay

In the same way that net curtains can retain memories of speech and atmosphere, they are also able to retain the memories of dust and dirt. Joseph Amato distinguishes between dust and dirt in the following way:

> 'Mothered by the same earth, dust and dirt have different fathers. Dust – finer and more discrete – belongs as much to air as to earth. Dirt – bigger and clumsier – is identified with soil. When wet, dirt reveals a closer kinship to water than to dust. But dirt's real father, which vouches for its closer affinity to soil, is muck, or to be more precise, excrement' (Amato, 2001:1).

Amato partly bases his categorisation on etymology; the word dirt comes from the Old Norse *drit* meaning excrement, which came to mean mud and soil in seventeenth-century English (Amato, 2001:23). Amato implies that dirt is associated with the fertile and dust with the sterile, dry and desiccated (2001:24)

Mary Douglas tells us that 'dirt is essentially disorder' and that 'There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder' (Douglas, 1966:2). She continues that 'dirt is matter out of place' (Douglas, 1966:44) so it is 'the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements' (Douglas, 1966:44).

If dirt is disorder, what then is dust? Jake Kennedy suggests dust is the abject, unwanted of the domestic space (2005:2). He considers that dust is a 'special kind, of dirt', it is 'refined' and the '(by)product of a system'[60] (Kennedy, 2005:2). He also notes that while the origin of dirt can generally be traced, such as a footprint on the floor, dust 'descends' (Kennedy, 2005:2). This idea of dust descending in a diffuse materialisation recalls Gilda William's statement that 'the abject is filthy, the gothic merely cobwebbed and dusty' (Williams, 2007:14). This suggests to me that dirt is 'the other' from outside the home, while dust represents the decay of the home and its occupants, both of which are relevant to this research. Dirt relates to the domestic labours required to maintain the boundaries and integrity of the home, and failure to control it threatens respectability. Whereas dust speaks of dysfunctional domesticity and the decay of the gothic home.

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[60] In the sense that Douglas (1966:44) uses the term.

By its nature dust is uncanny, it is both of the home and not of the home (Kennedy, 2005:7). It is formed from the decay of the home and is thus homely, but once it has descended it is considered unhomely and something to be removed from the home. Dust is composed of the detritus of living. It includes shed body cells from the inhabitants of the home as well as particles from the decomposition of the house. In *Great expectations*, Pip describes Miss Havisham in terms related to Amato's description of dust as sterile, dry and desiccated (Amato, 2001:24):

> 'So she sat corpse-like as we played at cards; the frillings and trimmings on her bridal dress, looking like earthy paper. … she must have looked as if the admission of the natural light of day would have struck her to dust' (Dickens, 1860-1861: Kindle Loc 910).

Dust is the disintegration of the domestic. As well as being uncanny, dust is also a gothic trope. Characteristically in gothic films, remote parts of the house are veiled in dust and cobwebs (Curtis, 2008:68). Dust permeates everywhere, it cannot be contained. As Kennedy says, it 'refuses borders' (2005:5) and is therefore not contained by any boundaries whether of domesticity or respectability. Dust also suggests domestic disarray and slovenliness, it speaks of dysfunctional domesticity and is the visible result of failed domesticity.

In her history of the Victorian home, Judith Flanders reports that rubbish was classified into two parts: dust, which consisted of coal dust and ashes from the fire; and refuse, which included everything else (2004:85). In towns and cities, this dust was collected by dustmen and taken to dust heaps where it was sorted for further use.[61] As a substance that can breach borders and harbour germs, dust was a particular concern to the Victorian housewife. As we saw in Chapter 3, cleanliness and the colour white were associated with moral purity, therefore dust and dirt besmirching the pristine white net curtains at the window, were a visible manifestation of impurity. It indicated a threat to the respectability of the home and revealed the porosity of its boundaries. In the advice manual *Our homes and how to*

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[61] Dust was used for brick making and the remaining debris as ballast for road making. Dust heaps were an eyesore but provided work and raw materials for industry. Charles Dickens puts dust heaps at the core of *Our mutual friend* (1864-1865) in which a fortune obtained from working the dust heaps is contested and the effects of the money on different characters are played out. In 1850, Dickens also published an article by Richard H Horne in his weekly magazine *Household words* entitled 'Dust, or Ugliness Redeemed' which showed the journal's readers how useful the dust heaps were despite their ugliness (Whelan, 2010:73).

make them healthy (Murphy, 1883) Robert Brudenell Carter, the surgeon who considered darkness a synonym for dirt in Chapter 3, gives his views on curtains. He claims they are 'mere dust traps, which become loaded with powdered filth of every description' (Carter, 1883:397). However, he suggests that if the housewife insists on having curtains they should be:

> 'of some white fabric of a semi transparent character, such as lace or gauze which will 'show the dirt' to such an extent that they must be sent once a fortnight to the wash tub' (Carter, 1883:398).

Not only does this article describe the evils of dust and curtains it also conflates the themes of white, transparency and honesty encountered in Chapter 3

Although in the nineteenth century dust was rightly seen as a harbinger of disease (Kelley, 2010:25), the view in the twenty-first century is more poetic. Mary Ann Caws writing in the catalogue for *The surreal house* exhibition says 'Dirt is to be treasured, for the necessary memories it includes, however disquieting' (Caws, 2010:51). Catherine Bertola makes use of these memories in her site-specific work, which often incorporates dust (Bewley, 2005). At the *Unravelling the manor* symposium, in Brighton in 2010, she spoke about her interest in the rituals and history of cleaning and the 'endless and futile cycles of trying to remove traces'. She incorporates dirt and dust in some of her site-specific work, to include the materiality of the site in her practice; she considers it a forensic material. Bertola not only uses dust to retain memories, she also uses it as a creative material. In 1999 she produced a series entitled *Sweeping it under* in which she used dust to recreate carpet patterns on the floor and in 2006 she produced *After the fact*, a floor installation of dust in a derelict Georgian farmhouse[62]. For the *Out of the ordinary* exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2009, Bertola used dust that had been swept up from the floor of the Museum, applied it to paper and cut it into a floral repeat pattern that was displayed as wallpaper in the Museum. She enjoys the idea of turning dust, which is considered worthless, into a work of art, and in that way making it valuable.[63] I also aim to make the mundane special, but in contrast to Bertola, my work is based in the uncanny, dysfunctional home. As Trevor Keeble notes, Bertola's aim is not to render

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[62] Bertola has recently reprised this work by producing a dust carpet as part of the Crafts Council's *Acts of making festival* 2015.
[63] Speaking at the *Unravelling the manor* symposium in 2010.

the home uncanny, but to work 'within the rhetoric and materiality of domesticity, not in order to undermine it but to search out its subtleties and deepen the viewer's relation to it' (Keeble, 2010:121).

Another artist who has used dirt to produced ephemeral 'carpets' is Cal Lane. She made *Dirt lace* (2006) by sifting dirt through lace stencils onto a street in Washington DC, where it remained until removed by rain and footsteps. In an interview for the catalogue of the *Radical lace and subversive knitting* exhibition, Lane describes how she was inspired to use this technique by watching her grandmother dusting cakes with icing sugar through a paper doily to create a lacy sugar pattern on their surface (McFadden, 2007:98).[64]

Cornelia Parker has used dust to produce a more permanent record of a site. In *The negative of whispers* (1997) Parker made a set of earplugs from dust collected in the Whispering Gallery of St Paul's Cathedral, London. The acoustics in this circular gallery, allow a whisper made by someone facing one side of the wall to be heard by someone on the opposite side of the dome. Parker transforms the ephemeral whisper into a physical presence by collecting the dust from the Gallery and refashioning it, to form a lasting reminder of an aural memory, in the form of earplugs. She uses the material traces left in the Gallery, to produce a lasting relic of the place and atmosphere of the site.

I use a mixture of dirt and dust in my practice, as they reference the three themes of this research; the domestic, the uncanny and the gothic. Dirt is 'the other' from outside the home, while dust represents the decay of the home and the occupants. I consider dust as a domestic waste product that represents an uncanny combination of the homely and the unhomely, and also references the gothic tropes of passing time and domestic decay. I use dust in its poetic sense, as a repository of memories, but also as a physical manifestation of the decay of the home and its inhabitants. I trap dust in silk paper to retain it and bind it to the curtain, in a similar way to Parker, rather than using it to produce ephemeral work like Bertola and Lane. However, I

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[64] In another example of duality, to dust something means either to remove a layer (as in housework) or to add a covering (as in dusting a cake with icing sugar) (Steedman, 2001).

also use it to capture the memories and essence of the home, in a similar way to Bertola's use of dust in 'wallpaper'.

I use the idea of the net curtain trapping particles of dust as a way of sieving and saving the memories of home, in its role as a silent witness. However the trapped particles are not merely memories of the home, they derive from the decay of the home itself; they are the uncanny gothic essence of the home. Dust trapped in net curtains also speaks of dysfunctional domesticity and the home becoming unhomely. It traps dirt and disease. Taken to excess, the dust can be considered to be silting up the curtains, blocking out light and breath, and finally suffocating life itself.

I have produced three curtains in this way, entitled *Dust*, *Decay* and *Disintegration* to embody the decay of the domestic. Each curtain combines lace and silk paper in increasing stages of decay, mirroring the 'frillings and trimmings' on Miss Havisham's wedding dress and its description as being like 'earthy paper' (Dickens, 1860-1861: Kindle Loc 910).

The first curtain, *Dust* (Figure 6.14), appears to be a conventional transparent curtain with a lace trim across it, but below the lace, the curtain has turned to silk paper embedded with dust. In the second curtain, *Decay* (Figure 6.15), more of the fabric has turned to silk paper and the lace is now embedded in the paper and showing signs of decay. The final curtain in the series, *Disintegration* (Figure 6.16), is almost completely silk paper, enclosing the remains of the disintegrating lace, and showing obvious signs of decay and degeneration.

This gradual silting up, mirrors the petrification of the curtains in the installation at Salts Mill. In that installation, the curtains metamorphosed into stone, incarcerating the heroine in her claustrophobic prison. Here, they are becoming heavy with the weight of memories and the disintegration of the dysfunctional home, silting up and decaying into fragile paper.

6.14 Quarini, C. *Dust* (2015). Size: 200 x 72 cm. Materials: voile, silk paper and bobbin lace. Photo: C Quarini.

6.15 Quarini, C. *Decay* (2015). Size 200 x 72 cm. Materials: voile, silk paper and bobbin lace. Photo: C Quarini.

6.16 Quarini, C. *Disintegration* (2015). Size: 200 x 72 cm. Materials: voile, silk paper and bobbin lace. Photo: C Quarini.

The curtains are embellished with a bobbin lace trim that incorporates lozenge-shaped motifs derived from the microscopic appearance of the tuberculosis bacillus (*Mycobacterium tuberculosis*). This reference to tuberculosis was chosen because the consumption it caused was a common disease in the nineteenth century, and was associated with delicate young women in particular. For example in *Jane Eyre*, Jane's schoolfriend, Helen Burns, dies of consumption in her arms.[65] Despite being a painful, wasting disease, consumption was the ideal death for young women in literature, as it rendered them pale, breathless and lethargic; the epitome of submissive Victorian womanhood.

The lace is a straight, continuous piece, with an inverted scallop shape on both sides, to suggest the disintegration of the lace, and to provide points at which threads can be linked to attach it to the silk paper (Figure 6.17). The pattern incorporates a half stitch ground and open oval shapes, highlighted with a thicker gimp thread around them, to emphasise their shape (Figure 6.18). Thus, the thread of disease runs through these curtains as it would have done through mid-nineteenth-century domesticity. It is an ever present reminder of disease lurking in the environment, awaiting its chance to invade the home.
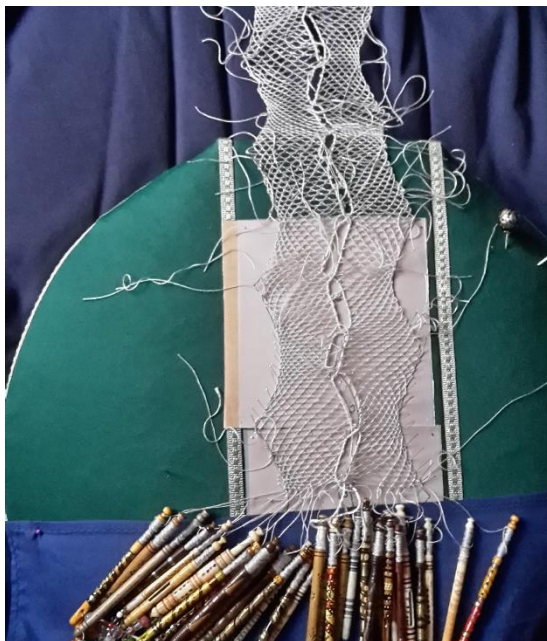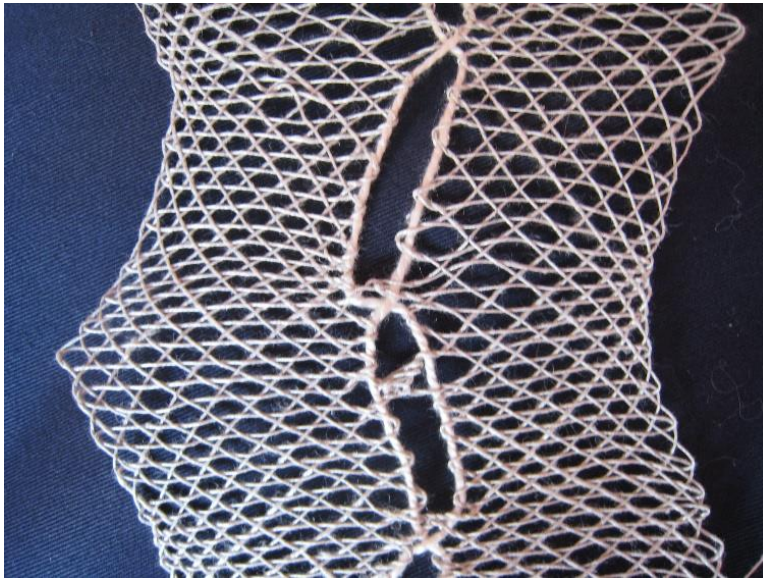

6.17 Quarini, C. *Dust* (2015) detail of the bobbin lace being made. Photo: C Quarini.

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[65] Sadly, Charlotte Brontë was all too familiar with the effects of tuberculosis, her mother and four sisters all died of the disease and it was thought to have contributed to her brother's death.

6.18 Quarini, C. *Dust* (2015), detail showing the gimp outlining of the lozenge shapes representing the tuberculosis bacillus. Photo: C Quarini.

The silk paper is also handmade, by drawing out silk threads and laying them over one another on a bed of net (Figure 6.19). The dust is then added to the silk. Then another layer of net is applied to the silk, trapping the threads and dust, so they can be fixed using a type of 'glue' known as 'silk medium', in a process that mirrors the image of the net curtains trapping dust and memories at the window (Figure 6.20). Once the silk medium has dried, the outer nets can be peeled from the silk paper, which has become a firm translucent fabric.

The dust I use is collected from a home that remains uninhabited for much of the year. The first cleaning of the house each year is thus a process of collecting the decay of the home and its memories, untouched by human hand, throughout the year. This combination of dust and dirt is therefore the essence of the place itself, unsullied by the footprints of the living or quotidian dirt.

These curtains embody the theme of decay and disintegration that occurs as dysfunctional domesticity leads to the home becoming uncomfortable, uncanny, and ultimately a haunted house. They suggest the idea of the dust of the home gradually silting up the fabric of the curtain until it is no longer fluid, but becomes rigid and unbending, yet fragile to the touch, trapped by its memories and its past. They also

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6.19 Quarini, C. *Dust* (2015) detail of silk fibres laid out to make silk paper. Photo: C Quarini.

6.20 Quarini, C. *Dust* (2015) detail of silk paper being made showing layers of net being used. Photo: C Quarini.

have echoes of the domestic duality of sanctuary and prison encountered in Chapter 4, as the fine ethereal silk fabric of the curtains becomes trapped in the threads of silk, hardening them and rendering them stiff, unyielding and opaque. This leads to the stifled threads becoming brittle and finally disintegrating into a shadow curtain, mirroring the decay of the home into a haunted, uncanny, gothic house.

This chapter has shown that dysfunctional domesticity and inadequate guardianship of the boundaries of the home can lead to the house becoming unhomely and ultimately disintegrating into a haunted house. The haunted house is a place of dust, decay, memories and whispers and this chapter has shown how the net curtain becomes a silent witness in the uncanny gothic home, trapping the whispers and secrets in its folds.

This chapter has also seen the development of the net curtain from a blank canvas to which the trapped heroine attached her pins and needles and then her cries for help, to an entity of its own. In this chapter, the curtain has been acting independently, soaking up the messages it hears in the home. Whether this is an active or a passive process, and to what extent the curtain is sifting messages and recording them selectively is unclear.

As well as retaining whispers, the curtain has become clogged with the memories of the home. They have rendered it impermeable. These memories are actively stifling it, as they lie tightly bound within it, becoming part of the fabric of the home itself. The home is no longer a sanctuary, but a haunted house, heavy with the weight of memories. The following chapter will explore whether the curtains and the haunted house have indeed taken an active part in this process of disintegration and immurement or are simply, silent witnesses.

7 The complicit curtain

This chapter will reveal the net curtain becoming more than a silent witness or claustrophobic barrier, but developing a life of its own and taking on an anthropomorphic role in the uncanny gothic home. How the net curtain becomes complicit in the uncanny home is the final question of this research and reflects the culmination of the developmental journey begun when the net curtain became linked metonymically to the duality of home as sanctuary and prison.

The curtains encountered in Chapter 6 had trapped memories, whispers, secrets, dust and the essence of the home itself and were revealing what they had overheard in the home, sometimes benignly, at other times maliciously. In this chapter the curtain finally transforms, to become a complicit actor in the home's change from homely to unhomely. It is no longer a bystander, merely commenting on events, but has agency and takes an active part within the home. The practice will show the curtain leaving the restrictions of the curtain rail, enlarging and creeping through the home, as well as interacting with other curtains and the fabric of the house itself. In this chapter, the home itself transforms from a cobwebbed gothic place to a menacing uncanny site.

The net curtain becoming complicit in the development of the home as an uncanny site builds on Freud's description of the uncanny occurring when the inanimate appears to become animate (1919), and the extension of this theme of unhomeliness in the work of Anthony Vidler (1992). The idea of furniture becoming anthropomorphic develops from Freud's essay (1919) and has links to Victorian popular fiction and music hall.

The darkness that masks this activity in the home is a gothic trope, referenced in many mid-nineteenth-century novels, which also builds on Douglas's idea of the potentiality of disorder and formlessness. She notes 'Formlessness is also credited with powers, some dangerous, some good' (Douglas, 1966:118). In this chapter, the shifting form of the net curtain, lying in the margin of the home, is about to take up those powers.

7.1 Secret intrusion of terror

The definition of the uncanny being used in this research is Freud's (1919) idea of the homely becoming unhomely. However, Anthony Vidler in *The architectural uncanny* suggests that Freud felt unhomeliness meant more than not belonging, but extended to:

> 'the fundamental propensity of the familiar to turn on its owners, suddenly to become defamiliarized, derealized, as if in a dream' (Vidler, 1992:7).

Vidler continues by suggesting that the home is complicit in its change from homely to unhomely. He says that the house:

> 'pretends to afford the utmost security while opening itself to the secret intrusion of terror' (Vidler, 1992:11).

These two important themes, identified by Vidler, form the backbone to this chapter. The 'propensity of the familiar to turn on its owner' is considered in the light of Freud's discussion of the uncanny as the possibility of the inanimate becoming animate. The 'secret intrusion of terror' is linked to the idea of margins being liminal sites and allowing the ingress of 'the other'. In contrast to Vidler, I will reverse the order of these two points, considering first the intrusion of terror and then the specific case of the familiar turning on its owner.

A consideration of how the home opens itself 'to the secret intrusion of terror' suggests that this intrusion must occur through its margins. Mary Douglas tells us that 'all margins are dangerous' (1966:150) because they are the place where entities are at their most fluid and where they interact with other forms. Therefore, they are the point where boundaries are most permeable and open to outside influence. However, Douglas considers that margins are also sites of power and intensely creative, precisely because they are the place where rules are defined, tested and established (Douglas, 1966).

Douglas also notes that 'Danger lies in transitional states, simply because transition is neither one state nor the next, it is undefinable' (1966:119). The uncanny home, by its nature as a transition between the homely and unhomely, therefore harbours danger, and nowhere more so than at its margins. Ambiguous margins, such as those

of the uncanny home are also shifting and formless, neither homely nor unhomely, coterminously familiar and strange. Douglas also considers that disorder has potential. Although it destroys existing patterns 'its potential for patterning is indefinite' (Douglas, 1966:117). It therefore symbolises 'both danger and power' (1966:117) because it destroys the old but facilitates the new.

Douglas suggests that margins, transitional states and disorder generate power. I therefore suggest that the dysfunctional domesticity and inadequate guardianship of the home encountered in Chapter 6 foster disorder, leading to the generation of power. In this research, the energy and power generated in the margins of the home are taken up by the net curtain, lying in that liminal space, and used to animate it and allow it to become complicit in the uncanny home. The sections that follow will show the house and net curtain taking on the power that develops from disorder, and menacing the home owner with supressed violence.

As part of this process of the house becoming complicit in its unhomeliness, Vidler suggests that 'the familiar turns on its owner' (1992:7). One of Freud's many definitions of the uncanny, is the case where the inanimate appears to become animate. This is also a core definition for Jentsch (1906), whose work Freud was building on, and one I consider essential for the feeling of the uncanny. Freud illustrates the point by recounting a story from the *Strand Magazine* in which a table appears to take on the form of a crocodile and menace the owners:

> 'in the dark the tenants stumble over things and fancy they see something indefinable gliding over the stairs. In short, one is led to surmise that, owing to the presence of this table, the house is haunted by ghostly crocodiles or that the wooden monsters come to life in the dark, or something of that sort' (Freud, 1919:151).

Freud then comments in his own dismissive style 'It was quite a naïve story, but its effect was extraordinarily uncanny' (1919:151). It is uncanny because furniture is not expected to be animate or threatening or to turn on its owner.

In a direct link to Freud's reference to animate furniture, the Surrealists, and many contemporary artists, defamiliarise the home using menacing furniture or images of furniture. The unsettling 'beds' by Mona Hatoum and Rebecca Fairman, described in

Chapter 2, show that furniture does not have to be animate to cause disquiet. Breaching the boundary of normality in any way, for example by becoming oversized or threatening, is enough to suggest the familiar turning on its owner.

7.2 Animate furnishings

There is historical precedent for the idea of furnishings acting anthropomorphically. In the nineteenth century, the idea of the spirits of the dead remaining in contact with their loved ones led to an interest in séances and communing with the deceased. Curtis describes how this nineteenth-century interest in spiritualism:

> 'brought 'haunting' into the domestic environment and spirits into association with mundane household objects. Ghosts became closely associated with the animation of tables, chairs and cabinets' (2008:97).

Furniture and personal possessions were considered to retain some memory of their owners and in some cases to have agency. The social historian, Deborah Cohen, writing about the British middle class and their possessions from 1830 to 1930 notes that:

> 'the suspicion that domestic objects were not entirely under human control lingered well into the twentieth century … Second-hand furniture figured as the catalyst for many a ghost story and fairy tale, contributing a crucial point of connection between the supernatural and a world in which inanimate objects obeyed the rules. C S Lewis' wardrobe is just the best known of a host of magical articles of furniture' (Cohen, 2006:165).

As Cohen notes, this attribution of agency to objects continued beyond the nineteenth century. Alfred Gell writing in *Art and agency* (1998) notes that many people 'attribute intentions and awareness to objects like cars' (1998:17) and that '99 per cent of car owners attribute personality to their cars' (1998:19). Gell considers the role of agents, intentionality and agency and notes that his own concept of agency 'is relational and context-dependent, not classificatory and context-free' (1998:22). The anthropologist Tim Ingold considers that artefacts do not possess agency but 'are swept up in the generative currents of the world' (Ingold, 2011:213). He notes that:

> 'Bringing things to life, then, is a matter not of adding to them a sprinkling of agency but of restoring them to the generative fluxes of the world of materials in which they came into being and continue to subsist' (Ingold, 2011:29).

Much has been written about the concepts of agency and intentionality, and Ingold provides a useful summary (Ingold, 2011:213-214), however, the present research is concerned with fiction rather than anthropological distinctions so will assume the net curtain has agency, however it was achieved, for the narrative purposes of this study. Interestingly, Ingold would seem to endorse this approach that narrative is more important than attributes, when he notes that:

> 'the functions of things are not attributes but narratives. They are the stories we tell about them' (Ingold, 2011:56).

Patricia Pringle's 2010 paper entitled *Scampering sofas and 'skuttling' tables: the entertaining interior*, examines the attribution of personality and agency to spaces and furniture in Victorian entertainments. This anthropomorphism allowed objects to become performers in the drama of the interior, in the same way as the net curtains become commentators and actors in the domestic environment in the present research. Also in the present study, the net curtain is personified and given a voice, in a type of prosopopoeia; a form of expression used, for example, by the Anglo-Saxons, in which an inanimate or abstract object is personified and represented as being able to speak, to enable it to comment on the story. Pringle shows that during the nineteenth century:

> 'it became possible to conceive of the interior as a reflection of a relationship between objects and people – a fluid entity whose inanimate components and living occupants could be perceived as working on and with (and possibly against) each other' (Pringle, 2010:221).

Pringle suggests that this idea of the home and objects within it becoming animate developed in the nineteenth century and that this illustrates the ambivalent feeling engendered by the domestic interior 'even as it became central to the century's image of itself' (Pringle, 2010:221). Her study of fairy tales revealed that:

> 'Domestic objects with independent characters, or houses with minds of their own, appeared to be relatively new characters in the nineteenth century imagination, rather than part of a folk tradition from which a fairy tale had evolved' (Pringle, 2010:222).

Pringle's assertion that the animation of furniture was 'relatively new' in the nineteenth century seems to downplay the Anglo-Saxon use of prosopopoeia, but she certainly identifies a surge in Victorian literature and entertainment linked to the animation of furniture. One of the first examples of this type of anthropomorphism

of household objects is thought to be James Fenimore Cooper's *Autobiography of a pocket handkerchief* (1843), in which an embroidered handkerchief narrates the story of its life, from construction, through its time in revolutionary France, and then its life in America. Jessica Hemmings introducing the story in *The textile reader* notes that it allows Cooper to criticise French and American values obliquely (2012:99). In the same way, the gothic novel allowed writers to comment on the ideology of separate spheres, and the use of the net curtain allows the present research to comment on domesticity.

Another example of objects having agency, is Katherine Walker's 1864 short story *The total depravity of inanimate things,* in which she humorously suggests that pins and needles, among other household objects, have a life of their own:

> 'the similar tendency of pins and needles is universally understood and execrated, - their base secretiveness when searched for, and their incensing intrusion when one is off guard' (Walker, 1864:361).

The difference between Cooper's handkerchief and Walker's pins is that the handkerchief, although a narrator with views of its own, does not act maliciously, while the pins seem to have developed agency and turned on their owner.

Agency, however, is not limited to handkerchiefs and pins. Malignant wallpaper pervades Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The yellow wallpaper*. The heroine who is locked in a bare room, with no distractions, as a cure for post-natal depression, comes to fear the wallpaper and endows it with malicious intent. She begins to see a woman, who is later indicated to be her alter ego, hiding in the pattern of the paper. She says: 'This paper looks to me as if it *knew* what a vicious influence it had!' (Gilman, 1892:5), and later comments: 'I never saw so much expression in an inanimate thing before, and we all know how much expression they have!' (Gilman, 1892:5). She continues by describing her childhood game of endowing furniture with character. Finally, she comes to believe the wallpaper itself is imprisoning her within its pattern.

The exhibition, *The yellow wallpaper* (2012) at Danson House, Bexleyheath, was based on Gilman's story, and featured work by the artist Ligia Bouton, who uses furniture anthropomorphically. In *The adventures of William Morris man* (2012) she

combines images from comic books and animates Victorian furniture, in scenarios in which the superhero battles an army of furniture monstrosities. Some of the pieces of furniture appear to have come out of the page (they have left a cut out space behind them) and they use their legs to move like animals in the same way as a 'scampering sofa' might (Figure 7.1).

7.1 Bouton, L. Detail from *The adventures of William Morris man* (2012) showing animated furniture escaping from the page and fighting William Morris man. Size: 40 x 50 cm. Materials: paper. Photo: C Quarini.

Bouton's furniture is confined to images on the wall (at present anyway), but Carl Clerkin has produced an actual piece of anthropomorphic furniture in *Long crawly thing*, a 5 m long stool, which was exhibited in *The uncanny room* exhibition in 2002 (Figure 7.2). It has a sinuous form and numerous bowed legs, making it appear like an oversized centipede, which is just about to come to life, and it is similar in appearance to the cartoon images of furniture in Bouton's work.

7.2 Clerkin, C. *Long crawly thing* (2002). Size: 37 x 30 x 500 cm. Materials: wood, vinyl. Photo: Philip Sayer. (Image from Peters, T. and West, J. (eds.) *The uncanny room.* London: Luminous Books.)

I made a similar 'long crawly thing' by making a length of oversized bobbin lace out of domestic string stiffened with PVA glue. It is approximately 3 metres long and 15 centimetres wide. It appears to have escaped from the border of a gigantic net curtain. Forming part of a small installation entitled *Enlarging* (Figure 7.3), as part of *The fabric of memory* exhibition at The Crypt Gallery in 2013, the lace hung in front of an image of a similar scrap of conventional lace hanging from a nail in the wall. There is no indication where the lace has come from, but it appears to have been torn from some delicate furnishing. The design for the large lace is taken from that of the smaller piece, to suggest that one has developed from the other. Their juxtaposition accentuates the difference in size between them. Twisted and hanging in an animate way, the oversized lace appears menacing and snake-like, similar to Clerkin's *Long crawly thing*, just as if it is about to slither away to cause its owner harm.

7.3 Quarini, C. *Enlarging* (2013) Installation combining photographic image of a scrap of Bedfordshire lace photographed at Salts Mill (2012) and oversized lace edging of a similar piece of lace made of string and stiffened with PVA, exhibited at The Crypt Gallery, St Pancras, London (2013). Photograph size: 100 x 66 cm, printed on paper. Lace size: 450 x 20 cm; materials: string and PVA stiffening. Photo: C Quarini.

I extended this idea of the net curtain acting anthropomorphically and turning on its owner by photographing oversized curtains in the home. An example is *Creep* (Figure 7.4), a photographic image in which the curtain has become enlarged and taken on a life of its own, and is creeping down the stairs of the home in a menacing way. This led to the development of *Floored* (Figure 7.5), in which the net curtain has become oversized and crept into the room, overturning furniture by the force of its path. It appears to be turning against its owner and bent on destruction. Photographing large volumes of fabric for this series of practice proved difficult, as fine transparent fabric, by its nature, does not hold its shape well, and drapes like liquid. The problem was solved with these two images by using a dolls' house as the setting for the images.[66]

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[66] The dolls' house is, of course, another uncanny site, but not the focus of the present research.

7.4 Quarini, C. *Creep* (2009). Photograph on paper. Size: 42 x 30 cm. Photo: C Quarini.

7.5 Quarini, C. *Floored* (2010). Photograph on paper. Size: 30 x 42 cm. Photo: C Quarini.

I developed the idea of the curtain expanding in size and taking over the home in another installation, which took advantage of the fluidity of the voile fabric used to make net curtains. I staged an image of the net curtain appearing to seep out from the side of a closed door (Figure 7.6) and linked this to metres of fabric appearing to flow from the wall of a gallery onto the floor and through the walls (Figure 7.7). The image shows that the door is unable to restrain the net curtain, but the evidence in the gallery of the fabric seeping out of the walls reveals that they are also incapable of retaining the momentum of the net curtain on the move. It has become an unstoppable force with its own menacing agenda.

7.6 Quarini, C. *Exuding* (2012). Photograph on paper. Size: 100 x 66 cm. Photo: Steve Smith.

7.7 Quarini, C. The installation *Exuding* (2013) shown at The Crypt Gallery, St Pancras, London, comprised the photographic image shown above and fabric appearing to seep out of the gallery walls. Photo: C Quarini.

Using outsized images and quantities of fabric in this way, unsettles ideas about the security to be found in the home. Mona Hatoum is an artist who uses outsized furnishings to defamiliarise the domestic, by changing the viewer's frame of reference, and thus unsettling them. In these outsized pieces the familiar becomes strange, referencing Freud's definition of the uncanny, and in many cases, it also becomes menacing, referencing Vidler's idea of the familiar turning on its owner.

The net curtains described above suggest that the furnishings are animate and have a force of their own. They may appear soft and comforting, but like a torrent of water can sweep all before them. In their power to fill and choke the home they reference Rachel Whiteread's *House* (1993) and Doris Salcedo's claustrophobic furniture, in particular, her glass fronted cupboards filled with concrete 'in which crumpled shirts are just discernible, pressed against the panes like bodies piling up behind windows that are stuck fast' (Salcedo, 2000:77).

As well as enlarging the net curtain and recording it menacing the home, I also use it to comment on, and take part in, the uncanny, gothic narrative. *I never laid a finger on her* (Figure 7.8) is one of the series of eight handmade net curtains, with tambour lace text applied to them, encountered in Chapter 6 as part of the *Whisperings* series. In that chapter it was acting as a silent witness in the home but now it speaks for itself. The text suggests that the curtain is claiming it is innocent of the charges being laid against it. However, the words indicate that not only does it have a life of its own, it also has a guilty conscience, and a secret to hide. It suggests some harm has befallen 'her' and that the curtain is in some way responsible. The curtain certainly could not have laid a finger on her as it has no fingers, but is it being disingenuous and playing with words? The oversized curtains in Figures 7.5 and 7.6 could have suffocated her or swept her away; no fingers would have been required for either crime. Alternatively, the curtain could be completely innocent.

7.8 Quarini, C. *I never laid a finger on her* (2009). Size: 60 x 50 cm. Materials: silk organza with cotton tambour lace. Photo: C Quarini.

I used this net curtain and two others from the series (*I can see through you* and *Appearances can be deceptive*) in an installation at Salts Mill as part of the *Cloth and memory* exhibition in 2012 (Figure 7.9). The three phrases could be used to describe any net curtain; none of them have fingers; they can be seen through; and they mask appearances. But here the curtains seem to be discussing a situation, suggesting that they have agency and are playing an active role in the events of the room. They have developed from silent witnesses, soaking up the atmosphere of the haunted house, into animate furnishings with agency in the complicit uncanny house.

7.9 Quarini, C. *Whisperings* at Salts Mill (2012) including *I never laid a finger on her, I can see through you* and *Appearances can be deceptive.* Size: 60 x 50 cm (each). Materials: silk organza with cotton tambour lace. Photo: C Quarini.

Photographic images of the net curtains in sites within Salts Mill, seem to confirm their guilt. The curtains are seen trying to hide the evidence *I never laid a finger on her – proclaiming innocence or concealing guilt?* (Figure 7.10), obscuring the view *I can see through you – obscuring the view* (Figure 7.11) and showing that appearances can be deceptive *Appearances can be deceptive – sanctuary or prison?* (Figures 7.12).

7.10 Quarini, C. *I never laid a finger on her – proclaiming innocence or concealing guilt?* (2012). Photographic image showing broken window with *I never laid a finger on her* at Salts Mill. Size: 100 x 66 cm printed on aluminium. Photo: Steve Smith.

In *I never laid a finger on her – proclaiming innocence or concealing guilt?* The curtain lies quite still behind a broken window. The force of the break should have marked the curtain, torn it, swept it aside, sullied it in some way, but it remains in its pristine state at the window, suggesting it is covering something up, and that the scene has been recreated to hide the evidence.

7.11 Quarini, C. *I can see through you – obscuring the view* (2012). Photographic image showing broken window with *I can see through you* at Salts Mill. Size: 100 x 66 cm printed on aluminium. Photo: Steve Smith.

I can see through you – obscuring the view is covering another broken windowpane. This time the viewer sees a close up image of the window and curtain. Something is preventing them seeing the whole view; they are only being allowed a restricted glimpse of the situation. The camera's focus on the curtain also renders the view opaque, therefore rather than seeing through the curtain, as its title suggests, this curtain is clearly obscuring the view for some reason.

7.12 Quarini, C. *Appearances can be deceptive – sanctuary or prison?* (2012). Photographic image showing broken window with tally marks and curtain. Size: 100 x 66 cm printed on aluminium. Photo: Steve Smith.

Appearances can be deceptive – sanctuary or prison? depicts a plain curtain caught on the jagged edge of a broken windowpane. This image references the pins and needle tally marks the trapped seamstress used in Chapter 4 and which pierced the large curtains in the Salts Mill installation, where these curtains were exhibited. In this image, appearances are deceptive because the tally marks appear to have moved from the curtain onto the glass of the window itself, casting into doubt the previous images of the clear windows and the pierced curtains.

These three images, and the curtains with tambour lace that they reference, show the curtains conniving to conceal a crime. The implication is that they have independently, or in concert, done away with their mistress and are now acting together to conceal the evidence. They appear to have become animate and complicit

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in the home's change from homely to unhomely, but ambiguity remains, as the curtains themselves tell us that 'appearances are deceptive'.

7.3 Darkness

Darkness is a gothic trope that helps to obfuscate meaning and memory and has the potential to aid complicity in the home. The tale Freud recounts of the table that metamorphoses into a crocodile takes place in the dark (1919:151). Darkness suggests ambiguity and uncertainty and allows the reader to consider how a table might be mistaken for a crocodile in the dark, or even how the power of darkness might allow a table to become an animal. If the events had taken place in broad daylight the facts would have been less open to possible interpretations and therefore less uncanny. Dani Cavallero writing in *The gothic vision: Three centuries of horror, terror and fear,* suggests that 'darkness is simultaneously obfuscating and illuminating' (2002:25) and that 'the darkest times are often disorientingly crepuscular rather than pitch black' (Cavallero, 2002:21).

Such a moment occurs when Walter Hartright first meets Laura Catherick in *The woman in white* just after midnight on the road to London. The darkness is obfuscating because it prevents Walter seeing her until he is close to her: 'I was … seriously startled by the suddenness with which this extraordinary apparition stood before me, in the dead of night and in that lonely place …' (Collins, 1859-1860:47). However it is partially illuminating as he notes 'All I could discern distinctly by the moonlight was a colourless, youthful face' (Collins, 1859-1860:48).

Darkness also suggests shifting shapes and formlessness. Places where phantoms can hide or reconfigure. It recalls the disorder and formlessness discussed by Mary Douglas, which she suggests is a symbol of beginning and creativity (1966:197). Jane Eyre, like many creative children, conjures ghosts out of the darkness when she is imprisoned in the red room at the beginning of the novel. A beam of light gleaming into the darkness of the room in which her uncle died, terrifies her, and sets off a chain of events in which she hears a sound like the 'rushing of wings' and feels something ghostly near her (Brontë, 1847:49). In contrast, when Pip first visits Miss Havisham in *Great expectations* he spends so long in her candle-lit room and in the dark passageways of her house that when he emerges into the courtyard again, he

says: "The rush of the daylight quite confounded me" (Dickens, 1860-1861: Kindle Loc 932).

Cavallero suggests that 'Light only hides darkness' (2002:21), implying that darkness and its ambiguities continually surround us, and are merely masked by the light of day. This idea of the potential of darkness to illuminate and to reveal or conceal the secrets of the home, led me to produce an installation entitled *The dark room*. It comprises three net curtains with lace trims (Figure 7.13) overlaid with embroidered words in luminescent thread (Figure 7.14). The thread is white and is therefore hidden within the pattern of the white lace (Figure 7.15). However, when the luminescent thread has absorbed light, it shines with a greenish glow; this light is subtle and is only revealed in the dark. In daylight, the curtains appear to be conventional lace curtains, but when darkness falls they reveal their messages in an appropriately eerie, gothic fashion. The curtains say: *What does the darkness conceal?*, *What does the darkness reveal?* and *Darkness reveals more than it conceals* (Figure 7.16). They link the themes of cleanliness and light discussed in Chapter 3, with the dust and darkness of the dysfunctional home in Chapter 6. However, in this case, as Cavallero suggests, the light obscures the message and in darkness the hidden comes to light.

7.13 Quarini, C. *The dark room* (2013). Detail showing part of the lace trim on one of the curtains. The work comprises three curtains (60 x 90 cm), with bobbin lace and couched threads forming the lettering, and a DVD. Materials: nylon, cotton bobbin lace, luminescent thread embroidery. Photo: C Quarini.

7.14 Quarini, C. *The dark room* (2013). Detail showing part of the lace trim on one of the curtains revealing the luminescent text. Size: 60 x 90 cm. Materials: nylon, cotton bobbin lace, luminescent thread embroidery. Photo: Steve Smith.

7.15 Quarini, C. Embroidering the text over the lace for *The dark room* (2013). Materials: nylon, cotton bobbin lace, luminescent thread embroidery. Photo: C Quarini.

7.16 Quarini, C. *The dark room* (2013). Detail showing the luminescent lettering on one curtain which reads 'Darkness reveals more than it conceals'. This appears as an image on the DVD and can be seen on the curtain when the light is extinguished. Size: 60 x 90 cm. Materials: nylon, cotton bobbin lace, luminescent thread embroidery. Photo: Steve Smith.

The dark room is linked to a DVD entitled *The darkness* composed of time lapse photographic images that show *Darkness reveals more than it conceals* hanging in daylight at a window next to a chair and occasional table (Figure 7.17). As the sequence progresses, the images pan into the lace trim on the curtain, then darkness falls and the message on the lace is revealed (Figure 7.18). The images then pan out from the lace back into the room to reveal that the table has been overturned and the contents spilt and thrown on to the floor (Figure 7.19). The darkness has clearly revealed something, but it is unclear whether the viewer is seeing the evidence of domestic violence, a simple accident, or the uncanny house at work.

This work resonates with Mike Nelson's installation *To the memory of H P Lovecraft*, shown at the *Psycho buildings* exhibition at the Hayward Gallery in 2008. In that work, the empty space of the gallery was smashed up, with what appeared to be claw marks on the walls, and broken, gaping holes round the room, suggesting a trapped beast had forced its way out of the space and escaped. In this unsettling, yet witty, installation, the viewer was provided with the evidence, but had to work out the narrative, all the while unsure whether the 'thing' might return. In the same way, but more subtly, as reflects its domestic origins, *The darkness* provides the evidence, but leaves the audience to unravel the narrative, and consider that, in this case, darkness has proved more illuminating than light.

7.17 Quarini, C. *The dark room* (2013). Detail showing the first image of the DVD with the net curtain hanging at the window in a room setting. Photo: C Quarini.

7.18 Quarini, C. *The dark room* (2013). Detail from the DVD showing an image of the net curtain trim before the luminescent text is revealed. Photo: C Quarini.

7.19 Quarini, C. *The dark room* (2013) Detail of the DVD showing one of the final images revealing a fallen table and spilt red wine. Photo: C Quarini.

The net curtain is an appropriate medium for this message of the duality of light and dark because it occupies an ambiguous site; it never completely blocks the light or allows it in; it never completely conceals or reveals. It lies in the liminal, crepuscular space between the home and not home, between the light and the dark. It is not a fixed barrier; nothing is certain. It can be a light fluid airy textile that can be brushed aside to reveal all, or it can entrap dust and memories within its folds, making it dark, dirty and depressing. Seen from outside the home, the net curtain hides the contents of the home during the day, but, at night, light inside the home reveals all.

When the net curtain is drawn across the window it denies the outside gaze, but its presence suggests that something has been concealed. The viewer looks within to find the secret, little thinking that the answer may be found hidden in plain sight, like the messages and QR codes applied to the net curtains in Chapter 5. Mike Kelley, writing in the catalogue for *The uncanny*, an exhibition of his work at Tate Liverpool in 2004, states that:

> 'The uncanny is concerned with what is concealed: this can mean either out of sight, hidden or locked away, or out in the open yet invisible to us because of darkness or some psychological inhibition' (Kelley, 2004:57).

The net curtains in the *Darkness* series conceal their message in plain view across their lace trim. However, they cannot be seen in the plain light of day because the lace pattern hides them, and it is only in the darkness that the messages are revealed.

7.4 The complicit house

Darkness does not only refer to a lack of light, in a metaphorical sense it also 'denotes the forbidden' (Cavallero, 2002:27). Chapter 3 revealed that dark homes hide dust and disease (Carter, 1883:386), but they also hide 'unutterable secrets and crimes' (Cavallero, 2002:27). Many of these secrets have already been revealed by the net curtain in its role as silent witness and through coded communication, but in the complicit house the net curtain and the fabric of the home collude to hide the sinister secrets of the uncanny home.

Chapter 3 showed that women became conflated with their homes in nineteenth-century domestic culture (de Wolfe, 1914; Gordon, 1996) and in much contemporary

literature. For example, in a study of three authors,[67] Margo Scribner (1980) shows how the physical state of the house mirrors the spiritual state of the fictional characters, so that morally sick people are shown to inhabit decaying houses, in such a way that the house projects or represents the character's mind.

Vidler (1992) reinforces the idea that architecturally, the family and the home, became synonymous, and that the repressed fears and secrets of the family became part of the fabric and structure of the house. The example he gives is Edgar Allen Poe's iconic 1839 story of *The fall of the house of Usher* (2004) in which the fabric of the decaying house violently collapses as the last two members of the Usher family die dramatically within it (Poe, 2004:184). Madeline Usher, having clawed her way out of the tomb in which she has been buried alive, falls on her terrified brother, and they both die as a storm rages and the physical house of Usher is reduced to fragments around the last living members of the family line of Usher. Vidler notes that the house of Usher was:

> 'a repository of centuries of memory and tradition, embodied in its walls and objects; the walls were marked by the 'discoloration of ages' and crumbling stones' (Vidler, 1992:18).

I used this idea of the decaying home immuring the inhabitants in the installation *Marking time* that I produced at Salts Mill in 2012, which was described in Chapter 4. The vast windows of that space appeared to be insidiously closing in, immuring the inhabitant of the room, as the fabric of the net curtains turned to stone and the pins and needles metamorphosed into chalk marks. In that work, the memories of the seamstress became embedded in the petrified walls, as her thoughts and fears formed the fabric of the room.

Although the house can represent, and be constructed of, the thoughts of its owner, the uncanny house can be deceptive. Barry Curtis, writing about windows in the haunted house says that they 'can alternate between apparent transparency and a troubling sense of opening onto another reality' (Curtis, 2008:103). I used a similar idea in a collaborative project using augmented reality technology.[68] In this

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[67] Charles Dickens, Henry James and Nathaniel Hawthorne.
[68] This work in progress is being developed with the technical assistance of Marie-Therese Gramstadt. The outcome will be practice based.

technique, a material artefact is linked digitally to an image revealed on an i-pad or smart phone. Thus, when the smart phone is poised over the artefact, the image that appears on the screen is not that of the artefact, but an associated image. This technology has been developed for use in museums to reveal more information about exhibits, but I am exploiting it to suggest a narrative or sequence of events.

The story I wanted to disclose was one of hidden repression and violence in the unhomely home, suggesting the net curtain had been complicit in the narrative. I envisaged linking a torn net curtain with a photographic image of the curtain at a window, appearing to be holding or resting on a knife (Figure 7.20).

7.20 Quarini, C. Photographic image of curtain with knife (2013). Image linked to the augmented reality net curtain. Photo: C Quarini.

The implication was that the knife had been used to slash the curtain, or that the curtain had used the knife for some purpose and been injured in the attack. However, for the augmented reality technology to be effective, the artefact has to be distinctive and clear enough for the smart phone to identify it, much in the same way as the QR codes used in Chapter 5. I tried using tears in the curtain, but the torn edges of the

fabric were not sharp and distinctive enough for the smart phone to recognise them. I therefore produced a curtain with an obviously repaired tear (Figure 7.21) and the stitches on the tear were found to provide a suitable trigger. In this work, which is still under development, I am trying to reveal the thoughts and anxieties from which the house is constructed in a practice form.
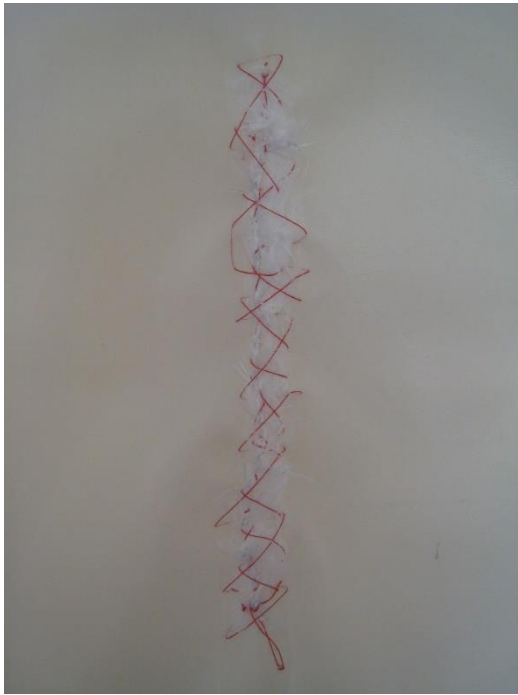

7.21 Quarini, C. Curtain showing the repaired tear (2013), which is used as the trigger for the augmented reality image linked to the curtain. Photo: C Quarini.

In Chapter 6, the net curtain recorded whispers and memories, both spoken and unspoken, in its role as silent witness in the home. However, interiors also retain memories. Curtis notes that there is a 'sense of congealed lives embedded in the ornament and décor' of the haunted house (2008:39), in an extension of his observation that 'objects and places can retain the memory of traumatic events' (2008:35). He links these memories embedded in the house to the gothic trope in which words appear out of walls or on mirrors (Curtis, 2008:105). I used the idea of words appearing and disappearing in the virtual sampler discussed in Chapter 5, but there they were used to reveal the unquiet voice of the trapped seamstress. In this chapter, the house itself is becoming complicit in the workings of the uncanny home, and rather than merely recording what it has heard it is 'spinning' the story to reveal secrets.

This idea of the fabric of the home revealing hidden secrets led me to produce *Revelation*, a small installation in which the net curtain and the home both appear to have agency and be complicit. In this scenario, the net curtain *I never laid a finger on her* is combined with words projected on to the wall. The words appear to seep out of the wall, as if they are the thoughts of the house, commenting on what it has witnessed in the home. The words on the curtain suggest that the curtain has agency and is protesting its innocence; but, as we have seen, those words are ambiguous.

The words seeping out of the wall certainly suggest that the curtain is not an innocent party. I wrote the words to form a poetic phrase that suggested the light airy nature of the net curtain as a transparent boundary to the home, in the style of a Victorian homily, but one that contained a deeper meaning. Each word is used in the subtexts, but only once, so that the three lines of revealed text fit together like a jigsaw puzzle. The three revealed phrases all refer to properties of the net curtain. The full text is shown in Figure 7.22.
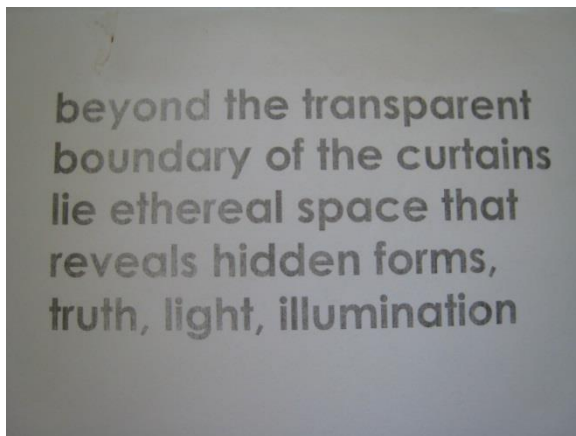
7.22 Quarini, C. *Revelation* (2010). The full text reads 'beyond the transparent boundary of the curtains lie ethereal space that reveals forms, truth, light, illumination'. Image produced using text in the Illustrator program. Photo: C Quarini.
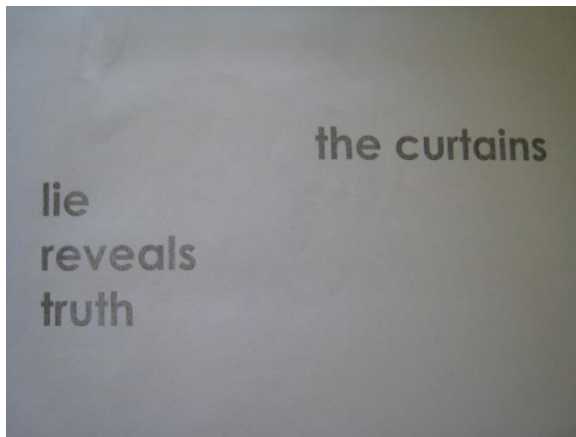
But the words fade in and out to reveal the three phrases the text is composed of:

'beyond the ethereal space that forms light'

'transparent boundary of hidden illumination'

and most revealingly

'the curtains lie reveals truth' (Figure 7.23).

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7.23 Quarini, C. Detail of *Revelation* (2010). Some of the text has disappeared to reveal the words 'the curtains lie reveals truth'. Image produced using the Illustrator program. Photo: C Quarini.

The curtain clearly does not have fingers it could have laid on anyone, but the phrase 'the curtains lie reveals truth' emanating from the wall suggests that it has metaphorically laid a finger on 'her'. Once again, there is no indication who 'she' is and what has happened to her. The curtain seems to have been complicit in the narrative, the intention is to leave the viewer wondering whether the home is revealing the truth or whether it was complicit in the crime and is now trying to implicate the curtain.

This chapter has shown how the net curtain can be complicit in the development of the uncanny home. It has turned on its owner and has colluded with the house to allow 'the secret intrusion of terror'. The net curtain has developed from a silent witness in the home to one that has uncanny agency and has taken on a life of its own. It has used the power generated by dysfunctional domesticity and disorder to become a dangerous margin. In this process it has become oversized and swept through the home on a menacing path, using darkness to cover its tracks. However, not only does it have brute force it is also cunning and has allies, and appears to be hiding a dark secret. The curtain has metamorphosed from its role as gothic domestic veil to become a complicit agent in the uncanny home.

8 Conclusion

This practice-based research has questioned how the net curtain can be used to consider aspects of the domestic by viewing them through the lenses of the uncanny and the gothic. Specifically it asked: how the net curtain could be used to represent the duality of sanctuary and prison in the home; how it could provide the trapped woman's only voice; how it could act as silent witness in the home; and how it could become a complicit actor in the uncanny gothic home? It has addressed the lack of fine art textile responses to the study of the uncanny and the gothic in the home by exploring the creative potential of the net curtain, positioned as it is on the boundary between home and not-home, and redolent as it is of domestic secrets and disquieting memories. The aim was to produce practice-based research, through a theoretical enquiry, and the outcome is a written thesis and a body of practice, which together explore these questions, using both text and stitch.

8.1 Reflections on the research

The net curtain as a boundary in the home proved to be an appropriate textile with which to reconsider the uncanny, the gothic and the domestic, which are all concerned with boundaries and their unstable, permeable nature. Its liminal nature references Freud's shifting boundary between the homely and the unhomely, and as a domestic boundary it embodies the gothic tropes of claustrophobia, confinement, and defamiliarisation, which link the themes of the research.

In the practice produced for this research, the net curtain reflected the intellectual uncertainty and ambiguity that permeate the uncanny and the gothic. Intellectually we know the net curtain cannot have agency, but this research introduced uncertainty. The messages the net curtain revealed were ambiguous, had double meanings and could be misunderstood. The net curtain also materialised Freud's idea of the familiar becoming strange by misbehaving as a domestic textile. Furnishings are not expected to have agency, attitude or opinions, and by expressing all three, the net curtain revealed itself to be strange rather than cosily familiar. It also beguiled by appearing aesthetically attractive, light and airy. Its white, pristine appearance suggested innocence and harmlessness. Like the sensation novel, the net curtain

appears to speak of domestic settings and safe suburbia, while generating illicit excitement by revealing what lies beneath.

The knowledge that Victorian women understood the language of textiles equally well as the language of writing (Kortsch, 2009), validated the use of stitch and text in the present research. Many nineteenth-century novels used references to needlework to forward the plot and my practice continued that process by using stitching to produce narrative. The conflation of women and their homes, and its use in fiction, reinforced the metonymous use of the net curtain to represent both. The gothic heroine's use of subversion (Massé, 1992:250) to defy her predicament also justified the use of subversive stitching (Parker, 1984) to critique domesticity, in the same way as novelists used their fiction to do so.

Interdisciplinary research into the uncanny, the gothic and the domestic in the mid-nineteenth century, explored the connections between them and proved a fertile area for generating practice. The research was extensive and involved the use of many primary and secondary sources as well as visits to exhibitions to contextualise the practice within contemporary fine art textiles. Focus on the core subjects was maintained by regular reviews of the research. Using mid-nineteenth-century gothic novels as a link between the main themes of the research provided a contemporary view of Victorian concerns, filtered through fiction. From a wealth of gothic novels, choosing six on which to concentrate was difficult, but those chosen each represented one or more of the main gothic tropes referenced. The narrative structure of the gothic novel also suggested the framework of the research, as a journey recounting the development of the net curtain from innocent furnishing to complicit actor. I found this narrative framework extremely productive for practice and theory, as it led to new insights and avenues of exploration.

The journey of the net curtain began in Chapter 3, with a discussion of transparent boundaries in the home, including the material boundary of the net curtain, but also those of cleanliness, morality and integrity, and the consequences if they are breached. Chapter 4 considered the ideology of separate spheres and the idea of home, and how some gothic novels critiqued them. It showed how the net curtain, as a domestic veil, could be used to embody sanctuary and prison in the home, in

combination with metonymous pins, needles and thread. The pins were used to pierce the cosy domestic net curtain with prisoners' tally marks and through installations the net curtain was seen to adorn the home, but also contain it.

Chapter 5 explored how the net curtain developed from barrier at the window to provide the trapped woman's only voice. It did this by becoming a canvas for the subversive stitching and coded, stitched communication of the trapped heroine, assuming that she had nothing but her needle with which to express herself. In Chapter 6, the curtain became more than a blank canvas on which the heroine stitched her thoughts. It became a silent witness in the home by recording what it had seen and overheard in the form of stitched text, and by the accumulation of dust. Through dysfunctional domesticity the home also progressed from a place of unquiet to an uncanny house; haunted by whispers, dust and disintegration.

Chapter 7 revealed the culmination of the net curtain's journey from barrier, surface, and silent witness, to explore how it could become complicit in the actions of the uncanny gothic home. It did this by developing power from the disorder of the domestic, and becoming animate, following Victorian precedent. By developing agency, and acting under cover of darkness, it became complicit with the haunted house. It grew in size and snaked its way through the house on a menacing path to take control of the uncanny gothic home.

I began this research aiming to produce a social history of the net curtain as well as practice through a theoretical enquiry. I soon realised that the history was an enormous research study of its own; one that I will continue and hope to publish in book form at a later date. However, it has informed the present study and an annotated list of research sources is given in Appendix III. There is no definitive history of the net curtain in Britain in the nineteenth century and although I have carried out research as a textile practitioner rather than as a historian, this preliminary research will form the basis for future personal research and may be useful to social historians and textile researchers.

Developing the research methodology was instructive, and a more formal process than any I have used before. It proved useful in encouraging reflection and

developing ideas, and has left me with a reservoir of information from which to draw when writing for publications, as well as a repository of practice ideas. Presenting conference papers and taking part in symposia also focused my ideas, and through discussion with peers and experts has brought new insights. The dissemination of the research has required the development of new skills, including writing for publication and reviewing exhibitions and books, curating an international exhibition and several minor ones, and teaching lacemaking to undergraduates. All of these have allowed reflection and personal development.

8.2 Original contribution to knowledge

The most significant contribution to knowledge made by this research has come from its interdisciplinary practice-based approach. Bringing together the three research areas of the uncanny, the gothic, and the domestic, has highlighted the links between them, and using a practice-based methodology to develop fine art textile work from these links has expressed them materially, and emphasised the role of stitching in meaning making.

This interdisciplinary practice-based approach contrasts with the more traditional areas of research in the fields I cover, for example much work on the uncanny lies within cultural studies with links to psychoanalysis; most gothic research is concerned with literary criticism; and much work on nineteenth-century domesticity is located within social history. My approach covered several wide fields of research, but focused on a point where they overlap in the nineteenth century, to comment on the uncanny gothic home, using the net curtain. Few researchers concentrate on this small area of overlap and therefore this work represents an under-researched area. By studying material culture linked to the uncanny and the gothic in the domestic environment, and considering sources derived from art theory, social history, gothic novels and contemporary fine art, it also approached the subject in a novel way.

Practice-based methodology results in different insights compared with traditional text-based approaches; for example, this 'embodied vision' (Barrett, 2007:145) allows parallels to be alluded to between lives in the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries. I hope that my 'mode of revealing' (Bolt, 2007) will aid the audience's 'consciousness of seeing', and perhaps result in the type of insights into the past

referred to by Renfrew (2003) in reference to fine art and archaeology. In the same way that Royle (2003) suggests that Freud provides a new way of thinking about and analysing everyday life in the light of the uncanny, I hope this practice-based research has provided a new way of thinking about the domestic and its links to the uncanny and the gothic.

Practice-based methodology allows research to be experienced materially and it is hoped that this approach will encourage 'knowledge transfer of mutual benefit between the worlds of practice and research' (Gray and Malins, 2004:105). The present research also has the potential to bring knowledge transfer to the world of practice. Its interdisciplinary nature extends from the three main research areas to encompass interdisciplinary practice outcomes. By linking stitching with media such as QR coding and stop frame animation, it opens up interdisciplinary areas of practice between traditional stitching and new digital media.

As well as the interdisciplinary insights, this work builds on existing research into the uncanny, in particular Freud's 1919 essay and the aspects of it dealing with the homely becoming unhomely, as well as his references to gothic literature. I interpret Freud's discourse on the uncanny in a specifically domestic material form. My research makes new connections between the uncanny animation of furniture, discussed by Freud (1919) and Pringle (2010), to develop textile practice using the net curtain, and it specifically builds on the work of Vidler (1992), rendering material his ideas of the home becoming complicit in its change into unhomeliness.

This study extends existing research into the gothic by opening up a new field linking the gothic to fine art textiles and domesticity. In particular, it redresses the lack of fine art textile research into the gothic identified by Catherine Spooner and others (Spooner and McEvoy, 2007:2). Gothic studies is a thriving and developing field, and my work tackles an under-researched area by materialising the gothic through an understanding of the uncanny and the domestic. Specifically, I have combined studies of gothic literature with material culture, both by considering references to stitching in gothic novels, but also by contextualising the work within contemporary fine art practice. These links could be of interest to students of the gothic, literary critics and stitch historians, in particular to those considering the use

of stitching in meaning making. Encouragingly, two recent exhibitions and conferences about the gothic (*Terror and wonder* at the British Library in December 2014, and *Gothic in Birmingham* at Birmingham Library in May 2015) included alternative readings of the gothic using art, architecture and music. Although none used textile practice, my work has a place in this new approach to the gothic.

Regarding domesticity, this research adds to the body of contemporary fine art textile practice referencing the domestic, seen, for example, in recent exhibitions, such as *Walls are talking* (2010). **Materialising this research makes manifest the experiences of domestic confinement and claustrophobia, for example, in a way that text alone cannot.** Exploring the three main research areas through the medium of stitched domestic textiles highlights the uncanny nature of domestic subversion and the links between gothic novels and social history.

The use, in this research, of stitching and crafts to address domestic issues, adds to an established body of practice. In particular it extends theoretical research and practice outcomes in the current discourse on subversive stitching (Parker, 1984), recently considered at the *Subversive stitch revisited* conference (2013). However, my use of lace in this context is unusual. Although the contextual review described some lace-based textile responses to the themes I cover, most of these works merely reference lace, for example by using images of lace, rather than actually using traditional lacemaking techniques to produce practice as I do. My use of lacemaking techniques and ability to design lace patterns are rare in contemporary practice. I hope this research will help to develop an interest in lace practice and a wider interest in lace and lacemaking. To expedite this, I co-founded the Lace Research Network at UCA Farnham in 2014, as a centre for the study of lace (see Section 8.4).

8.3 Dissemination

The research has already generated work for several exhibitions and a final exhibition of the complete body of work is planned for September 2015 at The Crypt Gallery, St Pancras, London. The exhibitions in which the individual pieces have been exhibited have been discussed in the text but include: *Cloth and memory* at Salts Mill (2012); *Be our guest* at Oriel Davies Gallery (2013); *The fabric of memory* at The Crypt Gallery, London (2013); *Lace effects 2* at Calais Museum (2014);

Digital encounters at the Herbert Read Gallery, Canterbury (2014); and *Imagine* at Waddesdon Manor (2014).

Aspects of the research have also been disseminated through conferences, seminars and talks. In particular at the *Concept and context in practice* conference, Farnham (2011); *Cloth and memory* seminar, Salts Mill (2012); *Time-place-space* conference, Farnham (2013); UCA staff conference, London (2013); *Lace and the museum* seminar, Edinburgh (2014); *Lace: the transgressive thread* conference, Farnham (2014); *Digital encounters* symposium, Canterbury (2014). I also wrote a conference review of *Lace: the transgressive thread* for *Textile History* (Quarini, 2014c) and an overview of the aims of the Lace Research Network for *Lace* (Quarini, 2014a).

The research has also been disseminated through publications including a chapter in *Lost in lace* (Quarini, 2011) and articles in the journals *Lace* (Quarini, 2010, 2012) and *Workbox* (Quarini, 2015b). A paper is in press for a special issue of *The Journal of Modern Craft* (Quarini, in press) for which I am also the Guest Editor.

As part of the wider dissemination of lace, I was also asked to review Piper Shepard's exhibition for *Selvedge* (Quarini, 2014b), and the book *Lace:here:now* for *Textile History* (Quarini, 2015a).

As well as these formal modes of dissemination I also maintain a website (www.carolquarini.com) and write a regular blog (www.lacethread.blogspot.co.uk) in which I discuss my practice. These informal methods of dissemination as well as the exhibitions, allow the work to be widely disseminated beyond the confines of the research community.

8.4 Further research

I plan to continue my research into the development and history of the net curtain in the nineteenth century using written sources and lace archives. I have already visited the Nottingham Trent University Lace Archive and that at Newstead Abbey with a view to carrying out further research.

It would also be encouraging to see more research into lace in general. In an effort to foster that research area, I co-founded the Lace Research Network (LRN) at UCA Farnham, as a centre for research into lace, encompassing theoretical and practice research. The inaugural conference of the LRN was held in May 2014 with an associated exhibition of the work of the international artist Piper Shepard at the Craft Study Centre, Farnham. Following the conference I was approached by the Editor of *The Journal of Modern Craft* suggesting a special issue of the journal focusing on lace. I am the Guest Editor for the issue and have already commissioned and submitted the papers for it.

I hope my work provides a stimulus for further research, particularly by researchers in the gothic and in subversive stitching, both in theory and in practice. I have already extended my own research in the domestic uncanny to consider other furnishings and my paper for *The Journal of Modern Craft* discusses both the net curtain and lace doilies as uncanny artefacts (Quarini, in press).

Regarding practice, I have recently worked with subversive stitching and text at Jane Austen House in response to her unfinished manuscript *The Watsons* and her ambivalent views on marriage. The outcome was a stitched veil, exhibited at the House in December 2014. I have submitted a proposal to Haworth Parsonage to carry out similar research into the stitched articles made by the Brontë sisters. I propose responding to these artefacts in conjunction with the Brontë novels to produce a subversive stitching outcome.

8.5 The last word

Subversive stitching and fabrics have pervaded this research. The net curtain, as a domestic veil, has shed an enigmatic light on the uncanny and the gothic, as befits its revealing and concealing properties. At the start of this research, it beguiled us to follow it into the uncanny gothic house. It has revealed some of its secrets, but many others remain hidden behind the veil. It strokes our cheek lightly as we peer from an upper window; caressing and enveloping us in its soft, angelic folds. Appearances can be uncannily deceptive.

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Be our guest (2013) Oriel Davies Gallery, Newtown, Wales

Cloth and memory (2012) Salts Mill, Saltaire, Bradford

Concept & context in practice (2011) James Hockey Gallery, Farnham

Deviants (2009) Worcester Art Gallery, Worcester

Digital encounters (2014) Herbert Read Gallery, Canterbury

Disobedient objects (2014-2015) Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Home sweet home (2009) Hub Gallery, Sleaford

Imagine (2014) Waddesdon Manor, Buckinghamshire

interLACE (2013) Thelma Hulbert Gallery, Honiton, Devon

Lace effects 2 (2014) Calais Museum, France

Lost, found, imagined (2007) Various sites, London

Out of the ordinary (2009) Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Power of making (2011) Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Psycho buildings (2008) Hayward Gallery, London

Secret Victorians. Contemporary artists and a 19th-century vision (1998) Hayward Gallery, London

Subversive spaces (2009) The Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester

Surreal house (2010) Barbican, London

Susan Hiller (2011) Tate Britain, London

Terror and wonder: the gothic imagination (2014) British Library, London

The dangers of knitting and sewing (2005) Crawford Arts Centre, St Andrews

The fabric of memory (2013) The Crypt Gallery, London

The new décor (2010) Hayward Gallery, London

The uncanny room (2002) Pitshanger Manor, London

The Yellow Wallpaper (2012) Danson House, Bexleyheath

Victoriana: The art of revival (2013) Guildhall Art Gallery, London

Walls are talking (2010) The Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester

Appendix I
Summary of practice

Marking time (2011) Size: 100 x 130 cm.
Materials: nylon, pins and needles.

Marking time installation in *Cloth and memory* exhibition at Salts Mill 2012.

First curtain in *Marking time* installation.
Size: 300 x 70 cm (each). Materials:
cotton, pins and needles.

Marking time DVD (2012). Final image.

The domestic bars of claustrophobia
(2012). Size: 100 x 66 cm. Printed on
aluminium.

The illusion of freedom (2012). Size: 100
x 66 cm. Printed on aluminium.

The scars remain (2012). Size: 100 x 66
cm. Printed on aluminium.

Escaping (2013). Photograph size: 100 x 66 cm, printed on paper. Curtain size: 300 x 70 cm; materials: cotton, pins, needles.
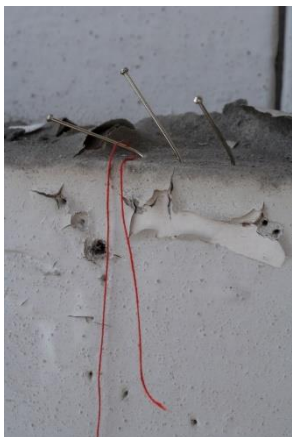

The thread that binds (2012).
Size: 100 x 66 cm. Printed on aluminium.

Embedded memories (2012).
Size: 100 x 66 cm. Printed on aluminium.

Mini installation for *Cloth and memory* (2012). Size: 2 x 3 cm.
Materials: pins, thread.

Pinned down (2012).
Size: 100 x 66 cm. Printed on aluminium.

Wish you were here (2013).
Size: 120 x 100 cm.
Materials: silk organza, pins, needles.

Help me curtain (2012).
Size: 60 x 50 cm. Materials: silk organza with cotton bobbin lace.

Help me DVD (2013).
Image showing lace being revealed.

'Virtual' sampler (2011).
Text and graphics made using the
Illustrator program.

Insider information (2013).
Size: 100 x 150 cm. Materials: nylon,
human hair, black thread on evenweave
linen.

Unheeded warning (2014).
Size: 95 x 105 cm. Materials: nylon, black
cotton thread on evenweave linen, white
cotton bobbin lace.

Looking through (2013).
Size: 95 x 105 cm. Materials: nylon,
cotton thread, satin ribbon.

Whisperings series (2009-2010).
Size: each curtain is 60 x 50 cm.
Materials: silk organza with cotton
tambour lace.
The curtains are: *Mind your own
business; Its our little secret; Just turn a
blind eye; I can see through you;
Appearances can be deceptive; What are
you looking at; What are you trying to
hide; I never laid a finger on her*

Appearances can be deceptive (2009). All
the *Whisperings* curtains follow this
pattern, although the text and tambour
edging are different for each one.
Size: 60 x 50 cm. Materials: silk organza
with cotton tambour lace.

Whispering (2014). Size: 100 x 150 cm.
Materials: silk organza with white cotton
bobbin lace and embroidery.

Dust (2015). Size: 200 x 72 cm. Materials:
voile, silk paper, linen bobbin lace.

Decay (2015). Size: 200 x 72 cm.
Materials: voile, silk paper, linen lace.

Disintegration (2015). Size: 200 x 72 cm.
Materials: voile, silk paper, linen lace.

Enlarging (2013).
Photograph size: 100 x 66 cm, printed on
paper. Lace size: 450 x 20 cm; materials:
string and PVA stiffening.

Creep (2009).
Photographic image printed on paper.

Floored (2010).
Photographic image printed on paper.

Exuding (2012). Installation, comprising
photographic image and fabric.
Photograph size: 100 x 66 cm, printed on
paper. Material: organza.

Whisperings at Salts Mill (2012) including
*I never laid a finger on her, I can see
through you* and *Appearances can be
deceptive.* Size: 60 x 50 cm (each).
Materials: silk organza with cotton
tambour lace.

I never laid a finger on her – proclaiming innocence or concealing guilt? (2012). Size: 100 x 66 cm. Photographic image printed on aluminium.

I can see through you – obscuring the view (2012). Size: 100 x 66 cm. Photographic image printed on aluminium.
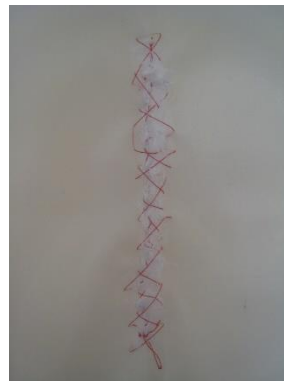

Appearances can be deceptive – sanctuary or prison? (2012). Size: 100 x 66 cm. Photographic image printed on aluminium.
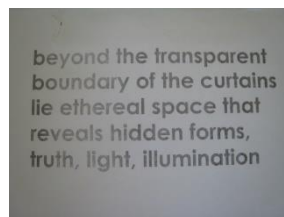

The dark room (2012). Three curtains with luminescent thread embroidered text: *What does the darkness reveal; What does the darkness conceal; Darkness reveals more than it conceals.*

The dark room DVD (2012). First image of the DVD.

Trigger for augmented reality practice (2013).

beyond the transparent boundary of the curtains lie ethereal space that reveals hidden forms, truth, light, illumination

Revelation (2010). Text produced using the Illustrator program.

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Appendix II Dissemination of the research

Exhibitions

2015 *The domestic veil*. Final exhibition of all the practice. The Crypt Gallery, St Pancras, London

2014 *Whispering* in *Imagine,* Waddesdon Manor, Buckinghamshire

2014 *Insider information; Unheeded warning* in *Digital Encounters*, Herbert Read Gallery, Canterbury

2014 *Looking through* in *Lace Effects 2*, Calais Museum, France

2013 *Escaping; Exuding; Enlarging* in *The fabric of memory* The Crypt Gallery, London

2013 *Wish you were here* in *Be our Guest* at Oriel Davies Gallery, Newtown, Wales

2013 *Insider information* in *Time-place-space*, James Hockey Gallery, Farnham

2012 Installation including: *Marking time*; *Virtual sampler*; three *Whisperings*; nine images from Salts Mill; Pins and needles DVD in *Cloth and Memory* Salts Mill, Saltaire, Bradford

2012 Dark room video at Herbert Read Gallery, Canterbury

2011 *Marking time* curtain; *Virtual sampler* in *Concept and context in practice,* James Hockey Gallery, Farnham

Conference papers presented

2014 'Twisted threads: subversive domestic lace' for *Lace: the transgressive thread* conference

2014 'The domestic veil: an exploration of the net curtain' for *Lace and the Museum* seminar, Edinburgh

2014 *Digital encounters* symposium, Canterbury (I was on the panel)

2013 'Drawing aside the domestic veil' for *Customise!* UCA staff conference, London

2013 'Subversive stitching: breaching the boundaries of domestic time and place' for *Time-place-space* conference, Farnham

2012 *Cloth and memory* seminar, Salts Mill (I was on the panel)

2011 'All margins are dangerous' for *Concept and context in practice* conference, Farnham

Publications

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Quarini, C. (2014a) The Lace Research Network. *Lace* 154: 49

Quarini, C. (2014b) The cut works of Piper Shepard. *Selvedge* May/June 90-91

Quarini , C. (2014c) Lace: the Transgressive Thread, University for the Creative Arts, Farnham 16 May 2014 *Textile History* conference review 45 (2): 261-262

Quarini, C. (2015a) Book Review of Lace:here:now. *Textile History* 46 (1): 138-139.

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Website: www.carolquarini.com

Blog: www.lacethread.blogspot.co.uk

Appendix III Net curtain historical research

There is no definitive history of net curtains in nineteenth-century Britain, but many texts mention them in reference to other home furnishings.[69] I have discovered information about net curtains in both works of history and original nineteenth-century sources, including advice manuals, journals, magazines, newspapers, paintings and photographs. The Bodleian Library in Oxford and the National Art Library in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, have been invaluable reservoirs of nineteenth-century publications including trade journals, household advice manuals, women's journals and catalogues from trade fairs, beginning with the Great Exhibition in London in 1851. Examples are catalogues from Liberty & Co (1904) and Dowden & Co (1915) and various journals including *Furniture and decoration, The furniture gazette, Englishwoman's domestic magazine,* and *The Queen*. Facsimiles of department store catalogues have also been useful sources of information and illustrations (Anon 1969, 1972). Other information about the history of net curtains has been gleaned from nineteenth-century paintings, photographs and illustrations, for example those in *Cassell's Household Guide* of 1869.

Industrialisation and the expansion of the urban environment, throughout the nineteenth century, led to more people living in towns and increased urban density, this encouraged the use of net curtains to ensure some privacy from the street. The development of machine-made nets in the mid-nineteenth century, led to a boom in the use of domestic lace curtains in the latter part of the century. In contrast to the lack of specific information about net curtains, the literature concerning lace manufacturing is quite comprehensive. Pat Earnshaw has written authoritatively and at length about the development of machine lace and the industrialisation of lace production in her two books (1986, 1995). Detailed information about Nottingham lace manufacturers and their products has been gleaned from Sheila Mason (1994), whose family were lace manufacturers, and general drapery retail information was obtained from Murphy (1914). Other books about lace that were consulted are listed in the bibliography.

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[69] An exception to this lack of specific information is an MA dissertation for the Royal College of Art by Catherine Ellis (1984) about Raschel nets and their use as net curtains from 1846 to 1984.

Regarding style and taste in net curtain decoration, Peter Thornton's books (1978, 1984) including *Authentic décor: the domestic interior 1620–1920* and Clare Jameson's *Pictorial treasury of curtain and drapery design 1750–1950* (1987) provide facsimiles of nineteenth-century illustrations, some of which include net curtains. However, neither of these authors discusses the social history of taste. By the 1870s there were numerous magazines and books aimed at different consumers advising them what to purchase and how to decorate their homes. Information on the social history of taste has been found in various nineteenth-century sources[70] including *Suggestions for house decoration* by Rhoda and Agnes Garrett (1876), Lucy Orrinsmith's *The drawing room: its decoration and furniture* (1878) and Charles Eastlake's 1872 book *Hints on household taste in furniture, upholstery and other details*.

Space and time constraints preclude the inclusion of a detailed history of the net curtain in this thesis. Instead, a list of sources consulted is included, which will provide a basis for future research by the author.

Net curtain sources
Stephenson, John W 2014 'Veiling the Late Roman House' *Textile History,* 45(1), pp.3-31. The role of textiles in the domestic setting and how their use linked to privacy, visibility, mystery, boundaries and gender relations in late Roman culture.

Drying frame for lace curtains. Patent 1873 (US Patent Office). Illustrated patent.

Facsimiles of *Sears and Roebuck & Co Catalogue No 117* (Chicago Illinois). Images and prices for late nineteenth century net curtains sold by the company.

The Drapers' Organiser – full page adverts for net curtains from Mallet & Sons and Browne & Co, both Nottingham firms (copies held at Newstead Abbey).

Peach catalogues 1897, 1902, 1906, 1909 (private collection). Images and prices for net curtains.

Sweet Dreams Security Co Matthias Megyeri and partners Contemporary net curtain designs based on security features.
Clarke, Alison (2006) 'Sweet dreams security: aesthetics for the paranoid home' *Home Cultures,* 3(2), pp.191-194.

Gere, Charlotte (1989) *Nineteenth century decoration. The art of the interior*

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[70] Kay Boardman's thesis (1994) on mid-Victorian women's magazines provided a useful overview of the sources available.

London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson. Interior information from paintings, photos, writing, literature, pattern books, inventories. File of images.

Cassell's household guide. 'A complete encyclopaedia of domestic and social economy and forming a guide to every department of practical life'. London: Cassell, Petter and Galpin. I looked at Vols 1 and 3 for 1869 at NAL

Furniture and decoration journal 1893 I saw No 37 vol 4 at NAL It includes images of curtains, applications for patents, novelties. Advertisement for R Stanway.

The furniture gazette 1876 'An illustrated weekly journal treating of all branches of cabinet work, upholstery, and interior decoration' (NAL) More like a newspaper with novelties, trade reports, legal and police intelligence – 3 narrow columns, not many illustrations although each issue has a couple of plates in the centre. *Furniture and decoration* seemed more useful for curtain design.
Included trade report of the Nottingham lace trade (p27).

Barrett, Helena and Phillips, John (1987) *Suburban Style. The British Home 1840-1960.* London: Macdonald Orbis (NAL). Retrospective historical accounts.
Includes a section 'Principles of good taste in household furniture and decoration'

The Georgian group guides. No 14 Curtains and blinds. A brief guide to the development and reconstruction of Georgian window treatments. NAL 4pp leaflet Discusses blinds and sub curtains.

Rhoda and Agnes Garrett *Suggestions for house decoration in painting woodwork and furniture* (1876) London: Macmillan. A chapter on draperies but in general not much information on curtains.

Mrs Albert Leigh 1913 *Lace curtain cleaning: A successful home business*. Facsimile of leaflet on www.gutenberg.org

Victorian Shopping. Harrods (1895) 11 pages of ads for lace curtains with prices.

Montgomery Ward Catalogue (1895) 10 pages of ads for lace curtains with prices.

Lace the fabric of romance. Booklet produced by the Federation of Lace and Embroidery Employers of Nottingham for the British Empire exhibition 1924.

Aynsley, Jeremy and Grant, Charlotte (eds.) (2006) *Imagined interiors. Representing the domestic since the Renaissance.* London: V&A Publishing.
Useful summary of domestic interiors. Photographs, paintings.

Thornton, Peter *Authentic décor: the domestic interior 1620–1920* (1984) Extensive history of interior decoration including curtains.

Jameson, Clare. *Pictorial treasury of drapery curtain design*. (NAL) Many illustrations of curtain designs from 1814 to 1900.

Schoeser, Mary and Rufey, Celia (1989) *English and American Textiles from 1790 to the Present.* London: Thames and Hudson. Lots on curtain design and fabrics.

Clabburn, Pamela (1988) *The National Trust Book of Furnishing Textiles.* London: Viking. Good review of nineteenth-century books and magazines. Useful chapter on furnishing windows.

Murphy, William S (ed.) (1914) *Modern drapery and allied trades, wholesale and retail.* London: Gresham (Lace Guild LG 5179). Trade directory of the worldwide state of lace production.

Ellis, Catherine R. (1984) *Lace Curtains and Raschel Nets: Factors Influencing their Design in Britain 1846-1984.* London: V&A Museum Royal College of Art (MA dissertation). Detailed information on manufacturing and design.
Survey of two areas of housing to determine which curtains are used by different classes.

Nylander, Jane C. (1983) *Fabrics for Historic Buildings*. Washington DC: The Preservation Press. Relates to US only.

Clifton-Mogg, Caroline (1988) *The curtain book.* London: Mitchell Beazley. Mainly modern use of curtains – small amount on history.

Thornton, Peter (1978) *Seventeenth Century Interior Decoration in England, France and Holland.* Yale University. Good on early history of curtains

Orrinsmith, Lucy (1878) *The Drawing Room: its Decoration and Furniture.* London: Macmillan and Co. Small red book 145 pp general advice on furnishing; a little on curtains.

Eastlake, Charles (1872) *Hints on Household Taste in Furniture, Upholstery and Other Details.* London: Longmans, Green. Very dismissive of all curtains!

Jura Lace and Muslin Curtains and Draperies. Liberty & Co 1904? (93). Small booklet of 15pp, 12 designs – one per page. Panels with edgings. All these designs specially produced for Liberty.

J R Burrows and Company. *Lace Curtains and Madras Muslins*. US company producing reproduction 19 century lace panels. Interesting website www.burrows.com