Looking and Aesthetics: Beyond literary representations of Voyeurism

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Deakin University

June, 2014
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Abstract

This thesis examines looking in literary and filmic representations to discover its aims and capacities beyond the conventional interpretations of the act as voyeurism.

Twentieth-century scholarship on looking in literature and film has approached the behaviour through the prism of psychiatric and psychoanalytic theories and, not surprisingly, found that the act satisfied the criteria for a diagnosis of voyeurism. This thesis re-examines the basis upon which these claims have been made and offers an alternative explanation for the motif of looking in nineteenth- and twentieth-century fiction and film.

The thesis consists of a creative and an exegetical component. The creative component is a symbolic artefact entitled *Mr Pincer’s Tenant*. This is the story of a man who looks through his binoculars into his neighbour’s window. As a portrayal of the character’s subjective experience of looking, the story represents an alternative example of looking to those that examine the act from outside the character, such as Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rear Window* (1954).

The story takes the form of a symbolic artefact which reflects the protagonist’s psychical arrangement, particularly his “aphasic” fragmentation of his visual world. The devices of dream formation; condensation and hallucination were deployed, and synaesthesia of thought and feeling, with looking acting as the catalyst for this process. The looking characters exemplified in the exegesis are examined within the theoretical frame of Sigmund Freud’s *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905). Freud declares that looking has both aims and capacities in relation to the attainment of the sexual object and to achievements in the direction of art. With this understanding the thesis returns to Freud’s pre-psychoanalytic work in order to contextualise looking in terms of its neurophysiological imperatives as well as its qualitative aims.

This thesis finds that looking, in literary and filmic representations, functions as a vital act in supplying consciousness with content as a precursory action in the creative process. This content is central to the completion of the higher aims of the sexual instincts. The literary characters examined in the exegesis, as with Mr Pincer, provide examples of the way in which sensuous material finds expression in symbolic form after its abstraction from the cerebral cortex. The characters also provide a model for the way in which symptoms, as expressions of repressed psychical material, can find expression as symbolic artefacts.

The thesis discovers that looking functions as a preliminary step in the process of creating art objects as symbolic envisagements of psychical material. This process operates as a higher function of the normal sexual instincts in which one part is directed toward satisfying libidinal drives while another is directed toward higher aims. Thus, the aim of looking for Mr Pincer and the characters exemplified in
this exegesis is primarily one of satisfying the latter while at the same time challenging the notion that the former leads to sexual deviations such as voyeurism. The thesis finds that the sexual instincts in voyeurism operate as a reflexive operation in which the object looked at is simply another self. It offers an alternative proposition: that Mr Pincer and the characters exemplified in the exegesis look in order to harness the power of the sexual instincts to reveal a hitherto unknown version of that self.
Introduction

...we all have repeatedly experienced great pleasure in watching something, in taking it in with our eyes, and have occasionally been ashamed of doing so, or even been afraid to look, although we wished to see... Bruno Bettelheim, 1982

This thesis consists of a creative and an exegetical component. The creative component is a symbolic artefact entitled *Mr Pincer’s Tenant*.\(^1\) The exegesis examines a range of literary characters whose main activity is to look; whether that looking is through binoculars as in the case of Alfred Hitchcock’s Hal Jeffries in his film *Rear Window* (1954) or with the naked eye as in Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Man of the Crowd* (1840). In each literary or filmic example the character’s action drives the discussion about the reasons for his looking, whether that is to satisfy physiological imperatives, or to discover the answer to a mystery.

Much of the conventional literary criticisms about such characters, and the novels or films themselves, have centred on whether or not the character is a voyeur. Such characters’ looking is examined in terms of the extent to which the behaviour meets psychiatric criteria for voyeurism.\(^2\) This exegesis will examine the limitations of those diagnoses, and in doing so, will make the argument that the characters’ looking can be understood more broadly as a perceptive act which satisfies both physiological imperatives and the need to achieve higher artistic aims. The thesis will identify and acknowledge the multifarious functions of looking in text and film to reveal its aims and further, its modes of discourse, from the presentational to the representational. These ideas are evident in *Mr Pincer’s Tenant*, as an example of the presentational form of discourse, as they are in the other works of fiction cited. This extrapolation of the functions and forms of looking will reveal the connections between looking and language.

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\(^1\) Sigmund Freud describes the patient’s symptom as the symbol of an event in memory (1893, 93). Susanne K. Langer describes the expression on the page as the symbol of sentience. This thesis conflated these descriptions to propose that *Mr Pincer’s Tenant* is a symbolic artefact because it functions in both these ways. Indeed, this thesis has coined the phrase “written artefact” to encompass those writings which act in these ways, but which are nonetheless artefacts, not aesthetic objects. Other written artefacts include Daniel Paul Schreber’s *Memoirs of my Nervous Illness* (1903), Conrad’s narrator’s pocketbook in *The Shadow Line* (1917) and Guy de Maupassant’s “Letter from a Madman” (1885).

\(^2\) Psychiatrists Harold Kaplan and Benjamin Sadock, authors of *Synopsis of Psychiatry: Behavioural Sciences Clinical Psychiatry* describe voyeurism as “the recurrent preoccupation with fantasies and acts that involve observing people who are naked or are engaged in grooming or in sexual activity” (1994, 677). The authors explain that this behaviour “is also known as scopophilia.” They are referring here to real people for whom voyeurism presents clinical manifestations of “distress”. Such patients, according to these authors, are distressed because they “conceal” the acts and it is this concealment which “disrupts potential bonding” with others (674).
This exegesis will argue that looking, as an activity which is central to the stories of each of the literary and filmic examples, is a behaviour which serves to supply the character’s consciousness with the sensuous intuitions that function as a necessary step toward acceding to those higher aims.

This physiological process is apparent, to a greater or lesser extent, in all the characters examined, but the degree to which they achieve a symbolic envisagement as a result of their looking act is the point on which they vary. Indeed, some of the characters forestall their acts of perception in favour of “seeing” in the simple sense of using their eyes to capture an image, while others look perpectively as a means of surrendering to the demands of those higher aims. The level of achievement along the pathway towards a reification of the objects of their psyche depends on a range of factors which will be identified and discussed in the chapters.

This exegesis proposes that the looking character, through a process of abstracting his psychical content, is able to reify that material, in different ways, to create an object which is symbolic of his feeling. This proposition reaches far beyond the conventional notions of the looking character’s act as a means of satisfying libidinal drives as they are described in the literature of psychiatry and psychology.

To elaborate the ways in which the looking act accedes to these higher aims the exegesis devises its own way of using the word ‘looking’ since the central argument is that the act is purposive. Moreover, the study explains not only the way in which it is purposive but the reasons for being so and therefore the exegesis elaborates Sigmund Freud’s “aim of looking” as he explains it in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905, 156). In doing so, this exegesis focuses on the *aim* of looking and its *capacity* to achieve its aims as foundational tenets upon which to base its claims that looking in literary representations is broader than the discourse on voyeurism conventionally suggests. To that end, the exegesis uses the word ‘looking’ as a noun in the active sense. This use has, however, led to the term ‘looking’ finding awkward constructions in this discussion. As a typical sentence “The character’s looking behaviour” had become corrupt in sentences such as “The end of Poe’s story finds the narrator frustrated with looking’s capacity to divulge the essence of crime”. In redrafting, these forms of grammar where changed in the interests of reader accessibility to a subject which has few, if any precedents. Thus, this exegesis takes the decision not to use the gerund in its possessive form so that such phrases as “looking’s capacity” become “with the capacity of looking to” in an effort to make plain that looking, as an action, has aims and capacities, and that these are attached to that act, but that they are however, not possessive in the same way as they would be with proper nouns.
The exegesis reviews the way in which nineteenth-century theorists and critics have used the word ‘looking’ and in doing so returns to Freud’s use of the term in his *Three Essays* under the heading “Touching and Looking” (1905, 156).

A certain amount of touching is indispensable before the normal sexual aim can be attained. The same holds true for seeing. Visual impressions remain the most frequent pathway along which libidinal excitation is aroused; ... it encourages the development of beauty in the sexual object. ... keeps curiosity awake. This curiosity seeks to complete the sexual object, ... It can, however, be diverted in the direction of art. It is usual for most normal people to linger to some extent over the intermediate sexual aim of looking ... this offers them a possibility of directing some proportion of their libido on to higher artistic aims (156-157).

This passage is particularly important for this thesis for several reasons: (1) Freud’s use of the word ‘looking’ takes both its verb and its noun form. He confers upon the word, for example, in the phrase “the intermediate sexual aim of looking” the gerund usage to indicate that ‘looking’ is influential in its own right. (2) Freud uses the word ‘seeing’ interchangeably with the word ‘looking’ – a usage which will be discussed in Chapter One of this exegesis, in the context of Alfred Hitchcock’s character Hal Jeffries whose looking contradicts Freud’s description of the aims of looking as set out above. Jeffries is the exemplar *par excellence* of a non-seeing ‘looking’ character because he does not achieve the aim with which the act is associated in Freud’s *Three Essays*. Freud’s passage above indicates that “visual impressions” offer a pathway toward “libidinal excitation” but, as Chapter One finds, this is not the case with Hal Jeffries, nor is it the case that he directs “some portion of [his] libido onto higher artistic aims”. (3) The redirection of “some portion of their libido on to higher artistic aims” is a key function of the act of looking and this function in relation to the word ‘looking’ is a primary concern of the exegesis. Freud states in the passage above that “visual impressions” which have derived from the act of “looking” facilitate the achievement of “higher artistic aims”. This will be discussed in Chapter Three of this exegesis. (4) Freud uses the terms ‘seeing’ and ‘looking’ and ‘visual impressions’ alongside the word ‘touching’; this exegesis extrapolates from this association that looking is involved in the uptake of sensory stimuli from the periphery of the body, as in the case of touching, in the pursuit of these higher aims. This exegesis will continue Freud’s line of thought in relation to looking towards higher aims as set out in *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895).

The exegesis confines its research into looking to the way in which it pertains to the apprehension of sensuous intuitions for the purposes of supplying consciousness with content. Freud’s pre-psychoanalytic work provides the foundational neurophysiological mechanism by which this is achieved including
On Aphasia (1891) and Project for a Scientific Psychology (1895). These two works powerfully portend the way in which neurological function facilitates the processes of artistic creation from apprehension of sensuous impressions to reification of those impressions into objects symbolic of feeling. For this reason Freud’s psychoanalytic work is not called upon since its aims shift to the analysis of behaviours as opposed to the explanation of primary brain processes. Freud’s Three Essays is however called upon for the purposes of re-examining the terminology used and the way in which this usage has changed over time. Tomas Geyskens, for example, in his Our Original Scenes: Freud’s Theory of Sexuality (2005) adopts the term ‘looking’ from Freud’s pre-psychoanalytic work to refer to the act: “Looking plays an important part in human sexuality,” he writes (17). Geyskens also mimics Freud’s use of ‘looking’ as a functional act with specific aims: “Looking has taken over the sexual significance of smell” (19). Other authors, by contrast, have broadened the term to include actions which have been associated with perversity as a result of mistranslation.3

Other central theorists discussed in this exegesis include Susanne K. Langer whose Philosophy in a New Key (1942) uses the term ‘looking’ in its noun form: “Language in the strict sense is discursive... it requires non-verbal acts like looking to be assigned specific denotations to its terms” (1969, 96-97). Langer confers upon these “non-verbal acts” a range of philosophical implications which align with Freud’s use of the term looking. These will be discussed in Chapter Three.

Philosopher Ernst Cassirer in his Essay on Man (1944) uses the word ‘look’ in the context of man’s primitive mentality. “Primitive man does not look at nature with the eyes of a naturalist...” (1972, 82). To look, or looking into nature, as Cassirer describes here, is to use the word in a metaphysical sense. His ‘looking’ or man’s looking, is a noun to describe, as Freud explains above, the apprehension of “visual impressions”. Since this is the way in which this thesis will employ the term, it will be found in such phrases as “with the capacity of looking to...” in order to signify that ‘looking’ has capacities, as Freud understood above, and as Geyskens elaborates. Used in this way, ‘looking’ acts as a facilitator of the symbolic actions which are the culminations of its capacities. This idea is discussed in Chapter Three.

3 See Bruno Bettelheim’s book Freud and Man’s Soul (1982). “It would admittedly be difficult to find a single English word to express what Freud has in mind with Schaulust – a term that combines the German word for lust, or sexual desire, with that for looking, viewing, or contemplating – but a phrase on the order of “the sexual pleasure in looking” would make his meaning clear; or, since lust is a near-equivalent of the German Lust and has further advantage that it can be used both as a noun and as a verb, it might be preferable to “sexual pleasure.” In either case, the reader would know immediately what is meant. The monstrosity contrived by Freud’s translators and perpetuated in the Standard Edition – “scopophilia” – certainly conveys nothing at all” (1984, 90-91).
This introduction has thus far outlined the terms of reference for this exegesis: (1) that the analysis will involve looking characters as they appear in literature and film (2) that for this thesis looking will operate as a verb, to look, as well as a noun, looking, and that this last will confer upon the word certain capacities (3) that key theorists such as Sigmund Freud have used the word looking in the same way as touching in order to indicate that the word functions to satisfy physiological and higher aims. This introduction will now turn to the word ‘looking’ in terms of the literary and filmic character and his activities and leave the continued discussion on usage to Chapter One.

Susanne K. Langer describes in her Philosophy in a New Key (1942) in the chapter entitled “The Genesis of Artistic Import” (246-265) the way in which a “significant form” or art object contains elements such as character behaviours. For this exegesis looking is the act to which her theory will be applied. Thus, looking is an element of art, as opposed to a clinical sign which may establish a diagnosis. Langer explains that although the art object contains looking as one of its constituents it is not therefore simply a portrayal of those acts in original form. She writes: “All these factors [colours, model, or for this discussion, looking] may be materials for artistic conception, but they are not the conception itself” (1969, 251). Langer’s “genetic fallacy” or the error of confusing the origin of [looking] with its import” provides one explanation for Laura Mulvey’s approach in her “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975). Mulvey analyses looking as an element of the art object, tracing it back “to its most primitive form” (248).

Langer discusses the elements of music; rhythms, measures, choric utterances, [looking] and explains that: “all such noises are incipient “themes,” musical models which artistic imagination may seize upon to form tonal ideas. But they do not themselves enter into music, as a rule; they are transformed into characteristic motifs; all the actual ingredients of song are not supplied but merely inspired by sounds heard in nature” (247). In this way looking becomes the inspiration for the whole object rather than operating as an “ingredient” of it, as Langer describes. “It is in this capacity [as ingredient] that [looking] enters into art,” writes Langer, but does so “not in its original capacity” as a sign (246-248).

With the preceding discussion in mind, Langer explains that the presentation of a literary or filmic text – the synopsis – should take the form of an “exhibit” (1954, 274). “In outlining the action of a story, poem, or film,” she writes, the response must “spring from a genuine poetic feeling”. Therefore, she advises that we “keep our synopses in the timeless present to indicate that we are exhibiting materials, not presenting elements of art” (274). This is in direct contrast to the clinical reports of literary critics such as Laura Mulvey: “Scottie’s voyeurism is blatant. Its sadistic side is equally blatant” (1975/2006, 350). Mulvey offers the external signs upon which she establishes such a diagnosis: “falling in love with a woman he follows and spies on, ... he has chosen to be a policeman with all the attendant possibilities of pursuit and investigation” (350). This assessment of
Hitchcock’s character in his film Vertigo (1958) reveals this scholar’s orientation to ‘looking’ in terms of whether the act is an element of art or is constitutive of it. This discussion is extended in Chapter One.

In Langer’s terms “an element of art” such as looking must undergo a process of symbolic transformation before it may be classed as part of the art object as opposed to its clinical sign. In her Philosophy in a New Key (1942) Langer explains that looking as an “instinctive act may serve the expressive function” but once the action is abstracted as art it exists as “the active termination of a symbolic transformation” (1942/1969, 45). These ideas are elaborated in Chapter One and particularly in Chapter Three.

The act of looking, in the context of this thesis, is thus defined as both a “seeing” act in which the character envisages an object or scene, as in the case of Hal Jeffries (Rear Window) who “sees” Lars Thorwald, and as an act of perception, in the way Sigmund Freud describes in Project for a Scientific Psychology (1895). From within this frame the exegesis discusses each of the ways in which characters look, from one end of that looking spectrum to the other, and sets those acts against physiological imperatives as well as aesthetic sensibilities.
Mr Pincer’s Tenant
Chapter One

Mr Pincer’s fingers curled around the barrels of his binoculars and his feet squared to the skirting board at the window. His belly spilled over the sill and his elbow angled into the sash’s joggle. His pupils narrowed onto the two-storey terrace across the street.

Mrs Grace Smiley’s nose pointed downwards from the terrace’s window and her handkerchief dabbed the corners of her mouth. Two women waved arms and handbags and poked fingers into car fenders. Her index finger pushed on the arm of her spectacles and her thumb blocked the hole at her eye’s canthus. The door of a florist’s van opened and bunches of peonies sprouted from cones of tissue.

Mr Pincer’s eyes bulged into the binoculars’ cups and his shoulder leaned on the window’s frame. His instrument floated on the waves of light, the ripples and shadows in the rolled glass.

Mrs Grace Smiley’s white chin pointed into the street, her hand draped a network of veins across the window’s face. Tea dripped down the side of her cup. Her eye tracked bin men at the end of the lane. Six bunches of flowers oxidised on the curbing; ribbons of purple lashed their stems, a sheet of cellophane wrapped their petalled heads. The sun’s yellow light veiled the terrace’s glass.

Her full-length dressing gown swept the front step, bunches of dead flowers clung to her chest and a white envelope sat on her hip. The letter dropped into the post office receiving pillar at the footpath’s edge, flowers heaped up at the concrete gutter. Her wide hem flipped up in the wind and her slippers skied through the drifts of plane-tree leaves. Her hair parted at the scalp into staples of silver, face powder collected in the folds of her skin.

The binoculars crept through her parlour past a ticking clock on the mantel and a rose-and-cream tea cup on the mahogany sideboard.

She returned to the window, sunlight browned her face and décolletage. Her draped body disappeared into a back room.
His corpus shivered in the cold recess of his window and the binoculars to dropped to his chest. His bare eyes coasted the terrace’s box facade, a long shadow crossed the street. White emulsion masked her face, a towel wrapped her head. Her eyes stared out from the deep sockets of her cheek bones into the opaque night.

Mr Pincer smoothed his palm over the lapels of his jacket and widened his bowtie mouth. His thumbs ran the circumference of his waistline and registered the diminution in his paunch. A cushion of pins prickled his groin.

The twists and scrolls of the terrace’s party wall projected into the street. Two moulded eyebrows curved over the terrace’s upper windows and two corner brackets rimmed their outer edges. A scalloped terracotta hat topped the unpainted chimney. A corrugated veranda curved inwards to a pout over an iron lace fringe. The bow of Cupid kissed the street and the house opposite.

Storm water rushed down the hills and valleys of the tin roof and tipped onto the postage-stamp garden. Two inches of silt and leaves washed up to the bluestone foundations, formed a beard on their porous faces. Nineteen spears topped the palisade fence between the terrace and the street, a wrought iron gate swung away from gusted wind.

The upper window rippled into the blanket of sun and dust particles roused in the parlour’s cavity under its restorative warmth.

* 

George Pincer’s elbow flexed over the car’s window ledge and his eyeballs protruded into the binoculars’ lenses. He panned the front garden of his rental house, tracked the skittering feet of the tenant’s dog. His nostrils sucked up parcels of air and his shoes ground sand into the car’s floor.

He narrowed a passage for his passing breath and exhaled a whistle across his teeth. The tenant inserted a key into the rented lock and led his collie dog into the house. The curtains shifted and the blind rolled up.

George Pincer exhaled into the slope of the windscreen and dropped his binoculars. Harry Pincer looked up at his father’s bald occipit and curled his fingers into telescopic barrels. He sniffed the air and kept watch on the tenant’s door. George Pincer’s bare eyes ghosted the
house, watched birds at the window’s sill, a tube of newspaper in the mail slot.

‘You know, Harry,’ he said. ‘These glasses don’t lie. Tenants, on the other hand, well, they can spin a tale or two.’

Harry’s school shoes pointed up to the windscreen and his calves flattened on the red vinyl seat.

‘There he is,’ George Pincer said. ‘The bastard.’

Harry’s white fingers pulled on the door handle. The courtesy lamp shed a yellow light over his face and neck.

‘Shut it, son,’

George Pincer’s neck veins knotted.

‘Now look what you’ve done. He knows we’re here.’

Harry’s fingers interlocked on his lap. The car pulled out of the street and vibrated up the road. A breath of monoxide crept past his lips and entered the small hole at his mouth. Red and yellow lights blinked. Harry snatched pictures of glowing bulbs, chased long strips of blurred film.

The car stopped alongside a shop full of wigged mannequins. Harry clicked his lids. The car tore the picture from his view. Stared into the dark tunnel ahead. A curtain of fog draped the head lamp’s beam. He buried his fingers in his abdomen and swallowed the flesh of his throat. White lines of paint broke into short strips and orange cat’s eyes flashed and dissolved into the soil.

George Pincer’s voice laboured over the car’s revs. Harry’s ears boiled in thin pulses of his blood. The words anchored his bottom to the bench seat and his eyes to the wash of stars in the sky.

_Ghosting, my son, is an art. It’s not something nervous vendors or owners should undertake. No, ghosting, as quality agents know, involves a refined technique, and son, you’re looking at one of the greatest in the business. I know before a tenant does a runner. Your average real estate agent, at best, informs you when he finds the tenants gone, the house trashed, and two month’s rent owing. These binoculars, son, have helped me to discover the intentions of a tenant even before they know themselves._

_And these glasses keep me on top of the market, son. I once discovered a nice little weekender in Marysville up for sale. Went up_
there to sniff out a white Wolseley with only two thousand miles on the clock. Drove the old duck’s car home and before I could get in the door the phone was ringing.

It was her. ‘Yes,’ she said, ‘George, your offer on the house of twelve thousand dollars is quite acceptable.’ Bloody Jesus, I got back in the Wolseley, tore up there, signed her, and had the house in the paper the next day for twenty eight. I wrote, ‘Lovely Weekender, Commute from Melbourne in an Hour.’ Sold it on the Sunday. Good God son, blow me down if I’m not an expert in the ways of ghosting. And how did I do it?

I was sitting in the car, window down, having a sandwich, when I saw JB Realty pull into her driveway. Got out the binoculars, did a little bit of lip reading, and gathered she wanted to sell. It didn’t take a genius to work it out. I went back in and offered her a thousand more than the agent quoted. She must have thought all her Christmases had come at once.

George Pincer’s hand clasped his notebook, thermos flask, binoculars.

The stiff car door cracked and Harry’s fingers gouged the lids of his dry eyes. The lambent moon passed a tree and capped the highest branch. Blue clouds bunched into puffed cheeks and an oval mouth.

George Pincer shouted from the veranda’s narrow platform.

‘Come on, son,’ he said. ‘Tea’s on.’

*  

Mr Pincer’s trio of fingers pulled on his chin. The single divan bed rolled on castors to the wall’s blank face. A bail of woollen coats topped the coil mattress and a foldable card table leaned into the stuffed shoulder of an armchair. A pack of vinyl records backed onto the mantel’s square end and dust collected on a stand of books. The barrel of his body rolled onto the bed.

His eye met the permanent screen of the window and his ear tuned into grains of sand broken in steel tracks.

The painted weatherboard house sheltered its sleeping owner who lay atop a timber slat bed. His snores deepened. In the kitchen Mr Pincer’s mother scoured the pantry shelves in the dark, removing plastic wrapping and lids, until her scavenging produced a log of Christmas cake, which she handed to her husband. He snatched and pushed it into his mouth, looking around the lounge room, squinting
up at picture frames. Mr Pincer’s mother sat on a kitchen chair with a block of cheese in one hand and a bottle of milk in the other. Her open-mouthed chews made scissors in the shadows on the wall. Their stomachs full, Mr Pincer’s mother and father slipped into bed with the householder, and as he roused they sandwiched his thin figure between them, coddling him to sleep again. In the morning, Mr Pincer’s mother convinced the man to let Mr Pincer’s father eat all the food, insisting also, that he sign the house over to his intruders. Mr Pincer’s father punched the unwilling householder, while Mr Pincer’s mother watched his bleeding face fall to his chest.

Mr Pincer’s lashes brushed the binoculars’ eye-cups, his hip wrapped the window’s sill and leaned into the window bay at Brunswick Street. His eye swept the five and a half bays on Johnston Street. The State Bank of Victoria’s upstairs residence housed its manager inside walls of lathe and plaster and carpets of autumn leaves.

Sardines lined up across pieces of toast, the blade of a knife squashed their bodies into liquefied butter. The dripping base of a mug stamped tea circles onto the bank’s painted sill.

Mr Pincer chewed and slurped and stared through the twin prisms of white light into the street. The binoculars turned to the bedsit’s moulded cornice and timber mantel, their lenses captured a hanging cobweb and his mother’s face inside a tilted picture frame. Two beer jugs bookended six copies of Our Bank. A group shot of the staff curved over a short crystal vase. His eyes clicked and his lips blew a tune. For what is a man, what has he got? If not himself, then he has naught.

His eye ran over the thin edges of the Frank Sinatra LPs. Frankly Sentimental, Dedicated to You, All Alone, Strangers In The Night.

Mr Pincer’s rib cage jarred on the edge of his hardwood desk. Columns of the bank’s ledgers smothered signed letters to Head Office and counter-signed cheques.

The bank’s abstracted Renaissance building accommodated his typing fingers and his money-counting and his drafting of maintenance requests and incident reports. Its solid steel vault door sealed a deep cavity at three in the afternoon and released damp concrete air at nine in the morning.

Mr Pincer’s suited arm waved and his two juniors signalled back. His eye scanned the red brick bank house and his hat tipped, dropped from
the tiled, hipped roof to the band of rustication at the level of his clavicle. His shoulders pulled up and back, their tips aligned at the square sinkings above the bank’s rendered base. His trapezius flexed and dropped and his eye’s laser measured the shrinkage of his vertebral discs on the bank’s four-panelled door.

* 

Harry rummaged in the folds of his bed sheets for his father’s binoculars. His soft fingers quivered over their leather case and flipped the lid. Birds shifted in the branches at his window. Boys trailed down the footpath and the lenses followed them to the school gate. Harry’s lips leaked words from under the barrels. *Why didn’t you come home for my tenth birthday, Dad?* Mother opened a tin of meat and made sandwiches, melted the Christmas candles and made ten short wicks.

George Pincer sent letters from the battlefield. *I’m up here, son, wheeling and dealing a few joints. Safe as houses, young fella, that’s what these properties are. I’ll come home one day and bring you a packet of firecrackers and a model aeroplane set.*

Mavis Pincer pushed dolly pegs onto singlets across the clothesline. She tramped through the long grass in her yellow satin slippers and dropped the washing basket at the back door. The slippers shaped into bananas at her feet. The binoculars snapped a picture of the tide-line around the stitching. Harry’s ears tuned into the waves of his father’s voice.

*Yes, I travel to visit my vendors, negotiate the terms and conditions upon which I will effect a sale. I said, listen mate, she’s sweet, the old duck wouldn’t know if her joint was worth forty or four hundred thou, but if we don’t tie her down now she’ll get away, and then what? We’ve lost her, we’re as good as buggered. She’ll get wind of the true value of the joint and it’ll be good night nurse. No, let’s sign her up now, tonight, suitcase deal, you know, we show up with a suitcase full of cash and she gets all nervous and we close her.*

* 

Mr Pincer bank shoes climbed the stairs, tread the carpet. The woven runner stopped at the door to his upstairs bedsit and curled up. Black knots swirled in the yellow timber and grit bedded into the floorboard’s tongue-and-grooved gaps.

The one-cup kettle rumbled to a boil on the laminate bench and Iced VoVo biscuits broke between his teeth. Cold milk splashed up out of
the mug and dotted the vinyl floor. Biscuits crunched, his lip bled. The last minute of sunlight burned at the window and twelve pigeons stood at the sill, their grey bodies inside his visual field. A thirteenth bird of salmon-and-brown clicked the stars of his feet. The feathered squatters marshalled into a solid line. Cold white air crept into their pockets.

Mrs Grace Smiley’s lighthouse-eyes signalled. A weak beam blinked, the sea of glass misted his lenses. Her brown face mooned into the street and her blue eyes kissed his line of sight. A silk scarf encircled her bare face and her gown’s quilt padded the bones of her shoulders. She laid her palm on the sash stile and connected her nose to the window’s pane.

Her eyelashes brushed the tethered Kelpie at Cafe Zino and blinked at plastic bags bobbing on currents of air.

Her breaths shot across her lower lip in tubes. Words exited the hole of her mouth. *Bring him here, I’ll make love to him.* The curtain’s tieback swung at her elbow and two swags of fabric closed over her face.

The binoculars retired to the divan beside his body’s hollowed log. Biscuit crumbs stabbed his hip and coats buried his neck.
Chapter Two

Mr Pincer’s chin tilted upwards under the bank’s porch and his ribs hooped into the street. His arms swung past his thighs and cut semi-circles in the air. The slits in his lids narrowed below the sun’s beam.

Mrs Grace Smiley’s cloche hat topped the pole of her body and her thick stockings splinted her legs. Her trapezoid handbag pressed to her belly and her ankle-strapped button shoes clip-clopped over the flagstone path.

Her thin phalanges clamped the bank’s high writing desk and her breath laboured under the coat’s panels. Her left foot slid forward into the toe of her shoe, her right sheared the bank’s carpet. Her fingers spread under the steel bars and her eyes lowered onto the stab-file of red withdrawal slips.

Light rays scattered off her brown forehead and mica flakes powdered the turtle-green counter top.

Mr Pincer’s face bloomed crimson under the folds of his handkerchief. His nose shot horns of air into the plain-dyed threads and trumpeted into the bank’s chamber. His elbow rubbed the counter, the heel of his hand sunk into the vinyl trim.

‘How can I be of assistance?’ he said.

‘Could you advise me on a matter?’ Mrs Grace Smiley said.

The bank’s incandescent bulbs exposed the porousness of her skin.

His fingers palpated the bump of his wrist watch and his eyes skirted the floor.

‘I think I could fit you in,’ he said.

Mrs Grace Smiley’s legs crossed and her chest hunched. Her handbag unclasped and her hand fished the satin lining. The lilac corners of her handkerchief peeked over the bag’s lip.

‘I’ve reached an age...’ she said, ‘...where I can’t manage my big house anymore.’

She damped the corners of her mouth and wheezed into the purple fibres.

‘I want to sell,’ she said. ‘Perhaps you know a good real estate agent?’

His hand slid over his crown and plastered his neck.
'Do you know anyone?’ she said.

Her hair pin-wheeled at her temples under brown metal slides.

His brows tightened and his tongue circled an encrustation on his lip. His flat hand knifed a gap in the curtains and his pupils set on the two-storey terrace opposite. His lips whispered into the window’s pane.

‘I can’t imagine you’ll raise more than eighty thou in the present property market.’

Mrs Grace Smiley’s elbows sunk into the chair’s rests.

‘I’m sorry,’ she said. ‘What?’

‘Eighty,’ he said.

His tongue unmoulded from his palate.

‘Oh, I see,’ she said.

His torso rotated a half-turn and his foot tapped.

‘Now,’ he said. ‘You don’t need to worry about getting agents involved. As it happens, I’m in the market for a property just like yours.’

Mrs Grace Smiley’s thumbs intertwined and her chin pointed upwards.

‘You want to buy it?’

‘Yes, that’s right. You’d save all those agent’s fees. And I can take care of the transfer, etcetera.’

‘I’ve never been involved in that sort of thing. My late husband bought the place in 1964. Bless him,’

‘What’s say I draw up a contract and pop over to your place this afternoon?’

‘This afternoon?’

‘Let me assure you, with the market in its present slump, this represents a very good offer.’

Mr Pincer’s eyes tracked her uneven gait. The jersey dress swung over the moons of her hips, coral flowers swished across the road. The mortgage interest and legal fees trotted up the drills of the knit fabric, and disbursements, and stamp duty weighted the dress’s gored panels.
His eyeballs climbed the columns of figures and his lips whistled their totals over his teeth.

Mrs Grace Smiley’s teabag seeped tannin droplets down her cheek. The wet sack stained the well of her eye-socket and spilled a dark tear. She parted the curtains and looked up to the silver-grey sky.

Her face absorbed the sun’s rays in the late morning. Her bottom leaned into the sloped wood-stack in the telephone-box portico, warmed her back. His binoculars’ opaque lenses kissed the porcelain face and dropped to his chest. The leather strap tugged his neck.

The Contract of Sale scrolled and tapped at the terrace’s door. His eyes tracked the circus of words. *Transfer of Land Act 1893.*

Mrs Grace Smiley’s hand flanged the terrace’s brass knob.

‘Good of you to come,’ she said. ‘Please, go straight upstairs. I’m slow these days, I’ll be up directly.’

His bank shoes sidled past her, line-danced across the threshold. His short inspirations captured the fragrance of her emulsion, nostrils plugged, shoes skipped up the stairs on a loom-woven carpet runner. Blue-brown leaves and cherry petals striped the floor of the parlour.

Mauve swirls wallpapered his shoulder and dado rail bumped his hip. Layers of paint peeled downwards in a wide curl, rose glass tinted his eyes in the crested mirror, silver nitrate dressed two cream-ware candlesticks inside the scalloped edges.

Her coughs echoed in the stairwell, her scarfed head rose up the unlit atrium at the top of the stairwell.

His shoes banged the parlour’s floor, head hung below the banister.

‘Ah, you’re here,’ he said.

Her chest expelled thin whistles over a dull hoarseness. The hem of her dressing gown brushed her quilted slippers.

‘You can see why I need to sell, can’t you?’ she said.

His hand massaged the beating mound of his left breast.
Her slippers patted the floorboards to the window, her eyes scouted the street. A finger waved.

‘See, more flowers. I wish they’d stop. Really, they’d be better off sending them to the hospital or the undertakers.’

‘Is there somewhere I can sit?’ he said.

His bottom padded the seat of a dining chair and the meat of his forearms hung at either side of the table.

Mrs Grace Smiley’s gown cast a black spire over a rectangle of white sky. Daylight penetrated the film negative and coloured her form in puce and cream.

She stepped up to the table, eyed his twitching hand.

‘I’ve filled it all out,’ he said. ‘Just sign here and I’ll be out of your way. I can see you’ve got things to attend to.’

‘You’ll forgive me for not offering you a cup of tea, Mr Pincer,’ she said.

Her purple knuckles flexed over the pen and her signature zigzagged across the page. She sucked a breath and coughed.

Mr Pincer’s palm sealed the slot of his mouth.

‘Tea?’ he said. ‘This calls for a whiskey.’

‘Oh,’ she said. ‘I hope you’ll excuse me. Drink makes my chest worse.’

‘Yes, yes, well, that’s all I need. We’ll settle at month’s end.’

Her chin adjusted to the level of the upstairs residence, her finger pointed.

‘You’re like me, Mr Pincer. You get to know about things when you’re at your window.’

His bladder pulsated and his breath held. The Contract of Sale stabbed his chest.

‘The world’s a funny place. I see some strange things from this window. And you, don’t you find that sometimes it’s easier to just watch from your window than to, you know. I’ve seen my fair share of car bingles and loose potatoes rolling down the street. I’m an old woman, nowadays I watch, and then I close the curtains. What will you do at this window?’
Her mauve handkerchief peeked out of the pipe of her sleeve.

‘I’ll get a tenant,’ he said.

Mr Pincer’s nose sniffed the burned particles above the slanted doors of the toaster. Tall ribbons of smoke frayed at the bedsit’s ceiling. His head set into the pillow’s slump, nostrils inhaled cinders out of the moist sheets. The Contract of Sale rolled into the dip in the bed and stamped a signature on his cold back.

His fingers pinched burned squares of toast, thumb and forefinger sooted. The carbonised slices dropped into the sink, his ear canals lowered over the kettle’s spout. The mug inscribed a white ring on the window’s sill. His eyes sealed the binoculars’ sockets.

The western sun scorched the dorsal side of his hand and sweated his palms. A tightened grip callipered the binoculars’ barrels and white light absorbed into the transparent liquid of his vitreous chamber. The barrels traversed the colour spectrum from the glare of white fondant to the grey-oyster of the terrace’s rolled window.

Daylight torched her west-facing hopper at five in the afternoon, purlins shrunk in her roof and stamped-tin ceiling contracted. Birds in the plane tree vocalised.

The parlour bedded down to near-darkness after five, its occupant sat at the window. She faced the bank, eyed the cyanosed street and waited for night. The cold smoke of a neighbour’s fire seeped into the parlour and soured the rose-infused air. Her foot pressed to the carpet and encouraged the static blood, her nose sniffed the dry dust of her stored logs through the gaps in the floor boards. The fire’s grate spat pine-cone seeds over the hearth and onto the singed mat.

Mr Pincer’s fingers clamped his whiskered chin and drew on the pedicle’s flesh. Blood in his skin dove into the core of his corpus, greased threads of his coat clung to his shoulder and streetlights and headlamps blinked in his field of view. His flaccid lumbricals draped the binoculars and his cannon-ball head cracked on the sill. The binoculars’ strap tensioned across his neck, the body of his instrument swung at his knees.
A gob of sputum hawked and the column of fibres at his spine flexed. His cigarette’s smoke ignited the salmon flesh of his larynx and woke the sedentary bronchioles at his lung bases.

A single flame burned at the swags of her curtains and warmed her bones and dried her cough and turned her pine cones red. The node of light flickered at the lime-plaster wall and flashed a tartrazine spark and shrank to black behind the fabric shield.

The crests of his shoulders rose up to his ears and hung forward, his nose pressed to the glass, eyes clutched the window’s extinguished rectangle.

The reddened tip of his cigarette drew his eyes back into the bedsit’s dim interior. A gust of oxygen blew over the greying ashes. The sky glowed purple beyond the rows of electricity lines and the squares of shop parapets. His cigarette burned low and short inside the cube of his room.

His eyes jostled amongst a party of clouds in the sky’s high dome. The moon silvered the window’s upper sash and lighted the open half. His line of sight fell to the meeting rail.

Mrs Grace Smiley’s hair shook in a crimped mop over the outside sill. Her head hung at the brick wall and her blue hand clutched the curtain’s tearing sheets. Her cough convulsed her shoulders above the dust and bird droppings.

His tripod of fingers quaked beneath the binoculars’ roaming barrels, their lenses waved between two fixed points within the framed glass. The distorted picture shivered under spots of rain and sheets of wind. The horizontal hold adjusted and the black-and-white fizzed. Her handkerchief flapped over the grey powder of her lips and her hand pressed to her chest and raised her head. Her hair parted in staples over a charcoal scalp. The weight of the rain pulled on the silver wool and blunted then end.

* 

Her two-storey tower gleamed in whitened masonry. Visitors stepped over the dust-coated doorstep and pale loaves of bread and pineapple fruitcake from an airtight tin graced her table. The visitors swallowed jars of still-warm jam and drank teapots of boiled water and steeped leaves.
The lobes of her ears drooped and the lids of her eyes curved to high crescents. Her visitors ate and talked and heated their bottoms on the stove’s closed door.

*

Mrs Grace Smiley limp body hung over the sill and her fingers dripped from their tips.

*

Harry stared up to the floating toy ship on the bath’s ocean and drowned his eyeballs in the clouded water. The liner’s hull bellied into the depths and scraped his chest. His seaweed fringe waved in front of his eyes and his lungs burned for air.

*

Mrs Grace Smiley’s walls shone and her window rippled. Her wet head withdrew into the parlour and rain drops entered the open window on gusts of wind.

Mr Pincer’s prisms condensed the damp air and misted. His eyes strained at the ledge and his head bobbed, his eyes reached for the shadows inside her parlour. His skull cracked on the rail.
Chapter Three

Mr Pincer’s bank shoes thumped down the stairs to the darkened antechamber of his office. His nostrils snorted the Brylcreem wafts of his senior teller and his tungsten shoulder banged into the jamb.

‘Morning,’ Mr Pincer said.

‘Morning,’ Geoffrey Smailes said.

Mr Pincer’s satin head reddened under the bank’s fluorescent tubes and his cheeks greyed behind the opaque streams of his cigarette. The office chair extruded padding into the hollow of his lumbar spine.

A finger drew a white cannula to his lips and an eye tangled in the wriggled straps of smoke. The veil of his hair draped his occipit and kinked at the spinous processes. His discs bulged into the lacquered shoulders of Ernesto Angerame’s chair at the Sportsmen’s Salon in Lygon Street.

A glossed poster of the ‘Playboy’ style clung to the yellowed wall and six plastic combs drowned in the blue water of the barber’s bell jar. *Give us the Style of the Month, Squire. Take it off up to the nape. Don’t spare the scissors. Can’t stand that lanky, thin stuff at the back.*

The arch of his shoes hooked the chromed footrest and the ball of his eye tracked the downward strokes of the wetted comb.

Geoffrey Smailes’ shoulder dusted the office wall panels and his patent shoes cast a white square on the mahogany desk.

‘Yes, Geoffrey, I’ll have a finger bun for morning tea,’ Mr Pincer said. ‘I’ll read the paper after you’ve done the crossword and I won’t take second lunch break today. I’ve got a bit of business to attend to.’

‘Righto, boss,’ Geoffrey said.

Geoffrey Smailes’ quiff shifted backwards on his head and the oval of his lips tightened. His hip stationed at the cash drawer.

Mr Pincer’s metacarpus sweated over the signed Contract of Sale. The tines of his other hand parted the auburn strands on his head. His eyes penetrated the curtained window to the two-storey terrace across the street and surveyed the narrow frontage along the property line and counted the wrought iron fence posts.
The house’s vendor wore low-heeled courts and a knee-length brown coat. Her hand clamped her brow, eyes scanned the line of cars. Her shoes covered the concrete manhole at the footpath and her wasted calf muscles pressed the corner of her chamois suitcase. A taxi’s yellow body obscured his view and red taillights blurred into amber car blinkers.

Shadows in the upstairs window rolled and his binoculars waited for an invitation to ghost. The glass pane split the morning’s light rays into shards of sepia brown and charcoal. Her birds landed on the sill and flapped.

The window yawned into the broad sky and gin-and-tonic bubbles fizzed in his eyes. The binoculars pushed into the dense drop of dimity curtain and plucked at the sheer fibres.

Mr Pincer’s index fingers tapped opposite keys on the typewriter. *Wanted. Tenant for two-storey terrace. Apply within.*

His notice pressed the bank’s message board and the brass head stabbed a drawing pin into the paper’s upper edge. His eyelids squeezed a blink in the direction of his senior teller.

The bank’s timber door opened and admitted Saturn’s burning sphere to the tissues of his retina. His lids crushed together and white stars burst in the liquid of his vitreous. His trilby pulled over his forehead.

The slab of a woman’s upper arm punched his right pectoralis muscle and his shoulders jolted backwards, hat dropped to the footpath. His throat gravelled a mnemonic of customer names. *Animal Print-Angela, Blonde-Brenda, Clipped Hair-Claire, Dazed-Dawn.*

His pink cheeks angled downwards and his thumb hook his hat.

‘Janet,’ he said. ‘Didn’t see you there.’

‘It’s Gina,’ she said.

‘Right. Yes, of course.’

Her eyelids narrowed to slits.

‘I’m not a customer here. Just want a free money box.’

His top lip rolled.

‘Is that so?’ he said.
The lining band of his trilby sealed his crown.

‘You work here?’ she said.

Her rubber-banded plaits swung past her neck.

‘I’m the manager,’ he said.

His heel scuffed the paver.

‘Then you can get me a free money box.’

‘I’ve got business to attend to. Besides, the money boxes are reserved for viable account holders. One of the other banks might better suit your purposes.’

His fingers slid down either side of the deep crease in his hat and his eyes reviewed the bank’s timber door. It’s cellulose fibres swelled under the midday sun.

Mr Pincer’s trilby rested on the terrace’s kitchen bench. His monogrammed handkerchief damped the droplets at his forehead and his cigarette smoke suffused the parlour’s vacant walls. His ear drew close to the carriage clock on the mantel and admitted clicks to the hollows of his auditory meatus.

The Contract of Sale flipped to a sub-clause. Personal Effects. His lips mumbled the list of items. Bone-handled knife and fork set, old meat plate.

* 

Mrs Grace Smiley lowered the dripping leg of a two-tooth lamb onto her blue-and-white meat platter. She pierced the thickest muscle of the joint and forked the thigh bone. The pewter blade of her knife patted the burgundy flesh and grey foam elevated the tin lid of her boiling minted peas. The stern of the gravy boat bumped the side of the butter dish. She licked her wrinkled finger.

* 

Mr Pincer’s tongue rasped his dry lip. The oval meat plate leaned into the rails of the pine dresser and the bone handles of the carving set paralleled the cut-glass salt-and-pepper pair.

*
Mavis Pincer’s steamed black pudding toppled off her pile of mashed potatoes and onto four thin slices of braised apple.

*

George Pincer pumped the throttle of his Holden station wagon at the intersection of Reid Street and Wangaratta Road. His palms gripped the steering wheel and an eye squinted at a notice on the front seat. Deceased Estate.

‘The beneficiaries are keen to get their hands on the readies, son,’ George Pincer said. ‘Owner died without giving sufficient notice for the relatives to catalogue the contents of the house for the auction. Looks like we’ll have to do it.’

Harry’s legs skipped into the lounge of the Californian bungalow. The leadlight window twinkled coloured pieces of inlaid glass. Waratahs, wattles, kangaroos and emus danced around a rising sun. He pressed his eye to the possum’s glass body and looked out to a lawn of red couch, a fence of yellow bricks and a blue-hilled garden bed of purple daffodils. His plump finger rippled over the fanlight panes and stabbed the button of the bell chime.

‘Who the hell is bothering us now?’ George Pincer said.

‘Me,’ Harry said.

George Pincer’s head shook.

‘Leave that alone and help me box up this rubbish,’ he said.

Harry tickled the gilt edges of a miniature deck of QE II playing cards. Fifty two cobalt faces flashed in his irides. The stack split and shuffled in his open hand. His school shirt flapped over the rectangle bulge at his trouser pocket.

George Pincer dropped a library of cookbooks and Women’s Weekly magazines into an apple crate.

‘More than two trailer loads of stuff for the tip here, son,’ he said.

Harry pulled the dresser cupboard open and removed a slim publication. The Spare Corner Cookery Book. He read instructions for increasing butter and a pencilled note. Not good for cakes or scones. Tested on August 17th, 1940. Jessica Hawley. The brittle leaves of a scrapbook parted and photographs and clipped newspaper recipes dropped into the book’s gutter. Lamingtons and pavlovas sat on plates
and women in hats and floral aprons bumped shoulders under the bulb of the photographer’s camera.

The cast of papers firmed around his ribs and warmed beneath the grey wool of his knitted vest. The letters of a vintage hand twirled between the pages.

* 

Mavis Pincer posted a notice on the timber slats of her front gate. *Do not steal the silver-beet or the lemons.*

* 

Harry’s fingers combed a rabble of potato mashers, apple peelers and sweets thermometers.

‘Jesus, move it, son. We’ll be here all bloody day,’ George Pincer said.

‘Who was the lady that died?’ Harry said.

‘Dunno. But she had a lot of junk.’

* 

Mr Pincer’s bare eyes ascended the steps of the bank’s sheltered porch and the flesh of his hip flanged the bullnose of the terrace’s window sill. His palpebral viewfinder set its lower limit at the level of the seventeenth course of bricks in the masonry wall. His eye spied two brown plaits and a string of cedar beads. The hair twisted downwards to a bristled tip and a string of wooden balls seeped banana oil. Red squares blinked in the outer corners of his field of view.

Gina’s curved fingers wrapped the plastic shingles of a money-box house. Her palm curtained the casement window, her thumb sealed the coin slot. Her knee bent up and the crepe sole of her desert boot stamped the bank’s wall. The money-box house’s footings stepped into the sloped landscape of her thigh. Her eyeballs oscillated in the slipstream of passing cars.

Mr Pincer’s knuckles gouged the deep wells of his sockets and curved into telescopes. The proximal ends of the shaft grafted to his cranial orbits and the distal ends captured a mass planting of white daisies in the drills of her blouse. Her bodice narrowed to a deep ‘V’ at the
breast bone and tapered into her waist. A line of inked stars trailed down the webbing strap of her haversack from shoulder to hip.

His arms fatigued and his shoulders drooped. Gina’s bag slouched at her neck. The cud of her strawberry gum balled inside her cheek and her eyelids sharpened to darts.

His palms slapped his hips and his belly withdrew from the sill.

His bank shoes echoed in the terrace’s entry hall and his irides flashed two cornflower discs in the deco mirror. The black lakes of his pupils whorled above fallen cheeks and beet chin.

His labial membrane stretched across his teeth and locked. A finger floated into the mirror’s silvered pond and poked at the diffracted words on the bank’s front window. Low. Deposit. Housing. Loans. The terrace’s front door admitted a curtain of light and a parked car’s wet diamonds.

His pupils turned to the street and the aperture widened. The sun’s rays burned his sclera and a dog’s bark ruptured his tympanic sheath.

Mr Pincer’s bank shoes scuffed the bank’s step.

‘Still here,’ he said.

His palm flattened the door’s brass plate.

‘Your teller gave me a money box,’ Gina said.

Her suede boots matched his footprints across the bank’s carpet.

‘You’re looking for a tenant,’ Gina said.

His balled fist punched six keys on the wall pad and his torso stiffened behind the enquiries counter. Gina’s eyes glowed reptile-green and her teeth whitened to lilac under the lamp’s UV rays.

‘The house you’re referring to is the two-storey terrace across the road,’ he said.

His breath escaped the gaps in the steel bars.

‘Perfect,’ she said.

‘For you?’

‘Yep,’
'No, it’s a three bedroom,'

‘Perfect,’

‘No, I’m looking for...’

His pincered fingers tugged the pen’s black fuselage and his nail zipped down the tail of chrome balls.

‘A good, reliable tenant,’ he said.

Mr Pincer’s fountain pen scored a ‘G’ in the bleached fibres of his blotting pad, its nib haemorrhaged indigo blood into the deep furrows of the letter and oozed serous ink. Gina’s velvet choker banded the mount of her larynx and brushed the raised nap of her mole.

Cigarette ash powdered her lips and the yellow incandescent globe of the banker’s lamp sunned her neck.

His pen scratched rent and bond figures into the fibrous paper. Ink migrated across her cyanosed cheeks. His thumb pressed the filter tip of his cigarette into the base of the ashtray and his index finger flicked the pen across the desk.

His chair spun on its pedestal. His eye grasped at the moving objects in the street; tracked a bolt of fabric teetering on a shoulder, a plastic bag flying on an air current, a salmon beard, a ballooned stomach, a shallow box of syrup cakes atop an open palm. His ears tuned into a soundtrack of crying babies and shouting men. His thighs flexed inside the legs of his trousers.

The film-shots connected car bonnets and boots end-to-end in a strip of grey bitumen. The music score harmonised the falsetto notes of young women and the bass tones of old men.

* 

Aggie’s head shook at the bathroom mirror and the tips of her fingers parted sections of her hair. She frowned at the sea-foam strands at her scalp and the coffee wisps at her neck.

Her gloved hands massaged chocolate unguent up the shafts and packed a dome of mousse on her crown.

The gloves inverted and dropped into the basin and her talked hands clapped chalk powder over the pastel-pink of the ceramic basin.
Her beauty case sat open on the pink quilt and her throat spasmed inside the ribs of her polo-neck jumper. Her lacrimalis bled brine onto the pancake foundation of her cheeks.

Her heels clopped into the upstairs lounge and her eyes fixed on the mustard carpet. *After twenty-five years, Harold, these are not tears, but the inflammation of marriage-itis.*

* 

Mr Pincer’s key advanced into the internal door at the residence. Its solid panel opened to a black-and-white picture of the upright piano and walnut-grained hostess trolley. The clock on the sideboard chimed midday and his stomach grumbled. His tongue slipped over his lower lip and collected moist dust from the spines of books.

* 

Aggie’s hair waved below the kitchen table’s rocking edge and her knees jumped above its pine planks. The farmer’s rural biceps flexed over the wide angle at her hips. Her throat emitted heaves of trapped air. The farmer kneaded her proving breasts and rained his sweat into the valley of her neck.

* 

Mr Pincer’s corned beef sandwiches slid along the gold speckled bench top and his raspberry cheeks turned to the long room of the scullery. His shallow breaths whispered past the three flying mallard ducks on the wall and the crocheted doilies under the sherry bottles.

* 

Geoffrey Smailes’ shoulder padded the varnished hardwood door jamb and his left ankle rested on the top of his right shoe.

‘A Gina Pitts for you,’ Geoffrey said.

Mr Pincer’s hands smoothed the lapels of his jacket and his nostrils trapped her patchouli oil.

‘Gina,’ he said.

Her paisley blouse swished umber courgettes past his eyes.

‘Take a seat,’

His head dropped over the Lease Agreement’s blank pages.
‘What’s your caper?’ he said.

Her fingers flipped the end of a plait.

‘I work at the supermarket,’ she said.

The skin over his forehead concertinaed.

‘You want to rent the terrace house?’ he said.

‘It’d be ideal, yeah,’ she said.

‘A month’s rent and the bond and she’s all yours. It’s fully furnished and even has frypans and a kettle.’

Her juvenile cursive unraveled across the dotted line.

‘You’re my landlord, then?’

‘I am indeed,’

‘I get paid next week,’ she said.

The haversack’s khaki flap blanketed her knee and two white pellets tinkled in her palm.

‘No cash?’ he said.

‘Nope. Want some chewy?’

The ball of her gum broke suction and menthol vaporised in his nostrils.

‘No, Gina, I can taste it from here,’ he said. ‘What’s your account number?’

‘Dunno,’

‘You work at Nancarrow’s?’

‘Yep,’

‘I’ll be at the door of the terrace house on Thursday with the keys,’ he said.

The strap of her canvas bag slung over her head and her plaits flicked. The door’s solid panel withdrew into the office. Gina re-entered the bank’s public chamber.
Mr Pincer’s lumbar vertebrae extended into the chair’s spine and his fingertips smoothed the cellophane wrapper of his cigarette packet. His eyes stilled over the loose sheets of the Lease Agreement. Gina’s signature meowed from a feline jaw. The ‘G’ speared whiskers into the page and curled a tail around the ‘a’. Two ears pointed up from the dotted ‘i’ and a belly swelled inside the ‘n’.

He leapt from the desk and charged to Geoffrey Smailes’ station. The spectrum of purples under the UV lamp penetrated the signature and a fan of rays stained his fingers and saturated the blood of his lips.

Geoffrey Smailes’ eyes tinted mauve.

‘Okay, Boss?’ Geoffrey Smailes’ said.

‘I’ve just signed a tenant for the joint over the road,’ Mr Pincer said.

‘Gina Pitts?’

‘Correct, Geoffrey,’

Mr Pincer’s neck flushed and his thumb tapped the signature line of the Lease Agreement.

‘The responsibilities of a landlord are many,’ he said.

Geoffrey Smailes’ mouth opened to a broad arch.

‘Property Condition Reports, Periodic Rent Inspections and Maintenance Checks,’ Geoffrey Smailes said.

‘Ah... yes, of course, I know all about those,’ Mr Pincer said.

Geoffrey’s equine dentition lengthened under the bank’s fluorescent strobes.

‘I’m no novice, young fella,’ Mr Pincer said. ‘The old man was a gun at the rent roll.’

The Lease Agreement surfed his desk and the pen nosed Clause Six. The tenant shall permit the landlord to inspect the premises for any untoward activity not previously authorised. His hand slid over his oiled head and two silver strands dropped onto the serifs of Gina’s cat.
Chapter Four

Mr Pincer’s chest expanded into the street and his lungs consumed long draughts of damp air. Passing cars blurred in front of the bank’s lower storey and sulphur fumes entered his flared nostrils. The Property Condition Report rode his hip on the flat plank of the Landlord’s Clipboard. His bank shoes scoured the bluestone step and shied grit across the narrow platform. The letterbox’s tin lid lifted to reveal a deep powder-coated cavity. The fibres of his buccinators shortened over his molars and his lips bunched. The square faces of his medial incisors shone in the convex mirror of his watch.

The robust coughs of an air-cooled engine spluttered in his ear canals. A green Kombi van’s chrome nose bumped over the curb. The van stared out of domed eyes and smiled through a porpoise mouth, and stamped a ‘V’ and a ‘W’ into his tibial plateau. The motor whistled to a stop at the padded fender of his hip.

His eyes penetrated the split screen to the wind-blown face of his tenant. Her plaits flicked over her shoulders, canvas bag looped her neck. The van’s door hinges caterwauled and the tenant’s legs swivelled out to the road. The narrow peak of her shoulder collected the Kombi’s door and sent the flat panel into the van’s frame. Her platform sandals rounded the front of the van and parked at the slider.

‘You’re the welcoming party,’ she said.

The hem of her tangerine skirt brushed the angle of the gutter.

A film of oil glistened at his forehead.

‘Give us a hand with this,’ Gina said.

Her head dove into the hollow oblong of the Kombi’s body.

‘Come on,’ she said.

His sclera sharpened under the dry clouds.

Her arms wrapped a wooden crate and pushed a splintered side into his chest. Ammonia gas whiffed up from between the slats and his alar cartilages gun-barrelled. The crate dropped on the front step to a chorus of mammalian squeals.

‘What’s in this?’

‘Guinea pigs,’ she said.

The fabric of her maxi-skirt ballooned out of the van’s rear.
‘No pets,’ he said.

‘They’re not pets, they’re family members.’

Gina’s wooden beads swung over the guinea pig house. A thicket of shredded paper rustled at the crate’s dark base.

‘Say hello to Frankie and Isabel,’ she said.

Mr Pincer’s eyes scanned the Kombi’s rectangular cavity. Two freckled faces followed his turning head. The small torsos breathed inside a pair of hand-knitted school jumpers. Four thin legs tapered to a quartet of faceted ankles. Two pairs of tanned feet clung to the skins of rubber thongs.

Gina’s elbow pressed the Kombi’s domed roof. Her axilla released sandalwood molecules into the air.

‘Get those boxes out of the back seat, girls,’ she said.

‘These yours?’ Mr Pincer said.

The van’s belly delivered a washing basket of blankets, a stack of board games and a quandary of unmatched shoes. His neck hung over a banana box of shrunken jumpers and skivvies.

‘Yes, Mr Pincer,’ she said. ‘They are mine. Meet Jasmine and Star.’

‘You didn’t tell me...’

‘Are you gunna open the door?’

Mr Pincer kneeled at the van’s front tyre and ran his fingertips over the rubber shoulder and sidewall. The webbed flank of his hand shielded his burning forehead and his floating patella cushioned the hard bones of his knee. A soprano voice pulsed at his ear drum.

‘Have we got a flat?’

His head twisted on its axis.

‘How long have you been driving on these tyres?’

‘Mum’s drived on them before I was born.’

A gust of air lifted his top lip.
‘I’m Jasmine and I’ve turned eleven,’

‘Right,’ he said.

His hands pushed into the stiff flesh of his thighs and his tight knee joints cranked open. His palms frisked his bank trousers and showered sand over his bank shoes.

A finger tipped the brim of his hat and bared his forehead. He looked down at Jasmine’s flat nose and stubbed chin. Her front teeth angled out of her chocolate lips. His eyes descended the geometric line of her orange cat suit to the broad flare of fabric at her ankles.

‘Where’d that get-up hail from?’ he said.

‘The Cat and Fiddle Arcade in Hobart,’

‘It’d be no use on the moon. You couldn’t bend over in it.’

Jasmine’s lower lip spilled over her chin.

‘I’ll open the door,’ he said.

Mr Pincer’s eyes clocked the pats of two thongs on the footpath. His knee flexed at the door’s jamb and his shoulder sloped into the architrave. Drips of iced-milk plunked onto the floorboards from the damp apex of a wafer cone.

‘Get out of here with that bloody sugary mess,’ he said. ‘For God’s sake, this is a civilised house, not a...’

‘A what?’ Gina said.

‘A bloody dosshouse,’

‘I thought you said there were beds here,’ she said.

‘There are,’

‘Then it’s not a dosshouse, is it?’

‘Hey?’

‘A dosshouse has improvised beds like a couch or sleeping bag on the floor. I should know.’
The VW’s painted slider set the trio of tenants inside a golden canvas of sunflowers. His eye’s brush swept the three heads in white road grit and the bodies in grey bitumen. The bristles sealed the potholes of Gina’s pupils in wet tar and knitted mailbox-red pigments into Star’s jumper. The long handle wove the median strip’s gravel into the fibres of Jasmine’s coveralls. The horsehair tip stippled the plane tree’s seed-balls into their eyes.

His feet shuffled backwards from his portrait and an eye closed to monocular vision. His field of view squared Jasmine’s thumb in the east and Star’s plait to the west, cropped Gina’s crown at the top of the border and rounded her stacked shoes below.

The image drained from the funnel of his eye into the cells of his cerebral cortex and the postcard swam in a bath of grey fixative.

Mr Pincer’s nose twitched over the rough-sawn wood of the guinea pigs’ crate. His ears twiddled at the high notes of their voice boxes. Gina’s fingers raked the shredded bedding and clasped a furred beanbag.

‘Isabel,’ Gina said. ‘I hope you’re not pregnant again.’

The girls’ low giggles tickled his waxed canals. Jasmine’s thongs flapped into the entry hall and the beads of her eyes glowed in the milk-glass dish light. Her fingers flicked the light switch up and down and smudged the contours of its jelly-mould housing.

‘Cool,’ Jasmine said.

‘Leave that alone,’ he said. ‘You’ll break it.’

His tongue pressed the hard dome of his palate and suctioned a click.

Star’s legs strutted up the stairs. His eye tracked her jig-sawing knees to the landing.

‘Mum,’ Jasmine said. ‘There’s a fireplace up here.’

Mr Pincer’s squints tightened into the van’s glinting roof. Gina’s sandalled foot hit a chock of wood and her plaits slapped her bowed clavicles. She tied a length of binder twine around the handle of the slider.

‘Lock’s broken,’ she said. ‘And the hand brake’s given up.’
‘Ever heard of a Road Worthy Certificate?’ he said.

Gina pushed a rusted spanner into his forearm.

‘You love your paperwork, don’t you?’ she said.

‘Speaking of which,’ he said. ‘There is the matter of your rent and bond, which, if I may remind you, is ...’

Gina’s tall heels clunked on the porch’s stone step. His narrowed pupils tunneled into the dark entry hall and peered inside. The strap of Jasmine’s schoolbag hung over the neck of a wall sconce.

‘Girly, if you break those off I’ll...’ he said.

The corner of an Arnott’s Biscuit tin squared the right angle at his cubital fossa and the point of a brown envelope clipped his palm. The envelope’s typeface leaned across the paper. *Gina Pitts. Hours Worked. Payment Received.* Gina’s scented oil hung at his nostrils.

‘And here’s the first month’s rent,’ Gina said. ‘Bond’s in the tin. You’ll return it, won’t you?’

His digits quivered over the thick undulations in the paper. The depth of the ridges in the tin’s embossed lid matched the grooves of his nail bed. His feet clubbed and his hand clutched the flaccid mound of his bottom. Syringes of blood needled his hamstrings and tapped into his spinal column.

His phalangeal micrometre pincered the cash’s thickness, gauged the total, his keratin plectrum flicked the note’s edges.

A palomino fringe swished through his line of sight, eyes met the child’s round face and golden mane. Her watermelon mouth opened between sun-browned cheeks.

‘Are you gunna give that tin back to Mum?’

His brow cinched.

‘You’re Star?’ he said.

‘Yep,’

‘The usual procedure, Star, is that the bond is returned after the property is deemed to be in the same condition...’

Star’s thongs flip-flopped up the path.
Mr Pincer’s hand troweled toast crumbs off the vinyl card table. Gina’s brown envelope angled into the top right quadrant and the Arnott’s tin elbowed his left arm. His bottom cushioned the chair’s wooden seat and his curved back padded the chromed tubes. His arms rose over his head and his hands cupped the roundness of his occipit. The beam of his eye plotted the envelope’s three angles and the tin’s four corners. His head-lamp eyes shone into the rainbow lorikeet perched on the tree branch. The bird cracked Thin Captain biscuits between the clamps of his beak and dropped pieces on the bush’s floor. His emerald feathers and scarlet breast silvered the deep, black canvas.

Mr Pincer x-rayed the metal panels and examined the black-and-white hollow of the biscuit tin’s cavity. A ten-dollar note lined the tin’s base and a spillage of coins dotted the perimetre. His eyes navigated the money’s flat bodies and applied compounds of interest to the principal. Captain James Cook looked out of his porthole to the sea’s turquoise waves and Mr Pincer’s fingers crooned the tin’s deep sides. That old black magic has me in its spell.

The lid flipped off. A photograph’s sepia shadows hung over a cluster of metal discs. His finger batted the shrapnel and his wrist flicked the postcard across the room. The tin pitched and rolled and two buttons fell overboard. His shoulders rotated on the mast of his spine and the coins scattered. His body ditched into the carpet’s swell and his arms flapped under the divan. The tips of his fingers trawled the seaweed pile for brown pennies and silver shillings.

Mr Pincer’s eye reddened over the kettle’s glowing button. A vapour of water peeled the kitchen’s painted tiles and softened the wax in his ear. His hand slapped the bench’s speckled laminate and collected the falling splutters. The coins showered the carpet and the photograph leaned face-down into the skirting board. Milk-tea infused the wooded fibres on the photo’s back and dripped over the kicking serifs of a high-school cursive. The card’s dog-eared tissued his nose.

The dust of ancient lavender bombed his mucous membranes and black ink powdered his thumb. His pointer finger dragged over the signature line. Georgette XXX. The silver-pink trails of merbromin tincture stained the tercet of kisses.
The photograph flipped to reveal its sulphide landscape. Georgette’s legs tucked beneath her velvet dress and her hand pressed the deep grey lawn. Her matte-berry lips widened and her dense cocoa eyes hid behind squinted lids. A wicker basket bolstered her hip and a checked blanket lapped her ankle. The buttermilk skin beneath the narrow brim of her toque hat misted.

His finger brushed along the fur trim. A horn’s blast signalled the start of a race and nine greyhounds skittered out of their starting boxes. His lips leaked two words. *White City.* The reeds of his chest whistled and his pupils bloomed.

The thin webbing of his thenar space stretched and set a frame for the photograph’s square body. His finger traced the picture’s selvedge and his palm trickled saline down her dress. The cardboard trembled and his heart fibrillated. His eyes matched the yolks of hers, willed her gaze to fall upon the wet heart of his irides.

His scuffs shifted backwards and stumbled on the coins. Georgette chewed sandwiches and smoothed the rug. The axis of her eye pierced the cameraman’s lens.

The photograph slid between the Teacher’s jug and the bank’s staff portrait of 1982 and his elbow dropped on the deck of the mantel.

The lorikeet set his wings in iridescent relief of the dark bush canvas, hung his head, the biscuits fell in triangles to the peat floor.

Georgette’s eyes pinned the brown heads of two half-pennies to the carpet’s tacked strips. Three shillings dotted the rug at the foot of his divan and five pennies freckled the narrow tops of his Frank Sinatra records. The coins clanged on the base of the tin and vibrated at his mastoid bone. Georgette’s laughs tickled his auditory ossicles and echoed at the track’s cash registers. *White City.*

Her lips warmed and her fingertip rotated an octagonal arrangement of green stones. The ring slid beneath the steel bars of the betting booth, its pearl core whitened over a stack of notes and jiggled coins. Georgette pursed her lips at the cameraman’s cheek and planned her wedding.

Mr Pincer’s lashes thatched and the nerves of his arms spidered into his neck. The photograph rose and one eye opened to its cream back.
To my dear Gina, your grandfather took this picture before we were married. Wasn’t I the lady of the lawn? All my love, Georgette, XXX.

His bottom plumped the chair’s flat base and his hand rippled the vinyl of the card table. His Landlord’s Record Book opened and lines ruled the A4 sheet. Rent. Paid. Bond. Not yet paid.

Mr Pincer’s vertebral discs softened into the lounge-chair’s cushioned back and his hand cupped the apple of his breast. His diaphragm descended into his belly and his lungs craved the lighted particles of a cigarette. The prongs of his legs vibrated and his bank shoes struck the bedsit floor. His coat flipped over his arm and his legs skipped down the stairs.

The oyster sky opened into his face. His trouser legs ribboned at the helical stripe of the barber’s pole, eyes beamed from the tobacconist’s plate-glass window to the stucco parapet of the terrace house. Three matchbox turrets obscured a hip and gable roof of corrugated iron and the slender neck of a brick chimney.

His bare eye panned the nine rectangular projections of the adjoining houses and the even dentition of their Doric friezes. The row of houses kissed at the shoulders and shared the worm tracks of their vermiculated party walls.

Medusa’s chalked eyes kept watch on the street’s landlords and the tenants. The string of paper cut-out houses danced under the guard of her carved face. The waves of her hair fell from a midline part to the ruffled triglyph at her neck. Three acanthus leaves sprouted from the bowl of her tiara and her chipped forehead and flaked lips refracted the rays of the sun. She surged forwards from the corbelled bow of her ship into the turbulence of the sea.

Mr Pincer’s flanks descended and his belly protruded into the tucked sails of his shirt. The rusted filaments of his umbilicus sprung from the vertical splits at his button holes. His chin jutted into the street. The sky’s clustered pearls boiled in a steam of precipitations.

The terrace’s sash window shot up. Two waving arms jostled at his eyes.

‘Mr Pincer, it’s me,’ Jasmine said.

His teal corneas streamed under the silver-white sky and his limbs hung at his thighs. The black cavity flashed the red sleeves of a
child’s knitted jumper. His bent toes pushed into the gutter’s angle and the neural missives of his deltoid muscle quelled. The girl’s red batons summoned his arm to return a wave. His left hand pressed his right wrist and the sole of his shoe pushed the footpath.
Chapter Five

Mr Pincer’s finger tips rapped the side of a Craven A packet and his eyes oscillated at the window of Foy and Gibson’s. His chin bobbed above the sill of a milk-bar in Gertrude Street.

His heels scuffed on a concrete gutter and turned into the intersection of Rose and Gore. The smoke of his cigarette blustered under the canopy of a plane tree.

Star’s speeding bicycle clipped his hip. His eyes chased the blended rings of the pink and yellow spoke beads. Her thongs batted the footpath and her brakes squealed in his ear. The bicycle’s cow-horn handle bars clanged on the iron fence post. Her feet skated up the path.

The corners of his mouth formed pea-sized nodules under the pressure of his tight lips. His eyes set on the door knocker, his bank shoes stepped over cracks and tall weed heads. The striker’s semibreve note vibrated across his tympanic membrane, his auditory nerves collected the waves and brush-stroked his vestibular canvas.

* * *

A baker drummed on the terrace’s door and a mailman whistled through the slot. Mrs Grace Smiley received the white bread and white letters. She stained the bread in black currant jam and the letters in tears.

* * *

Mr Pincer’s foot pulsed over a grey paver and his thumb tapped the barrel of his chest. The Property Condition Report vested his torso in layers of white bond paper. The body of stapled sheets withdrew and his eye ran down the cover page. Fixtures and Fittings. Six brass escutcheons, one fireplace fender, a set of wrought iron dogs. One rum latch and privacy bolt. His finger tapped the long cannula of the biro inside his breast pocket.

Star’s head protruded from behind the door and her beet cheeks bulged under the helmet’s mushroom cup.

He stared into the wet pats of her eyes.

‘You banged that bike of yours into the bloody spear tops,’ Mr Pincer said.
‘What are they?’ Star said.

Jasmine’s white face popped out from behind her sister’s. Her open hand spilled lumps of rock cake onto the floor.

His eyes followed two currants to the skirting board.

‘I saw you walking up the street, Mr Pincer,’ Jasmine said.

Her tongue ran over her palm.

‘What are you doing here?’ she said.

‘Working,’ he said. ‘I’m a very busy man.’

His hands dove into his pockets, his nails’ short stubs hit the stitched bases. The silver speckles in Star’s helmet twinkled under the strobes of sunlight. His fists thrust into his hips, elbows bat-winged, turning shoe ground sand into the concrete.

The tram’s wheels polished the steel tracks and electrified the bones of his ears. The car’s bi-folding doors retracted and two white legs pierced the step, a navy skirt and pinstriped shirt brushed the steel grid.

Gina’s brown plaits swung at her shoulder and small hand gripped the railing. The punched holes in her school shoes revealed the white skin of her feet. Her loose chrome buckles tinkled at her ankles.

‘Mr Pincer,’ Gina said. ‘You got the bond okay?’

His body rotated and his eye shot up the line of cars.

‘The bond?’ he said.

‘You’ll keep it safe, won’t you?’

His shoulders held a quarter turn, hips squared with the bank’s front door.

‘Ah, yes, safe as houses,’ he said.

Her peaked cap sported a yellow logo.

‘Left Nancarrow’s?’ he said.

‘Mmmm,’

Gina’s nose vacuumed the skin of her arms.
‘We’ll get bowled over standing here,’ he said.

The bank’s air engulfed his hot face.

‘Afternoon,’ Mr Pincer said.

His knees clicked past a line of customers to the office. The Landlord’s Clipboard angled into the upper quadrant of his desk, two pages flipped on top of the bank’s wooden ruler. A pen rolled across four words. Bond. Not yet paid. A ball point scrawled five new words. Paid and held in trust. A turquoise border stained the margin of his peripheral vision.

The moss stitches of Geoffrey Smailes’ waistcoat framed the door and the grid of his worsted pants latticed the panel.

‘Yes, Geoffrey? What is it?’

‘Typewriter ribbon, boss. We’ve run out.’

‘Couldn’t you do the stationery orders, young fella?’

Mr Pincer’s shoes left the desk and climbed the short flight of stairs to the bank’s vault. His body turned and eyes mooned the bank’s chamber. Silver particles veiled the heads of the customers. The sun’s rays perfused the bank’s public quarter through an oblong window set into the rear brick wall. Dust particles tumbled in the floating oxygen and vanished under the sun’s fallen beam. A wave of follicles rose and tightened over his legs.

*

Mr Pincer’s molars crushed the vertebral column of a limp sardine. The silver bodies of three dead fish bedded into his buttered-toast thirds. His eyes burrowed into the pinhole canals of their vertebral bones and his thumb shattered their ribs. His finger strummed the pleated bodies of the headless fish at the base of the tin, and his nail stabbed their bellies.

*

Harold waited for his father. George Pincer’s car sped into Wodonga and out of Wangaratta and over rabbits’ pelts and the slough of snakes. Harold’s sardine brothers glinted up at him from their tinplated bed.
Mr Pincer’s grey eyes swam in the mirror’s silvered pool and his teeth bore the liquid’s murk. A toothpick stabbed the webbed tail of a fish and pierced his gum. The cusp of his porcelain crown bled pulp onto the fins of his lips.

Star’s bicycle frame strutted the fence and Jasmine’s thongs ramped the front door’s step. Frankie and Isabel scampered up the rubber planks and burrowed into a compressed block of grass hay. His distended nostrils vacuumed the rodents’ plumes and his eyes stared into the dark opacity of the upstairs window. The drape of grey powder dissolved to a transparent screen under the sun’s keen eye.

A web of thin cracks laced the mantel and a cluster of tea-pot circles ringed the dining table. The pearl stitches of Gina’s knitted beanie coiled her head and the metal teeth of her boot zippers bit into her finger. Her hand patted her shin and her plait-ends dusted the top of her shoulders.

She stood at the window and faced the street.

His eye lasered from her nose to the glass and measured the width of the melanin splats on her cheeks.

Her palm sealed the glass and warmed a circle of condensed air under its arch. His lambent eyes joined the white plate of crystallised molecules and locked the image into his prisms. The binoculars held still and the flat end of his nose aligned with hers. His heart slowed and the flaps of his mitral valve softened inside the cage of his calcified ribs. The milk of his lacrimations soothed his excoriated corneas under the blinks of a calamine sky. The upstairs window misted, droplets slid to the bottom rail and brown threads of her hair clung to the wet glass.

Mr Pincer’s index finger chopped the seal of a bank envelope. The heel of his hand smoothed the letter’s papillary ridges and the typewriter’s vibrato clicks tapped across the words. *The bank regrets to inform that it has taken the decision to demolish and redevelop the premises above its chambers. Your early vacation is anticipated.*
The bank’s letter dropped into the autumnal swirls of the mustard carpet, its yellow logo glared. His knees locked at an obtuse angle above the letter’s fold and the apple at the top of his cervical spine crisped. His thick nail scored his scalp and tingled the cartilage of his ear. Puffs of air shot from the circus of his mouth and winded his lungs. The collapsed bags craved the gases of his cantankerous replies. *A refurbishment of the upstairs residence, though necessary in some respects is, from my perspective, entirely uncalled for. Indeed, some redecorations would suffice, and if the bank agrees, could be undertaken by the current occupant, whose prowess in such renovations is of a proven standard. If the bank could see its way clear to allowing the incumbent to obtain quotes for materials then work could begin immediately.*

He stared into the vitreous enamel of the s-bend and counted the electrical volts at his detrusor muscle. A trickle of urine yellowed the water and jaundiced the sentences at the bowl’s surface. *The materials could be collected from the hardware shop in Smith Street. In fact, the vehicle I drive could be modified, with the back seat in the lowered position, to carry lengths of timber up to five feet. I would not charge the bank, of course.*

His eleventh and twelfth ribs hooped and his pectoral girdle drew up to his ears. *Actually, I would charge the bank after all these years of maintaining the upstairs residence for free. Why should the bank receive any more free services? If the bank wasn’t so interested in wasting money on idiotic ventures such as unnecessary refurbishments then it wouldn’t find itself having to pay its managers to collect timber from the hardware shop.*

The webbed ligaments in his knees slipped with the pressure of his tramping feet. His body dropped onto the divan’s thin mattress and his patellae drifted under loose skin. His eye met the picture of Georgette on the lawn at White City.

Her hot face darkened under the shade of the car door. The mist on her skin evaporated. Her mouth widened and eyelids narrowed. The camera man rolled his film onwards and waited behind the lens. Georgette smiled for her fiancé and held the pose. The camera man clicked the scene. Thin dogs stretched out around the track and curled sandwiches dried to toast. Georgette’s palm flattened over the chequered picnic blanket.
The blue-green of her eyes matched the cyan squares of her genetic palette. His eye snapped a picture of a Scotsman and an aborigine and red-headed children in silver tunics.

Ice-cream dripped onto the woollen fabric of the picnic blanket and baked to firm balls.

His lips pursed around the soft barrel of a cigarette and his broadened nares issued tubes of smoke. His eyes shifted to the tea-infused paper on the bedsit wall.

* 

Aggie’s orbicular ligamenture tugged under poised lips. The green gauges on her apron ripened to a transparent yellow. She looked back at him from the height of heeled court shoes. Why can’t I entertain my pharmacist friend, Harold? The shaft of his cigarette flipped at his words. Why do you have to bring strangers into the house?

* 

The Property Condition Report unfolded onto the red laminate of the kitchen table. The head of his biro speared his words, injected a new sub-heading in tight cursive. Guinea Pig Clause. Tenants who keep the aforementioned animals shall undertake herewith to reimburse the landlord for any damage deemed to be the result of their habitation at the rental property. The page snapped closed over his notations and the nib of his pen dribbled indigo ink onto his white shirt pocket.

The flesh of his lower lip gathered and his eyes returned to the terrace’s upper window. The sky’s cauliflower clouds passed across the rippling pane. His thick optics and over-sized metal rims clinked on the bank’s sash stile. The window’s cord and pulley wheel tightened and his broad orange tie flipped between his fingers. His rusted hair curled at his occipit and his primrose dentin glistened under the bank’s fluorescent lights.

Hourglass-ed women signed documents beneath the crisscross of his chromed pen and his loins set hard. The supple paint on the terrace’s window frame stiffened over the sill, dew on the smooth ledge dried.

His fingers interweaved at his lap and his gluteal cheeks pressed into the seat of his chair. The plate of his thumb clicked on his belt buckle and his hip cushioned the window’s sill.

*
Mrs Grace Smiley’s gored skirt and teal cardigan dropped bombs of naphthalene into the street’s air.

The knee-high pile of sawed logs shed bark and splinters onto the footpath. The wood-bag spread flat, its two jute handles splayed. The skin on the backs of her hands stretched tight and the bag’s braids slung together. Her hessian raft skied the bluestone pavers.

His eyes shifted to the terracotta pot on top of a brick chimney. Grey smoke left its open throat and joined the Fitzroy air. A square of cindered paper rode the fire’s warm currents and sailed upwards to the branch of a tree. Amber sparks blasted out and rained over the roof. Burned stars extinguished in the sooted beds of the slate shingles and the chimney’s carbon discharge ribboned smoke upwards in intertwining straps of charcoal and grey-white.

Mrs Grace Smiley’s fire iron poked the coals at the grate. Her lips whitened and dried and her shins glowed red. *I keep a fire for the visitors, mainly.*

Mr Pincer’s eyes dropped to the bedsit floor. The bank’s yellow logo shot rays to his gold incisor. Diamond shards clamped the meat of his tongue. The sole of his bank shoe twisted into the paper and scored circles of grit, his face met the window’s glass, his eyes ghosted the street.

Jasmine’s gouache raincoat collected drops of rain and her open palm welled. Her lips angled upwards and licked the spits. His eyes tracked the blinks of her lids and the broken rods of liquid on her cheeks.

His corneas touched the pane, the globes stung in autumn’s tears. His hand’s cold epithelia suctioned the glass and tracked summer’s retreat through open pores. His eyes sheltered beneath the dry faces of split logs.
Chapter Six

Mr Pincer’s shoes lifted up and down on the bluestone step of the terrace house. His eyes scanned the panels of the door and one hand wrung the fingers of the other. A forefinger slid over the Lease Agreement and its dry tip scraped the elaborated tenets of the Guinea Pig Clause.

A shout from behind the door vibrated the thin lining of his ear canals and the biscuit skin of Gina’s face filled the gap between the jamb and the panel. Her top lip rose above the silk of her gums and two teeth pierced out of the pink membrane. His eye ran the length of a tooth, measured eighths of an inch, circled the band of her hand-knitted scarf. The thin tube coiled her neck and unravelled at the belt in her jeans. His fingers clamped the pages of the Lease Agreement between thumb and forefinger.

‘I’ve added a Clause to cover any misadventures those creatures of yours might get involved in,’ Mr Pincer said.

Gina’s mouth formed an oval shape.

‘Landlords,’ she said. ‘Next you’ll want me to pay the rent and live somewhere else.’

‘Not quite, though I...’

‘What?’

‘The bank’s refurbishing,’ he said. ‘They want me to find another place,’

‘So you’re...’

‘I had thought of that, yes,’

‘What about the lease?’

‘It’s void,’

‘Why?’

‘You didn’t tell me you had pets... or children for that matter,’

‘Children?’

‘The current lease is not strictly correct, is it, Gina?’

‘Jesus,’ she said. ‘So this is an eviction?’
'Hold your horses,'
'What do you want then?'
'I’m looking for a room, that’s all.’
'So you’d be my lodger?’
'That... and your landlord,’
'Jeeezuz,'
'I wouldn’t be an imposition, Gina,’ he said. ‘In fact, I’d spend my time looking for somewhere more permanent.’
'Can’t you stay with relatives?’
'Haven’t got any. Besides, think of the lodger’s fees,’
'I don’t really know you,’
'Nor I you,’ he said. ‘Now, put your signature under this Guinea Pig Clause.’
'Come off it. I’m not signing that.’
'Take me in as your lodger and I’ll waive it.’

A square of sunlight shot the gap in the door, the principal plane shed yellow light on the back of his head and mapped the lobes beneath. His thoughts zipped back and forth between neurons and his face turned to the sun’s full beam. His eyes opened to the bank’s upper window.

His dressing gown hung over the lampshade, loose arms dangled inside gaping pockets. The belt’s long snake slid into the loops and tied in a loose knot over the front panels. The lamp’s shade lent a conical form to the gown’s shoulders and tapered into a padded cowl. A headless figure at the window peered back at him.

* 

Mr Pincer’s bank shoes bedded into the runs of the staircase, reached the landing, rested and started off again. The shoes worked the tack of the carpet and his eyes examined their broken stitching and fraying laces and thin, friable tongues. The cracks swallowed balls of carpet dust and grinned. The telephone tinkled in his ear.

‘Yes?’
'Boss, the ledgers,'

'Is it you, Geoffrey?'

'Yes, it’s me,'

'Ah, the ledgers,' he said. ‘I’ll be down directly, son.’

The bank’s letter lay scrunched in a ball at the leg of the divan. His knees spread wide over the triangle corner and the weight of his head fell into his palms. His elbows stabbed his thighs and his breath pelted the auburn hairs on his chest. His stomach riffled and his eyes closed over the bank’s white paper.

*

The yoke collar of Aggie’s mackinaw coat of emerald and black diamonds sprouted long fibrous tufts. Her hands banged down the front and teased the knotted strands apart, legs speared the tubes of a pair of stockings in the shade of Bosc pears. The coat’s front panels pulled together and gloves dove into the proximal joints of her fingers.

Richard Hudnut hairspray atomised the outer surface of her backcombed nest. A blue pollened wand shadowed her eyes. The sponged head moved back and forth over her crepe eyelids and her mouth opened to a wide oval. Wafts of 4711 Eau de Cologne filled the air. His words hit the back of her neck. You look like a turkey gobbler. Who are you trying to impress? You don’t need that stuff, Aggie. A make-up pad pressed her cheeks and a run in her mascara blotted. His diaphragm hardened to the tightness of a medicine ball. Her toes pierced into the points of a pair of court shoes and clip-clopped toward the door. The ball of one foot spun. I once cooked for Miss Australia, you know. Her block heels made hollow knocks down the stairs.

*

Mr Pincer’s knees locked at right angles and his elbows pressed into the flesh of his thighs. His fingers palpated his jaw upwards to his temple and his eyes opened to the amber light of an antique shop. The Frank Sinatra records attracted the price of a dollar. Aggie’s cat prints and the two-door wardrobe and his trilby displayed one-dollar tags. His eyes fixed on the set of encyclopaedia, the valve at his lips leaked two words. One dollar.
Aggie’s glory trinkets rested in her trunk at the foot of the bed. The lid lifted. Her mother’s hand-pump vacuum cleaner puffed bombs of perfume out of filter pads. His knuckles pushed into his nostrils. The pin of a red and gold badge stabbed a starched linen nurse’s cap. The insignia around its rhomboidal edge spoke. *Mothercraft Nurse Trainee 1959.* Aggie’s voice tunnelled through his ears. *Could’ve finished my training, Harold. Made something of myself. Why did you have to insist on getting married? Was it so you could tie me up to the kitchen sink? You walked into the bank, Harold, and left me there.*

The badge dropped back into the trunk and the lid hit the ridge. A thick marking pen wrote on the back of the bank’s creased letter. *Everything’s a dollar.* His tongue slid over the yellow logo and across the typed words and his hand smacked the wetted letter onto the trunk’s lid. His shoe kicked dents into the trunk’s corner and his throat emitted clapping laughs.

*  

Mr Pincer’s steps echoed inside the bank’s small antechamber. His shoes reached the bottom step and his lips hissed the last figures in the columns of the ledger. The roll of coins up the wooden bowls of the cash drawers rattled the air. His ears hammered under the motor of the bank’s air-conditioner. A customer talked and coughed and a date stamp hit the desk. The teak door opened into the entry of the residence.

‘Boss,’ Geoffrey said.

‘Mmmmm?’

‘Are you okay?’

‘Clear the doorway, Geoffrey,’ he said. ‘Time waits for no man.’

Geoffrey’s fingers combed his quiff and copper eyes followed his boss’s shoulders through the unlit passage.

Mr Pincer pulled the ledgers into his chest and struck a match. Curls of smoke replaced the office’s close air and burnt particles passed across his tongue. His eyes set on the columns of figures down the page and fell to a pattern of checking and re-checking. His totals scrolled under each of Geoffrey’s pencilled figures. The clock’s hour-hand pulsed toward two in the afternoon around a dinner-plate face.
His extraocular muscles seized over the number two in the second column and shifted down the rows on the page in increments of two.

His head hung below the fulcrum of his kyphotic neck and the strings of muscles in his shoulders torsioned under the bowling-ball weight. His bolar blades tensed and the sinews thickened to rope.

The cigarette stubbed out in the bank’s chrome ashtray and his chin pushed up to the level of the plate glass window. The end-of-financial-year figures marched down the narrow columns between the tuck-pointed joints of the brick walls. Grey mortar fall in chips to the garden bed. His hand rolled over the cellophane barrel of his Iced VoVos at the bottom of the desk drawer, picked out a biscuit and inserted the sandwiched hemispheres into the dry cavity of his mouth. The cream-filled body fractured into four under the force of his mental protuberance.

His chrome-plated pen rolled across the blotting pad, three digits at his right hand collapsed on top of the silver rod and his head sunk over the uneven pillow. A circle of liquefied icing streamed from his mouth and spread over the absorbent paper.

The banker’s lamp shed an incubator’s yellow light across his face. The bank’s dark chamber closed off from the day’s transactions and re-opened under an hotelier’s license. Bank staff left dishes in their sinks and creases in their shirts and convened in the dimmed lounge.

The bank’s adding machines, typewriters, in-trays, deposit slips, loan application forms and rubber date stamps littered the overhead shelves and island tables.

Patrons smoked cigars, drank whiskey and stared at the commemorative plaques on the walls. A retired manager spoke into a microphone at the bottom of his pilsener. I started at the Swanston Street branch. After a few years there I moved to the small township of Yea. That was my first managerial post. A rubber thimble covered his thumb. The speaker collected a pile of cash and flipped the corners. I put in for a promotion four times before I got the Yarra Junction branch. A cash drawer opened and a junior teller slid coins up the wooden bowls and into his hand. When the cleaning contract came up for renewal I grabbed it. Paid for the wife’s trips to Tasmania to see her mother. A row of metal filing cabinets opened all at once and their white-faced contents tipped onto the floor. Deposit slips, default advisories and customer names glared up from the carpet squares. Mr Cedric Hampton, 26 Clover Street, Malvern. Loan declined.
The hotel’s lamps goosenecked out of the timber-panelled walls and
the patron’s heads tilted and pressed onto sheets of used carbon paper.
White words trickled across the purple cheeks of an internal
memorandum. The bank expresses regret at the sudden loss of a
manager. He suffered a fatal myocardial infarction in the course of
his duties at the Hawthorn branch. The patrons’ inked fingers
smudged their mouths and chins. A stream of mauve saliva stained
their white collars. The speaker stood up and emitted more words. I
learned to type at forty words a minute by the time I made teller. But I
never got past two-fingered chicken plucking or hen pecking or
whatever it’s called.

‘Boss,’ Geoffrey said.

‘Hmmmm?’

‘Opening in five minutes,’

‘Right you are,’ Mr Pincer said.

‘Listen, son. Couldn’t give us a hand to shift a bit of furniture and a
few boxes?’

‘Sure, boss,’ Geoffrey said. ‘Tonight okay?’

‘Tonight, yes,’ he said. ‘Now, I’m going upstairs for a bite to eat.’

Twelve white filters balanced on the rim of the bank’s ashtray.

His nostrils flared and sucked at the floating droplets of Geoffrey’s
Old Spice. The binoculars’ strap hugged the peak of his shoulder and
banded his deflated chest.

Mr Pincer stood at the window of the upstairs bedsit and set the lenses
on the street below. The legs of a running man scissored past the
spaghetti restaurant and the coin laundrette and skipped a hump in the
bitumen and vanished under the porch of the bus ticket office.

His cervical spine’s nerve fibres burned and frayed and his teeth
clenched over the flesh of a finger. His eyes settled on a white pigeon
at the terrace’s sill. The bird’s crimson eyes absorbed the reddest
waves in the light’s spectrum and refracted a pale wash over the
terrace’s stucco render.

The pigeon bathed in the pomegranate waters of the late morning.
Bright blood perfused the skin at the base of his wings and stained his
cerise legs. The stars of his feet edged close to the sill’s margin and clawed at the chips of white gloss paint.

Mr Pincer’s eye rims hardened and salt dried in the fixed angles at his nose. His bottom lip hung below intermittent draughts of breath. The seersucker skin over the peak of his laryngeal prominence loosened into threadbare folds. The guy-wires stretched at the sides of his neck and his fingers pressed their anchoring condyles. His eyes bedded into the binoculars’ eyecups and the heel of his hand flattened onto the fat pad at the top of his spine.

He stared across the street to a picture of his tenant. Her chin’s pallid tip reached up to the nearest cloud and her white sclera sharpened under the midday glare.

The mammelons along the inferior border of her two front teeth formed a filigreed entrance to her open mouth. Her cheek bones heightened into the sun’s rays and her mandible angled upwards away from her neck. The twelve links of her left plait staggered to a point, the thirteen kinks of her right plait bent under the twisted loops of a rubber band.

Her eyes chased a helicopter over roofs and fell to a pattern of skittishness over a church steeple, lids blinked and caught new images every second slowed at the level of the street. Her pupils narrowed into the angle of the gutter and sifted overlapping leaves. The contraction furrows of her irides flattened and her pinpointed pupils captured the white paws of a sleeping cat beneath a shower of broken leaves.

His lips pressed together and his throat vibrated in the hum of his phonations. *Danny boy, Oh Danny boy, the pipes, the pipes are calling.* His flat palm pushed the rim of his auricle out from his head and trapped his falsetto notes in the hollow. The binoculars quivered, the picture rippled, his throat shivered a song. *From glen to glen, and down the mountain side.* The cyan bead at her jugular notch disappeared into the magenta plains of the terrace’s wallpaper.

Mr Pincer’s trousers dropped to the floor, belt hung inside loops and cotton pockets flapped over oedematous ankles. His thumb and forefinger callipered atrophied muscle and opened up around the sausages of his hamstrings. He stood at the window and counted the grains of sand on the sill. His finger’s manometre measured the force
under the bounding elastic of his carotid artery. A knock at the door stopped the flow of blood inside the vessel. Geoffrey’s forehead beamed into the room.

‘The furniture, boss?’

‘Ah, yes,’

‘And the boxes. Nearly packed?’

‘Within a whisker, son.’

Mr Pincer’s Jockettes encased the square cheeks of his bottom in a hanging bag of stretched knit fabric. His hips flexed and his fingers dove into the ring of the packing-tape roll. The binoculars’ strap lassoed a kitchen chair and pinned his foot to the floor under the fallen seat. Georgette’s pennies spun and fell onto the keratinised plates of his five toes. His eyes shot her picture on the mantel and burned the white flesh of her legs.

‘Just someone I used to know, Geoffrey,’ he said.

‘Old flame?’

‘Oh, yes. Took her to the dogs a bit,’

‘Greyhounds?’

‘Ah ha. I made a few dollars,’ Mr Pincer said. ‘Georgette used to say I had a keen eye for a winner.’

‘That so?’

Mr Pincer’s neck veins distended under the pressure of the bombed packing boxes and Geoffrey’s eyes reached into the contours of the ceiling. The two sets of feet trollied the box down the staircase in incremental bumps. Mr Pincer’s shoes lost traction and missed three steps. The box surfed the wall, an arm wedged between the carton and the door.

His décolletage flushed red behind the buttons of his bank shirt. The two men set the box on the crests of their hips and birthed the hard corners through the bank’s fire exit.

Mr Pincer counter-balanced his weight at the side of the box and waited in the dark for the dilatation of his pupils. His jugulars shrunk
back and his head angled upwards to meet the full height of the terrace house. His eyes shot a light between the two acorn adornments at the top of the parapets to the imperfect circle of the moon. A blue nose and black cheeks protruded into the night’s air.
Chapter Seven

Mr Pincer’s toes poked the cotton twill blanket at the end of the bed and his face punched out an uneven dome. His snores kept three-four time and his finger slid out, spasmed and hooked the strap of the binoculars. The black cylinders slid over the flap of the packing box nearest his bed and the lenses captured the bedroom’s breadth and depth in feet and inches.

A six-inch skirting board lined the perimeter of the twelve-foot square floor space and a plaster ruff circumscribed the neck of the fourteen-foot high wall.

His head nestled in the sunken dip of Gina’s pillow, the binoculars’ eyes zoomed into the honeyed knots of the timber ceiling, x-rayed fractures in the plaster at the wall’s edge and the termite’s pin pricks in the window’s frame. His forehead bobbed in the waves of thick and thin glass and his lashes sieved the seeds and stones from the opaque waters. The vodka-blue lines in the window’s pane opened to a silver ribbon on the sky’s bleached canvas.

The sun’s broad light scalded the binoculars’ lenses and singed the fine hairs along his eye margins. His twin cylinders tunnelled into the ivory threads of the net curtain and waited for the sun’s globe to burn out. His eyes opened to the curtain’s fibres coiled into an orb web. The spider’s white abdomen ballooned in the outer quadrant of his visual field, legs flickered in the mesh of the curtain, fringe swept its jute selvedge. His eye still in a milk scotoma, gripped the opaque spot, held the thickened white ball. The spider’s legs zigzagged, head nodded at a rate of one hundred beats in a minute. His fingers danced the lace up and down and his stomach echoed the motion of its rugate lining. The white spot kept pace with his eye’s oscillations inside the window’s frame. His eye fixed on the blind sky, hung in its tumescence. The curtain skipped the bracket and landed across his neck, the threads opened to the white moon of Jasmine’s face.

‘Mr Pincer,’ Jasmine said.

‘What?’

‘You okay?’

‘Get this confounded rag off me,’ he said.
Jasmine’s ball of red hair stopped at the bedside and her mouth spread wide. Her teeth blued. Two short tweets escaped her throat.

‘Did you like sleeping in here?’ she asked.

‘No, I didn’t,’

‘Why not?’

‘Too hot,’

‘Where are your summer pyjamas?’

His nares blew wide under the pressure of his exhalation.

‘Don’t you have school today?’

‘Nup,’

‘Why not?’

‘Pupil Free Day,’

‘What the hell’s that?’

His body rolled to face the door of the lodger’s room and his cheek flattened into the pillow. A salivary trail leaked from his mouth’s horizontal slot and moistened the pillow’s soft fundus. His eyes tracked the charcoal undersides of Jasmine’s feet and his ears picked up the swish of her soles on the floorboards.

The bedside table tilted under the weight of his hoisting torso, the mirror blurred an outline of a roseate chin. His pupils waited for their focus and his nose shifted in close to the mirror’s doubled light. The shafts of his pearl whiskers blinked.

A trio of digits clasped his chin’s pedicle and pulled on the whiskers’ black anchors.

The lacework of veins at his shins swelled; a volume of treacle traversed a series of incompetent valves. His mouth opened to the mirror’s face, expelled the smoke of haddock flesh; his fingers raked his scalp, parted the staples of lead and picked twists of tangerine zest at his ear’s orifice. His eye lids blinked dried brine, fingers divided the white hairs of his sternum and flattened a crop of woollen steel.

His teeth clenched and the room’s musted air withdrew into the gap of his mouth, his feet rose and set on top of a packing box, his heels bedded into the cardboard. Black syrup drained out of the shallow venous channels.
‘Want some toast?’ Gina asked.

‘By Jesus,’ he said. ‘Do you fellas ever think of knocking?’

Gina’s long fingers spanned the base of a bread-and-butter plate and her thumb plugged the handle of a mug. Drops of water fell on his cheek and cake crumbs fell into the corrugations in the bed sheet. The guy-ropes in his neck tensioned and his eyes rose to the level of his tenant’s face.

‘The lodger’s fee,’ she said.

‘Any chance of letting a man dress himself?’

The side poles of his cervical spine shortened and pulled the skin of his neck up into a circus tent. His feet escaped the curtain’s sheath and dropped to the floor. Gina’s cheesecloth dress smoked a sodden campfire. It’s crinkled threads leached the oil of split logs and the ashes of burnt gum. Leaf resin balled between grinding palms and particles of smoke ejected from the bases of his dry lungs.

* 

Mr Pincer’s palms cupped under the shower’s raining head, handfuls of water splashed his face and a Velvet soap cake pushed across his skin. His closed eye sockets collected the splashes, white foam eggs slid off the ledge of his chin and broke over the talus bone at his ankle.

The nerves of his cold dermis tingled at the shoulder blades under splitting grapes of boiling water. His blind hands inched along the tiles in an up-and-down hunt for the tap handles.

An elbow crashed into the soap dish. A bolt of electricity arked back up the channel of the deep nerve in his elbow to his armpit and a sting in his cornea burrowed into the frontal lobe and nigged his optic nerve. His fingers opened in groping stars and hooked the looped pile of the towel. The small voice of a radio sailed into his ears. Hey yeah you with the sad face, Come up to my place and live it up. The words fought the drone of the bathroom fan. More words arrived. Hey yeah you beside the dance floor, Whattya cry for let's live it up. His light hum joined the song in the steamed air and his auricle turned to catch more of the waves. His lips tightened around the blows of his breath and accompanied the song in whistles.
His waist wrapped in a towel and his wetted feet printed a track to the window’s sill. The re-hung curtain shielded his wet body from the street and the music pulsed the vessels at his temple. His palm compressed the blood-filled tube and re-directed his view to the bank’s tiled, hipped roof up to the plain brick chimney. The square hollow belched deoxygenated air and the porch below hooded the customers. His eyes rolled in the waves of glass to the bank’s rendered parapet and floated to the double-hung window.

A silver minim beat the flagstone path in the outer margin of his right eye, shifted his eye. A silver-white circle turned on the black painted face of the bank’s front door. The ripples in the bedroom window disrupted his stomach’s rhythm and tiny particles in his semicircular canals floated past hairs.

Throbs at his temple burrowed deeper into his lobes. The curtain’s orb web draped his head, the net skullcap mapped his cranial vessels, spider’s legs crept between the fissures and licked the brain’s gyri, eight feet tunnelled beneath the cerebral arteries. The song played. Just answer me the question why, You stand alone by the phone in the corner and cry.

Mr Pincer’s feet tingled and reversed from the window and his eye quivered in the herringbone stitch in the blanket. The window’s waves and lines flowed into his macula and the blanket’s threads wove in and out of its cones. A windmill’s fins ticked and the rotations echoed in his stomach. His head sunk into the pillow’s mound and his ear tumbled in the washed ocean. The swollen vessels at the lining of his skull drummed a violent beat, and the bruised arterial walls pulsated.

His eyes closed and the yellow ganglion resolved a picture.

The window’s waves and lines slowed, the ticks and turns subsided and the scintillations dulled.

The lightening cracked and the hardhat of his cranium tightened. The tympani in his ears unhooked from the agitations in his stomach.

The music played. Come up to my place and live it up.4

*  

Georgette seated herself on the grass with one hand pressed into the warm ground. She held an egg sandwich up in the air. Mr Pincer said he would be pleased to take tea and sandwiches at White City, to kneel next to her on the lawn. He felt the gravel push into his knee and opened his fingers to receive the handle of her tea cup. Her flattened fingers, with their raspberry-stained nails, betrayed her efforts as a jam maker. The butter and salt, mashed into the egg filling, formed balls in his mouth. His lips opened to laugh when she said that if he did not like the sandwiches they would do for the dogs. Her lashes, as fine as cactus hairs, numbered fifteen on the top and ten on the bottom, and he found he liked Georgette’s whole face. He lifted his empty cup over the blush of his cheeks. She asked him if he felt hot and if he wanted to take off his bank suit jacket. He told her his skin might burn if he didn’t move to the shade. She said the hot sun and the flies had become annoying. Her soft triceps swung as she batted the flies from her face. He gazed at the poplin fabric pulled tight over her bosom.

His forefinger touched a crumb at the corner of his mouth. He wiped his lower lip and planned, in his mind, the wedding between himself and Georgette. White fabric draped the trestles, a bow matched the green of the cut grass. He told the bank’s staff about his good fortune in finding her, and watched Geoffrey drink from a glass full of effervescent bubbles.

A photograph of the bride and groom hung on the wall at the bank. The shaving cuts on the groom’s chin bled and three strands of hair fell over the bride’s eye.

Mr Pincer’s palate dried and stiffened, and his swallows repeated, and his hand slid across the bedside table to the toothbrush. The head jammed into his mouth and the bristles scraped his tongue. His eyes opened to a bedroom filled with the bright warmth of a Halloween pumpkin. The oak dressing table and oval mirror bathed the room in orange flesh. His binoculars’ lenses pasted orange windows on his eyes. Aggie’s jars of brandied cumquats assembled on the kitchen shelf. His quelled and hungry stomach sent messages to his pulsed head, his eyes set on Gina’s cindered toast. The square tablet rose and his nares sniffed. His mandible chewed, the flexed muscles battered his bruised temples and pained the vessels. The cold tea soothed the membranes of his throat. His packing boxes yellowed, the sun migrated southward.
His wristwatch displayed five and the numerals tick-tocked around a white face and stopped at the bank’s double-hung sashes. Geoffrey cleared the cash drawers, locked the strong room, closed the curtains and set the alarm.

His throat drained the tea cup and swallowed a crust of toast. The lines in his forehead rose and fell, the swells of his cheeks padded his bones. His arms slipped into the sleeves of his dressing gown and feet into his scuffs. The tea cup balanced on the plate, and clinked in chime with the click of his knees.

‘Mr Pincer,’ Jasmine said.

Star’s eyes scanned his great body.

His dishes clanged on the sink’s steel deck.

‘Morning all,’ he said.

‘Morning?’ Star said.

‘Oh, I meant evening,’

‘What’s wrong with you?’ Jasmine said.

‘What do you mean?’

‘You stayed in bed all day,’

‘Yes, it certainly looks that way,’ he said. ‘Now, where’s your mother?’

‘Fish n Chip shop,’ Star said. ‘Back at six,’

‘How about that,’ Mr Pincer said.

Jasmine’s brows closed over her nose.

‘Did you smoke one of Mum’s cigarettes?’

‘No, I certainly did not,’ he said. ‘Where are those two scallywags? Isabel and Frankie,’

‘In their box,’ Jasmine said.

‘Well, then, bring them out.’

Mr Pincer leaned over the wooden crate and lowered his face to within an inch of the twitched bodies. His hand lay over the coat of one guinea pig and his lids and the pigs’ retracted.
Jasmine’s oval mouth released a squeak. Frankie’s black lips lifted up and down over his long teeth, his body balled up and disappeared in the folds of the dressing gown. Mr Pincer’s finger stroked the fabric; his hand moved over the black mound and improved the sheen. His neck extended, nose sucked. Frankie’s shoulders jittered, eyelids closed over the brown beads of his eyes, whiskers slowed to one or two twitches in a minute.

Mr Pincer’s head lifted up and the weight of his back pressed into the chair. His thick white finger pressed Frankie’s paw and palpated the fine bones within. Frankie’s white claws punctured the skin of the big leg, twitters vibrated the membrane of his ear drums.

Jasmine’s fingers curved around Frankie’s collapsed spine, wrapped the guinea pig in her hand-knitted school jumper and pressed her cheek to his pouch belly. Her yellow lashes fringed Frankie’s black fur. The blue of her blood tinted in the membrane of her eyelid. Mr Pincer’s fingers passed under his nose, vacuumed the air. His hands slid down into his robe pockets.

‘See,’ Jasmine said. ‘Frankie doesn’t smell.’

Mr Pincer’s toes abutted the skirting board in the parlour and his thumb and forefinger clamped the sill. His other thumb filled the depression in his sphenoid bone, fingers flanked his forehead. The sky’s light entered the hole of his pupils, enveloped the bruised vessels of his swollen brain.

The first street light flickered and the flat top of Gina’s head approached. Two bunches of hair hung on either side of a part along the sagittal plane. The narrow propeller blades of her shoulders disappeared under the porch roof, the front door slammed, shoes tapped up the case.

His eyes refocused on the street. A pair of tennis shoes hung over the cables above the tram stop, a trolley wheel emitted sparks of electricity and cracked through the damp air. The automatic doors released a man in a red cap. His legs jumped from the step and arms threaded a sports bag, his hat dotted the tram’s bi-folding doors. The street’s pedestrian’s vacated. A pushbike leaned at a signpost, the black saddle collected raindrops and red fenders arched over narrow tyres.

*
Mavis Pincer’s thin fingers gripped a pair of cow-horn handle bars. She rode her cream step-through to the shop and bought a length of muslin. At home she wrapped food parcels and sent them to England. Harold addressed the package. 39 Bank Street, Gateshead. A pencilled head formed the word gate and a conical nose and spherical eyes curled.

*

‘How was your first night?’ Gina said.
‘Satisfactory, I’m sure,’ Mr Pincer said.
‘Lodger’s fees?’
‘Haven’t been in to the bank today.’

*

Mr Pincer’s nose moved to the window’s pane, pupils constricted inside the bank’s upstairs residence. A trestle leaned into the wall at the rear of the bedsit and two canvas drop sheets lay on the carpet under the legs.

A memorandum from head office unrolled over his corneal tissues. The bank intends to coat the interior walls in neutral tones. The boathouse walls and camomile cornice of the upstairs bedsit warmed his vitreous humour. Amber flames in the fire’s grate cooked the skin of his shins.

The peaks of his friction ridges bristled a deep split in the oak mantel. Loops and swirls in the plank of timber transmitted a neural map to the outer layer of his cerebral hemispheres.

The binoculars’ convex eyecups sealed his orbital rims; the visual instruments raised a quiver in his torso, his mouth hung open and the long porch of their barrels shaded the pulp of his lips.

The glass eyes sneaked out of the parlour’s window to examine the bank’s architectural skeleton. Rows of studs stood naked under the partial demolition of the upstairs residence, the membranous cortex of the bank’s lath and plaster walls showered fine grey dust. The Emu in the Sky constellation loomed large on the bank’s Milky Way canvas. A slender flying body flew bright and trembled in patterns. George
Pincer’s realtor’s lenses cast moons and stars over the bank’s fractured walls.

* 

Mr Pincer’s heels sunk into the padding of the four-legged pouf, paint flaked and corners of vinyl wallpaper curled. The chair’s tight back moulded to his lumbar spine, the square seat cushioned his ischial tuberosities.

Aggie’s eyes reflected the fire’s squares of orange, her fingers dug into the brush’s bristles and ripped a matted ball of fluff from the head. The iron fireplace sat inside an arched cavity in the bank’s wall. Her hair flamed the fire. The burnt particles irritated his throat’s lining.

Mr Pincer sat in his chair in front of the grate and inhaled wafts of coiling smoke. Aggie laid the brush’s short body on the vanity in the bathroom next to the comb and stared into the mirror. She dragged her fingers across the crepe of her eyelids and waited for the skin to shrink back. The man from Dalgety resigned his post as bread-kneader in the downstairs galley kitchen. She ripped matted hair from the brush’s bristles. The fire crackled.

* 

‘What are you looking at?’ Jasmine said.

A constellation of russet freckles passed his clouded aqueous. A spattered nose and dotted cheeks angled upwards into his face.

‘What are those glasses for?’ she said.

Mr Pincer counted the spots of melanin. Jasmine’s yogurt skin cultured the bank’s chosen shade. *The walls and ceiling, doors, architraves and skirting boards shall employ the neutral tone called Whisper.* His lips wrinkled to a hollow canal. *Whisper.*
Chapter Eight

Mr Pincer’s feet parked at right angles to the kitchen bench, his tan leather scuffs sleeved his long metatarsals. The flock lining warmed the front half of the thin white planks.

‘Like the rotten ones, do you?’ he said.

‘I’m making a cake,’ Star said.

The skin of his forearm rolled over the bench, the radius and ulna shuddered up his arm. A jar banged on the bench.

‘Cinnamon,’ Gina said.

Spice dust tickled the walls of his antra and clogged the mucous membranes. His finger crossed the open nares, plugged a sneeze.

‘Christ Almighty,’ he said. ‘I think I’m allergic.’

‘When’s it gunna be ready?’ Jasmine said.

‘After The Price is Right,’ Star said.

Star’s tongue pushed into the corner of her mouth, the heel of her hand forced butter into a dune of sugar.

‘Gunna have some when it’s cooked, Mr Pincer?’ Star said.

‘The stomach’s sensitive,’ he said. ‘Can’t eat food that’s been fingered.’

His hands slid into his navy-green robe pockets, chin descended into his chest. A yellow missile passed the corner of his eye, slapped his lapel, fell onto the bench.

‘That’s for being nasty,’ Star said.

Jasmine’s feet charged across the floor. The mass of her hair bobbed from the couch to the kitchen and flounced her sister’s shoulder. Her cupped hand scraped the white granules back into the bowl and drove the butterball into the top.

‘See, all fixed,’ she said.

Her eyeballs rolled upwards to her sister’s pinched mouth.

His open hand patted the shawl collar of his dressing gown, sugar grains snowed the floor. The gown’s collar retracted, the Smartex
Eucalyptus oil is recommended in the event of grease residue on this woollen flannel.

The vertical lines at his brow closed up and stiffened, head lifted, eyes returned to Star’s working hands. Thick yellow worms filled the spaces between her fingers. A wooden spoon slid across the paddle of Jasmine’s tongue.

The limits of his peripheral vision compressed the girls into a five-by-seven snapshot. The image steeped in a bath of cerebral developers. The knobs of Gina’s graphite bones protruded into the drape of her fine skin. Star’s head rose above her mother’s and her swimmer’s shoulders umbrellaed the wings of her sister. Gina’s broad fans belied an ectomorphic body. Jasmine’s stout nose and full lips focused the camera’s pupil.

His sharp eye deckled the edges of the dark-olive brown landscape. An arrow of untanned skin ran across Gina’s crown, drew his eye to a point in the middle of her forehead. His eye chased the hollows of Jasmine’s silver curls and divided the foiled strands of Star’s plaits.

* Georgette’s photograph travelled with the camera man on his excursions into war and a lock of her hair occupied the gutter of his correspondent’s journal.

Army paper noted his two favourite girls. Georgette, I declare, you have the best legs in all Australia. Baby Iris, the gummiest smile. The Kodak Bantam clamped his brow and a finger rested on the wind knob. His knees shook amid the grasses of black blood and his palm swaddled the camera’s square lens housing. His teeth chattered to the beat of Georgette’s song. Hickory, dickory, dock, the mouse ran up the clock.

* Mr Pincer’s eyes dressed the heart of Star’s lips. The elegant rise of the atria matched the Cupid’s bow of Georgette’s short philtrum. A silver-purple translucent membrane encased each the three mouths of his picture.

His legs wrestled, burned back to the lodger’s room. The binoculars slept in the dark between folds in his cotton blanket. His tongue clicked at the cold incandescent light globe and the downturned
switch. His eyes lowered onto his arm’s tin-foil dermis, hairs of metal rose under the silver moon.

His thigh flexed into the binoculars’ magenta body, fingertips slipped over the patina of their Bakelite shell. Draughts of vinegar gas rose from the brittle, keratin scratched and his nasal vault singed. His palm hooded their hard corpus and tingled under the charge of the two skins.

* 

George Pincer’s hand raised a feverish sweat and fused into the binoculars’ shell. The binoculars waited on the passenger seat of the car during property valuations and open homes.

* 

The moon’s round face offered luminous company at the evening window. His silvered corneas joined the beam, face poured into the cast of a pewter spoon and hand filled the mould of a leaden glove. Iron filings rained down the papered wall, a stand of vertical pins pressed his profile. The unmoulded cast of his frontal lobes glittered.

A shiver of filaments prickled his neck and white balls of slag punctured the dorsal surfaces of his feet. Halide air filled his lungs and the furnace in his bedroom foundry burned.

His gloved fingers gnashed the gelatine leaves of his cornea and gripped the barrels of the binoculars. His eye traversed the mucoid film to the blue-white lenses and further into their chromium cones. The lenses dished into the metallic smoke and his eyes hunted the white light of George Pincer’s vision.

The barrels flipped end-to-end, the wide objective lenses opened to a thin diagonal thread. His eye bulged into a distant view of his toothbrush; tasted the white bristles and the pink head. His thumb rose to the ocular lenses, the lunula whitened and the crescent bulged.

The binoculars lay prone on the bedsheet, their milk lenses in the moon’s dimmed lunar face. His hand slid across his chest and compressed his lungs, his neck hung from the anchorage point at the top of his thorax, his hand dropped over the binoculars’ long body and his fingers tightened around their casing. A liquid seeped from the volar surface, glued his hand to the softened exo-skeleton. A black mass extruded into the hollow of his palm and climbed his thenar
eminence. Plastic melted into the snuff box at his wrist. His face burned in a perfusion of sulphuric blood, his eye circled the shelled rims of the ocular cups and ran the length of his digitus minimus.

The pearlescence of the brass ring at his fourth metacarpal echoed the oyster shells at his nail bed. His tongue licked the secretions from around the coupling and his shoulders drew back. The tendons on the back of his hand pulled into a five-line staff, his fingers broke from the barrels and arpeggiated on an invisible keyboard. A puppetry of digits played the moon’s silver chords.

* 

The binoculars rolled over to face the window, the blanket fell across their necks. The hall’s dishlight waxed in the landing and the small void overflowed with buttermilk light.

Mr Pincer’s skipped the platform and his eye marked off nine spindles in the staircase and ten toes on the top step. Creamed skin warmed into ivory ankles and salmon legs to rose knees. A bruise on the right patella dispersed purple clots across the skin and two warts clung to their mobile island. The tumours rose and disappeared under a hood of rippled skin.

His eyelids concertinaed into the folds at his brow.

‘I kept a piece for you,’ Star said.

A dense brown wedge of cake topped a cracked plate.

‘Much obliged, I’m sure,’ he said.

‘I’ll put it here,’ she said.

The plate slid onto a packing box in front of the wardrobe.

‘Right you are.’

Her lips tucked into her cheeks and two vertical lines scored in the fresh pastry of her skin. His tongue slid over white lips and collected the cake’s vanilla currents.

‘I hope you like it,’ Star said.

Her finger struck the light switch. The room lit up in banana strobes. Her heels attracted dirt from off the oiled floorboards.

His ears tracked the tick-tack of her soles, and his marble eyes set on the mound of cake. His head waved over the plate and the tomb of his
olfactory apparatus expanded. The cake’s sweet precipitations inflated the apexes and bases of his lungs and decongested their sacs.

The bank’s deposit slips joined end-to-end on the bedside table, the cake slid onto the absorbent mat. His head dropped into the depression in the pillow, knuckles sealed the shafts of his nose.

The cake blipped. His yawn captured cup-fulls of the cake’s noble gases.

*

Mr Pincer’s ears registered a voice and his eye’s oscillations measured the spread of sugar syrup over the bank’s paper.

‘Lodger’s fees,’ Gina said.

His hand slid over his nipple, splayed over the pear of his pectoralis muscle, the other pancaked his twitching cheek.

Gina’s loose hair fell to her shoulders over a wrinkled t-shirt; a motif spanned the full width of her chest in the upper cases of an antique font. *JOY DIVISION*. The pair of words slipped from his white mouth. His feet hit the floorboards.

‘Think you could pay up?’ Gina said.

‘Bank isn’t open til Monday,’ he said.

The cake bled sap onto the paper, the four-storey brown tower wept a dense yellow liquid, the upper level descended into the burnt layers. His eyes climbed the wedge, crossed the crem a of Gina’s cheeks.

‘Not gunna waste that, I hope,’ she said.

‘The kid gave me such a big piece. I need to keep an eye on my girth.’

Gina’s eyeballs rose to the ceiling and fell, her thumb rotated in the cake’s highest peak. A moist blob dropped into her mouth.

‘Delicious,’ she said. ‘You eat the rest.’

‘Christ Almighty. Let a man get out of bed.’

The crepe soles of her desert boots squeaked in two-four time.

Mr Pincer drew his dressing gown belt together, tied the ends into a loose knot, parted his fingers and raked the hair on his crown into a bed of flattened reeds. His palm left his head and two strands rose up.
A cigar of lint collected on the top of his left scuff. His fingertips palpated the four corners of a cigarette packet through the rayon lining of his pocket. His copy of the *Age* spread across the dining table, elbows sunk into the deep sheets. A match flared over the black-and-white printed tablecloth and waned at the top left of the page. His eye registered a portrait photograph, italicised letters, tables of figures. His optical power diverted inwards and inched across the block paragraph from the capitalised letter of the first word to the full stop at the foot of the last word. Syllables vibrated on his tongue and leaked in a buzz from his mouth. The high sun struck his parietal bone, his head tilted into the penetrating beam. His skull rotated twenty degrees, rays scorched a red dot onto the sentences.

White smoke passed over the curled bone shelves of his turbinates and left his chimney flues in scrolls. Streams engulfed his head and greyed the printed text, words merged and flowed in a stream of shattered text. His eye concentrated on the strange couplings of adverbs and adjectives and paused on a well-used phrase. *Mostly fine.*

His finger moved over the newspaper along a line of letters. *Rain in patches.* His lips pulled up inside his mouth and pressed together, another word arose from beneath the puffs of smoke. *Fine.* His head lifted from the newspaper and sea-shell tubes of smoke curled out to the kitchen from the holes in his conchae.

‘Not in the house,’ Gina said.

Mr Pincer’s head shot out of the fog, his torso sprung back in the chair, eyes set on his tenant.

‘Why the hell not?’ he asked.

‘Stinks the place out,’

‘You can talk,’

‘What do you mean?’

‘You know. That bloody weed of yours,’ he said.

Gina’s clawed fingers pushed the dishcloth across the bench in wide sweeps and frisked cake crumbs to the floor. Her feet slapped the beds of her platform sandals. The straps wound the rope-bound wedges to her calves. The hem of her wrap-around denim skirt sheered her legs off above the knees and brushed the shanks of dark hairs.

‘Will you put that out,’ Gina said.
‘Alright. Keep your shirt on.’

‘In here, please,’ she said.

The sponge filter of his cigarette compressed into the base of the ashtray and the sun’s beam penetrated the thick glass, to the newspaper’s words. The white tubular corpse rested on a bed of ashes, the glass coffin banged on the bench. Gina swished past and blooms of her frangipani oil entered his open passages.

Mr Pincer’s bottom warmed over a grate of dry pine cones and his hands clasped at his coccyx. His belly distended into the robe’s belt, hands slid into robe pockets, wrists issued curled tufts of carrot hair.

His eyes panned Gina’s cat’s-head mug and the links down Star’s plaits. The blue flames on the stovetop hissed under a simmering pot and steam rattled an aluminium lid. The mirror’s silver screen plotted the eversion of his lower lid margins from the globe of his eyes. Two ounces of water spilled from his eyes’ brimmed vessel. His auditory membrane tightened amid voices off the kitchen walls. Do you still like Arthur Hamilton? Get lost. You like him. You love him. Star loves Arty Hamilton. Star loves Arty H.

Saffron hairs punctured the red margins of his eyelids. The high decibels of Jasmine’s voice jarred the tremulous hairs. His inner canthus pinched up and emptied saline dribs onto his sunken cheeks. His lips narrated the picture’s title. Horizontal Lid Laxity.

The upper and lower curtains parted, finger tips hung in the air at his brow, plasticine hoods cringed to a narrow slit. Arty, Arty, Arty, you love Arty. Star loves Arty Hamilton.

His torso rotated ninety degrees, eyes fixed on the snaps of Jasmine’s red mouth.

‘Give a man a bit of peace,’ he said. ‘Jesus bloody Christ.’

The mirror’s screen magnified his opaque scleral tissue the black pupillary hole, shot blood vessels, rusted white coats. His flat hands bordered either sides of his nose, sandwiched the triangular flesh.

‘Sorry, Mr Pincer,’ Jasmine said. ‘We didn’t know you were praying.’

Jasmine’s stocking-stitched cardigan hung from her neck; strands of eight-ply yarn unravelled. The cyan-dyed wool encircled her
shoulders in a flat yoke, projected pigments into her sclera. Her sandals clomped across the floorboards.

*

Georgette’s thick knitting needles criss-crossed looped yarn and click-clacked between her fingers.

*

Mr Pincer’s eyes bounced inside the coils of her hair and returned to the mirror’s silver pool. Red strands floated at his crown, hands plastered the skin of his cheeks.

‘Mr Pincer,’ Jasmine said. ‘I got your binoculars.’

A set of gapped teeth and a stretched pair of lips filled the mirror’s lower quadrant. His fingers gripped the angle of his mandible.

‘I’ve seen you looking through these,’ Jasmine said. ‘You like them, don’t you, Mr Pincer?’

The linked telescopes pushed into his chest.

‘Better?’ Jasmine said.

His upper body bent over the binoculars’ twin barrels, nares sampled the merino draughts of her damp sleeves. The sprockets of his spinal column opened, neck cranked downwards, eye targeted the melanin stains on her two bright sapphires and counted the copper-blue dots of her titanium irides.
Chapter Nine

Mr Pincer’s shoulder tucked into the blanket and contracted at the deltoid muscle under the drape of a coarse twill. His pink forehead glistened in the daylight and his ear flattened into the pillow’s valley. The binoculars dozed on the bed’s upper edge, blinked at the oyster sky. The sun’s early rays flooded the broad funnels and exited through the ocular necks. His febrile hand patted the round head of the farthest barrel and cupped the Bakelite torso.

His larynx idled, his arm purred and the pool of liquefied cerumen at the base of his ear canal rippled.

His corpus rolled to the supine position and his eyes gazed up at the wall’s cream planes. The binoculars’ olive-oil lenses descended over his deep orbits and panned the transverse line of the scotia. A magnified protrusion of nose surrounded the sheet of glass inside the window’s frame. His eyes surveyed the knife-point of black at the door’s top border. The shadow’s deep wedge interrupted the straight lines of the lodger’s vault. His eyes dove into the prism’s ninety-degree angle and two forty-fives, and measured the triangle’s height and width and fixed on the sloping side between the two acute angles. His laser beam scanned up and down the length. Pythagorus grasped the known lengths and summed the squared values of the vertical and horizontal bars. The missing number whispered at his lip and electrochemical transmitters charged the soft, red tissue.

His eyes scored the arc of the door’s full swing and shaded the quarter circle in pinpointed dots; charted the rectangle strip of timber around the door and lined the groove in moulding. A shower of iridian pigments fell to the binoculars’ barrels. The door’s six insertion moulds squared to a tableau of playing cards. The cards formed columns and inverted their faces and conjured the portraits of Mavis and George. His eyes played a game of solitaire on the blank occipits of his parents’ heads.

Three hooks sprouted from the crevice at the face of the wall, the slim profile of the picture rail, the scrolled tongues of hammered tin. His tongue licked at the specks in the room’s dry air.

Aggie’s cat prints hung from triangles of fuse wire, a set of three iridescent green marbles spilled from the dilated pupils, rolled across the bank’s tufted floor. The binoculars’ lenses entered the cat’s open windows and danced on luminescent tapestries.
A fence of timber lined the walls of the room and rose upwards to a cap of moulded wood. His eyes dove into six foramina in the Kauri pine boards and through a burnt knot hole. A family of grubs fed on the soft wood shavings and belched sulphur gases the secret labyrinths. The wall’s hollow canals breathed draughts of air and exhaled through the binoculars’ objective cups.

The lenses pressed to the holes, blanketed the glass in white fog. Thick forests of vibrissae grew out of the piriform openings and tickled the binoculars’ discs, the barrels sneezed on the faces of the corner blocks. Wooden cubes bulged into the room, two senile eyes spied his recumbent body from a height of eight feet.

The window’s frame yawned and stretched inside its brick recess, his body outlined on the glass, paper legs hung, equalled the distance of the window’s lip to the floor. The window presented, in turns, an oil painting and a looking glass, and obstructed his ghosting on black nights and on white mornings. His eyes rested in the muted canvas of the Yarra Valley; charcoal plumes rose, the bank’s hoist rotated.

The binoculars lenses fatigued, his bloodshot eyes pressed into the skin of his orbits. The barrels shook and refocussed on the textured wale of the curtains’ long drops; separated the warp and weft threads under the microscope of his intraocular lenses. The two-up-and-one-down weave of the fabric shielded the room from strobes of heat and trapped cold sheets of air at the glass’s face. The street’s grit embedded the curtain’s flocked fibres. His tongue ran over the concrete shells of his teeth.

The telescopes pivoted on the pedestal of his wrist and scored a circle on the bedroom floor. The convex prisms marked the porcelain ball of the door handle and the swags ballooned. His blood swirled at the fistula of his radial artery and radial vein and at the junction of the telescope’s yoke, chemical transmitters flushed and swelled a volume, his vessels pumped.

The door handle’s bronze neck protruded into the room; the two-inch ebony head twisted in quarter turns. The black dart at the top of the door dissolved under the window’s broad rays. The tall panel backed into the wall and bunches of cherries grew in the rectangular void. A
flannelette nightdress and splatters of coral melanin pasted an alabaster moon.

‘Mum wants to know if you’ll have tea with us tonight,’ Jasmine said.

His finger tips gouged at his eyes.

‘Does she?’ he said. ‘What exactly is she serving?’

‘Sausages,’

His upper lids vanished.

‘Righto,’ he said. ‘Any gravy?’

‘Think so,’

‘Mashed potato?’

‘Yep,’

‘Then, I can hardly say no,’ he said.

Mr Pincer’s knuckles pleated his trousers from thigh to superior border of his patella. The mirror’s silver curtain parted, corners of his mouth rose and bloodied stamps on his chin crinkled. The tabs of toilet paper at his mandible blistered and the opaque rings of Jupiter spun in a grey arcus at his corneal margins.

* 

Harry Pincer’s plasticine orbits cupped the dome of the observatory and his small hand plastered Brylcreem on the crown of his head. His twin lenses beamed up to the ceiling and plotted the twinkled constellations. His finger flew and touched the white nipples in the magnificent bosom of navy velvet.

* 

Mr Pincer’s nasal antrum twitched and vacuumed the fragranced vapours in the landing’s chamber. The tenant’s frame stood in low relief at the bedroom’s architrave.

‘By the powers,’ he said.

Two forefingers plugged his flared nostrils.

‘Your hippy scent is powerful enough to knock a man down.’
Gina’s plaits flipped over her shoulders.

‘Yeah,’ she said. ‘And your old man’s smell reminds me of a nursing home I once worked in.’

Mr Pincer eyes chased Gina’s trots to the kitchen, tracked the rotations of the can opener’s handle.

‘I’ve been informed that it’s a good Irish dinner,’ he said.

‘Late scratching,’ Gina said. ‘It’s chick pea stew.’

‘Hell’s bells.’

His finger tamped a blotter on his chin and pressed a crusted flake. Star’s voice intruded on his task.

‘Jasmine said you’re an astronomer,’ Star said.

‘How do you make that out?’ he asked.

‘The binoculars,’

‘I’m a bank manager,’

‘Do they need to look through binoculars?’

‘No, that’s the job of a landlord.’

The window’s square lights in Star’s white eyes.

Gina’s arm worked the masher and her head jack-hammered over the pot.

‘How’s that hippy stew coming along?’

Her hand stopped and rested on the utensil’s handle.

‘It’s not hippy,’ she said.

‘Mung beans,’ he said. ‘What do you call them?’

‘I call them guinea pig food,’ Star said.

Star’s laugh sang through his ears and swept the miniature bones inside. Her puce mouth stretched to the circumference of a cut apple.

His fingers pressed his lips and his cheeks balled up and tightened. His knees cranked forward and his shoes parked at the skirting board beneath the mirror. The peaks in his trousers collapsed and his larynx dropped down in his throat. His breath thickened and hung in wafts at
the mirror’s face. His epicranius muscles softened and his eyebrows wilted over his lashes. The long fibres of his corrugators slackened in the trenches between his eyes.

His breath thickened on the mirror’s face, molecules misted, air fogged, his cheeks masked, his chin pouchcd. His eyes peeped through holes in the whitened air to the picture of an adolescent Harold Pincer.

*

The rear window of a wedding car spanned the mirror’s width. A black suit with a white carnation at the lapel swam in a pool of silver nitrate. A head brushed the grey felt trim of the car’s interior. The back of his finger ran over his chin and forced the whiskers backwards. A barber’s blade scraped the groom’s tender skin, the wedding face shone. The camera’s flash blasted magnesium powder into the faces of the newlyweds. His eyes paled in the full blast of the flash and the milk-white coats of his teeth absorbed the fallout. His cuspids sallowed the glare of the lights.

The pictures lay in a bank stationery box, angles of the wedding suit crushed, carnation oxidised. The black-and-white oblongs of card marshalled into stacks and shuffled. The bright prominences of his wedding cheeks blurred into the car’s red upholstery. His shirt’s white starch dusted his lips. The groom’s mouth stretched wide under the high exposure of the photographer’s lens and his eyes betrayed a spectral sensitivity. His thumb teased the hard edge of a block of photos, the flipbook animated. The groom’s skin flicked from shades of grey to invisible white.

*

‘Tea’s ready,’ Jasmine said.

‘Isabel and Frankie can eat the stew,’ Star said. ‘We’ll eat their chopped grass.’

Star’s laughs vibrated his ears. His nasal alae spread wide and his nose shortened in the mirror’s reflection.

The room fell under the hammer of the kitchen’s fluorescent strobes. Four bowls stood on the bench, full heads of steam, and four stainless steel forks lay with their backs to the napkins.

‘Righto,’ he said. ‘Very generous, I’m sure.’
The bowls moved through the parlour, clipped grass and arm pits rose in the jet stream. His forehead pulled up, bottom clamped the chair in front of a blue bowl. Dots circled the rim.

‘You make these?’ he said.

‘Got them from the market,’ Jasmine said.

‘Anyone want lemon juice?’ Gina said.

‘Yuck,’ Star said.

‘Looks hearty,’ Mr Pincer said.

His eyes coasted the table, set on Gina’s open mouth. Steam blew across the room. Star’s oval mouth took a single pea, and Jasmine’s lips sucked and pursed at the end of a fork.

‘What?’ Gina said.

‘Hmmm?’ he said.

‘Never seen a chick pea?’

‘I have indeed,’ he said. ‘They were featured in a documentary about Ankara.’

His face moved over the bowl, nostrils opened, lifted, filled with steam.

‘Smells like some sort of camel hide,’ he said.

‘Right, that’s it,’ Gina said.

Gina’s fork bounced off the table, hit the floor between the two forelegs of a chair. His ears clanged. Star’s hands landed flat over her ears. Jasmine’s fingers criss-crossed her lips.

‘Who the hell do you think you are?’ Gina said.

‘Hold your horses,’ he said.

‘You have no right to insult me in my own home,’

‘Your home?’

‘Yes, I’m the tenant, if you remember,’

‘And I’m the landlord,’ he said.
Mr Pincer’s fork rested at his bowl’s rim. The tower of peas collapsed into the thin liquid. Coriander leaves fringed the pool of yellow soup. Gina’s bowl sat on her lower lip, base rose to face the ceiling. Turmeric-stained water ran in rivulets down her chin. A doily of coriander papered her central maxillary incisors.

‘What?’ she said.

‘Your teeth,’

Mr Pincer’s cheeks pumped shots into the room.

‘Your teeth,’ he said.

His chest squeaked puffs, a finger waved at Gina’s mouth, skin bunched over his cheeks. Jasmine’s small giggles filled his ears. Star’s mail-slot mouth dispatched parcels of air over sing-song cheeps.

Jasmine’s shoulders bobbed and her torso scissored into her thighs.

‘Got grass on your teeth, Mum,’ Jasmine said.

Mr Pincer’s fingers pressed the leaking corners of his eyes.

‘Mr Pincer’s crying,’ Star said.

‘Mum,’ Jasmine said. ‘It’s green.’

His hand cupped his mouth, warm breath filled the hollow, air hung at his face in a damp mask, seeped backwards through his lips.

‘You okay?’ Star asked.

‘Right as rain,’ he said.

Gina’s thongs flapped the boards to the landing.

Mr Pincer pinched two green leaves off the stalks in his bowl and pasted a leaf into Star’s hand. Jasmine’s palm received a withered leaf.

‘Here, put this on your front tooth,’ he said. ‘You too, Jasmine.’

Two leaves foliated the square faces of his grey dentition. Three sets of eyes tracked Gina’s path back to the table.

‘What?’ Gina said.

His neck extended and his jaw arced. Star and Jasmine’s eyes locked on his horseshoe of amalgam pegs.
‘Mum,’ Jasmine said.

‘Mmmm?’ she said.

‘Look,’ Star said.

Star’s mouth quivered and tightened to a small circumference.

‘Ha, ha,’ Gina said. ‘Very funny.’

Mr Pincer’s blind nail picked at his front teeth, a leaf clung to the tip of his finger. His palms pushed into the base of the chair, his body hoisted up. His knee joints cracked across the kitchen floor.

‘Do the guinea pigs eat leftovers?’ he said.

Gina pushed a cloth across the ridges of the sink.

‘Look, pay your lodger’s fees and bugger off to your room,’ she said.

Gina’s heels rubbed Ajax into the stainless steel corrugtions, her sun-damaged chin whitened in the sink’s silver face and a cherry-juice stain migrated down her neck. Her face glowed under the incandescent globes of the kitchen’s high ceiling. Her feet zigzagged from the fridge to the stove. Abrasive cleanser powdered her cheeks.

Mr Pincer’s abdomen protruded over the bench’s corner, his eyeballs rose.

Her feet shifted from the kickboard to the fridge’s trim in a network of invisible threads. The four rows of stitching on the bands of her cuffs scraped the floor.

The cans of chickpeas on the pantry shelf rolled across his palm. His sharp fingernail scored a label.

‘See,’ he said. ‘Product of Turkey.’

The column of his spine winched upwards from the bench and his palm flattened over the lapel of his suit jacket. His shoulders rose and dropped, arms slid up and down in the hollow pipes of his sleeves.

‘Thanks,’ Gina said.

His head turned toward his tenant.

‘You helped me,’ she said.

Her lips’ chine softened and her finger pressed the round hull of her mouth.
‘You made them laugh,’ she said.

The weight of her upper torso dropped onto the bony purlins of her shoulders. Her forearms paralleled the bench, neck leaned over the flat deck. A plumb-bob plait swung over the coiled placemat and stopped at the nadir.

His eye ran down the vertical line to the mat’s raffia bullseye.

‘I should be grateful,’ Gina said. ‘It’s been a long time between laughs.’

She stood at the window and looked out. He gazed up at the loose strands of hair dangling from her occipit.

* * *

Georgette’s twisted bun trapped the fingers of Viennese bakers. Thick forearms spiralled around the sweetened coils and shivers pimpled her scalp.

She hand-kneaded knot-rolls and pretzels at the hotel’s kitchen after the war, buried herself in the unfillable stomachs of the returned soldiers.

* * *

Mr Pincer’s blink captured the outline of Gina’s body, marked the lines of her upper wings from the inferior angles at her scapulae to the narrow channel at her lumbar spine. His eye’s beam joined the three coordinate points into an inverted isosceles triangle. The two equal angles at her shoulder tips touched the vertical member of the window’s frame and the descending sides met at the midline between her posterior iliac spines. The skin on his arms tightened in a rash of horripilation and his hand ran up and down the stand of raised quills.

‘You saw how they laughed,’ Gina said. ‘I used to be able to make them do that.’

‘I suppose you think I’m a bad mother,’ Gina said. ‘I was better once, a long time ago. I used to play with the kids. Now, I’m just tired and worn out.’

His eye drifted to the burnt street lamp to the right of the figure; a bright sphere illuminated half of her head and animated his subject.
Her elbows dropped, her hands fell to her lap, her body made a quarter turn into the room. The low sun lit the shoulder nearest the window.

She leaned forward and tilted her head downwards over the dining table and clasped one hand in the palm of the other, eyes boring the medullary rays of the oak table top.

‘Can’t remember exactly when I stopped laughing,’ Gina said. ‘Maybe I’m a bit lonely.’

The portrait of his tenant set under a darkened sky.

A finger rose to the oiled canvas, the tip pressed into the brightened pigments.

‘I used to have lots of mates,’ she said. ‘That was until we started living in the Kombi. I laid awake at night and thought of the house we used to have and the washing machine and my younger face.’

His pupils opened up to the highlights of her cheeks and lips, the white square in her iris. The picture vignetted and slipped into the folio of his mental archive.

‘Now, I just sort of live,’ Gina said. ‘Or survive, I suppose. But the girls need to laugh. I know that.’

‘I'll put a light on then, will I?’ he said.

His eyes shifted from his tenant to the lamp’s dappled shade, scuffs parked at the wooden base, finger rested on the switch.

‘Thanks, Mr Pincer,’ Gina said. ‘That’d be good.’

The lamp shed white light over his back. A yellow mask split his face along the median plane. His hand covered the illuminated side, eye focussed on the angles and valleys of the dark side. Light hugged the crest of his cheek bone, smoothed the sweep of his brow. His skin clung to the bones of his orbits inside a plasticine mould.

His tenant’s thongs flip-flopped, fed the nerves of his ears.

‘Sausages tomorrow night,’ Gina said. ‘I promise.’

His hand dropped into his suit jacket pocket and his eyes shot back in the direction of the voice.

The gold threads of Gina’s hair flashed at his eyes, lips showered gold powder over the floor. The gilded buttons on her jean pockets dropped
tendrils down to her thongs. Her gold-plated fingers set tea cups on shelves and bread-and-butter plates in the slatted spaces of the dishdrainer.
**Chapter Ten**

Mr Pincer’s thimbled forefinger worked backwards and forwards over the square ends of a pile of fifty-dollar notes. His lips counted the stack and his eyes held still above the movements of his carpal ligaments. A chrome-plated pen squiggled figures on the back of a deposit slip, thumbs stretched rubber bands into hoops. His eyes paused over the twelve-high pile of notes, elbows slid across the timber-inlaid counter.

His eyes shot a beam to Geoffrey’s quiff, tracked its high wave above the teller’s desk. Geoffrey’s arms poked into a stationery box.

‘Count the rest of these, will you,’ Mr Pincer said.

Geoffrey’s head bobbed up, his eyes jumped through the wire hoops of the desk file.

‘I need to check the progress of the building work upstairs,’ Mr Pincer said.

His fingers clawed the soft filter of a cigarette, pinned a neck to the narrow side wall of the packet, drew it out.

‘Shouldn’t be long, son,’ he said.

Plaster dust smothered the horizontal faces of the staircase, left the vertical rises naked. His bank shoes imprinted the steps, his hips met a band of builder’s tape at the landing. Long gilded ribbon spanned the hallway from the top baluster to the door handle of his bedsit.

His hand ripped at the tape, turned the knob, the ball of his head dropped into the room. His eyes scanned the four walls, surveyed the lucid cavity through a white fog of dust. His bank shoes matched the builder’s foot prints on the timber planks and his cigarette rained ash into an empty paint tin at the skirting board.

His finger nail scratched a strip of masking tape at the window’s face. Mr Pincer raised his binoculars to his orbits, sealed the eyecups to his eyes, looked out into the white sky. A wave of electrochemicals crossed the small muscles of his epigastrium, the moons of his eyes cast silver beams across the street to the fruiterer’s shop. A yellow dog idled at the wheel of a bin of oranges, a rubber apron flapped at a tray of garlic corms. The binoculars dropped and swung. His bank shoes bedded into the fresh uncompacted powder of lime.

The pivotal hinge joints at his knees aligned with the row of bare studs at the wall and opened out to one-hundred-and-eighty-degrees.
His arms rose and his elbows rested on the meeting rail in the middle of the sash window. The ball and socket joints at his shoulders cranked upwards, rotator cuff muscles pulled his arms into his chest.

The extruded mass of his soft belly filled the sill recess and spilled to a box shape. The pimpled body of his tongue shrunk under the passage of his breath, licked an annular flake at the lateral border of his lip. His lips whitened under his nail’s scrapes, bled at the scab’s voilaceous heart.

‘What the hell are you doing up here?’ a voice yelled.

The binoculars dropped.

‘I'm this bank's manager,' Mr Pincer said. ‘Here to inspect the work.’

‘No unauthorised personnel allowed,’ the workman said.

‘I’m authorised, son,’ he said. ‘This used to be my residence.’

‘Well, mate, you’re not residing here now.’

Mr Pincer’s eyelids creased, bells set on a pair of Blundstone boots, the thick tyre tread and broad width, on a steel cap.

‘Get to hell out of here,’ the workman said.

The workman’s boots crossed the plank, snout met the window’s frame, greater alar cartilage flared and nostrils steamed at the glass.

Mr Pincer’s nares bloomed, sniffed the air. A rush of sawdust rushed to his throat, raised a cough. His eyes blinked a picture of the workman’s coir moustache.

‘The bank’s overdraft facility might be of interest to a man such as yourself,’ Mr Pincer said, ‘You'll find me downstairs if the need arises.’

A length of yellow tape unrolled, the banister ribboned to the bank’s internal door. A ticker-tape word flapped along its length. Caution.

Mr Pincer’s fists hardened to nuggets and swung, synchronised to the march of his shoes. The knots of a string bag pulled taught across a blister-tray of sausages, a packet of frozen peas, four potatoes and two carrots. A broad shunt at his shoulder arrested his stride.

‘Sorry,’ Gina said. ‘Just getting the shopping for tonight's tea.’
Droplets of frangipani oil filled his nasal vestibule, impregnated the mucosal lining. His hand brushed the lapel of his jacket.

‘You're home early,’ Gina said.

‘Certain amount of paperwork to finish upstairs,’ he said.

The straight edge of her loose hair fringed her clavicle and a dark leather strip pinned a tubular bead to her neck. A blue-grey cylinder echoed the silver threads in her jacket. Its turn-down collar rolled around her shoulders and flattened to a yoke at the front. Two square ends met and boxed her torso into a short-waisted frame. The buttons from the top of her sternum to the inch below her natural waistline counted seven. Five self-fabric discs oscillated on their tin shanks, to the stitch line at the hem between her iliac crests.

The springs of the jacket’s merino fibres relaxed over her laboured torso, wool sagged at the suspended teardrops of her breasts. A larger woman’s upper body filled the jacket, her exaggerated rotundas moulded its hoops and shallows.

* Georgette trussed her body in silk corsetry and drew the jacket’s front panels tight across her chest. Her compressed torso hampered the flow of breath and paralysed gut movement. She faced the tall cavity of the wardrobe and flipped wooden coat hangers, picked out the silver jacket, set it over Gina’s small chest. Gina threaded her arms into the flat pipes, matched the midline seam to the vertical line of her spinal column. The jacket’s invertebrate body assumed the angles of Gina’s scapulae, draped her hips and bust line.

Her reflection poured into the flatbed of a nitrate screen. The patina of Georgette’s face bronzed the shadows. The steel fibres of her woollen hair recoiled and the staples parted.

Mr Pincer measured the length of Georgette’s nose from root to apex in ten thousandths of an inch.

Her chambray dress hung to her knees in a sheet and her milk-biscuit stockings sheathed the outward curves of her legs. The flaccid leather of her black-strapped pumps relaxed over the prominences of her small toes and the wide pores of the stitch-line swelled the blobs of boot polish.
Mr Pincer’s breath condensed over the liquid silver of the picture and his finger moved in the fixative and poked at the polythene folds of his jowl.

* 

Gina’s groceries swung at her thigh and banged up the staircase, hit her pumping legs. The brushed potatoes’ eyes peeked out of the string bag and the carrots’ long tubers speared the calves of her legs. His eye waded at the spoon-drain of her back, dipped into the concave lines of stitching and the small circumference of her cinched waist.

‘Six o’clock okay?’ Gina asked.

Water dripped from the softened peas and pooled on the timber boards at the landing.

‘As you wish,’ he said.

His shoes parked at the door of the lodger’s bedroom and his feet slipped into the hoods of his scuffs. A blanket of dust skirted the room and fluff gathered at the base blocks. The dado rail’s narrow profile separated the room’s superior half from the inferior, and a horizontal line marked the internal circumference. The furniture and effects vibrated and air pulsed in his ear canals. A monotone voice leaked out.

Mr Pincer’s scuffs inched close to the threshold of the room, words pealed out of a small plaque on the door. ‘Man in a Bedroom’. The unguarded canal of his inner ear belled. A monologue fed its chamber.

* 

The six planes of this bedroom present a three-dimensional geometric enclosure within which its subject lives. The lining boards, squares of carpet, ceiling plaster sheets and rectangle openings constitute the four sides of the cuboidal structure. The man in the bedroom sits on his bed and waits for his square-faced clock to move its two hands to the twelve. He stands before the oblong mirror and looks at the angled frames of his spectacles and selects a pair of boxer underpants to pull over the square faces of his gluteal muscles. He draws a match from a rectangle box and strikes and takes a cigarette from a carton and smokes.

Mr Pincer’s eyes scanned the contents of the room; the square, flat sleeves of the record collection and the six books of his encyclopaedia; traced the straight lines of the divan bed and the
pointed angles of the corners, the flat lines of the man’s hip, his horizontal body, the length of the bed from head to foot. His ears tuned into the voice.

*The man turns his body and holds onto his single rectangular blanket and re-positions himself and settles.*

Mr Pincer’s eyes clocked the man’s toes; peeped and turned blue-white, the rods of his metatarsal bones straightened, the ends of his nail plates squared.

*The man’s feet flex in the cold air and extend beyond the limits of the bed. The feet hit the trunk and the toenails poke into its tin shell and disturb his sleep. He flexes the tendons in his ankle and draws his feet back inside the boundaries of the divan’s box base.*

*The man rises from his bed and selects a square-shouldered suit from the wardrobe and hangs it over his back. His finger touches the butt of his tie and forms a square knot at his throat.*

Mr Pincer’s mouth closed and his corneal epithelia warmed under a film of tears, eyes caught the man’s brick head and flat face, the pigeon holes of his nose, the postage stamp of his eye.

*The man in the bedroom writes on square pieces of paper with a rectangle shaft of wood. He pushes the rod of lead over the stamps and inserts his carpenter’s pencil into the slot of his pocket.*

Mr Pincer’s shutters clicked three times, captured the man’s notations in miniature snapshots. The light-sensitive pigments in his eyes preserved the images, transported the negatives to a cerebral storage compartment, copied and stored.

*I am a man in a bedroom and I wear my square clothes and look out of my rectangle window. I am a cuboidal man.*

Mr Pincer’s eye plotted the man’s brow; the points of hair from the first shafts at the medial edge to the last red bristle at the lateral border. The line of his brows paralleled the window’s sill and the line of his mouth copied the picture rail.

Mr Pincer’s pupil beamed a light onto the room’s back wall. Granny Smith apples bobbed onto the flat screen. The coloured slides turned in the carousel. Gum balls and plum puddings flashed onto a matte-white vinyl sheet. Aggie’s blue night-dress draped the screen, static fabric clung to the mounds of her breasts. His lids closed. The voice shunted sound-pockets out of the room.
Silver drops fall from the corners of the man’s eyes and roll to the wall and climb up over the sill. The man’s naked feet move to the window and angle-park and the man raises the sash and releases the balls.

Mr Pincer’s eye rolled the man back to the bed, snapped a shot of his naked feet and another of his own.

‘I’m wearing this man’s slippers,’ Mr Pincer said.

The voice pulsed in his ears.

The man’s eye-liquid runs onto his square shirt pocket and he pulls out his handkerchief and presses the corner to the canthus of his right eye. The man lays his body out in the supine position and allows his upward-facing palms to curl.

Mr Pincer’s legs shuddered and cold neural waves bolted their full thickness, toes inched from the ‘Man in the Bedroom’ installation, eyes peered into the binoculars. His lacrimals dripped pearlescent balls. The liquid spheres filled the cuboidal bedroom and rolled over the divan bed.

The man closes his eyes.

Mr Pincer’s arm rose, fanned left and right, nose pressed to the transparent, acrylic sheet at the entrance to the gallery.

‘Your bedroom is full of soft, round balls,’ Mr Pincer said.

His skin flushed red, muscles swelled and pulsated, his ears twitched.

‘Isabel and Frankie had four babies,’ Jasmine said. ‘You can touch them, they don’t smell.’

Her hands cupped the newborns’ damp bodies. A jolt of electricity shot up his arm, finger flexed over the trembled fur.

His chromed eyeballs lighted the rubus of her mouth. The welded rod of his finger connected to a guinea pig baby. Electricity twitched the fibres of his flexor nerve, drew his thumb over the black hump of a baby’s head. The cluster of newborns tooted from the heart of Jasmine’s clasped hands.

‘Can you help me look after them?’ she said.
Jasmine’s feet pitter-pattered to the kitchen, her hair-coils sprung up and down.

Gina’s hand smoothed a red-and-white checked tablecloth and her plaits descended in spiked rods to the halter of her green apron. The broad loops and thick knot of a cotton bow bloomed at in the lumbar curve. Squares of white light shone in the silver faces of the spoons. Lines on the picnic sheet paralleled the knives’ handles. Hot air blipped up from the gravy’s brown lake. Twelve black sausages hung over the edges of a plate. Peas rose to a pyramid above the lip of a white bowl. A volcano of mashed potato expelled long wisps of steam from an inner chamber.

‘God, I love gravy,’ Jasmine said.

‘Don’t guts all of it,’ Star said.

‘Mr Pincer,’ Gina said, ‘Please, you start.’

‘Right you are,’ he said.

‘I hope you like it,’ Gina said.

Mr Pincer’s eyebrows rose, lids retracted, balls swelled and angled toward the tubes of meat.

‘A man could get fat if he didn’t watch himself,’ he said.

Gina’s cheeks balled up, acetate skin rippled at the sides of stretched lips. The torch of her irides burned a hole in his plate.

‘Gravy?’ she said.

‘Better let Jasmine take first swig at that,’ he said.

Star’s peas lined the sloping walls of her potato tower.

Mr Pincer poked a link of sausage into his mouth’s oval hole. Jasmine’s square tooth margins pierced the knob-end of a black meat tube. Gina’s closed-mouth mastications set her plaits swinging.

‘Nice?’ Gina asked.

‘A man could get used to this,’ he said.

‘Did you see the new additions to our family, Mr Pincer?’ Gina asked.

‘The babies, yeeees. Young Jasmine could charge twenty cents a look at school.’
The three laughs chimed, his ears collected the music of their shared blood. Jasmine’s fork tuned at the dinner plate’s ceramic edge. Vibrations jangled his ossicles.

‘Finished,’ Jasmine said.

‘Me too,’ Star said. ‘I’m gunna check the babies.’

The two pairs of feet pounded the timber boards at the landing.

Gina’s eyes spotlighted her empty plate.

‘Lovely little guinea pig babies,’ she said.

‘Go into breeding, Gina,’ Mr Pincer said. ‘Make a couple of bucks.’

The clashed cymbals of her laugh drove the plug of his finger into his ear canal. His feet paralleled, pushed up invisible train tracks under the table.

‘The girls liked the tea,’ Gina said. ‘Thanks to you. I mean, I’d probably have fried tofu.’

His fingers interwove on the table.

‘Sometimes I just don’t know what to cook for the kids. I joined a vegan class once, just for them. That didn’t work. They hated the gluten-free sponge cakes and the meat-free spaghetti bolognaise. Then I bought a wheat mill and made organic bread. They didn’t like the indigestible bits. You ever find yourself like that? Ever find that everything is out of place, Mr Pincer?’

His feet reversed under his chair, crossed at the ankles, eyes moved from left to right inside the frame of the window. A dark outline formed around her head, in-filled a sheet of black and white newsprint, captioned at her shoulders. Do you know this person?

‘Do you? I mean, do you ever feel like you’re so alone that if you died tomorrow nobody would notice? Well, I do. I feel like that. I don’t think I have the energy to, you know, to get up in the morning and look at nothing. I mean, face being lonely. No, not just lonely, but empty and hollow as well. Does that sound strange to you?’

His eye inked the face inside the black dome, traced the outline of the bust’s narrow shoulders. Do you know this person?

‘I don’t have family. Not really. I mean, I did. But people don’t understand when you tell them you’re bringing your kids up in a Kombi van. I know we have a house now. Thanks to you, again. It’s a
good house. I feel safe here, you know, comfortable. I hope you like your room. Do you like it?’

The black silhouette leaked strings of words into the room’s thick air. His eyes hunted the pinholes of the pupils, the crook of the nose and marked out the wingtips of the shoulders. Hair sprouted up out of the torso’s inverted vase and fed on a bath of silver salts. His eyes vacationed in the backlight of the window’s frame, deflected rays off the metallic silver body, stroked the film of glass.

The crystal grains of the latent image trickled from the base of a vase and trailed across the sill. His eyes shifted to the lime sky and soaked up the rain of powdered light, his pupils narrowed and settled on the corrugated sheets of the bank’s front porch. A murmuration of starlings dropped feathers of grey-brown, their down chests moulded into parallel valleys of iron.

‘Do you like it?’ she asked. ‘Mr Pincer?’

‘Like what?’ he said.

Gina’s sniffs excoriated the tissue lining of his ears and her tears dampened the oxygen in the room.

*  

Aggie’s cries chaffed the skin of his deep canals, dripped onto the sofa’s cushions. Salt crystalised in the pores of her cheeks.

*  

Mr Pincer’s eyes coasted the dove-white pages of the bank’s ledgers.
Chapter Eleven

Mr Pincer’s index finger pushed down on the brim of his trilby. An olive light spread upwards over his cheeks and nose. Forty keys bunched into his right trouser pocket, finger tips palpated their hard edges through rayon lining. His shoes marched in a crisp beat across the flagstone pavers, face angled up to the terrace’s tall facade. Neural impulses ran through his calves and thighs, pinged in the cold pouch of his stomach, alternated signals of hunger and satiation.

The street’s bitumen air filled his lungs. His bank shoes checked off the number of moves to reach the terrace’s step. The door opened to a dark slot. A child’s arms wrapped a cardboard box. Star squeezed out of the gap and belted past, carton hugged to her chest.

‘What’ve you got there?’ Mr Pincer said.

‘Just stuff,’ she said. ‘We’re having a clean out.’

‘Good thing,’ he said.

The box hit the curb at his shins, a low cardboard flap pressed into his knees. A teddy bear’s ear twitched at the fabric of his bank trousers, two amber eyes squinted up at the sunlight.

Mr Pincer’s meat-filled arm gripped the bear’s neck, manipulated the wood and wool inside, a finger pressed the paws and pads, rotated the arms one-hundred-and-eighty degrees. The bank’s polyester shirt received the bear’s champagne mohair, buried his bald patches and holes in the smooth fibres.

His knees bent at the box’s corner, digits fanned and combed the rubble of miniature farm animals, flexed two Barbies’ knees. The dolls’ hair stood out from their heads, five platinum strands dropped onto the golden spines of little books.

‘What are you throwing these good toys out for?’ he said.

‘Mum reckons we have too much stuff,’ Star said.

‘My mother threw my model cars away when I was a boy,’ he said. ‘Wish I had them now. Great pity.’

‘Mum said we can’t fit it all in the Kombi,’ Star said.

‘The Kombi?’

Star’s bare toe pressed the box’s soft base and the other kicked the side. Her brown feet paced back to the house.
His hips flexed, the box’s weight rested at his abdomen, intercostals tensioned, chest grunted up the staircase. The box dropped on the dining table, the bear toppled out and hit his shoe.

‘What’s this chap’s name?’ he asked.

‘Heinrich,’ Jasmine said. ‘I got him from our Dad.’

‘What’s he doing outside in the rubbish?’

‘He’s old and worn out and we’ve got no room for him.’

Heinrich’s face drew close. Mr Pincer’s eye peered into the glass lens. A silver-grey circle shimmered at the margin of the bear’s irides between the limbus and the opaque ring. Mr Pincer’s eye advanced into the bear’s posterior chambers past a thin transparent section. A portrait of a whiskered bear shone under the foveal spotlight. Mr Pincer’s finger pressed the bear’s eye. A voice-box narrated a story.

*German farmer, Heinrich Vogt, lived in Hamburg with his grandson, Heinrich junior. The young bear stowed away in a hat box bound for Australia on his sixteenth birthday. His lungs compressed, struggled to inflate under the pressure of crumpled tissue paper.*

Mr Pincer’s eyes rested in the milk of the bear’s palpebral windows and his chin nestled in the pear of his belly.

Jasmine’s orange cat suit flashed into his field of vision.

‘Mum reckons we need more room in the Kombi ‘cos the four babies are gunna live in a bigger cage,’ she said.

‘Well then, I’ll adopt Heinrich,’ he said.

The bear straddled the pouch of keys at the trouser’s pocket. Mr Pincer and Heinrich trotted back to the lodger’s room. Mr Pincer laid Heinrich on the bed. The bear’s hips flexed and his black, stitched mouth curved into his cheeks.

Mr Pincer’s hand flattened over the bear’s head and electrochemical tingles pulsed in his mid-section and trembled in his loins.

‘Want to do a spot of ghosting, Heinrich?’ he asked.

The binoculars’ broad lenses issued frozen beams into the bear’s round cheeks. The lips thinned, brows pulled tight over hardened eyes.

‘We don’t have to do it right now if you’re busy, Heinrich,’ he said.
Mr Pincer’s fingers tapped at the binoculars’ hard body. The strap fell off the bedside table, dangled at his ankle and spiralled around the flesh and bone of his wrist. His eyes exited through the window’s broad pane.

The rectangle of glass yawned under a grey-orange wash. His eyes whitened and swelled, creased into the pale light. The hotel’s clock gonged the late hour, a flock of gunmetal birds rummaged in the leaves at the front garden. The bird’s low gargles filled his ears and sunlight stooped across the path.

The autumn twilight tinkered in the street and the darkness waited at the roof tops for an invitation to descend. The gap between the burnt sun and the black night spread wide and filled the window’s frame. The binoculars’ tourniqueted his wrist. The pixellated limb breathed the last oxygen from his gentian blood, water spilled from his lids and ran down his face. His finger flicked and stabbed at the swelling hand and his eyes settled in the valley of the window’s middle distance.

* Herr Vogt’s lambs bleated and screamed and stamped their trembled hooves. The farmer squeezed the handles of the aluminium pliers, rolled latex bands onto their woollen sacs, threw their frames and hides at the flat dirt. The cries stopped at midnight and numbed the collapsed legs. The bone shrank from the wool, the lamb’s larynxes vibrated in the darkness. Herr Vogt slept in the company of his castrating tool.

* The bony prominences of his hand disappeared beneath bloated flesh; palm flat on the twill of the blanket, a deep cyanosis at the skin, pulses faded.

Mr Pincer’s eye dove into the skin’s pitholes and met a stranger. The strap tightened around his wrist, nail poked the foreigner, digits flexed and extended. Mr Pincer’s body rolled onto the bed and fell to somnolence. Crystals of tanning salts leached out of the strap’s pores and stained his wrist’s dermal layers. Dirt banked under the plates and indigo pigmented the keratin. The hand’s photo-feit matched; his manus brother toiled in the bank’s mahogany chamber.

His lungs sucked and spluttered and the tourniquet loosened and swung off the edge of the bed. Blood perfused the blue flesh and the
warmed hand opened onto the light box of the window. His left traced his right over a background of orange dusk. Blood escaped the collapsed veins and filled the meat of his forearm.

‘I haven’t got time to do the tea tonight,’ Gina said.

Her foot crossed the threshold of his bedroom door. ‘We’re loading up,’ she said.

A pile of washing clung to her chest.

‘Tea and toast is fine for me,’ he said.

Her cheesecloth skirt cast gold threads across the floor, feet spun on Dr. Scholl’s.

Her soles clacked to twenty-seven down the stairs.

‘Loading up?’ he said. ‘What do you mean?’

His head hung over the balustrade and his belly rested on the straight edge. Gina’s plaits coiled under the dome of her navy beret and her thin neck stuck up out of her orange skivvy. The knit fabric ringed her throat and the weight of her wooden beads dragged on the bend of her cervical spine. Sandalwood balls swung back and forth from one breast to the other, clogs percussed in an even beat back up the staircase. Her small hand left the ascending volute and her fingers caged the carved monkey.

‘What’s going on, Gina?’ he asked.

‘We’re moving,’ she said.

‘What do you mean?’

‘Time for a new place,’

‘The Kombi?’

‘If that’s what we have to do, then yes, the Kombi,’ she said.

‘Jesus,’ he said. ‘I thought we had a good little arrangement,’

‘For you, maybe,’ she said.

The firm tube of knit fabric stretched and shrank, her ribs rose and fell.

Mr Pincer’s eyes turned to the five green garbage bags at the wall.
‘Those bald tyres won’t get you far,’ he said.

‘Neither will the lodger’s fees that you still haven’t paid,’

‘I’ve been meaning to settle up,’

‘I’m leaving in the morning and I’ll be expecting the bond back,’

‘The bond?’

‘My tin,’

‘Ah, yes, the tin.’

Mr Pincer’s legs quick-marched across the landing to his lodger’s bedroom. Heinrich’s cut metal beads flashed and his mouth thinned to a single row of stitches.

‘I suppose you want to go with them,’ he said.

The bear’s eyes shone white squares and his moustache bit into his cheeks.

‘Bugger that,’ he said. ‘Nobody’s going anywhere.’

Mr Pincer’s body rotated inside the sealed box of his bedroom and the digits of his outstretched arms fanned through the air. A laser beamed across the room to the slender aperture of the door. The open hollow interrupted the straight planes of his cuboidal vault and permitted sheets of daylight across the hall. The door’s panel withdrew into the frame, his arms crossed the flat plains of his latissimus dorsi, his shoulder joints pulled into his thorax. His body braced and hardened into a latticed tower.

His headlamp eyes scattered rays of light across the wall, his long vertebral column leaned into the tall body of the architrave. Nail heads shone and clicked into his vertebral discs and pinned his body to the room’s box structure. His eyes beamed back and forwards inside the vault. The hinge joints of his elbows matched the obtuse angles of the room’s corners, the vertical boards of the dado aligned with the long bone of his femur. The volume of his expanded lungs equated to one hundredth of the available air inside the cube and the gradient of the internal staircase matched the slope of his shoulders. His mental archives returned the terrace’s original floor plan; its geometrical angles and lines borrowed from his body’s design. Mr Pincer and the terrace house shared a flawed anatomy. His muscles
trickled acid into the stream of his blood and volts of electricity crossed their fibres. A blind finger reached for the anchored head of his humerus bone and the long straps of his sartorius muscles twanged inside his thighs. The excitable cells in the thick fillets of his heart sparked and the grip on his tuberosities weakened and failed. His nails dug tracks across the skin of his back.

‘Mr Pincer,’ Gina said. ‘Can I come in?’

His palm cupped an auricle.

‘Are you in there?’ Gina said.

‘I’m in,’ he said.

‘Can I open the door?’

‘As you wish.’

Mr Pincer’s shoulders leaned over Heinrich’s recumbent body; robed the bear in his dressing gown.

‘Just getting changed,’ he said.

‘I’ve worked out that between us we don’t owe each other anything,’ Gina said.

‘How’s that?’

‘You owe two month’s lodger’s fees, and I owe half a month’s rent, so we’re even,’ she said. ‘It’s just the bond I’ve come to collect,’

‘The bond,’

‘My tin, Mr Pincer,’ she said. ‘I want it back tonight,’

‘Righto,’ he said. ‘Let a man get some clothes on.’

Incense powder sooted his nasal hub. The discs of Heinrich’s amber irides shone. The packing box lid opened.

‘Where the hell’s that tin, Heinrich?’ he said.

The bear’s mouth pulled into curves, triangular nose inched upwards. The flat paddle of his hand divided row of suits, parted jacket vents. The tin’s silver body glinted through a gap.

‘Here it is, Heinrich,’ he said.

‘Now, old chap, let’s have a look.’
His thumb nail prised the tin’s lid, flipped the metal square off onto the blanket. The melted centres of Georgette’s cocoa eyes shone two white squares into his face. Electricity pulsed through his groin. Georgette’s hand flattened on the mauve lawn, the ruffles of her velvet dress fed the camera’s eye. The micrometre of his optical instrument calculated the width of a strand of her hair. The thickest threads emanated from the nape of her neck.

Mr Pincer’s fingers riffled the objects in the tin, eyes paused on the teardrop of her jugular notch, forefinger moved over the bare white voile of her hand to the silver circle of her engagement ring.

The tip of his finger made a lap of the ring’s mount. The dry white membrane of his lips dusted her ochre mouth. His fourth metacarpal threaded the ring. The pad of his second digit pressed the node of the pearl. The oyster sphere warmed under his pulse. Georgette’s pupils grew in diameter, molecules of air vibrated his ear drums. The photo dropped onto the bedcover and his eyes blinked white. His fingers wrenched at the ring. The silver circle clanged at the base of the tin. Two knuckles rapped on the door’s timber panel.

‘I’ll be out directly,’ he said.

The door opened, his head shot up. The beams of Gina’s eyes struck the spillage of coins. A film of water crossed her electric-green globes. Her tensile lips shone blue-white rays, whimpers burrowed the coiled tubes of his cochleae. Blisters of liquid burst and spilled over the discs of her irides and swelled the grey-sage balls.

Mucous trails silvered her lips, stained her fingers, tarnished the coins. Georgette’s picture slid between her fingers. Gina’s chromium eyes dissipated in the black-and-white.

Gina’s hand troweled the blanket, heaped the objects into a pile, laid Georgette’s picture on top, replaced the lid on the tin.

‘We’ll leave first thing,’ she said.

Her white tooth margins occluded, breaths pushed out of a slim gap.

Heinrich’s stitch lines drooped and his beads closed over. His hairless body slumbered on the bed. Mr Pincer’s hand blanketet the bear’s knees. His eyes turned, fingers tipped the triangle shoulders of a row of suits, lips buzzed a string of words. *Beige, pale malt, nutmeg.* His elbow bumped the tan-bark double-breasted polyester suit and static
electricity cracked his heart. The tan-bark number transacted loans, declined credit applications, recalled default bank cards. Twinges radiated his chest, focus shifted to the beige nylon safari outfit; viscose fibres slid to the left of the wardrobe. His splayed hand clamped Heinrich’s body, pushed the furred paunch into his wet armpit.

The Kombi’s air-cooled engine chomped at the bluestone verge, its exhaust pipe spat tubes of black particulates. The van’s rear cavity housed two white masks, eyes faced to the street; white salt mounded at the medial commissures, irides reflected the Kombi’s orange door. Gina’s long brown plaits hung at either side of a midline part and rested over her cervical processes. The tails tickled the moss stitches of an emerald cardigan.

‘Righto,’ he said. ‘Got the guinea pigs?’

‘In the back,’ Star said.

‘Goodo.’

‘We’ve given them names,’ Jasmine said. ‘Harriet, Margo, Bridgette, and the boy’s name is Harold, after you, Mr Pincer.’

Heinrich’s head flopped through the gap in the Kombi’s door.

‘Better take him,’ Mr Pincer said. ‘You got him from your Dad.’

The bear’s legs withdrew into the van’s cavity.

Mr Pincer’s shoulder leaned into the Kombi’s slider, forced the solid panel closed.
Chapter Twelve

Mr Pincer’s shoulders met the high pads inside his suit jacket and dropped, his arms swung, recalibrated, and his neck arched up to the terrace’s upper window. The glass pond shifted inside the frame’s limits. His fingers flexed, encased an empty palm. The hollow tube hardened; his line of sight fell to the veranda’s round nose. Its tin sheet bore the pits and flakes of a malignancy of the skin. His eye clocked two ashen pigeons, his ear collected their files at the ridges and furrows of the terrace’s iron.

His eyes rippled over the oxidised tubes of iron at the fence. White trumpet flowers of convolvulus measured an inch across and edged the pathway from the bitumen street to the bluestone step. The flower’s metastatic nodules formed networks of roots under the flagstone yards from the parent plant. Chlorophyll leaves carpeted the garden beds, weed faces turned skyward. His bank shoe kicked anchored roots.

Plane-tree leaves gathered at the doorstep in tied-up bundles; long strands of white hair arranged and wrapped. His fingers scraped the heap, scooped and picked at single threads. Gusts of wind separated the leaves, drew them upward from his open hand on warm thermal currents. His eye tracked the flight path of a leaf through the street to the father tree. His breath vacuumed plane-tree hairs, his lungs spluttered in paroxysms. His hands swung and his bank shoes ambled back to the house. A shoe slapped the curtail step at the foot of the staircase, an eye ran the line of the house’s pitch.

* 

The bank’s grand rake at the Swanston Street branch rose above his head. His shoulders met the ninth step and crossed the spandrel. The bank approved of his blossomed height, offered incremental promotions on the basis of long legs and erect spine. He started as ink-well filler, made teller’s mail-boy in a few short months. Electricity ran up his legs, light waves pulsed on the silver beds of his retinal tissue. His eyes gazed upwards into the void of the staircase. Glass bricks encased the columnar void of the hospital’s well. The penultimate floor housed patients’ waiting visitors. Twelve scalloped chairs lined the room, opened into the ward’s rectangular prism. Mavis Pincer waited in the Fowler’s position in bed sixteen. She forgot the tall man from the bank, remembered the blue-grey plumage of her artificial birds. Teller Pincer sat in the half-moon vault,
matched his eyes to the balls of fellow visitors, traced the nurse’s zigzagged footwork.

*

Mr Pincer’s fingers dug into the hills of salt at his medial canthi. His shoes stepped in a slow drum beat up the stairs to the terrace’s kitchen. The sink tap dripped into a Vegemite glass, drops plunked in his ears. The jar’s plain rim matched his lips, pollen spikes washed his throat, fought his gullet. Gina’s candle wax and burnt wick flavoured the water, her pimento smoke and rose-petal infusion tinted the glass. A finger pressed high on his dorsum, a beam shot the scullery.

A mosaic of tin lids concealed liquefied contents. A finger pressed the pea-green, the lentil-yellow, the tomato-blood. A honeycomb of metal tubes condensed into a mass of gelled soup.

*

Mavis Pincer’s pine meat safe stored cross-cut beans and bread-and-butter cucumbers. Mustard seeds littered the vinegar sea bed. Harold stared at the fish eggs in their spiced hatchery. Mavis Pincer snaked her whole arm into the rear of the cupboard; a blind finger tapped the rounded shoulder of a tin of Spam. His thumb hooked a lid, pressed a tubular body into his chest. His eyes fixed on the half-drawn curtains, his throat spoke to the tin through ventriloquists’ lips.

*There is nothing wrong with eating by the light of the oven warmer. In the absence of a tenant, a landlord is the master of his house, and of his consumption of electricity and gas.*

A tin expelled sulphur dioxide flatulence out of its punctured neck. His vice grip twisted the can opener’s handle, and the throat expelled a dry exhaust of gases. The blue horns of the stove flickered, the hob’s breath warmed the kitchen. The flame detained his eyes, the tin plunged the depths of the saucepan. The kettle’s water filled the moat. His belly squashed into the stove’s flat abdomen, bubbles blipped up from under the tin, broke at the water’s surface.

Mr Pincer counted the specs of chicken in the well of soup. His eyes dipped close to the bile, his transparent breath joined the steam, his finger ran around the tin’s razor lip. Thin trails of blood flowed into the steaming moat and coagulated into a pool of protein. The brown clots stuck to the tea towel’s pallid fibres. His nose pressed into the folded wad and filtered molecules of Gina’s patchouli. The rope of her plaits dangled at his eyes, the links numbered twelve. The tin hoisted up out of the pot and the head of a pewter spoon stabbed the
soup’s cream core. A sealer of broth filled the cracks of his tongue and coated the taste buds in crystals of salt. A filled spoon passed to his mouth, the tin clanged on the floor.

The window’s sash banged at the meeting rail and the curtain’s long panels swished past the timber mouldings. A match waved under his cigarette, nose vacuumed white filtrates. His eyes fixed on the sign at the face of the bank’s new building. *For Sale or Lease.* The nib of his chrome-plated pen stabbed the lease contract, tight fingers pushed the pen’s paralytic body across the signature line.

Mr Pincer’s mortared the tower of grey concrete panels and set inside a white powder-coated window frame. A glass pane absorbed the gleam of his corneas, drew his eyes into the square interior; photographed the sepia cast of a door, a wardrobe, a ceiling vent. The wall angle-parked a divan bed, the hollow cube housed a bookcase.

An ant-sized dressing table, a spider-sized gentleman’s chair The bank’s scale drawings featured sat in opposite corners. His lips blew smoke from the terrace to the bank’s new building. Charcoal particles occupied his new bedroom.

His stomach pitched and rolled and disturbed the bilge of soup. A shot of gaseous potassium ferrocyanide burst out of his throat.

The parlour’s light-filled wall bubbled and cracked. His macula drowned in a batter of paint. His retina sieved curds and grease and lumps of lamb fat, splatters of gravy and cursing words and spit.

His bank shoes shuffled to the laundry trough cupboard. Deep grey cracks fractured the hearts of soap cakes; the mesh of their wire cases bent and tore.

* 

Mavis Pincer’s soap holder swished in febrile water, frothed bubbles, sealed the grey dishwater. Thin suds treated tea stains on her white porcelain cups. Tradesmen marked the rims.

* 

Two blue mugs dropped into a basin of tepid water; a wire soap holder swam in a vortex, fish mouths opened, gulped in islands of froth. The bloated china bodies sunk to the bottom.
His eyes dove and his nostrils gulped tallow and lye and the funk of his mother’s wet skin. His hand paddled and splashed in the spiralled water, a finger hooked the plug out, white foam drained from the basin. The stains in the mugs clung to the smooth lining of their throats. His armpits chilled at the shirt’s axillae. The sink pipe swallowed, coughed, frothed, spluttered up the frangipani droplets of Gina’s oil. Her words chuffed out of the pipe and landed on his chin. 
*Can’t remember. Exactly when.*

His lungs inspired the sentence fragments, and exhaled single words back into the kitchen. *Can’t. Remember. Exactly. When.* The words tapped in his ears. The couplets whistled through the fine aperture of his lips. Syllables rode his tune and bounced in duplets along the wall. His eyes left the sink, shot the hooked rug, spun in an elliptical pattern. A centrifuge on the parlour floor spun into a burnt orange core. Gina’s nose pointed into the plaster junction closest to the window. Her eyes groped the shaded corner, lips spoke the word duets, face clung to the dim vertical landscape. His nose stabbed into the right angle at the corner, smelled the architectural flaw.

His eyes clicked the hours of daylight, calculated the distance of the window from the corner, wrote an equation on the wall. A laser beam calculated the relationship between the distance of the corner from the window and the quantum of light inside. The miniature rods in the wall’s bed absorbed the light from the window. Rods twitched in the dimness and brightened in the sun. His finger ran down the curvilinear line of his nose to the wall’s dark angle and tapped a beat to Gina’s verse. *Can’t remember. Exactly when. I stopped. Laughing.* Picture fragments resolved at the tip of his finger; the curve of Gina’s chin, the rim of her ear. His face pressed the wall, nostrils inhaled droplets of myrrh, teeth chewed tears of frankincense. His shoulders’ wingplates hardened, his neck’s bollard firmed.

Mr Pincer riffled his cerebral filing cabinet. Jigsaw pieces split the almonds of her eyes, the leaves of her lips. Fragments dropped to the floor, backs uppermost, inscribed in seven lines of unrhymed verse. *Can’t remember. Exactly when. I stopped. Laughing. Maybe I’m. A bit. Lonely.*

The wall’s lathe and plaster body crumbled, the painted skin peeled. His feet marched back to the trough cupboard, melon head dove into the tin cavity, split on the blunt tin edge of the door. Black seeds burst from the gash. His fingers pressed into the spread of pips and dust and
brushes and paint at the bottom of the cupboard. Light bulbs shattered in a pool of grey vitreous. His feet drew up, pushed into the floor and rushed back to the window.

Gina’s hands perched at her hips, a finger marked the highest point of her iliac crest. The dry brush traced the line of her up-turned chin and the east-west plane of her shoulders; shaped her smile, recalled the day she arrived, stood at the Kombi’s window, arms around an electric frypan, eyebrows in crescents, the squeals of her children.

The screwdriver’s blunt end pierced the paint’s skin, a rubber disc flopped onto a sheet of newspaper. His nasal vestibule trapped the paint’s risen vapours. The brush’s stiff vibrissae stabbed the print of the paper three times and fractured the horsehair thicket. His fingernails picked at the lid’s dermal layer and peeled strips of opaque tissue off the round face. His eye licked the original name of the tint. *Lime White.*

*Mavis Pincer’s white shirt lifted in the wind, calcium hydroxide powder slaked cups of water. She painted the milk of lime over the narrow pine hall table and across the laundry washstand and over the Huon splashback. She white-washed the fence palings and chicken house, the cupboard fronts and staircase banisters in summer. She rinsed the brushes, turned her calloused palms upwards on her thighs and fell to a snoring dormancy.*

*Mr Pincer’s finger tips sanded the light-starved cracks of the wall. Gina’s words danced. His fingers trapped the words, drove them under his nails. His eyes examined the architectural void, the corner nearest the window. Her words transposed and re-settled on the wall’s powdered face. *Laughing. Exactly. Lonely. A bit.* The window’s light shot through the canals in his dentin. His teeth gleamed yellow-ivory. *Lime White.* The paint matched the hue of his incisors, promised her corner a restoration and her poem a cleansing.*

*The horsehair bristles dove into the tin and the paint’s alkaline sweetened. His lips breathed the paint’s name. *Lime White.* The dismal volume whirled clockwise in the tin and the wall’s dry landscape thirsted. His lungs sucked the paint’s timid vapours, his hand fished the trough’s base, netted a bag of calcium carbonate.*

*
Mrs Grace Smiley made snow piles over her garden’s beds, settled handfuls on the mounds of acidic dirt. Her favourite word spilled from her lips. *Gypsum.* Her arms swished the air, her two flat syllables repeated. *Gypsum.* She neutralised the burn of her children’s tempers, raked the chalk’s whiting into the exhausted soil.

*

Mr Pincer penned a missive in three-sentences. *Geoffrey. Bring polyvinyl acetate glue to investment property. Gallon keg in stationery cupboard.* The bell-chime pulsed his feet and up his legs; white glue waited on the coconut-fibre mat at the front door. The weight of the glue pressed into his hip, toes pinged on the steps. Seven of the glue’s eight pints joined the *Lime White,* the tin filled to three quarters.

Handfuls of the calcium powder shook the pool of white. Draughts of the vase’s water slaked the cracked mounds. Swells heightened around the brush’s head and splashes rose up the handle.

His hand pushed utensils about in the kitchen drawer, eyes dashed about the walls and across Gina’s corner.

*

*Lime White* enjoyed broad application at the terrace house. The walls begged for *Gypsum’s* appeasement and *PVA’s* reparation.

*

The chroma of his teeth deepened, lips drew into his cheeks. His eyes bulged into Gina’s dark angle, his fingernail bed hit the sharp end of a paring knife. Blood’s rivulets spilled over the silver faces of the spoons.

*

Mavis Pincer’s mouth domed, dribbled three syllables. *Cochineal.* Crimson dye dropped into a hill of icing sugar. Harold’s eyes torched the dropper. Pigments oozed onto the sifted white powder. A sentence spilled from the gap in her concave lips. *The blood of a thousand insects to ice just one cupcake.*
The bed of his fingernail pumped dye into the swirled distemper, intensified the colour. The paint’s volume climbed the brush’s ferrule, drops disappeared into the viscous batter. His arms worked, rotated to fatigue, rested at the wall. His lips counted the ninety beats of his heart.

The brush’s first splat hit the wall’s acute angle and descended to the floor along the sagittal plane. The left and right sides of the corner split in two. His left hand’s first strokes crosshatched the sinister aspect. The porous landscape’s shade graduated from opal to white. The bristles dunked and wet the wall’s dexter side. His strokes watered the parched skin, fed the empty canvas rich licks of serous fluid. The pale yellow syrup dripped the tenant’s words and nourished starved participles. Can’t remember. Exactly when. The brush’s horizontal bristles caught drips.

His feet stepped back from the wall. Gina’s eyes stared into the street, lips recited her lines. The pallor of her face merged with the clouds. Strobes of light forced her eyelids closed and her lips into balls. Her poem performed. I stopped. Laughing. Her chest sunk, cheeks descended. The brush marked the wall along the lines of her rostral silhouette from the angle of her nose to the concave dish of her lashes. The two mounds of her rima rose out of the wall’s flat face. The paint rippled. I stopped. Laughing.

The words whetted the brush, contoured the canvas. Gina’s horsehair plaits swished the kite of her nose, bristled her auricle. Four silver rings circled the helix and two balls of zirconium studded the lobe.

His neck extended, ear popped, eyes counted the pinhole bubbles.

* 

A crewel needle punctured Gina’s lobes; softened wax sealed the nicks. Sun beams struck her pupils, circled the bands of her irides tightened. A film of water coated the corneas, pigments tinted the paint green.

* 

Mr Pincer’s feet tapped away from the Lime White portrait. His eye measured the canvas from caudal edge to cranial tip. The tissues of his heart quickened. Puffs of benign cumulus traversed Gina’s cerebral
sky. His warm breath joined the clouds and condensed the paint’s liquid. A neural wave rose from his thigh to his epigastrium and charged his stomach with hunger. The brush dipped into the *Lime White* and powdered her cheeks. The fifth and sixth lines of her verse filled the buccal hollows. *Maybe. I’m a bit.*

The couplets dizzied his cochlear, tumbled in the drum. His brush scored a transverse line, the words scrambled and marched across the wall and lined up from short to tall. His eye attached their crossbars and curves, ticks and bends. The words formed groups, clanned together; foreigners. The window’s bright light narrowed, focussed on the rays at her convex lens. His eye shot a beam backwards onto the screen of her retina. His boned orbit closed into the wall and his flesh sealed the hole. The screen projected a man on a bed; fingers interlocked and eyes at the window. A trilby sealed his head and dull leather shoes hooded his feet. Knees locked at ninety degrees. The man’s eyes squared to the Italianate rectangle of the State Bank’s building.

The brush’s servant fixed on the wall’s corner and the bristles dried. The man’s eye port-holed and his mouth spoke the seventh line of Gina’s verse. *Lonely.* The screen’s optic nerve tickered a thick white fibre. *Can’t remember exactly when I stopped laughing. Maybe I’m a bit lonely.*

The man sat at his wall of light-sensitive tissue. The verse scrolled from morning to nightfall. The man read the credits. A spider’s feet crawled under his skin, a cascade of fireworks prickled the black screen. The blood in his neck migrated to his chest and dispersed across his two breast plates. A nerve trilled, shot his arm, tambourined his ears.
Chapter Thirteen

Mr Pincer’s tongue wetted a square of bleached epithelium at the dry corner of his mouth. A cigarette hung at his lip’s lateral edge. His eyes dazed. The day’s last bands of sunlight crossed the bed and the wall behind and the match’s head danced amber spikes beneath the cigarette’s narrow lumen. His eyeballs burned two phosphorescent circles.

Smoke funneled upwards and stirred at the ceiling of the bank’s new apartment. Fog set in the undulations of his skull.

His finger pressed the binoculars’ lenses to the slats of the new white shutters. His weight dropped onto his elbows, neck extended over the sill. Diametrical chords of light spanned the binoculars’ prisms. His eyebrows brushed a white blade, shed a copper hair. Two fingers burrowed into the grey hanks at the summit of his cervical spine, tilled up and down.

* 

Mrs Grace Smiley’s permanent waves lasted two months, or three if the girl used the smallest rods. She passed the bank’s manager, ammonia droplets took up residence in the vestibule of his nasal apparatus.

* 

The binoculars’ cataractual opacities sheeted the lenses. His eyes photographed the street. The window’s slats waved in his peripheral vision, six flat heads screwed the shutter’s frame. His beaded eyes locked onto their faces, examined the angle of their conical throats. A Gladstone bag full of tools shrouded the base of a countersunk hole.

* 

His hand traced the bodies of screwdrivers onto a pegboard in the back shed of the bank. The youthful manus painted their heads and filled their faces in glossed red.

* 

Carpet gases filled his nasal antra.

116
The bag pulled up at the window’s ledge. His fingers tightened around a yellow handle, cervical vertebrae ratcheted upwards to the level of the highest screw, the driver’s tip sunk into a slotted face. The palmar skin of his hand clicked in turns, throat pushed breaths into the shutter’s fins. The weight of his shoulder forced the driver into the split wood, and delivered, to his magnetised eyes, the tapered shaft of a zinc-coated screw. The chuck of his carpal bones fastened around the driver’s handle and, after twenty sinistral turns, raised a wobbled row of metal men to the surface. Clods of dust clouded his throat and collected at the corners of his mouth. His gullet moved up and down, finger pushed the shutter’s stile. The oblong body fell to the floor.

The street’s broad torch flooded his irides and wood-dust filled his nostrils. His eyes fixed anew on the terrace house; thick shoulder pressed the glass, belly filled the window’s reveal, laughs skated the transparent face. His convulsed chest bellowed air, swollen eyes leaked saline tears, chest withdrew from the street’s open rays and leaned into the metallic pipe around the apartment’s balcony. A wide-bore tube of steel and the six-by-eight deck abutted the building’s masonry front. Sparrows fluffed.

* 

Aggie’s petticoat hems flapped the wind-dried grasses in the bank’s backyard.

* 

Mr Pincer’s damp heap of ribbed singlets and white bank shirts wanted a string line. His shirt tails moistened the apartment’s porous tiles and swelled the cells of a typed letter.

*I wonder if the bank could see its way clear to permitting me to install a door in the wall of my bedroom so as to effect a passage through to the balcony.*

The bank’s logo flashed gold peaks at his eyes. *A tenant might discover a means by which to enter the bank from the heights of these platforms and therefore management has upheld its right to deny such an installation.*

The balcony’s bull-bar horns curled at their ends and pierced the wall at the level of his forehead. His arterial vessels clenched a dent at his temple, eyes rose and drove pinpoint pupils into the binoculars’ eyecups. His ribs fixed a hooped thorax, exhalations misted the window’s glass, eyes surveyed the heights of the terrace house. The notch of his umbilicus slid below his belt, eyes settled on the upper
storey of the terrace’s front facade. The unchanged guard of her grey-feathered pigeons lined the sill. The birds’ pigmented spots and cherry angiomas strobed.

The open slats of his apartment window radiated yellow stripes into the rhubarbed layers of the binoculars’ skin.

Mr Pincer’s finger struck a solar tattoo, his hand cupped a birds’ cold epidermis.

* 

George Pincer’s clubbed fingers meshed the hollow barrels; his skin and the birds’ shared a damaged cutaneous layer.

* 

Mr Pincer’s white metacarpals shone up at the sky, blushed crimson in the heat, palms rose to the apartment window, knuckles curled around the crocodile skin of the binoculars. His eyes swam the terrace’s dark pond.

His ears received a call to ghost. The vacant pane yearned, his eyes’ palpated, examined the skeleton and viscera and arterial tubes and venous threads. The window starved, ached, wanted morning’s flashes and afternoon’s thunder, silent book-reading and hair-brushing.

* 

Mrs Grace Smiley’s squatters stayed, waited, absorbed the goings on in the house. The bird’s silver bodies pined for the terrace’s tenant.

* 

Mrs Grace Smiley’s opaque glass delivered the long, grey body of her mantel to the right, and three-light chandelier at the ceiling, and twelve glass teardrops. The box of shadows divided the wall into charcoal and embers and cut the drapes into ribbons of burgundy and cream. His eye fished the hook above the fireplace, flapped wings in the street light, puttered a clan of moths, mooned a grey-flannel blanket. The binoculars dropped to his chest.

The Olivetti typewriter tapped out words in the white interior of the bank’s apartment. *Wanted. Tenant for two storey terrace. Apply within.* His fist clenched the barrels at the crook of his elbow and his eye stabbed the point of the doona.

*
Mavis Pincer’s cotton dress ballooned and the bed linen rose in gusts. Harold’s forehead crinkled, eyes blinded. Mavis Pincer’s legs pegged a tent of sheets to the ground.

*

Mr Pincer’s arms pulled burned shirts from the dryer’s rubber mouth; sleeves threaded a coat hanger. His mucosal membrane absorbed the bush’s burned floor, fingers spanned the fibres of a retired safari suit, drew the corpus to his chest. The legs leached haemoglobin out of the open flares. The bank shoes choked on the wall’s calcium powder. His lids blinked at the laces’ frays, finger ran the parcel shelf of the built-in wardrobe. The boards rained particles onto his head.

His hunger drew salt and ash from the morning toast, teeth cut sliced starch, elbow bumped the shower’s mirrored door. A bold sun shot the skylight, struck his lucent skin; vessels fractured and burst in scarlet spiders at intervals along his arm. Drops of water fell and silvered the tendinous ropes of his foot.

Meandering queues of fidgeting digits lined the bank; a man with a hawkish nose and a woman with a lampshade fringe hogged the line. The man sniffed twice and the woman coughed.

Mr Pincer’s lips sealed, shoes repaired to the office.

The notice sweated and stuck to the corkboard in the bank’s chamber. A handful of thumb tacks stabbed the corners. The customers turned their heads and narrowed their eyelids at the words. Wanted. Tenant for two storey terrace. Apply within.

A rubber thimble rolled up and down the tip of his finger and the telephone’s receiver lifted and dropped. The blotter returned a bleached face and triangulated ears. The white wad swallowed navy ink from a fountain pen’s cartridge. Spots grew and merged and seeped toward the pad’s long border.

‘Boss,’ Geoffrey Smailes said.

‘Pincer, landlord,’

Geoffrey’s elbows braced three-ring binders.

‘Yes, Geoffrey. What is it?’

‘You wanted to check these?’
Mr Pincer’s finger waved in the direction of the office sideboard and his eyes fell to the blotter pad. Indigo starbursts filled a cellulose sky.

* 

Teacups wisped steam. Mrs Grace Smiley’s cow-jug brimmed globular milk. She poured tea and broke cheese off in rough chunks. Said she liked the cured blocks from unbranded packets; dissolved the piquant grease in hot tea. ‘I like a lot of butter,’ she said. ‘I take no notice of the doctor’s orders. Always put plenty in cakes, especially. Nothing worse than a dry cake.’

* 

The apartment’s fellow residents dinned his ears, creaked floorboards and contracted bed springs. Noise penetrated the cavity of his residence; doors banged at tea time and slammed throughout the night. His Olivetti typewriter tapped at three in the morning and at five.

_I am kept awake owing to the late and sporadic hours of these individuals. I would like the bank to ask my apartment neighbours to desist._

His bed squeaked, body rolled on the single mattress, eyelids swelled to two ounces. His fingers stiffened and typed. Head Office replied via internal mail.

_Should the matter continue the bank advises contact with local council. It understands that the residents are young professionals in the emerging computer industry and often engage in late-night tasks of a technological nature._

His knuckles percussed the plaster between two studs, palpated a hollow cavity. The kettle’s surges and the fridge’s groans ricocheted in his ear canals and his words swore. The sky lightened to grey, elevator rose and doors opened. The occupants laughed and spilled out and spread into the communal hallway. Shimmers of heat radiated from their bodies and his chair’s stuffing sunk. The resident’s knocked and bumped and a rank humidity soured the building’s concrete pillars. A tram gonged at five o’clock and two birds flapped a shine on the balcony’s rolled tin. His eyes dove into the grey plumage.
The first timid globe blinked in the street and strips of yellow and blue electricity pumped the meat-filled ends of a fluorescent bun. Sparks shot up and down a red tumbler of carbonated liquid and a white straw suctioned the effervescent bubbles. His eyes dove into the olive-green pool inside the window’s frame and swam laps through the ripples. A frigid blue vortex wrapped his legs.

*

Mavis Pincer’s polyester trench coat blipped air-pockets full of questions. *Harold, when are you planning to visit your mother? You left me up here in Wangaratta on my own.*

*

Mrs Grace Smiley’s stippled walls papered the binocular’s lenses. Waves of mauve unrolled across the upstairs room, yolk and tinsel shivered in strips. His eyes tip-toed through to the parlour’s back wall, his white hand rounded the flaccid mound of his pectoralis muscle and slid down to the bulge at his flank, pinched the flesh of his stomach. His teeth clenched.

*

Mavis Pincer’s words rose from the window’s shadow. *Silver-beet stalks are disappearing every day. Don’t worry, Harold. I know who’s responsible. Those hooligans next door ought to be ashamed.*

*

Mavis Pincer informed the church ladies that citrus trees drew their nutrients from the hot poultry manure of her fowls. Harold’s tender mouth burned. She sliced rind and strained juice and melted wax over the surfaces of the finished marmalade. Lips mumbled and hissed. Whole lemons rode the mandolin’s blades. Harold crouched beneath a trestle table at the fete, his teacher swallowed the jellied spoonfuls of citric acid.

*

The window’s glass heralded. His tired eye stumbled inside the darkened hollow and fell against the bow-fronted dresser. Two drop
handles tick-tocked at his forehead. A grey veil closed the shadowed box and the window cancelled his ghosting. The binoculars buried their heads in his chest. His armpits drained into the bank’s yellowed shirt, toes scuffed on the apartment’s nylon carpet, shoulder banged the cupboard’s mitre. His eyelids copied the moon to quarter phase his orbits. The binoculars’ strap coiled his neck, pulled and bloodied his mouth. His tongue detected the separated elements of sodium and steel. The cotton pouch of his y-fronted pants stanchioned the flow. His eyes rested in the pallid canvas across the road.

* 

Mrs Grace Smiley’s storm lamp beamed into service. Power outages and woodshed scouts busied the brightened light. The Tilley’s paraffin-filled brass tank waited on the sideboard. She crossed the bolts of her legs and heard voices in the telephone, lit the white cord mantel, x-rayed the skeleton of the mahogany chair.

* 

Mr Pincer’s hand shelved his brow and collected a square of the sun’s rays. His trilby covered the hook of the bank’s stand, his head rose and feet stepped toward the lime man at the top of the traffic pole. His eyes detected a chequered image of plumped lips and jersey dress, the up-and-down beat of modulated steps.

The sun’s beam hit the forehead, patched the hairline in melanin, blued the sclera, infused plum-juice into the lips. The handbag flattened into the hip, eyes rose. A haematoma swelled at the bed of the thumb nail, purple clots expelled through the eye of a sewing needle. The plates banged between car doors and chocks of firewood. Telegraph poles steadied the gait, oiled splinters flattened the palm. Teeth bit the lower lip, black-heeled shoes floated on a grey sea of flagstone pavers.

‘You weren’t in the bank, Mr Pincer,’ Mrs Grace Smiley said.

His moist palms slid down the thighs of his trousers.

‘Just slipped into the milkbar for some gaspers,’ he said. ‘I see you’re out of hospital.’

‘I spent three months in the palliative ward. Awful food, you know,’

His cheeks puffed, air whistled out of a tightened oval.
‘The chest had me feeling quite like I could have left this world. The doctors filled me with all sorts of potions. I’m surprised the treatment didn’t kill me.’

His eyes trapped her lips.

‘That sign,’ she said. ‘The one in the bank,’

‘Ah yes, the tenant moved on.’

His eyes locked on his bank shoes.

‘I didn’t think I’d be looking for a house to rent. Not at my age. But here I am. Loaned the proceeds of the sale to my son-in-law to buy god-knows-what,’

His head shook and his cheeks slapped his teeth.

‘Mrs Smiley, you wouldn’t want to go back into the terrace. It’s too big, and the stairs...’

‘Yes, but I like the place. It’s what I know.’

A tune whistled out of her chest.
Chapter Fourteen

Mr Pincer’s open nostrils drew chlorinated jets of air from the hospital’s bed sheets. His face met the cold air inside, leaned into the door frame, eyes shot back at the long shadow across the street. Mrs Grace Smiley rested a hand on the banister and a foot on the first step. His nose pointed into the mains power box, knuckles pushed two switches up. The skin of his face tightened into squints.

His eye laser pulsed at the thin leg, measured the distance from crest of tibia above to the small hammer inside the ankle.

The beam shot back at his face and two fingers pressed the keratinised skin at his temple, dripped cold tea off cotton balls into the tender hollows.

Mr Pincer pressed a fist into his hip, hooked her arm through the triangulation at his elbow. His bank shoes hit the first step and the second. Mrs Grace Smiley’s button shoes marched in time with the tap of his cleats. The bellows of her chest hissed and her heels knocked on the treads, her fingers spread over the newel cap and gripped. Her head rose and eyes landed on the etched glass of the light shade, shoes clip-clopped into the parlour. The noon sun spared the upstairs room, shone a hard beam on the bank.

Mrs Grace Smiley absorbed the sun’s recuperative warmth on cold days, stood for hours, eyes in slits, drew the amplified heat into her deepest tissues. Purple bands flowed through the panel-windows and filled the telephone-box porch, a dozen fires her bones.

Dust sheeted the mantel and the sill, silver specks floated from the walls to the window. His lungs puffed, her lungs inhaled visible particles and exhaled an oxygenated chuckle, wrinkled the coutil at her neck. His eye followed a vertical line from the crest of her spine to the deep canal below her occipit.

She looked out into the street, his eyes copied.

‘I live in one of those boxes now,’ he said.

Her breaths huffed out of narrowed flutes.
'I never did fathom what was wrong with the old joint. The refurbishment damn near killed me. Banging and sawing all bloody day.'

‘Oh?’

Her eyes traced the movement of the footpath.

‘Did you see that dog in the basket on the front of the man’s bike? The look on his face made me laugh. I think he was saying, “Drop me off at George Street, will you.”’

A fan of lines radiated her temple from a pivot at her eye.

‘I stayed at this house while they rebuilt the top half of the bank,’ he said.

‘Then you’ll know that you can see a lot from here.’

His head lowered and his arm dragged on a chair, his bottom pressed into a moulded seat. The purple dress fabric drew across her spine, swung at her popliteal fossae. Her waist shrank from the circus of self-fabric at her waist.

‘So you’ll move back in then, Mrs Smiley?’

‘Oh yes,’ she said. ‘Look, the hospital has sent my bags in a taxi. For an extra $12 I thought it was worth it.’

His eyes captured the dark shape inside the white frame and clocked the body’s steps.

‘I’ll go down and get your bags,’ he said.

‘Very kind, Mr Pincer.’

Her two large suitcases humped up the stairs and dropped in the parlour and his bellows puffed at the rate of thirty breaths in the minute.

The window framed a blank canvas. His eyes shot to the dining table and to the wall.

‘Mrs Smiley,’ he said.

‘I had to lie down,’ she said. ‘You don’t mind?’

The rods of her legs ran perpendicular to the settee’s long plane. His eyes beamed into her closed lids. Her mouth hung at the resin of her teeth, a sheet of mulberry paper draped the cricoids rings in her neck.
Her breasts flattened, the button holes stretched open at the front of her dress. A white woollen spencer finished at the hips, her jersey dress dropped into the narrow valley between her thighs. Brown elastics gathered the stocking tops, skin wrinkled into bunches. Her eyelids rose, pupils fished in a mucoid film.

‘What will you charge me for rent?’ she asked.

His fingers clasped a chin roll and pulled.

‘Let’s not talk about that now,’ he said.

‘Yes,’ she said. ‘We must. Please.’

His palm plastered at his neck, slid down to his chest.

‘My pension money. Will that be sufficient?’

His elbow projected into the window’s stile and his hand capped his brows, eyes crossed to the bank’s entrance door. The wooden fibres absorbed the sun’s rays, shielded the customers from the sun’s heat.

‘I haven’t had a tenant here for over a month. Thought the rental market was ...’

‘Dead?’

‘When I moved into the bank’s apartment I sort of forgot about the place. Let the garden go a bit.’

‘Let me fix it up,’ she said.

His pupils constricted to pinpoints and his elbow held fast, fingers saluted the bank’s front door.

‘What I want is to live here in perpetuity, as they say. I have no reason to move again,’ she said.

His vocal cords emitted a tight note, elbow lowered, face turned to the settee.

‘Here’s an idea. Leave the pension in your account and I’ll transfer funds for the rent each month.’

‘As you wish, Mr Pincer. You’re the bank manager.’

‘And landlord,’ he said.

His lips banded his teeth.

Her arm rose and a finger stretched, poked the suitcases.
'Bring me my things before you leave. I need my tablets.'

The suitcase’s metal feet bruised the timber floor, dropped onto the boards at the settee. The zip ran over the square shoulders and her wings leaned, elbow pressed into the cushions.

Mr Pincer eyed her lips. Air blew out of her bulged cheeks. Two white scored tablets pressed onto her spooned tongue.

‘A drink, Mr Pincer?’

The glass’s rim dripped onto the plastic bag full of tablet boxes and repeat prescriptions. Her larynx’s sharp prominence rose and fell in swallows.

‘Ah, that’s better. Lucky I left this old furniture here,’ she said.

His eye shot to the pill bottle on the lamp table, captured the first and last letter on the label. His hands swished together, shoes echoed across her draped ear lobes.

‘The bank awaits me,’ he said. His bank shoes quick-stepped in the landing.

‘Take that passbook with you,’ she said.

Mr Pincer’s fingers splayed and isolated the bank’s logo, set the gold letters inside the small angle at his proximal joint. *State Bank*. His hand slid down the page and stopped at the last figure in the column. $24. Mrs Grace Smiley’s signature scrolled and ticked inside a tight box at the right and her digits flashed at his burning corneas.

His hand withdrew from the passbook and the pages sealed their additions and subtractions from his view. His eye spotlighted the passbook’s black face, his thumb opened the pages. The last page showed automatic withdrawals at monthly intervals and the pension’s failure to keep pace. The hospital room cost more than she had to spare. The rental charges at the terrace house exceeded the small balance. Electricity and gas accounts, bond, the cost of food and medicines echoed in his ears. The figures grew tall inside the columns and bolded. The tip of his finger ran up and down their towers, pressed the passbook’s stiff leaves over the gold logo. The heat of his blood perfused the cellulose fibres of the empty account.
Mr Pincer’s ear drums awoke to the gasps of pressurised air out of hydraulic brakes in the street. Engines revved and pumped tubes of wet concrete into boxed-up sections in the adjoined office tower and concrete trucks hit the curb below his apartment at five in the morning and at four.

His body logged and rolled, his shoulder humped. The cartilage of his ear flattened into the pillow. The workmen signalled stop and go and pour in single syllables. His smallest finger stabbed at the ear canal and twisted, hairs inside ripped from their follicles. His finger withdrew and popped the bung, dug at the sheets under his knee, nail scored the rims the binoculars’ smooth eye.

The glass’s eye rose from the bedclothes, his orbits connected to their soft cups, the barrels burrowed into the window’s face. The instrument of eye-and-glass-and-palpebral-body-and-Bakelite-limbs flushed into the bank’s virgin pane. The terrace’s open curtains permitted his eye to the dim orange of the parlour’s interior, past the pill bottle and the glass of water on the sill to her legs on the settee. His eyes coasted their mottled landscape, the detachment of the stockings from the legs, counted the miniature elevations and depressions in the nylon sleeves at her knees.

His prisms followed the line of her fallen arm down to the floor and moved into the darts between her spread fingers, rested on the fastened buttons over her sternum, hunted the rise and fall of her chest. The buttons stopped their wobble, sat stationary in their holes. His breath rose under the binoculars’ bridge, clouded the bank’s new window, seeds of nausea sprouted in the dry rugae of his stomach. The suitcases teeth opened two inches, the plastic bag full of pill bottles bulged. The chandelier’s artificial rays cast a shroud the case’s black throat. The window admitted a blend of orange rays, tanned the brown-leaves of her skin and buried her body in the soil of the settee’s upholstery.

*

Chicken roasted in her pan, soft leaves of sage wrapped the hearts, sprigs of thyme pierced the thighs, sticks of rosemary trussed the wings. The ball of string, poultry shears, bone handled sharpening steel repaired to the utility drawer. Juices clouded the bird’s thick breast.

*
His lumbar vertebrae collapsed and a thread of acid shot up his back. His dry balls shrunk behind his lids and the binoculars returned to bed, their body cooled under the brushed cotton of his pyjama trousers. The toots of trucks singed his ear drums, brakes squealed and stiffened their cilia at the roots. His eye peeled the metallic rail around the balcony and knocked the lemon helmets on the workmen’s heads.

* 

The sun belted the morning hours on his side of the street.

Mrs Grace Smiley’s high west window welcomed the sun. The afternoon’s attenuated beam animated objects on her stage, bloomed vases of hydrangeas bloomed to lilac, puff-balls blinked.

The sun’s rich streams to drove out splinters and located cuts to the foot, proved bread dough, and unbound hair from cotton rags, dried tears from a letter, warmed stiffened honey and softened blocks of butter. The yellow fat brightened and shone on a square plate. Mrs Grace Smiley talked of the keeping qualities of crushed pineapple in a fruit cake.

* 

The square of his handkerchief blotted beads on his brow, the damp cloth draped his blue irides. His lids opened, permitted a rain of yellow and white, his body drew into the glass and his binoculars pressed to the flexed pane. The white stucco walls of the terrace spilled clots of cream over the tall-box house, water in the glass tasted brackish, pills in the bottle caked.

His eyes advanced into the candle-lit parlour, brushed the angles of the furniture. The sideboard mirror swallowed his beam, reflected a tin-foil face. His silvered eyes shrunk from the binoculars’ prisms and his chin hung over his chest. The tips of his fingers pushed his nostrils upwards and crushed the pollinated bristles inside. His knuckles blocked the opening and long mucous cords descended from their hollows and swung at his broad bank tie.

Mr Pincer’s eyes set at the window and ghosted the white cavity of her parlour. The west window performed a late-afternoon ritual, a
narrow stream of light broke at the high oblong and showered rays across the room.

Mrs Grace Smiley’s white palm faced the floor boards and the shallow bowl of her fingers filled with gold. His eyes followed the beam to the east of her knees and rested on the medial condyles of her ankles.

Her parchment skin cracked at the peak of the bones and light shot into the fat of the marrow. His eyes milked her flesh through the blue threads of her veins and filled the bag of his stomach. His wetted lips swelled beneath the pressure of his finger. Her button shoes fell in a lateral rotation to face the window, her ankles spread. His eyes ghosted her private knolls.

The high west window fell to a dim orange and silver-grey. The fallen light dulled her shoes, quickened the flight of a dark bird in the oven. Her lips opened, breath shot in, blue oxygen filled the labial pulp. Her cheek globed and chilled white.

* 

The make-up pad and rouge powder blanched white at the hospital. A glass of milk filed her belly and a taxi drove her to church. A plate of porridge and a pancake of make-up fed the funereal stomach.

* 

A thicket of her hair fell back, ear’s ellipsis faced upwards, the gingerbread lobe rested unadorned at the height of her neck, canals widened, voices crammed her ears.

* 

The raised sash carried the shouts of her daughters, tight fingers punched the chime three times. Mrs Grace Smiley breathed a sigh and ignited the invisible gas beneath the chrome base of her kettle. The blue exhalations soothed the children’s vibrating shouts. The children of her pelvis’s hollow shell advised her many failings. A child in the bank said that all her money, what was left of it, would never be enough. Another child stamped her foot on the floor, hit her mother’s calcified joints, laughed for all the customers to hear. A too-good
mother. The grown children knew nothing of their mother’s filo eyelids and thirteen lashes.

*

Mr Pincer’s lenses thickened to opaque green at the petals of her closed lids. His fingers ran the leather strap of his binoculars to the curled tail, their cones banged on his sternum and swung in a pendulum across the midline of his body. The tick-tocking barrels moved from one shoulder to the other at seventy beats in the minute and stopped at the lowest point.

His eyes met the black face of her passbook and fixed on the gold logo. Her next visit to the bank afforded the opportunity to raise the issue of her insufficient funds. His stomach contracted into folds, pushed acids upward, flooded his throat. A tin of baked beans lined up on the kitchen shelf, his nose pierced the lid. The can opener’s handle turned in clean grinds at the metal lip. His open mouth rasped on the frilled edge. Blood and beans dribbled into the buccal cave.

Orange plasma swam the front panel of his bank shirt. Powdered borax and a gallon of water dressed the stain. His trough. His bloated fingers poked the white sails, drowned the air-filled sack, billowed and puffed at his elbow. His breaths punched out, his fist dropped into the frothed alveoli.

His wet fingers dabbed the binoculars’ barrels, drew their rubber sockets to his eyes. His cranial bone and glass balls fused and angled into the dusted umber pan across the street. The glass of water and the pills opalesced. The transparent pool of melted wax rippled at the candle’s wick, the flame breathed small gusts of air in the parlour’s dust.

Mr Pincer’s eyes hugged the mouldings, filled the joints, stepped into the parlour’s fresh shadows. His fingers gripped the binoculars’ barrels and pressed their lenses to the bank’s smooth glass.

The tenant’s body lay supine on the settee.

His eye traced a line from the tip of her finger to her ankle, ran a sienna beam across to the wall and plotted the coordinates, quivered parallels to the south of his picture. The mantel clock summoned and
his pincered fingers turned the key. His ears chimed the strikes and his fingers open to five hour hands. The binoculars dropped to his chest.
Exegesis

Chapter One

This chapter examines modes of looking as they are portrayed in Edgar Allan Poe’s fictional works from *The Man of the Crowd* (1840) to *The Purloined Letter* (1844). The chief action of these characters involves a type of close and investigative looking, whether that is following a stranger, or unravelling the details of a crime. However, despite the intensity of their acts, each remains within the scope of what is “usual for most normal people” according to Freud’s meaning of this phrase in his *Three Essays* (1905, 156). Charles Baudelaire’s essay “The Painter of Modern Life” (1863) acts as a means of situating the looking character in the context of artists such as Constantin Guys. His theory of the artistic process as it relates to sensory perception forms a key discussion in relation to the way in which looking inspires the artist to create. Alfred Hitchcock’s principal looking character in *Rear Window* (1954) is discussed in relation to Laura Mulvey’s critical response to that film in her “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975). Mulvey’s article approaches Hitchcock’s characters from outside of their experience of the act as classic deconstructionists have in the late twentieth-century.5 Thus, her paper offers an alternative to the approach in this thesis in which the character is examined from within the psychical dynamics of his act.

Twenty-first century scholars have investigated Poe’s theme of looking as it is portrayed in his crime fiction. The focus has been on his use of optical devices or the way in which his detective stories have been constructed. Elizabeth Sweeney’s article “The Magnifying Glass: Spectacular Distance (2003) in Poe’s ‘The Man of the Crowd’ and Beyond” for example, discusses Poe’s use of visual techniques. Peter Thomas’ chapter “Poe’s Dupin and the power of detection,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Edgar Allan Poe* (2002) finds that Poe’s stories “replace the unintelligibility of mystery with explanation, emphasising the potential comforts of narrative: the apparent provision of order, of meaning, of a metaphorical map in time that seems to tell us where we are” (2004, 133). This chapter, by contrast, focuses on Poe’s theme of looking in terms of its aims and capacities as they relate to the psychical dynamics of the character. This approach represents a very different understanding of the looking character in that it focuses on his subjective experience.

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The term ‘looking’

The introduction explained the usage of the word ‘looking’ as it pertains to this thesis. That discussion is now continued in order to specify the particular words that are often used interchangeably with the word ‘looking’ in scholarly texts. Sigmund Freud uses the term ‘looking’ in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) under the heading “Touching and Looking” (156). The terms Schaulust, scopophilia, “the gaze”, voyeurism and other words to describe the act of looking are not applied to the behaviours of literary characters in this exegesis because they do not fulfil the “aim of looking” as Freud describes in his *Three Essays*. “It is usual for most normal people,” Freud writes, “to linger to some extent over the intermediate sexual *aim of looking* ... this offers them a possibility of directing some proportion of their libido on to higher artistic aims” (1905,156-157, my italics). Used in this way, the phrase “the aim of looking” links the physiological motives to the character’s action. The other words, as listed above, tend to carry moral, psychiatric or political connotations and are thus unhelpful to an investigation of looking as that action relates to the psychical dynamics of characters. Indeed, the psychical dynamics which underlie the act of looking, as far as Freud described them, are amoral, non-pathological and apolitical.

Moreover, the psychiatric term “voyeurism,” as it is found in psychiatric texts, functions as a diagnostic classification and is thus not applicable to the characters in this thesis. The phrase “usual for most normal people” thus provides the prefatory context within which the looking act is examined. In *Three Essays* Freud separates the phrase “usual for most normal people” into two parts: (1) looking in order to complete the sexual aim and (2) looking in order to direct some proportion of the libido on to higher artistic aims. Both these aspects of looking are examined in this exegesis; the second part is extrapolated in Chapter Three in terms of the psychical dynamics which function to supply consciousness with content. The primary task of looking is further divided into: (1) the mechanism of the sexual instincts for reproduction and (2) the mechanism of the sexual instincts for homeostasis. The first will be examined in relation to the way in which this schema has been appropriated in the service of supporting Laura Mulvey’s political argument on which much scholarship on looking is based. The second, of homeostatic mechanisms, will be discussed in relation to the way in which neurological imperatives lead to the attainment of “higher aims”.

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Freud’s passage in *Three Essays* uses the terms “seeing,” “visual impressions” and “looking” in order to convey the actions of patients and the actions of nerves in both physiological and qualitative contexts. The word “seeing” appears in the sentence: “A certain amount of touching [and] ...seeing” in order to indicate that these actions on the part of the “normal person” or “normal” literary character provide for the apprehension of “visual impressions”. Visual impressions, or the uptake of sensory information from the periphery of the body, for Freud, as for Susanne K. Langer and Ernst Cassirer, are qualitative actions; they involve the apprehension of sensory stimuli as outlined in *On Aphasia* (1891). This action, as Freud explains, is both a physiological mechanism and a qualitative one: “The fibre tracts, which reach the cerebral cortex after their passage through other grey masses, have maintained some relationship to the periphery of the body, but no longer reflect a topographically exact image of it” (53). The reason that they do not reflect a topographically exact image of the body is because the fibre tracts undergo changes which reflect their new function of containing qualitative information. Thus, when Freud uses the term “visual impressions” in the sentence above, he is referring to the fact that the impulses are differentiating according to their final function as images, and thus as contributors to consciousness.

Freud uses the word “perception” in *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895) to discuss the functional aspects of homeostasis. For example, “If, however, a perceptual neurone has received its cathexis of attention, a number of things may happen ... [its actions] correspond more or less to the state of an investigator who has made a perception and asks himself: What does this mean? What does this lead to? ...[It leads to] a mnemic image” (1895, 363, 364). Freud remains throughout *Project* of the view that looking functions as a precursor to this physiological action of “perception”. Moreover, his use of the word “perception” provides evidence for the way in which looking precedes qualitative actions. He does not use the word “perception” in *Three Essays* when describing the actions of touching and looking because he is describing the “sexual aims” in regards to the instincts rather than the physiological mechanism of homeostasis. Thus, it is in fact Freud’s *Project for a Scientific Psychology* in which the word “looking” is used in its role as a precursory action to the physiological process of perception. This exegesis uses the word “perception” in this same way.

The word “voyeurism” is a diagnostic category which describes a syndrome in which the looking character is repeatedly preoccupied “with fantasies and acts that involve observing people who are naked or are engaged in grooming or in sexual activity” as Kaplan and Sadock explain in their *Synopsis of Psychiatry: Behavioural Sciences Clinical Psychiatry* (1994, 677). For this exegesis, such diagnostic terms are not applied to characters for the following reasons: (1) the author is not a psychiatrist or psychologist and therefore is not qualified to make such diagnoses (2) the criteria Kaplan and Sadock use to make the diagnosis of voyeurism cannot be verified in the case of literary and filmic characters; that is,
the following criteria, as examples, cannot be established: “masturbation to orgasm”, “first voyeuristic act occurs during childhood”, “intense sexually arousing fantasies” (1994, 677) (3) the scope of the thesis, as discussed in the introduction, is not intended to encompass the looking of literary and filmic examples which “involve the act of observing an unsuspecting person who is naked, in the process of disrobing, or engaging in sexual activity” (1994, 677). The characters do, however, look, but do so in the manner of such characters as Lick Jimmy of Ruth Park’s *The Harp in the South* (1948). “Lick Jimmy, too, liked to stand behind a dark curtain and watch the life of his neighbours,” explains Park’s narrator of this character who feels himself to be something of an outsider as a Chinese man in 1940s inner western-Sydney (2009, 12). Thus, a “looking character” for this thesis, is a character who looks, as Lick Jimmy does, in a way that “is usual for most normal people” as Freud explains in *Three Essays* (1905, 156). Hitchcock’s *Rear Window* (1954) is the filmic exemplar of the external view of the looking character taken from the perspective of other characters; his nurse, girlfriend, police associate, the audience and the camera itself. The creative component of this thesis tells the story of a looking character from the point of view of his subjective experience and therefore the exegesis follows this approach in its discussion.

In summary, this thesis takes as its frame of reference the subjective experience of the looking character. From within this frame, it elaborates the implications of Freud’s phrase, the “aim of looking,” as that is portrayed in literature and film. Freud’s “aim of looking” orients the act within the patient or looking character as it is constituted in the psychical mechanisms of looking. With that in mind, this thesis will identify and acknowledge the multifarious functions of looking in text and film to reveal those aims and further to determine what modes of discourse may be employed, from presentational to representational. These ideas are explored in *Mr Pincer’s Tenant* and in the exegesis to reveal the connections between looking and language, as discussed in each of the chapters, particularly in Chapter Three on Freud and aphasia.

*Looking, crime and the unconscious in Edgar Allan Poe’s fiction*

Poe’s narrator in *The Man of the Crowd* (1840) looks in a single self-limiting episode of “electrified” surveillance which begins with heightened curiosity and ends in “weariness unto death.” He stares into the stranger’s “crime” but finds himself confronting looking as a tool for investigation rather than as a discloser of secrets. For this reason his mission becomes an examination of the efficacy of looking in the face of crime’s concealments: he wants to know if looking, as an act of “scrutiny,” is capable of returning the information he has set out to discover. He concludes, after his intense immersion in the act, that “the essence of all crime is undivulged” and thus condemns himself to accept that looking, as a
mode of discovery, is limited in its capacity to reveal secrets. He stops “amid the 
momently increasing confusion,” and in this state, imposes the limitations borne 
of his own despair, on an act which he nevertheless suspects possesses aims and 
capacities (2010, 236-237).

This narrator’s first-perscription account of his looking adventure is framed within the 
bounds of two ideologies of man. La Bruyère’s seventeenth-century book The 
Characters (1688), which describes the archetypes of man including the 
“undivulgable” individual, and Hortulus Animae (1498) or, Little Garden of the 
Soul in English, which is reputed to be unreadable. Between these two texts the 
narrator sets up the limits within which man can be understood: he is 
“undivulgable” and “unreadable” (2010, 237). The narrator, in this way, is 
expressing his finding, through the telling of the story, that despite offering 
promise, ultimately, the act of looking fails to achieve the goals it had set out to 
attain.7 The narrator is also attempting to justify the abrupt cessation of an act to 
which he had hitherto been “resolute not to abandon” (1840/2010, 236). He had 
wanted to explain that the act of looking is not infallible, but the end of story finds 
him frustrated with the capacity of looking to divulge secrets and hears him blame 
the stranger for his unwillingness to allow himself to be “read.” He declares the 
subject of his gaze “the type and genius of deep crime” (236-237). The stranger’s 
particular “crime” is intractable, he concludes, but in stating this, a path is left 
open for Poe to introduce other characters who use looking as a means of 
investigating the secrets which the narrator of The Man of the Crowd was unable 
to reveal.

Poe and the looking act after “The Man of the Crowd”

Poe’s later stories split the method of looking into reasoned logic and 
mathematical order to test the hypothesis that the act does, despite its limitations, 
have promise. Poe sets looking the task of uncovering cryptic puzzles, but this 
time endows the act with more defined characters, in the roles of private 
investigator and police detective. Monsieur Auguste C. Dupin acts as primary 
looking character in The Murders in Rue Morgue (1841) and appears again in The 
Purloined Letter (1844) in the role of “poetic” investigator against his 
“mathematical” counterparts (2010, 115). Dupin sets out on his looking adventure 
in Rue Morgue with “that infinity of mental excitement which quiet observations 
can afford” (71). He adopts the kind of convalescent inquisitiveness of Poe’s 
narrator in The Man of the Crowd but not his level of emotion. Dupin looks “with 
a minuteness of attention” where his counterparts focus on calculating the 
microscopic details of the crime (72). His intuitive method of investigation sets

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from http://www.biography.com/people/jean-de-la-bruyere-40510. See also Thurston, Herbert. 
1910. 18 May 2014.
his looking act against the impaired vision of the police who hold “the object too close.” Dupin concludes that the Prefect of Police’s looking “failed in the solution of this mystery” because his method was too limited (102). “He might see, perhaps, one or two points with unusual clearness, but in so doing he, necessarily, lost sight of the matter as a whole” (1841/2010, 82). But these later stories of Poe’s, in which his characters test looking and its capacities, discover that reasoned logic and mathematical rule provide only two more flawed methods.

Dupin’s reasoned logic relies on the subjective accounts of witnesses rather than the somatic responses of the character. He holds a sailor at mock gunpoint and demands: “You shall give me all the information in your power about these murders in the Rue Morgue.” The sailor provides a detailed explanation of the Ourang-Outang’s escape, concluding that “he must have escaped from the chamber, by the rod, just before the breaking of the door” (1841/2010, 102). Dupin ascertains by the end of the interview that the “beast” had occupied his, the sailor’s, bedroom, and had “broken from a closet adjoining” and escaped through the door of the chamber. His deductions rely almost entirely upon witness statements which he simply repeats: “With one determined sweep of its muscular arm it nearly severed her head from her body,” he reports (101). In this way, he too is little closer to the “essence of crime” than the narrator of The Man of the Crowd. But instead of conceding this in his final summation of the crime and its curious obfuscations, Dupin declares that the Prefect of Police was “defeated in his own castle” (102). This deflects attention from the act of looking and its methods onto the bumbling of the police and their methods. As Poe’s chief investigator, Auguste C. Dupin apprehends the disparate elements of crime and reassembles them to find the solution, but leaves the mystery “undivulged” just as the narrator in The Man of the Crowd did before him.

**Sensory awareness and looking**

Poe’s narrator in The Man of the Crowd is the first of his intuitive characters to exploit the heightened sensory awareness of his convalescent state and makes good ground under the press of his “novelty of emotions” (1840/2010, 229). He tracks his target without “care of things within the hotel” in a constant bid to embrace the sensory responses evinced in the act of looking. Indeed, he becomes “enchained” to his looking under the “wild effects of the light” (232). He is stimulated to continue looking, but not to catalogue “the innumerable varieties of figure, dress, air, gait, visage, and expression of countenance” (229). He wants, instead, to discover the destination to which his “emotions” will take him. Poe’s narrator is endowed with the redoubled sensitivity of the newly recuperated man; grateful for his revived condition yet not so blinded by the joy of survival that he misses the torture of another’s soul. “It was something even more intense than despair that I then observed upon the countenance of the singular being whom I had watched so pertinaciously,” he admits (236). These sensations assist in the
process of his investigation but have not, however, proved equal to the task of divulging the essence of crime.

Poe repeatedly brings his characters close to divulging crime but stops short of allowing them a complete revelation of its secrets. His narrator in *The Man of the Crowd* almost experiences the most profound capacities of looking, coming within range of glimpsing the essence of crime “at death hour” when he meets the stranger at a corner under “a blaze of light [which] burst upon our sight, and we stood...” (236). This act marks the end of the anonymous pursuit in which his looking is held at a distance and, as the story reveals, it signals the end of his capacity to discover the secrets of crime. He gives up, blaming the stranger for being so obtuse.

By contrast, in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841) the narrator restates Dupin’s assessment of the investigation so far: “We must not judge of the means by this shell of an examination. The Parisian Police, so much extolled for acumen, are cunning, but no more. There is no method in their proceedings, beyond the method of the moment. They make a vast parade of measures; but, not unfrequently, these are so ill adapted to the objects proposed, ... The results attained by them... are brought about by simple diligence and activity” (1841/2010, 82). This evaluation of the Police’s looking unites the men in their own act; they share a sense of bewilderment in the face of a failure of this “diligence and activity” and wonder how else looking could be employed for the purposes of divulging the essence of crime. Thus, looking in Poe’s stories has wider capacities, yet these are not revealed because the method is “ill adapted” to its aims. Another method needs to be discovered.

The two men – the narrator in *The Man of the Crowd* and the stranger he follows – separate and then resume the looking method to which each is most familiar. The narrator indulges in an internal reverie about the futility of the looking act while the stranger steps with “mad energy” into “the heart of the mighty London”. “It will be in vain to follow,” he explains, because “This old man ... refuses to be alone”. On this final note, the narrator concludes that aloneness is the condition upon which crime is laid bare, and as a “man of crowd” this stranger is one of a mass of men who defies the scrutiny of looking, even if it has been undertaken “with much inquisitiveness” and with a high degree of sensory awareness (1840, 2010, 230).

Poe reproduces aspects of the narrator in *The Man of the Crowd* in the reasoning character of Dupin and the mathematical non-poet of Minister D. in his story *The Purloined Letter* (1844). He does this to illustrate the narrator’s conclusions about the failure of looking to achieve its aims and to set about finding a solution to this problem. As described in the introduction, Freud specified that the act of looking has aims: “the aim of looking ... offers a possibility...” he writes, indicating that the act strives toward certain aims but also has capacities to fulfil those aims.
(1905, 156-157). In the context of Poe’s stories, the aim of looking is to know crime, or the unconscious; this is the topic of discussion for Chapter Two of this exegesis in the section on Freud’s schema of visual and other forms of perception. But in the stories of crime thus far covered Poe sets each character’s method against the other. In *The Purloined Letter* the looking act is put under the microscope and charged with unearthing the essence of crime using “absolute perfection” of technique involving both reasoned logic and mathematical principle (1844/2010, 112). To that end, Dupin examines non-sensory detail in a test of the validity of his method. Poe’s narrator in *The Man of the Crowd*, by contrast, uses bodily sensations and emotional responses but, as the story finds, does not follow these to their intuitive end.

Poe continues to set Dupin the task of questioning the proposition that Minister D.’s mathematical logic has some validity. In *The Purloined Letter* Dupin criticises the Parisian police for failing to find the letter and attributes the failure to their considering “only their own ideas” of “searching for anything hidden, advert only to the modes in which they would have hidden it” (1844, 113). Although Poe’s characters work toward discovering the capacities of the looking act, they each find that despite their best efforts, looking as a mode of discovering crime is not efficacious of its own accord. The stories find that while looking has aims and capacities, there are other elements which must come into play in discovering the essence of crime.

Nonetheless, Poe’s characters, each in his own way, focus on a distinct aspect of the looking act and at times even touch on its aims. In *The Man of the Crowd* Poe’s looking character begins with the “tides of population” and refines his act to focus on the singular man. He realises that crime’s essence is hidden in the physiognomy of just one man and not in the “abstract and generalising” crowd (1840/2010, 229). In *The Purloined Letter* Dupin articulates this discovery in his criticism of the police’s habit of pursuing “the masses; but when the cunning of the individual felon is diverse in character from their own, the felon foils them” (1844/2010, 113).

Dupin points to the flawed method of adhering to “old modes of practice” involving “boring and probing, and sounding, and scrutinising with the microscope, and dividing the surface of the building into registered square inches” (1844/2010, 114). He finds the letter in the “excessively obvious” place on the shelf but fails to articulate the significance of the letter’s recovery beyond its face value. Dupin remarks only that the letter prevented “the whole world” from “perceiving it” because it was sitting plainly in its place on the shelf. In this way Dupin serves Poe’s realisation that old methods of looking lead to old conclusions and that a particular, and as yet unspecified, method needs to be discovered.
In *The Purloined Letter* Dupin has been exposed to the idea that the letter, or crime, remains undivulged and unreadable. Despite this he sets out to show that the Minister’s mathematical rule is too rigid; “logic applied to observation upon form and quantity” cannot hope to divulge the secrets of crime, he declares. His indulgence in the game of outwitting the Minister at the end of the story serves only to divert his own attention from discovering a method of looking which would employ sensory perception as a means of discovery (115). Even though the letter is found, or indeed is discovered to be in its rightful place, its contents remain a mystery. The different looking characters examine the clues as to its contents but none ventures beyond his old method of looking. The narrator in *The Man of the Crowd* uses sensory excitement as his *modus operandi* while Dupin uses reasoned logic. Meanwhile, the Minister D. uses mathematical “axioms” (115). *The Purloined Letter* presents characters who go beyond the capacities of the singular character in *The Man of the Crowd* yet Dupin and Minister D., in their own ways, limit the capacity of looking to achieve its aims as the narrator of *The Man of the Crowd* did before them.

For example, in *The Murders in Rue Morgue*, Poe sets his looking characters in a world of “enigmas, conundrums and hieroglyphics” and though he endows them with looking methods beyond pure calculation, he saddles them with the mental limitations of the analyst (1841/2010, 67). The analytic looking character embodies “the very soul and essence of method” but fails to notice the sensory stimulation to which he is exposed (67). Poe does, however, allow these characters to sense the possibility that the essence of crime may be divulged. The narrator intuits “a vague and half-formed conception of the meaning of Dupin,” as it flitted over his mind. “I seemed to be upon the verge of comprehension without power to comprehend – as men, at times, find themselves upon the brink of remembrance, without being able, in the end, to remember” (91). Each of Poe’s looking characters is similarly afflicted; their act offers them some insight into its aims and capacities but ultimately leaves them frustrated.

Poe repeatedly brings his narrators to the point of a sensory method but drops him back into “the blundering idea of motive” (1841/2010, 92). In *Rue Morgue* Poe’s narrator realises that the method of looking, in which reasoning is the main device, fails to uncover “the true state of affairs” (1841/2010, 69). He advocates for the adoption of a “multiform” approach involving the “recesses of thought altogether inaccessible to the ordinary understanding” (1841/2010, 68). His ideas can be linked back to the convalescence of the narrator in *The Man of the Crowd* who exploits his “happy mood” and its attendant inquisitiveness to drive his looking method but ultimately the “idea of motive” takes precedence over any metaphysical processes.

In *Rue Morgue* Dupin proposes that his method of reasoning approaches “matters beyond the limits of mere rule” to a process of “fancy and imagination”
(1841/2010, 69-70). But even that does not provide him with the ability to “comprehend” beyond “a vague and half-formed conception” (91).

Convalescence and the act of looking

Poe’s most accomplished character in matters of “fancy and imagination” is his narrator in *The Man of the Crowd* whose convalescent “brow to the glass” brings strong sensory awareness to his looking endeavours. Unlike Poe’s later characters, he is rendered emotionally situated between morbidity and mortality as a result of his having been “ill in health” (1840/2010, 228). He experiences an awareness of his somatic responses to which he had hitherto been anaesthetised. The story’s premise that “the essence of crime is undivulged” is served as the narrator’s senses are raised to feverishness before being dropped back to “absorbed contemplation” (236). Poe wanted to cast doubt on whether even convalescent looking is possessed of the necessary power to divulge the secrets of crime. His looking character in *The Man of the Crowd* therefore, “follows [the stranger] whithersoever he shall go” but only so far as his enlivened senses will permit (1840/2010, 233).

Poet and literary critic Charles Baudelaire has researched the sensory awareness of the convalescent character; a study which has taken him into the realms of looking as it pertains to the artist. He finds the state of convalescence an important precondition for the production of art just as Poe finds the state of convalescence an important precondition for looking in his portrayal of the act in *The Man of the Crowd*. For Baudelaire, the artist must look, and in order to look perceptively, he must be in the convalescent state. He describes the sensory “drunkenness” of his favoured artist Constantin Guys in his essay “The Painter of Modern Life” (1863) whose work, he says, embodies an “immense reservoir of electrical energy” (1964, 9, 18). Guys paints “dreams” onto canvas from the “mass of raw material” accumulated in his role as one of the many looking characters to which Baudelaire refers. Such characters include the dandy or looking character of “blasé” habits and the flâneur looking character, of passionate disposition. Monsieur Guys is sensitive, Baudelaire explains, with a passion “for seeing and feeling” (9). Guys is a looking character able to bring to his artistic endeavours “the flickering grace of all the elements of life” (9).

Guys is “always, spiritually, in the condition of [the] .... convalescent,” writes Baudelaire, a condition from which he may wrest the youthful “faculty of keenly interesting himself in things” (7). This faculty is put to good purpose in the midst of the crowd to “see, examine and analyse: groomsmen, footmen, women, children, bows and curls, and the nape of the neck, waists and skirts, bold determined glances, and heavy, solemn moustaches” (11). Guys consumes the material detail of the external world, writes Baudelaire, and culminates its sensory energy into “a single animal, a proud image” (11). Guys “darts onto a sheet of paper the same glance that a moment ago he was directing toward external things”
(12). He captures his “childlike perceptiveness” on the canvas in “a ferment of violent activity.” Baudelaire’s dandy, by contrast, is a man with an “unshakable determination not to be moved” (29). He looks with “aplomb” into the crowd but remains “monastic” in his unresponsiveness to its sensory stimulation (26-29). Monsieur Guys surrenders to the sensory enlivenment of his “animally ecstatic gaze” and expresses these sensations in the portrayal of “fine carriages and proud horses, ... glittering equipment, ... chords of music” (8). He savours these sensations, sacrificing the “happiness” of the dandy in the name of producing art.

The “rich and idle” dandy looks but does not perceive, writes Baudelaire, because his aim is simply to grasp the images before him in an act of greedy consumption. Whereas Monsieur Guys subscribes to “an aim loftier than the mere flâneurs;” his looking functions as an extending arm of consciousness. Monsieur Guys looks “for that quality... [of] modernity; ... whatever element it may contain of poetry ... to distil the eternal from the transitory ... the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable” (12-13).

Monsieur Guys’ looking, explains Baudelaire, satisfies its sensory aim and its aesthetic destination. His looking act, especially its intensity of perceptiveness, starkly contrasts that of twentieth-century character, Hal Jeffries, in Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rear Window* (1954). This character defies the aim of looking, of it having a connection to sensory awareness, as Freud describes in *Three Essays* (1905): “Looking... is indispensable ... [in the attainment of] the normal sexual aim” (156). Hitchcock’s film presents Hal Jeffries as convalescent, sitting in his apartment during the six weeks of his recuperation from a broken leg, yet not sensorially receptive, as the narrator of *The Man of the Crowd* is. Rather, Hal Jeffries’ becomes recalcitrant; he does not adopt an “animally ecstatic gaze,” as Baudelaire’s Constantin Guys does. Jeffries’ boredom is his chief symptom and his resistance its most obvious manifestation. In this state, his looking acts as a reinforcement of the original symptom rather than a facilitator of its relief. This is in stark contrast to the convalescent characters of *The Man of the Crowd* and “The Painter of Modern Life” who both embrace the condition and its possibilities in terms of the aims and capacities of looking. Jeffries’ convalescence, rather than alleviating his malaise, actually increases his susceptibility to the diagnoses and judgements of twentieth-century psychiatric experts and legislators, in the film playing the roles of nurse Stella and fiancé Lisa Fremont, who each champion the prevailing social attitudes toward looking behaviours. In this sense, his looking, as set out in the synopsis of *Rear Window* below, is a type of not-looking; resistant to the sensory enlightenment that the convalescent state brings.

Hal Jeffries looks out of his apartment window into the apartments of his neighbours across the courtyard. He looks to relieve his “boredom” and to avoid the threat of marriage. He sees a lonely woman’s tears and a youthful dancer’s torso and a composer at his piano and a husband with his new wife. Jeffries uses a
long-focus zoom lens to capture images of “a murderer... parading his crime in front of an open window.” He looks at some “pretty private stuff” and finds his interest pricked and his boredom slightly relieved. His nurse warns him not to look and his girlfriend admonishes his behaviour. The local detective takes no interest in either his looking or the subjects of his gaze. The consensus of opinion among his fellow looking characters is that “we’ve become a race of Peeping Toms.”

But Jeffries continues to look and to complain: “You’ve got to get me out of here. Six weeks sitting in a two-room apartment with nothing to do but look at the neighbours,” he complains. He looks at night and during the day and remains the “lonesome, bitter old man,” of his nurse’s description. His “swamp of boredom” leads him to “welcome trouble” and to eschew “a beautiful young girl.” He looks incessantly at “bickering and family quarrels and mysterious trips at night, knives and saws and ropes” but nothing ignites a spark of “inspiration” even as his fiancé marvels over the composer-neighbour who writes “utterly beautiful” songs.

His fiancée, Lisa Fremont, calls him a “frightening ghoul” and his nurse, Stella diagnoses him as “diseased”. Despite this Jeffries continues to look and begins to wonder himself “if it is ethical to watch a man with binoculars and a long-focus lens” (Hayes, 1954). Nurse Stella situates his looking within a legal system designed to control as much as to punish. “New York State sentence for a Peeping Tom is six months in the workhouse,” she warns, elevating Jeffries’ behaviour from its status as a response to confinement to an identifiable offence.

“The apparatus of punitive justice,” writes Michel Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975) incorporates “the permitted and the forbidden,” including “passions, instincts, anomalies, infirmities, maladjustments ... perversions ... drives and desires” (1995, 17). The twentieth century saw “modern mechanisms of justice” bring judgement and punishment to the “soul,” writes Foucault, in his survey of institutions, technologies, social and ideological practices from the Middle Ages to modernity. In this frame, the act of looking constitutes a perversion, and is thus treated as a behaviour which attracts suspicion and contempt as illustrated in *Rear Window*. Though Foucault does not directly encompass looking in his list of acts punishable by law, he draws the comparison between ordinary acts of behaviour and those deemed criminal, and makes the point that the line between them is very thin.

Stella reminds Jeffries of an early form of punishment for his particular looking behaviour: “In the old days they used to put your eyes out with a red-hot poker.” Foucault’s work examines the way in which “perversions” (or acts of looking, for this thesis) became punishable under a system which had come to include not only the crime but the criminal, and thus encompassed “one’s estimation of him ... [and] all those notions which have circulated between medicine and jurisprudence since the nineteenth century” (1995, 18). Lisa Fremont’s “estimation of him”
encapsulates this entanglement of beliefs: “Sitting round looking out the window all the time is one thing but doing it the way you do with binoculars, and wild opinions about every little thing you see, is diseased,” she tells Jeffries. Fremont speaks for the psychiatrists and psychologists with whose delineation of looking behaviour she roundly agrees. Her statement stamps a psychiatric diagnosis onto a behaviour hitherto presented and accepted as a criminal act.

Crime and looking

Hitchcock’s Nurse Stella offers Jeffries’ “soul” for criminalisation, as well as his “instinct, unconscious, environment, heredity,” as Foucault describes (1995, 19). She, and Lisa Fremont, render his looking vulnerable to “a whole set of assessing, diagnostic, prognostic, normative judgements,” in line with the shift of focus from the act to its origins (1995, 19). “In the Middle Ages,” writes Foucault, “to judge was to establish the truth of a crime,” but in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries “other types of assessment have slipped in” (1995, 19). Stella and Fremont, in Foucault’s schema, act as “subsidiary judges” presiding over questions of whether a “mental hospital would be a more suitable place of confinement than the prison” (1995, 21).

But neither institution is likely to have an impact on Jeffries’ looking, since his is neither an illness nor a crime, but a resistant form of morbid looking. This type of looking aligns with those characters whose act returns least impressions from either the external or internal world.8 For these characters, the act delimits their head, or mind, from the body, or sensations: Jeffries fights the conduit between looking and the body’s sensations and thus avoids or rejects any hint of a bodily response to his looking. Fremont’s tuning into the composer’s music elicits a redoubling of this resistance to feeling: “You have a great talent for creating difficult situations,” he responds after she brings his attention to the composer’s music.

Meanwhile, Jeffries questions whether his looking breaches some invisible code of conduct. “I wonder if it is ethical to watch a man with binoculars and a long-focus lens,” he asks. Nurse Stella’s response represents the general public and the film-going audience; her judgements about his looking begin at the first line of her dialogue. “The New York State sentence for a Peeping Tom is six months in the workhouse.” Her statement underscores the legal ruling on looking and sets the punishment for any breaches, and her fighting words set the moral and legal boundaries within which his looking is examined within this film narrative.

However, Hal Jeffries, as a looking character, is no poor innocent, criminalised and diagnosed, but rather a recalcitrant who is anaesthetised within the narrow

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8 Other such non-looking characters include director Clint Eastwood’s Walt Kowalski in his Gran Torino in which this lead character perpetually looks from his veranda at street gangs and the neighbours. He shouts: “Get off my lawn!” (2008). Kowalski never moves beyond his angry, self-indulgent looking and in this regard he aligns with Hitchcock’s Hal Jeffries.
plaster cast of a twentieth-century perspective. His numbness is symptomatic of the constraints of the times, echoed in his rejection of the binding, contractual agreement of marriage. “You can just see me rushin’ home to a hot apartment to listen to the automatic laundry and the electric dishwasher and the garbage disposal,” he whines. Jeffries rebels against the oppression of Stella’s sentence, Fremont’s diagnosis and Detective Doyle’s “rear-window ethics” with steely looks through the windows of those from whom he is utterly disconnected. He refuses to feel the despair of Miss Lonely Hearts or to hear the “inspiration” of the composer’s music, instead holding the supercilious position of Charles Baudelaire’s dandy spectator, who defends and protects himself using “opposition and revolt” (1863/1964, 28). Jeffries’ looking, viewed from this perspective, may be construed as an act of rebellion to a structured world of “two-bedroom apartments,” of “three years in Dannemora,” of “no windows in the workhouse” and of “a race of Peeping Toms” (1954).

But Jeffries is a man of his “two bedroom apartment,” where Baudelaire’s artist, in opposition to the dandy, is a “man of the whole world,” endowed with a curiosity for everything in his sights. Jeffries is the unseeing spectator, blind to the spectacle in which Baudelaire’s artist finds “particular beauty” (5-15). Baudelaire describes the looking character with artistic ambition as the curious child for whom everything new is a sensuous delight (8). Jeffries’ looking is in direct opposition to Baudelaire’s description because he rejects any vista to which he is subjected. Jeffries is no artist, nor seer of the “external world” in Baudelaire’s frame, but rather, is a character of diminished receptivity. Indeed, Hitchcock’s cinematic viewpoint sets him within the frame of Detective Doyle’s “rear-window ethics” and ensures he cannot look in any other mode (1954).

Jeffries does however share with the artist a rejection of “morals and politics” as they are imposed upon his looking behaviour. The artist, in his looking, or apprehension of sensuous data, eschews the codes of offices outside the bounds of art’s creation (1964, 7). In Baudelaire’s scheme, Jeffries is a thwarted artist, looking out from his window as a “highly skilled animal... limited to the narrowest circles” (7).

Jeffries looks to revolt against the “rear-window ethics,” to “welcome trouble,” to stare it in the face, to avenge its presence in his life. He does not want to “see and feel,” as Baudelaire’s artist does, but to defy Nurse Stella’s sentence and Fremont’s diagnosis, and to expose the very absurdity of these delineations of his position (1863, 1964, 9).

Yet his survival as the mental patient and criminal, as ascribed by the film’s internal premise, is contingent upon his dandyism; his dispassionate, uninspired looking. He can do no other, from inside the walls of “politics and morals” than to look “from an unshakeable determination not to be moved” (7). His blindness and anaesthesia institutionalise his looking as the “Peeping Tom” of Stella’s gaol and
the “diseased” patient of Fremont’s asylum. He is the looking character for whom looking, as a response to confinement, has brought little, if any relief of his symptoms. He looks into neighbours’ windows to alleviate the physical restrictions of a “smashed leg,” as Stella calls his injury, from the beginning of the story, and is still using this failed method at the end, in response to another broken limb. His looking is ineffectual as a treatment for his insidious state of boredom. His unrelenting rejection of Fremont’s overtures and his repeated sarcasms about the entrapment of marriage are symptoms of his state of diminished receptivity.

But Hitchcock embraces this boredom, even exploiting it, using the symptom as the impulse to situate his character at the window and the camera inside his eye. His cinematic construction is the embodiment of the dandy spectator in relation to his crowd; the looking character who, in Baudelaire’s terms, “aspires to insensitivity” (1964, 9).

Baudelaire’s dandy is an aloof looking character who takes his view from the heights of his horse’s back, trotting through the crowd in a “cult of the self” (1964, 29). His dandy archetype is the unseeing observer who takes snapshots of the world from afar, capturing its topography, yet remaining blind to its “form and colour” (8). Baudelaire’s dandy is not a man in convalescence, as Poe’s narrator in The Man of the Crowd is, but like Jeffries, is in a state of pre-convalescence.

Jeffries never reaches an intoxication of the senses; he sees his neighbours through his prism of boredom and thus any glimpse of “trouble” offers the chance to break the monotony of the act. “I’d welcome trouble,” he retorts, squinting into his neighbour’s kitchenette. “You know, I think you’re right. I think there is going to be trouble around here.” Meanwhile, Poe’s narrator in The Man of the Crowd looks out of the café window and surrenders to his “aroused, startled, fascinated” state and even revels in its capacity to enliven his looking and to bring about a new clarity of “mental vision” (1840/2010, 228). Jeffries becomes more blinded under the weight of his boredom and rejects any vision of Lisa Fremont as the “beautiful young girl,” instead viewing her as the “nagging wife.”

Fremont herself notices Jeffries’ opacity of vision borne of his malaise: “Where does a girl have to go before you notice her? I will have to move into an apartment across the way and do the Dance of the Seven Veils every hour,” she complains. Her plea goes unnoted but the refrain is echoed in Stella’s remark: “Lisa Fremont is the right girl for any man with half a brain who can get one eye open.” Thus, the act of looking, for Jeffries, has a vastly different impact to that of the narrator in Poe’s The Man of the Crowd. While Jeffries keeps Thorwald in view so far as it serves his position as the dandy spectator, Poe’s narrator experiences “a craving desire to keep the man in view” to serve his “singularly aroused” state (1840/2010, 233). But in the service of the film’s premise, Jeffries is predictably consistent in his unresponsiveness to somatic stimuli. Fremont
looks across to the composer’s apartment with an open mouth and listens to the music. “Where does a man get inspiration to write a song like that?” (1954). Jeffries is unable to respond differently, operating on the margins of pre-convalescence, in which he sees only “ropes and saws.” He resists the sensorial “wild effects” of Poe’s narrator who embraces the emotional lability of convalescence. Jeffries’ looking act, though arising from an invalided state, operates in the mode of a cinematic camera, devoid of the somatic responses characteristic of looking characters of a more heightened receptivity.

Looking as perversion

Thus far, in this chapter the looking act has been discussed as it is represented in literature and film as (1) a mode of exploiting convalescence (2) a means of engaging curiosity (3) a mode of criminal investigation and (4) a method of not-looking. The next section discusses the way in which twentieth-century literary and cultural theorists have viewed the act. As explained, nineteenth-century literary texts represent looking in terms of its capacity or incapacity to explain the unconscious, but in twentieth-century film looking is represented as an act endowed with lasciviousness as well as criminality.

As mentioned earlier, Foucault in his *Discipline and Punish* (1977) is concerned with the punitive approach to behaviours which he calls “inclinations”. His argument that the judiciary has grown to encompass a wide range of behaviours which might, for this exegesis, include looking, sheds a different light on the study of Hal Jeffries’ looking act. This punitive approach to behaviours or “inclinations”, Foucault writes, “displaces the very object of the punitive operation” such that the character’s behaviours are punished, along with, or rather than, his crime. In this modern configuration of the accused and his crime, it is “the body,” writes Foucault, which “is no longer the object of punishment, and thus the judicial system must “rain down... upon the heart, the thoughts, the will, the inclinations” as was shown in the case of Hal Jeffries’ looking (1977/1995, 16). Punishment against “the body and the blood” is no longer considered “humane,” writes Foucault, therefore a new administrator is found to exact punishment.

In this frame, film theorists and critics preside over the looking character in the role of judge and psychiatric expert, ruling over matters of “the heart, the thoughts, the will, the inclinations,” as Foucault explains, and interpret and categorise according to the will and whimsy of an invented “scientifico-juridical” panel (1995, 19). The behaviours of the “soul,” writes Foucault, as assessed under the powers of this panel, re-emerge as “perverse actions,” which were hitherto acts carried out in response to twentieth-century constraints (1995, 19).

Modern incarnations of these judges of the “soul” take the form of commentators on the character’s looking act. Television movie-reviewer David Stratton’s
diagnosis of Hal Jeffries goes even further; he extends his judgement to the
viewers of the film as well. Stratton declares Rear Window (1954) “the ultimate
film about cinema itself because when we go to the cinema we’re voyeurs like he
[Hal Jeffries] is in this looking at other dramas, other people’s stories and that’s
what he’s doing. So really in a way it’s Hitchcock’s film about the cinema” (SBS,
2000). His remarks echo Foucault’s “scientifisco-juridical” approach to
“inclinations”; making the diagnosis that Hal Jeffries is a voyeur without
reference to the psychiatric criteria pertaining to that diagnosis. Hal Jeffries’
looking, in the film, as far as the audience can tell, involves looking across the
courtyard at his fully-clothed neighbour, who is not disrobing, but packing a
suitcase and making a telephone call.

**Looking and cinematic technique**

Rear Window is Hitchcock’s film about the cinema, as Stratton describes above,
but only insofar as its construction of the physical metaphor of audience in
relation to characters is concerned. It is not, as literary critics have claimed,
Hitchcock’s presentation of looking as a psychopathology. Laura Mulvey, in her
essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975) has described the film as a
cinematic portrayal of voyeurism. In the same year as Foucault released his
Discipline and Punish in French, Mulvey published her paper about Hal Jeffries’
looking in Screen. Foucault argues that that ordinary behaviours or “inclinations”
are often assessed as crimes; Mulvey argues that Hal Jeffries’ ordinary behaviour,
his looking, is “ perverse” according to her psychoanalytic interpretation. Her
imposition of a quasi-psychoanalytic analysis upon the “offender’s soul,” as
Foucault calls the criminalisation of “inclinations”, is a demonstration of the
widening of the function of psychiatrists and criminologists as well as cultural
and film theorists. “By solemnly inscribing offences ... susceptible of scientific
knowledge,” writes Foucault, “they provide the mechanisms of legal punishment
with a justifiable hold not only on offences, but on individuals; not only on what
they do, but also on what they are, will be, may be” (1977/1995, 18).

Mulvey’s interpretation acts as precedent of this “judging something other than
crimes,” to use Foucault’s phrase to describe the actions of the judiciary in
relation to “inclinations” (19). Her examination of Jeffries concludes with a
diagnosis of voyeurism, derived from the work of Sigmund Freud, to whom she
attributes a hypothesis of the unconscious dynamics underpinning such a
diagnosis. Not only does Freud not approach particular looking behaviours from
the perspective of making a clinical diagnosis but he is cautious in labelling any
of the sexual instincts as psychopathological. Mulvey explains that she had a
particular purpose in mind and to that end admits to “appropriating” Freud’s
theory of the sexual instincts to explain the looking behaviours of Hitchcock’s
characters. “It is helpful,” she writes, “to understand what the cinema has been,
how its magic has worked in the past ... Psychoanalytic theory is thus
appropriated here as a political weapon” (1975/2006, 342). While Freud’s work in
*Three Essays* indicates that looking serves several aims, Mulvey’s work, by contrast, indicates that looking serves only one purpose: to satisfy the libidinal instincts in a perverse way.

Mulvey’s position holds that Hal Jeffries broadly represents the audience while the subjects of his gaze represent the film being watched. Thus, Hal Jeffries’ looking, his gazing across the courtyard into the apartments of those opposite is, for Mulvey, the sole criterion upon which to base a diagnosis of voyeurism. She attributes Jeffries’ predicament, his “compromised” position, to the vigour of his erotic drives. Thus, according to this analysis, every cinema-goer is a victim of his galloping and seemingly uncontrollable drives. These drives, as Stratton writes above, leave not only the character but his audience vulnerable to a diagnosis of voyeurism.

Mulvey positions men as looking characters and women as subjects of the male gaze. In this construction, women serve as objects of “visual pleasure” for men, while women, as pleasure-givers, undress in front of open windows in their role as providers of erotic stimuli. Thus, according to Mulvey, men consume this “visual pleasure” as a means of satisfying their perverse tendencies.

While Mulvey’s feminist-psychoanalytic approach to *Rear Window*, and other films in the Hitchcock oeuvre, exploits the sexual innuendo surrounding the words “visual pleasure” it does not attain to its derivation in human infantile sexuality. She claims to “appropriate psychoanalytic theory as a political weapon in order to demonstrate the way in which unconscious patriarchal society has structured film form” (2006, 342). Instead, her paper reveals a *misappropriation* of Sigmund Freud’s *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) and in doing so comes to the mistaken belief that men, as a collective force, control the form which art takes in the course of satisfying perverse needs. Art, on the contrary, finds its own form through the apprehension of sensuous intuitions which are applied to consciousness, as this exegesis describes further in Chapter Three. Ernst Cassirer, in his multi-volume work, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1923-1929) extrapolated the foundations and implications of the “products of culture,” as he called the output resulting from the psychical processing of these sensuous impressions. His conceptualisation of the products resulting from the act of looking, his symbolic forms, is discussed in chapters Two and Three.

*Freud and looking*

Sigmund Freud uses the term “looking” in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) under the heading “Touching and Looking” (156) as mentioned in the introduction to this thesis. This can be distinguished from his use of other words to describe the looking character, such as scopophilia, voyeurism, “reize” and *Schaulust* – all of which have their place in his various theories but are not applicable to this discussion about the looking act. For this exegesis, the word
“looking” is used as Freud uses it in his penultimate paragraph in Three Essays. “A certain amount of touching [and] seeing... is usual for most normal people [to achieve] the sexual aim of looking” but the “libido” [can be redirected] on to higher artistic aims” (156-157). References to “scopophilia” in Freud’s work appear from 1909 in “Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old-Boy” and then again from 1910 through to 1917 in various analyses of patients including those diagnosed with obsessional neurosis and paranoid schizophrenia. None of these discussions pertain to what is “usual for most normal people” and therefore they fall outside the scope of this thesis. There is only one reference to “scopophilia” in Three Essays, on page 157, in which Freud distinguishes between a perversion and the ordinary “pleasure in looking” (1905). However, even this distinction is not relevant for the argument in this exegesis, for the reasons outlined above and in the introduction. Moreover, the term has been misused in other contexts and its usage has fallen, therefore, outside Freud’s intentions. Bruno Bettelheim in his Freud and Man’s Soul (1982) explains that the mistranslation of Freud’s terms “scopophilia” and Schaulust has led to many misinterpretations of his work.

In addition to the definition of voyeurism mentioned earlier in this chapter, psychiatrists Harold Kaplan and Benjamin Sadock, authors of Synopsis of Psychiatry: Behavioural Sciences Clinical Psychiatry explain that this behaviour “is also known as scopophilia” (1994, 677). In the context of the discussion above, Kaplan and Sadock’s use of Freud’s term “scopophilia” supports Bettelheim’s argument that mistranslations have led to improper use of the terms. Freud’s use of “scopophilia” in Three Essays occurs in relation to the distinction between pathological looking and looking which falls within what is “usual for most normal people” (1905, 157). This thesis is concerned with the latter form of looking and its aims as Freud described in his On Aphasia (1891) and his Project for a Scientific Psychology (1895).

Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure” and Freud’s theory of sexuality

Laura Mulvey, in her Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema (1975) characterises Hitchcock’s protagonist Hal Jeffries as an archetypal male within a voyeuristic film genre. However, Freud’s Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality (1905) explains that “in the majority of instances the pathological character in a perversion is found to lie not in the content of the new sexual aim but in its relation to the normal” (1905, 161). Mulvey’s argument, for this exegesis, thus invites a return to Freud’s Three Essays to re-examine his intentions for using the sexual instincts as a way of explaining not only psychical motives of the sexual object but its ambitions towards “higher artistic aims” (156-157).

Film scholar Barbara Creed in The Oxford Guide to Film Studies observes that Laura Mulvey’s 1975 paper “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” puts “female spectatorship on the agenda for all time” but “What of the female spectator?” she questions, in this schema about the dominance of the male gaze (1998, 10). Creed
points out that although “Mulvey demonstrated in specific terms how the unconscious of patriarchal society organised its own signifying practices, such as film, to reinforce myths about women and to offer the male viewer pleasure,” she did not answer a central question posed in the paper. Creed wonders how an audience, made up of both men and women, can participate equally in an act which Mulvey characterises as peculiarly male (1998, 11). Mulvey views Hal Jeffries in terms of his male power position in relation to the females in the film and declares him a voyeur. While this interpretative vantage point serves a feminist agenda it does not provide a theory of the role of unconscious desire as a motive for looking.

Moreover, Mulvey’s use of Freud’s schema of the sexual instincts affects more than the looking character’s “soul,” to use Foucault’s word from his *Discipline and Punish* (1977). Such use of Freud’s theory renders looking “susceptible of scientific knowledge” and situates the act within the “mechanisms of legal punishment” (1995/18). Thus, Foucault’s envisagement of behaviours starkly contrasts Mulvey’s interpretation of looking as a perverse manifestation of the sexual instincts (16-17). Indeed, Freud’s schema of the sexual instincts has the effect of sheltering the act under the umbrella of normality which, in turn, has the effect of allowing that “some proportion of the libido” be directed toward “higher artistic aims” (156-157).

By contrast, Mulvey’s argument in “Visual Pleasure” displaces the intention of Freud’s theory of the sexual instincts. He contends that in infancy, the drive to look is aimed at satisfying hunger and assuring safety, and in adulthood ensures the survival of the species. This last involves the creation of a new aim “that can take the place of the normal one [and] these new aims are already hinted at in the normal sexual process” (1905, 155). Thus, Freud’s *Three Essays* sets out to explain the aim of the instinct for survival and for homeostasis and only includes “perverse” acts in a continuum of normal acts of looking. Indeed, Freud explains that the sexual aim of looking “can scarcely be counted a perversion” since as a means of apprehending “visual impressions” it “remains the most frequent pathway along which libidinal excitation is aroused” (1905,156).

*Looking and pleasure (1)*

Mulvey asserts that the cinema offers audiences “a number of possible pleasures” including scopophilia (1975/2006, 344). However, she does not define “scopophilia” in her essay although other readers of her paper have. Her use of

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9 Semiologist Srdjan Smajic, in the chapter entitled “Scopophilia and scopophobia” of his book *Ghost-seers, Detectives, and Spiritualists: Theories of vision in Victorian Literature and Science* (2010) distinguishes his use of the scopophilia from Mulvey’s to argue that looking characters “read” the objects of their gaze in the same way theorists “read” a text for meaning. “I associate scopophilia with the pleasure derived from viewing objects and persons as legible texts,” he explains, whereas “Mulvey ... uses the term to designate the pleasure in using another person as
the term serves to confuse the pleasure derived from looking in the service of satisfying a reproductive aim with the pleasure derived from looking in the service of a “higher artistic aim” (1905, 156). Freud in his *Three Essays* distinguishes these two forms of pleasure and dignifies each as a legitimate physiological method of completing either the sexual object or the higher artistic aim. Pleasure, in Freud’s schema, drives the looking character towards “higher artistic aims” through “libidinal excitation” which “encourages the development of beauty” (1905, 156). He leaves any further elaboration of the development of beauty to later works. For example, in “A Note Upon the Mystic Writing Pad” (1925) he draws upon the “hypothetical structure of the perceptual apparatus” in its role as the writing pad upon which to “receive impressions” (228, 230). These impressions arrive from the “external world” as a result of the activity of looking and travel to the unconscious under the impress of pleasure. “It is as though the unconscious stretches out feelers,” Freud writes, along which impressions travel back to the “receptive surface” in a constant process of sensory apprehension (228, 230). Pleasure is thus a driving sensation upon which art is made. But in Mulvey’s paper the terms “sexual” and “pleasure” are exploited for political purposes rather than for explaining the psychical mechanism of pleasure in relation to looking. For example, Mulvey proposes that the sexual instincts exist “as the erotic basis for pleasure in looking at another person as object ... as perversion, obsessive voyeur and Peeping Tom” (1975/2006, 344). The problem with this construction of pleasure in its relation to looking is that these activities are not psychically or physically associated with pleasure but with the staving off of unpleasure.10

In *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895) Freud postulated that looking, as a mode of perception, is capable of satisfying the infantile instinctual drives and in this aim it provides either the real object or the hallucination of one (328). The latter is a psychical mechanism which provides satisfaction in a process of “cognition and reproductive thought”.11 In cinema-goers this satisfaction is not, however, auto-erotic in origin as Mulvey insists, but a source of non-genital pleasure, and may, as Freud explains, provide satisfaction of an “intermediate

10 Psychiatrists Kaplan and Sadock confirm this statement in their *Synopsis of Psychiatry* (1994) under the section “Paraphilias and Sexual Disorders” in which they repeatedly insist that paraphilic activities function to “avoid anxiety by displacing the libidinal impulses to inappropriate objects” (674-675). The sensation of pleasure as a driver for the behaviour is not entertained at all by these authors. Indeed, they draw attention to the *unpleasure* associated with watching people groom, disrobe and engage in sexual activity (677).

11 This mechanism is discussed further in Chapter Two and Three in which these activities of thought become important in terms of the motivation to continue looking. In *Project* Freud writes: “During the process of wishing, inhibition by the ego brings about a moderated cathexis of the object wished-for, which allows it to be cognized as not-real,” but nevertheless remains a stimulus for the repetition of the looking behaviour (1895, 327). His primary example is the baby who continues to look for the breast even when it is no longer before him.
sexual aim” (1905, 156-157). This satisfaction in childhood involves a scenario in which the mother returns and, in adulthood, is redirected to another object, offering the same reassurance and feelings of pleasure. The difference between the adult and the child, writes Freud scholar Tomas Geyskens in his Our Original Scenes: Freud’s Theory of Sexuality, is that “the search for milk eventually ends in the satisfaction of the need. The search for pleasure, on the other hand, has no such natural end” (2005, 22). Moreover, this exegesis proposes that the “search for pleasure” is a means rather than a destination. Freud’s schema illustrates that pleasure, as a physiological discharge of nervous stimuli, operates as a mechanism for the stimulus of the organism to repeat the behaviour (1920, 14-15). This repeating of the looking behaviour, under the impress of pleasure, will be discussed further in chapters Two and Three.

Voyeurism and looking

In Three Essays Freud states that “in the majority of instances the pathological character in a perversion is found to lie not in the content of the new sexual aim but in its relation to the normal” (1905, 161). His statement makes plain that a perversion only becomes pathological, that is, “voyeuristic, or Peeping Tom,” as Mulvey describes above, when the normal sexual aim is jettisoned in favour of a singular object. When a “perversion has the characteristic of exclusiveness and fixation” it can be regarded as a “pathological symptom” (161). In this psychical construction, voyeurism operates along reflexive pathways which inhibit the normal aim of the sexual instincts (160-161). While Freud positions voyeurism along a continuum of normal sexual behaviour, Mulvey, by contrast, approaches looking as a part of a voyeuristic closed psychical pathway. Such a proposition is, however, not possible. Tomas Geyskens in his Our Original Scenes: Freud’s Theory of Sexuality (2005) explains that Freud’s later paper Instincts and their Vicissitudes (1915) provides the schema for the psychical reflexive action involved in perverse looking. He outlines the circumstances under which the aim of the sexual instincts may be perverted: “In Freud’s theory [of voyeurism] only the reflexive phantasy in which the other is another me, can explain our sexual interest in objects. Without phantasies the sexual instincts would remain in a state of autoerotic pleasure” (2005, 45, footnote 2). In this configuration the subject is looking at another self. But looking at another self does not satisfy the sexual instincts; indeed, in Project Freud investigated looking insofar as it serves to recall and revive the wished-for object through psychical processes to satisfy hunger or to find the lost mother (1895, 328). He left theories of perversions to later papers. Geyskens explains that in voyeuristic looking “reflexive activities reflect the difference between the two types of object-choice: …the narcissistic object-choice … reminds …him of himself” and in the perverse relation the looking character looks at himself as object. Thus “voyeurism [operates as] a transformation of an earlier infantile phase in which the subject looks at himself” (2005, 39-40). In Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure” by contrast, the normal sexual
instincts operate as drivers towards perverse acts in a psychical construction in which the subject chooses himself as object.

This practice, Mulvey insists, is evident in the psychical construction of the audience: “the mass of mainstream film, and the conventions within which it has consciously evolved, portray a hermetically sealed world... indifferent to the presence of the audience, producing in them a sense of separation and playing on their voyeuristic phantasy... promotes the illusion of voyeuristic separation... gives the spectators an illusion of looking in on a private world. The position of the spectators in the cinema is blatantly one of repression of their exhibitionism and projection of their repressed desire on to the performer” (344-345). This physical relation between the screen and audience, Mulvey argues, leads to a “voyeuristic phantasy” but, as with her other claims, is not established in Freud’s theory of sexuality. Geyskens explains that looking is in fact one of the original constituents of the sexual instinct (2005, 17-18). While “looking as fore-pleasure in normal sexuality is not qualitatively different from voyeurism as sexual pathology” Freud “considered voyeurism a transformed sexual aim. ... [thus] the sexual perversions cannot be understood as aberrations of the normal sexual instinct. They are, on the contrary, its original constituents” (2005, 18-20). In this schema the cinematic environment – low lighting, artificial isolation and “brilliance of the shifting patterns of light and shade on the screen” – is not capable of arousing in the spectator a “voyeuristic phantasy” as Mulvey asserts (1975/2006, 345).

Mulvey’s “appropriation” of the theories postulated in Freud’s Three Essays and her non-clinical use of psychiatric terms appeals to the mechanisms by which the sexual instincts act to achieve their aims but endows those instincts with actions that do not exist in the theory. What is established in Rear Window, quite apart from the “sexually arousing phantasies” that Mulvey finds in the film, is that Hal Jeffries engages in looking behaviour. To assign that looking the psychiatric category of voyeurism is asking viewers to believe that on a psychical level he has relinquished the object from which he derives pleasure in favour of looking at another version of himself. This construction might be plausible in the event that a replacement object is capable of returning equal pleasure. None is forthcoming and so audiences are asked to accept that Hal Jeffries’ looking at Lars Thorwald is really his looking at himself, Hal Jeffries, in the mirror. Even in this configuration, Hal Jeffries does not derive sexual pleasure in the looking behaviour; instead his looking lacks the sensation upon which Mulvey bases her argument: “Visual Pleasure.”

Cinematic constructions of looking

The single view-point in Rear Window (1954) chronicles the intense gaze of its protagonist over the six weeks of his recuperation from a broken leg. The camera’s focus is set on the grimace of his face, the hard-edged gaze of his eye
and the speed with which he pushes the wheels of his chair up to the glass barrier. But it also embeds itself inside his eye to track his line of sight through the lounges and bedrooms of his neighbours.

In this frame, Jeffries operates as optical device through which the audience observes Lars Thorwald talking on the telephone and leaving his apartment late at night. Francios Truffaut in his Hitchcock Truffaut (1962) interviews Alfred Hitchcock about his intentions for Rear Window. His book explores Hitchcock’s motif of looking as it is portrayed in films ranging from The 39 Steps (1935) to Psycho (1960) in which the various characters peer through keyholes, windows and famously into a shower cubicle.

Hitchcock sets Hal Jeffries at the window and the audience at his eye in a deliberate cinematic construction designed to implicate the audience and its hero equally in the perpetration of the looking act. He devised the Greenwich Village film-set to present looking as a performance, and imposed directorial control upon the act to replicate its natural situation outside the cinema. Hitchcock wanted to make “a purely cinematic film,” he tells filmmaker Francios Truffaut, and to achieve this he created a physical construction as metaphor for looking in both its mechanical and perceptive modes. Thus, in Rear Window, the camera simultaneously plays the role of inanimate looking device and sensory organ. Hitchcock intended for the film’s looking character and its audience to exist at once as detached spectator and morally-burdened spy (1962/1983, 214).

Hitchcock aimed to present “the purest expression of a cinematic idea” he says, using the man, or camera, his audience or the world of looking characters, and the windows through which they look (1962/1983, 214). His “cinematic idea” requires the elements of man and camera, and film set and audience in an arrangement which approximates the basic configuration of the act of looking. The first, and perhaps most essential of the elements, is his “man.” But for Hitchcock to bring the “purest expression of the cinematic idea” to the screen he needed a role in which the character could act as “man” as well as camera. Therefore he needed a looking character who is disconnected, distanced and unemotional. To achieve this he abstracted the character of Hal Jeffries from Cornell Woolrich’s original narrator in It had to be Murder (1942). But to test whether “a purely cinematic idea” could be achieved he also needed to create characters who do not appear in Woolrich’s story, and whose roles oppose Jeffries’ mechanical looking, in order to portray the world of curious onlookers alongside their bored looking counterpart. To that end, Hitchcock installed girlfriend Lisa Fremont as the character with a heightened capacity for sensory receptivity and Nurse Stella as the character immersed in the fear of moral and ethical standards.

Hitchcock’s “purely cinematic idea” thus represents the broader looking society in microcosmic form, whereas Woolrich’s original story presented one man,
emotionally involved in the subject of his gaze, looking at another man. Hitchcock based his directorial method on Vsevolod Pudovkin’s cinematic technique in which scenes are cut back and forth from the face of the actor to the object of his view. Hitchcock adapted Pudovkin’s technique to present the looking act in a cinematic format and used directorial control to situate the audience as both viewers of the looking character and as looking characters in their own right. “Let’s take a close up of Stewart [Hal Jeffries] looking out of the window at a little dog that’s being lowered in a basket. Back to Stewart, who has a kindly smile. But if in the place of the little dog you show a half-naked girl exercising in front of her open window, and you go back to a smiling Stewart again, this time he’s seen as a dirty old man!” (1962/1983, 216). Hitchcock aimed to show that the looking act, as represented inside and outside the cinema, is open to a range of interpretations depending on the moral and ethical viewpoints of its audience.

In summary, Hitchcock’s film is a cinematic exposition of the mechanics of filmmaking as it relates to the mechanics of looking. The film uses a single point of view and directorial control to reduce the act to its narrowest incarnation and to that end permits its chief protagonist only a limited range of emotions. He is simply “a man looking out,” as Hitchcock describes (1983, 214). Jeffries does “peep out of the window” but he is not therefore “horrible,” asserts Hitchcock, he is instead, merely a “snooper.” Hitchcock seals his answer with a question: “but aren’t we all?” (1983, 216).

Truffuat plays the devil’s advocate: “We’re all voyeurs to some extent.” Hitchcock simply reiterates his motive for making the film: “I’ll bet you,” Hitchcock says, “nine out of ten people, if they see a woman across the courtyard undressing for bed, or even a man puttering around in his room, will stay and look; no one turns away and says, “It’s none of my business.” They could pull down their blinds, but they never do; they stand there and look out” (1983, 216).

Ultimately, Hitchcock is interested in the act of looking as a means of discovering its capacities and to that end produces films which portray a character who “looks out”. His use of “purely technical” methods is his way of exploring this; Hal Jeffries is everyman, while the cinematic screen operates as the panorama of the world stage, and the audience members are the role of curious onlookers.¹² Hitchcock wanted to show how cinematic technique could capture the essence of the world looking at itself and effectively engaged his idea of “a man looking out” to portray this.

¹² In German the noun Schaulustige means “curious onlooker” and is perhaps the derivation of Freud’s intention for the word Schaulust as he used it in his 1909 paper “Little Hans” in which he writes: “the child... begins to display an intense desire to look” or in German, “begann eine intensive Schaulust” (94). The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol 11.
Woolrich’s narrator in his short story *It had to be Murder* (1942), on whom Hitchcock’s Hal Jeffries is based, is a first-person narrative about a man who looks out of his window as the narrator of *The Man of the Crowd* does; with great emotional intensity. The character admits to feeling judged and incriminated for his habit. He remarks: “Sure, I suppose it was a bit like prying... That wasn’t my fault, that wasn’t the idea” (1996, 327). Nevertheless, this character, through his looking, insinuates himself into an unfolding detective story.

I knew he couldn’t see me within the darkness of the bay window. ... I was back at the window again with the first sun of morning. ... I stayed there by the window all night, keeping a sort of death watch. ... I got the spyglass ready. I got him in the right focus after a minute or two.... The lens could follow him all the way... God, how I watched his expression. My eyes clung to it like leeches. ... I blew out the match, picked up the phone in the dark. It was like television. I could see to the other end of my call, only not along the wire but by a direct channel of vision from window to window.... I watched him more closely than ever, after he’d hung up. ... I had the glass up and I was practically fluoroscoping him” (1942/1996, 327-347).

This narrator’s depth of feeling is as evident as the closeness with which Woolrich follows his subjective experience. Readers feel his sorrow for “the couple in the flat below” and the empathy he feels for the woman’s “night-long suffering” (328-29). Such subjective experiences are not expressed in Hitchcock’s portrayal of Hal Jeffries whose looking reveals only his rejection of marriage, small apartments, criminalisation of the looking act and Lars Thorwald’s deviousness. The film never allows audiences to feel his despair. By contrast, Woolrich’s narrator, as is evidenced in the passage above, expresses the subjective experience in words as well as actions. Chapters Two and Three further this discussion on the subjectivity of the character.

The authors of “Paraphilias and Paraphilia-Like Behaviours” in *Gabbard’s Treatments* (2007), a publication of American Psychiatric Publishing, aspire to a more progressive approach to looking behaviours. Fabian Saleh and his co-authors propose that looking, as portrayed in stories such as Woolrich’s, is approached from the perspective of the narrator’s own experience of it. However, the chapter’s authors attribute such repetitive looking to the intensity of “sexually arousing fantasies” and thus thwart their own attempt to achieve a picture of the “qualitative mental experience” to which they aspire (2007). This exegesis, however, proposes that Woolrich’s story, as with Hitchcock’s rendition of it, does not betray “sexually arousing fantasies” within the narratives and that if such fantasies do exist, they are not made evident to the readers or audience. But in a bid to reposition such intense looking acts within a philosophical context, Saleh and his co-authors propose that clinicians focus on the looking character’s own
“thoughts [and] perceptions” which, according to these authors, will re-orient the clinician to the character’s “unique erotic valence.” This “unique erotic valence” refers to the behaviour identified as the foci of the so-termed paraphilia, which if carried out repeatedly, can be taken to be a habit, and may even be regarded as an addiction, as may be the case with Woolrich’s narrator and Hitchcock’s Hal Jeffries. In either case, the act of looking, as Saleh indicates, is “qualitatively” different for each character (2007).

Mulvey makes her assessment of Hitchcock’s characters based on the “observable behaviours” as they are presented on screen in the same way Saleh and his co-authors make their assessments of patients as they are presented in the clinical setting (2007). By focussing on the “observable behaviours” Mulvey assesses only the clinical signs to the exclusion of the symptomatological picture and thus loses the opportunity to glimpse the “qualitative experience” (2007). The nature of the symptom, as a noun used to encapsulate that which a patient says he feels, in relation to his looking, represents an opportunity for him to express his “qualitative mental experience” but this is not taken up in Mulvey’s approach. The qualitative experience of the looking character is, however, taken up in this exegesis in Chapters Two and Three.

The looking act, as a “qualitative mental experience,” distinguishes Woolrich’s narrative from Hitchcock’s incarnation of it as Rear Window. But Hitchcock, in presenting the technical aspects of looking, is purposely omitting his character’s subjective experience to achieve a particular cinematic effect. Indeed, the point of Hitchcock’s rendition of Woolrich’s original story is to make a “purely cinematic film” as he describes; to draw particular attention to the coalition of the camera, screen and characters (1962/1983, 214). This construction systematically aims for the purest form through which to express the relationship between the audience and the cinematic screen story. Laura Mulvey’s selective reading of Freud’s Three Essays in her paper “Visual Pleasure” offers, by contrast, a platform upon which to advance a feminist-political agenda, but in doing so, misses the “qualitative mental experience” of the character.

This chapter examined how looking functions in Poe’s “The Man of the Crowd” and Baudelaire’s “The Painter of Modern Life” and in Alfred Hitchcock’s Rear Window. In all three cases looking is associated with the story’s chief character in a state of convalescence. This state, the chapter found, can offer opportunities for the act of looking to find its aim, or not, as was the case with Hal Jeffries. Noting the differences between Monsieur Guys’ and Hal Jeffries’ looking, this chapter supported the thesis’ overall claim that looking has multifarious functions which are expressed in representational and presentational forms, and that none of these satisfies a diagnosis for voyeurism. The chapter showed instead the way in which looking can be discussed outside of discourses about voyeurism.
This chapter began by explaining the parameters within which the looking act would be examined in this thesis, and defined the term “looking” using Freud’s *Three Essays* as a basis upon which to frame the act in terms of literary and filmic characters. Freud’s statement that “it is usual for most normal people to linger to some extent over the intermediate sexual aim of looking” acted as a prefatory precept upon which to build the argument that the practice of looking in literary representations is broader than the discourse of voyeurism suggests (1905, 156). As a means of beginning to frame this discussion, Edgar Allan Poe’s looking characters were introduced, and their individual looking behaviours were examined in terms of the capacity of looking to achieve its aim. Hitchcock’s character in *Rear Window* was reviewed in terms of the way in which such looking has been categorised within film “theory and practice” (1975/2006, 342). His act of looking was contrasted with that of Charles Baudelaire’s looking character, artist Constantin Guys. While Guys’ act inspires art, Hal Jeffries’ perpetuates malaise. This chapter found that Laura Mulvey’s essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975), on which much twentieth-century scholarship of looking in literature and film is based, represents one purposed reading of the act. Indeed, the chapter showed that Mulvey’s approach is founded on a misreading of Freud’s *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905). Freud’s theory explains that acts of looking which are “usual for most normal people” are not the same as those upon which a diagnosis of perversion is made. In re-examining the assertion in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” that Freud’s theory of sexuality reveals the underlying psychoanalytic mechanism by which Hitchcock’s characters can be diagnosed as voyeuristic, this exegesis found instead that Freud’s theories offered the opportunity to take a broader view of the looking act and to explore “the aim of looking” in the way Freud intentioned in his *Three Essays*. 
Chapter Two

Chapter One reviewed the act of looking in terms of psychoanalytic approaches, in particular film theorist Laura Mulvey’s interpretation of the looking character. This chapter reviews the act of looking in relation to its broader aims and capacities in neurophysiological terms. Freud’s *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895) acts as a founding document for the premise that neural activities constitute the subjective experience. In this regard, Roland Barthes’ *Camera Lucida* (1980) acts as an exemplar for the way in which the act of looking, in his case at a photograph, broadens the discussion of looking beyond conventional discourses of voyeurism. Barthes’ particular form of looking sets aside the technical aspects of photography in favour of aspects which engender an “affective consciousness” (1980/2000, 55). Similarly, Joseph Conrad’s character in *The Shadow Line* (1917) apprehends the sense data contained in the experiences of his time as ship’s captain. His self-doubt, isolation and “menace of emptiness” culminate in the writing of a pocket-book which becomes a symbol of his feeling (1946, 225). His looking out to sea and to the ship’s crew functions as a mode of perception, which involves his whole body in the way Freud postulated in *On Aphasia* (1891). This study and his later work *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895) describe the way in which sensuous data is apprehended and stored as mnemic images. This process involves the reconciliation of the periphery of the body with its representative cortical area to establish the pathways needed for looking to achieve its aims and capacities, particularly those involving the reification of the subjective experience (1891, 53 and 1895, 315). This discussion is contained within the overarching aim of the thesis as a whole; to identify and acknowledge the multifarious functions of looking in text and film to reveal what the aim of looking is and further, to determine what modes of discourse may be employed to express this, from the presentational to the representational. These discoveries are expressed in *Mr Pincer’s Tenant* as they are in the other works of fiction cited. The discussion of the functions and forms of looking, importantly, reveals the connections between looking and language, as explored below.

*The subjective experience of looking at a photograph*

In Roland Barthes’ *Camera Lucida* (1980) the author looks into the photograph of his mother. He “recognises her fragments” and continues to look to “rediscover” her. He stares into the picture and “misses her being” as he realises his looking “provokes only her identity, not her truth.” He looks until he “experiences her, strong as she has been.” He looks at “her very illness” until his looking “engenders his mother.” He looks into the picture and realises “what I see has been there, in this place... what I see has indeed existed.” He looks at the picture of his mother and declares, “I am the reference in every photograph.”
realisation brings feelings of aloneness without escape, “cruel, sterile deficiency” and grief. He cannot let his “gaze drift” away from “suffering.” He decides a photograph should “be looked at when one is alone.” Barthes’ considers the fact of his looking and remarks, “Alas, however I look, I discover nothing ... such is the photograph: it cannot say what it lets us see.” He asks: “How can we look without seeing?” He looks again at the photograph of his mother and “enters crazily into the spectacle, into the image,” taking into “his arms what is dead. The photograph touches me if I withdraw it from its usual blah-blah: ‘Technique,” “Reality,” “Reportage,” “Art,” etc.: to say nothing, to shut my eyes, to allow the detail to rise of its own accord into affective consciousness” (Barthes, 1980/2000, 3-119).

*Camera Lucida* is an autobiographical account of Barthes’ struggle with conventional approaches to viewing images. He insists that the photograph “must escape usual discussions of the image,” and thus usual discussions of looking; it is common “among commentators (sociologists and semiologists) to seize upon a semantic relativity... this argument is futile... the photograph is an image without code” (1980/2000, 88).

Thus, *Camera Lucida* provides a qualitative exemplar for the way in which the subjective experience of looking is expressed in written terms. Indeed, Barthes realises he will need to devise new forms of emotional awareness and a lexicon which succeeds “Photography’s commentators” as a means of explaining this “affective consciousness.” On this basis, he begins his qualitative foray into “the essence of the image” through the sensory pathways, rejecting any method involving a “reductive system” (8, 106).

Barthes uses the act of looking as a methodological anchor to question theorists who remain fixed to notions of chronology in determining the meaning of a photograph. He questions the idea that a photograph offers a fixed reality of *that* time and *that* place. The photograph for Barthes offers a mode of conceiving of the emotion in the image (88). Barthes’ looking informs his development of a group of descriptors for the photograph’s “magic”. A photograph’s *punctum*, he writes, is its sting, speck, cut or little hole; it is “that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)” (27). His *studium* is his “enthusiastic commitment” to the picture which “is always coded” (51). The photograph’s pure representation is captured in his word *noeme*, or “that-has-been” (96). Its *air* is the “expression of truth” through which he moves from “recognising” to “discovering” (108-109).

In his autobiography, *Camera Lucida*, Barthes realises that discovery of the “truth” of a photograph requires its percipient “see the luminous shadow ... which accompanies the body; and if the photograph fails to show this *air*, then the body moves without a shadow, and once this shadow is severed, ... there remains no more than a sterile body” (110). He thus decides that looking should return
knowledge beyond mere identity; beyond “a figuration of the motionless and made-up face beneath which we see the dead” (32). He tests the act of looking to its limits to find what it “teaches me;” to discover its “power of expansion” beyond the “sting” to what that sting represents (43).

Thus, in this non-fiction narrative of the subjective experience of looking Barthes gives an example of a photograph into which he looks to experience its sensuous properties, to engage on the level of the senses. Duane Michal’s (b.1932) photograph Andy Warhol (1958) provides a clue to its metonymic value because one detail “fills the whole picture [with] the slightly repellent substance of those spatulate nails at once soft and hard-edged” (45). “I recognise with my whole body,” Barthes writes, the “not strictly intentional” thing in the photograph, but rather the “supplement that is at once inevitable and delightful” (47). In this way, Barthes’ looking begins to exceed and transcend the notion of looking in which voyeurism is a reflexive psychical dynamic of “looking at the other as just another me” (Geyskens, 2005, 45). His looking is carried out with emotional intention – he discovers that the work of looking, as a method of identifying the details that leave an impression, involves noticing not what the photographer delivers as an image, but the flash or dart of lightening that is felt. Barthes wants to experience the photograph on a sensuous level, using his whole awareness, both psychically and physically. He looks to closely feel its unusual detail and to eliminate any prior knowledge or culture. “The detail which interests me is not, or at least not strictly, intentional, and probably must not be so; it occurs in the field of the photographed thing like a supplement that is at once inevitable and delightful” but which is also symbolic of feeling (2000, 47).

Unlike earlier looking characters such as Hal Jeffries, Barthes in Camera Lucida, uses his eye as a subjective instrument. However, his eye is not that of the camera, as in Alfred Hitchcock’s films, but a feeling eye, capable of connecting to the sensuous experience. “I refuse to inherit anything from another eye than my own,” Barthes says, because “no culture will help me utter this suffering which I experience entirely on the level of the image’s finitude” (51). Barthes looks at the photograph of his mother, grasps what is a past reality, of which he was not a part, and ultimately learns, through his looking, that the photograph is an “agent of Death” into which he might choose to insinuate himself (90-92). His looking, he decides, can also be a transcendent act, and despite learning that “at the end of this first death, my own death is inscribed,” there is, in the photograph, an “intractable reality” to which his looking has been directed in the service of its aim; “to supply the transparent soul its bright shadow” (2000, 110). Barthes’ looking presents an exemplar of the sensorially-attuned looking character for whom the act offers an experience of the connection of body with psychical objects. In the same way, Harold Pincer, in Mr Pincer’s Tenant, becomes the sensorially-attuned looking character; the story is preoccupied with visual stimuli, looking and descriptive detail, which together create a recognisable scenario the
like of which Barthes describes. Indeed, Mr Pincer’s obsession with watching comes to dominate both his physical and emotional lives. As with Barthes’ *Camera Lucida*, the story manipulates the reader’s understanding of chronology and action to blur the boundaries between the actual and the imagined, to explore themes of illusion and desire and to highlight the intensity of the relationship which emerges between Mr Pincer and the object(s) of his attention. In this way, the prose reflects the themes and concerns of the novella in its profound focus on detail as is the case with Barthes in his discussion of the *experience* of looking.

Barthes’ looking provides the qualitative outcomes that Freud had described in *On Aphasia* (1891) when he found that “the fibre tracts ...no longer reflect a topographically exact image of the periphery of the body” (53). Barthes describes in written form the qualitative experience of Freud’s fibre tracts which “contain the body periphery in the same way as a poem contains the alphabet” (53). Thus, Barthes’ sensuous method of looking, in which his whole body is involved, provides a “living” example of Freud’s theory of the qualitative capacities of the nerve fibres at the level of the cortex.

*Looking and aphasia*

The discussion thus far has described the way in which Barthes’ *Camera Lucida* uses looking as a means of engaging in the subjective experience of the photograph. The chapter will now turn to the way in which Freud uses the looking acts of his aphasic patients to re-establish neural pathways which had been lost or disconnected. This thesis contends that this re-establishment brings new ways of engaging in the subjective experience of looking. Freud exploits this engendering of an affective consciousness, as Barthes describes, to explain the neurophysiological mechanisms of visual perception. He favours a schema of visual perception which encapsulates its qualitative aspects over the notion that looking is primarily an act of voyeurism. Freud explains the sensory awareness involved in looking as a perceptive act as Bathes does in his *Camera Lucida* (1980), in contrast to “Photography’s commentators” who seek to reduce the photograph to its component parts (2000, 88). In this way, this chapter extends the discussion in Chapter One on Freud’s neurophysiological schema for visual perception to explore the subjectivity of looking in search of a broader understanding of the act.

In his early exploration into the psychical mechanisms of hypnosis, Freud himself experienced an affective response to looking, in the same way Barthes describes when he looks at photographs. Freud looked with “astonishment” and “seduction” at hordes of neurotic patients undergoing hypnosis in Nancy, France. “There was something positively seductive in working with hypnotism,” he wrote, and “in the summer of 1889... I was spectator of [Hippolite] Bernheim’s astonishing
experiments upon his hospital patients” (Freud, 1925, 16). Freud’s excited spectating led him to pursue a career in neuropsychology based upon the fruits of his observations as he describes in An Autobiographical Study (1925). “I received the profoundest impression of the possibility that there could be powerful mental processes which nevertheless remained hidden from the consciousness of men” (1925, 16).

The symptoms, or what the patient says she is feeling, acts as Freud’s cue to the patient’s psychical dynamic. He not only looked at the topographical picture of the patient, the signs the patient exhibited – “her case presented a variegated picture of paralysis with contractures, inhibitions and states of mental confusion” – but more importantly, he looked at the symptomatological picture (1925, 19). He used the device of looking, or perceiving, to ascertain more than the codified signs that the patient exhibited. Freud was concerned, from the outset, with the subjective experience of the patient and how this feeling translated into psychical images. Even dream content became a “valid psychical product” from which the dreamer’s somatic responses had “translated into images” (1925, 42).

To that end, Freud returned to Vienna to work as a physician alongside Joseph Breuer between 1886 and 1891, during which time his observations of the doctor’s patients materialised into theories about the existence of an affective consciousness. He watched patients “express in words the affective phantasy ... symptoms had meaning and were residues or reminiscences of those emotional situations” (1925, 19). Thus, Freud’s looking act, as a method of deriving subjective data from patients and his own observation that “the life of the emotions” is stored psychically as images, culminated not only in a theory of psychical feeling-pictures but of its realisation as an aesthetic object (1925, 21). His case histories represent symbolic artefacts, derived from “chance observations” and “speculative” looking (1925, 17). Freud re-investigated theories of aphasia, which had earlier been postulated, demonstrating his interest in neurophysiology. On Aphasia (1891) shows his “speculative” looking method and his conclusions reveal his willingness to risk feelings of fear and humiliation in the name of exploiting his experimental device of looking. “The “Aphasia” has just come out,” he wrote in a letter to Minna Bernays, “and has already caused me deep disappointment. Breuer's reception of it was such a strange one; he hardly thanked me for it, was very embarrassed, made only derogatory comments on it, couldn't recollect any of its good points” (1891, 229).

Through this experience Freud discovered that emotional distress found representation in image form in the psyche. He observed, for example, that the emotions surrounding decisions which were “terribly important” in terms of his medical career found representation in dreams. “I dreamed that Bruke told me I couldn’t get it [the travelling grant], that there were seven other applicants, all of whom had greater chances!”(1885, 154). Indeed, Freud demonstrated a sensibility for conceptualising the ways in which daytime affect translates into night time
psychical events. “Your foreboding,” he wrote to Martha Bernays, “is exactly like those nightmares that torture one when one is suffering from indigestion. Then on waking one is relieved that it was only a dream” (1884, 101). Freud’s observation that “everything that had been forgotten had in some way or other been distressing; either alarming or painful or shameful” thus had the potential to find expression, in symptoms and dreams (1925, 28). These forgotten, but emotionally-loaded experiences, after undergoing a process of distortion, abbreviation and “misunderstood translation,” find representation as psychical images, he observed (1925, 42).

But Freud had concluded, even before On Aphasia, in his preface to the translation of Bernheim’s Suggestion (1888) that consciousness could not be localised to any particular part of the nervous system (Bernheim, 1889). On Aphasia postulated that affective consciousness, as described in Barthes’ Camera Lucida above, involved a dynamic process in which not only did sensory impressions – visual perceptions, for example – and their attendant emotional content reside in one brain location, but that the brain functions as “a continuous cortical area” capable of transferring “impressions and images” to regions “not covered by localisation” (1891, 102).

Tom Hooper’s film The King’s Speech (2010), based on actual events using the historical notebooks of real-life speech therapist Lionel Logue, draws on screenwriter David Seidler’s own experience of stuttering. While this may have contributed to the amalgamation, artistry and fiction-making of the film, it also offered the opportunity to illustrate Freud’s hypothesis above. Speech therapist Lionel Logue (Geoffrey Rush) sets out to reconnect his patient, King George VI (Bertie), with the sensory perceptions derived from the whole body as a perceptive organ, to reacquaint the cortical area of speech with its sensory and motor receptors (Seidler, 2010). The previous notions of cortical function held that individual cortical areas were responsible for particular aspects of functioning and that this function could not be undertaken by other areas. Freud showed that sensory apprehensions represented in one brain location were transferable to another location.

Thus, Freud’s own investigative and sensorially-aware looking foreshadowed his theory that visual perceptions are stored and retrieved, and that a functional disconnection from these images does not necessarily result in a permanent loss of access to them. Logue demonstrates, using headphones, that the neuro-physiological basis of the King’s (Colin Firth) aphasia lies not in a mechanical disconnection from brain centres, but with a lack of the bodily sensory receptors’ connection with the cortical speech areas. Speech therapist Logue restores, to a great extent, the King’s capacity to perceive bodily sensations and to translate that sensory information to the existing speech centres. Logue asks Bertie to “try singing it ... sing me the chorus” because “continuous sound will give you flow” (Seidler, 2010). Logue’s method involves withdrawing consciousness from the
mind to stop Bertie from thinking about the stammer and instead bringing his conscious awareness to his body. The King practices deep breathing; “expand the ribs, put your hands on your ribs, loosen the shoulders,” instructs Logue. The King sings vowels at an open window, jumps up and down and hums, after which Logue asks: “How do you feel?”

In Freud’s terms, the King’s “continuous cortical area” is reawakened and reconnected to the bodily receptors during these exercises and thus Logue’s question speaks to Freud’s idea of the “transmitted stimulus” of the external world finding its sensory representation, once again, in cortical cells. In effect, the King is retrieving and reviving old stored images and the neural pathways to these images, but is also laying down new sensory perceptions in the speech centres. The speech apparatus becomes reconditioned to operate on the basis of its newly laid-down sensory information and is therefore restored as a functional apparatus.

Freud’s own looking method began, characteristically, with a neuropathology, as in the case of King George VI’s aphasia. This investigation informed his qualitative view of brain processes. Freud’s future work in which he traced the “transmitted stimulus” from the periphery of the body – the eye, for example – had its foundations in On Aphasia which attempted to describe the impressionistic nature of apprehended and stored images. “We can surmise only that those fibres which arrive in the cortex after permeating the gray matter still contain a connection to the periphery of the body but can no longer produce a topically similar image, just as ... a poem contains the alphabet in a rearrangement that serves other purposes in manifold associations of the individual elements, whereby some may be represented several times, others not at all” (1891, 55). This important passage of Freud’s underpins his notion that visual impressions are retained as abstractions in the same way words operate as functional components in language to bring meaning through different relations to one another. This is a qualitative view of the aims and capacities of looking and ties with Barthes’ experience of looking as he describes in Camera Lucida.

Looking and pleasure (2)

These early postulations about the character of psychical content and its relation to sensory perception finds expression in Freud’s later work on the way in which neurones act qualitatively to effect physiological homeostasis. Freud’s Project for a Scientific Psychology (1895) aimed to reveal the “determinants of consciousness” and thus, even this early work, had sown the seeds for a qualitative theory of consciousness (1895, 284).

Thus, Freud’s Project acts as a founding document for the premise that neural activities constitute the subjective experience. Indeed, his early postulations about pleasure, in relation to looking and other forms of sensory stimulation, reveal his emerging conception that as a somatic response, this stimuli has an effect on
consciousness far beyond the economics of the neuronal excitations (1895, 294–296). Even his phrase “excessively intense ideas” is a qualitative conception in its expression of the feeling of intensity and of passion, despite its origins in physiology as an overflow of neurological feedback. Freud observed that the hysteric or obsessive patient amalgamates and distils these “ideas” into one exceedingly prominent idea, and that this montage becomes the patient’s dominant thought, whose origins had arisen from a range of perceptions (1895, 294-296). Freud’s work thus extends the scope of looking beyond the way in which Mulvey describes the act in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975) to vistas which take in its qualitative aims and capacities.

This exegesis aims to trace sensory stimuli from bodily receptor to cerebral cortex in literary or filmic characters, from the eye to the image storage area, in order to ascertain “what we are aware of” on a qualitative level, as Freud did with his patients in Project. In his pursuit of this aim Freud writes: “Hitherto, nothing whatever has been said of the fact that every psychological theory, apart from what it achieves from the point of view of natural science, must fulfil yet another major requirement. It should explain to us what we are aware of, in the most puzzling fashion, through our consciousness” (1895, 306). Freud’s and his patients’ looking acts, he knew, supplied not only a quantity of neural impulses to the brain, but extracted from those impulses a quality of content which went to make up a notion of consciousness. Thus, the mechanism of visual perception, in both its manifestation as a mechanical organ of anatomy and as a means of deriving a conception of consciousness, is central to his efforts toward describing “the factors determining consciousness, as a function of perception,” as he wrote in a letter to Wilhelm Fliess (1895, 146). Thus, Freud’s discovery that looking determines consciousness provides a broader understanding of both the behaviours and the subjectivity of the literary and the filmic characters exemplified. His discovery expands the notion of the character’s looking act into realms of consciousness as it is expressed in literature.

**Looking and the basis of consciousness**

This chapter will now follow the actions of the neurones under conditions of perceiving and of stasis to distinguish active looking from the sleeping state. Freud found that this action of the perceptual neurones had to do with a characteristic other than could be measured quantitatively. He decided, as an early speculation, that “the basis of consciousness” rested on the “motion of the masses of the external world” as it supplies “excitations” to minimally “filled” perceptual neurones (1895, 309). But during sleep, these excitations, he postulated, derive from images already stored, as no further external perceptions could be apprehended. Thus, Freud postulated a way in which the act of looking has aims and capacities even in the sleeping state. This notion ventures far beyond the conventional view that looking is a form of voyeurism.
Freud associated these “motions of the masses” of excitations with the sensation of pleasure and of “unpleasure” in *Project*, confining his discussion to pleasurable stimuli in the context of a perception, and developing the “unpleasure” component of the discussion in later works. He noted that pleasure, as a form of sensory stimulation, is not “durable” and “leaves no traces behind and cannot be reproduced” (1895, 309). Thus, his first conception of pleasure, as it relates to looking, proposed that the act was a part of a continuous search for stimuli as a means of supplying consciousness with content and that this was instigated under the stimulus of pleasurable feelings. Freud realised that because “transmission of quality is not durable” the feelings of pleasure in association with looking needed to be restimulated continually and that therefore feelings of pleasure play an essential role in perpetuating the looking act (1895, 309). But as he noted, this does not mean that the character looks to satisfy libidinal desires, but more likely, to discover its wider aims and capacities.

In describing the neurological relationship between looking and pleasure Freud realised he needed to explain “how it is that excitatory processes in the perceptual neurones bring consciousness along with them” (1895, 310). He set out to describe the coincidence between characteristics of consciousness and processes of perceptual neurones to formulate an early conception of the subjective experience (310). Freud was concerned with how visual perceptions, apprehended under conditions of pleasure, found their way to the cortex, and eventually became the “determinants of consciousness.” He knew that feelings, in association with looking, fused to become a conceptual entity known as “consciousness” and that during sleep, when perceptions are obtained from pictures already stored, an opposing state of consciousness must exist. Freud was thus moving toward an idea that perceptions derive from both conscious and unconscious states. He called the sleeping state “the omission of consciousness” and asserted that under these conditions “psychical events [are not left] unaltered” (1895, 310). The character apprehends images which are not derived from direct looking but from looking while sleeping, or dreaming. This kind of looking extends the scope of the act beyond conventional views of it as voyeurism because such a view relates only to the waking state. Proponents of the “looking as voyeurism” school hold that the character must be awake in order to look at the subject of his interest.

The independent rearranging of psychical events as occurs during dreaming propelled Freud to investigate consciousness during times when it is “omitted” or as he later called it, is involved in “dream-work” (Freud, 1900). Dreaming, for Freud, became a type of night-time looking in which perceptions are apprehended, or rather re-apprehended, and made into new sequences of events, complete with emotional content. Thus, Freud had established that psychical images arise from direct visual perception, and from internal perceptions, or dreams, but proposed a third process by which perceptions may be derived; from
wishes, or hallucinated perceptions (1895, 318). He ventured that these imagined feeling-pictures contribute to consciousness in the same way as images derived from the other two processes and have the same capacity to effect physiological changes. “Wishful activation will produce the same thing as perception,” Freud wrote, as he set the foundation for a theory of consciousness which reached far beyond his initial apprehension of it as the “quantitative catheisis of impermeable neurones” (1895, 318). Freud had, in this way, moved beyond quantitative science to a philosophical science; he had hypothesised that both the conscious and unconscious states supplied impressions that equally determine consciousness. Thus, the characters’ looking acts, both sleeping (through dreaming) and waking, offer opportunities for supplying consciousness with content. In this way, Freud’s work aligns with this thesis to discover the aim of looking in patients, or literary and filmic characters, beyond the conventional interpretations of the act as voyeurism.

In Project for a Scientific Psychology (1895) Freud characterised consciousness as possessing a capacity for storing images, which can later be recalled in the service of satisfying wishes and in meeting physical and psychical demands in the absence of the object or wished-for thing. He furthered this view of psychical activity with his conception of “mnemic” traces or images which, he writes, effect the “reproduction of experiences” by retrieving psychical data, or memories, to satisfy a physiological demand (1895, 319).

But Freud had considered this process earlier in On Aphasia (1891) in which he grappled with the accepted, yet not well clarified, theory that “an idea is localised in the nerve cell” (55). Freud wanted to separate the “physiological-modification-of-the-nerve-fibre-through-sensory-stimulus” concept from its representation in the psyche. His work to explain how a feeling finds an image-symbol became the focus of Project (1895) and of The Interpretation of Dreams (1900). He worked toward a hypothesis which described the “idea” in its physiological existence, and the sensory stimuli which modifies a receptor as a separate and not necessarily transferable process. The “idea” in physiological terms, Freud hypothesised, “starts at a specific point in the cortex and from there spreads over the whole cortex and along certain pathways” (1891, 56). This thesis applies those neurophysiological precepts to show that the aims and capacities of looking in literary and filmic characters stretch beyond the conventional interpretations of the act as voyeurism. It does this primarily by showing, using literary and filmic examples, the way in which the characters’ looking act provides qualitative data which can manifest in the creation of a symbolic artefact.

The “idea” which has spread manifests as “memory” in the part of the cortex affected, but this “event,” Freud decided, does not, of itself, constitute consciousness. Freud pursued what he considered did constitute consciousness in Project, whereas in On Aphasia he simply raised his prescient view that “whenever the same cortical state is elicited again, the previous psychic event re-
emerges as memory” (1891, 56). This statement finds its elaboration in Project in the explanation of the physiological basis of pleasurable feelings, in the satisfaction of physiological demands and in the hypothesis of the contents of consciousness. It finds qualitative form in L. P. Hartley’s novel The Go Between (1953) in which the narrator’s past “is a foreign country” full of “relics ... lying at the bottom of a rather battered red cardboard collar-box” (1). “As I handled them,” the narrator recalls, “a recollection came back, faint as the magnet’s power to draw, but as perceptible. ... the intimate pleasure of recognition, ... It was a roll-call in reverse; the children of the past announced their names, and I said, “Here” (1953, 1). Freud made the point that “affective states” which are elicited will trigger the return of the memory, which for this discussion, provides the link between the psychical content and its origins in sensory perceptions. Looking characters are stimulated through their acts to retrieve memories which they reconcile with current events, as with L. P. Hartley’s narrator in The Go Between who, through the stimulation of affect, finds his “foreign country” (1953, 1).

The eyes, as chief looking apparatus, are replete with receptor neurones, always in a state of readiness, accepting repeated stimuli more readily than new sources of stimuli. Freud followed the investigation of the activity of receptor neurones, especially their “state of readiness for excitation” to the farthest point possible in Project in his effort to propose a hypothesis of the “determinants of consciousness.” The looking character or patient, Freud ventured, having made particular observations before, is more neurologically amenable to the reception of those images on a second and subsequent viewing. Freud’s discussion linked the stimulus of the receptor neurones – the eyes – to the sensory responses to show that neuronal cells, in their state of readiness, accept pleasure as well as pain, and that these sensory stimuli are stored as “mnemic images.” These feeling-pictures, Freud elaborated, arise from both external and endogenous sources; from direct perception of visual images and from memory (1895, 324).

Freud’s distinction between a real and an imagined image hinges on the inhibitory activity of a group of cells he called the “ego.” The looking character is capable of obtaining and storing images as a direct result of his observations and through “wishful activation,” but the particular content and arrangement of his eventual album of mental images depends on the ego’s moderating activity (1895, 318). Freud saw the ego’s moderating role as protective of the psychical mechanism against overstimulation (1895, 311). The psyche, Freud said, needs protection from internal sources of stimulation, or emotions, and external sources, or visual perceptions. The looking character’s experiences of pleasure, pain and of satisfaction are attached to images, and stored as “wishful states” (1895, 320). These feeling-pictures leave behind traces and motives for repeating the behaviour which had been brought about by the original feeling. “The wishful state results in a positive attraction towards the object wished-for, or more precisely, towards its mnemic image” and even if the wishful state brings about a
painful experience, the attraction is, nevertheless, as strong (1895, 321). The difference between pleasure and pain, he found, is that “the experience of pain leads to a repulsion, or a disinclination to keeping the hostile mnemonic image cathected” (1895, 321).

Thus, the ego, as a “network of cathected neurones” acts to shut out further pain in the event of a “hostile image.” This mechanism Freud called “inhibition” and regarded it as a primary defence. But as he found, the ego is unable to distinguish between real and “not real” images and therefore needs a mechanism by which to discern imaginary hostile images. Freud conjectured that the perceptual neurones themselves might participate in distinguishing at least the external world from images derived from memory. He was able to establish, however, that the ego acts in response to both real and “not real” stimuli, and if that stimulus results in unpleasure, even from imaginary sources, a defence is launched.

Thus, the looking character, in his experiences of pleasure and satisfaction, is rewarded through the mechanism of the moderating ego; he is supplied with images which are not real but which he can nonetheless enjoy. This occurs through the ego’s actions which bring about a moderated cathexis of the wished-for object which the looking character cognises as not real but equally satisfying (1895, 326). Mr Pincer cognises “not real” images and enjoys them as real.

The literary character’s feelings of pleasure and pain in relation to returned images are also represented in Mark Romanek’s film One Hour Photo (2002). Seymour Parrish, “Sy” (Robyn Williams) is a photo-lab technician working at the local SavMore grocery store. Through his looking behaviour, primarily his looking at other people’s family photographs, Sy “cognises” feelings of pleasure or satisfaction and ‘unpleasure’ or the feeling of an unsatisfied desire. He looks at photographs of the Yorkins and, through his insinuation into the family’s activities, attempts to find matching or similar psychical objects (2002). This looking behaviour is, however, interpreted as perverse in conventional discourses on the practice of looking as discussed in Chapter One. Indeed, Sy is referred to as a paedophile in contemporary scholarly responses to the film. But in the context of this discussion, within the frame of Freud’s schema for visual perception, Sy’s looking functions as a neurophysiological activity in which the aim is to apprehend psychical material, as Freud describes above.

The function of the moderating ego, as mentioned, is biological, as in the case of the hungry baby who is satisfied, if only temporarily, by the hallucination of the breast. But in other instances of looking, this moderated cathexis of the wished-for object gives rise to pleasure, pain or satisfaction in the adult looking character who is able to complete images which arrive as partial images, yet have the

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13 See for example Millennial Masculinity: Men in Contemporary American Cinema (2013), Chapter Seven, in which David Greven writes: “The film [One Hour Photo] gives Sy... the appearance of a classic pedophile” (146).
potential to arouse a feeling of satisfaction. This occurs, Freud says, when the wishful cathexis of the image perception and the perception from external sources match completely (1895, 326).

In instances where the perception does not tally with the mnemic image a method is found, Freud writes, “of completing the similarity to an identity” (1895, 327). The dissimilarity between the wishful cathexis of a memory and a perceptual cathexis triggers the action of the ego to authorise a feeling based upon the similar aspects of the two images. The looking character’s existing experience comes into play when a mismatch between the wished-for mnemic image and a fresh perception occurs; an already-felt somatic response is evoked to a particular visual stimulus and an attempt is made to match those feelings to the new ones. The ego instigates this “reproduction of cathexis” to effect a release of the “sensations of identity” (1895, 328). The looking character is thus able to derive images from “association,” or a matching of perceptions with already-stored images, and by “reproductive thought” or the creation of a near-enough match with his existing stock of pictures. In either case, the character is able to experience sensations of pleasure, pain or satisfaction from only partially-recognised images.

Freud proposed a third instance by which the wishful state gives rise to an image and its attendant sensory responses. When “a perception emerges which does not coincide in any way with the wished-for mnemic image” it nevertheless arouses “an interest for cognising this perceptual image” (1895, 329). Freud proposed that the looking character’s “own body” plays a key role in creating and accepting the new image (1895, 331). Poe’s narrator, who pursues the stranger in The Man of the Crowd (1840), as discussed in Chapter One, is inspired to continue looking because the stranger fits with a feeling of a memory rather than a memory per se, or if not the whole feeling, then some fragment of it (Poe, 1840/2010, 232). Even though these visual pictures seem ambiguous; the stranger resembles aspects of both a “satisfying object” and a “hostile object,” as Freud calls these new images, the looking character nevertheless employs his act of looking to “cognise” the unfamiliar pictures into the current stock of images (1895, 320-321). This method of looking at unfamiliar or partially-familiar images provides the mechanism for creating and storing images and their attendant sensations in a continual process of perception by which new images are made from remnant feelings. But these newly-created images, Freud warned, form only impressions of images based on similarities of sensation and visual perceptions, not direct facsimiles of the observed individual (1895, 327). However, importantly, these stored images, even if distorted, become the trigger for a discharge of feeling and thus are liable to become part of any symbolic artefact that is created as a result of this looking (1895, 327).

The importance of a “History of Looking”
The chapter will now return to Roland Barthes’ *Camera Lucida* in which he describes his feelings in relation to looking at a photograph. Freud’s work on the mechanism of mnemonic images becomes useful for explaining the way in which the looking act operates to both provide images and to return them. Roland Barthes’ “cognising” of his mother as an entity represented in feeling is recognition of her visual manifestation. But this constitutes only fragments of the whole image. These partial “matches” are enough, however, to “release the sensation of identity” as Freud explains, which then triggers a process of “reproductive thought” (1895, 328). Barthes “engenders his mother,” or as Freud describes, “completes the similarity to an identity” (1895, 327). Barthes’ looking act thus consists in a wishful intention to cathect to a memory upon whose achievement he is able to declare: “what I see has indeed existed” (Barthes, 2000, 77).

But with this recognition comes the alienating potential of looking if, as Barthes discovers, the act does not return the sensory responses brought about through his inscription in the picture’s scene. Charles Clifford’s photograph “The Alhambra” (1854) on the other hand “touch[es] me,” Barthes writes, as he recognises that “it is quite simply there that I should like to live. This desire affects me at a depth and according to roots which I do not know” (2000, 38). Hal Jeffries in *Rear Window* acts in the opposite way to Barthes; he is unable to retrieve or revive the feeling embedded in the images of Greenwich Village, as discussed in Chapter One. Meanwhile, Barthes retrieves and revives the mnemonic image of the “shadowy porch, tiles, crumbling Arab decoration” of “The Alhambra” (2000, 38) in an act of “release of sensation of identity” (1895, 328). Jeffries is disengaged from the scene of the other flats in Greenwich Village, or in Barthes’ words, from arousing an “affective consciousness” in relation to the scene.

Thus, Barthes’ looking, in contrast to Jeffries’, engenders an historical view. Barthes writes: “I want a History of Looking,” in a declaration of what the photograph, as a portrait of “myself as other” is, and what it cannot be: the “image which coincides with my (profound) self” (2000, 12). Barthes’ “History of Looking” begins with the photograph relieved of its weight which is “heavy, motionless, stubborn” to reveal the lightness of the “self” in History: a mobile, shifting, altering, divided, dispersed self (2000, 12). Barthes is responding to the photograph as opposed to analysing its elements, as “Photography’s commentators” do – to its parts in sum.

Freud explains the neurophysiological mechanism underlying such a looking experience as Barthes’. “The aim and end of all thought-processes is to bring about a state of identity, the conveying of a cathectic quantity emanating from outside into a neurone cathected from the ego. Cognitive or judging thought seeks an identity with a bodily cathectic, reproductive thought seeks it with a psychical cathexis of one’s own, an experience of one’s own” (1895, 331). This statement draws together the aims and capacities of looking in neurophysiological terms; all
thought involves sensuous impressions drawn from existing psychical material or from external impressions and is applied to conscious. This sense data is conceived of as emanating from the individual. Looking, for literary and filmic characters is thus an individual enterprise involving influences of existing psychical material and of that of the external world.

The photograph holds stubbornly to “that which has been” – Barthes’ “History of Looking” – conceives of a “self” as an entity in motion and of a consciousness made up of collected perceptions (2000, 12, 77). Freud recognised this “History of Looking” at the neuronal level – his “processes of thought” – in which the looking character adopts a wishful state in the service of “cognising” perceptions for psychical purposes, and is, as he described, a process beginning in infancy and continuing through adult life. The aim of making this biological “History of Looking,” Freud maintained, had as much to do with the “economics of nervous force” as it has to the question of what exactly constitutes the “determinants of consciousness” (1895, 282). Nervous force, for Freud, is the energetic entity behind all psychical processes, including those which go to supply consciousness with content. A “History of Looking” for Freud thus involves not only the direct perception of the first object of satisfaction, but of the perception of images made up of fragments of visual perceptions and half-remembered feelings, and in the absence of those, a hallucination of the wished-for object. But in making a “History of Looking” the character looks first to survive and then to create, and as Freud found, consciousness is subject to constant overwriting of perceptions. Even the process of remembering is more a “calling-up” of a hallucination than of a retrieval of data based in reality; psychical secondary processes ensure the cognising of myriad perceptions, from all sensuous sources, in a constant replenishing of the looking character’s stock of images.

These secondary processes distinguish the photograph from consciousness; the photograph represents what has been where consciousness exists as a symbol of what is and what will be. The photograph is “false on the level of perception,” writes Barthes, because it reveals only the past; Freud’s theory of visual perception suggests that psychical processes deliver a forward-moving representation of the air or “truth” of a perception achieved through the “cognising” of the elements of the photograph which in reality are not there (2000, 109, 115).

Barthes’ sensations arise at the level of the receptor neurones of vision: “my eyes were touched with a kind of painful and delicious intensity,” he writes of his response to Federico Fellini’s Casanova (1976) in which “each detail, which I was seeing so exactly, ... overwhelmed me: I passed beyond the unreality of the thing represented” (2000, 116-117). Barthes is explaining the sensation of cognising elements of the photograph which do not exist in codified terms but in abstract terms. The richness of the colours, the embellished photography, the fine costumes collectively exude more than their meaning in semiotic terms. Barthes is
emotionally moved by the subjective experience of the film as a whole rather than by any of its disparate elements. Thus, the practice of looking in literary representations reveals the extent to which Freud’s notion of the act as “a psychical cathexis of one’s own, an experience of one’s own” plays out in fiction and in non-fiction (1895, 331). These neurophysiological processes provide for the subjective experience of the looking character whereas the psychical construction of voyeurism provides only for an external presentation of the characters’ behaviour.

Individual consciousness is constituted in this two-way process of taking what is seen and making, from existing and fresh perceptions, a representation of the experience beyond “the thing represented” (2000, 117). Freud remained faithful to the representation of his patient’s subjective experience and in doing so achieved a theory which described the perception “beyond the thing represented”; his study of latent dream content, for example, explains perceptions beyond their manifest content.14

Barthes looks with his “whole body” (45) to discover the photograph’s expression of truth in a process Freud describes as involving a “fellow human being” whose visual impression stirs a memory of similar features, and whose vocalisations return auditory reminders of “one’s own body” to bring about a discovery of how to cognise (1895, 330). The photograph, when it is perceived with the whole body, initialises Barthes’ “thinking eye” to “add something to the photograph” in an expansion of the punctum beyond the sign to the thing itself (2000, 45). Freud’s “complex of the fellow human being” demands both a visual recognition and a bodily engagement in the process of achieving not only an identity, but of the making of a consciousness (1895, 330). The sensorially-aware looking character, in the act of looking, seeks Barthes’ “expression of truth” at the level of his eye and of his body, from which he derives the sensuous information necessary to deliver to him both the subject and its “luminous shadow” (Barthes, 2000, 110). Thus, Barthes’ Camera Lucida contributes newly to the discussion in Chapter One of the looking character who is narrowly conceived. Laura Mulvey’s conception limits the act to its perverse actions, as seen through the prism of Freud’s Theory Essays on the Theory of Sexuality (1905). This discussion re-conceives of, and even broadens, the notion of looking as a qualitative process involving the whole body as perceptive organ.

Looking and salvation

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14 Freud calls the latent content of dreams the “thoughts that lay behind the dream” and defines their content as both “undisguised fulfilsments of wishes” and disguised wishes which have undergone repression. “In cases where the wish-fulfilment is unrecognizable, where it has been disguised” the content is expressed “in a distorted shape,” writes Freud (1900, 141). This “distorted shape” is a perception “beyond the thing represented,” as Barthes describes the sensation of unreality of a perception.
In Joseph Conrad’s short story *The Shadow Line* (1917) a man stands on the poop of a ship looking out to sea. He stares at the “low clouds ... of dark convolutions resting on the water, motionless, almost solid.” His eyes fix on the “fatal circle” of Koh-ring until his “boredom, weariness and dissatisfaction” descend into “moral dissolution.” His gaze oscillates between the “appalling vision of a ship floating with a dead crew” and the “broad shadow on the horizon.” He looks back at the “ever-lasting Koh-ring,” and writes its “menace” into the pages of his pocket-book. He details its “mysterious currents” and “shadowy forms” in long passages until finally he steps “out of darkness into visibility” (1917/1945).

Joseph Conrad’s narrator is unnamed in *The Shadow Line* (1917), exemplifying a looking character for whom the act captures images which match the gravity of the psychical quandary in which he finds himself. The story recounts in first-person autobiographical form a ship’s captain on his first command, who takes up the position after “throwing up” his former naval commission. He is aware of being “out of gear mentally” and of “feeling very tired, mostly in my head” (229-237). His waiting in the seamen’s barracks brings him into contact with the “intricate navigation” of Captain Giles, who “silenced me by the perfect equanimity of his gaze” (222). The two men exchange “sustained, holding stares” during the long, hot and slow days on shore.

In Freud’s terms, these images of a sick crew, of the former captain’s mental “weariness” and of the cook with a weak heart collectively form a mnemic image, which is capable of returning somatically in the form of symptoms. But also, as Conrad’s story shows, of returning as textual renditions of the narrator’s despair. The narrator keeps a pocketbook in which he details his feelings; having abstracted mnemic images and reified them onto the page, he creates an enduring symbolic object. This process will be the subject of Chapter Three in which the symbolic transformation of psychical objects is explored insofar as literary and filmic characters have portrayed the process.

In Freud’s schema, as discussed earlier in this chapter, Conrad’s narrator looks out to sea, or the external world, and to the vessel and its crew, or the internal world. This process, in neurological terms, equates to the apprehension of sensuous impressions from the external world and from his existing psychical content. His symptoms, as Freud describes, exist as evidence of “everything that had been forgotten,” but had “in some way or other been distressing; either alarming or painful or shameful” (1925, 28). These distressing feelings make themselves known in symptomatological form, as Freud writes in *An Autobiographical Study*.

In this paper, Freud summarises his findings in relation to mnemic images and reiterates that these forgotten, but emotionally-loaded experiences, become psychical objects, as he later referred to them, having undergone a process of distortion, abbreviation and “misunderstood translation” (1925, 42). Freud’s
conceptualisation of the process of creating consciousness began with the patient’s symptoms, followed by a return to the psychical origins of those symptoms, and concluded with the notion that mnemonic images, as contributors to consciousness, provide both a physiological and a qualitative explanation for the looking act. Conrad’s narrator, in looking out to sea and to the decks of the ship, acts to bring about or return to the physiological state of homeostasis. This process, Freud writes, involves a constant reconciliation of external stimuli with existing psychical objects. In *Project* as noted in Chapter One, Freud writes: “The aim and end of all thought-processes”, of which apprehension and application of neural impulses to the psyche is one, “is to bring about a state of identity, the conveying of a cathectic quantity emanating from outside into a neurone cathected from the ego. Cognitive or judging thought seeks an identity with a bodily cathectic, reproductive thought seeks it with a psychical cathectic of one’s own, an experience of one’s own” (1895, 331). Conrad’s narrator’s looking act involves all of Freud’s processes of thought-activity which culminate in him bringing about a “state of identity.” The looking character informs his psyche of the mass of “excitations” as Freud calls the neural impulses from the external world, and apprehends those excitations, as a means of supplying consciousness with more content. This process, Freud found, acts as a physiological imperative to maintain homeostasis, but it also acts as a qualitative process to satisfy a higher aim. One of those higher aims is the creation of aesthetic objects. “Visual impressions remain the most frequent pathway along which libidinal excitation is aroused,” Freud writes in *Three Essays*, but the act of looking “can be diverted (‘sublimated’) in the direction of art” (1905, 156).15

Conrad’s looking character is stimulated into curiosity born of his illness, but only achieves this state of perceptive capacity, after a long period in which he is depressed and despairing. His visions become unreliable and tormented and his state of detachment from sensory capacities is absolute. In spite of this he recognises that he needs sensory stimulation because his spirit, in his mind, is under threat of annihilation. He thus looks upon his pocketbook as an object which can both contain and evoke feeling and function as a stable receptacle for his feelings. In this way, looking acts as the catalyst for his recovery; he inscribes

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15 In the next paragraph of this sequence about the act of looking, in Freud’s *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), he returns to the act in its physiological context. He restates that looking has many aims, both biological and psychical, but none is a perversion (voyeurism) unless it satisfies these three criteria. “It is usual for most normal people to linger to some extent over the intermediate sexual aim of a looking that has a sexual tinge to it; indeed, this offers them a possibility of directing some proportion of their libido on to higher artistic aims. On the other hand, this pleasure in looking [scopophilia] becomes a perversion (a) if it is restricted exclusively to the genitals, or (b) if it is connected with the overriding of disgust (as in the case of voyeurs or people who look on at excretory functions), or (c) if, instead of being preparatory to the normal sexual aim, it supplants it” (1905, 156-157). For this exegesis Freud’s statement that looking “with a sexual tinge to it” provides stimulus for the artist to begin his work is important. Though none of the looking characters exemplified in this exegesis looks “with a sexual tinge” the point is made that sensory stimulus is a necessary precursor to achieving the “higher aim”.
in his pocket-book the feelings which had previously been uncontained and thus causing “menace” in his psyche.

Conrad’s pocket-book as symbol of feeling

Susanne K. Langer’s *Feeling and Form* (1953) explains that objects such as the narrator’s pocket-book exists as a “transparent symbol of feeling” derived from the lived experience (292-293). In this schema, Conrad’s narrator abstracts from his symptoms a “simplification and manipulation of life’s image” as the artist does, “that makes it [the pocket-book] essentially different from its prototype”, the original symptom, or despair (1916/1946, 293). Captain Giles is the catalyst to the narrator’s return to sea, inspiring in him a “curiosity” of “very fierce sentiment.” The narrator’s new-found inquisitiveness triggers his “mind’s eye [to] see” the pathway to “one’s heart’s desire” (241). The narrator notices “something remarkably earnest about Captain Giles gaze” but even so it “was full of respectful curiosity” (222). “Captain Giles continues to gaze at me,” he explains, until the full extent of my “spiritual drowsiness” becomes evident. His first encounter with the ship brings a burst of “vertical sunlight” through which he is able to look plainly at his situation. He sits in his cabin and contemplates the interface between his “quarry” and the magnitude of the task ahead. “I saw my own face propped between my hands. And I stared back at myself with the perfect detachment of distance... this quietly staring man whom I was watching, both as if he were myself and somebody else” (247).

He takes up his sextant and looks out to sea. “The darkness had risen around the ship like a mysterious emanation from the dumb and lonely waters” (262). He does not resile from the horror of the Gulf of Koh-ring despite its reflections of “my consciousness.” Koh-ring, he decides, is “intensely hateful to my sight,” but stares it in the face despite the risks of its power to show him “oblivion” (271). His curiosity sustains him through his continued looking during which he realises “what I had already left behind... my youth” (211). He looks squarely at the photograph of the dead former captain, from whom the narrator took the role of captaincy, at his “ill-omened stare” and sees the “artist and lover” beneath, whom he declares is “just such as man as myself” (254). He makes the decision to take a different path to the former captain whose “act of treason,” his suicide, left the ship imperilled.

Conrad’s narrator looks into the face of Koh-ring and sees there the “obscure weakness of my soul,” but unlike Poe’s narrator in *The Man of the Crowd*, he continues to work toward “divulging its essence”, or uncovering the unconscious objects hidden there. The “essence” for Poe’s narrator is the unconscious, and for Conrad’s character, the “soul” plays the same role. Conrad’s looking character stares “that old ruffian”, the former captain, in the face and feels keenly the “burning” and “shivering” of his crew. He begins to fear that the secrets of Koh-ring will be undiscoverable. He looks into the “chalky physiognomy” upon the
pages of his pocket-book, and despite its “death-haunted” content, keeps watch (279). “The artist [or Conrad’s narrator] is showing us the appearance of feeling in a perceptible symbolic projection,” writes Langer, which offers “a way of conceiving emotion” (1953, 394). His pocketbook becomes a symbolic object constitutive of his feeling – a written artefact.

Poe’s character in *The Man of the Crowd* meets the face of his own resistance and ceases his further looking. In contrast, Conrad’s character “sets his face hard” and his “voice curt,” and continues to look in spite of what he might find down the “blamed hole” of his “great difficulty” (278). He sets down his mechanical instruments of looking; glass, compass and sextant, and takes up a pocket-book and pencil. These tools of the “artist and lover” had come into his possession, he says, at a time of “moral isolation” and had “saved me” (285). These devices of observation facilitate his further looking in a mode of perception which enables him to make the transition from the cataloguing of “days and nights... stars, sun, sea, light, darkness, space,” to the writing of notes expressive of his feelings (279). Hal Jeffries’ binoculars, by contrast, prevent further engagement in the act of looking.

But the narrator notes that the first extract in the pocket-book is “curiously mechanical” with details of the “ordered arrangement of the stars” (279). However, his later narrative tells of a “decomposition” of the sky and a “corruption of the air;” his lists of elements give way to “disastrous images” and a “fading memory of light-hearted youth.” His writing moves from representational to presentational mode; from lists of signs to the symbol of feeling (275). He sees the possibility of “sails blown away” or “dismasted” and of his command “shrinking ... from mere vision” (286). But he discovers amid his words that “There was ... an effect of inconceivable terror and of inexpressible mystery” to which he wholly surrenders (286). He is the looking character for whom the act, as a mode of perception, finds its ultimate destination.

*On looking and pain*

Conrad’s narrator looks out to sea as a means of relieving his psychical pain; his visual receptors provide the sensory stimulus necessary to recall and revive psychical images which had been repressed. The symptom, or Conrad’s narrator’s “moral isolation,” Langer writes in her *Problems of Art: Ten Philosophical Lectures* (1957), is the outward expression of the somatic mnemonic symbol. It is made up of “un-composed, actual experiences” which undergo a process of abstraction to become an object separate from its somatic origins (87). The character’s looking is thus the first step towards the reification of objects; the pocket-book is a symbol of his feelings.

Freud’s *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895) aimed at alleviating mental pain, and to that end used hysteria as the exemplar to which a theory of symbol
formation and repression could be applied. The particular display of signs and symptoms in hysteria are neurologically accessible and thus attractive insofar as the findings of psychical processes are concerned. But even though Freud apprehended the patient’s story as a unified representation of psychical life he often used a method of analysis which dissects that picture. Conrad’s narrator, by contrast, captures the events, painful as they are, and applies them to consciousness. He assimilates the sensory impressions borne of his peril at sea with those of his existing mental quandary, and discovers a way in which to abstract those images onto the page. Freud applied a medical model of providing relief for his patient’s pain and tended, certainly in the example of Emma (1895, 353), and earlier in the case of Frau Emmy von N. (1893), toward a theory of effecting symptomatic relief or even complete eradication of pain at the expense of understanding its importance as a presentational symbol (1893, 48-105). Thus, Freud was inconsistent in his approach to symptoms, sometimes using a representational approach and other times using a presentational approach. For example, he sometimes viewed the symptom as a symbol of the mnemic image (presentational), and at other times referred to the patient’s vocalisations during hypnosis as a type of literal “confession” (representational) (1893, 93).

Conrad’s narrator recognises his psychical content as presentational; he understands its meaning in relation to the total structure of his psyche. He feels pain and writes its “menace” in the pages of his pocket-book. Langer explains this form of presentational symbolism in her Philosophy in a New Key (1942): “The meanings given through language are understood only through the meaning as a whole, through their relations within the total structure. Their functioning as symbols depends on the fact that they are involved in a simultaneous, integral presentation. This kind of semantic may be called “presentational symbolism” to characterise its essential distinction from discursive symbolism, or ‘language’ proper” (1969, 97). The significance of distinguishing presentational symbolism from the representational is to demonstrate the way in which pain can be expressed symbolically as in the case of the pocket-book, as opposed to being understood representationally, as in Mulvey’s view of looking as voyeurism.

Freud wanted to find in his theory of symbol formation and repression access to a psychical story which, once revealed, would effect relief of symptoms and bring a restoration to “normal” psychical functioning. But in his keenness to anaesthetise unpleasure he diverged from his pathway toward the articulation of a philosophy of “what we are aware of.” His investigations moved in two directions: (1) to an alleviation of symptoms (presentational symbols), and (2) toward an articulation of a theory of consciousness. The problem lay in his approaching the presentational symbols as representational symbols (language proper) and at the same time considering psychical content a presentational entity, made up of sense data. The two approaches became confusing. However, the looking act, in this thesis, is approached presentationally to provide a consistent view of the looking
act as constitutive of the aesthetic objects exemplified. This is in contrast to the literary and film critics mentioned in Chapter One whose work takes a representational approach. This distinction will be taken again up in Chapter Three.

**The relationship between symbols in symptoms and symbolic formation**

For Freud, the “puzzle” of symbols could be resolved by the activity of thought, and if not by judging thought and reproductive thought, then by an elaborate method of replacing the displacements and by tracking physical sensations back to their psychical origins. His theory of symbol formation provides an explanation for simple transpositions of one object upon another; a many-coloured scrap of stuff for the idea of the fatherland, or a more complex series of displacements of objects to bring about a complete dissociation from the original idea (1895, 349).

The theory of repression explained how an idea borne of unpleasure was no longer available to consciousness. However, these two explanations draw conclusions of rationality to a process bound up in the irrationality of affect as it arises in Conrad’s narrator and in the Freud’s Emma. But in his keenness to find a solution to the puzzling story and thus relief of symptoms, Freud stepped away from a mode of symbolic perception in which he apprehended an intuition of the whole patient, and moved toward listing linguistic signifiers as meaningful entities in their own right. Freud attempted to make intelligible a collection of repressed ideas by designating them one composite word; an early example is his collapsing of images and words associated with shop assistants, laughing, assault and sexual release into one word – “clothes” (Freud, 1895, 355). This is an example of Freud’s application of discursive methods to a non-discursive medium; dreams as discursive entities and patient-stories as events in reality.

Freud’s bringing to consciousness of a multiplicity of repressed ideas, and the tracking back of physical sensations to psychical states, leaves the patient with a set of signifiers adrift at sea, floating as Conrad’s “intricate navigation” brought to realisation: the “mechanical” investigation returned the “ordered arrangement of the stars” and probably even the names of the various constellations, but did not linked his bodily sensations to his psychical memory. Thus, Freud’s symbolic perceptions, particularly in relation to memory, as is evident in his *On Aphasia*, fell away to a theory of linguistic signifiers as identified in psychical content in his later psychoanalytic work.

Freud’s search for the truth of hysteria – the psychical root of the compulsion and its expression as symptom – was characteristic of his designation of the mental state as a “proton pseudos” or false statement based on a preceding falsity (1895, 352). His thesis that the truth or the semblance of reliability may be drawn from content borne of affect is founded on both an unreliable witness and his mobile evidence. The hysteric’s psychical processes have ensured that his repressed
psychical content remains that way; concealed from consciousness. The outcome of her perceptions was “quite rationally constructed,” writes Freud of Emma’s conscious conclusions that she should not return to the shop for fear of a further assault, but her “two false connections” which had excluded from consciousness the sexual arousal in connection with one shop assistant, had succumb to a process of irrationality (1895, 355). This theoretical pathway makes discursive perceptions and is thus an unreliable representation of the prevailing psychical content and its motives. As discussed above, Freud’s approach to the “proton pseudos” was representational; he viewed the material as language proper. Freud’s original aim to explain the “puzzling” quality of the contents of consciousness through his own exposure to the subjective experience of the patient gave way to a discursive perception which arrives at the meaning of what has been perceived from its manifestations (1895, 306).

Thus, Freud’s own looking, as with Captain Giles’, was “remarkably earnest” and full of “respectful curiosity” but resulted in his setting his patients, metaphorically, “out to sea.” Freud expected, through a re-acquaintance with psychical content, both conscious and unconscious, that the patient would come to know the root of his “spiritual drowsiness,” as Conrad’s narrator did. He ventured that a re-acquaintance with repressions would result in the satisfaction of the patient’s “heart’s desire” (1917/1946, 223, 225, 241). While Conrad’s character does achieve the capacity to understand his pocket-book as an integral presentation, Freud’s patients continue to grapple with “permanent units of meaning which are combinable into larger units,” as Langer describes discursive representations (1969, 96). Conrad’s narrator explains: “I stared back at myself with the perfect detachment of distance” through the prism of the pocket-book (1917/1946, 247). Freud’s psychoanalytic theory does not permit of this re-viewing of symbolic projections; instead it shows the patient pictures of his repressed complexes, represented in consciousness by the idea of “clothes” but does not offer a psychoanalytic “pocket-book” in which to store them (1895, 355).

Freud seemed not to trust the information of his own symbolic perceptions, and thus reverted to reporting the patient’s symbol formations and repressions as a discursive perception, even though he had brought his patient to the brink of “oblivion” as Conrad’s narrator had. Conrad’s character, instinctively, undertakes a purposive mode of looking driven by a psychical need for satisfaction, and though he begins by cataloguing the “days and nights, stars, sun, sea, light, darkness, space,” he persists until his sense of perception permits of different sensory stimuli, which becomes the impetus for an estrangement from the self.16 He perceives of “disastrous images” and through an immersion into the spectacle

16 *Mr Pincer’s Tenant* presents as the cataloguing of the “days and nights, stars, sun, sea, light, darkness, space” in its first reification of psychical objects as the pocket-book does in Conrad’s story.
of his pocket-book, he “finds an identity with a bodily cathexis” (1895, 332). He feels the “burning” and “shivering” of his own body and of its psychical representation and finds a connection, as Freud describes in On Aphasia, to a psychical impression, reflective of the association of one or more bodily sensations (1891, 53). “The chain of physiological events in the nervous system and the mental processes” are parallel, or “dependent concomitants,” Freud explains, and this is why “we cannot have a perception without immediately associating it” so that “ideation and association of ideas” brings about an identity with the psychical self (1891, 55, 57). “The aim and end of all thought processes,” writes Freud, “is to bring about a state of identity”, the like of which Conrad’s narrator achieves through his viewing of a symbolic perception of his own situation in the form of his pocket-book (1895, 332).

Conrad’s narrator achieves this perception by bringing on a “prototypical surrealist mood,” as a mirror of the process of Freud’s hypnosis of his patients, which Louis A. Sass in his Madness and Modernism (1992) calls “the feeling of living in a vast museum of strangeness” (45). Conrad’s narrator notices that “there is something going on in the sky like a decomposition, like a corruption of the air. I feel as if all my sins had found me out. It seems to me that all my life is infinitely remote, a fading memory, something on the other side of a shadow” (Conrad, 1945, 285). Once Conrad’s narrator passes across the “shadow line” to the Stimmung, or state of mind of “radical alienness” in which the “world is stripped of its usual meanings and sense of coherence and therefore defies any standard description,” he is in a position to find or re-find the state Freud calls a “cathexis of identity” (Sass, 1992, 45).

Conrad’s narrator gazes out to sea in what Sass describes as a “truth taking stare” and which may be understood as a mode of looking, or “perceptual strategy” which occurs when the perceiver “is in some sense inactive or detached,” writes Sass (1992, 72). But it is through the psychical process of “tracing back to information of one’s own body” as Freud describes, that the narrator can form a symbolic perception of his unified self and leave behind the fragmented image (1895, 331).

Conrad’s narrator stares into the face of “the obscure weakness of his soul” and determines the affect which had preceded the onset of his illness; his burning and shivering are clues both to the composition of his mnemic images and to the pathway back to the “fading memory of light-hearted youth.” The narrator enters a self-induced hypnotic trance in which the “inconceivable terror and inexpressible mystery” arouse and revive affect-laden mnemic images of past traumas (Conrad, 1945, 286). But the mere fact of engendering a transient state of identity, as Freud found, does not produce a diminution of symptoms, or effect pain relief, particularly if tracked over time. However, with this knowledge Freud, as mentioned earlier, failed to extrapolate from his theory of the role of mnemic images, a method by which the patient could achieve a coincidence of a psychical
image and a bodily cathexis, and abstract from that the realisation of a symbolic projection of his feeling. The value of making a form expressive of the patient’s feeling is to reify a mass of otherwise uncontained, disparate sense data. But this data, derived from psychical content, as Freud was able to ascertain, is not a direct rendering of the perceptions of dreams, parapraxes, and linguistic associations, but a once-removed stranger to the original data. Conrad’s narrator “put down on paper the thoughts and events of a score of days” and did not “expect the record to outlast” him but discovered that his narrative endured in its existence as a symbolic form representative of his “moral isolation” (1945, 285).

Thus, Conrad’s narrator, as with other “artists and lovers”, devises a method himself, for achieving a state of identity, discovered through the perceptive activity in which he had been endlessly engaged: his looking. Conrad’s narrator looks, but now with the curiosity of the convalescent whose eyes become the tools par excellence for apprehending the sense data of authenticity, or truth quite outside of any “confession” or indeed “untrue account,” as Freud calls “an incomplete story obtained under hypnosis” in his “Case Histories from Studies on Hysteria” (1893, 79).

In doing so, Conrad’s narrator shifts from a discursive method of apprehending sense data, in which he documents the “ordered arrangement of the stars” and adopts an intuitive method of immersion into the reality of both his external and psychical world. He looks with intention through the “decomposition of the sky” and “corruption of the air” to his somatic mnemic image. Instead of looking at the picture and allowing it to shrink from “mere vision,” he objectifies his authentic reflection of his affect (1917/1945, 285-286). The making of a pocket-book, as an object which contains his feelings, and in turn represents those feelings, in an inviolable structure, is the practical and philosophical realisation of Freud’s conception of the psychical movement from the paralysis of the aphasic, to the stammers and stutters of the hysteric, to the achievement of a state of identity with a bodily cathexis. Thus, this chapter has shown the pathway of sensory stimuli as it occurs during the act of looking, and has described the way in which that stimuli find expression in symbolic form.

Freud wanted to articulate the process of the psychical shift from the “truth telling” delivery of the somatic psychical image, and its physical correlative, the stammers and stutters, to an externalisation of their coincidence, as a tangible object. However, the object most representative of this state of identity was the “Case History” which contained the narrative of the patient’s symptoms. Freud went on to devise the “talking cure” as a method for eliciting a glimpse of the somatic mnemonic symbol, which through the writing-up of the “Case Histories” became the objectification of the patient’s psychical content as symbolic artefacts.
This chapter has reviewed the act of looking in relation to its broader aims in neurophysiological terms. In doing so, it has progressed from the discussion in Chapter One in which the act of looking is aligned with conventional discourses on voyeurism to a discussion about the way in which literary characters portray looking as a means of apprehending sensuous data. Freud’s *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895) provided the neurophysiological schema upon which the hypothesis that neural activity is constitutive of the subjective experience was based. Roland Barthes’ *Camera Lucida* (1980) acted as an exemplar for the way in which the act of looking engendered an “affective consciousness” as a necessary first step in the act of perceptive looking. His whole body functioned as a sense organ which responded to the photographs of his selection. Joseph Conrad’s character in *The Shadow Line* (1917) created a pocket-book which ultimately functioned as the symbol of his feeling. Freud’s *Project* provided the conceptual basis for this chapter’s proposition that the practice of looking in literary representations is broader than the discourse of voyeurism conventionally suggests. In particular, Freud’s proposition that “bodily experiences, sensations and motor images” aim to achieve a “state of identity” with psychical objects is fundamental to this chapter’s notion of perception as a means of apprehending sensuous data for application to consciousness (1895, 332). The next chapter discusses the portrayal of literary characters for whom the apprehension of sense data and its application to consciousness functions as the first step toward an envisagement of that data in symbolic terms.
Chapter Three

Chapter One of this exegesis reviewed the act of looking as a form of perversion. Chapter Two explored modes of looking as they engender an “affective consciousness” on the part of the percipient; in particular, the way in which Roland Barthes (1980) approaches the photographs of his childhood and early life as symbolic artefacts capable of engendering feeling. Barthes’ mode of looking was framed in terms of Freud’s Project for a Scientific Psychology (1895) in relation to the neurophysiology of this type of perception. This chapter examines the act of looking as a process for rendering a symbolic envisagement of the subjective experience. The looking character, as artist, is explored in the context of Susanne K. Langer’s theory of art as described in her Philosophy in a New Key (1942) and her Feeling and Form (1953). Langer uses the presentational approach to art objects; she understands works as symbolic forms, whole and inviolable. The act of looking, as discussed in Chapter Two, thus becomes for Langer an intrinsic part of the whole art object. Freud, by contrast, shifts back and forth, from the representational to the presentational approach in his discussion of patients’ behaviours. In his pre-psychoanalytic work he approaches symptoms as abstract components of psychical material as well as clinical signs. Thus, for Freud, looking operates as an action within a qualitative neurophysiological schema and as a sign within the context of the patients’ presenting picture. This distinction acts as the pathway into a discussion of the relationship between the neurophysiological mechanisms underlying the act of looking and the production of art as a symbolic envisagement of that process. This discussion is contained within the overarching aim of the thesis as a whole; to identify and acknowledge the multifarious functions of looking in text and film to reveal what the aim of looking is and further, to determine what modes of discourse may be employed to express this, from the presentational to the representational. These discoveries are expressed in Mr Pincer’s Tenant as they are in the other works of fiction cited. The discussion of the functions and forms of looking, importantly, reveals the connections between looking and language, as is discussed below.

Discursive and presentational forms

Langer’s “presentational symbolism” approaches the act of looking as elemental to the art object in which it is portrayed. Her theory of art views the process of

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17 Freud’s representational approach is occasionally evident in his “Studies on Hysteria” (1893) in which he treats the patient’s responses as literal units of meaning. For example, in discussing Frau Emmy von N. Freud recognises that “pains... repeated in her memory as the somatic symbol of the whole complex of associations” and at the same time questions the “truth” of what she tells him. “She told me the story more truthfully... it was evidently the erotic factor which had caused her to give an untrue account of it” (71, 79). Indeed, in this paragraph, he refers to the patient’s verbalisations as “confessions” rather than symbolic presentations of psychical material.
apprehending sensuous intuitions and their eventual abstraction to the page, screen or canvas as constitutive of the process she calls “symbolic transformation” (1942/1969, 45). In Philosophy in a New Key (1942) Langer summarises the way in which she applies her term “symbolic transformation” to describe its function in the making of art: “Art is essentially the active termination of a symbolic transformation of experience” (1969, 45). This chapter examines the neurophysiological mechanisms of symbolic transformation in characters for whom the act of looking functions as catalyst for that process. The primary filmic example is Michelangelo Antonioni’s Blow Up (1966).

In Chapter One, literary and filmic examples took the form of “exhibitions” as Langer describes in Feeling and Form (1953, 274). Her work explains that art objects exist as forms symbolic of the feeling from which they derive. Chapter One conformed to Langer’s theory of art by “exhibiting” materials in first-person, present-tense format and ensured that these “exhibits” are understood as synopses of the art rather than dissections of the separate looking acts within them. For example, Hitchcock’s Rear Window (1954) was presented as an exhibit of the original work and contrasted with Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure” in which elements of that art are presented, namely, the looking act as clinical sign (1953, 274). This way of presenting the literary and film examples in this exegesis thus distinguishes between presenting looking as constitutive of the art object and looking as a clinical sign. This chapter will extend that discussion by “exhibiting” Antonioni’s film Blow Up (1966) to distinguish it from the prevailing psychoanalytic studies of that film and its character.18 Chapters One and Two established that the looking behaviours which exist within the various works exhibited are constitutive of the works themselves and not elements of the art object (1953, 274).

This point is important for this thesis because it distinguishes the representational approach, to which film critics such as Laura Mulvey subscribe, and the presentational approach of which Langer is a proponent. The creative component, Mr Pincer’s Tenant, embodies the presentational approach to written artefacts in its depiction of a character whose looking is constitutive of the whole work. His progression toward a symbolic envisagement of the psychical dynamics of his life experience is evidenced at the end of the story in his reification of the picture of his tenant.

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18 See for example, Norman K. Denzin’s The Cinematic Society: The Voyeur’s Gaze (1995) in which the looking audience and the looking characters are separated from the art object in order to discover “what motivates the voyeur’s perverse desire to look” (1). In this book Antonioni’s film Blow Up is featured as an exemplar of the voyeuristic film genre and the characters who portray “the cinematic voyeur’s gaze” (42).
Chapter Two was concerned with explaining the neurophysiological mechanisms which underlie such works as Roland Barthes’ *Camera Lucida* (1980) and, in turn, the way in which those works act to engender a feeling response in percipients. This chapter links the “exhibition” of film and literary texts as précis of the original with Langer’s intention for doing so in terms of her larger philosophical tenet of presentational symbolism. Langer explains in her *Philosophy in a New Key* (1942) that the “symbolic elements that compose a larger, articulate symbol are understood only through the meaning of the whole, through their relations to others” (1969, 97). The act of looking thus operates as “a functioning symbol” within “a simultaneous, integral presentation” (97) and in Langer’s theory is termed “presentational symbolism” to characterise its essential distinction from “discursive symbolism, or language proper” (97). This is an important point for this exegesis, and particularly for this chapter, because for the remainder of this discussion, literary texts and films will be understood as “functioning symbols” within which the looking act is understood as constitutive of the art form rather than as a signifier to be extrapolated from it. This is in contrast to Mulvey’s approach to films in which she applies the tenets of Freud’s *Three Essays* to “the unconscious of patriarchal society” to determine the way in which it “structured film form” (1975/2006, 342).

To make the link between this discussion on presentational symbolism and that of Freud’s neurophysiological schema of visual perception, the chapter returns briefly to his *On Aphasia* (1891). This work was discussed extensively in Chapter Two to establish the underpinnings of the neurophysiological mechanisms of looking. However, it is important here for the discussion on presentational symbolism to show how these mechanisms underlie the process of symbolic transformation. Freud (1891) approached his patients’ aphasic conditions as presentational symbols; as abstract formations of their psychical objects. He described the sensory mapping process and its psychical embodiment in presentational terms: “The fibre tracts, which reach the cerebral cortex after their passage through other grey masses, have maintained some relationship to the periphery of the body, but no longer reflect a topographically exact image of it. They contain the body periphery in the same way as a poem contains the alphabet” (1891, 53). “A poem contains the alphabet in a rearrangement that serves other purposes, in manifold connections among the individual topical elements, whereby some may be represented repeatedly, others not at all” (1891, 53).19 This is important to the overall premise of this thesis that the practice of looking in literary representations is broader than the discourse on voyeurism: Mulvey’s *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975) suggests that the looking

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19 Valerie D. Greenberg states in her *Freud and His Aphasia Book* (1997) that Freud’s discussion of the brain’s functions in presentational terms “is central to his aphasia book” (120). She writes: “Just as the message or information transmitted by nerve fibres must undergo a process of translation, Freud’s usage here reveals a translation of brain anatomic terms into a linguistic and literary discursive sphere. The language [of Freud’s] melds disciplinary discourses so completely that it at once describes poems and nerves” (121).
act operates as a language signifier. “Scottie’s voyeurism is blatant,” she writes (1975/2006, 350). Langer shows the way in which such an approach is “discursive” in her chapter “Discursive and Presentational Forms” in Philosophy in a New Key (1942/1969, 79-102). Mulvey’s statement functions as Langer describes: “Language in the strict sense has permanent units of meaning which are combinable into larger units; it has fixed equivalences that make definition and translation possible; its connotations are general, so that it requires non-verbal acts like looking to assign specific denotations to its terms” (1942/1969, 96-97).

In contrast to Mulvey’s representational (or discursive) approach, this chapter will focus on “non-verbal acts like looking” as presentational symbols. “Wordless symbolism, which is non-discursive and untranslatable,” writes Langer, “does not allow of definitions within its own system, and cannot convey generalisations. The recognition of presentational symbolism as a normal and prevalent vehicle of meaning widens our conception ... far beyond the traditional boundaries” such as those around the discourse on voyeurism (1969, 97). With this conceptual framework in mind, the exegesis presents a synopsis of Michelangelo Antonioni’s film Blow Up (1966) as a filmic example of the way in which a text can be approached from within the theory of presentational symbolism. The chapter will identify both the neurophysiological processes as schematised in Freud’s Project for a Scientific Psychology (1895) as they pertain to presentational symbolism, and will reference Langer’s Philosophy in a New Key (1942) as a basis upon which to discuss the protagonist’s process of symbolic transformation.

Michelangelo Antonioni’s film “Blow Up”

The following is a synopsis of Michelangelo Antonioni’s film Blow Up (1966).

Photographer Thomas looks out through the gates of a dosshouse. He looks at a photographic model; stares at her expressionless face. He clicks his camera at her, leaning over her, demanding her compliance. “Fast as you can, give it to me,” he says. He finishes taking the pictures and walks away.

Thomas goes to an artist’s house. He looks longingly at a white canvas covered in a spray of paint dots. The artist stands and looks at one of his paintings. “Must be five or six years old,” the artist says. “They don’t mean anything when I do them. It’s just a mess. Afterwards I find something to hang onto. Then it sorts itself out, and adds up. It’s like finding a clue in a detective story.”

Thomas goes to an empty park and looks at people playing tennis. He develops the roll of film from the park, looks at the negatives with a magnifying glass over a lightbox. He magnifies a section of one image and projects it onto the wall. He makes the section of the image very large and looks at the enlarged picture with a magnifying glass. He makes the picture larger and larger, narrowing in on the fence. He sees a hand holding a gun. “Somebody was trying to kill somebody else,” he says.
Two young colourful girls arrive at the studio. Thomas looks at their pink and blue dresses and green and orange pantyhose. He watches them romp over tangled purple paper. He stares at their jumbled legs and jostling arms. The girls draw him into the squealing play. Thomas tosses and turns on the floor with the semi-naked girls. The girls exclaim: “You weren’t expecting us, were you?” The girls are ejected from the studio.

The artist’s girlfriend, Patricia, asks: “Were you looking for something just now?” Thomas replies: “No, I don’t think so. I saw someone killed this morning.” He points to the picture: “That’s the body.” She replies: “Looks like one of those paintings” (Antonioni, 1966).

The following discussion will focus primarily on Blow Up’s protagonist, Thomas, and in particular his process, in neurophysiological terms, of creating an object which is symbolic of his feeling. As noted in Chapters One and Two, Freud’s schema for the apprehension of visual perceptions involves the sensuous uptake of impressions. These are applied to consciousness and abstracted in the form of symptoms, or as discussed in Chapter Two, in the form of returned psychical objects, such as dreams or affective states, which may act as triggers, as in the case of Roland Barthes’ Camera Lucida (1980). In this Chapter, the focus will be on how those returned objects find expression in forms other than symptoms, dreams and affective states.

Thomas is stimulated to harness a sensory impression of the external world as opposed to grabbing snapshots of it. The scene in which he and the giggly girls become involved in a playful act is the catalyst for this process. His playfulness with the girls triggers his sensory involvement with the world; firstly to re-establish bodily awareness with psychical connections and, secondly, to re-establish sensory awareness of the outside world. This is the physiological opposite of voyeurism in which Tomas Geyskens, as noted in Chapter One, finds “reflexive activities reflect the difference between the two types of object-choice: ...the narcissistic object-choice ... reminds ...him of himself” and in the perverse relation the looking character looks at himself as object. Thus “voyeurism [operates as] a transformation of an earlier infantile phase in which the subject looks at himself” (2005, 39-40). In Blow Up Thomas is looking at objects in the external world as a means of linking those to his psychical world. At the end of the fun with the girls he discharges them onto the street; in neurophysiological terms, they are no longer needed. The girls complain: “But you haven’t taken any photos.” According to Freud’s Project for a Scientific Psychology, however, Thomas has indeed taken photos. Or more precisely, has aroused bodily “interest” which triggers an “activity of thought,” as Freud describes it, in which a cathexis in the impermeable neurones arising from the external world excite consciousness of a quality which leads to a discharge of feeling, and to the furnishing of information, and the storage of the perception as a “mnemic image” (1895, 359). In aesthetic terms, the creative outcome is that he is now sensorially aware
enough to proceed to capturing a picture, or seeing the picture he has already taken, as potential objects symbolic of his feeling. The giggly girls’ complaint about the photographer is true in its reference to his not carrying out the looking act as a base function; of clicking and thieving image copies of their external form. But their claim is false on the level of his sensory perceptiveness; his apprehension of perceptions derives from bodily receptors which contribute to his store of mnemic images. The girls merely act as the sensory stimulus for this process.

Freud further described the mechanism of the apprehension of sensuous data as a whole-of-body experience by coining the phrase “indications of quality.” He introduced the concept in his discussion on psychical attention and its impact on the eventual content of consciousness. “The facilitations between the impermeable neurones constitute memory, the representation of all the influences which the impermeable neurones have experienced from the external world” (Freud, 1895, 364). Langer describes this same process in philosophical terms:

The abstractions made by the ear and the eye – the forms of direct perception – are our most primitive instruments of intelligence. They are genuine symbolic materials, media of understanding, by whose office we apprehend a world of things, and of events that are the histories of things. To furnish such conceptions is their prime mission. Our sense organs make their habitual, unconscious abstractions, in the interests of this reifying function that underlies ordinary recognition of objects, knowledge of signals, words, tunes, places, and the possibility of classifying things in the outer world of their kind. We recognise the elements of this sensuous analysis in all sorts of combination; we can use them imaginatively, to conceive prospective changes in familiar scenes (1942/1969, 92-93).

Langer’s observation of “prospective changes in familiar scenes” is particularly pertinent to the shift in the way Thomas, in Blow Up, reviews the photographs he has taken of the man in the park. His initial response to those pictures is that they portray a man who has been killed. “Somebody was trying to kill somebody else. I saved his life,” Thomas says. Then later, after his “sense organs have made their habitual, unconscious abstractions” he responds to the pictures differently. He looks at the magnified picture he has created and “conceives changes in familiar scenes”. His “memory,” or the image of his memory, as portrayed in the photograph, is an example of the “repeated somatic symbol of the whole complex of associations” as Freud explained in “Hysteria” (1893, 71). In earlier parts of the film Thomas cultivates an attitude of cynicism, but later, after a process of reification of his memory’s “complex of associations” he states that he “saw someone killed this morning” from the perspective of an artist. His girlfriend responds to the magnified image of that scene: “Looks like one of those
paintings,” she says. His photograph, or symbolic artefact, has become the symbol of his abstracted psychical content. His photograph, Langer writes, has become “the active termination of a symbolic transformation of experience” (1969, 45). The “somebody was trying to kill somebody else” statement transforms into “one of those paintings” as a demonstration of this process of symbolic transformation.

The neurophysiological mechanism of symbolic transformation

The external world provides Thomas with stimulus through the lens of his camera, but in the frolic with the girls, it provides stimulus through the receptor neurones of his whole body. This is the difference in his mode of looking, or his mode of apprehending sensuous data, from that of the beginning of the film. His looking, in this later mode, triggers “attention” along different sensory pathways to different cortical neurones. These stimuli “which actually reach the permeable neurones have a qualitative characteristic” but only become so after entering the perceptual neurones, writes Freud (1895, 312). At the “nerve ending apparatus” the stimulus is perceived as a quantity of stimuli, and becomes a feeling-image once it arrives at the cerebral cortex. The stimulus, for Thomas, is bodily; his attention is aroused at the periphery and is fed back to the psychical processing area to become a constituent of his mnemic trace. Thomas is thus supplying his psychical storage area with sensuous data far beyond the one dimension of his visual receptors, and his “psychical attention” prepares his psychical storage area for the reception and cognition of unfamiliar data; pictures which he previously would not have cognised due to their non-coinciding portions, as Freud explains (1895, 330).

Now, when he returns again to look at the enlargement of the park picture, in its most pure form, Thomas is looking at a visual presentation of both the object he viewed and the feeling associated with it; a mnemonic image. But he is also looking at a symbol of those traces which arose as a result of endogenous processes. Freud recognised that the eventual externalised mnemonic trace, Thomas’ blown up picture, represents not only the sensory perceptions derived from the receptor of the organ of sight but of the organs of touch, sound and even smell. Equally, the mnemonic image presents the endogenous activities, as they had been stored psychically, at a much earlier stage of life (1895, 317). This would also include such psychical activities as dreaming in which those endogenous objects are re-organised, assimilated and turned into symbols of their original content.

Dreaming as a form of looking

The thought activity of dreaming, as Freud schematised in his Project for a Scientific Psychology (1895), offers an opportunity to recognise the way in which he was able to envision psychical content as symbolic of its origins. In this schema, dreaming can be understood as another form of looking. Freud made the
link between the mechanism of retrieval of psychical material during day-time perception and that of the retrieval of image traces during sleep.

“During the day-time a constant, even though displaceable, cathexis (attention) is sent into the pallium neurones (the ego) which receive perception from permeable neurones (periphery) so that it may well be that the carrying-out of the impermeable primary processes (psychical processes), is made possible with the help of this impermeable (cortex) contribution” (1895, 336).

Freud here postulates that the ego’s activities of judgement, inhibition and reproductive thought are helped in circumstances in which new perceptions are processed alongside existing ones. Thomas’ new perceptions, taken during his day-time frolic with the girls, contribute to the psychical processes which go to make his new mnemic images. But Freud noticed that in these times of high affect, access to psychical material mimics the process occasioned during sleep when the mechanism of the ego “withdraws cathexis of attention” (1895, 337).

The “withdrawal of cathexis of attention” results in an uninhibited accessing of psychical material; Thomas retrieves and draws upon otherwise un-accessed mnemic images after the frolic with the girls because he is no longer “off London” and is in a heightened state of affect. “By an automatic mechanism of attention, the impermeable neurones, the cortex, excludes the permeable neurones, the peripheral impressions, so long as it itself is uncathected” (1895, 336). Thomas looks at his blown up picture and perceives it as being “like one of those paintings” because, as the artist in the film says of his work: “It’s just a mess. Afterwards I find something to hang onto. Then it sorts itself out, and adds up.”

This observation is echoed in Freud’s description of how dream content, in its manifest state, finds its derivation in visual and other perceptions which had been apprehended earlier in the day. “Dreams exhibit every transition to the waking state, and to a mixture with normal impermeable (cortex) processes ...[expressed in] partly nonsensical, partly feeble-minded, or even meaningless or strangely crazy” images (1895, 337). Thomas’ blown up picture is no longer a hand-and-a-gun picture or a man-dead-in-park picture, but a symbolic artefact arising from the psychical attention which drove him to repeatedly enlarge the original photograph. His “withdrawal of cathexis of attention” or a by-passing of the primary processes of judging and inhibition, as a result of high affect, allowed for his psychical access to the mnemic images, which in other states of consciousness, would not be possible.

But sleep is not the only state in which this access is possible; hypnosis and altered states of perception, such as day-dreaming, or indeed, artistic meditative states also offer uninhibited access to mnemic images. Thomas achieves the
capacity for recalling and reviving memory traces after the initial production of his photograph; the successive enlargements of the park picture, together with the feeling that “something fantastic’s happened,” as he describes his feeling to publisher Ron: “They’re fantastic. What makes them so fantastic is ... look, hang on will you, Ron. There’s someone at the door” (Antonioni, 1966). Thomas is interrupted, but retains his state of excitation and curiosity, and experiences an explosion of somatic perceptions. He is thus highly receptive to the apprehension and storage of fresh mnemic images; “the affective process approximates the uninhibited primary process” in which neural pathways are followed which would ordinarily be avoided due to the risk of unpleasure (1895, 356-357). But in this heightened state “attention is adjusted toward memory” and not toward inhibition, and therefore the passage of discharge (feeling) is permitted (1895, 357).

Thomas becomes more amenable to new perceptions and less inclined to avoid unpleasure. The discharge of pleasurable feelings, and of the perception of the “indications of quality,” or feeling-pictures in association with “a constantly cathected mass of neurones (the ego),” work to assist this process (1895, 359). Also, these factors provide the psyche with a continued interest in the perception; “attention consists in establishing the psychical state of expectation even for those perceptions which do not coincide in part with wishful cathexes. For it has become important for a cathexis to be sent to meet all perceptions, since those that are wished-for might be among them” (1895, 360). This searching among the cathexes in a bid to discover the wished-for cathexis is the act of looking which Thomas has adopted as a result of both his “psychical attention” and of his subsequent “withdrawal of cathexis of attention.” These apparently opposing psychical activities, for the photographer and artist, are harmonious and mutually dependent elements of their endeavours toward “finding something to hang onto, sorting the images out, and adding them up.”

A third psychical activity in this artist’s process, and in Thomas’, is the retrieval of hostile mnemic images; those feeling-pictures which have arisen as a result of a painful sensory experience. “Pain no doubt leaves permanent facilitations behind in the permeable neurones,” or sensory receptors responsible for perception from the outside world. This stimulus gives rise to a mnemonic image of the object which has excited the pain (1895, 307-320).

Looking and pleasure (3)

Freud describes the mechanism by which a memory of pain is stored, but his discussion applies equally to the affects of pleasure and satisfaction. For Thomas to recognise the significance of his magnified picture as a representation of the hostile object, he had first needed to call up and revive the painful experience of it. To do this he needed to bring about the “withdrawal of cathexis of attention,” or a state in which he would not avoid upleasure. From this state he then needed to access the “repressed” image because as Freud writes: “a hostile mnemonic image
is abandoned by its cathexis as soon as possible, and is inclined towards repression” (1895, 322). Thomas’ retrieval of the repressed image therefore relies upon a further psychical activity in which the “intrusions into consciousness” are made possible (1895, 373). Freud supposed that in permitting these “automatic” or uninhibited intrusions into consciousness the ego acted purposively, or wishfully, as opposed to randomly. But he also noted in the activity of thought called “observing” that “a passage of association” occurs between “two neurones linked and simultaneously cathected” such that “conduction between them is favoured” (1895, 374). Thus, Thomas had permitted the intrusion of representations of painful stimuli through the activity of thought which had initially been directed toward satisfying curiosity. In other words, Thomas’ looking act triggered the intrusion into consciousness of the objects which would otherwise have remained repressed.

Thomas’ action of enlarging the park pictures mimics the activity of thought required to bring about the awareness in consciousness of the mnemonic images abandoned under the influence of painful stimuli. This action is important to the discussion of looking in literary representations because it shows the way in which looking and its attendant neurological processes provide for the return of images which are otherwise unavailable to consciousness. In the neurological schema of voyeurism, by contrast, these thought processes are absent, as was shown in Chapter One, in the discussion on perverse forms of looking.20

Freud’s theory, at a much earlier stage, had signalled the idea that psychical objects transmit between particular cortical areas. While the object-relation dynamics of voyeurism precludes the transmission of impulses from one cortical area to another, other kinds of looking actually facilitate this. Freud showed that speech centres which were functionally dissociated from other areas of the brain could however, regenerate nerve tracts so that new pathways could communicate from one area to another. This is important for this discussion because the looking character in literature, particularly those involved in artistic creation, rely upon the re-establishment of pathways and the making of new pathways in order to access repressed and forgotten psychical material. Though the looking character, such as Thomas, has not suffered a functional disorder of speech, he has, it could be argued, experienced dissociation from his old-established (repressed) psychical objects.

As discussed in Chapter Two, Freud postulated that not only did sensory impressions, visual perceptions for example, and their attendant emotional

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20 As a reminder, Tomas Geyskens in his Our Original Scenes: Freud’s Theory of Sexuality (2005) explains that: “Looking... is not autoerotic but reflexive. Voyeurism anticipates an object [but] this object remains just another me” (43). In the voyeuristic object-relation the looking character is unable to access psychical objects other than those already established. By contrast, other looking characters embrace looking as a means by which they can access and abstract psychical objects not otherwise known to them, such as those which are repressed.
content, reside in one brain location, but that the brain functions as “a continuous cortical area” capable of transferring “impressions and images” to regions “not covered by localisation” (Freud, 1891, 102). Freud believed aphasic patients, and those for whom the pathways from one cortical area to another have become dissociated, do however, maintain a capacity for retrieving psychical data, and for accessing previously applied data from consciousness. In a letter written in 1896 to Wilhelm Fliess, five years after On Aphasia, Freud reiterated this point:

> Our psychical mechanism has come into being by a process of stratification: the material present in the form of memory-traces being subjected from time to time to a re-arrangement in accordance with fresh circumstances to a re-transcription. Memory is present not once but several times over, laid down in various species of indications taking the paths leading from the periphery of the body to the cortex. How many of these registrations there are; at least three, probably more. The different registrations are also separated (not necessarily topographically) according to the neurones which are their vehicles (1896, 233).21

The “speech” of the photograph and the written word

Antonioni’s film BlowUp (1966) presents a photograph consisting of a series of black and grey squares as a representation of Thomas’ psychical dynamics. The stepped appearance and pixelations exhibit the staccato quality of his psychical life. Mr Pincer’s Tenant exhibits this same staccato quality. In Freud’s neurophysiological terms, the “speech” of Thomas’ picture and Mr Pincer’s Tenant reveal aphasic disfluency in their frequent interruptions and repetitions and general lack of smooth flow. Freud described in On Aphasia (1891), as discussed above, that the temporary loss of association between one cortical area and another is expressed in stuttered speech. Thomas’ photograph and Mr Pincer’s Tenant represent this stuttered speech in visual and written form and, as with Freud’s aphasic patients, therefore offer important qualitative information.22


22 This important qualitative information exists in Mr Pincer’s Tenant in the form of fragmented sentences and paragraphs. As has been shown in Thomas’ photograph, the first reification of these abstractions appears fragmented, but then as his artist friend confirms, “afterwards I find something to hang onto. Then it sorts itself out, and adds up.” This “adding up” is what reviewers and publishers are looking for when they review fully-realised aesthetic objects. “Publishers prefer fewer fragments and more paragraphs” [than Mr Pincer’s Tenant contains]. C. Atherton (personal communication, April 27, 2013).
Daniel Paul Schreber’s *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* (1903) offers qualitative knowledge about the way in which psychical objects, dissociated from each other, find representation in written form. Schreber embraces nerves as both elements of his artefact and as qualities which are constitutive of it.

*The human soul is contained in the nerves of the body; about their nature I, as layman, cannot say more than that they are extraordinarily delicate structures – comparable to the finest filaments – and that the total mental life of a human being rests on their excitability by external impressions.* Daniel Paul Schreber, 1903, “Memoirs of My Nervous Illness”

Louis A. Sass in his *Madness and Modernism* (1995) uses Schreber’s narrative to exemplify his theories about the way the psychical dynamics of schizophrenia are expressed in writing. Schreber’s “delusional world” is characterised by “grammatically incomplete expressions” involving the “leaving out of a few words, later leaving out most of a sentence” and therefore “must be read as a symbolic representation of aspects of Schreber’s own consciousness” (253-255). This thesis proposes that written forms of aphasic disfluency – written artefacts – offer researchers specific insights into the way psychical dynamics are expressed on the page. Rosemary Dinnage in her “Introduction” to Schreber’s *Memoirs* points out that such written artefacts provide researchers with the patient’s subjective experience as an important form of qualitative knowledge. “Successive generations of psychiatric writers have used the book [Memoirs] as the nub of successive theories,” she writes (2000, xi). Indeed, *Memoirs* offered Freud the opportunity to postulate about Schreber’s subjective experience, published as “Psychoanalytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia” (1910). For this thesis, *Mr Pincer’s Tenant* offers insight into the way the creative writer’s consciousness finds symbolic representation on the page. In this frame, *Mr Pincer’s Tenant* can be understood as “Letter from a Madman” (1885) has been for Guy de Maupassant. He wrote his story in three versions, each time from a different perspective, before finally offering it in first-person format as “The Horla” in 1886. Its 2005 publishers, Melville House Publishing, celebrated the preceding two versions as written artefacts, publishing them in one small volume, and in doing so demonstrated the way the author had developed his work from its early versions to its final form as a fully-realised aesthetic object.23

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23 This progression has been noted in the case of other writers in which their written artefacts become aesthetic objects through successive re-writings. More importantly, however, is that these written artefacts are recognised for their symbolisation of psychical dynamics. See for example, SBS’s *William S. Burroughs: A Man Within* (2010). “William S. Burroughs moved to Tangiers, Morocco, where he struggled with his heroin addiction; there in the form of notes, journal entries and letters to Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, he excavated the literature that would become the novel “Naked Lunch” (1959). Critics responded that it was “obscene”. What is
The eye transmits dimensions, shapes and colours to us. It deceives us on these three points. Guy de Maupassant, 1885 “Letter from a Madman”

In terms of its representational knowledge, Mr Pincer’s Tenant offers the theme of looking as Maupassant’s artefact does; a character behaviour which has been the subject of scholarly discourses in the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries from social, political, psychological, juridical and medical perspectives. But importantly, the “speech” of the texts offer qualitative insight into the way in which psychical objects are represented in written form. From this perspective, Mr Pincer’s Tenant, as with the other texts mentioned, act as the impetus for a discussion on the way in which written artefacts come into existence, and how they function within their own context, as symbolic artefacts. This discussion is furthered later in this Chapter.

Looking and Ernst Cassirer’s Symbolic Forms

Freud’s On Aphasia provides clues to the way in which he had envisaged the nature of neural processes. His discussion here is impressionistic rather than purely scientific; he identifies the impressions of neural activity rather than the pathways of singular transmissions. “The cerebral cortex receives at least as many fibres from the periphery, though by devious routes, as were required for projection in the spinal cord” (1891, 52). Grey matter, Freud explains, is made up of afferent and efferent fibres, whose “functional significance has changed each time it emerges from a nucleus” (52). Freud gives the example of the eye, which is apt because, as visual sensory organ, its functions align with those of the looking character. “A fibre of the optic nerve conveys a retinal impression and in its place another fibre goes” (53). During this passage the fibres become associated with kinaesthetic oculomotor impressions and are thus no longer simply visual pictures but impressions of the muscles; bodily position, weight, muscle tension and movement. Freud remarked therefore that neural activity is not characterised by one direct pathway but by the association with which it becomes linked. This led him to liken nerve fibre activity with the activity of language as it functions in a poem. This was described in Chapter Two of this exegesis.

The work of Ernst Cassirer provides a useful framework in which to situate this neural activity philosophically. His Philosophy of Symbolic Forms (1923-1929) discusses the forms which the various reifications of sensuous apprehensions take. His Essay on Man (1940) is particularly focussed on art as a medium which both engenders and contains neural impressions in symbolic form. Since Cassirer’s Philosophy of Symbolic Forms is essentially about the ways in which sensuous

missing from that reading of Burroughs is the raw image of the unconscious [that is evident on the page]. sbs.com.au/william.s.burroughs:a man within (2010).
impressions find form, his work supports Freud’s Project in terms of its underpinning of the neurological basis of artistic creation. In Essay on Man Cassirer writes: “A philosophy of culture begins with the assumption that the world of human culture is not a mere aggregate of loose and detached facts. It seeks to understand these facts as a system, as an organic whole. ...The various forms of human culture; myth, language, art, religion, history, science, are not held together by an identity in their nature but by a conformity in their fundamental task” (1944/1976, 222-223). This chapter will discuss Cassirer’s philosophy of symbolic forms in relation to the actions of the looking character.

Reality and non-reality represented in literary characters

Freud’s On Aphasia makes plain that: “Fibre tracts... no longer reflect a topographically exact image” of the periphery of the body “after their passage through other grey masses” (1891, 53). This central passage in Freud’s work points to the difference between his approach to the neural activities of the looking character, or patient, and those of Cassirer’s. While Freud saw “grey masses” as the associative areas in which nerve fibres could differentiate from their place of origin, say the eyes, for example, Cassirer subscribed to the view that neuronal activity remains of one origin and aim.

Cassirer, through a study of Kurt Goldstein’s Human Nature in the Light of Psychopathology (1940) asserts that the “inability to adhere to a definite mode of vision, and on the other hand, to make a free choice between different modes of vision, seems to be the fundamental deficiency underlying the pathological deviations of the aphasic’s intuition of space, time and number” (1985, vol.3. 252). Cassirer’s philosophy of symbolic forms demands of its cultural products that they represent the “idea” inherent in them as opposed to the “realities, ... statements which correspond exactly to his own concrete sensuous experience,” as he describes the cognitive limitations of one of Goldstein’s “cases” (1985, vol.3. 254). The “idea” or symbolic consciousness of an abstract thought,” Cassirer argues, “is not a “photographic plate, on which in the course of time various images are produced which overlap and mix with one another, until they finally become a single unclear image” because “the plate will never be able to know it as such, to refer it back to the particular elements from which it grew” (1985, vol.3. 313). Cassirer’s doctrine remains distinctly within the “sphere of meaning” as drawn from the sensuous experience, yet he maintains that because the aphasic patient cannot derive a “spiritual view” and thus a symbolic meaning representative of his feeling, his consciousness exists outside of the scope of the philosophy of symbolic forms.

Thus, there is a clear difference between Freud’s observation that aphasic patients can re-establish “facilitations” and create new ones as a result of re-establishing a bodily pathway, and Cassirer’s conclusion that aphasic patients are permanently excluded from “what is not before his eyes” (Cassirer, 1985, vol. 3. 277). Freud
saw somnambulism as a manifestation of returned psychical objects which he hypothesised had been repressed in situations of distress, as was discussed in Chapter Two in relation to hysterical patients. Freud was not concerned with whether these psychical objects arose as a result of altered perceptual states, or from dreams, but rather whether they were amenable to revision.

Cassirer’s view is that meaning is dependent on reality whereas for Freud, any perception is capable of transformation into a psychical object. Cassirer said of a patient’s aphasic signs that these test the “interdependence of reality and the possibility of things” (1944/1976, 57-58). He drew from his own and psychiatrist Kurt Goldstein’s observations of the limits that speech disorders place on patients; he proposed that perceptions of reality become separated from perceptions of abstractions in aphasic patients. This is pertinent to this discussion about the way in which sensuous impressions are apprehended and applied to consciousness, and in particular, the way in which these find expression in the actions of literary characters. But as Freud argued some fifty years earlier in On Aphasia: “for one afferent fibre tract three or more efferent fibre tracts emerge from one single nucleus” (1891, 52).

Freud demonstrates this process at the neuronal level in his discussion on the associative capacity of neurones which sit alongside already-established facilitations. He attributes the role of speech in its linking of both motor and cognitive neurones to the reestablishment and creation of associations between thoughts. He described the sense of reality as consisting in indications of discharge (feeling), motor discharge (speech) and indications of quality (the image) and the way in which these three aspects of thought constitute attention (Freud, 1895, 373). Freud regards all perceptions as indicative of reality irrespective of whether these are recognisable as concretions or abstractions derived from the world, so that even aphasic patients retain vestiges of the cognitive processes of thought insofar as perceptual cathexes allow. This process of thought, Freud found, is initiated and perpetuated under the influence of affect. Thus, his “mechanism of attention” holds that the indications of reality, as derived from all sources of perception, external or from a wishful cathexis, constitute a form of reality by virtue of their capacity for the cognition of both a feeling and an image as a product of the activity of thought (Freud, 1895, 370-373).

By contrast, Cassirer examined psychiatrist Kurt Goldstein’s clinical data and his book Human Nature in the Light of Psychopathology (1940) and determined that aphasic patients in whom functional links to speech areas of the brain had been lost had therefore lost all neurological links to these areas. But Freud had suggested in 1891 that damage to one cortical area does not prevent the patient conceiving of visual perceptions in abstract terms. He indicates this in his statement that “the fibre tracts which reach the cerebral cortex... contain the body periphery in the same way as a poem” (1891, 53). Freud’s statement conflates devices of literature with those of physiology, and in doing so, presents the
argument that the looking character has a capacity to not only supply consciousness with content derived from reality but also from content associated with abstract sources. Indeed, Freud prefaces his claim by saying that poetry “is a subject with which we are concerned here” as though neural pathways and the process of creating poetry are intrinsically interlinked. Poetry, as Freud recognised is, by its nature, concerned with abstractions, as are the looking character’s psychical objects to the page, screen or canvas (1891, 53).

Physiological responses are thus the natural pathway along which the actions of the creative process travel: apprehension of sensuous impressions, applied to consciousness, remixed with endogenous content, returned to consciousness through the activity of thought, are abstracted in a symbolic projection. All of this work can be summed up as the symbolic transformation of the lived experience; in the first instance it results in the making of a symbolic artefact, and in the second, after transformation, results in the making of art.24

*Symbolic consciousness and reality*

Cassirer, in his examination of aphasic patients, was concerned with the pathology of symbolic consciousness insofar as it “compel(s) us to take a broader view of the problem, for it is manifested in disturbances of action no less than in disorders of speech and perceptual knowledge” (Cassirer, 1985, Vol. 3, 261). Cassirer points to the signs associated with the particular aphasia, such as cognitive impairment, but also examines motor function in relation to speech; “mistakes in action” and “faulty planning” (1985, Vol. 3, 262). He wanted to demonstrate, using the signs these patients exhibit, that reality and abstract thought have disconnected from each other and that in this situation the patient is unable to think in terms of symbols. “Even though he [aphasic or apractic] can still apprehend and in general correctly handle what is “real,” concretely present, and momentarily necessary, he lacks the spiritual view into the distance, the vision of what is not before his eyes, of the merely possible” (Cassirer, 1985, vol. 3. 277).

Cassirer’s work involved contextualising this “lack” within his doctrine, as described in *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1923-1929) in which he subsumes all products of culture into a philosophical theory of the “idea”; the aim and product of the symbolic forms is the result of language, myth, religion, art, and theoretical knowledge. But as he writes, “when consciousness lacks the secure guidance of language, or no longer obtains it with the same definiteness as before, perceptual knowledge and action also take on a different character” (Cassirer, 1985, 276).

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Thus, while Freud’s work in *On Aphasia* and *Project* was concerned with the pathology of speech in terms of its capacity to reveal the way in which neurones operate by “association” rather than “localisation”, his work only touched on the notion of symbolic consciousness insofar as the problem of aphasia could reveal it. As set out above, his passages about memory in *On Aphasia* provide an introduction to the way in which he was approaching neural impulses as both transmitters of sensuous information and storers of associations. In making these hypotheses, however, Freud did touch on the way in which symbolic consciousness was possible and achievable despite apparent dissociations with neural pathways to speech centres. Freud writes: “the subject with which we are concerned here [is a] a poem” and the psyche’s existence as a form of symbolic consciousness which correlates to its existence as a physiological apparatus capable of such consciousness (1891, 53). Cassirer, in his much later work (Volume Three, 1929), takes the selective view that “mistakes in action” and “faulty planning” preclude the patient or, for this thesis, the looking character, from summoning his symbolic consciousness as and when necessary.

This is the central difference between Freud’s rejection of the theory of localisation in relation to speech disorders and Cassirer’s, which has the widest implications for the looking character and his capacities as artist to apprehend intuitions for later abstraction. The artist depends on his symbolic consciousness, as does the central character in Tom Ford’s *A Single Man* (2010), discussed below, who for different reasons, but with the same effect, finds himself unable, temporarily, to make “associations” as Freud calls the neural connections which do not involve direct transmission (1891, 52-53). The film version of *A Single Man* (2010) is based on, though not slavishly faithful to, Christopher Isherwood’s novel of the same name (1964). Indeed, some of Ford’s most prophetic dialogue is not taken from the book, yet has the effect of expressing, even more succinctly, protagonist George Falconer’s “predicament”. Falconer (Colin Firth) looks in the mirror of his bathroom and describes what he sees: “Looking in the mirror staring back at me isn’t so much a face as the expression of a predicament. My heart has been broken. I feel as if I’m sinking, drowning, can’t breathe” (2010). He is, at this point, like the aphasic patient for whom facilitations seem locked-off from abstract thought, or what Cassirer terms, from “symbolic consciousness”.

**Filmic representations of symbolic consciousness**

The film version of a *A Single Man* (2010) brings into heightened awareness using perfect photography the distinction between George Falconer’s reality and the “possibility of things” as Cassirer refers to the capacities of symbolic consciousness (Cassirer, 1944/1976, 57-58). As mentioned above, Cassirer proposed that perceptions of reality become separated from perceptions of abstractions in aphasic patients and, as can be seen in Ford’s film, with individuals who are experiencing deep grief. Falconer looks at butterflies, hears hammering, watches his neighbour kiss her husband. A ticking clock counts the
minutes of his concrete and fragmented existence, and he is thus held at a
distance, suspended from his symbolic perception of the world. He looks at the
secretary’s hair, lips, and narrows in on her lined-eye. In the same way, Mr
Pincer, in *Mr Pincer’s Tenant*, zeros in on the detail of his existence; his
binoculars act to magnify the objects of his life and thus prevent a more global
view of things. His looking, as with Falconer’s, becomes a method of delimiting
his perceptual abilities in the face of the overwhelming mass of perceptions that
the wider world presents.

Cassirer describes this fragmented looking as “more than a mere inhibition of
association” because in this state “objects serve as signals but not symbols”
(Cassirer, 1985, 239-240). A signal, Cassirer points out, is a name for an object,
but it does not confer meaning beyond the name. But as was pointed out above,
while Cassirer delimits the patient’s capacities for symbolic consciousness from
his, the patient’s, plain vision, Freud sees the patient’s dreams, screams and whole
symptomatological picture as part and parcel of his capacity for consciousness
which he says is inherently symbolic. Cassirer is stricter about the distinction
between a symbol and symbolic consciousness; the linguistic symbol acts to
signify whereas symbolic consciousness, as he writes, provides the “spiritual view
into the distance, the vision” to imagine “what is not before his eyes, of the
merely possible” (1985, vol. 3. 277). Freud saw his patient’s symptoms as
emblematic of “the vision of what is not before his eyes” and with that in mind
did not distinguish between the symbol as linguistic signifier and symbol as
representative of psychical content. Indeed, Freud’s neurological schema provides
the neurophysiological framework for the activity of thought involved in artistic
creation while Cassirer’s philosophy of symbolic forms provides the conceptual
schema for the way in which symbolic transformation occurs as a crucial part of
this process.

For Cassirer, the aphasic patient is unable to make art because his vision is limited
to the absolutely real. The perception of non-aphasic patients, by contrast, “stand
in ideal unity of meaning,” writes Cassirer, so that “in symbolic perception we
have a unity of view” (1985, 238-240). Falconer, for Cassirer, would be a patient
or looking character, for whom this unity of view is absent, even if in his case,
this is temporary. Falconer stares at bodies playing tennis, not the tennis player,
stares at the blue shoes and the dress of a child and smells the smooth body of a
fox terrier. “Smells like buttered toast,” he tells its owner, but fails to integrate
the sensuous impressions of the dog with the whole picture of the woman and her car.
In his job as university professor he is unable to illustrate his point about minority
groups in literature by drawing analogous examples in real life. His student,
Kenny, asks if he has ever tried a mind-altering drug called mescaline. He replies
that he does not want to bring about a change in perception using a drug. Kenny
nonetheless, recognises his teacher’s need to reconnect with the sensorial
memories of his body and sets out to trigger, through a purposeful invitation to the beach, a “tracing back to information from his own body” (Freud, 1895, 330).

Falconer goes to the beach with Kenny and plunges into the sensory experience of the water, in both its actuality and its possibility, so that his earlier “aphasic” statement that “I feel as if I’m sinking, drowning, can’t breathe” becomes, at the end of the movie, “I can feel” (Ford, 2010). This experience embodies what Freud schematised in his statement that “activity of thought” involves a constant process of reconciliation of perceptions, “for instance, in the visual sphere with quite similar visual impressions of his own body” (1895, 331). Falconer reconciles his psychical objects with those of his bodily sensations.

The end of the movie sees Falconer look up into the sky and see the full moon and the clear sky, and an owl flying away. He now recognises that objects in his visual world “stand in ideal unity of meaning,” as Cassirer describes the non-aphasic’s perception (1985, 239). Falconer’s visual perceptions reflect Freud’s “activity of thought” in which the looking character relies upon the cognising of perceptions from “one’s own body” anew and upon the reconciliation of those perceptions with the memories of previous activities of thought.

Falconer illustrates the recognition of his now reunified bodily perceptions with those of his psyche in his final summing up of his subjective experience. “A few times in my life I’ve had moments of absolute clarity, when for a few brief seconds the silence drowns out the noise; I can feel, rather than think. Things seem so sharp and the world seems so fresh. It’s as though it had all just come into existence. I can never make these moments last, I cling to them but like everything, they fade. I’ve lived my life on these moments. They pull me back to the present. And I realise that everything is exactly the way it’s meant to be” (Ford, 2010). Falconer’s observation that he can “feel, rather than think” speaks of his restored capacity, though intermittent and momentary, of his bodily and psychical images communing under the influence of affect. It also speaks of his restored capacity for seeing things sharply and freshly, as if a new image had been made from his former memory.

In this process, George Falconer’s “aphasic” state, in which his visual perceptions delivered only signs, has given way to a restored capacity for symbolic transformation in the way Cassirer had envisaged in his Philosophy of Symbolic Forms: Language (1923). He sums this process up in the following quotation:

...the chaos of impressions begins to clear and take on fixed form. The fluid impression assumes form and duration when we mould it by symbolic action... [But] the product of their activity in no way resembles the mere material with which they began. ...our independent imprint which articulates it into diverse spheres and forms of reality are not simple copies of an existing
reality but represent the main directions of the spiritual movement, of the ideal process by which reality is constituted – a diversity of forms which are ultimately held together by a unity of meaning (1923/1955, 107).

Falconer’s fragmented view of his world; the school student’s tennis rackets, the shoes, pathways and doors, become a “unity of meaning” in the way Cassirer describes. And importantly, for this thesis, his new vision is not a replica of his psychical objects; his particular “symbolic action” ensures his “unity of meaning” operates as an abstraction of his psychical objects. This aspect of the creative process will be discussed below in more detail, but for now another example of the “aphasic” mind is discussed, as presented in psychiatrist Louis A. Sass’s study of schizophrenia and art entitled Madness and Modernism (1992).

A woman with schizophrenia draws a picture of a fruit bowl in which the pieces of fruit appear to be lifting out of the bowl and separating from each other. The watermelon sits at an oblique angle from the bowl, in an upward flight, and the pears and leaves also take flight in a constant state of separateness. Sass refers to this patient’s symbolic artefact as the embodiment of her psychical “fragmentation, where details or parts overwhelm the synthetic whole” so that “the perceptual world has a quality of fragmentation. Objects normally perceived as parts of larger complexes may seem strangely isolated, disconnected from each other and devoid of encompassing context; or a single object may lose its perceptual integrity and disintegrate into a disunity of parts” (Sass, 1992, 49-50). Mr Pincer’s Tenant also exhibits this quality, though in written form; pronouns overwhelm the synthetic whole, stilted grammar reflects the fragmentation of the perceptual world in a disunity of parts.25

But the fact that the patient has painted the fruit-bowl picture at all, this thesis contends, demonstrates her capacity to create, in symbolic form, an object expressive of this feeling of fragmentation. Moreover, the existence of her painting confirms Freud’s findings of aphasic patients that the theory of localisation of the activities of thought can be dispelled, as can Cassirer’s conclusion that “pathology of symbolic consciousness” precludes the patient from access to neural pathways which permit of the psychical cathexes necessary for the expression of affect in symbolic form. The patient’s painting of the fruit, even though it depicts the separation of objects, the sensation of living with a schizophrenic mind is, nevertheless, an example of a symbolic artefact. As such,

25 One of its reviewers observed that: “The structure of the piece sometimes seems to be written in fragments rather than paragraphs” and “much of the pace is the same and quite quick with short sentences”. C. Atherton (personal communication, April 25, 2013). “Overuse of ‘He’ or ‘Mr Pincer’, too many pronouns.” C. Atherton (personal communication, April 25, 2013). Thus, in terms of its existence as a symbolic artefact, Mr Pincer’s Tenant offers, as Sass’s patient’s picture does, a symbol of psychical disunity in written form.
it materially supports Freud’s rejection of the localisation theory of cortical cells, and confirms his view that “the functional significance of a [nerve] fibre on its way to the cerebral cortex has changed each time it has emerged from a nucleus” in constitution of the “body periphery” as an image of it. Though this is not a “topographically exact image of it,” Freud stresses, it is nonetheless an abstraction of that image.

This is important for the present discussion because Freud’s hypothesis supports the argument that psychical objects represent a collection of sensory stimuli which has undergone qualitative changes as a result of its passage along the nerve fibres. These can then be abstracted to the canvas, as in the case of the patient with schizophrenia, even though mid-twentieth century neurologists argue that for such patients the transmission of images across the different cortical areas is not possible. The existence of her painting shows that despite her partial or total loss of the ability to articulate ideas due to the schizophrenia, she has nonetheless demonstrated that she conceives of a “unity of view” because of what she has produced; the reification of her psychical objects presents this “ideal unity of meaning,” of which Cassirer writes (1985, 238-240). Thus, the patient with schizophrenia, as with the looking character, as Freud has demonstrated in *On Aphasia*, is capable of drawing upon hitherto forgotten parts of memory and is capable of reifying those forgotten parts as a symbolic artefact.

However, even though he recognised that a unity of view is expressible for such patients, Freud stopped short of offering a fully-realised philosophical discourse about the way in which cultural products derive from psychical objects. Despite making the statement that “fibre tracts contain the body periphery in the same way as a poem” he did not conceive of a method for facilitating this process – of a practical modality of delivering sensations from their existence as mere symptoms to their concretisation as objects which are symbolic of them (1891, 52). Freud approached the patient’s symptoms from the point of view of the subjective experience and split the psychical constituents of that experience into conscious and unconscious representations. His patients produced tangible evidence of their sensate world in behaviours which collectively formed patterns expressive of the dynamics of their psychical life. Some of these constituents, he found, were readily accessible while others only revealed themselves during altered states of consciousness or at times of reduced inhibition. However, in spite of Freud’s interventions along psychoanalytic lines, in particular, using the talking cure, it was the patients themselves who found expression for their subjective experiences as objects of culture.26

26 A very good example of this is Marie Cardinal’s novel entitled *The Words to Say It* (1975) in which she not only provides a day-by-day account of the experience of undergoing psychoanalysis, but transforms that experience into an object symbolic of her feeling. But even more pertinent for this thesis is that she reifies her illness, her psychical objects, in a way Freud was unable to either describe or facilitate.
Symbolic function of psychical objects

Freud recognised the symbolic formation of the collected constituents of the patients’ psychical contents (symptoms), and drew inferences in two ways; he recognised the perceptions apprehended from the external world in the stories of their dreams, but also identified the return of the representations of endogenous processes in the behaviours they exhibited in their day-to-day lives. In this way, Freud did understand the symbolic function of these objects but did not confer upon them significance in the ideal world, and therefore, within the world of his psychoanalysis, the patients’ psychical objects remain mere behavioural manifestations. Thus, the symptom, for Freud, while not conceived of as “an intuition of the whole,” as Cassirer conceived of them, was nonetheless understood as symbolically meaningful (Cassirer, 1985, vol.3. 240).

Freud edged toward a symbolic perception of his patients’ diverse range of symptoms, but instead of drawing from those symptoms an object which “builds up its own intelligible realm of intrinsic meaning which stands out sharply and clearly from any merely purposive behaviour within the biological sphere” (Cassirer, 1985, vol.3. 240, 276) he remained, largely, within the epistemological frame of “discursive perception” in which, as Cassirer describes, a “problematic statement” is derived from “a correct combination of distinguishing features” (1985, vol.3. 240).

Cassirer is describing both the general approach that his philosophy of symbolic forms takes and the scope of the aphasic’s mental perceptive capabilities against his, the patient’s, psychically “unified” counterparts; that is, those patients for whom the visual world “stands in ideal unity of meaning” as opposed to those for whom the world is fragmented (1985, 239). In Cassirer’s scheme, Freud’s modality of discursive perception finds the patients’ behaviours “symptomatically indicative” of a pathology but not necessarily symbolically meaningful (1985, vol.3. 240).

Freud’s “what we are aware of” and Cassirer’s “Philosophy of Symbolic Forms”

While Cassirer plainly distinguished between a discursive perception and a symbolic perception, his doctrine of symbolic forms, as a philosophy which encapsulates the way in which human intuitions culminate into products of culture, drew on historical events as sources of the manifestations of those products, and elicited conclusions about the intuitions which had gone to make up those products. By contrast, Freud imbued himself in the subjective experience, in the present, of the patient’s symptomatological picture and though the result of this incursion fell short of evolving a doctrine in which the expression of symptoms is conceived of as a product of culture, of the world as idea, he nevertheless brought the symptom to within range of the world of immanence.
However, his transitions between “ordinary mental life” and that of the symptomatic world of the patient is, in one way, drawn together and recognised as constitutive of an overall symbolic world in which psychical processes provide the source material for cultural products beyond mere symptomatological pictures. He does this every time he writes of “a lively and gifted girl, who had suffered eighteen months without my being able to help her” in a literary style that lifts that experience between the observant neurologist and the despairing patient beyond mere consultation. His passages confer a poetic quality; “She walked bent forward, dragging her legs and with short steps; she staggered as though she was a cerebellar case and, indeed, often fell down” (1893, 100). He continues in this vein for many pages in his “Studies on Hysteria” in a reification of the physical and psychical pictures to which he was presented. His writing itself becomes the symbolic artefact of the patients’ traumas.

However, despite this poetic sensibility Freud approached works of art and literature using scientific discourse and thus produced discursive results; his intention to respond sensorially to the paintings of Leonardo Da Vinci ended up as a clinical study of a patient he had never encountered in real life. His paper “Leonardo Da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood” (1910) concludes that Da Vinci’s works reveal that “there was a sexual repression of quite special strength” and continues along those psychoanalytic lines, despite earlier in the paper, pledging a great fervour for the symbolic representations of the artist’s work (Freud, 1910, 70).

However, Freud’s steadfast dedication to the patient’s subjective experience ensured that, within the frame of his pre-psychoanalytic theory, the patient’s symptoms could be conceived of within the realm of symbolic meaning. This applies to the contents of dreams as it does to the behaviours exhibited as manifestations of the dynamics of unconscious psychical events. The patients’ “pathological processes involve displacement, such as we have come to know in dreams” so that for the looking character, such actions as looking through binoculars or into keyholes, act as precursors to this “displacement” of his psychical material (Freud, 1895, 340-350).

Freud understood this interplay of psychical objects and sought to explain its impact on the life of the individual, and in that pursuit, left aside a comprehensive extrapolation of these movements in a form reflective of the meaning of psychical life. What Freud did achieve, however, was to elaborate the characteristics of the patient’s conscious and unconscious contents and to validate them as symbolic entities which contribute to the making of the products of culture. Freud’s symbolic perception of the patient’s symptoms and dream stories went as far as to recognise that “for every compulsion there is a corresponding repression and for

27 See Susan Sugarman’s text *Freud on the Psychology of Ordinary Mental Life* (2010) which re-envisions Freud’s foray into the psyche as an expression of the subjective experience.
every excessive intrusion into consciousness there is a corresponding amnesia” (Freud, 1895, 349). On the face of it, this observation would seem to be a discursive perception, but Freud’s elaborations on his initial and later work on symbol formation and the meta-psychologies that have evolved from that work, are suggestive of his recognition that a patient’s psychical events provide the substance from which all products of culture derive. “I wanted to do no more than explain defence,” he said, “but I was led from that into explaining something from the centre of nature... the problem of quality.” Yet his patients, as with looking characters, explain it – the problem of quality – every day in their work by way of their symbolic artefacts and their aesthetic objects (1895, 283). Explaining the problem of quality remained Freud’s elusive task for the remainder of his working life.

However, Freud’s own act of looking, his curious observation, did achieve both its biological and qualitative aim in that it explained defence, but more than that, as with the looking character, it arrived at a view about quality in the context of the “determinants of consciousness” (Freud, 1895, 284). From this perspective, Freud, unlike those who do not submit to looking as an act with instinctual and qualitative aims, achieved his goal of explaining “what we are aware of” (Freud, 1895, 306). From this understanding, this thesis has sought to identify and contribute to an expansion of the act of looking in literary representation beyond the discourse of it as voyeurism, and in doing so has found that Freud’s work presents the act as a perceptive activity which precedes a psychical reshuffling of objects in a neurophysiological process which works towards their culmination as symbols of meaning. For this thesis then, such a discovery acts to dispel the arguments of literary and cultural critics whose work submits that the looking characters’ actions are nothing other than voyeuristic. Such works include Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” as discussed in Chapter One, but also include psychoanalytic interpretations of the film Blow Up in a similar representational use of Freud’s Three Essays (1905).28

This chapter has identified the way in which Freud’s use of the representational approach to patients’ symptoms contrasts with Langer’s presentational approach to literary and filmic portrayals of looking. It found, however, that even though Freud shifts back and forth from the representational to the presentational approach in his discussion of patients, he nonetheless sustains an argument that the theory of localisation of cortical cells is not demonstrable in practice and that

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28 See for example, “Antonioni’s Blow-Up: From crib to camera”. Goldstein, Melvin. American Imago, Vol 32(3), 1975, 240-263 in which the author writes: “Antonioni, a director very much attuned to the unconscious, offers in this film an incisive psychological study of the voyeur and his solitude”. This type of discourse in which the underlying assumption is that all looking behaviour is voyeuristic remains representative of the critical responses to the literary characterisations of looking.
transmission of data between brain areas is achievable even in cases of aphasia. The chapter extrapolated from Freud’s finding that the looking character, aphasic at the beginning of the literary representation is, by the end, capable of achieving a unity of meaning in the form of a symbol. It discovered that the looking character, as perceiver of sensuous impressions and creator of symbolic forms constitutive of his feelings, embodies the statement that the practice of looking in literary representations is broader than the discourse of voyeurism suggests.

The chapter functioned as discursive narrative reflective of the presentational symbol of Mr Pincer’s Tenant. Mr Pincer, as looking character, looks to conceive of his world; this takes the form of an objective assessment of the small objects and individual still-shots that come into view. But as the story progresses, his subjective experience, his qualitative mental experience, becomes the central modality of his looking. This conforms to the processes of the characters exemplified in this chapter; to Thomas in Blow Up who snaps pictures of the fashion models’ legs, hair, external visage, and to his later incarnation as the perceptive artist, invested in the abstract content of a photograph taken in a moment of heightened sensory awareness. Throughout the story, Mr Pincer engages his sensory organs in the process of looking, including seeing, touching, smelling, tasting and hearing, but for first part of the story he fails to integrate those sensations with his existing psychical content. George Falconer functions in the same fragmented way, as is captured in Ford’s hyper-real cinematography. As these two stories progress, however, the characters become sensorially aware, and are thus able to reify their qualitative mental experience. Mr Pincer abstracts the picture of his tenant, in its most unadorned form, while George Falconer declares at the end of the film that “everything is just as it should be”.

Conclusion

This thesis examined looking in literary and filmic representations to discover its aims and capacities beyond conventional interpretations of the act as voyeurism. Two modes of research were used to achieve this: the development of a symbolic artefact in which a looking character is portrayed and an exegesis on the underlying neurophysiological mechanisms of the act. The artefact presented a symbolic envisagement of the sensory intuitions arising as a result of looking, while the exegesis examined influential scholarship on the acts in literary and filmic portrayals. Within the these two modes of research, the process of writing the thesis revealed that the artefact consisted of abstractions of the sensations derived from the act of looking, while the exegesis consisted of observations about the ways in which those abstractions find form in the external world. Thus, the thesis, in using these two modes of research, discovered that the presentational approach offered insights into the subjective experience as culminated in the symbolic artefact and in the aesthetic object while the representational approach
offered a contextualisation of the scholarly responses to the act as it is portrayed in literature and film.

The symbolic artefact, *Mr Pincer’s Tenant*, arose from the mental image of a pair of binoculars and a man who would use them. The device of free association, as it relates to the act of looking, was deployed to abstract words as carriers of the sensory impressions associated with those images. The development of a plot involved envisaging the binoculars as instrument of magnification for the physiological apparatus of the eyes and framing that image within the structure of a story. The binoculars, in this sense, acted as character, capable of intensifying the protagonist’s experience of looking, but also acted independently, as looking object with its own aims and capacities.

The plot unfolded as a close examination of the aims and capacities of the looking act as described in Sigmund Freud’s *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895). This process is exemplified in Joseph Conrad’s *The Shadow Line* (1916) in which the sextant acts as magnifying device for the compromised apparatus of the eyes of the story’s narrator. The recurring image of the dead ship’s captain operates as the somatic mnemonic symbol of his psychical predicament. The new captain, on his first command, writes of his despair in a pocketbook, presented in the story as subjective snapshots, within the main story of an imperilled ship and its sickly crew. The pocketbook functions as symbolic artefact; it exists as the reification of the recurring image of the tyrannical dead captain in combination with the flux of affect associated with his present-day despair.

The story of *Mr Pincer’s Tenant*, as “pocketbook” thus exists, in Langer’s frame, as symbolic artefact, combining the elements of looking, binoculars and characters, but as with the seaman’s diary, it does not, on its own, necessarily “yield a greater entity”. Importantly, for this thesis however, *Mr Pincer’s Tenant* accedes to Freud’s *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895) in its portrayal of the psychical processes which underlie visual perception and more than this, it does so in a presentational format.

Moreover, the narrative structure of *Mr Pincer’s Tenant* mimics Freud’s processes of dream formation in which displacement of the constituents and hallucination of wished-for elements provide an envisagement of the subjective experience of the character involved in the looking act. Freud had portended in *On Aphasia* (1891) that fibre tracts function in the same way as poetry functions in language; that psychical content which originates at the periphery of the body undergoes changes at the cortex to reflect a condensation of data (53). Langer observed this process in poetic works: “Condensation of symbols is a fusion of forms by intersection, contraction, elision and suppression to intensify the created image, as in James Joyce’s poems which become a distorted dream language” (244). *Mr Pincer’s Tenant* is, to some extent, reminiscent of a distorted dream language.
The work of the writer, as looking character, involves looking and perceiving in an attempt to achieve a “state of identity” between brain and body receptors, as Freud described (1895, 332). This involves, as Freud identified, the awakening of the neural pathways from the body periphery to the cortex to bring to consciousness those objects which are latent, such as dream content, or the objects associated with symptoms.

This bringing to consciousness is the thought activity of Conrad’s seaman when he writes his pocketbook, and of Antonioni’s Thomas when he magnifies his picture of the park. This is the thought activity of Mr Pincer, when he repaints the parlour wall in the image of his former tenant; each of these represents the beginning phase of the process of creating the symbolic artefact.

The artefacts of *Mr Pincer’s Tenant*, the seaman’s pocketbook and the blown up photograph, exist as early envisagments, which may or may not undergo symbolic transformation to become fully-realised aesthetic objects (1942/1969, 26). The aesthetic objects of Conrad’s novella *The Shadow Line* (1916) or Antonioni’s film *Blow Up* (1966), by contrast, exist as representations of the “active termination of a symbolic transformation of experience,” as Langer writes in *New Key*; a text in which she embeds the neurophysiological processes of perception into a conceptualisation of the way in which sensory impressions become forms symbolic of feeling (45). Within this frame, Langer acknowledges the symbolic artefact as the output of the artist’s in a preliminary phase of becoming an aesthetic object. She also acknowledges that in this state it operates, nonetheless, as a symbol of feeling. “A Greek vase” in which the creative principle resides, exists as a symbol of feeling (41). *Mr Pincer’s Tenant* exists as an exemplification of Langer’s statement; it contains sensuous impressions from the psychical world and from the body periphery in an assembly of material parts and combines those parts in symbolic form constitutive of the feeling from which it was derived.

Freud had documented the narratives of dreams and symptoms in his various works, but had not made the conceptual leap from recognising these passages as clinical reports to understanding them as presentational symbols. His work on the neurophysiological schema of psychical objects in which he described the passage of sensory impressions from the periphery of the body to the cortex and his notion that fibre tracts contain qualitative data brought his work to the precipice of a conceptualisation of looking in which the erupting psychical objects, under the influence of affect, could find form, symbolic of the sensory perception from which they derived. This thesis extended Freud’s conceptualisation to propose that looking, as a perceptual act with aims and capacities, facilitates the apprehension of psychical objects which, after application to consciousness, supply the artist with the data from which to abstract objects in a process of symbolic transformation. The resulting objects may be conceived of as artefacts symbolic of feeling or as fully-realised aesthetic objects. This proposition moves
the discussion beyond claims that looking operates as an activity which satisfies libidinal drives in a perverse relation to that of “normal” sexual psychical functioning, as was discussed in Chapter One.

In a bid to achieve this, the thesis returned to looking, using the presentational mode in which a looking character was envisaged and his subjective experience presented as symbolic artefact. It also returned to looking using the representational mode in which looking characters in literature and film had been interpreted as voyeurs, and re-examined those propositions in light of Freud’s *Three Essays*. The thesis argues that Freud’s assertion culminates in the abstraction of psychical objects as artefact or as fully-realised aesthetic object. It also argues that either of these reifications produce a symbol of feeling and as such each satisfies Freud’s proposition that the act of looking, if directed toward “higher artistic aims” can, in concrete terms, achieve those aims (1905, 157). Freud examined the act of looking in *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895) out of a desire to articulate “what we are aware of through our consciousness” and to that end, proposed a schema of the neurophysiological processes by which this is achieved (1895, 307). His acknowledgement of symptoms as leaked psychical content in distorted form, and his recognition that this, and all the other examples of psychical content, exist as composites of original sensations, set his thinking at the edge of an hypothesis about looking as the perceptive device *par excellence* for beginning the process of objectifying the “puzzlements” with which the patient, as looking character, grapples (342).

Freud’s work, after *Project*, moved away from his earlier envisioning of psychical objects as qualitative data capable of operating as language does in a poem. Nevertheless, he did observe in *Case Histories from Studies on Hysteria* (1893) that his somnambulistic patients, for example, Frau Emmy von N., presented a somatic mnemic symbol as fragments of speech. She presented verbal tics and stammers “consisting of a succession of sounds which were convulsively emitted and separated by pauses and which could be likened to clacking” (92). Her “spastic inhibition of speech and peculiar stammer” recalls the sentence structure of *Mr Pincer’s Tenant*, and other narratives which portray the dynamics of psychical objects. Freud describes these tics and stutters as externalisations of the symbol of an event in memory (93).

Chapter Two discussed the aphasia of the fictionalised King George VI (Bertie) who demonstrated a similar externalisation of the symbol of an event in memory. His words arrived in fits and starts, repetitions and half-sentences interspersed with pauses and silences. His stutters, as with Frau Emmy’s, appear in written form as novels, verse, and on canvas, as well as in other symbolic forms. Freud’s observation that somatic mnemic symptoms find representation externally is exemplified in Christopher Isherwood’s novel *A Single Man* (1964) and in Jean Paul Sartre’s *Nausea* (1938) and in Daniel Paul Schreber’s *Memoirs of My
Nervous Illness (1903) and many other novels which portray the experience of psychical conflict or the dissolution of the psyche in written form.

As discussed in Chapter Three, Sass (1992) discusses the way in which artists portray this dissolution of the psyche. The common characteristics of the writing of those cited include a fragmentation of the words, sentences and voice. Of Nausea Sass writes, “the narrator, Roquentin, becomes aware of certain disquieting alterations to the perceptual world; and to clarify these for himself, he resolves to observe and record, from a position of utmost detachment, every detail of his experience” (66). Sartre’s words and style reflect this alteration of the perceptual world: “Things have broken free from their names. They are there, grotesque, stubborn, gigantic, and it seems ridiculous to call them seats or say anything at all about them: I am in the midst of Things, which cannot be given names. Alone, wordless, defenceless, they surround me, under me, behind me, above me” (1938/1963, 180). This sequence resonates with the writing style of Mr Pincer’s Tenant in which the narrative resembles the genres of both prose and verse. Sartre’s novel, despite its fragmentation of language, achieves the status of aesthetic object through its “meaning as a whole,” as Langer writes; it functions as a symbol because the words which make up the total object interrelate “in a simultaneous, integral presentation” (1942/1969, 97). Mr Pincer’s Tenant, by contrast, in its presentation of the “somatic mnemic symbol” at the beginning phase in the writing process, exists as a narrative “succession of sounds which are convulsively emitted and separated by pauses,” as Freud describes Frau Emmy’s vocalisations (1893, 92).

Mr Pincer’s Tenant, in Freud’s terms, represents a symptom “made into a symbol of the event in memory” and is presented in this form, purposefully, as an artefact which may, or may not proceed to the point of evolving into an aesthetic object (93). If it were to evolve into art, it would exist as a symbol of feeling from which “something emerges ...which was not there before,” as Langer writes (1953, 40). This ineffable “something” is the product of the process of symbolic transformation and it is this process which sets the work apart from its origins as symptom, or as dream, or as sensory perception. The work would assume its status as symbolic object constitutive of the elements of looking, binoculars and characters, but would go further to present “something which was not there before”.

However, for the purposes of this thesis, Mr Pincer’s Tenant, as symbolic artefact, reflects the different modes of the looking act as portrayed in the texts and films exemplified in the exegesis; most characters are grappling with the sensations which are arriving at the cortex after apprehension through their different acts of looking. Some characters stop before their act has achieved its higher artistic aim while others, such as Mr Pincer, achieve the preliminary aim of the sexual object; they reify their visual perceptions and present an artefact which is symbolic of the feelings from which it derived. Thus, Mr Pincer’s
Tenant, as symbolic artefact, exists within the context of this thesis as the embodiment of the premise that looking in literature and film offers more than the limited interpretation of the act as voyeurism. Indeed, as a reflexive psychical relation, voyeurism as an act of looking actually prevents the possibility of the sexual object achieving its higher artistic aim.

Thus, this thesis shows, using both presentational and representational modes, that Freud’s assertion in Three Essays is achievable. Through the act of looking, as represented in Mr Pincer’s Tenant, and in the literary and filmic examples discussed, characters can direct some portion of their libido onto higher artistic aims and can realise those aims as symbolic artefacts or as aesthetic objects. Freud’s assertion was tested against his earlier neurophysiological research in which he postulated that looking supplied sensuous intuitions for application to consciousness, and as such contributed to “what we are aware of” and to the constituents of art, both elementally and qualitatively. This thesis discovers that looking, as an act of visual perception, supplies consciousness with sensuous content, and that under the impress of the libidinal drives, facilitates the achievement of higher artistic aims.
References


