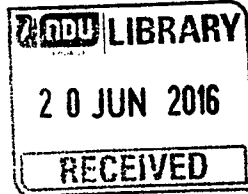


**Under the Custody of the Uncanny:  
A Reading of the “New Aesthetic”  
Within the Contemporary Frame**

Jad Khairallah

**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment for the Degree of**

**Master of Arts in Design**



Notre Dame University

Faculty of Architecture, Art and Design

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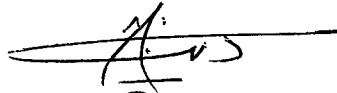


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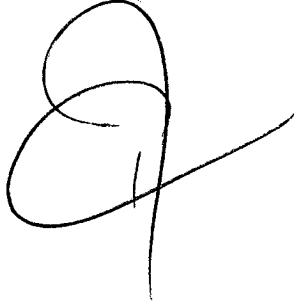
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Reader 2: Ms. Nadine Hindi

A handwritten signature in black ink, featuring a circular loop and a few sharp, intersecting strokes.

## Acknowledgments

This project would not have been possible without the support of many people. Many thanks to my adviser, Mrs. Dina Baroud, who read my numerous revisions and helped make some sense of the confusion, also thanks to Dr. Jean-Pierre El Asmar, Ms. Nadine Hindi and Dr. Farid Younes, who offered guidance and support. And finally, thanks to my parents, and numerous friends who endured this long process with me, always offering support and love.

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## Abstract

My dissertation explores the influential power of visual culture in reforming how we aesthetically behave with relation to contemporary television images. This influence depends on psychological and cultural structures that are linked to the television imagery, and more precisely to visually disturbing images. The approach to this question aims at examining a new aesthetic generated by the means of its television persona. I intend to tackle this by, first, drawing on the meaning of the weird and strange imagery that underlies the new aesthetic. Second, to recognize the new aesthetic tangible status within the contemporary culture where it manifests its natural attribute; and later to outline its functional system in position to television—the outside-inside television screen—to allocate the discussion of the new aesthetic within the television culture (the spectacle). By doing so, the work tries to reason the presence of a new type of aesthetic which can be grounded at future design approaches to imagery conceptualization. Methodologically, the work presents, as a literature review, the possibility to explore the Freudian uncanny by channeling its own disturbing aesthetic nature and its correspondence to fit within the frame of the new (aesthetic), provoking unfamiliarity in visual presentation yet imposing familiarity in its cultural context. In a critical reading of the subject, and elaborating on the new aesthetic tangibility, the imagery is read in position to culture, environment and individual. I first observe the interchangeable link with its environment that can either accommodate or simply dispel its persona completely. Second, I examine the contemporary tools of reading the new aesthetic with reference to the surrounding culture to comprehend the implications of such tools on the overall experience. Finally, I discuss its tangibility through a television example to illustrate, from the perspective of the viewer, how the disturbing imagery manifests a conscious transcendence of the new aesthetic phenomenon from a direct non-realistic to a more indirect and realistic image presentation.

## Introduction



By means of a contemporary frame, television's constant exposure of war and inhumane atrocities opens the possibility to explore a fresh type of visual aesthetic, one that is a reflection of unpleasant imagery. From uncensored presentation of people's death to war atrocities, as these disturbing images function from within the contemporary television environment, an investigation into its repeated exposure allows an insight on the relation between the unpleasant stimuli (the television image) and their receiver. The exploration of this phenomenon takes on the name of 'New Aesthetic' from within that television frame and depends on psychological and cultural structures that condition its establishment and elaborate its presence.

Through a psychological path we elaborate the overdrive of unpleasant imagery with reference to the Freudian uncanny; as a concept hidden under the façade of normality, experienced subjectively while covered by the security of society, showcasing horror and discomfort in a new state of mind. The nature of the Uncanny helps to condemn the aesthetical disturbance contained by television's projection of war images, death and catastrophes, while a culture of consumerism and entertainment reforms the aesthetic pillars of its contemporary cultural media perception.

According to Sigmund Freud, the uncanny refers to unpleasant characteristics when explaining its "character" as a possible "Image & description of a stimulus" (Freud, *The Uncanny* [Das Unheimliche] 57, 1990). The word denotes something eerie and weird, striking an "unhomely" feeling as what you see or feel reject the norms of what was once a safe environment for the conscious<sup>1</sup> and it is when that safety is tapped that the route contributes its uncanny feeling.

This thesis revolves around examining a fresh theoretical view on the concept of the moving image through a contemporary frame, while under the custody of a psychological

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<sup>1</sup> Freud, Sigmund. *The Uncanny* [Das Unheimliche]. London: Penguin Books, 1990. 241-274.

concept. By throwing a bridge from the realm of psychology to that of imagery, the process of referencing disturbing television images by means of this uncanny feeling, aims for a better dive under the layer of aesthetical disturbance contained within the contemporary means of television. While the spatio-temporal frame of this research reference an abstract concept of the contemporary frame of discussion, nevertheless, it functions within a field of (moving) image. By so that the discussion transit from that of the Freudian uncanny and its functional background of pure literary presentation, and attempts a post-Freudian persona of no longer “a feeling” but a tangible visual representation in the name of new aesthetic. This process is possible by the recognition of the former in the plane of composition based on the interpretation of many authors and theoreticians (from different fields of research) that helped guide my own re-reading of this uncanny through a contemporary time-frame of television imagery.

It is Jan Niklas Howe in his chapter *Familiarity and no Pleasure. The Uncanny as an Aesthetic Emotion* who acknowledges the Freudian uncanny within a frame of a visual entity while relying on three “Aristotelian” models (Howe, 2010) with regards to repetition, familiarity and recognition. By implying that there is familiarity arising from within the repressed self that transforms an object (the image) into something uncanny,<sup>2</sup> Howe’s discussion proves that a similarity in the emotional response of a positive bias (the beautiful) can be found in that of an uncanny unpleasant bias (the disturbing) and cannot be attained without a look at its functioning structure.

As the return of the familiar, by means of a re-encounter with a familiar element, is an important aspect for identifying the psychological uncanny model, its attribute requires to be evaluated outside that frame and later to be implemented within a contemporary television culture in the name of “New Aesthetic”. That ideology is possible, according to Anneleen

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<sup>2</sup> Howe, Jan Niklas. “Familiarity and no Pleasure. The Uncanny as an Aesthetic Emotion.” *Image & Narrative* 11.3 (2010): 42-63.

Masschelein in her book *The Uncanny* (2012), due to the Uncanny's conceptualization; as it capitalizes on the uncontainability to one specific domain, its transitional scheme throughout the decade stabilizes its nature as simply uncontainable within psychology yet remaining loyal to its Freudian theory. This label the Uncanny as a present day psychological concept that underwent a transformative change throughout its life cycle by no means limited to a specific disciplinary interpretation.

In this dissertation, aesthetics refers to the politics of form and experience with relation to a time frame.<sup>3</sup> With reference to both Eduardo Navas and David M. Berry who worked on the new aesthetic, the definition conceptually situates the new as one kind of emergent aesthetic form that represents a vibe or an attitude “that attempts to document a certain unfolding condition” (Berry, 15, 2010). When visualized through the eyes of a modernized uncanny, the explicit, obscure, strange and ugly are the conditions of a contemporary television frame that attempts recognition under the roof of a new aesthetic. According to David M. Berry, the “new” is used to show up that which is already there. He continues in his book *New Aesthetic, New Anxieties* (2010) through a particular focus on linking computation with consumption in the examples of blogs and Tumblr, and implies that a re-reading is inevitable when linking the digital in media, computers or television with an already present and familiar cultural image (in our case the disturbing image).

With an increasing reliance on digital technologies throughout the contemporary frame, the “new aesthetic” categorizes itself by an imposing digital alongside a present contemporary scene, where it follows the notion of grabbing from the past and remixing to fit within the frame of the new.<sup>4</sup> What can be considered as past is related to precedent familiar ideologies, methods, visualizations or moods arising from its own surrounding culture, which

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<sup>3</sup> David M. Berry, Michel van Dartel, Michael Dieter, Michelle Kasprzak, Nat Muller, Rachel O'Reilly, José Luis de Vicente. “New Aesthetic, New Anxieties.” 2012. V2. 15 october 2014 <<http://v2.nl/publishing/new-aesthetic-new-anxieties>>.

<sup>4</sup> Navas, Eduardo. Remix Theory: The Aesthetics of Sampling. Springer: Ambra Verlag, 2012.

is then reintroduced and infinitely remixed by the contemporary power of technology.<sup>5</sup> The imposing “digital” on the contemporary scene provides the new aesthetic with a newer method of contemplation, one that is familiar and unfamiliar to the visual eye in the same process of digital manipulation of an old image. The uncanny takes part in this process by channeling its own psychoanalytical nature and its correspondence to fit within the frame of the new, as it provokes unfamiliarity in presentation yet imposes a return of the familiar in context. This notion of influence from within a cultural background, relies not only on the digital, but also on social and political anxieties of war and atrocities and reframes its familiar essence into a new aesthetic.

While gaining a new method of exposure through television (functioning through a new digital time-frame), the uncanny does not emerge ubiquitously; what is then of social, political or cultural weight is part of the uncanny’s nature, as its impact of discomfort by means of visual representation from television comes across omnipresent; it implies an interchangeable relation with its anxious surrounding. The structure of television culture, environment and individual, stand important for monitoring the composition that holds the aesthetic pillars of new cultural media. As the new aesthetic presents various qualities inherited by the uncanny, which contribute to its valued position in this contemporary frame, the likes of uncontainability, dissemination and familiarity<sup>6</sup> prove vital in the link this new aesthetic makes with its environment, with an interchangeable relation that appears to question the fragility of such a culture and its ramification within the new aesthetic. While inside a contemporary frame of technological take over, the new aesthetic apprehends within the frame of image and television, as its nature benefits in projection and exposure, while the individual functions within an anxious world of television culture as the real and unreal

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Masschelein, Anneleen. “The Canonization of the Uncanny.” Masschelein, A. The Unconcept: The Freudian Uncanny in Late-Twentieth-Century Theory. Albany: State University of New York Press., 2012. 125-136.

merge<sup>7</sup> through television examples of black comedy, broadcasting news and even cartoons. It is in this contemporary frame that the new aesthetic attempts a much needed recognition as the former's manifestation is in no way foreign but natural.

The disturbing visuals of contemporary culture gain momentum and prevail in the name of new aesthetic. Characterized by a focus on the digital (whether in creation or projection), the new aesthetic relies heavily on the notion of remixing from the old while influenced by its surroundings. In fact this frame prepares the Uncanny presentation of disturbance to morph under the notion of acceptance while utilizing the new aesthetic as its brand of appeal, as the contemporary culture comes to translate the new as harmless, impersonal, free-floating and even interesting.<sup>8</sup> It is that a shift starts to grace this contemporary world, as a fascination with the ugly and the "negative" takes center stage, molding itself in the form of new aesthetics. Yet an important question arises as to who initializes the acceptance of such an aesthetic and who gives the new aesthetic its state of recognition?

As the uncanny projects its presentation unto the public, it is this public that takes control to decide whether to embrace or dismantle this new type of uncanny aesthetic, as theorists from Martin Heidegger (1996) to Zuzanna Dziuban (2012) argue in favor. To embrace such disturbance is to apply a sort of normality which retaliates against its safe environment, as the people take shelter under the communal pillars that houses agreed-upon ideologies; The new aesthetic comes to question those ideologies and maybe to reposition the aesthetically intolerable. Again nothing can be implemented without a level of communal agreement through the use of tools and criteria such as environmental and cultural assessment. With a focus on the television aspect of the presentation, the visual eruptions of contemporary anxieties come to provoke a different perspective for the new aesthetic while

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<sup>7</sup> Sontag, Susan. Regarding the pain of others. New York: Picador, 2003.117.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 22

imposing the uncanny concept as a reactionary function within that domain, a domain molded by the digital in way of presenting, reporting and reading the disturbing image.

The new aesthetic cannot be pinned down easily as a visual trait, in fact, Eduardo Navas, a researcher in the crossover of art and media in culture, adds that the new aesthetic has little possibility to become something more serious without a more in-depth vision of its possible production. As a future contemporary phenomenon of disturbance, the new aesthetic function requires to be documented in order to condition its presence as a proven power source in the contemporary frame and that will be possible when it starts to accommodate a tangible personality.

Through the frame of television culture, the once psychological uncanny concept takes on the form of "New aesthetic". The interchangeable nature of the surrounding culture serves to add to its ever-changing form and manifestation. To accept such an uncanny aesthetic is to rely on the public's approval. It is in the public's power to accept or dispel such an aesthetic. To study such a task is to lay down a pattern of thoughts that links the environment and the individual with the tangibility of a new aesthetic as observing the implication of the environment and the impact on the individual results in measuring its value through contemporary culture. The measured value gives a possible look at the position of such an aesthetic and if it stands a chance as an independent tangible force.

## Research scope

### Aim

I intend to discuss the new aesthetics' tangible status by reading its position as a natural attribute of the contemporary frame in order to get a clear aspect of its grounded position in a television culture with what it entails as ramification on designers and future contemporary image-making.

## Objectives

To argue on the notion of tangibility is to understand the position of the new aesthetic whether as a depthless concept or as a serious player in the contemporary field. As popular presentation of disturbing images through the contemporary screen demands better understanding of their purposeful nature, the emergence of a new aesthetic ought to be evaluated, and to undertake such a task is to outline a reflective framework that can help evaluate its characteristic. I must first observe the surrounding or better yet the environment that the new aesthetic hold accountable for its action, as that surrounding can either accommodate or simply dispel its persona completely. Second, I must examine the many contemporary tools that function within the new aesthetic field so as to truly comprehend their implications on the overall experience. Lastly, I must understand its tangibility, as visible new aesthetic patterns gathered from a television example transcend to a non-visible (realistic) image representation akin to unconsciously acting out the new aesthetic.

In analyzing the environment, tools and overall impact of the new aesthetic throughout the frame of contemporary culture, I should be able to get a glimpse on the position of the new aesthetic in regards to its tangible nature.

1. Observe the new aesthetics' interchangeable link with its environment that can either accommodate the new aesthetic or simply dispel its persona completely.
2. Examine the contemporary tools of reading the new aesthetic with reference to the surrounding culture to comprehend the implications of such tools on the overall experience.
3. Discuss the transcendence of the new aesthetic from a direct non realistic to a more indirect and realistic image presentation.

## Methodology

Through the framework of the image and its connection with the television screen, the research sets out to examine the tangibility of a new aesthetic phenomenon. We tackle this issue through a descriptive approach from which the primary purpose “is to provide an accurate description or picture of the status or characteristics of a situation or phenomenon. The focus is not on ferreting out cause-and-effect relationships but rather on describing the variables that exist in a given situation and, sometimes, on describing the relationships that exist among those variables” (Burke 366, 2010). With a link to the disturbing image in particular, the collected data refer to psychological references (the uncanny) to understand the psychoanalytical connection with the strange and weird, in addition to environmental and cultural references that elucidate its functional frame (the anxious society and the television culture). By gathering an initial literature review, the subject will then be investigated to validate a natural attribute to the new aesthetic phenomenon and prove its tangibility within a contemporary frame. The research was conducted by a content analysis, employing the results of searching numerous scholarly journals that carried out research on the unpleasant stimuli and their receiver (from uncanny to aesthetics), as well as the functioning contemporary frame (the culture of spectatorship).

In the perspective of Anneleen Masschelin, whose work emphasizes the interactions between literature and psychoanalysis, the fascination with the ugly, or better yet what is considered as negative beauty through the literal culture, refers back to the psychological uncanny as a concept of disturbance that functions within various cultural dimensions. As Masschelin questions those dimensions away from pure psychological specifics, we ask if its position as a concept of uncontainability can successfully describe and link disturbing aesthetics arising from contemporary television. In the perspective of Susan Sontag, her representation of monstrosities through photographic images of war once had the purpose of



shocking and disciplining the viewer. As she questions the change in accepting these images as shocking, we ask about the moving image of television and what the former can entail as a future visual outcome.

With numerous interpretations of the weird and strange imagery arising from contemporary television, it is an anticipated outcome that several environmental, cultural and psychological elements will be investigated to determine the degree of readiness to first, label visual forms as new aesthetics and, second, to reach a level of tangibility. Looking for appropriate data requires an in-depth search on the aesthetics and what can be referred to as negative, as well as articles on the uncanny subject and the television screen, keeping in perspective the visual and cultural aspect that will help guide the dissertation back to the frame of discussion that is of television. In addition, media examples will also act as a paradigm for referencing the disturbing and comprehending the new aesthetic.

### ***Research Design***

The collected data start from a wider frame that belongs to psychology and the conceptualization of the uncanny; then it continues through a similar psychoanalytical mood to underlie an unexpected pleasure arising from experiencing disturbance, after it involves a culture of spectatorship that initiates the mutation of the spectacle through image and gives rise to a new aesthetic. The pacing that follows the collected data is subsequently presented in order to reach a point where the reference to a new aesthetic is actually established, and the operation on its tangibility can begin. This is where the collected data is reformulated through first the surrounding environment with links between the uncanny and the new aesthetic, second, through the television culture and the reading of new images, and third through the individual in the position of the viewer in relation to a television example in order to reference a new aesthetic tangibility.

*Data Analysis Strategy*

Dividing the thesis into two parts is necessary in order to underline the difference between the literature part of gathering data (part one) and the analytical part of new aesthetic tangibility (part two), in addition to seven chapters (see, Fig 1) that function as follows:

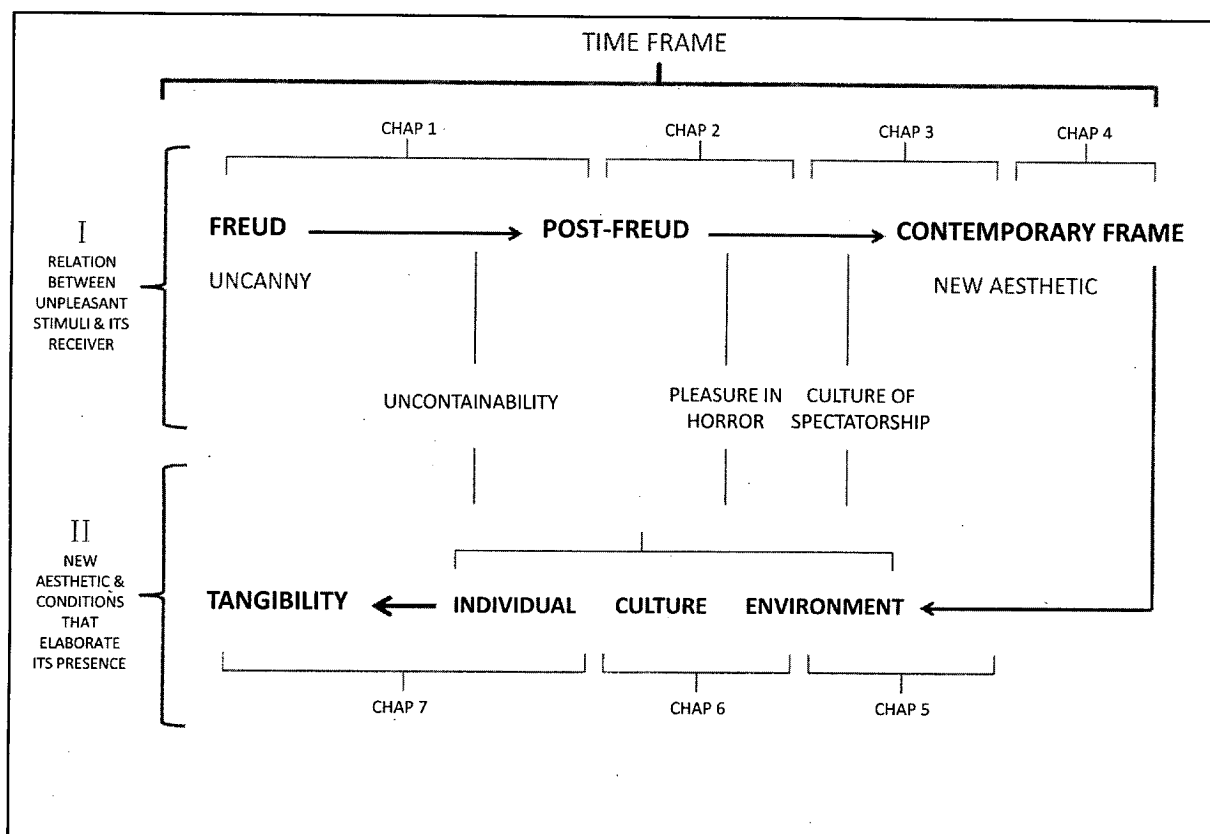


Figure 1 A diagram that represents the time-frame of the thesis discussion as well as the two parts and the seven chapters.

In the first part of the dissertation, we search and examine different data throughout the literature review in order to contextualize the findings within the pattern of the disturbing stimuli and its receiver. It follows four subsequent chapters from introducing the uncanny, understanding hidden pleasures through disturbing presentations, understanding the culture of the spectacle, to finally identifying with a new aesthetic. In the second part, we try to decode the gathered patterns; the analysis of the data will serve the hypothesis that argues the position of the new aesthetic as a natural attribute of the contemporary frame. This analysis will follow three points of discussion: environment, culture and individual in the position of

the viewer. Through both environment and culture, the dissertation will utilize initial elements gathered from the review of the disturbing while coding those patterns within a new aesthetic frame. To conclude, a triangulation of the patterns and themes will formulate a level of understanding of the new aesthetic by establishing a connection with the viewer within a television exemplar in order to initiate its tangibility.

Through that last chapter, the discussion gives rise to the black comedy example, a moving image concept that gathers both comedic and horrific ideologies under one roof. The uncontainability of the black comedy environment, the easy exposition to the viewer by means of television and its link to an uncanny presentation, beg the implementation of such a concept in the study of cartoons as a heavy dose of new aesthetics. By channeling this non-realistic example of cartoon animations, we can contemplate the bizarre world of situation comedy as a means of deconstructing the world of common sense in which all of us live.<sup>9</sup> The common sense or the reality may prove difficult at first to investigate on its own, while a non realistic representation may act as an investigative primary tool to seriously grasp the limitless implementation of the new aesthetic within a contemporary television.

While it would not be enough to simply present a television example portraying the many characteristics of the new aesthetic phenomenon, those patterns will attempt a link with a dissimilar example. To understand its function, new aesthetic patterns gathered from a new aesthetic television example will attempt a link with a different television projection image and from a non-realistic conscious approach to rather unconsciously act out the new aesthetic, which is where my findings can prove valuable.

In his book *Television Aesthetics: Perceptual, Cognitive and Compositional Base* (Routledge Communication Series, 1996), Nikos Metallinos, who analyzes television as a

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<sup>9</sup> Newcomb Horace; Hirsch Paul M. "Quarterly Review of Film and Video." From Television as a cultural forum (1983): 561-573.

powerful visual communication medium,<sup>10</sup> depicts three basic television categories that stand as the following: *Conventional or network television programs* that center on entertainment and information such as soap operas, game shows and musical variety shows to name a few, and an *information* category that presents broadcast news in addition to an *education* category that follows children's television programs and documentary programs. While Metallinos (1996) separates these groups, he does emphasize a clear overlapping as each leans towards the greater purpose of entertainment.<sup>11</sup>

With the chosen television example belonging to the *conventional* category, the *information* category will act as the needed paradigm to better elucidate the idea of tangibility; within the *education* category, the discussion would be limited to a predefined context (whether in presentation or framework) and a specific aim to educate the viewer, while the *information* category acts as the closest contender to take on the *conventional* category as it is not as limited as its counterpart. What prevails is a stage that welcomes new aesthetic patterns and emphasizes its transcendence, from a direct conscious state to a rather indirect and unconscious state of perception; that point in discussion places our example (black comedy cartoon) as a reckoned image substance that applies its pattern to a similar image example from the same television screen all the while indirect and unconscious. The link between the two entities provides a more condensed evaluation of the real transformative force that is the new aesthetic and the possibility of a serious outlook on its tangible self. This characteristic of the *information* genre linking with the animation category of *conventional or network* television while under the banner of contemporary television culture, gives insight on a possible hypothesis that argues the position of the new aesthetic as a natural attribute of the contemporary frame.

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<sup>10</sup> Mirzoeff, Nicholas. An introduction to Visual Culture. New York: Routledge, 1999. 20-35

<sup>11</sup> Metallinos, Nikos. "Compositional factors." Metallinos, Nikos. Television Aesthetics: Perceptual, Cognitive and Compositional Bases (Routledge Communication Series). Routledge, 1996. 158-159.

## Approach and Contribution

This research paper is an introduction to the world of strange and weird visuals, with a psychological and a cultural concept at its core, arguing on its natural presentation within a television concept. The existence and rise in popularity of televised images that depict disturbing visuals to the spectator is researched against its surrounding culture and projected under the phenomenon of new aesthetic. By categorizing that particular moving image within this concept and classifying it within the field of visual aesthetics, the once image of disturbance is provided with a re-reading that elevates its status unto a new pedigree aimed for any individual in the arts and design field to benefit from understanding, using and experimenting with disturbing visualization. As this new aesthetic identifies with the surrounding environment and culture, its transcendence to a tangible force implies that disturbing visuals actually function as a natural attribute within their contemporary surroundings.

## Limitation

I am aware of several limitations and shortcomings; first of all, the research is conducted with the psychological reference that is the uncanny even though I try to implement it beyond its psychological field of discussion. Second, the context of the research is grand and encompasses many sub-fields which I attempt to gather within a limited master thesis frame and a limited time schedule. Third, a quantitative analysis would have helped with analyzing the new aesthetic through personal interviews and questionnaires which I attempted to measure through a trial found in appendix 1.

## Guide to the Dissertation

This dissertation begins with an overview on the relation between the unpleasant stimuli and their receiver to better understand the position of the disturbing (image) through many fields of discussion that varies from psychology (uncanny) to television culture and to give a better view on the situation of the unpleasant and its nature. In Part I, we begin by understanding the image and its link with the visual culture, and then we introduce the disturbing image and try to dive under its fragile layer. By so doing we introduce the aesthetic experience behind such imagery and hint at a new way of reading its nature with what it entails as ramification on the disturbing. To complement that research, we first mention the uncanny concept as a psychological pedigree; second, we examine a theory on the link between horror and jokes; third, we observe the culture of spectatorship; and fourth we introduce the new aesthetic phenomenon as a response to all of the above-mentioned.

The dissertation continues and tries to elaborate the presence of a new concept under the name of new aesthetic by examining the conditions that elaborate its presence. In Part II, we begin by examining the environment, then the culture and finally the individual in the perspective of the viewer to analyze and provide tangible characteristics for this new aesthetic phenomenon.

## **Part I**

In a virtual land, the reign of the image falls within a unique spatial aspect that belongs to an intangible and two-dimensional ground, best acknowledged within the screen. In this dissertation, the screen takes the form of television that projects the disturbing image; thus an analysis is needed to understand the relation between this unpleasant stimuli and their receiver.

The image as a concept references a set of functions that mediates the interpretation of a thought; the likes of writing a poem and interpreting its essence unto a painting reflects a deep relation between the image and the word according to Jacques Ranciere, writer of *The Future of the Image* (2009). Whether in the form of a still image or a moving image, the word depicts social descriptions of behavioral, scenic or just influencing passages through an established relation between the sayable and the visible.<sup>12</sup>

The concept of the image has been investigated by many thinkers who analyzed its nature within a functional link to its cultural surrounding (in particular the culture of the image). The likes of Ranciere, who mentions contemporary tools, focus on the beneficial aspects of such gears in the exposure of the image, while television and media drive a culture that is indefinitely spectatorship, as Jean Baudrillard and Susan Sontag discussed in their writings.

In the perspective of Jacques Ranciere, writer of *The Future of the Image* (2009), he believes the image creation is as important as its tools. By understanding the concept of image and image production, he was able to interlink these major headers with the present social sphere. The concept of the image is derived from a text, or better yet, a notion in space, but that notion is translated by the use of available mediums open to exploration, starting from simple papers to computers and software. While focused on the notion of art, Ranciere

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<sup>12</sup> Ranciere, Jacques. *The Future of the Image*. London: Verso, 2009. 25-27



believes in the perception of the possible by so that art is limitless.<sup>13</sup> In a large society, the labor of art practice is as important as the concept, while there is emphasis on the contemporary dialect that highlights not only the story of the image but the tool as well. As for the production of the image, Ranciere mentions two methods: one is dialectical montage with the aim of revealing a secret truth and the other is symbolic montage that assembles images in the form of an analogy.

What Ranciere is adding to the notion of cultural media is the fact that the image is given the freedom to benefit from contemporary tools. These images or ideologies, wrapped in secrets and analogies, have the chance to be roaming free and can even reach extreme levels of exposure. Such is the animation show ‘The Amazing World of Gumball’<sup>14</sup> which heavily integrates realism and animation throughout its fifteen-minute episode. The messages behind such exposure are then backed up by ideologies reflected by the sayable and similar to their medium, and are beyond counting.

As for Jean Baudrillard, a French sociologist and cultural theorist, the media act with the image and deliver a heightened dose of reality, which is referred to in the book of Mark Poster’s, *Jean Baudrillard Selected Writings* (2002), as “a spectacle of exposure”.<sup>15</sup> The terminology that is ‘the spectacle’ gives us a look at the nature behind the screen which in reality must deploy realism, yet it happens to act upon preconceived models.<sup>16</sup> The likes of settings, plots and narratives defined by the screen diminish authenticity and turn the image into a spectacle. The spectacle is all about enjoying the show and a show requires a crowd, but how do you attract a crowd? It is through the notion of shock where the receiver is manipulated by images that prove shocking yet attractive. Disturbing visuals are one medium

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> The Amazing World of Gumball is an animated sit-com following the misadventures of Gumball and his family in the weird and wonderful town of Elmore, the series, combines 2D and 3D animation in a live-action setting.

<sup>15</sup> Poster, Mark. *Jean Baudrillard Selected Writings*. Cambridge: MIT: Stanford University Press, 2002. 200-201

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

for inducing shock, as in the footage of the ISIS beheading,<sup>17</sup> heightened in plot and narration to create a perfect show-stopping number.

In the perspective of Susan Sontag, a filmmaker and a political activist, she discusses the image in its photographic form portraying wounded soldiers at war in the book *Regarding The Pain Of Others* (2003), while giving great attention to the viewer. By admittingly calling our society a “culture of spectatorship”,<sup>18</sup> Sontag is astonished by the loss of the power to be shocked. She stands similar to Baudrillard in concept but heightens the notion even further to the point of getting used to the image.<sup>19</sup> With a frame, of a strictly photographic aesthetic of death, she enounces that the shock is no longer shocking but a dose of pleasure is found in such disturbing images.

In a contemporary frame, it is easy to supplement Sontag’s ideology that references the still image when we refer to the moving image taking off in the form of disturbing television imagery, creating or, better yet, building up the main blocks of the individual’s contemporary surrounding, so a deeper dive under that layer will help to clearly elaborate the experience.

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<sup>17</sup> The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria is a Salafi Jihadi militant group that uses beheadings to intimidate local populations and has released a series of propaganda videos aimed at Western countries

<sup>18</sup> Sontag, Susan. Loc.cit. 8-14

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

## A Dive under the Layer of the Image

The core of the image sits within a bigger ideology, one that is more than the outer layer of image and technological mediums. The perception of the image or better yet the aesthetic, in the shape of the overall experience, comes radicalized by a culture that is addicted to the image that derives from an anxiety-inducing society (with the ramification of old and new cultural situations of atrocities and anti-humanitarian acts still finding its echoes).<sup>20</sup> We stand now at the point of monitoring the structure that holds the pillars of aesthetics of this new cultural media.

The contemporary frame holds a “mutation in the sphere of culture”, as Fredric Jameson in his book *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic Of Late Capitalism* (1991) asserts that different kinds of cultural impulses from residual to emergent are still making their way out of the aesthetic sphere. The lack of a general cultural dominance paves the way for many expositions that alters the aesthetic production.<sup>21</sup> In addition, the designated consumer society paves the way for a higher dose of continuous aesthetic innovation and experimentation. We are facing a culture that is bombarded by television and images, lots of weird, strange, awkward, bizarre, eccentric images that are surely radicalizing the aesthetic perception of the viewer.

So it is that a shift in aesthetics starts to grace this contemporary world, with a fascination with the ugly and the ‘negative aesthetic’.<sup>22</sup> Philosophers from Martin Heidegger to Immanuel Kant, both well known for their discussion on aesthetics, initiate the encounter with new visual phenomena to be more sublime than beautiful.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Vidler, Anthony. *The Architectural Uncanny. Essays in the Modern Unhomely*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992.

<sup>21</sup> Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: NC: Duke University Press, 1991. 13-20

<sup>22</sup> Ffytche, Matt. “Night of the Unexpected: A critique of the “Uncanny” and its Apotheosis within Cultural and Social Theory.” 2012. *Questia*. 12 May 2014 <<http://dx.doi.org/10.3898/NeWf.75.04.2012>>.

<sup>23</sup> Mirzoeff, Nicholas. *Loc.cit.* 20-35

In fact the aesthetical perception has dissimilated into the sublime and is being molded into what is referred to as brand new aesthetical experiences. The new referring to innovative ways of reading and processing the image has reached a point where the impact is more subterranean than superficial.

This dive into the sublime opens up a new possible way of reading the aesthetic of new cultural media and that is through a psychological path that can link with the subterranean contact with disturbing images. When the psychology field attempts to weigh in on ‘compulsive beauty’ as taken from the book with the same name by Hal Foster, who relates psychology to the disturbance of surrealist work, multiple notions are introduced that can help elaborate this issue at hand. The grotesque, the sublime and the uncanny belong to a category of psychoanalytical genres that can aid to condemn the nature that is of aesthetical disturbance. However, the discussion behind the nature of these terms must relate to a cultural frame in order to stay relevant with the topic at hand.

The grotesque, explains G. K. Chesterton, is a mean of presenting the world “in a new light without falsifying it.”<sup>24</sup> Chesterton, an English writer and philosopher, believes that the grotesque is one way of portraying the reality as it is with no manipulation from outside sources.<sup>25</sup> Contemporary cultural media do not comply exclusively under that house of work, considering that its manipulation of the image, as mentioned earlier, renders the shocking image for example less grotesque and more in-between dullness and extremists but nevertheless maintaining a variable dose of gruesomeness. As for the sublime, Mario Costa, a philosopher who worked on the sublime and on technology, renders the concept as a new method of aesthetic expression that relates to the technological takeover of our contemporary world.<sup>26</sup> Still, the sublime does not convey the radicalism of aesthetic but only interlude

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<sup>24</sup> Oddie, William. Chesterton and the Romance of Orthodoxy. Chicago: Oxford University Press, 2008.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Costa, Mario. Le Sublime Technologique. Lausanne: Iderive, 2006.

aesthetic with technology under the notion of expression. The uncanny on the other hand and according to Sigmund Freud in his book *The Uncanny* (1919), qualifies itself as “the study of the qualities of our sentiments” very much opposed to the narrow sense of “the study of the beautiful”.<sup>27</sup> Through this notion the uncanny, according to Freud, refers to something strange and weird, striking an “unhomely” feeling as what you see or feel rejects the norms of what was once a safe environment for your conscious. With this concept hidden under the facade of normality, experienced subjectively while covered by the security of society, it can help to showcase horror and discomfort in a new state of mind.

In order to understand the relation between the unpleasant stimuli and their receiver, we dive through many layers and ask what can this occurrence, by means of psychology first and the surrounding culture second, tell us about its potential for the disturbing image.

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<sup>27</sup> Freud, Sigmund. Loc.cit. 241-274

## Guide to Part I

By means of understanding the relation between an unpleasant stimulus (a disturbing image) and its receiver, a reading of what can be referred to as unpleasant through a psychological and cultural concept in general will then attempt a link with the disturbing image in particular. The following theoretical presentation develops and analyzes a new perspective for the negative experience, providing focus on an uncanny image while catering a culture of spectatorship that is redefining its essence. To comprehend that relation, the term uncanny in Chapter One outline a psychological link with the disturbing, in Chapter Two it implies a hidden pleasurable experience behind disturbing and horrific images, while in Chapter Three it describes the cultural surrounding and the influential power of the contemporary image by looking at the notion of shock. Chapter Four revises the previous notions and reformulates the uncanny concept under the notion of “New-Aesthetic” experiences. The conclusion summarizes the findings and outlines future areas to study the tangibility aspect of such a phenomenon.

## Chapter One

### The Conceptualization of the Uncanny

The fascination with the ugly or rather what is considered as ‘negative’ beauty, directs the perception to what is referred to as ‘Uncanny’ due to fundamental links with the disturbing. Its definition and function from a psychological perspective initiates the first stop in our time frame that will introduce the term and highlight its Freudian perspective. By this way it gradually paves the way into a post-psychological reference; the conceptualization of the “uncanny” marks its transition from a pure psychoanalytic-literary framework to a somehow stabilized concept spread between many disciplines and fields. This “canonization” calms the uncanny from the wrath of psychology specifics and reasons its operation as a future independent concept. This chapter is a review of the term *uncanny*, its link with the unpleasant and its influential transition while the pacing by which this transition is presented, mounts to a minimalistic depiction of the uncanny’s fate throughout the years; what it portray is a growing interest in the disturbing within new disciplines yet under the custody of a psychological mediator.



## The Freudian Uncanny

Through the field of psychology, the definition of the word uncanny comes courtesy of Sigmund Freud, a renowned psychoanalyst, who introduces it in his 1919 essay 'Unheimlich', which literally stands for 'unhomely', though translated as 'uncanny'; "The uncanny is the class of frightening things that leads us back to what is known and familiar" (Freud, *The Uncanny* [Das Unheimliche] 195, 1990). For Freud, the uncanny reflects a fearful feeling by which something can be familiar, yet foreign at the same time, resulting in an emotional response of uncomfortable familiarity. The only previous study was that of Ernst Anton Jentsch, a German psychiatrist, through his book *On the Psychology of the Uncanny* (1906), who concludes with the Uncanny as a fear of the unfamiliar yet based on intellectual uncertainty.<sup>28</sup> However, Freud continued from that definition and provided an extended review on the word and its connection with "things, people, events and situations which are able to arouse in us a special variety of the fearful" (Martinez 39, 2014), and initiated a better understanding of the term to the point of gaining recognition under the name of the Freudian uncanny.

The Freudian psychology provides an introductory window onto the notion of the uncanny through the sole use of literary studies as examples. Freud's examination of different literature was directed mainly at enabling 'the uncanny's operationalization'<sup>29</sup> under the psychoanalytical discourse. And through his interpretation, the uncanny stands as an effect produced when one is confronted with unconscious thoughts, backed up by characteristics such as discomfort, unease and familiarity. One of those literatures is the "The Sandman" written by E. T. A. Hoffmann in 1816 that involves a boy haunted by manifestations of the sandman, a mythical creature who cuts out boys' eyes. Lis Moller in her book *The Freudian*

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<sup>28</sup> Jentsch, Ernst. "On the Psychology of the Uncanny" (1906). in Angelald, 2:1 (1996): 8

<sup>29</sup> Dziuban, Zuzanna. "Incorporating the Uncanny. Das Unheimliche as a Cultural Experience." *Inter-Disciplinary Press* (2012).

*Reading: Analytical and Fictional Constructions* (1991), simplifies Freud's interpretation as follows:

The Sandman who, as we are told in the beginning of the narrative, throws handfuls of sand in children's eyes "so that they start out bleeding from their heads." "The Sandman" evokes the fear of damaging one's eyes, which is a terrible one in children and in many adults as well. Psychoanalysis has documented that loss of eyes is a recurrent theme in dreams and fantasies as well as in myths and legends. It is the study of such fantasmal constructions, continues Freud, that allows us to trace the universal dread of losing one's eyes back to its infantile source. Anxiety about one's eyes is a substitute for the dread of being castrated. It is this "peculiarly violent and obscure emotion", excited by the threat of castration that "first gives the idea of losing other organs its intense colouring" (p. 231). The essay's introduction defines the uncanny as "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of the old and long familiar" (p. 220). That which "is known of old and long familiar" in "The Sandman," then, is the castration complex; the feeling of the uncanny evoked by Hoffmann's narrative originates in the repressed anxiety of childhood, the anxiety of castration (Moller 113, 1991).

While Lis Moller believes that there is a return of a recognizable act through a specific presentation that triggers a disturbing yet familiar response, it is Elizabeth Wright in her book *Psychoanalytic Criticism: A Reappraisal* (1998) that directs our attention to the composition that drives this uncanny phenomenon, particularly within the arts.

In literature, uncanny automata, mechanical dolls, machines out of control, become powerful metaphors for this inability to adjust one's objectifications or else for the rigidity of the existing order. The uncanny is the illusory aspect of all objects brought home to us: we cannot rely upon them as leading to the satisfaction of desire. The Surrealists took the failure of the category as a central theme of their manifestos. Surrealist art specializes in the uncanny object, the watch that melts (Dali), the pipe that proclaims "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" (Magritte). The uncanny object brings home to us that all objects are in some sense "transitional objects" (Winnicott), or in Klein's sense at once "good" and "bad", involving a sudden shift of desire. Literature and the arts can present us with forms of the uncanny that life cannot, because the writer/artist has more access to illusion. He can contextualize as he wishes, choose whatever frame he likes. (Wright 134, 1998)

In reference to both Miller and Wright, we can affiliate the psychological uncanny with repressed and surmounted desires that come to the surface or reappear through specific presentations and engage in a familiar sense that is one of fearful outcome (with the fearful linking to the negative). The uncanny is then categorized first as a return of the familiar, and second as engaging a feeling of disturbance. With a reference to the arts through Wright's interpretation, we must mention the subject of aesthetics and the possibility of a connection with psychology. In fact, Freud cites the following:

It is only rarely that a psychoanalyst feels impelled to investigate the subject of aesthetics even when aesthetics is understood to mean not merely the theory of beauty, but the theory of the qualities of feeling... The subject of the "uncanny" is a province of this kind. It undoubtedly belongs to all that is terrible—to all that arouses

dread and creeping horror; it is equally certain, too, that the word is not always used in a clearly definable sense, so that it tends to coincide with whatever excites dread.

(Freud, *The Uncanny* [Das Unheimliche] 1, 1990)

Freud's attempt to merge aesthetics and psychoanalysis directs the attention to the negative aesthetic, while implying that the uncanny's feeling of fright is hard to categorize and define; it is nonetheless an emotional impulse similar to that of any other (positive) emotion. Thus Freud's essay attempts a contribution to the category of aesthetics through its own psychological field.<sup>30</sup> This additional criteria opens the door for endless uncanny possibilities that we try to understand through this thesis, as it shifts from a strictly literary psychological domain and proves uncontainable within psychology.

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<sup>30</sup> Wright, Elizabeth. Psychoanalytic Criticism: A Reappraisal. New York: Routledge, 1998: 136-137

## A Shift from a Strictly “Literary” Domain

Through the psychological frame, the uncanny’s acceptance as a concept according to Freud spreads into various disciplines and goes more deeply, while taking into account the ever-changing spatial and cultural surroundings. Anthony Vidler depicts the uncanny under the architectural pillar that is deconstruction, and proves himself along with Samuel Weber (1973), Helene Cixous (1972), Tzvetan Todorov (1970), and Terry Castle as a standard reference in the discourse of the uncanny right next to Freud.<sup>31</sup> This interdisciplinary exposition of the uncanny emphasizes the shift from a once strictly literary domain to a more cultural sector while remaining rooted in theory.<sup>32</sup> A theory that leads to the radicalism of anxious aesthetics is being processed not only in psychoanalysis, literature and philosophy, but also in visual studies, social sciences and architecture, to name a few.

Dabbling in fields that bypass psychological premises raises the question of the boundaries of the uncanny form. In demonstrating the sheer “uncontainability” of the concept, Nicholas Royle in his book *The Uncanny* emphasized more than any other the undisclosed frame holding the uncanny concept. In his opinion, the fact that the uncanny was not a major psychoanalytical concept<sup>33</sup> presented a loose end that kept it away from a sheer psychoanalyst criticism and left it under conceptual ambiguity and vagueness.<sup>34</sup>

This characteristic is furthermore backed up by Susan Bernstein (2004), who claims that the uncanny is ambulatory: it cannot be pinned down.<sup>35</sup> The most comprehensive work that focuses on the uncanny’s undisclosed terrain belongs to Anneleen Masschelein in the field of literature and psychoanalysis, who in her book *The Canonization of the Uncanny* (2012) believes that the uncanny does not comply with the psychoanalyst domain and “one

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<sup>31</sup> Masschelein, Anneleen. Loc.cit. 125-136.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Royle, Nicholas. *The Uncanny: An introduction*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Bernstein, Susan. “It Walks: The Ambulatory Uncanny.” *Comparative Literature Issue*, December 2003: 1111-1139.

may even wonder if this was ever the case” (Masschelein, 136, 2012). Its acceptance and fashionable status stand clear in titles and subtitles of books and articles that regularly attempt to hover over the psychology theme and open up the uncanny door to newer representational methods.

## Through the Art of Dissemination

Yet regardless of the uncontainable status, psychoanalysis holds a tight grip in the roots of the uncanny. The concept still draws its ideology from none other than Freud. For Masschelein, no matter the amount of friction that haunts its nature by various schools and disciplines (outside of psychology), Freud is guaranteed as an “author-function” or better still as a reference for the uncanny’s dissemination.<sup>36</sup> Freud holds the base of the uncanny notion and proves important when referencing different conceptual dispersions, as found for example in Robin Lydenberg’s writings (1997) and Royle’s books (2003) as they are authors that attempt to elaborate on the subject differently from the psychological normality of the uncanny discussion; Freud is then considered a starting point from which many concepts can take off.

According to Masschelein, the state of the uncanny is somehow enlarged as it associates with other fields while gaining from these encounters a degree of substantial modification. All these forms of dissemination are part of the conceptualization process that introduces, through two axes, the uncanny stepping away from a pure psychoanalytical perspective and into smaller yet variable frames. In general, the two axes direct the road to where the uncanny ought to stand as ‘unfamiliarity’ in relation to its functional background.<sup>37</sup>

The first axe belongs to a conceptual field of adjectives that made their debut along with the uncanny concept that at times can be used as ‘quasi-synonyms’: the sublime, the grotesque, the fantastic, the strange and the abject stand as a category of psychoanalytical adjectives falling in the same pedigree as the uncanny but emphasizing a sense of the “supernatural” than that of the ‘unfamiliar’.<sup>38</sup> As for the second axe, politics and ontological categories such as alienation and fear took a toll on the uncanny phenomenon; while similar adjectives were mentioned to clarify the uncanny’s distinctive personality, the mention of the

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Praver, Siegbert Salomon. *The “uncanny” in literature: an apology for its investigation*. London: Westfield College, 2007.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

political facet is a crucial point that weighs in on the subject of culture. According to Masschelein, the Freudian definition of “the familiar that has become strange” relates to the notion of alienation. Here political possibilities of the uncanny are translated through the ethics of dealing with racism, nationalism, and xenophobia.<sup>39</sup> The stranger according to Siegbert Salomon *Prawer* is found within ourselves and in our identity yet threatened by the outsider.<sup>40</sup>

The stranger we speak of is none other than the “unhomely” feeling when grasping extra-territorialization, estrangement and ambivalence of the post-colonial subject. As with reference to Prawer, politics portray a literal translation of the notion of feeling outside the safety of your home through the infiltration of the “other” into the sanctuary we call our familiar environment. What this entail is a deep connection with culture, as Andrew McCann (2014) refers to the Freudian uncanny as a culturally specific experience belonging to the subjective-aesthetic domain of a highly differentiated modern society.<sup>41</sup> Here, the cultural domain holds lots of weight as a manipulator of the uncanny nature, a culture that distinguishes the uncanny as “unfamiliarity” rather than a “supernatural” experience.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Prawer, Siegbert. Loc.cit.

<sup>41</sup> Ragnhild, R.T. “The uncanny in new media art.” 2012. [leoalmanac](http://leoalmanac.org). 15 March 2014 <[www.leoalmanac.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/06\\_RTTronstad.pdf](http://www.leoalmanac.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/06_RTTronstad.pdf)>.



## Unfamiliar with a Stop Sign

The Freudian uncanny had a long bridge to cross as it stands now as a combination of psychological ruptures, political and social alienation that is characterized by an ‘unhomeliness’ derived from the inner dispute over familiarity. Further, while the issue of representation starts to appear on the horizon as a new problematic, it is clear that the uncanny concept is always to be considered against its background (whether cultural, political, or socio-economical). By engaging through a post-Freudian time-frame, here in this century the rise in technological advancement in media and visual communication creates an extra layer for the uncanny concept to thrive.

Culture and anxiety move along the same track that leads to an aesthetic response expressed following existential contemporary dilemmas. The likes of xenophobia, homelessness, immigration and trauma, mentioned before by Masschelein, formulate the essence of an anxious society, while the dissolution of borders between countries enables the transition of this anxiety far above its boundaries. So the uncanny ramification becomes clear as it slides onto “the plane of composition” from where it was merely “the concept of an affect”,<sup>42</sup> by so that we can consider it now as a theoretical notion that serves both as an analytic tool and an artistic inspiration (from within its anxious surrounding).

In addition, this frame involve a re-introduction of the uncanny in a computing processing culture and inspires new schools and trends that rely heavily on bringing together new production principles and merging them with theoretical discourses;<sup>43</sup> From Gothic and Cyberpunk to art installations and animation, this dissemination of subfields, (mentioned by Masschelein), recreates what the uncanny is mostly famous for: its uncontainability. We can read that specific characteristic as it makes for an always available uncanny, unfamiliar with

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<sup>42</sup> Masschelein, Anneleen. *Loc.cit.* 125-136.

<sup>43</sup> Navas, Eduardo. *Loc.cit.*

a stop sign, constantly morphing yet still finding habitat to call its own (that consistent change will later be used to link with contemporary television).

We can also witness a different side of the uncanny through its new implication in this century, as according to Masschelein, the uncanny deploys recurring elements starting with visual arts and the importance of the human figure; Dolls, body parts, waxworks are all at the core of the visual art uncanny.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, contemporary literature joined new figures to the collection such as enhanced humans by technology, implants, and aesthetic surgery which led to a new field of the uncanny that is the uncanny valley. This field of robotics and cognitive science is a major example of the uncanny's extreme application in contemporary times away from Freud.

With all this talk on the ramification of the uncanny and its connection with the disturbing, a better recognition of this negative concept, in contrast to a positive concept (humor) in the following chapter, will identify the uncanny (the negative) in visual presentations as it finds a *raison d'être* under the roof of indirect psychological interest.

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<sup>44</sup> Masschelein, Anneleen. Loc.cit. 125-136.

## Chapter Two

### A Safety Valve for a Contemporary Mind

In terms of the uncanny concept, the experience is linked to ‘unconscious desires and beliefs’, according to Freud, as through uncanny work, repressed and surmounted desires resurfacing unto the open, produce that discomfort, that aspect of the “frightening” we term the uncanny.<sup>45</sup> Through visual and oral elements, the psych of the individual is probed by presentations that waken inner desires hidden by a cultural unconsciousness. The unconscious is veiled by cultural ideologies that prevent free expression of what is meant to remain hidden and placed under the banner of normality prevail as uncanny experience that touches the security of the inner self. By means of media and visual presentations, the moving image that is of television imagery presents a tool for visual consumption of basically dissimilar images: from disturbing to non-disturbing, they all migrate in the same stream, with the disturbing (reference to the uncanny) acting in our favor through this dissertation. In order to discuss the hidden agenda of disturbing presentations and its effect and appeal, I rely on the theory of the safety valve discussed by Stephen Le Drew in his article *Jokes and their relation to the uncanny: The comic, the horrific, and pleasure in Audition and Romero’s Dead film* (2006) through his context of film studies, as this theory aims to explain the urge for horrific presentations within a hidden pleasurable experience.

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<sup>45</sup> Freud, Sigmund, Loc.cit. 241-274

## The Comic and the Horrific: A Thin Line

The connection between the unpleasant stimuli and their receiver can be interpreted while looking at a hidden line between what is considered horrific and what is considered comical. The comic or the joke according to the theory of Stephen LeDrew will serve essentially the same purpose as that of the horrific, which means aiding in demonstrating the similarities found between a generally positive concept (joke) and its negative counterpart (horror that identifies with the uncanny, as mentioned before by Freud).<sup>46</sup> In LeDrew's article titled *Jokes and Their Relation to the Uncanny: The comic, the horrific, and pleasure in Audition and Romero's Dead films* published in 2006 he states the following:

“Understanding the relationship between jokes and the uncanny, and the psychic mechanisms behind them, is the key to understanding the effects and appeal of horror” (LeDrew, 1, 2006). Continuing from Freud's mention of the negative, the uncanny research can benefit from the safety valve theory (in this case through film studies) as the horrific in LeDrew's case can be redirected as a mediator for a post-Freudian comprehensive reading of visual disturbance in contemporary television.

As the safety valve theory relies heavily on an internal (psychological) and external stimulus (visual and oral presentations), this collaborative effort proves the safety valve theory to be an undependable method to exploit in our thesis topic, as the use of disturbing television imagery and the viewer will substitute the important stimulus in discussing the topic ahead. A needed mention in this chapter is the reference of Freud when diving into the unconscious mind, as his elaborate presentation on the uncanny in 1919 will ease the link when contemplating a Freudian uncanny with a Freudian unconsciousness.

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<sup>46</sup> LeDrew, Stephen. “Jokes and Their Relation to the Uncanny: The Comic, The Horrific, and Pleasure in Audition and Romero's Death.” 2006. *PsyArtJournal*. 16 March 2014  
<[http://www.psyartjournal.com/article/show/ledrewjokes\\_and\\_their\\_relation\\_to\\_the\\_unc](http://www.psyartjournal.com/article/show/ledrewjokes_and_their_relation_to_the_unc)>.

In a psychological context, the individual is charged with hidden desires and beliefs, A matter of safely expressing these buried ideologies without the consequence of social critique gives a clear light for the safety valve theory. These desires and beliefs function differently between individuals but still align together under one roof known as societal rules and regulations.<sup>47</sup> I present a couple of examples concerning these unwritten rules: You are not allowed to be racist. You are not allowed to bully a disabled man. You are not allowed to judge a person's sexual orientation.

*The significant censor.* It all begins with the concept of “the dream-work” where Freud mentions that unconscious wishes are expressed in dreams<sup>48</sup>. According to LeDrew, that same process can be attributed to jokes (while I will not go through the mechanism of the process) as jokes, similarly, allows “otherwise unacceptable thoughts and wishes access to consciousness and verbal expression” as stated by LeDrew (2006).

Freud claims that jokes make possible the satisfaction of an instinct in the face of an obstacle that stands in its way.<sup>49</sup> This satisfaction comes courtesy of a wish fulfillment that is similar to dreams. And so, the obstacle which Freud mentions is the censorship which dreams and now jokes present themselves as a means to be granted access to consciousness.<sup>50</sup>

Freud posits that there is a rule that determines the yield of pleasure that a joke provides. This rule is founded upon the premise that there are thoughts or wishes originating in the unconscious against which there is an internal obstacle to its reaching conscious expression, and thus satisfying the wish (LeDrew 4, 2006).

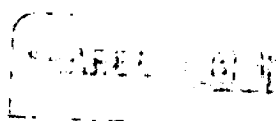
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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Freud, Sigmund, Loc.cit. 241-274

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.



According to LeDrew, the nature of the dream or the nature of the funny joke creates a distortion that is necessary in order to roam freely out of the conscious mouth. A dirty joke on sex for instance presents a break in an unconscious zone teeming with sexual fantasies, which with the help of the joke censor the intensity of the subject and grant access to the consciousness.

The significance of the censorship is its role as “a safe way of expressing unconscious instincts and wishes without undoing the fabric of civilization” (LeDrew 4, 2006). Still, the pleasure aspect of the joke does not rely solely on that inhibition. Nevertheless, it seems that while the chosen joke is being revised in the unconsciousness, “we can take pleasure in the thought that it conveys without the accompanying guilt” (LeDrew 4, 2006). So we tend to not find anything wrong with something that is clearly giving us pleasure. In this perspective, one must think about the emitter and receiver of the joke as two major players in this game of minds.

*Unexpected Pleasure.* Through the phenomenon of contemporary imagery, the shift in the interpretation of the safety valve theory will override LeDrew’s case of the joke and deliver a more focused attention on the visual disturbance (televised images). With the joke holding a lustful and/or hostile purpose, the link with the moving image through the contemporary television image exposure provides the joke with justification; imagery in general holds a similar state of coverage whether acting through an aggressive defensive exposure or simply aiming for attention-grabbing exposure. Whereas the introduction of the term ‘psychic energy’ in the discussion is to elucidate the “concept that sits behind the operation of the mind” (LeDrew 4, 2006) as LeDrew believes that psychic energy is expanded when dealing with thoughts and wishes that are normally inhibited. From the point of view of the emitter,

the tension is higher as his unconscious revision is to be presented in form and that form can manifest through televised imagery that is expressed by programs, shows, news, or ads.

Freud claims that aggressive tendentious jokes reveal a sadistic component in the creator that is more or less inhibited in real life (1905: 143). The "purpose" of jokes, then, is the acting out of aggressive, sadistic impulses which have no other avenue for expression; without these jokes as an outlet these impulses would be restricted to the unconscious (and might result in pathology or find some other means of expression) (LeDrew 6, 2006).

Thus the receiver experiences pleasure from "the liberation of psychic energy that was used for inhibition" whether by laughter, crying, fear or excitement, since the key component is the involuntarily transference of disturbance (the televised image) into the receiver's perspective.<sup>51</sup> As Freud claims, we did not expect this outcome from the emitter but rather had an indefinable feeling of some sort. We are aware that any image is plausible but it's a matter of when the emitter will hit us, the receivers, with such a punch. In addition, an infantile mode is presented by Freud to stress yet again that the infantile is the source of the unconscious which the emitter can utilize, as the emitter is possibly tapping an infantile mode of thinking that produces with the receiver some sort of pleasure as it passes by repressed childhood thoughts.

This play with hidden unconscious thoughts returning to surface again can be associated with the uncanny's return of repressed and surmounted desires and beliefs (familiarity). As the uncanny strikes discomfort and unease when in contact with disturbing

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<sup>51</sup> Freud, Sigmund, Loc.cit. 241-274



imagery, the link to the “economy of inhibition”, according to LeDrew, can be directed to the liberation of psychic energy that is translated into that feeling of eeriness we call the uncanny.

Perhaps we can extend this understanding of the comic to horror, where we also obtain pleasure from another’s suffering; the very fact that we take pleasure in the suffering of another reveals repressed sadism, or repressed aggressive drive; the “return” of this repressed sadism reminds us of the unconscious forces that we are subject to, and invokes the uncanny (LeDrew 6, 2006).

The horror which LeDrew relates to the joke can be directed to the uncanny that relies heavily on acts of disturbance and discomfort similar to that horror. And through visual uncanny presentations, the presented work is heavily calculated as a mean of censoring the intensity of the subject while treasuring that hidden unconscious thought that came into the open.

The presentation that the emitter is responsible for, whether comical or horrific, holds great value for the receiver as “The form conceals the thought and guards it against criticism from the censor” (Freud, *The Uncanny [Das Unheimliche]* 250, 1990). Here is where imagery must find a link between calculated exposure and great presentation. All in all, the safety valve, while discussed by LeDrew through films, aims at exercising a “safe” means of experiencing uncanny images. By channeling that same effect into the contemporary television, we can consider the safety valve theory is a tool for the contemporary mind in experiencing discomfort and unease in a hidden and sometimes transparent pleasurable manner, explaining the intricate result of pleasure that exists between an unpleasant stimulus (disturbing presentations) and its receiver.

In the next chapter, I will deal more with the presentation aspect through television that follows uncanny images in contemporary television while taking into account the shock that radicalizes what I call a culture of spectatorship.

## Chapter Three

### A Culture of Spectatorship

In this chapter, I will deal with the ever-changing contemporary surroundings and their impact on the disturbing image. Starting from media-driven images to a transition in the cultural perception, what I call 'a culture of spectatorship' is merely a showcase of the status that contemporary culture can embody following a repeated television exposure. This ideology will recall not only the pleasant but the unpleasant as well to benefit our study. In order to understand such ideologies, one must first attempt to identify the realm of entertainment that plays a major role in giving the televised image that extra "oomph" of exposure. So, this additional focus on the visual presentation gives birth to the shocking mechanism; the method of shocking with images deriving from their own surrounding culture attracts the viewer and places him in the seat of a spectator. And in doing so, this constant probing of the eyes appears to morph the cultural perception, as a new "culture of spectatorship" aims to define this contemporary frame. Here, the uncanny concept of disturbance starts to dust off its erstwhile image of repulsiveness and redeems itself under the mercy of contemporary imagery, hoping for a second chance at exposure.

## Channeling the Scheme of Entertainment

The analysis and criticism of imagery under the custody of contemporary culture, ushers us into television as a present-day popular device for image projection. Jaques Ranciere, in his book *The future of the image* (2009), embraces the notion of technological advancement, by giving the image the “freedom” to benefit from contemporary tools. With the assistance of technology, television is but one of the many tools of projection that advanced not only in resolution but in presentation as well.

Ranciere believes that image, in regard to its nature, gains more independence and can even reach extreme levels of exposure. The independence which Ranciere speaks of is more directed to the ease of transmission that the image gains and to fluidity in catching the picture as it hops in the wild from one screen to the other.<sup>52</sup> What prevails is a rise in the level of exposure, reacting to the status of the expandable image. The image stands as a reflective mirror of a cultural doctrine, reflecting on screens what is meant to present the essence of the bearing culture.<sup>53</sup> Close to its core are a set of unspoken beliefs that function within that frame and transport the image from a mere mimical reflection to a more retouched manifestation. The likes of a dictatorial political governance on the image can and will alter the reality of the presentation.

As an example, the broadcasting of war images on American television exposes the American soldier sympathetically while camouflaging whatever atrocity is happening behind the screen. Similarly, the subjectivity of the network, as in the example of the Lebanese Channel Al Manar (anti-Israeli), broadcasts images that reflect its own personal ideology. The social, religious and ethical beliefs of the country, as in the case of Saudi Arabia, present examples of other influencers to the outcome of the image. The major link between

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<sup>52</sup> Ranciere, Jacques. Loc.cit. 25-27

<sup>53</sup> Mirzoeff, Nicholas. Loc.cit. 20-35

these influences lands on the function of the image within a media-frenzy society.<sup>54</sup> Political, social, and ethical influences, while not in our focus, still function under that same roof of presentation from which the media find shelter, a roof that caters to the fast projection of content with focus even more on visual presentation.

Television stands between a “communication medium” and an “aesthetic object” on a bridge that is linked to cultural roots.<sup>55</sup> According to Horace Newcomb and Paul M. Hirsch, the nature of television whether as a transmitter of specific messages or as a medium for expressing ‘aesthetically shared believes’ finds neither to be governing. The concern is for the ‘dominant’ message,<sup>56</sup> What stands as an important aspect in television is one “dominant” message disguised in pleasant fictional entertainment.<sup>57</sup> Television positions itself in contemporary culture under the custody of pleasantly transporting the image to its receiver. Here the notion of entertainment comes forward to attract the viewer as the domain in which contemporary images function, positioning itself between the creator and the receiver of the televised images.

The creator behind the screen is in touch with how the receiver interacts with media whether as a passive spectator and/or as an active participant;<sup>58</sup> In the words of anthropologist Victor Turner, the creators are *bricoleurs* who respond to real events, to shifts in attitude and value, and always seek to combine cultural elements and create new meaning while taking into account technological shifts.<sup>59</sup> The creator behind the image opens the door for the receiver to indulge himself in “uncommon sense”.<sup>60</sup> The interest in plot, characters, shapes and colors is very appealing as it reflects the realm in which we allow our monsters to come

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Newcomb Horace; Hirsch Paul M. Loc.cit. 561-573

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Turner, Victor. The ritual process: structure and anti-structure. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co,1995. 160-179

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

out and play.<sup>61</sup> The culture of ‘common sense’ which the receiver takes shelter in is counteracted by that ‘uncommon sense’ found in the television.<sup>62</sup> The inspiration of the creator is morphed outside of its regular frame with the purpose of attracting the viewer while aiming for that *something*, mentioned before by Jacques Lacan,<sup>63</sup> in order to ensure the best results possible.

Entertainment in the frame of television derives from attracting the viewer through settings, plots and narratives defined by the screen. The fascination with that perfect face, body, house, life and universe entertains the viewer as he is distracted from the outside world and fills his brain with the world of television images.<sup>64</sup> Transportation to the other side occurs as the viewer is provided with amusement and enjoyment with a simple click of a button.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Newcomb Horace; Hirsch Paul M. Loc.cit. 564

<sup>62</sup> Turner, Victor. Loc.cit. 160-179

<sup>63</sup> Lacan, Jacques. “Literary Theory: An Anthology.” In *The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience*, by Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, 441-447. Blackwell, 2008.

<sup>64</sup> Mirzoeff, Nicholas. Loc.cit. 20-35

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

## A Shocking Mechanism

As the inspiration of the screen feeds on cultural chronicles, it must deploy realism.<sup>66</sup> For Jean Baudrillard, it happens to act upon preconceived models of entertainment that diminish authenticity and turn the image into a spectacle.<sup>67</sup> The spectacle is all about enjoying the show and a show requires a crowd that television attracts through its many methods of extravaganza. Attracting the viewer's eyes through shock is but one method of the television box that relates to the uncanny concept and disturbing visuals. Think about an image of a falling building; here the receiver is manipulated by images that prove shocking and yet attractive enough for his eyes to stay fixed and watch.

Disturbing visuals are one medium for inducing shock, as a natural catastrophe is heightened in plot and narration to create a perfect show-stopping number. Shocking the viewer with images of real-life disasters such as war, death, and famine are believed to shake the inner self and keep the soul vulnerable. This method came into being after World War II as the images of death were graphically portrayed in newspapers for the public to "take in the insanity" and its "outrageousness".<sup>68</sup> This method of shock is retaliated against by Susan Sontag in her book *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003) as she questions its mechanism in relation with the spectator.

With a frame of a strictly photographic aesthetic of death, Sontag disputes in the favor of the spectator as her question at whom such shock-pictures are aimed argues about the nature of the human who belongs to the educated class and is allowed a better treatment of exposure. Her in-depth interpretation on the intersection between spectator and representations of atrocity proves Sontag a reliable reference for the concept at hand. While the outline in which she questions disturbing imagery is that of war, the "image" as an entity

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<sup>66</sup> Poster, Mark. Loc.cit. 201

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Sontag, Susan. Loc.cit. 8-14



plays to our concern. The insanity of war generated the following ideology when reporting the monstrosities of the battle field: if the horror could be made “vivid enough”, the people would take in the insanity and its outrageousness,<sup>69</sup> and to prove a point or an ideology in time is to deploy shock to discipline the mind.

Under the custody of technology and cultural advancement, the photographic image of Sontag is raised and matched by televised images that still to this day deploy horror.<sup>70</sup> The culture of consumerism and entertainment picks up where Sontag left off and pushes the issue even further. This culture is reformed not only by anxiety but also by ideologies that enjoy disaster, gloat over horror and operate on the principle that “if it bleeds, it leads.”<sup>71</sup> Stunning the viewers with LIVE images popping out of the screens incarnates the shock in the form of a realistic entity.

No matter the amount of blur or the lack of it, the moving image fulfills its duty as a cultural educator that aims to inform and influence the viewer. And while it is noble in its role, its ideologies are inevitably touched by the power of consumer entertainment that coexists side by side with the anxious culture of the contemporary frame. What results, is a natural fragmentation of the shocking image heightened in plot and narration, creating a perfect show-stopping number.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Flaig, Paul. “Life driven by Death: Animation Aesthetics and the Comic Uncanny.” *Screen Journal* 54 (2013): 1-19.

<sup>71</sup> Ffytche, Matt. Loc.cit

## The Mutation of the Spectacle

Here we stand in a culture of spectatorship, a culture where the objects of contemplation are backed up by tools of great influence: big chunks of Imagery reflecting fear and anxiety are covered by a cultural layer, captured on televisions and broadcast around the globe in seconds. They flow around wrapped by the magic of the spectral. The new media shock, with its bedazzling look, requires us to rethink the uncanny concept. That strange, weird feeling when constantly watching images of death and famine, familiar to the self yet unfamiliar with the safety where lies the self, can be exhausting. That intensity in image projection and that constant probing of the eyes is bound to take toll. Here, a new issue emerges. In our culture of “spectatorship”, have we lost the power to be shocked? Sontag again will act as a reference for discussion as she asserts that disturbing images can stop to irritate our inner self following the “mutation in the sphere of culture”.<sup>72</sup> The mutation we speak of is a change in the perspective of the spectacle and its level of reception.

Media have trained the viewer to transform unintelligible realities into fiction.<sup>73</sup> Sontag mentions the example of 9/11<sup>74</sup> as the screen captured the planes slicing through the World Trade Center. Viewers later agreed that the scene was ‘unreal’, comparing it to an ‘action movie’.<sup>75</sup> The reception of the viewer placed him in the seat of a spectator attending the screening of an apocalyptic yet ultimately ‘harmless’ blockbuster.<sup>76</sup> Politics placed aside, events like these showcase the surreal dislocation from a culturally tensed reality. No pain is felt while no harm is done to the viewer. ‘Harmless’, Sontag calls those images. Victims of famine and war are people we do not know. We can’t feel their pain but only see their pain. This is not to say that these cultural products are utterly devoid of feeling but now are rather

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<sup>72</sup> Jameson, Fredric. Loc.cit. 13-20

<sup>73</sup> Sontag, Susan. Loc.cit. 25-50

<sup>74</sup> The September 11 attacks (also referred to as September 11, September 11th, or 9/11) were a series of four coordinated terrorist attacks by the Islamic terrorist group al-Qaeda on the United States in New York City, New York, and Arlington County, Virginia, on the morning of Tuesday, September 11, 2001.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. 19

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. 17

“free-floating and impersonal”.<sup>77</sup> They lie for a while and vanish later on. The whole atmosphere is characterized by a lack of depth and a flatness of some sort.<sup>78</sup> The erstwhile spectacle imagery appears to be changing.

Guy Debord in his book *Society of the Spectacle* (2000) states that the spectacle is “but a social relation among people, mediated by images”; the link of the self with the other functions under the medium of the image and what the image attempts to project. What gives the culture its new change of form is the lack of separation between ‘real life’ and the represented spectacle.<sup>79</sup> Debord reacts against the notion of the shocking image that forms the spectacle and condemns its tendency of appearing as essential. The conditions of the shock appear to mutate outside of its once natural position.

As the shift in the cultural perception comes into view, the culture of consumerism adds an extra layer of mutation. The ‘weight and seriousness’ of any image fade from honor and admiration as it stands ‘juxtaposed’ with the glossy image of advertisement.<sup>80</sup> The shiny glossy images function side by side with the rest. This contrast between two opposed imagery looks extreme yet both are turning the wheel of the cultural machine while fulfilling their contemporary occupation. The culture of consumerism is but an additional layer in the mutation of the spectacle.

We are getting accustomed to the shock. With screens everywhere, our eyes struggle to look away. Here the uncanny takes advantage of this cultural mutation. It starts by dusting off the previous image of repulsiveness and redeeming itself under the mercy of contemporary image hoping for a second chance at a modest exposure. Where the uncanny stands in its environment, it must make way through the force field of different cultural impulses. “From obscurity and sexually explicit material to psychological squalor,” yet

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Jameson, Fredric. Loc.cit. 13-20

<sup>79</sup> Debord, Guy. *The Society of the Spectacle*. New York: Zone Books, 1994. 62

<sup>80</sup> Sontag, Susan. Loc.cit. 27

Fredric Jameson in his book *Postmodernism* (1991) admits that no longer such inquiries scandalize and a new “depthlessness” finds its extension both in contemporary “theory” and in a whole new culture of the image. This era is fascinated by this whole “degraded” landscape of schlock and kitsch, according to Jameson. The uncanny in this case, comes to make its own addition to the mix as an extra layer to the mutation in the sphere of culture.

The following chapter introduces the new aesthetic as a response to the relation between the unpleasant stimuli of the television image and its receiver. The new is but a method of reading and processing the image as it stands now molded enough to grasp a disturbing uncanny concept.

## Chapter Four

### The Rise of a New Aesthetic

In this last chapter, the disturbing visuals of contemporary culture gain momentum and prevail in the name of new aesthetic. The uncanny aesthetic happens to rise under the notion of acceptance while utilizing the new aesthetic as its brand of appeal. It is now that a shift in aesthetics starts to grace this contemporary world, as a fascination with the ugly and the “negative aesthetic” takes center stage,<sup>81</sup> molding itself in the form of new aesthetics. Fast and with lots of background noise, that’s how the receiver processes information originating from the new aesthetic<sup>82</sup> as television acts out as its referential, owing to the role it plays in broadcasting and influencing cultural ideologies. Here, the uncanny is no longer grasped as it is but better yet as a new aesthetic covered by the security of the public approval of society’s aesthetic judgment to roam freely.

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<sup>81</sup> Mirzoeff, Nicholas. Loc.cit. 20-35

<sup>82</sup> Cloninger, Curt. Manifesto for a Theory of the “New Aesthetic”. 2012. 23 February 2014  
<<http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/manifesto-theory-%E2%80%98new-aesthetic%E2%80%99>>.

## An Uncanny Aesthetic

The technological and cultural surroundings have provided the uncanny concept with a better means of exposure (check previous chapters); allowing the uncanny to be referred to simply as a new aesthetic (a new visual phenomenon) requires a deeper theoretical study and is an exaggerated statement to say the least. But what the new aesthetic and the uncanny prove to function under is a theoretical frame, a frame which helps the uncanny concept to elevate its status and slowly rise under the notion of acceptance while utilizing the new aesthetic as its brand of appeal. This brand is what links the uncanny with the cultural and moreover societal field from which it will reason its transformation and existence as an aesthetic player in the contemporary frame. The uncanny concept when placed under the roof of new aesthetic does not act like a stranger.

In fact the return of the familiar, as one of its major traits is similar to the familiarity from which the new aesthetic derives its characteristic (not new) and as the uncanny's formality of reading and processing the image passes through a cultural context, the new aesthetic bases its ideology on the constantly changing cultural surroundings. In addition, the visual outcome is of great importance to the new aesthetic and similarly the uncanny stands on a parallel line (with what we mentioned earlier on the shock and the nature of attracting the viewer with a well-thought presentation) wrapped by a hidden tendency for addiction with similar ideologies that will be discussed later on in detail. Not too far does the uncanny stand from the criteria of new aesthetic as the new aesthetics' frame of function collects from the uncanny enough stamina to elevate the disturbing concept to a higher pedigree. Following the previous discussions, beauty can no longer be the only criteria of expressing this cultural aesthetic as disturbance has found its pathway under a new notion.

## The Presentation of a New Aesthetic

In addition to the way these uncanny images present themselves, the way we read them greatly impact the viewer's perception. Curt Cloninger in his essay *Manifesto for a Theory of the 'New Aesthetic'* (2012), believes that the only way to read is "acrobatically" where culture has even updated its reading method to better accommodate these new images. Fast and with lots of background noise, that is how the receiver can process information,<sup>83</sup> shocking information, such as the image of Dorothy, still lost or the-not-so-happy ending of a fairytale. Television is a major player and a big example of the rapid emission of information that according to Cloninger, "cannot be processed except as a function of peripheral seeing and distracted absorption". (2012)

The new aesthetic stands at a point in time where the chaos of juxtaposed images on television have become a normality for the viewer as he functions with, instead of against, that environment. As new aesthetic images present themselves in the form of "visual eruptions" of contemporary culture, the uncanny is but a reactionary function within that domain. The anxious world outside will not disrupt the anxiety of the world inside the television box. Through this ideology, these uncanny images are given a better chance for experience and exposure.

The shocking images mentioned in chapter three are now moving quickly and are a part of our system. The initiative to keep accepting these images is due to the fact that "we recognize ourselves in New Aesthetic images."<sup>84</sup> These images stand in between total familiarity and white noise,<sup>85</sup> while the recognition of the self is but "complicated, enmeshed,

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<sup>83</sup> Cloninger, Curt, Loc.cit.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.



Othered”<sup>86</sup> and through this state of getting accustomed to that environment, the shock starts to diminish or better yet becomes tolerable under the label of aesthetic judgment.

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

## Aesthetic Judgment

The public proves to be the only one who can firmly allow or dismantle the new aesthetic.<sup>87</sup> Don Ritter in *The Ethics of Aesthetics* (2008) declares that “aesthetic judgments are created by the fulfillment or lack of fulfillment of the aesthetic criteria contained within a person’s aesthetic perspective.” In this frame of culture, the public is the receiver and carrier of perspectives that could break or make the aesthetic experience.

According to Heidegger (1996), the task of making the uncanny disappear or thrive belongs to the ‘publicness’ and that is through the grasping of the surrounding reality that places the public in a safe, ‘being at home’ status.<sup>88</sup> The criteria placed by the public derive from initializing the uncanny as a natural phenomenon and part of the ‘normality’ that constitutes its safe environment. Safety, in this case, comes from getting accustomed to the surroundings<sup>89</sup> and implying that no harm can be done in the house one take shelter in. The cultural environment presents itself as the housing of ideologies held by the pillars of communal judgment.

With a focus on the digital aspect of the presentation, the visual eruptions of contemporary culture provoke a different perspective for the new aesthetic while imposing the uncanny concept as a reactionary function within that domain. Through a domain molded by the digital in its way of presenting and reading the image, the uncanny benefits and projects its presentation unto the public. It is that this public takes control as to whether to embrace or dismantle that new type of aesthetic. The conclusion that will follow will carry on the discussion and introduce the methodology of a tangible implementation to this theoretical exploration.

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<sup>87</sup> Masschelein, Annelien. Loc.cit. 125-136.

<sup>88</sup> Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1996.

<sup>89</sup> Cloninger, Curt, Loc.cit.

## Conclusion

This first part is an exploration of the unpleasant (taking the form of an image) and its function through psychological and cultural dimensions. The uncanny concept comes to label disturbing images as at once familiar and unfamiliar projections within the receiver's perception. Under the custody of contemporary culture, the uncanny was treated with many tools that designed a new perspective for the once psychological concept, as the uncontainable nature of its entity only proved an untouched potential waiting to be dissected and explored.

The influence of different cultural dialect gave the disturbing image a better means of exposure, while its ever-growing popularity proved hidden in the pleasurable psych of the viewer; with an over-exposure through technology and media; the once easily entertained culture is getting amused and becoming fond of the strange and weird television images. Thus a mutation in the sphere of spectacle gives access to the uncanny concept, to slowly rise under the notion of acceptance, while utilizing the new aesthetic as its brand of appeal.

***The frame of discussion.*** A look at the unpleasant stimuli from different contemporary visual angles such as psychology in Chapter One, the hidden pleasure in Chapter Two, and culture in Chapter Three developed the theoretical frame of this research, with the fourth chapter reformulating its function under a notion called new aesthetic.

A psychological concept at its core, the conceptualization of the uncanny capitalized on the "uncontainability" of the subject as it shifted from one cultural domain to the other while remaining rooted in theory. This constantly transitional route somehow stabilized its nature and reflected its inspirational characteristic as it grew within new disciplines yet remaining within Sigmund Freud's ideology. The position that the uncanny holds in contemporary culture through art instillations, Gothics, cyberpunks and animation to name a few, kept it away from sheer psychoanalytical criticism and raised the question of whether

that was ever its natural surroundings. The uncanny gains momentum as a concept in space due to its departure from the supernatural and its distinction as an unfamiliarity produced when confronted with unconscious thoughts. The route of the unfamiliar comes from the anxious culture that carries the uncanny concept, as the link with the disturbing image is but an inspiration from its familiar background and expressed by unfamiliar representations.

The uncanny's exhibition of disturbing and unfamiliar images can be interpreted while looking at a hidden line between what is considered horrific and what is considered comical. In doing so, the safety valve theory aimed to defend the horrific presentation masked by a hidden pleasurable experience. As jokes allows unacceptable thoughts to access the conscious mind, similarly through the notion of horror and the disturbing visual, television's burst of such atrocities calms the internal censor from its own conscious censorship. What prevails is a pleasure in anticipating and receiving uncensored thoughts without the effort of the mind in censoring what could be considered a crime of civilization.

A media-frenzy society is what inspires contemporary culture for channeling images that idealize the presentation and captivate the spectator, as under the custody of entertainment, contemporary media projects through the television box both natural and man-made imagery wrapped in media driven ideologies. The notion of attracting to the screen comes by technique of the shock; as a disturbing tool, it is still employed in favor of proving a point and disciplining the mind, while a rage in the cultural act of spectatorship appears to override its impact.

As we question the loss of shock in our world, the uncanny concept starts to dust off its former image of repulsiveness and redeems itself under the mercy of contemporary image, hoping for a second chance at exposure. No matter the importance of its concept, the seriousness of the contemporary image fades within the glossy image of heavy advertisement while a new era of spectatorship appears to benefit the uncanny concept. This juxtaposition is

crucial in molding the culture of spectatorship that got accustomed to the disturbing image while unaware of the status it acquired during the process; it stands naïve while craving the spectacle.

The theoretical frame of this research will act as a starting point to attain a more concrete evaluation in the form of a new aesthetic phenomenon. The focus on contemporary culture as a master puppetry for the uncanny elevates the notion to what is referred to as a “New Aesthetic”; looking at dissemination, uncontainability, surroundings and method of reading, the following criteria provided a theoretical reference for the uncanny concept as it populates the contemporary world. By using the subsequent points of discussion; environment, culture and the individual, the next step reinterprets the concept of the uncanny within a television contemporary frame, so as to show that the impact of many gears has indeed influenced and transformed its disturbing concept.

A fascination with the ugly appears to rise in the form of new aesthetics; with it, the “new” method of processing the contemporary image lays out the welcoming carpet for the negative aesthetic. Through a notion named the uncanny, beauty is no longer the only criteria for expressing this television culture, while the imposing “digital” on the contemporary culture provided the new aesthetic its theoretical debut.

## **Part II**

## Guide to Part II

As the unpleasant is labeled within the frame of a new aesthetic, through this part we attempt to condition and elaborate its presence. The intention is to discuss the new aesthetic's tangible status, by reading its position as a natural attribute of the contemporary frame in order to get a clear view of its grounded position in a television culture. Chapter Five explains the context of this research by reviewing the definition of the new while examining the exchangeable link with its environment. Chapter Six provides an engaging perspective on the relation that the new aesthetic holds with its technology counterpart through a contemporary frame of a visual culture. First we describe the parameters of technological advancement within the world of image projection and, second, we discuss the fast image projection and its impact on the new aesthetic. Chapter seven discusses the tangibility issue, in the perspective of the viewer, as it relies in particular on concrete television examples. The conclusion summarizes this research and outlines areas for future evaluation while recognizing the new aesthetic in its tangible status.



## Chapter Five

### The New Aesthetic: An Interchangeable Link with its Environment

This chapter presents a clear perspective on an interchangeable link between the new aesthetic and its environment as I explore the nature of the new aesthetic through a link with its former uncanny self and validate the uncanny's existential force as more than just an emotional aesthetic stemming from a stimulus. The new aesthetic presents various qualities inherited by the uncanny which attribute to its valued position in the contemporary television frame, with the likes of uncontainability, dissemination and familiarity that prove vital qualities in the link this new aesthetic makes with its environment. The culture that represents the surrounding environment proves to be as influential as its counterpart; in fact, with reference to Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*, the discussion gives a peek into the environment's natural attribute to accommodate the new aesthetic and the discussion throws a glance on the relation between the new aesthetic and its environment as it questions the fragility of its culture and what prevails as ramification on the new aesthetic.

## The New Aesthetic as a Modern Uncanny

The new aesthetic is a reference to a modernized uncanny that contributes to the process of revisiting familiar cultural antics and remixing them to fit with the new while under the custody of various modernized tools. I look at first so as to understand the nature of the new aesthetic, by referring back to its uncanny roots, to clearly grasp the new aesthetic's persona in parallel to its environment. I then link the uncanny with the new aesthetic while emphasizing inherited qualities that make for a clearer and more robust relation with its environment.

*Introduction to an Uncanny Aesthetic.* Three successive “Aristotelian models” discussed by Jan Niklas Howe, in his book *Familiarity and no Pleasure. The Uncanny as an Aesthetic Emotion* (2010), act as a standard concept of psychological aesthetics which rely on repetition, familiarity and recognition to imply positive “aesthetic” evaluations. The identification with this process acknowledges a pleasant emotion or better still a “positive bias” (Howe 55, 2010) recognition with reference to a chosen stimulus. In this dissertation, designing a new aesthetic from the uncanny's unpleasant nature implies the television screen acting as stimulus, while it follows a repeated exposure from the disturbing image.

But with the psychological uncanny standing familiar to a repressed self and projecting an unpleasant emotion, Howe's study argues that the “Aristotelian model” is indecisive by stating that “the uncanny permits no conclusions to be drawn regarding the group of aesthetic preferences that Darwin has labeled “love of the new” (Howe 57, 2010), and that, no matter the repetition, the uncanny's already familiar status cannot simply rely on the “Aristotelian model” for aesthetic approval but must be evaluated within its underlying

structure to let the concept slide onto ‘the plane of composition’ from where it was merely ‘the concept of an affect’.<sup>90</sup>

The review of the uncanny structure is important to help label visually disturbing images arising from contemporary television, by describing the conceptualization, dissemination and uncontainability that deem the uncanny an aesthetic composition ready to describe the image of war, horror, and death and by paving the way for a deeper interdisciplinary connection with the new aesthetic, away from psychology and within a rich environmental and cultural context.

*Conceptualization.* In his book *The Uncanny* (2011), Nicholas Royle emphasizes more than any other the undisclosed frame holding the uncanny concept, something that presents a loose end away from sheer psychoanalysis criticism. And while Anneleen Masschelein believes that the uncanny does not comply with the psychoanalytical domain and that “one may even wonder if this was ever the case” (Masschelein 131, 2012), both Royle and Masschelein help present its sheer “uncontainability”. The conceptualization of the uncanny marks its transition from a pure psychoanalytical-literary framework to a somehow stabilized concept. As this canonization calms the uncanny from the wrath of psychology specifics and reasons its operation as an independent concept, its nature spreads into various disciplines to which we direct with this dissertation into the art and design field.

*Dissemination and uncontainability.* As it stands uncontainable within its psychological habitat, the state of the uncanny is somehow enlarged through the art of dissemination as it associates with other fields while gaining from these encounters a degree of substantial modification. Books, films, art, all these forms of dissemination are part of the conceptualization process that informs us about an uncanny stepping away from a pure

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<sup>90</sup> Masschelein, Loc.cit. 125-136

psychoanalytical perspective into smaller yet variable frames. And it is the surrounding environment that transports the uncanny into new territories; Andrew McCann refers to the Freudian uncanny as “a culturally specific experience belonging to the subjective-aesthetic domain of a highly differentiated modern society” (McCann 140, 2003). Here the cultural domain holds lots of weight as a manipulator of the uncanny nature.

The whole act of conceptualization, dissemination and uncontainability validates the uncanny's existential force as more than just an emotional aesthetic stemming from a stimulus as mentioned by Howe in his book but rather as a concept of a wild force that we will guide and refocus on the television image with regard to the contemporary frame. As a self-sufficient concept described best by Annaleen Masschelein in her book *The Uncanny* (2012) it proves reliant on the surroundings for its processing power and with a better analysis of its environmental cultural background, Masschelein believes in a somehow familiar aesthetic response captured by none other than the uncanny's influence. What is to be acknowledged is an unpleasant concept with visible reflections of disturbing imagery whose function comes from familiar cultural dilemmas.

As a combination of psychological and cultural ruptures of political, social, and economic predicament, the cultural anxiety creates an extra layer for the uncanny concept to thrive. Culture and anxiety move along the same path that leads to an aesthetic response expressed following existential dilemmas. The likes of xenophobia, homelessness, immigration and trauma formulate the essence of an anxious society, while the dissolution of borders between countries enables the transition of this anxiety far above its boundaries and unto the discomfort of the televised image. This characteristic makes for an always available uncanny, unfamiliar with a stop sign and constantly morphing. Following its environmental

attribute, we will aim to find a habitat for the uncanny in the name of a new aesthetic and through the frame of television culture.

## The New Aesthetic Link with the Uncanny

To refer to the uncanny simply as a new aesthetic requires a deep theoretical interpretation and is an exaggerated statement to say the least, but what the new aesthetic and the uncanny prove to function under is a common functional frame. I look at first at the new aesthetics' functional frame within a contemporary world and then create a link with the uncanny aesthetic as an interpretative paradigm for disturbing yet familiar visualization. What prevails is an uncanny that elevates its status and slowly rises under the notion of recognition while utilizing the new aesthetic as its brand of appeal.

***Definition of the new.*** The notions of remixing, the digital and familiarity will assist in defining the new aesthetic with regards to its functional frame:

First, the definition of the new, in aesthetic, takes on limitless interpretations<sup>91</sup> with the dilemma of whether the new aesthetic is considered to be something actually “new” or if it relies on the notion of recycling of old concepts.<sup>92</sup> In his essay “The New Aesthetic and The Framework of Culture” (2012), Eduardo Navas, a researcher in the crossover of art and media in culture, believes that the new aesthetic is not necessarily new but relies heavily on the notion of remixing as he states that it is “not so much a movement, but arguably more of an attitude towards media production and computing processes that are embedded in every aspect of daily life” (Navas, 2012), arguing on the nature of an aesthetic that sits between old and new.

Secondly, while arguing on the concrete definition of the term, Navas admits that no tangible definition exists, but a clear reference to the ‘digital’ is required. In the past, the term *new* was employed to introduce innovative activities and by looking at the present status of the images from the contemporary frame, these present an “aesthetic defined by or influenced

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<sup>91</sup> Navas, E. Loc.cit.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

by computer technology's increasing role in daily life" (Navas, 2012). With a technology that opens the possibility for a greater innovational force, the new aesthetic does not try to present something 'innovative'.<sup>93</sup>

Thirdly, by acknowledging the recycling of material (in terms of digital aesthetics) and as it function while remixed from an original presentation, the new aesthetic maintains a familiarity with its conventional form. While the recycling or remixing of elements surpasses its regular norm of taking and combining, similar to revisiting an old picture and retouching it through digital computerized tools, the new aesthetic functions on a rather conceptual basis<sup>94</sup> so as to reintroduce concepts, rather than only technical images, into a digitalized world.

*Association between the uncanny and the new aesthetic.* The three notions for describing the new aesthetic merges with similar uncanny facets as when we place the uncanny concept under the roof of new aesthetic it does not act like a stranger; the uncanny's formality of reading and processing the image through a cultural context is reminiscent of a new aesthetic whose ideology of remixing images comes from inside that same culture. In fact, this re-introduction of the uncanny in a computing processing culture brings with it a new field for the uncontainable concept to impose its authority within a digitalized concept where the new aesthetic communicates a similar "digital" attribute. Furthermore, the return of the familiar as one of its major traits is similar to the familiarity from which the new aesthetic derives its characteristic, as the uncanny's familiarity to the psychological self, parallels the new aesthetic presentation which holds an already familiar form that is far from being utterly new.

Following the nature of the uncanny that links with the disturbing, beauty can no longer be the only criteria for expressing this cultural aesthetic, as disturbance has found its

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.



pathway from within its surrounding environment, under a notion named the new aesthetic. This brand is what links the uncanny with the cultural anxious societal field from which the uncanny will reason its transformation and existence as a new aesthetic player in the contemporary frame, while revisiting contemporary disturbing images of war, death, and horror under a brand new computerized aesthetic we refer to as the new aesthetic.

Not far, the uncanny stands from the criteria of new aesthetic as the new aesthetics' frame of function collects from the uncanny enough stamina to elevate the disturbing concept to a higher pedigree. What we start to refer to as the new aesthetic is but a modernized uncanny reference to the process of revisiting familiar cultural antics and remixing to fit with the new under the custody of various modernized tools.

## The Environment's Link with the New Aesthetic

While the new aesthetic benefits from the uncanny's attribute within its environment, this next section is a depiction of the environment's position with regards to the new aesthetic and a hint at the operational nature of a contemporary environment in the prospect of embracing this new aesthetic. Through Guy Debord's *The Society of The Spectacle* (1994), the discussion gives a peek at the intricacy of contemporary culture; the latter reveals a culture very well enchanted by the surrounding spectacle of innovation and depicts a fragile culture, very well mesmerized by the glossy and is ready to embrace the new aesthetic.

*A Rupture in the Culture* In order to get a better perspective from the environment's side and the link it holds with the new aesthetic, I concede to Guy Debord who in his book *The Society of the Spectacle* (1994) implies that it is of culture's nature to constantly alter its perception and embrace the new, as Debord refers to this change within the notion of fragility. This theoretical approach proves Debord a reliable reference as it paves the way to understanding the functioning work place of the new aesthetic, and even though his analysis takes place solely in the world of the arts, I approach the latter with a theoretical explanation of what may link up with the television aspect of the new aesthetic.

As Debord refers to culture as "the general sphere of knowledge and of representations of lived experience within a historical society" (Debord 181, 1994), what he first acknowledges is this power of unity; there exist an accumulation of agreement and communal approval on a common cultural language as this commodity attributes the power to "generalize". But what he also admits is a negation in this unity that appears best throughout a contemporary frame. This negation is linked to a fracture in the common language as the struggle "is predicted entirely on the permanent victory of innovation" (Debord 180, 1994). The struggle between tradition and innovation appears to stimulate the

core of the culture that he believes leads to a reformatory internal cultural development. The spectacle is to blame for this rupture as Debord adds that in thus gaining its independence culture embarks on “an imperialistic career of self-enrichment” (Debord 181, 1994), and what is understood falls in the frame of a culture which appears to be very well enchanted by the surroundings. The culture is in fact mesmerized by the spectacle and the technological innovative power of the glossy image, a notion believed best captured within the contemporary frame.

*From Fragility to Tangibility* As Debord continues the discussion deeper into the negation and consumption aspect of a culture, I refer back to that surprisingly delicate culture that feeds on innovation; the culture that represents the surrounding environment proves to be as influential as its counterpart and what stands clear is the new aesthetic benefiting from the culture’s attribute within the surrounding environment. The interchangeable relation between the new aesthetic and its environment implies an important ideology of fragility in accordance with the environment and paves the way for a tangible new aesthetic; the commodity of a fragile culture makes it easy to accommodate the new aesthetic into its environment and reveal the first division in making a tangible new aesthetic.

The discussion throws a glance at the relation between the new aesthetic and its environment as a mutually influential alliance, the new aesthetic functions with contemporary culture, under inherited uncanny qualities that make for a digitalized presentation that is as much uncontainable and free as it is familiar to its environment. No matter its diversified nature, that environment is also part of an anxious culture that unsurprisingly reflects its anxiousness within contemporary image projections. The environment seems accepting of these new imagery implications presented by the new aesthetic; the fragility of such an environment and its innovative presentation makes way for a significant new aesthetic that

functions interchangeably with its surroundings and arranges an inherent status within its contemporary frame.

The following chapter examines the contemporary tools for reading the new aesthetic and the significance it adds to the overall experience.

## Chapter Six

### Reading the New Aesthetic

This chapter provides an engaging perspective on the functional aspect that the new aesthetic holds with its technology counterpart through a contemporary frame, in the shape of a disturbing image and its relation with television. This exchange between the two is best described at first by the parameters of technological advancement within the world of image projection with reference to Jacques Ranciere; what technology grants is a means of diverse and easy exposure for the contemporary image where the new aesthetic holds an appearance nevertheless under the notion of disturbing visualization. These images have the chance to be roaming free and can even reach extreme levels of exposure due to the power of television, yet the message behind them is directly reminiscent of the surrounding culture that translates best through a media-frenzy society. The implication of such matters impels the new aesthetic to morph with, instead of against, its culture to the point of creating a solid ground for itself, acting out as nothing more than a natural aesthetic within a culture of spectatorship.

## Technology and the Image

What the contemporary frame adds is a mutually engaging relation between technology and the image, with Jacques Ranciere writer of *The Future of The Image* (2009), stressing that the image creation is as important as its tools as we regard a disturbing image in the name of the uncanny that makes use of technological tools to reassess itself within the frame of a new aesthetic.

To begin with, it is important to single out the notion of image and the notion of technology, to later introduce the two concepts together within the frame of discussion. Jacques Ranciere in his book *The Future of the Image* (2009) acts as a reference for both concepts due to his valuable reflection on the image creation and its technological tools. First, the image concept refers to a set of functions that mediate the interpretation of a thought; the likes of writing a poem and interpreting its essence into a painting reflects a deep relation between the image and the word according to Ranciere. Second, he believes the technology concept takes on the role of mechanism that helps improve the operation and its interpretation by means of a digital surrounding.

Through the contemporary frame of discussion, a mutually beneficial relation exists between technology and the image, as Ranciere stresses that the image creation is as important as its tools. It is Through Ranciere's approach while in his field of contemporary art that he emphasizes important theoretical notions that take into account many modern strategies linked to the creation prospect; one of those notions embraces modern-day media as open to exploration and nevertheless unlimited, providing the image with endless possibilities while utilizing the power of technology as in the example of computer electronics. And to recognize the image in a contemporary frame is by all means limitless in count, mainly where this rapid advancement in digital media is clear, with globalization and communication technology easily allowing the observer to face countless images.

While Ranciere stresses that the image creation is as important as its tools, the significant tools in the form of technologies come to provide opportunities for experimentation and unlimited potential; Ranciere even asks the readers in his last chapter if “...some things are Unrepresentable.”<sup>95</sup> As he answers a definite no, another author named Raymond Williams in his book *Television: technology and cultural form* states that technology’s significance lies in its uses<sup>96</sup> and agrees with Ranciere in giving worth to technological implementations within the world. In redirecting the notion of *image* to a new aesthetic, I must place the concept of disturbance in the spotlight as one is to consider that, similar to other aesthetics, these images have the chance to be roaming free and can even reach extreme levels of exposure. Yet it is with Annaleen Masschelein in her book *The Unconcept: The Freudian Uncanny in Late-Twentieth-Century Theory* (2012) that we refocus the attention on the aspect of the disturbing as she believes that, through an uncanny representation, we can make use of technological tools to translate conceptual images and benefit artists and designers alike.

With reference to the image of an uncanny whose nature is uncontainable, is somehow familiar and is linked with disturbing visualizations as previously reflected in chapter five, Masschelein mentions novel implications for technology that deploy the human figure as a natural attribute of the uncanny image. (This conceptual ideology is clearly reminiscent of the irrepressible power of the uncanny, the familiarity with the body and the disturbing visual outcome from a technological fusion). Dolls, body parts, waxworks with enhanced humans by technology and implants, and even aesthetic surgery are the results of the uncanny concept and its technological counterpart (this leads to the uncanny valley which will not be discussed in this thesis.) And while Masschelein discussion fuses the uncanny

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<sup>95</sup> Ranciere, Jacques. Loc.cit. 25-27

<sup>96</sup> Williams, Raymond. “Television: Technology and cultural form.” *Psychology Press* (2003): 5.



concept with technology, it is in this dissertation that we resume our analysis while taking in consideration the new aesthetic in the form of a modernized uncanny and its technological counterpart that we analyze in the form of the television field.

## The Message

While the ease of exposure within a contemporary environment proves the image to be diversified in nature, the implication of such an act is not done yet as Jacques Ranciere refocuses our attention to the message that is also influenced by technology's exposure. What he states is that "images and their connections to a narrative or affective end occupy the center stage" (Ranciere 27, 2009) as he implies that with this digital world a better means of attention is given to the message behind the image and one ought to take advantage of the situation to transmit whatever is intended.

Ranciere discusses a new sort of montage, a montage based on similarities and correspondences that reveal a mysterious element rather than dialectical clashes that are rather obscure and secretive. Meaning that, even though the presentation is easily rendered, it transmits a not so direct message but rather one that is familiar and camouflaged in order for the receiver to locate its essence not in the retina but in the brain,<sup>97</sup> encouraging new analysis to tackle the nature behind the image in favor of the shallow aesthetic presentation that becomes possible with technology.

Through this dissertation, the focus on the television culture turns our attention to the message behind the new aesthetic image. The analysis does not fall too short of Ranciere's approach when contemplated through the same notion of familiarity and camouflaged ideologies. With the new aesthetic, as an image of disturbance, I argue in favor of the message that directs back to an anxious culture; by referring to images that are actually mirroring the bearing culture<sup>98</sup> such as images of war, death and atrocities, they reflect a familiar essence similar to the one discussed by Ranciere, yet it comes camouflaged by media beliefs that transport the image from a mere mimical reflection to a more retouched manifestation. The message behind the new aesthetic thus cannot be pinned down as easily as

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<sup>97</sup> Ranciere, *Ibid* 115.

<sup>98</sup> Mirzoeff, Nicholas. *Loc.cit.*

its disturbing image presentation, which is relying on television as one medium to transport the image to its receiver, but it paves the way for a needed look into the functioning television culture to truly comprehend the essence of this new aesthetic.

## Reading through Television

The implication of technology on the new aesthetic is studied within the television sphere and what may link to understanding its repercussion with a tool that portrays excessive imagery and channels a new way of reading the new aesthetic with regards to a surrounding culture that translates best through a media-frenzy society.

Fast and with lots of background noise is how the receiver processes information originating from the new aesthetic,<sup>99</sup> as television acts out as a referential, owing to the role it plays in broadcasting and influencing cultural ideologies, acting as a cultural agent.<sup>100</sup> Curt Cloninger in his essay *Manifesto for a Theory of the 'New Aesthetic'* (2012) believes that the only way to read is “acrobatically” where culture has even updated its reading method to better accommodate these new images. Fast and with lots of background noise is how the receiver can process information,<sup>101</sup> and even shocking information.

As new aesthetic images present themselves in the form of “visual eruptions” of contemporary culture, the uncanny is but a reactionary function within that domain. The shocking images of an anxious society move quickly and are a part of our system while television is a major player and a big example of the rapid emission of information that according to Cloninger, “cannot be processed except as a function of peripheral seeing and distracted absorption” (Cloninger, 2012). The initiative to keep accepting these images is due to the fact that “we recognize ourselves in New Aesthetic images” (Cloninger, 2012) as these images stand in between total familiarity and white noise;<sup>102</sup> This recognition of the self in the new aesthetic is but “complicated, enmeshed, Othered” (Cloninger, 2012), yet reflective from our own environment. Through this ideology, the new aesthetic is given a better chance

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<sup>99</sup> Cloninger, Curt. Loc.cit.

<sup>100</sup> Fiske, John. *Some television, some topics, and some terminology*. London: Routledge, 2001. 2-21.

<sup>101</sup> Cloninger, Curt. Loc.cit.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

for experience and exposure while an additional contributor in the form of entertainment, from within the culture itself help influences the way we interpret its reading.

A media-frenzy society is what inspires contemporary culture to channel new aesthetic images that idealize the presentation and delight the spectator. Under the custody of entertainment, the anxious world outside will not disrupt the anxiety of the world inside the television box but better still use the power of technology to morph it. The terminology that is “the spectacle” (Sontag 61, 2003) gives us a look at the nature behind the screen which in reality must deploy realism, yet it happens to act upon preconceived models.<sup>103</sup> The likes of settings, plots and narratives defined by the screen diminish authenticity and turn the image into a spectacle.

For Jean Baudrillard, a French sociologist and cultural theorist, the media delivers a heightened dose of reality which is referred to in the book of Mark Poster *Jean Baudrillard Selected Writings* (2002) as “a spectacle of exposure”.<sup>104</sup> As under the custody of entertainment, contemporary media project through the television box both natural and man-made imagery that are wrapped by media-driven ideologies. The creator behind the screen is in touch with how the receiver interacts with media whether as a passive spectator and/or an active participant.<sup>105</sup> In the words of anthropologist Victor Turner, the creators are *bricoleurs* that respond to real events, to shifts in attitude and value, and always seek to combine cultural elements and create new meaning while taking into account technological shifts.<sup>106</sup>

The creator behind the image opens the door for the receiver to indulge himself in “uncommon sense” (Turner, 1995). The interest in plot, characters, shapes and colors is very appealing as it reflects “the realm in which we allow our monsters to come out and play” (Newcomb Horace; Hirsch Paul M 564, 1983). The culture of ‘common sense’ which the

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<sup>103</sup> Poster, Mark. Loc.cit.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Newcomb, Horace; Hirsch, Paul M. Loc.cit. 561-573

<sup>106</sup> Turner, Victor. Loc.cit. 160-179

receiver takes shelter in is counteracted by that 'uncommon sense' found in the television.<sup>107</sup> The inspiration of the creator morphs outside of its regular frame with the purpose of attracting the viewer. The notion of shocking the spectator is one method that both links with the new aesthetic disturbing visuals and draws inspiration from none other than the anxious culture.

Disturbing visuals are one medium for inducing shock, as the likes of a natural catastrophe is heightened in plot and narration to create a perfect show-stopping number. Shocking the viewer with images of real life disasters such as war, death, and famine are believed to shake the inner self and keep the soul vulnerable. At least that is what Susan Sontag argues in her book *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), as she questions the photographic aesthetic of death, The insanity of war generated the following ideology when reporting the monstrosities of the battlefield: if the horror could be made "vivid enough", the people would grasp the insanity and its outrageousness.<sup>108</sup> To prove a point or an ideology in time is to deploy shock to discipline the mind. But here is where the new aesthetic comes to argue against that ideology while it relies on the television and its rapid method of image projection within a media-frenzy society.

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Sontag, Susan. Loc.cit 20-50

## The Mutation of the Spectacle

The new aesthetic stands at a point in time where the chaos of juxtaposed images on television becomes regularity for the viewer as he functions within that environment. Here is where I attempt a better reading of the new aesthetics' position with regards to contemporary tools and their implication on the mutation of the spectacle.

The culture of spectatorship is a term that references the culture's position to a media-frenzy society. Add to it the television projection of fast images that molds within the technological magic of the spectacle and one questions the position of the new aesthetic as to where it stands as a visual adaptation. The disturbing visuals arising from contemporary television, that strange, weird feeling when constantly watching images of death and famine, familiar to the self yet unfamiliar with the safety where lies the self, can be exhausting. That intensity in image projection and that constant probing of the eyes is bound to take toll as Sontag asserts that disturbing images can stop to irritate our inner self following the "mutation in the sphere of culture".<sup>109</sup>

The mutation we speak of is a change in the perspective of the spectacle and its level of reception. The chunk of images arising from the anxious culture appear to be harmless,<sup>110</sup> as Sontag explains by means of referring to the projected images as situational aspects of people we do not know. The addition of the glossy media image, whether in presentation or coverage, makes for these images being indifferent. This is not to say that these cultural products are utterly devoid of feeling but better still are now free-floating and impersonal. They lie for a while and vanish later on. The whole atmosphere is characterized by a lack of depth and a flatness of some sort while the culture of consumerism adds an extra layer of mutation. The "weight and seriousness" of any image fade from honor and admiration as they

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<sup>109</sup> Jameson, Fredric. Loc.cit. 13-20

<sup>110</sup> Sontag, Susan. Loc.cit 8-14

stand “juxtaposed” with the glossy image of advertisement,<sup>111</sup> the shiny glossy images function side by side with the anxious image.

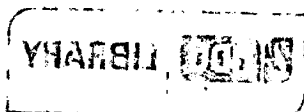
This mutation of the spectacle is a glimpse on what entails a reading of the new aesthetic by a way of approaching contemporary culture with a proper sense of the aesthetic and conceptual stakes of its mixed modes. The new aesthetic is but a response to the technological takeover of our culture and in both literal and empirical explanation, the surrounding environment holds a mutation in the visual adaptation; Fredric Jameson in his book *Postmodernism* (1991) admits that no longer such inquiries scandalize and a new “depthlessness” finds its extension both in contemporary theory and in a whole new culture of the image.<sup>112</sup> Jameson reminds us of the new aesthetic’s uncontainability as it morphs with its culture to the point of creating a solid place for itself within the television culture.

This sort of tangibility and acting as a natural attribute of the surroundings requires a concrete investigation of this new aesthetic, which I will attempt in the following chapter through an observational study of a televised example.

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid. 27

<sup>112</sup> Jameson, Fredric. Loc.cit. 13-20





## Chapter Seven

### The Individual

While the new aesthetic as a phenomenon attempts a higher degree of tangibility and the contemporary frame of environment and culture provides its motives for embrace, it is the individual, or better yet the viewer, who has the task of making the new aesthetic thrive. That is according to Heidegger (1996), who grants the public, in the position of a viewer, the ultimate power of whether to embrace or dispel such visual formalities. Through that ideology we can contemplate an actual television example from the new aesthetic category and analyze its projection in order to show tangibility. In the perspective of the viewer, the individual's approach functions under the notion of feeling at ease and safe with disturbing visuals, as if the new aesthetic phenomenon, in the example of the cartoon, is already integrated in his system, so that we detect and point to visible traits in a different oblivious visual example (broadcasting news). Following the discussion, the new aesthetic labels itself as a tangible entity through direct and indirect visual projections that survive on the verge of a contemporary television presentation.

## Safe within his Environment

The tangibility status of the new aesthetic, within the television sphere, entailed a needed analysis of both its environment and functioning culture. From a fragile culture ready to embrace the new aesthetic to an overexposed television image within a consumerist and spectatorship society, what the latter provided is an interchangeable relation that impacts as much the new aesthetic as the surroundings. Here is where the focus retaliates on the individual; in its position as a viewer, we can contemplate a projection of the new aesthetic onto the television screen and criticize this projection in order to show tangibility.

It is the individual, or better yet the public, whose status as a viewer, promotes a better understanding with regards to the recognition of the new aesthetic. While Zuzanna Dziuban mentions the importance of the culture when discussing *Incorporating the Uncanny, as a Cultural Experience* (2012), as she implies the power of the uncanny as covered by the security of the society,<sup>113</sup> it is Heidegger's input (1996) that insinuates the task of making the new aesthetic disappear or thrive as a task that belongs to the publicity.<sup>114</sup> The criteria placed by the public derive from initializing the new aesthetic as a natural phenomenon and part of the 'normality' that constitute its environment. This normality redirects to grasping of the surrounding reality that places the public in a "being at home" status<sup>115</sup> while the notion of safety, comes to imply that no harm can be done in the house one takes shelter in.

With the reference of the notion of safety; a safe individual finds shelter within the house he builds, so the new aesthetic presents itself as an attempt for a new housing ideology held together by contemporary television environmental and cultural pillars. As the frame of safety engages both the individual's surroundings and his psychological nature (uncanny nature), it attempts a link with the tangible status of the new aesthetic; in fact a brief on the

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<sup>113</sup> Dziuban, Zuzanna. Loc.cit

<sup>114</sup> Heidegger, Martin. Loc.cit

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

safety valve theory gives a glimpse on the psychological nature of the individual with regards to the new aesthetic in general and to disturbing images in specific. As the environment and culture proved ready to embrace the new aesthetic (refer back to chapters Five and Six), the latter gains better concrete status that reflects back unto the viewer getting accustomed and even finding a safe and pleasurable means for experiencing the disturbing images in the form of new aesthetic experiences.

*A safety valve theory* The moving image that is of television imagery, presents a tool for visual consumption of disturbing visualizations and the theory of the safety valve discussed by Stephen Le Drew in his article *Jokes and their relation to the uncanny: The comic, the horrific, and pleasure in Audition and Romero's Dead film* (2006) defends the urge for horrific presentations as a hidden pleasurable experience. What we refer to as the new aesthetic is but a modernized uncanny reference to the process of revisiting old antics and remixing to fit with the new under the custody of various modernized tools.

In terms of the uncanny concept, the experience links to “unconscious desires and beliefs” (Freud, *The Uncanny* [Das Unheimliche] 15, 1990). Through uncanny work, “repressed and surmounted desires” (Freud, *The Uncanny* [Das Unheimliche] 16, 1990) produce that discomfort, that aspect of the “frightening” we term the uncanny. Through visual elements, the psych of the individual is probed by images that stir inner desires hidden by a cultural unconsciousness. The unconscious is veiled by cultural ideologies that prevent the free expression but what is meant to remain hidden and placed under the banner of normality prevail as uncanny experience that touches the security of the inner self.

The uncanny's exhibition of disturbing and familiar images can be interpreted while looking at a hidden line between what is considered horrific and what is considered comical. As jokes allows unacceptable thoughts to access the conscious mind, similarly through the

notion of horror and the disturbing visual television's burst of such atrocities calms the internal censor from its own conscious censorship. What prevails is a pleasure in anticipating and receiving uncensored thoughts without the effort of the mind in censoring what could be considered a crime of civilization. All in all, the safety valve aims at exercising a "safe" means of experiencing disturbing experiences. The safety valve theory is a tool for understanding the contemporary mind in experiencing discomfort and unease in a hidden and sometimes transparent pleasurable manner when in contact with disturbing images or better yet the new aesthetic.

*Safety within the self* This hidden pleasurable aspect discussed by LeDrew (2006) is but a glimpse at the psychology of the individual face-to-face with unconsciously adjusting to the nature of horror and jokes. As the tangibility of the new aesthetic finds refuge within its environment and culture, LeDrew's approach adds to the mix an important psychological reference to the notion of safety as this safety within the self stands as the result of anticipating and receiving uncensored or better still disturbing visual material without disrupting the internal sensor of the individual.

When that sensor comes reformed by the surrounding technological environment and its ever fragile culture of consumerism and entertainment, it is the television which is taking the pressure off the viewer and broadcasting disturbing imagery that stops to irritate but rather satisfy. This satisfaction refers back to Susan Sontag in her book *Regarding the Pain of Others*, where she blames the eyes' "indiscriminate lust", as she claims "the appetite for pictures showing bodies in pain as keen, almost, as the desire for ones that show bodies naked" (Sontag 3, 2003). Add to that the agitated environment and the fragile culture, and the new aesthetics' discussion starts to make sense within its contemporary frame.

## A Path to Tangibility

To question the link of evaluating the tangible aspect of the new aesthetic by means of its contemporary surroundings, and to fully abide by the theoretical methodology, require a concrete model from the television screen. As it is not enough to simply present a television example portraying the many qualities of the new aesthetic phenomenon, my hypothesis argues the following: examining a conscious and direct case of an extreme new aesthetic presentation, and offsetting its projection unto an indirect and unconscious case of a new aesthetic presentation, prove the new aesthetics' tangibility and portray its transcendence from a foreign act to a natural safe act.

First, what is meant by a conscious and direct case revolves around a clearly visible moving image with new aesthetic characteristics. One example will be a black comedy cartoon. Second, what we refer to as an unconscious and indirect case revolves around a hidden representation of the new aesthetic within another moving image in the example of broadcast news. Third, uncovering traces of the new aesthetic within an oblivious example (broadcasting news) implies that the new aesthetic is actually tangible while acting as a natural attribute from the contemporary frame of television. The normality of the new aesthetic in television projection in both conscious and unconscious presentations and its connection with the environment and television culture refers back to that safety notion with the viewer and validates its acceptance and innate nature.

To attain such a goal, we first begin by reformulating the characteristics of the new aesthetic phenomenon, second by choosing examples from the television frame of discussion and third by creating the needed link in order to prove the new aesthetic tangibility.

### *1. Characteristics of the New Aesthetic*

To identify with the new aesthetic phenomenon, several characteristics, gathered from the television culture and its environment, are recognized within four representational elements: *Distortion of reality, ethical sentiments, aesthetics* and *humor*. As each key term refers to a set of actions, varying from strictly visual (image) to what functions underneath the visual (substance), the latter providing clear indication signs to the new aesthetic disturbing nature. It is important to note that the four acts function together within the television body, and each assists the other in order to outline the frame that is of the new aesthetic phenomenon. And while the new as a phenomenon or an ideology can be translated through other fields such as installations, furniture, and graphics, it is within a television example that we interpret its nature.

#### Distortion of Reality:

Inside that act, the new aesthetic portrays an alternative reality, whether through exaggeration or through camouflaging the subject (that can take the form of an image). In both cases, the issue of familiarity is present; while distorted from reality, the resulting image (in our case) retains a reference to its familiar self akin to the familiarity found in the uncanny concept as mentioned in Chapter Five. With the new aesthetic acting as a modernized uncanny, the notion of remixing, as mentioned before by Eduardo Navas, relies on reworking (getting inspired by) an already present act and modifying its presentation, hence the constant return of the familiar. The distortion of reality is then a rework of an existing disturbing reality unto a newly camouflaged presentation.

### Ethical Sentiments:

The issue of sensitive material functions along a new aesthetic whose representation is disturbing. Disturbance, as a key indication to any element (visual element) that introduces controversial acts whether for entertainment or reporting purposes, functions on a “shocking” bases to emotionally impact the viewer; from taboo and embarrassing material to unordinary situations, the new aesthetic (in the form of the moving image) idealizes these presentations and functions in its favor. As mentioned in Chapter Six, as the television screen is responsible for these images (whether in political and social lanes) the culture of spectatorship functions in favor of that atmosphere. The fact is that when the shock intensifies, the emotional response from the viewer, whether positive or negative, translates as short, brief and limited, implying a diminutive response to the disturbing.

### Aesthetics:

The visual presentation of the new aesthetic gets its inspiration from the psychological uncanny. The weird, strange, and disturbing act as references to a modernized uncanny whose presentation, even though extreme, refers back to a psychological familiarity. The new aesthetic provides these horrific images with a new perspective and transforms their role. In the eyes of a new aesthetic, these images no longer present atrocity but rather function on similar bases as the beautiful. We can't live without them, we are used to them, we even crave them as mentioned in Chapter Three. The disturbing is then a natural part of the moving image that both attracts and disgusts.

### Humor:

The funny is an essential part of the new aesthetic in order to minimize the intensity of the disturbing. As mentioned in Chapter Two, humor may function within two levels' one is a



comical visual representation (a funny image) and the other is a contextual comical presentation (a funny scenario). In both cases, the humor aspect of a moving image assists in reconstructing the intake of the disturbing, by so that the psychological self unintentionally experiences the discomfort without the sole burden of the disturbing.

## 2. A television Example

Through this dissertation, the new aesthetic presents itself in the form of disturbing imagery deriving from the television sphere. A televised example that depicts an extreme case of new aesthetic through cartoon animation will exhibit a clear and direct presentation of the four characteristics mentioned previously. According to IMDB an online database of information (related to films, television programs, and video games, including cast, production crew, fictional characters, biographies, plot summaries, trivia and reviews), the *Marvelous Misadventures of Flapjack* follows “The comical seafaring adventures of a young, enthusiastic boy, his pirate captain mentor, and the talking whale that raised him from birth” (IMDb, 2014). Often referred to as “gross-out humor and black comedy” (Chdr, 2014), the show’s content usually goes by on over-the-top animation style and clever sound effects while emphasizing overly dramatic storylines (see Fig.2). To help evaluate the new aesthetic, two episodes are referenced, with each one adding to the discussion the needed analysis to clearly reflect on the four new aesthetic characteristics.



Figure 2 Three screenshots from the show showing the main characters

*The episodes.* The first episode titled *Something's a Miss*, which originally aired on June 11, 2009 on Cartoon Network (see Fig.3), sees Flapjack continually getting mistaken for a girl (see Fig.4) so he and Captain K'nuckles attempt to literally “man him up”, only to discover that his voice is the problem. This episode is characterized by a sexual identity crisis that adds to the already disturbing presentation through a contextual storyline that involves a man with a girl’s voice (see Fig.5), a marriage proposal between Flapjack and another boy and transgender surgeries (see Fig.6).



Figure 3 The intro screen from the first episode

Figure 4 A screenshot of Flapjack mistaken for a girl

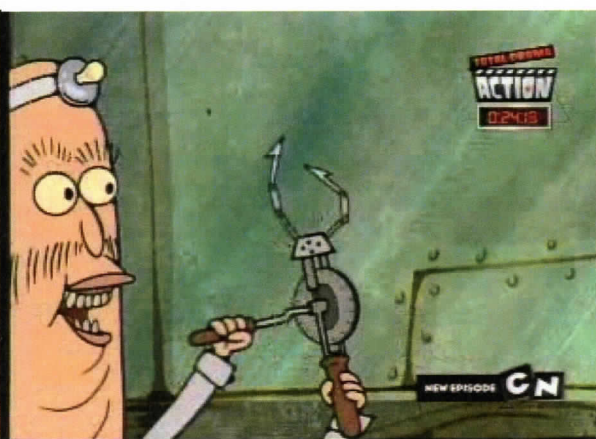


Figure 5 A screenshot of a “man with a little girl’s voice”

Figure 6 A screenshot of Flapjack attempting surgery

The second episode titled *Who let the cats out of the old bag's house?* which originally aired on August 16, 2010 on Cartoon Network (see Fig,7), sees Flapjack causing an infestation of non-lucky cats in Stormalong (see Fig,8), leaving him and Captain K'nuckles to fix the problem (see Fig,9). This episode is characterized by an imposing disturbance in visuals that involve continuous appearances of “the cat with no eye balls and a razor mouth” (see Fig.10).

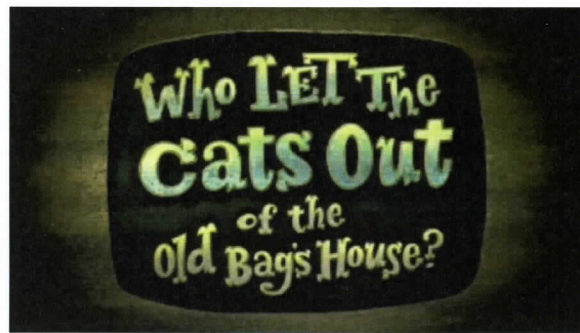


Figure 7 The intro screen from the second episode

Figure 8 A screenshot of Flapjack and the cat

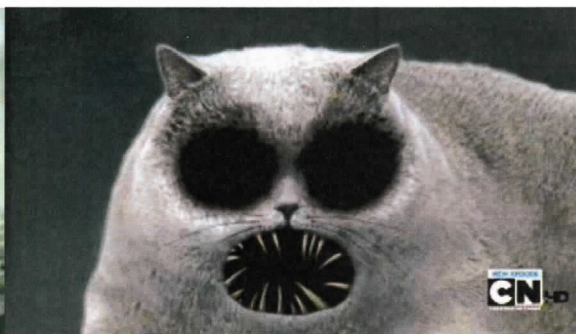
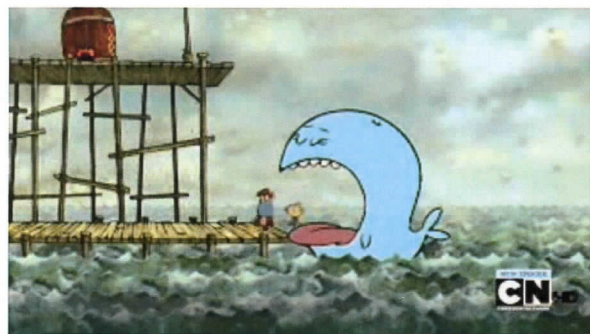


Figure 9 A screenshot of Flapjack, bubbie and K'nuckles

Figure 10 A screenshot of the cat

### 3. Acting out the new aesthetic

The following analysis is a glimpse on the new aesthetics' representation within a non-realistic depiction, through a chosen animation that acts upon a heavy case of extreme uncanny aesthetic. As the individual molds within the contemporary environment and its television culture, the route for a tangible new aesthetic requires but an additional analysis in

regard to its possible tangible status, which is by attempting a link with a rather realistic image projection. It is when the gathered patterns of thoughts merge within a more realistic platform and provide a more condensed evaluation of the real transformative force that is the new aesthetic that we acquire the possibility for a serious outlook on its tangible self.

From a direct approach to rather unconsciously acting out the new aesthetic, this is where my findings merge. It is with this intention that we welcome the findings from a direct conscious state to a rather indirect and unconscious state of perception by stating that the moment the new aesthetic projects itself into something real, it gains tangible characteristics.

The non-realistic representation of the new aesthetic is but an extreme depiction not standing far from an exaggeration and an over-the-top illustration. This characteristic is clear in “The marvelous misadventures of flapjack” where the depiction of disturbing imagery portrays detailed and even horrific images; the example of a cat with no eyes and a razor mouth is a staple for the episode *Who Let the Cats Out of the Old Bag’s House?*. As for when the issue of sexual identity comes to worry young Flapjack’s head, the show dives into sensitive and controversial material very much instinctive with the nature of the episode *Something’s a Miss*.

In addition, a humoristic veil tops these traits which camouflaging the intensity of the horror; something already mentioned by Stephen LeDrew in his article *Jokes and their relation to the uncanny: The comic, the horrific, and pleasure in Audition and Romero’s Dead film* (2006) which implies an intricate relation between horror and the joke. In the light of our discussion, this new aesthetic example relies, or better still, functions within the tri-force that is of a contemporary culture, the environment and the individual. With that being the case, a clear example from the television frame references the cartoon animation as an example that addresses directly the viewer. Consequently the nature of a new aesthetic may

lie within another television type so as that once its nature appears to parallel indirectly with a different example, the new aesthetic attains a tangible status.

According to Laura Scholars and Joseph Turo in their article *Video Cultures, Television Sociology in the "New TV" age* (2006), the study of the television medium within a cultural approach "gives analytic emphasis to the expressive and the symbolic dimensions of television" (Grindstaff 112, 2006). What the two authors imply is a link to the television effect in producing programming that in return produces social representation from its surrounding.

In order to reflect the cultural representation of the disturbance that trails the new aesthetic, I will attempt a similar reflective method between the already discussed animation show and a non-animation show. Broadcasting news as a contemporary televised program of its own comes to reflect a concealed performance of the new aesthetic, with a link to projecting disturbing imagery while influenced from the surrounding culture, makes for the News show a close contender to discuss the issue at hand.

### ***Analyzing the link***

In order to acquire a new aesthetic representation from the category of *Information* as referenced by Nikos Metallinos in his book *Television Aesthetics: Perceptual, Cognitive and Compositional Bases (Routledge Communication Series)* (1996), I first examine the new aesthetic characteristics through the animation example and I then attempt to mirror those traits unto the general frame of the broadcast news show. This theoretical discussion of projection into an unconscious reality as it links to the perception of the viewer attempts to provide the new aesthetic with its tangible characteristic as an already existential force.

Four new aesthetic representational elements come to underline the animation show: *Distortion of reality, ethical sentiments, aesthetics and humor*. While each links up with a

characteristic from the new aesthetic, the four function on account of a culture of entertainment and fast image projection, a ready to embrace environment, and a familiar individual getting accustomed to the disturbing visual.

### *Distortion of Reality*

On television, an inevitable act of distortion is visible within animation shows, as what *The marvelous misadventures of Flapjack* and others alike portray are scenarios of distorted yet familiar realities. In our example, the creator Thurop Van Orman aims to reflect his own real life story through his work,<sup>116</sup> yet it is through a distorted reality that he engages the viewer into his world of talking whales and strange adventures. Many elements from the show reflect an alternative to a rather grander realistic entity as when examining this distortion through specifics; the likes of candy throughout the show act as a familiar reference to alcohol.<sup>117</sup>

This distortion of reality through animation links to the new aesthetic by means of remixing and endless possibilities; it is within the context of broadcasting news that the viewer appears to face a distortion of the projected television reality. When the reported news comes remixed by the power of entertainment, what is then an *informative* section is also influenced by “TV’s capacity to entertain arising from its ability to transport viewers into an imaginary world”, as Percy H. Tannenbaum a social science researcher implies in his book *The Entertainment Functions of Television* (2014). Linked to the broadcast news’ ability to remix the reported news whether for entertainment purposes or even political affiliation purposes, the new aesthetics’ remixing provides endless possibilities for the television screen as similar to an animation show that alters reality while maintaining its fair dose of familiarity.

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<sup>116</sup> Lange, Ariane. *Inside The Marvelous Mind Of Thurop Van Orman*. 16 September 2014. 15 January 2015 <<http://www.buzzfeed.com/arianelange/thurop-van-orman-flapjack-cartoons#.yukVrEMwYA>>.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

### *Ethical sentiments*

The storyboard from *The marvelous misadventures of Flapjack* deals with some sensitive material that leads us to the aspect of ethical sentiments as an additional representational element of the animation show. In the form of uncomfortable situational discussions and in the episode *Something's a Miss*, the animation cartoon includes sensitive material that may or may not emotionally link with the viewing public and this can be seen within the new aesthetic function of controversial and sensitive material projection in a count of the different layers of the contemporary frame.

While reporting the everyday news, it is through the broadcasting news show that a similar approach can be visible. Subsequently, what stands similar to the animation is the overwhelming touch of a culture of entertainment' "to the degree that TV has repositioned the news as entertainment, this represents a crucial change in the way it is gathered, presented, and perceived by the public" (Tannenbaum 237, 2014). For instance, through the likes of war images that stand sensitive in nature, the power of politics comes to flow through a veil of entertainment while influencing new types of shows that are purely news satire as "The Colbert Report"<sup>118</sup> for example. Yet Tannenbaum continues that "what is informative for one person may be merely entertaining for another" (Tannenbaum 237, 2014); the reception of information is different between individuals and Susan Sontag adds that the reflected emotions are either way free floating as they lie for a while and then vanish later on, giving the all-important disturbing image a momentary sense of compassion.

### *Aesthetics*

A staple for the new aesthetic characteristic comes in the form of disturbing visuals as the cat with no eyes in the episode *Who Let the Cats Out of the Old Bag's House?* is a clear

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<sup>118</sup> The Colbert Report is an American late-night talk and news satire television program hosted by Stephen Colbert that aired on Comedy Central

representation of the unusual and weird visuals arising from the animated show. These strange images provoking discomfort take into account natural everyday elements and are reworked with the purpose of emphasizing a notion, shocking or simply entertaining.

Broadcasting the news is not far from an excellent example for reporting shocking visualizations. With Sontag's reference of shocking the viewer, a culture of consumerism and entertainment evokes that notion with Tannenbaum stating that "TV news' appetite for striking visual imagery makes it inevitable that suitable material should be manufactured for it" (Tannenbaum 235, 2014). It is a clear reference to the audience's position within contemporary television and very much in tune with the aesthetical perception of the new aesthetic as "The audience expects drama and excitement from the news" as the former deploys shocking visuals into its culture of spectatorship.<sup>119</sup>

### *Humor*

The notion of the joke is an important inhibitor for the viewer as Stephen LeDrew argues in favor of the comical as a safe means for experiencing uncanny images. *The marvelous misadventures of Fapjack* functions through a two-sided direction within the joke and the horror as the receiver faces disturbing visuals yet censored by the funny nature of the animation show. According to LeDrew, it all goes back to experiencing discomfort and unease in a hidden and sometimes transparent pleasurable manner when in contact with disturbing images or better yet the new aesthetic.

This two-directional route finds a similar depiction within the broadcast news when viewed as a merely representational frame of a set, news anchor, cameras and lighting. "Because news shows are paced, balanced, orchestrated, and packaged according to the rules of show business, they fit smoothly into TV's fantasy world," according to Tannenbaum

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<sup>119</sup> Tannenbaum, Percy H. Loc.cit. 228



(2014), and as the transmission of the news comes packaged within a television ambiance, it is here that humor amends itself.

When reporting the atrocity of the world, “The limited length and episodic character of newscasts makes it difficult to achieve dramatic impact with any individual news item.” (Tannenbaum 228, 2014) What is then reported as an outbreak of Ebola while showcasing images of suffering people is then followed by a less enticing news segment. This sudden shift in context, whether in the story, the news anchors’ own reaction or by advertisements, creates this contradiction that embodies a comical representation of contemporary television and its juxtaposition with the glossy image.

### *Discussing the results*

This theoretical discussion portrays a somehow representational aspect of the new aesthetic through a realistic image projection deriving from the same television as the animation show. Following the discussion, the new aesthetic labels itself as a visible entity by a direct and indirect projection of disturbing imagery that survives on the verge of a contemporary television culture. While direct in its presentation, the animation show successfully portrayed the new aesthetic characteristics and with an indirect or better yet unconscious presentation, the broadcast news still reflected characteristics of this new aesthetic. The moment that this aesthetic entity finds itself projected unto the viewer (directly or indirectly) within its television culture says a lot about its raw substantial power. What this entails is an already vital presence of a new aesthetic essence within contemporary television that by highlighting this transcendence gathers fundamental ground and presents itself as a tangible entity within its contemporary frame.

This notion of tangibility cannot stand affiliated with the new aesthetic without a clear mention of the environment, culture and individual’s effect from within the contemporary

frame of discussion. The whole discussion proves a sort of readiness from the three variables, where reading these type of images found in the animation shows through the scope of new aesthetic helps deploy its new perspective as a tangible force. And what this entails for designers and artists alike is a new perspective towards images labeled as weird, strange and different and a glimpse on possible ramifications within contemporary image making.

## Conclusion

I have argued that the new aesthetic phenomenon is a natural attribute of the contemporary frame as I present an aesthetic labeled as disturbing, in its conceptual and literal presentation, which holds a tangible position within its environment, its culture and its receiver. This new aesthetic is the result of examining a fresh theoretical view within a psychological concept while under the custody of a contemporary frame. From the realm of psychology to that of imagery, analyzing the uncanny through a defined frame that is of contemporary television culture enabled a new perspective for the Freudian concept and helped design the uncanny into a tangible new aesthetic. The Identification of this new aesthetic by means of its television persona implies that the recognition of weird and strange imagery links to natural underlined connections between the outside and the inside world of the television screen.

This connection identifies, first, the environment and its operational nature in embracing this new aesthetic, followed by a look at the functioning of the television culture through a media-frenzy society and lastly through the public's approach in acting safe within that aesthetic. The study of what is referred to as disturbing, weird and strange is but a glimpse at providing a re-reading of these images in reference to the contemporary frame of discussion.

In particular, the existence and rise in popularity of televised images that depicts disturbing visuals to the spectator is researched against its uncanny nature, surrounding culture and environment, where the impact generates a designing of this uncanny into a new aesthetic phenomenon. It is an introductory to a new world of contemporary image-making and to a new aesthetic that provokes unfamiliarity in its visual presentation yet imposes familiarity in its context due to its link with the surrounding cultural anxiety of death, war and atrocities.

With three theoretical cases of environment, culture and individual we analyze the personality of this new aesthetic and what it entails for it to be evaluated as tangible through an acknowledgement of its natural attribute of the contemporary frame.

*The environment.* The new aesthetic attributes its position, in the contemporary environment, to a psychological concept in the name of the uncanny. To refer to the uncanny simply as a new aesthetic requires a deeper theoretical study and it is an exaggerated statement to say the least, but what the new aesthetic and the uncanny prove to function under, is a theoretical frame. While The uncanny aesthetic presentation is an interpretative paradigm for disturbing yet familiar visualization, the new aesthetic is a reference to a modernized uncanny that attribute to the process of revisiting familiar cultural antics and remixing them to fit with the new while under the custody of various modernized tools (television acting as one of those tools).

What prevails is an uncanny that elevates its status and slowly rises under the notion of recognition while utilizing the new aesthetic as its brand of appeal. The connection the new aesthetic makes with the uncanny emphasize inherited qualities of uncontainability, dissemination and familiarity that prove vital qualities in the link this new aesthetic makes with its environment. And through Guy Debord's *The Society of The Spectacle* (1994), the discussion gives a peek into a susceptible environment; the latter reveals a culture very well enchanted by the surrounding spectacle of innovation and depicting a fragile culture very well mesmerized by the glossy and fitted to recognize and embrace the new aesthetic as an innate concept.

*The culture.* The implication of technology on the new aesthetic is studied within the television sphere and what may link to understanding its repercussion to such a tool, a tool that portrays excessive imagery as it channels a new way of reading the new aesthetic with regards to a surrounding culture that translates best through a media-frenzy society. What

technology grants is a means of diverse and easy exposure for the contemporary image where the new aesthetic has an appearance nevertheless under the notion of disturbing visualization. These images have the chance to be roaming free and can even reach extreme levels of exposure due to the power of television, yet the message behind them is directly reminiscent of the surrounding culture that translates best through a media-retouched society. The new aesthetic stands at a point in time where the chaos of juxtaposed images on television becomes regularity for the viewer as he functions with, instead of against, that environment. The implication of such matters intends the new aesthetic to morph with, instead of against, its culture to the point of creating a solid ground for itself, acting out as nothing more than a natural aesthetic within a culture of spectatorship.

*The individual.* To recognize the new aesthetic within a frame of tangibility, the focus retaliates to the individual in the position of the viewer as the one who can firmly allow or dismantle the new aesthetic while basing its count on concrete examples from the television culture and the surrounding environment. Feeling at ease in the contemporary house one built, sets a starting point for the new aesthetics' embrace, as this clear indifference and state of safety is then evaluated within a natural unconscious-indirect presence of the new aesthetic phenomenon.

The former analysis of the inside-outside world of television image helped initiate four new aesthetic characteristics: *Distortion of reality, ethical sentiments, aesthetics* and *humor*, the four functions in account of a culture of entertainment and fast image projection, a ready-to-embrace environment, and a familiar individual getting accustomed to the disturbing visual. The theoretical discussion portrays a representational aspect of the new aesthetic (cartoon) through a realistic image projection (broadcasting news) deriving from the same television as the animation show. The moment that this aesthetic entity finds itself unconsciously projected within its television culture says a lot about its raw substantial

power. What this entails is an already vital presence of a new aesthetic essence within contemporary television that by highlighting this transcendence into an indirect presentation, it gathers fundamental ground and presents itself as a tangible entity and reminds us of its natural attribute within the contemporary frame.

The new is all about accepting moving images that reflect disturbance while referencing its functional frame to acknowledge its presence, through an innate nature, and acting as part of a bigger phenomenon, that through this dissertation is referred to as new aesthetic. The scale of this issue is extensive and multifaceted even at this thesis level. To generate achievable strategies and development targets with regards to the new aesthetic, there is need for more studies to allow further assessment of local dimensions of the subject. With reference to the outline that follows this conclusion, the exploration of a new aesthetic throughout this thesis is an introductory to a bigger and wider issue where the new can be investigated above this descriptive research and within quantitative methods that future research strategies can assist in attaining this goal.

## Outline



The following outline is a representation of a functioning system that initiates the examination of the uncanny within its contemporary frame; this functioning system is structured by retaliating the natural attribute of the aesthetic of the uncanny image. This system identifies a consequent set of points, where each attempts to acquire characteristics from which we reason the presence of a new type of aesthetic.

*Re-contextualizing the Uncanny: Conceptualization, Dissemination and Uncontainability.*

By transitioning from a pure psychoanalytical-literary framework to a stabilized concept on its own, the uncanny marks an important step in its conceptualization. And as it associates with other fields, the state of the uncanny is somehow enlarged while gaining from these encounters a degree of substantial modification. According to Anneleen Masschelein, the uncanny brings together new production principles and merges them with theoretical discourses, from gothic and cyberpunk to art installations and animation, as this dissemination of subfields recreate what the uncanny is mostly famous for its uncontainability. This provides a preliminary perspective on what underlies the new aesthetic by channeling its uncanny nature and its correspondence to fit within the frame of the new.

*Uncanny and New Aesthetic: A Familiar link.* The uncanny's familiarity to the psychological self parallels with the new aesthetic's ideology of remixing already familiar forms. The return of the familiar is then a major trait that links the uncanny with the new aesthetic.

*Uncanny and New Aesthetic: A digital link.* The re-introduction of the uncanny in a computing processing culture brings with it a new field for the uncontainable concept to impose its authority within a digitalized concept where the new aesthetic communicates a similar "digital" attribute.

*Fragility.* Embarking on a career of self-enrichment according to Guy Debord, where the culture gains independence from traditional ideologies and follows the innovative power of the glossy image, best acknowledges the commodity of a fragile culture in accommodating the new aesthetic into its environment.

*Technological tools.* As Jacques Ranciere stresses that the image creation is as important as its tools, the disturbing image embraces modern day mediums as open to exploration and nevertheless unlimited, providing this image with endless possibilities while using the power of technology to reassess its effortless exposure within the frame of a new aesthetic.

*The message.* A better means of attention is given to the message behind the image according to Jacques Ranciere, as with a digital world one must take advantage of the situation to transmit whatever is needed. The disturbing image comes camouflaged by media beliefs that transport it from a mere mimic reflection to a more retouched manifestation, thus encouraging new analysis to always tackle the nature behind the image in favor of its shallow aesthetic presentation.

*Reading the message.* Fast and with lots of distraction is how the receiver processes information and even visually disturbing information. Curt Cloninger argues that contemporary culture has updated its reading methods to better accommodate these images. Through this ideology, the new aesthetic is given a better chance for experience and exposure while an additional contributor in the form of shocking entertainment helps influence its interpretation.

*The mutation of the Spectacle.* The viewer's response with the chaotic juxtaposed televised images of horror and advertisement creates a sort of regularity. As Susan Sontag asserts that disturbing images can stop to irritate our inner self following the mutation in the sphere of culture, she refers to the impact of projected disturbing imagery as free-floating and impersonal where the atmosphere is characterized by a lack of depth and a flatness of some sort.

*The recognition of the new.* Feeling at ease in the contemporary house one built sets a starting point for the new aesthetic's embrace. This normality redirects to grasping the surrounding reality that places the public in a "being at home" status while the notion of safety, comes to imply that no harm can be done in the house one takes shelter in. The moment that this aesthetic entity (now home), finds itself projected by the public unto its own culture through concrete television examples says a lot about its raw substantial power.

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## Appendices



## Appendix 1

### An experiment to understand viewer's feedback from new aesthetic images

In order to gather patterns of thoughts that helps recognize the new aesthetic within a frame of tangibility, I aim to study the overall impact of the public in view of a new aesthetic; the studied variables gathered with the assistance of an environmental psychologist in order to assess the experience range from *Interest, novelty/familiarity, emotional effect* to *reflection/interpretation*. By addressing these notions and particularly the novelty/familiarity variable, we can expect a better understanding of the individual's connection with the new aesthetics, a connection that functions within the neutrality of the individual in contrast to the projected disturbing imagery. This neutrality can be later interpreted within a frame of normality towards such disturbance that implies for the contemporary individual a safer relation in the midst of these images.

#### *Instruments measuring overall impact*

Through this dissertation, the new aesthetic comes in the form of disturbing imagery deriving from the television sphere. A carefully chosen televised example that depict an extreme case of new aesthetic through cartoon animation presents itself unto the test subjects, with a set of questions that ranges from television influence to personal reflection. This analysis utilizes questionnaire data collected from arts and design individuals by means of watching two consecutive episodes of *The Marvelous Misadventures of Flapjack* cartoon show.

*The questionnaire.* The scale of audience impact follows three categories (see Appendix 1); the first is introductory to the test subjects and their position towards television influence, the second part is a scale that represents the impact following the experience, while the third part is the reflective outcome from the screening. As the dataset is divided into three categories, the focus on the second part allows for a better contextual analysis as it allows the data to be

converted into a mean and reflected on a scale from 1 to 5. The four psychological variables of *Interest, novelty/familiarity, emotional effect, reflective interpretation* reveal an overall impact following the screening. From a negative (1) to a positive (5) denominator, we can expect to find a neutral impact if the mean is close to (3) as this scale acts as experiencing a neutral attitude towards these moving images.

### ***Describing the measurements***

*Participants.* An experimental study was conducted with fifteen individuals, randomly chosen but belonging to the Arts and Design field. With 13 female and 2 male, 11 of them come from a design background, 3 of them come from an architectural background and 1 of them comes from a purely artistic background. 12 of the participants are aged between 18 and 28 while 3 of them are aged between 29 and 40. Following a conscious understanding of the designer's reaction to this presentation gives the subject of disturbing imagery a re-reading and a new method of analytical critique that is aimed for any individual in the arts and design field, to benefit from understanding and utilizing such disturbing visuals in the name of a new aesthetic.

*Questionnaire.* Each respondent watched two simultaneous episodes of the chosen cartoon and filled out a three-part questionnaire, see appendix 1. First, respondents were asked to evaluate the level of frequency in watching television and to rate the level of influence on the viewer. These two questions served to focus attention on the participant's background concerning the television subject. The next group of questions assessed the way in which certain aspects of the screening left impact on the participants. Subsequently, each indicated to what extent they responded with 22 statements regarding their experience on a negative and positive scale of 1 to 5, (1) as close to a negative appraisal while (5) as close to a positive appraisal, all the while channeling (3) as neutral. The majority of these items were generated

by the author and an environmental psychologist after an extensive literature review and were used to assess the degrees of Interest (4 items), the degree of novelty/familiarity (5 items), emotional effect (2 items) and reflection/interpretation (11 items). In addition, respondents were asked to indicate from a group of 16 terms the words that best describe their results from this experience as the former served to focus attention on the participant's outcome regarding the screening.

To gather patterns of thoughts that helps recognize the new aesthetic within a frame of tangibility, a necessary connection must function within the neutrality of the individual in contrast to the projected disturbing imagery. This neutrality can be later interpreted within a frame of normality towards such disturbance that implies, for the contemporary individual, a safer relation in the midst of these images. I describe the results of each part of the questionnaire, by calculating an average that relates to the overall impact of the cartoon unto the participants.

*Part1:* On the basis of the first part of the questionnaire, the average variable linked to watching television in table 1, is the denominator "moderately often", as 7 out of 15 chose this measure as their answer. 4 participants watch television "very often" followed by 3 out of 15 who chose "Extremely often". While 1 participant checked out television "slightly often", everyone seemed at least in tuned with the television world as none responded with "not at all often".

| Television watching variables | Number of People |
|-------------------------------|------------------|
| Extremely often               | 3                |
| Very often                    | 4                |
| Moderately often              | 7                |
| Slightly often                | 1                |
| Not at all often              | none             |

**Table 1 the average variable linked to watching television**

As for the following question regarding the television influence, and with an average of “very influential”, 9 out of 15 participants agreed on that, while 3 individuals described it as “Extremely influential” and “moderately influential”. According to table 2, we expected to find a certain popularity when it comes to television as a contemporary tool of image projection; our results showed a predictable outcome necessary for implying a readiness to dive in the world of new aesthetic.

| Television influence Variables | Number of People |
|--------------------------------|------------------|
| Extremely influential          | 3                |
| Very influential               | 9                |
| Moderately influential         | 3                |
| Slightly influential           | none             |
| Not at all influential         | none             |

**Table 2 the average variable linked to television influence**

*Part 2:* I performed a confirmatory factor analysis using a scale formulated to measure the four variables: *Interest*, *novelty/familiarity*, *emotional effect*, *reflection/interpretation*. The scale estimates the relationships between a variable and a participant, and simultaneously tests the impact behind these items. This part of the questionnaire permits a better contextual analysis as it allows the data to be converted into a mean and reflected on a scale from 1 to 5. An overview of the items retained in the model can be found in table 3.

| variables                        | S1  | S2  | S3   | S4   | S5  | S6  | S7   | S8  | S9  | S10  | S11 | S12  | S13 | S14  | S15  | Total | Total/5 |
|----------------------------------|-----|-----|------|------|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|------|-----|------|-----|------|------|-------|---------|
| <i>Interest</i>                  | 4.5 | 3.5 | 4.25 | 4.25 | 3.5 | 4   | 3.25 | 3.5 | 1   | 2.75 | 3.5 | 3.75 | 3   | 3.75 | 2.75 | 51.25 | 3.4     |
| <i>Novelty /Familiarity</i>      | 3.8 | 3.2 | 3.2  | 3    | 3.2 | 3.8 | 3.6  | 2.8 | 2.2 | 3    | 3.2 | 3.4  | 3   | 3.2  | 3.2  | 47.8  | 3.2     |
| <i>Emotional Impact</i>          | 4   | 3   | 4    | 4.5  | 2.5 | 3.5 | 4    | 3.5 | 1   | 3.5  | 4   | 3.5  | 3.5 | 3    | 3    | 50.5  | 3.4     |
| <i>Reflection/Interpretation</i> | 3.5 | 2.8 | 4.2  | 3.4  | 3.5 | 3.3 | 3.5  | 3.1 | 2.5 | 2.9  | 4   | 2.9  | 2.9 | 3.4  | 2.9  | 48.8  | 3.2     |
| <i>Total</i>                     | 3.9 | 3.1 | 3.9  | 3.8  | 3.2 | 3.6 | 3.6  | 3.2 | 1.7 | 3    | 3.7 | 3.4  | 3.1 | 3.3  | 3    | 49.5  | 3.3     |

**Table 3 the results of the measured variables**

The data of each of the 15 participants is calculated on a scale over 5 based on the four variables, while the average of each individual is then reported within one total calculated variable.

The variable *interest* has an average of (3.4) over (5) and ranging from (1) as estimated on subject 9 to (4.5) as estimated on subject 1. According to table 3, the results of the variable *interest* imply a neutral response to the screening with an 18% tendency towards a positive appraisal.

The variable *novelty/familiarity* has an average of (3.2) over (5) and ranging from (2.2) as estimated on subject 9 to (3.9) as estimated on subject 1 and 6. According to table 3, the results of the variable *novelty/familiarity* imply a neutral response to the screening with a 14% tendency towards a positive appraisal.

The variable *emotional effect* has an average of (3.4) over (5) and ranging from (1) as estimated on subject 9 to (4.5) as estimated on subject 6. According to table 3, the results of the variable *emotional effect* imply a neutral response to the screening with an 18% tendency towards a positive appraisal.

The variable *reflection/interpretation* has an average of (3.2) over (5) and ranging from (2.5) as estimated on subject 9 to (4.2) as estimated on subject 3. According to table 3, the results of the variable *reflection/interpretation* imply a neutral response to the screening with a 14% tendency towards a positive appraisal.

*Part 3:* On the basis of the third part of the questionnaire, the average variable linked to the participant's description regarding the screening in table 4 is the denominator "different/original", as 13 out of 15 chose this term as their answer followed by 9 out of 15 who describe the outcome as scary while 7 out of 15 describe it as entertaining, interesting, confusing and surprising. According to table 4, we expected to find a certain uniqueness towards the screening; our results showed a descriptive outcome necessary for implying an agreeableness towards the unique visualization.

| Participant Outcome | Number of People |
|---------------------|------------------|
| Entertaining        | 7                |
| Boring/Dull         | 2                |
| Intense             | 2                |
| Dramatic            | 5                |
| Powerful            | 5                |
| Fun                 | 6                |
| Scary               | 9                |

|                        |    |
|------------------------|----|
| Interesting            | 7  |
| Confusing              | 7  |
| Not my type            | 6  |
| Sympathetic            | 1  |
| Thought-provoking      | 6  |
| Gripping               | 1  |
| Emotionally satisfying | 2  |
| Different/original     | 13 |
| surprising             | 7  |

**Table 4** the average variable linked to participant outcome from the screening

### ***Interpretation of the Results***

To argue upon the tangibility of the new aesthetic, the results attempt a necessary connection with the neutrality of the individual in contrast to the projected disturbing imagery. This interpretation of neutrality within a frame of normality towards such disturbance implies for the contemporary individual a safer relation in the midst of these images. For analyzing the results, I will mainly rely on the second part of the questionnaire for its collected data, while emphasizing on the variable *Novelty/familiarity* and its link to the discussion at hand. As to talk about the individual's overall impact, the link with the previous discussion of culture and environment will act out as important referential material.

The concept of disturbing visuals implies for a negative notion within the individual's perception. As Susan Sontag discussed in her book *Regarding the pain of others* (2003), the atrocity of images served one purpose and that is to impact the viewer with negative emotions and feeling in order to better absorb the message. In contemporary television, we predict a change to the overall negative characteristic of the image within the domain of a new

aesthetic. Here, the results of the questionnaire indicate a rather neutral response from the participants. While the scale of neutrality lies on (3), the overall result of (3.3) in table 5, indicates a rather neutral overall impact towards the screening with a 16% indicative towards a positive appraisal. As expected, the results showed a predictable outcome necessary for implying a sort of indifference to disturbing and shocking visualizations.

| Variables                 | Results |
|---------------------------|---------|
| Interest                  | 3.4     |
| Novelty/Familiarity       | 3.2     |
| Emotional Impact          | 3.4     |
| Reflection/Interpretation | 3.2     |
| Total                     | 3.3     |

**Table 5 results of the four variables**

Three variables will be discussed collectively while the variable *novelty/familiarity* will be discussed separately whilst I analyze its link with the notion of safety. With a score of 3.4 over 5, this indifference comes to grips with the *interest* of the participants *vis-à-vis* the projected cartoon. The neutrality through this variable links to the surrounding culture and the notion of fragility referring back to Guy Debord and his discussion of a delicate culture, ready to embrace such imagery rather than condemn it as a negative entity.

The *emotional impact* of the participants, detailing a similar result, is a good reminiscence of Susan Sontag’s claim of a mutation in the sphere of culture. What Sontag claims are cultural products that are not so much utterly devoid of feeling but better yet free-floating and impersonal as they lie for a while and vanish later on. And with a score of 3.2 over 5, the variable *reflection/interpretation* indicates a neutral rather than a negative



reflection, as this refers to the new aesthetics' function within a society of consumerism that digests fast these images, and is a reference to Curt Cloninger in his essay *Manifesto for a Theory of the 'New Aesthetic'* (2012), who believes that the only way to read is "acrobatically" where culture has even updated its reading method to better accommodate these new images.

Again, the variable that is of *novelty/familiarity* holds a score of 3.2 over 5 and stands within that same level of neutrality as the rest of the variables. As with the four results, a noticeable identification is apparent with the contemporary culture and its surrounding environment. What is interesting with this particular variable is its important reflective link to the new aesthetic; as the variable indicates a neutral rather than a negative reflection, which is a definitive representation of the new aesthetics' stand between "familiarity and white noise", as Curt Cloninger in his essay *Manifesto for a Theory of the 'New Aesthetic'* (2012) reflects on a somehow familiar and unfamiliar characterization that leaves the new aesthetic within impartial ground. And while Cloninger mentions familiarity where "we recognize ourselves" (Cloninger, 2012) in the new aesthetic, the notion is but a natural attribute of the new aesthetics' interpretation as being not necessarily new but relying heavily on remixing.<sup>120</sup> As expected, the results showed a predictable outcome in tune with the nature of the new aesthetic.

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<sup>120</sup> Navas, Eduardo. Loc.cit.

## Questionnaire to collect viewer feedback

## The Public and The New Aesthetic

To study such a task is to lay down a pattern of thought that links the environment and the individual with the tangibility of the new aesthetic. The televised animation provides an opportunity to collect viewer feedback to help assess the notion in perspective. Please spare a few minutes to reply to this questionnaire.

**Q1 What is your educational background?**

- Architecture.....
- Design.....
- Arts.....
- Others.....

**Q4 How often do you watch television ?**

- Extremely often.....
- Very often.....
- Moderately often.....
- Slightly often.....
- Not at all often.....

**Q2 What is your Age**

- 18-28.....
- 29-40.....
- 41-above.....

**Q5 How would you rate the level of television influence on the viewer?**

- Extremely influential.....
- Very influential.....
- Moderately influential.....
- Slightly influential.....
- Not at all influential.....

**Q3 Are you...?**

- Male.....
- Female.....

Q6 For each pair, please mark a point on the scale towards whichever is closest to your experience of watching the screening today.

|   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |   |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|---|
| 1. My concentration was wandering                         |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | <i>I was completely absorbed by what was happening</i>              |
| 2. I didn't feel that I was learning anything             |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | <i>My eyes were opened to some new ideas</i>                        |
| 3. It didn't really get me going                          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | <i>I was gripped by the sights and sounds of the screening</i>      |
| 4. I was mostly in my 'comfort zone'                      |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | <i>I felt challenged and provoked</i>                               |
| 5. I felt tired and uninterested                          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | <i>I felt lively and enthusiastic</i>                               |
| 6. There wasn't really much that touched me               |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | <i>I found aspects of the screening very moving</i>                 |
| 7. The performance didn't really hold my attention        |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | <i>I was often on the edge of my seat</i>                           |
| 8. There was nothing much new for me                      |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | <i>It got me thinking about things differently</i>                  |
| 9. I felt flat  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | <i>I felt tense and excited</i>                                     |
| 10. I don't feel much urge to discuss the screening       |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | <i>I will be talking about the experience for some time to come</i> |
| 11. I acknowledge a clear representation of Good and Evil |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | <i>I acknowledge a clear overlapping between Good and Evil</i>      |
| 12. I read this image under the frame of visual freedom   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | <i>I do not read this image under the frame of visual freedom</i>   |
| 13. I label this image as harmless                        |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | <i>I label this image as influential</i>                            |
| 14. I praise the use of sensitive material                |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | <i>I dispel the need of sensitive material</i>                      |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |   |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|---|
| 15. The frame of humor hold impact on the transmission of the message  |  |  |  |  |  | The frame of humor does not hold impact on the transmission of the message                                      |
| 16. I acknowledge a very systematic storyline  |  |  |  |  |  | I acknowledge a not so systematic storyline   |
| 17. The shocking visuals serve a purpose   |  |  |  |  |  | The shocking visual do not serve a purpose  |
| 18. There is an element of predictability  |  |  |  |  |  | There is no element of predictability   |
| 19. You believe The realistic visual expression contribute to the ability to convey the message more clearly |  |  |  |  |  | You believe The realistic visual expression do not contribute to the ability to convey the message more clearly |
| 20. My attention is drawn more towards the visuals and the technique   |  |  |  |  |  | My attention is drawn more towards the story  |
| 21. There is a sense of familiarity  |  |  |  |  |  | There is a sense of unfamiliarity   |
| 22. You dispel such a visualization  |  |  |  |  |  | You accept such a visualization   |

**Q7 Which of the following words or phrases best describe your outcome from the screening? (PLEASE MARK AS MANY AS APPLY.)**

|              |  |  |  |  |  |                        |  |
|--------------|--|--|--|--|--|------------------------|--|
| Entertaining |  |  |  |  |  |                        |  |
| Boring/Dull  |  |  |  |  |  | Gripping               |  |
| Intense      |  |  |  |  |  | Emotionally satisfying |  |
| Dramatic     |  |  |  |  |  | Different/original     |  |
| Powerful     |  |  |  |  |  | surprising             |  |
| Fun          |  |  |  |  |  |                        |  |
|              |  |  |  |  |  | Thought-provoking      |  |

Thank you for taking the time to complete this form  
Please hand this sheet to the designated memb

Questionnaire with a random collected viewer feedback

### The Public and The New Aesthetic

To study such a task is to lay down a pattern of thought that links the environment and the individual with the tangibility of the new aesthetic. The televised animation provides an opportunity to collect viewer feedback to help assess the notion in perspective. Please spare a few minutes to reply to this questionnaire.

**Q1 What is your educational background?**

- Architecture.....
- Design.....
- Arts.....
- Others.....

**Q2 What is your Age**

- 18-28.....
- 29-40.....
- 41-above.....

**Q3 Are you....?**

- Male.....
- Female.....

**Q4 How often do you watch television ?**

- Extremely often.....
- Very often.....
- Moderately often.....
- Slightly often.....
- Not at all often.....

**Q5 How would you rate the level of television influence on the viewer?**

- Extremely influential.....
- Very influential.....
- Moderately influential.....
- Slightly influential.....
- Not at all influential.....

Q6 For each pair, please mark a point on the scale towards whichever is closest to your experience of watching the screening today.

|   |   |  |   |   |   |  |  |
|---|---|--|---|---|---|--|--|
| 1. My concentration was wandering                         |   |  |   |   | X |  | I was completely absorbed by what was happening              |
| 2. I didn't feel like I was learning anything             |   |  | X |   |   |  | My eyes were opened to some new ideas                        |
| 3. It didn't really get me going                          |   |  | X |   |   |  | I was gripped by the sights and sounds of the screening      |
| 4. I was mostly in my 'comfort zone'                      |   |  | X |   |   |  | I felt challenged and provoked                               |
| 5. I felt tired and uninterested                          |   |  |   |   | X |  | I felt lively and enthusiastic                               |
| 6. There wasn't really much that touched me               |   |  |   |   | X |  | I found aspects of the screening very moving                 |
| 7. The performance didn't really hold my attention        |   |  |   | X |   |  | I was often on the edge of my seat                           |
| 8. There was nothing much new for me                      |   |  |   | X |   |  | It got me thinking about things differently                  |
| 9. I felt flat  |   |  |   |   | X |  | I felt tense and excited                                     |
| 10. I don't feel much urge to discuss the screening       |   |  |   |   | X |  | I will be talking about the experience for some time to come |
| 11. I acknowledge a clear representation of Good and Evil |   |  |   | X |   |  | I acknowledge a clear overlapping between Good and Evil      |
| 12. I read this image under the frame of visual freedom   |   |  | X |   |   |  | I do not read this image under the frame of visual freedom   |
| 13. I label this image as harmless                        |   |  |   |   | X |  | I label this image as influential                            |
| 14. I praise the use of sensitive material                | X |  |   |   |   |  | I dispel the need of sensitive material                      |



|   |   |   |   |  |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|--|---|---|
| 15. The frame of humor hold impact on the transmission of the message   | X |   |   |  |   | The frame of humor does not hold impact on the transmission of the message                                      |
| 16. I acknowledge a very systematic storyline   |   |   | X |  |   | I acknowledge a not so systematic storyline   |
| 17. The shocking visuals serve a purpose  | X |   |   |  |   | The shocking visual do not serve a purpose  |
| 18. There is an element of predictability   |   |   | X |  |   | There is no element of predictability   |
| 19. You believe The realistic visual expression contributes to the ability to convey the message more clearly |   | X |   |  |   | You believe The realistic visual expression do not contribute to the ability to convey the message more clearly |
| 20. My attention is drawn more towards the visuals and the technique  |   |   | X |  |   | My attention is drawn more towards the story  |
| 21. There is a sense of familiarity   |   | X |   |  |   | There is a sense of unfamiliarity   |
| 22. You dispel such a visualization   |   |   |   |  | X | You accept such a visualization   |

**Q7 Which of the following words or phrases best describe your outcome from the screening? (PLEASE MARK AS MANY AS APPLY.)**

|              |   |                   |   |                        |   |
|--------------|---|-------------------|---|------------------------|---|
| Entertaining | X | Scary             |   | Gripping               | X |
| Boring/Dull  |   | Interesting       | X | Emotionally satisfying |   |
| Intense      |   | Confusing         |   | Different/original     | X |
| Dramatic     | X | Not my type       |   | surprising             |   |
| Powerful     | X | Sympathetic       |   |                        |   |
| Fun          |   | Thought-provoking | X |                        |   |

Thank you for taking the time to complete this form  
Please hand this sheet to the designated member.

## Appendix 2

### Conference Proceedings

Monstrous Geographies is an inter- and multidisciplinary conference focused on the relationship between the monstrous and the geographic. The scope of the conference entails diverse subjects from post-apocalyptic landscapes to imagined monstrosities and future landscapes of annihilation and death. Inter-Disciplinary.Net is accredited by the British Accreditation Council for Independent Further and Higher education and is responsible for the 4<sup>th</sup> Global Conference that ran from March 22<sup>nd</sup> to Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> 2015 and took place in Lisbon, Portugal.

This thesis acted as a starting point, from which the following Abstract was accepted and chosen to be developed in a 3000-word essay titled “A Plague upon Our Virtual Land”.

An interchangeable relationship between a concrete geographic land of technology consumerism and entertainment appears to amend the virtual land of television imagery. The culture of consumerism and entertainment picks up where the war photography of Susan Sontag left off and pushes the issue even further. The once purely photographic image of atrocity is now raised and matched by technologically advanced televised images that, to this day, deploy the shock effect as their influential power, stunning the viewers with *live* images popping out of the screens to incarnate this shock in the form of a realistic entity. This contemporary culture reforms itself not only through anxiety but also through ideologies that enjoy disaster, gloat over horror and operate on the principle that ‘if it bleeds, it leads’. This is not to say that these cultural products are utterly devoid of feeling but, instead, they are now free-floating and impersonal. They lie for a while and vanish later on. The whole atmosphere is characterized by a lack of

depth and a flatness of some sort. The one-time spectacle of imagery appears to be changing. Employing the ideological theorization of Susan Sontag, whose image function lies under a strictly photographic aesthetic of death, I explore the overwhelming plague invading the purposeful aspect of the shock. It is a reinterpretation of the shock within the virtual geography of the image under the custody of contemporary culture. The discussion gives insight into a somehow eradicated future that basks in the emotionlessness of the culture of spectatorship, while this overwhelming plague claims custody of a newly evolved monstrous perception.

I presented in front of fifteen other participants sharing their own versions of the monstrous; the fellow presenters were all full-time professors each assimilating with his own discipline. I was able to gather lots of feedback that helped influence the outcome of my thesis, as what was then a small dissertation on shock and television, later on was rendered deeper through the discussion on the so called spectacle, the desensitization of the viewer and the act of repetition. After the three day conference, the inter-disciplinary press accepted my paper for their eBook publication in addition to future talks on getting featured in a hard copy publication.

