**DISQUIET**

“Anxiety may be compared with dizziness. He whose eye happens to look down into the yawning abyss becomes dizzy. But what is the reason for this? It is just as much in his own eyes as in the abyss . . . Hence, anxiety is the dizziness of freedom.” - Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844)

If anxiety is comparable to dizziness, the bodily symptom of disquietude could be described as a tightening sensation occurring somewhere deep within the solar plexus, accompanied by slight nausea. A sight or sensation provokes an initial response of apprehension that mildly constricts the body and then lingers within as a felt memory. Unnoticeable from the outside, a vague queasiness and the relentless hum of low-level agitation are the only other discernible effects. These faint symptoms are the act of disquiet. They have manifested as the result of an encounter with a particular thought image: one that is simultaneously understood to be both familiar and alien. Disquietude spawns in response to this perception of a disturbing collision between the intimate and the strange. What is felt is the throb of the uncanny.

“I was already feeling uneasy. All at once, the silence stopped breathing.” – Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet* (1982)

Disquiet hovers somewhere between unease, worry and restlessness. Milder than distress and more difficult to pinpoint, once recognised it takes just an instant for the unnerving malaise to set in. An explanation for the trigger of this sense of being ill at ease is not immediately apparent. Yet something is not quite right, and it is definitely personal. Stemming from a place rooted far beneath the surface, this disturbance often eludes easy identification. The invisible register of alarm is even more unsettling, for its uncertainty.

“Like great works, deep feelings always mean more than they are conscious of saying.” Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942)

Who should be deemed worthy of beginning to attempt assessing the levels of conscious and unconscious meanings ascribed to a work of art? Should it be the artist who dreamed of a devil woman, or smothered and upturned found portraits, or rearranged subjects and scenes into newly distilled versions of events, or shed an eerie disembodied light on reflected shadows? Or should these depths be explored equally through the eyes of the observers who scan the works, who pause to understand a tilted jaw, an arachnid woman, the punctured head of a man and a crouch of desperation? Meaning, inscribed both at the moments of inception and reception, will be endlessly translated and recast through the lenses of time.

“There are no and there couldn’t be any images in consciousness. But the image is *a certain type of consciousness*. The image is an act and not a thing. The image is consciousness *of* something.” Jean-Paul Sartre, *L’imagination* (1936)

If we choose to look beyond merely seeing, each of the manifold images that wallpaper our worlds will play out their acts of consciousness for us upon each viewing. Once in a while and infrequently enough to cherish, we discover a vision that returns stare in a jolting reflection, occurring for reasons perhaps serendipitous, learned or imagined. If one of these sights should unveil a deeply personal truth reflected through the mirror of another, the glimpse of an uncanny doppelgänger might be seen for long enough to register the shock of recognition. Symptoms of unease are but the outermost tangible traces that are exposed under our glance, then shouldered until becoming dislodged by incoming thoughts. The meaning of disquiet is only for the unconscious to know.

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Dr Chantal Faust is an artist, writer and lecturer in Critical and Historical Studies at the Royal College of Art, London.