

Playing Dead: Disconnection and the Technological Uncanny

Keywords: uncanny, non-use, phenomenology

Abstract

In this paper I discuss the phenomenological implications of new communication technologies. Some may strike us as "uncanny" in contrast to a "technological sublime." Using Heidegger's concept of *unheimlich* and appropriating the history of the Freudian uncanny, I present disconnection (in the form of non-use or non-participation) as a reaction to the uncanny. Disconnection results in a kind of "playing dead" or "*sein-zum-Tode*" ("being-towards-death") for the non-user, who dwells on the perceived authenticity of their adherence to forms of communication more face-to-face.

These ideas are oriented towards communication technology critique. Those discussions suffer from cliched and limiting frameworks divided into utopian and dystopian camps. An alternative is possible if we consider the naturalization of "new media" and how we accept certain technologies as sensible or a "sublime" improvement to our lived experience. Other technologies less familiar strike us as "uncanny." In the face of the unfamiliar, some of us withdraw. We then find ourselves excluded, as in the case of non-users in the digital divide. This "playing dead" has us draw from discourses of authenticity and how we perceive our lived experience as being more true due to our non-engagement with mediated communication.

Playing Dead: Disconnection and the Technological Uncanny

Introduction

Francisco Goya's *Saturno devorando a su hijo* (Saturn Devouring His Son) (1819-1823) depicts a horrific display of cannibalism, as a wild eyed figure with a mane of unkempt hair consumes a smaller humanoid, tearing flesh while grasping the body between his great hands. It is a depiction of the Greek titan Cronus, who castrated his father and ruled over a golden age without laws or strife. Knowing that his own sons will overthrow him, he devoured them as they were born. The painting is a rejection of the sublime, and an embrace of fear, dread, Freud's Uncanny, all the strange familiarity with monstrosity which disturbs systems and order. Goya's *Pinturas Negras* (Black Paintings) are all haunting, terrible images which emphasize this strangeness, and deviate from the aspirations of art to depict beauty. Instead, they subvert the form and illustrate the grotesque.

At the same time, a wide body of literature seeks to reconcile the relationship between human and non-human. On the one hand, utopians argue for the transcendent and transhuman potential of media, futures where social problems are resolved via the use of innovative technological answers (Miller, 2011). On the other hand, dystopians bemoan a perceived loss of agency and control that leads to bleak futures where humanity is either totally destroyed or transformed into technology's slaves. Both of these perspectives are unhelpful for understanding the nuance that is possible in technology criticism. But before we can consider a better framework, general observations must be made.

First, we could ask if it is redundant to talk about technology and media. I use the terms "media" and "technology" somewhat interchangeably, but what happens when we describe all

media as technology? What do we lose out in the concept of mediation? Or is all technology mediating? Concepts like technics (Mumford, 1976), mediation (Grusin, 2015b), human-nonhuman networks (Latour, 2005) and entanglements (Hodder, 2014), all dance around the interdependence of people and things, and the lifeworlds (Dorfman, 2009; Idhe, 1990) that emerge from these relationships. The most valuable distinction is that technology isolates artifacts on their own, while "media" acknowledges the way that thing engenders a new type of being-in-the-world (via Heidegger) or understanding through an artifact.

Second, studying media and technology often involves a fascination with the new or novel. Foundational concepts like the digital divide (van Dijck & Hacker, 2003) and Rodgers (1983) "Diffusion of Innovations" contain a normative prescription in favor of adoption and use. The study of "new media" addresses those phenomena on their own terms, in their own world. As such, we do not typically consider non-users and technology refusal when talking about something like Facebook - studies of those communities see the world as the platform describes it.

Therefore, technology criticism emerges as a reaction to a seemingly totalizing world that new media presents. Arguments against our "hybridization" (Latour, 1993) and neo-Luddite rhetoric depends on naturalistic fallacies and a romanticization of what life was like before artifacts like the spinning loom, the steam engine or the computer arrived and supposedly ruined everything. Additionally, the critique of "technological determinism" (Wyatt, 2014) rests on a simple argument that non-humans and artifacts are only imbued with with the intentions of their creators, and that they are instrumental.

To contribute to more nuanced accounts of technology criticism, I intend to make the

following arguments. First, naturalizing mediated experiences is continuous; new technologies change our lifeworld in ways that becomes mundane or normal for us. This is supported by embracing the affordances of technology and not questioning the concealment (Heidegger, 1995) or silences (Trouillot, 1995) created as the world is "better" mediated. To understand that, it is important to move away from normative frameworks and use a parallel in aesthetics. This is how I employ the concept of the "technological sublime" (Nye, 1994).

Next, I introduce the "technological uncanny" as a way of understanding our phenomenological responses to the otherness of technology, and weigh this against existing frames of moral panics, neo-Luddism and anarcho-primitivism. Technological criticism is typically restricted by the frames currently employed, which often read as barely veiled technophobia to scholars biased towards pro-use. The post-human and McLuhan's (2001) understanding of media as "extensions of man" evoke a sort of bodily integrity identity disorder in the way we respond to our mediated selves, sometimes with revulsion and fear. The desire to go "off the grid" or disconnect is a type of dismemberment even as globalization and the ubiquity of technology expands grids everywhere. There is no longer any "off-the-grid," there are only alternative grids.

Lastly, I discuss Heidegger's *unheimlich* (un-homelike), an eerie sort of phenomenological experience and its relationship to *sein-zum-Tode* (being-towards-death). What is it to withdraw from the uncanny and search for authenticity? In the context of communication technologies, it is to get offline, to disappear, and to "play dead."

The Technological Sublime

I do not always know the best ways to take care of myself. Without the guidance of

others, I wouldn't know if the food I ate was unhealthy, or if routine I had was too sedentary, or if the stress I endure could be alleviated. Large bodies of knowledge and specialists who study these things could tell me the right ways to have a better life, not just for myself but for others. So I depend on those people and their knowledge to help guide me.

Society is made of these relationships, where people cultivate and share ideas which express various ways of being. A key actant in these discussions are nonhumans, who increasingly have their say. SenseBand is a device which proposes to be able to "read" a wearer's emotional state through continuously monitoring their heartbeat. It can alert others if a wearer appears to be feeling too stressed, or if it decides they are in need of some support. Likewise, FitBit is popular because it allows users to self-track their physical performance and maintain what it understands to be a healthy lifestyle. The "Vi" is a proposed device which takes this a step further and can verbally tell wearers what actions they should take to meet their goals.

An entire host of "wearables" now exist which embody two ideals: first, the bodies of knowledge required to achieve ideal states of being, and second, the tools for tracking and monitoring the wearer's state of being over time, to see if they are progressing to that ideal. But the FitBit and others are not new. We have worked to perfect our senses through the science of acoustics and optics, to where we can offer corrective lenses and hearing aids that give their wearer a more idealized experience of the world. Even those with color-blindness can wear EnChroma Color Blindness Glasses, which give some semblance of restoring lost colors.

Wearable technologies diffuse boundaries between a discrete self and the world, making these barriers porous. They are perhaps the best examples of a "cybernetic" approach to media theory, in that they unquestionably assume their place as "extensions" of a person and our senses.

But this metaphor is expansive. Television allows us to see further away. Radio and telephones let us hear others who are not present. Electric lighting (Marvin, 1988) enhances our vision so that we can see at night. These also change our culture. Media studies focuses on the way technology changes how humans communicate. As we gain better tele-present means of interpersonal and mass communication, there are social repercussions in how we communicate stemming from the expectations of the medium (Hjarvard, 2008).

But if mediation means to expand what is possible (Grusin, 2015b) through the use of technology, then goes beyond obvious extensions of visual/audio senses. If there is an ideal room temperature for humans to be comfortable, air-conditioning is a form of technology that helps mediate our experience of the world so that we are not too hot. Clothing provide us with a sophisticated means of satisfying not just our skin's desire, but the cultural techniques of symbolic production via color theory and aesthetics.

My point is to indicate that the mundane has an ever-present and phenomenological impact on how we live. Even in its retreat to the background, humanity depends on esoteric processes and the artifacts they engender, like pressure treated wood, synthetic fabrics, logic gates and polybutylene terephthalate. Unique materialities engender the cultural artifacts which create social phenomena that are the subject of study for communication and media studies. A turn towards the material is present in work on science and technology studies and media archaeology, but too much of a focus on this results in claims of "technological determinism," as I will explore below. For now, I mean to highlight the importance of the mundane.

This importance is clear in the "technological sublime." The sublime is a liminal event, which inspires a kind of awe and unity. It is a kind of connection with greatness that evokes a

sense of individual purpose, a holistic fellowship of community. Stemming from a natural experience of wonder, this has become something that Nye (1994) argues American society also began to feel with the sight great constructs, like great dams or bridges. Kasson (1999) and Marx (2000) also articulate a technological sublime and it could be argued that the spectacles of electric light found in the work of Marvin (1988) are another form of technological sublime. The observance of a sublime functions as a social rite which enhances social cohesion, bringing people together through a power experience that alters our conception of what is possible. While this concept originates in Kant's work and aesthetics of the natural world, Nye (1994) writes that the technological sublime rejects natural limits. It involves a temporary effect where wonder is created through a rift between those with the knowledge of a machine and those without, emerging from "the superior imagination of an engineer or a technician, who creates an object that overwhelms the imagination of ordinary men." As we become acclimatized and desensitized to this effect, new technological sublimines must be constructed. It presents the idea of "reason in constant evolution" (p. 60). Natural sublimines, like the Grand Canyon, reflect eternity in the awe of nature. The technological sublime is directed towards the future and the destruction of boundaries like time and space.

Each sublime carries with it elements of terror. In this it is similar to Otto's (1958) concept of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, the numinous experience of a holy other, something that is mysterious, tremendous and appealing in some respect. Like a "fear of the Lord" in the biblical Old Testament (Proverbs 9:10), to fear a thing is also to respect it for its power. Other philosophy of technology carries with it this sense of the strange otherness of the megamachine (Mumford, 1967), whether this is Winner's (2010) comparison of a nuclear reactor

with a whale or Heidegger's (1977) thoughts on a hydroelectric damn (Verbeek, 2005).

The technological sublime is also manifested in the mundane on a much smaller scale. The idea that there are invisible knowledges embodied in artifacts, or that there are better means of being only possible by incorporating the nonhuman into our lives leads to a sense of momentary wholeness. Think of the consumers who owned black and white television sets and the moment they purchased a color television. Or the social impact of color films like *The Wizard of Oz* (LeRoy, M & Fleming, V. 1939). The moment when Dorothy exits Kansas and enters Munchkinland is a sensory cornucopia. Likewise, air-conditioning allowed people to settle in regions with a lifestyle that would not have been possible otherwise. The movement towards wearable technology represents this trend towards a better, idealized self, more consistent with a perfected sense of something greater than our flawed experience.

Yet familiarity breeds contempt. I have noted how Nye argues the technological sublime must be reinvented. Domestication of technology (Haddon, 2006) means we grow accustomed and expectant of our new sense. Losing one's glasses is not a reversion to some primitive state, but a literal handicapping in a world that expects us to be able to see a certain way. The loss of power during a heatwave can lead to death, as the elderly and small children are unprepared to cope without their air-conditioning (Nye, 2010). We label these artifacts and their knowledges infrastructure, although something like "sanitation" was also a culturally profound development that totally changed society.

These improvements are not without their political implications, and while I have focused on the phenomenological importance of the mundane, it is important to note that criticism of new technics comes from not just a moral panic about the way life is changing, but shifts in agency

and autonomy. Every new sublime and its experience is ordained by designers and engineers who have articulated that ideal. Like medicine (Foucault, 2012; Ilich, 1976), bodies of knowledge have developed into institutions who effectively articulate its proper administration. In our contemporary society sophisticated artifacts emerge from the capital and effort of industries interested in sustaining continued economic growth.

As research responds to new forms of mediation and technology, what we are responding to is the efforts of those industries to sustain themselves. As one example, Facebook is the subject of many social studies, interested in human behavior, computer mediated communication, human machine interaction, and sociology of media. The company has two lines of rhetoric, in that it is interested in creating relationships and community, and that it creates products for doing so. My argument here is that scholarly work on Facebook responds to the first claim unquestionably, accepting the technological sublime experienced through the affordances of the platform. But research seldom addresses the second claim of "products" through a comparative and critical sense, without resorting to dystopian fears and anxieties. Studies of the first nature center around users. Studies which are critical must look to "non-users" as an excluded population, in the same way that journalists look to hear both sides of an argument. But as platforms like Facebook and the technological sublime they offer become ubiquitous, domesticated and expected, it becomes impossible to see them as anything but naturalized. Pro-use biases become implicit as technics are naturalized in what it means to be social. A monopoly on the sublime is locked in place as we cannot envision alternative ways of being, and we only look to the next update, which will increase our resolution, decrease our latency, and perfect our senses. This connection supposedly is offered with each other, but it is dominated by the artifact

which embodies those ideas and offers the experience of this sublime.

The Technological Uncanny

To understand the technological grotesque, it is worth exploring a similar concept which already has its place in discourse on technology. As life-like robots are designed, they sometimes fall into an area that we call the "uncanny valley" (Masschelein, 2011, p. 149-151). This relates to the degree to which we are able to empathize with the nonhuman. A robot which is clearly unfamiliar, like the trash-can shaped R2-D2 from Star Wars, is clearly nonhuman. Artificial humanoids like the replicants of Blade Runner are nearly indistinguishable. But somewhere far beyond R2-D2's design and just short of the replicant is a form which is clearly not quite human, something that evokes a sense of discomfort and strangeness in us that is difficult to parse. It even can lead to a sense of terror and dread.

An unintended linkage in the intellectual history of identity was forged when Mori's work was translated. Masschelein (2011) argues for the "uncanny" as a form of "unconcept," a negative concept which is marked by what the unconscious does not know. The uncanny has its roots in German idealism and Jensch's (1997) *Psychology of the Uncanny*, originally published in 1906. But it arises in the late 20th century with links to the Ugly (Eco, 2007; Bayley, 2012) and the grotesque (Connelly, 2012). Trigg (2012) provides us with further complications of this unconcept, arguing that the uncanny "resists unequivocal definition, leading not only to experiential anxiety, but to conceptual doubt, too." As it is rooted in dyads, "familiar/unfamiliar, near/far, homely/unhomely—the uncanny circumvents laws of logic, yet at the same time frees itself from the need to be resolved of its paradoxical status" (p. 27). It is the familiar yet strange, the uncomfortably close and uneasy relationship with the nonhuman other, an idea that makes

itself available to so many areas of analysis. It has a strange appeal and an attractive side. Bayley (2012) writes that academic historical narratives on ugliness cannot be written - it is an avoided subject and the books do not exist (p. 13). The same may be true for the uncanny, particularly given Masschelein's negative way of definition. How can we write a history of the uncanny when domestication erases the past and normalizes technology? We get used to things. But before that happens, there is the disconnect.

It's possible for us to describe this disconnect in the frame of a moral panic. Furedi (2015) notes the way the emergence of new media in the 1950's and 60's related to a narrative of crisis about the declining of reading in the public (p. 197). And moral panics concerning new technology are hardly a new phenomena. Benedictine abbot Johannes Trithemius's *De laude scriptorum manualium* (written in 1492) was highly critical of the printing press and the changes it would bring to the production of texts, which had been the domain of scribes (Brann, 1979). But I do not think the moral panic is as useful as the uncanny for two reasons.

Cohen's (2002) anatomy of the moral panic involves four stages of "warning, impact, inventory and reaction." While Rowe (2009) notes the problems of transporting this concept through space and time and applying it beyond Cohen's work, he offers a critical perspective for the moral panic. Generally speaking, these work to "build a valuational consensus (even among some of those it condemns) in times of disruptive change and threat, when the disturbing anomic of society can be represented as demanding an unimpeachable moral order" (p.34). Rowe also notes McLuhan's (2001) influence in literature on moral panics, but *Understanding Media's* contribution is colored by an ethnocentric argument about western rationalism's ability to offer cool detachment from the terror of new technology. So although the critical function of a moral

panic is compelling, they have the character of mass events, and like the natural sublime, they speak to an eternal sense of order and purpose. On the other hand, Masschelein (2011) even notes that scholars sometimes view the uncanny as a “negative sublime” (p. 66). This frames the technological uncanny in a dialectical tension with the technological sublime.

The uncanny is involved with the familiar, the accepted, the normalized by most. It has the potential to persist. This is why wearables and self-tracking creates a sense of uncertainty, despite their long lineage in pedometers and the ideals of physical conditioning. Surveillance also creates a sense of the uncanny, despite how we accept (or ignore) the numerous systems long in place through which we can be monitored. Here I intend to illustrate its proper place for thinking about the relationship with the nonhuman which evokes a discomfort and dread, the part of the mundane technological sublime that sets off bells for refusal in every secret neo-Luddite.

One of the primary origins for this is in E. T. A. Hoffman's (1817) story "The Sandman." The subject of the story, Nathanael, recounts a legend of the Sandman, who throws sand in the eyes of children to help them fall asleep. Hoffman's version of this piece of folklore expands this legend to say that the Sandman then takes the children's eyes and feeds them to his own progeny who live on the moon. This imagined folktale is the subject of Freud's (2003) 1919 analysis. However, in the original text Nathanael later falls in love with Olympia, who is later revealed to be a sophisticated automaton. This causes him to question whether or not he is real. Nathanael descends into madness and later commits suicide. The doubt spreads to others though. "The story of the automaton had struck deep root into their souls and, in fact, a pernicious mistrust of human figures in general had begun to creep in" (Hoffman, 1817).

Eco's (2007) comments on the uncanny note that it involves a situational form of ugliness

"in which we are frightened or horrified by something that isn't going the way it should" (p. 311).

Olympia evokes an intellectual uncertainty with an aesthetic connection to the grotesque.

Another example Eco cites is Kafka's (2013) *Metamorphosis*, first published in 1915. In this story, Gregor Samsa is transformed into a giant bug. What is uncanny isn't this experience in and of itself, "but the fact that his family take the event as embarrassing yet entirely natural, and they have no inkling of the alteration of the order of things..." (p. 323). The audience is to suspect that the *Metamorphosis* speaks to how we accept the terrible as natural, and how willing we are to embrace apparent strangeness.

How does the uncanny enter into media and technology studies? Masschelein (2011) provides us with one obvious point of connection via "Hauntology" (pp. 144-147). The connection of Heidegger, Derrida and Freud point to bodies of research on spectrality, ghosts, telepathy, and other related social and material phenomena. In this there is work by Thacker (2015; 2011; 2005), Warner (2006), Marvin (1988), Sconce (2015; 2000), del Pilar Blanco and Peeren, (2013; 2010) and Ndalians, (2012). Additionally, we can think about the strangeness of the nonhuman (Grusin, 2015a). The "cosmic horror" of an unknowable and mysterious other is something found in Harman's (2002) assertions on the retreat of objects into unknowability. Harman (2012) himself acknowledges this connection. Cosmic horror and the uncanny are related in the total otherness of what terrifies us. While the sublime and *mysterium tremendum* contain a promise of connection and unity with a greater mind than our own, the uncanny is the indifferent and alien, a substrata of materiality beyond our comprehension. What purposes does technology have? The techno-logics of artifacts have this same cold nonhuman quality.

Several fine examples of a technological uncanny exist in the films of Daniel

Cronenberg. *The Fly* is a remake of a classic horror film, in which Seth Brundle is an inventor developing teleportation pods, and slowly becomes transformed into a fly-like creature who accidentally travels between pods with him (Cronenberg, D. & Cornfeld, S., 1986). *Videodrome* involves a complex storyline which merges McLuhan-esque ideas about television as the mind's eye, the control of others and the transformation of the flesh through technology (Cronenberg, D. & David, P., 1983). This last theme is also the focus of *Crash* (Cronenberg, D. & Lantos, R., 1996), based on a Ballard (1973) novel. The fusion of bodies and metal through automobile accidents has a sexual quality. Each of these see not just the control of people slipping away in favor of something not-quite-human, but a world in which these things are possible and even normalized by others. *Videodrome* ends with the the protagonist uttering the words "Long live the new flesh," a proclamation of allegiance to a future where bodies and ideas are fluid, and the governing ideas can be recorded, transmitted, and programmed onto people. This is a highly deterministic version of our anxiety over media effects, but the relationship between sinew and magnetic tape is striking. An orifice in the body which accepts VHS is unsettling and somehow more compelling than the distilled inspirations of McLuhan.

But even with these provocations, acknowledgement of the technological uncanny are read more as fear or outright technophobia. Media theory's use of cyborgs and the framing of technology as "extensions of man" makes critique sound like the desperate pleas of apotemnophiliacs (those with the desire to have healthy limbs amputated). And there is a lack of merit in this literature that makes it difficult to honestly engage with. Neo-Luddism has intellectual tendrils wrapped up in anarcho-primitivism and is inspired by the work of people like Perlman (1983). The more extreme of these writers take the worst anxieties over technology

along with the strongest assumptions of technological determinism to make a case for the necessity of destroying modern civilization. In these activist rhetorics, they transform themselves from critics into cranks, as Kirkpatrick Sale did when he smashed a computer in front of an audience during a talk in 1995 (Fox, 2013, p. 26; Kelly, 1995). In an age where we tout the importance of "code literacy," any form of refusal or rejection a type of willful ignorance, a technological illiteracy that educators find difficult to engage with. The most clear example is the work of Theodore Kaczynski, also known as the "Unabomber." His motivation to mail bombs to academics and engineers stemmed from a paranoia over what he perceived as the slavery of industrial society. This destructive mania which killed three and injured twenty three others means it is hard to justify not dismissing his ideas outright.

These examples illustrate two problems when we discuss the role of technology in society. First, new mediations are always emerging as the technoscape (Appadurai, 1990) changes. The technological imperative is how Winner (1978) describes the dependence of things on other things, for instance, transportation on sophisticated tooling for manufacturing parts to create cars. The economic imperative stems from planned obsolescence and the need to replace and sustain growing mountains of e-waste (Maxwell & Miller; 2012; Gabrys, 2011). Technics are normalized as we move towards the sublime described in the previous section. And yet it is never totally familiar to us. Any time the power goes out, or our email is slow to respond, or we lose our phones, we are reminded of our dependence on things. This dependence on the nonhuman, the material apart from us induces a sense of anxiety which we can never fully reconcile. It is a fear of the otherness of technology, the sense that we can never truly relate with it, like Nathanael and Olympia.

Second, the uncanny is a situational terror. It is something that is not always felt and experienced by everyone in the same circumstances. It can be manifested in artifacts, like the TV-B-Gone (a universal remote which can shut off televisions in public places), or the CyborgUnplug (a device that stops drones from transmitting images and prevents private remote surveillance). But universal critique of technology has the quality of inevitably serving anarcho-primitivist motifs, lifestyle activism or other polemics. This is why media theory often fails to adequately provide a critique of technology. Without adequate contextualization, situation and historicizing the technics and artifacts in question, critique is dismissed as moral panic or the work of a crank (most commonly labeled as “Luddism”).

The Eerie and Being-Towards-Death

The notion of uncanniness for Heidegger (1967) comes from the translation of *unheimlich* as uncanny, rather than “unhomelike” (p. 233). Anxiety is a fundamental part of being-in-the-world which oscillates between the sense of “being-at-home” vs “not-being-at-home” (*das Nicht-zuhause-sein*) a tension between how Dasein is both everyday and yet existential self-reflection. While Heidegger uses this uncanniness in a very limited sense, I want to expand the concept to talk about how new technologies and changes to our phenomenological lifeworld can add to this sense of “not-being-at-home” and the unfamiliar to where we “play dead.”

As new media and technology institutes a new technological sublime, it helps to constitute the intelligible world. The hydroelectric dam and the nuclear reactor today are just more pieces of essential infrastructure. For most people, there is no choice to “unplug” from the power grid they provide. Likewise, a social grid or a web weaved by Facebook and others leave

us with little choice to disconnect if they become the primary means of staying in touch with each other. If the grid is composed in an unfamiliar way, if it carries with it political prescriptions and uncanny elements that we cannot recognize in our own intentions for use, this increases our anxiety about our own subjectivity.

Today, there are services which help plan out one's death so that people can be notified online (<http://www.thedigitalbeyond.com>). Facebook turns individual pages into "memorials" where other users can commiserate together. This certainly resonates with Heidegger's (1967) argument that "being-towards-death understands the certainty which is thus grounded" (p. 301). All of us know we are going to die. While being and time are eternal, we are not. The evasion of such realities is what Heidegger calls an "inauthentic Being-towards-death." on this point, consider the discourses of non-users and media resisters who claim they are looking for a more authentic experience with others (Portwood-Stacer, 2012).

Mark Fisher (2016) claims the eerie is constituted by "a failure of absence or by a failure of presence." In contrast to the weird, the presence of which is difficult to grapple with, the eerie happens "either when there is something present where there should be nothing, or is there nothing present where there should be something" (p. 61). He uses the example of an "eerie cry," abandoned structures and points to the question of agency - where is the thing that is responsible for these phenomena? It's perceived absence in light of its effects leads to this sort of eerie feeling, which in hand with the uncanny, heightens our anxiety of the world and our own subjectivity in it. The faceless distribution of death notices or shuttling back and forth of communication on the internet and in other mediated situations heightens this feeling of the *unheimlich*, the sense of not-being-at-home. In a sense, going offline or becoming unreachable is

a form of “playing dead” – if you have been offline long enough, and there is no other means to reach you, people may think you are dead. This sort of eerie lack of presence becomes the exception as we expect people to be online, to be plugged in, and to be associated with one another via the internet.

Conclusion

To summarize, the technological sublime is a liminal event where new media introduces a temporary sense of social unity and purpose, creating an idealized wholeness and perfected world. It leads to the domestication of artifacts that we then cannot live without. The technological uncanny is the sense that these artifacts are still disturbing and foreign to us, and that we will never truly be able to see them as familiar. It involves an affective response to specific forms of nonhuman materiality that intrude on our sense of what is normal or natural.

These concepts have two purposes. First, the sublime and uncanny have a dualistic and dialectical relationship which helps us to understand more nuanced and useful forms of technological utopianism/dystopianism. Second, the anxiety that this provokes can be associated with Heidegger’s notion of the uncanny as well and by extension being-towards-death. People who disconnect and go offline effectively “play dead” in the technological lifeworld, so that they are insensible or unrelatable, as they search for a more authentic experience of the world.

Things are not instrumental, they have clear affective and political dimensions helping mediate our experience of the world (Bennett, 2010). But to acknowledge their strangeness is not to grant them a power they do not already have, it is to move past the deadlock in how we conceptualize the human/non-human dependencies which the human world depends on. It also enables us to begin to acknowledge a world that is more-than-human, to move into less

anthropocentric realms of analysis and think of an ecology of relations.

References

- Ballard, J. G. (1995). *Crash*. Great Britain: Vintage Books.
- Bayley, S. (2012) *Ugly: The Aesthetics of Everything*. New York: Overlook Press.
- Bennett, J. (2010). *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Duke University Press.
- Brann, N. L. (1979). A Monastic Dilemma Posed by the Invention of Printing: the Context of De laude scriptorum manualium by Abbot Johann Trithemius (1462-1516). *Visible Language*, 13(2), 150-167.
- Cohen, S. (2002). *Folk devils and moral panics: The creation of the mods and rockers*. Psychology Press.
- Connelly, F. S. (2012). *The Grotesque in Western Art and Culture: The Image at Play*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Cronenberg, D. (Director), David, P., Solnicki, V., and Héroux C. (Producers). (1983). *Videodrome* [Motion Picture]. USA: Universal Pictures.
- Cronenberg, D. (Director), Cornfeld S. (Producer). (1986). *The Fly* [Motion Picture]. USA: 20th Century Fox.
- Cronenberg, D. (Director, Producer), Lantos R., Thomas J., (Producers). (1996). *Crash* [Motion Picture]. CA: Alliance
- van Dijk, J. A. G. M., & Hacker, K. (2003). The Digital Divide as a Complex and Dynamic Phenomenon. *The Information Society*, 19, 315–326. <http://doi.org/10.1080/01972240390227895>
- Dorfman, E. (2009). History of the Lifeworld: From Husserl to Merleau-Ponty. *Philosophy Today*, 53(3), 294–303.
- Eco, U. (1997) *On Ugliness*. McEwen, A. (Trans.) New York: Rizzoli

- Fisher, M. (2016). *The Weird and the Eerie*. Fisher Books.
- Fox, N. (2013). *Against the Machine: The Hidden Luddite Tradition in Literature, Art, and Individual Lives*. Washington: Island Press.
- Foucault, M. (2012). *The Birth of the Clinic*. London: Routledge.
- Foucault, M. (1983). *This Is Not A Pipe* (No. 24). University of California Press.
- Freud, S. (2003). *The Uncanny*. New York: Penguin.
- Furedi, F. (2015). *Power of Reading: From Socrates to Twitter*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Gabrys, J. (2011). *Digital Rubbish*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Grusin, R. (Ed.). (2015). *The Nonhuman Turn*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Grusin, R. (2015). Radical Mediation. *Critical Inquiry*, 42(1), 124–148. <http://doi.org/10.1086/682998>
- Haddon, L. (2006). The Contribution of Domestication Research to In-Home Computing and Media Consumption. *The Information Society*, 22(4), 195–203. <http://doi.org/10.1080/01972240600791325>
- Harman, G. (2012). *Weird Realism: Lovecraft and philosophy*. John Hunt Publishing.
- Harman, G. (2002). *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*. Chicago: Open Court.
- Heidegger, M. (1995). *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*. Indiana University Press.
- Heidegger, M. (1977). *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.
- Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and Time*. Harper Perennial.

- Ihde, D. (1990). *Technology and the Lifeworld*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Hjarvard, S. (2008). The Mediatization of Society. *Nordicom Review*, (2), 105–134.
- Hodder, I. (2014). The Entanglements of Humans and Things: A Long-Term View. *New Literary History*, 45(1), 19–36. <http://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.2014.0005>
- Hoffman, E. T. (1817). “Der Sandmann.” In *Die Nachtstücke*.
- Illich, I (1976) *Medical Nemesis: The Expropriation of Health*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Jentsch, E. (1997). “On the Psychology of the Uncanny” (1906) *I. Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 2(1), 7-16.
- Kafka, F. (2013). *The Metamorphosis*. New York: Modern Library.
- Kasson, J. F. (1999). *Civilizing the Machine: Technology and Republican Values in America, 1776-1900*. New York: Macmillan.
- Kelly, K. (1995, June 1). “Interview With The Luddite.” *Wired*. Retrieved November 26, 2016, from <https://www.wired.com/1995/06/saleskelly/>
- Latour, B. (2005). *Reassembling the Social: An introduction to Actor Network Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Latour, B. (1993). *We Have Never Been Modern*. (C. Porter, Trans.) Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Magritte, R. (1929). *The Treachery of Images (This is Not a Pipe)*. [Painting]. Retrieved from <http://collections.lacma.org/node/239578>
- Marvin, C. (1988). *When Old Technologies Were New*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Masschelein, A. (2012). *The Unconcept: The Freudian uncanny in Late-Twentieth-Century Theory*. Albany: SUNY Press.

- Maxwell, R., & Miller, T. (2012). *Greening the Media*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McLuhan, M. (2001). *Understanding Media*. London: Routledge.
- Miller, V. (2011). The Body and Information Technology. In *Understanding Digital Culture*.
New York.
- Mumford, L. (1967). *The Myth of the Machine: Technics and Human Development*. New York:
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Inc.
- Marx, L. (2000). *The Machine in the Garden*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McLuhan, M. (2003). *Understanding Media*. Ginko Press
- Ndalianis, A. (2012). *The Horror Sensorium: Media and the Senses*. London: McFarland &
Company, IC.
- Nye, D. E. (2010). *When the Lights Went Out: A History of Blackouts in America*. Cambridge:
MIT Press.
- Nye, D. E. (1996). *American Technological Sublime*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Otto, R. (1958). *The Idea of the Holy* (Vol. 14). Oxford University Press.
- Perlman, F. (1983). *Against his-story, against Leviathan!*. Black & Red.
- del Pilar Blanco, M., & Peeren, E. (2010). *Popular Ghosts: The Haunted Spaces of Everyday
Culture*. Continuum.
- del Pilar Blanco, M., & Peeren, E. (2013). *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in
Contemporary Cultural Theory*. (M. del Pilar Blanco & E. Peeren, Eds.). London:
Bloomsbury.
- Portwood-Stacer, L. (2012). Media refusal and conspicuous non-consumption: The performative
and political dimensions of Facebook abstention. *New Media & Society*, 15(7),

1461444812465139–1057. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1461444812465139>

Rogers, E. M. (1983). *Diffusion of Innovations* (3rd ed.). New York: Simon and Schuster.

Rowe, D. (2009). The Concept of the Moral Panic: An Historico-Sociological Positioning. In

Lemmings, D, & Walker, C. (Eds.) *Moral panics, the media and the law in early modern England* (pp. 22-40). Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Sconce, J. (2015). The Ghostularity. *Communication +1*, 4, 1–27. [http://doi.org/10.7275/](http://doi.org/10.7275/R5445JD2)

[R5445JD2](http://doi.org/10.7275/R5445JD2)

Sconce, J. (2000). *Haunted media: Electronic presence from telegraphy to television*. Duke University Press.

Thacker, E. (2015). *Tentacles Longer Than Night: Horror of Philosophy* (Vol. 3). John Hunt Publishing.

Thacker, E. (2011). *In the Dust of this Planet: Horror of Philosophy* (Vol. 1). John Hunt Publishing.

Thacker, E. (2005). Biophilosophy for the 21st Century. *CTheory*. Retrieved from http://ctheory.net/ctheory_wp/biophilosophy-for-the-21st-century/

Trigg, D. (2012). *The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of the Uncanny*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press.

Trouillot, M. R. (1995). *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Beacon Press.

Verbeek, P.-P. (2005). *What Things Do: Philosophical Reflections on Technology, Agency and Design*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Warner, M. (2006). *Phantasmagoria*. Oxford University Press, USA.

Winner, L. (2010, August 8). *The Whale and the Reactor*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Winner, L. (1978). *Autonomous Technology*. Cambridge, MA.: The MIT Press.

Wyatt, S. (2014) “Technological Determinism is Dead, Long Live Technological Determinism.
In Scharff, R. C., & Dusek, V. (2014). *Philosophy of Technology* (pp. 456-466). Malden,
MA: Wiley Blackwell.