



The Art Object and Our Augmented Reality



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Through my research, it has become clear that "online" and "offline" are no longer binary distinctions. As sociologist and Media theorist Nathan Jurgenson states, "we are not crossing in and out of separate digital and physical realities, ala the Matrix, but instead live in one reality that is augmented by atoms and bits."¹ This paper investigates how the affective art object can make our digitally augmented reality visible, stripping away the false dichotomy of "online" and "offline".

¹ N Jurgenson, "Digital Dualism versus Augmented Reality", in *The Society Pages*, 2017, <<https://thesocietypages.org/cyborgology/2011/02/24/digital-dualism-versus-augmented-reality/>> [accessed 19 June 2017].

Introduction

With the advent of personal computers, tablets, and smartphones, we are now faced with the emergence of an "always-online"² culture. The rise of social media, blogging, and content-sharing sites³ has resulted in an explosion of communication, information exchange, and user-created media content. This has allowed for the manifestation of Internet subcultures and communities—mediated by computer screens and relying heavily on the notion of information and knowledge exchange, no longer bounded by geographical limits.

Current prominent Internet subcultures include; Health goth (a subculture, fashion style, and aesthetic featuring monochrome sportswear⁴,) and Vaporwave (a genre of music turned Internet subculture concerned with a nostalgia for retro cultural aesthetics, video games, technology, and post-modern Japanese culture⁵.) Additionally, the Internet

² "Always-online" refers to the way modern technology continuously keeps people connected via Internet, and thus always accessible. Sherry Turkle suggests that people have become so tethered with their 'always-on' devices life can be represented by the digital screens we keep in our pockets. S Turkle, "Always-On/Always-On-You: The Tethered Self", in *Handbook of Mobile Communication Studies*, 2008, 121-138.

³ Notable examples include Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Vine, Snapchat, Twitter, Tumblr

⁴ Contrary to its nomenclature, Health Goth has little to do with healthy living nor gothic neoclassical. "Health Goth projects a completely un-reflexive subjugation of the individual in the urban ecosystem, reimagining the present future by mocking self-awareness as a Humanist project of little efficacy." RadoZ, "Transcending NormCore With Health Goth - AMDISCS : Futures Reserve Label", in *AMDISCS : Futures Reserve Label*, 2014, <<http://amdiscs.com/normcore-health-goth>> [accessed 17 May 2016].

⁵ Considering its status as a relatively underground internet culture, there has not been much academic writing concerning Vapourwave. However, was X. (2015). *Vapourwave: A Brief History*. 10 June 2015. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PdpP0mXOIWM>. [Accessed: 9 May 2017] is considered by many prominent Vapourwave Facebook groups to

has allowed for the augmentation of pre-existing offline cultures, such as kawaii aesthetic — 'kawaii' referring to the quality of cuteness in the context of Japanese culture⁶.

The term 'postinternet' was first coined by Marisa Olson and represents the idea of society and methods of interaction following the popularisation of the Internet⁷. The movement has not been thoroughly defined, with Guthrie Lonergan instead using the term 'Internet aware' in place to mean art that concerns the Internet and its effects on society, culture and aesthetics.⁸ My research addresses a number of interpretations of what 'postinternet' means, and how it interacts with the changing relationship between the "online" and "offline".

This essay accompanies my artwork 'i hope senpai will notice my art' which uses postinternet ideologies, its aesthetics, and affect as a framework to explore how the participatory nature of the Internet has changed the way images proliferate, and how this has affected the art image. I unpack the evolving relationship between "online" and "offline" through semiotic analysis of icons and symbols used across digital interfaces and social media. Furthermore, I explore how the Internet and social media has encouraged the development of Internet subcultures, and how these cultures differ from "real-life" subcultures—if

be a good introductory resource to those wanting to learn more about the subculture.

⁶ Anon, (2016). In: 1st ed. Available at:
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/276314?redirectedFrom=kawaii>
[Accessed 23 Jun. 2016].

⁷ A Vierkant, The Image Object Post Internet, in , *JstChillin*, 2010, pp. page 3, 4 and 5, <http://jstchillin.org/artie/pdf/The_Image_Object_Post-Internet_us.pdf> [accessed 9 June 2017].

⁸ T Beard, "Interview with Guthrie Lonergan", in *RHIZOME - blog*, 2017, <<https://rhizome.org/editorial/2008/mar/26/interview-with-guthrie-lonergan/>> [accessed 10 June 2015].

there is even a difference at all in today's "always-online" world. I consider what this means for qualities of softness, cuteness and femininity—considering the traditionally male-dominated nature of cyber culture—to highlight the social implications of the changing relationship between the "online" and "offline".

Online and the Democratisation of the Image

As a contemporary counterpart to the printing press, the Internet and its associated digitalisation of the image has resulted in a second wave of democratisation. That is, while physical media once imposed technological restrictions on image reproduction, recent technological advancements have allowed the image to be reproduced, altered, and distributed more easily than ever before. This democratisation of the image has influenced the function of the image both online and offline.

Walter Benjamin criticises this democratisation of the image in his essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'. He addresses the new-found reproducibility and availability of art, questioning the value of the original. He writes of the loss of the "aura" through the mechanic reproduction of art itself, where the "aura" represents the originality, authenticity, and presence of a work of art⁹. For Benjamin, a painting has an aura, while a photograph of this same painting does not.

Benjamin's concerns are echoed by contemporary media theorist Boris Groys, who considers the democratisation of art to be weak. He argues that contemporary artists avoid the "strong" images of classical art and popular culture in favour of "weak" gestures, available only to small or semi-closed participant communities. He states, "This repetitive and at the same time futile gesture [of making reductive avant-garde art] opens a space that seems to me to be one

⁹ W Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", in *Marxists.org*, 2005, <<https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm>> [accessed 24 June 2017].

of the most mysterious spaces of our contemporary democracy—social networks like Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Second Life, and Twitter, which offer global populations the opportunity to post their photos, videos, and texts in a way that cannot be distinguished from any other conceptualist or post-conceptualist artwork."¹⁰ For Groys, every instance of social-media sharing is a repetition of a "weak gesture"—a timeless mundanity; an expression of excess.

For Hito Steyerl, the poor image is similarly weak in quality. She states, "The poor image is an illicit fifth-generation bastard of an original image."¹¹ However, Steyerl differs from Groys in that she believes the online democratisation of the image reveals the nature of its circulation, and this language connects Internet users globally. She states the poor image "constructs anonymous global networks just as it creates a shared history."¹¹ The poor image enables global connectedness through the disruption of the status quo, and there is nothing weak about this unifying visual language.



Figure 1. An example of a poor image which has become an Internet meme. *Do I look like I know what a "jay peg" is?*, 2014.

¹⁰ B Groys, "The Weak Universalism", in *e-flux*, vol. 15, 2010, <<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/15/61294/the-weak-universalism/>> [accessed 26 June 2017].

¹¹ H Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image", in *e-flux*, 2009, <<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61362/in-defense-of-the-poor-image/>> [accessed 25 June 2017].



The poor image becomes not just about some original copy, but through its endless circulations becomes a copy of a copy of a copy. It asks to be considered as its sum presence in circulation, "its own real conditions of existence."¹¹ As Steyerl concludes, "it is about reality"¹¹.

The poor image itself becomes a self-referential symbol of the online democratisation of the image. My artwork 'i hope senPai will notice my art' adopts aesthetic attributes of the poor image—its pixelated noise and glitches—to highlight this, drawing attention to how the poor image has enabled global connectedness.



The Internet is Memes

Coined by British evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins, the term 'meme' initially referred to the spread of ideas, behaviours or style between people within a culture¹². More recently, Internet memes have broken off from their neo-Darwinist associations, and become synonymous with an image, video, hashtag or catchphrase that is manipulated and circulated through digital platforms.

Popular memes include;

Doge (2013)



Figure 2. Origin of the Doge meme. Sato A, 違うよ、今日は金曜日じゃん !!, 2010.



Figure 3. An example of a Doge meme. Dunkin' Dogenuts, 2015.

¹² "Meme", in Merriam-Webster, 2017, <<https://www.merriam-webster.com>> [accessed 23 May 2016].

I Hope Senpai Will Notice Me (2012)¹³



Figure 4. An example of an 'I Hope Senpai Will Notice Me' meme. *i hope senpai notices me this year*, 2015.



Figure 5. A Tumblr text post referencing the 'I Hope Senpai Will Notice Me' meme. *Sempai noticed you*, 2012.

Functioning similarly to Hito Steyerl's poor image, the meme is not about some original image, but is to be considered as its sum presence in circulation. The meme is not just about Internet culture, but *is* Internet culture—embodying its endless circulation.

'i hope senpai will notice my art' is unashamedly named after the 'I Hope Senpai Will Notice Me' meme, and features a number of appropriated meme-related images. This use of memes highlights the unifying visual language that spurs digital connectedness, making our digitally augmented reality visible.

¹³ The word 'senpai' is a Japanese honorific term used when speaking to someone of a marginally higher social status, such as a person one school grade above

'i hope senPai will notice my art', a Postinternet body of work

In line with Postinternet ideologies, my work 'i hope senPai will notice my art' is more concerned with commenting on communications technology than being medium-native to the internet itself. My work features physically materialised digital icons, symbols and memes to investigate the relationship between the "online" and the "offline", the "virtual" and the "real".



Figure 6. My submission for ADAD4010 Assignment 3. 2016. Lim C, Acrylic on plywood.

Estonian installation artist Katja Novitskova similarly works within postinternet ideologies to investigate issues regarding technology and digital imagery. Her work 'Future Growth Approximations I-VIII' features a series of digital stock images printed on large aluminium cut-outs. The work presents the viewer with unreal two-dimensional physical objects, better suited photographed than looked at in person. This is a deliberate device to convey the aesthetic of

Internet art—visually dissolving the border between the real and the virtual.



Figure 7. A photograph of Katja Novitskova's work in a gallery. Novitskova K, *Approximation II*, 2012.

Brian Droitcour criticises Novitskova's postinternet approach, stating "Post-Internet art is about creating objects that look good online: photographed under bright lights in the gallery's purifying white cube."¹⁴ He claims postinternet art relies on the status of the gallery, becoming art about the presentation of art rather than having any immediate material presence itself. Droitcour boldly claims, "Post-Internet art does to art what porn does to sex — renders it lurid."¹⁴

¹⁴ B Droitcour, "THE PERILS OF POST-INTERNET ART", in *Art in America*, 2014, <<http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/magazine/the-perils-of-post-internet-art/>> [accessed 26 June 2017].

Conversely, I do not present Katja Novitskova's "silicone and plastic utopia of technological progress."¹⁵ Instead, I present lovingly hand-painted plywood sculptures of digital icons and popular Internet iconography. My icons are realised as 2.5D sculptures—not quite three-dimensional, but not quite 2D either. For Steyerl, the "flattening out of visual content"¹⁶ that occurs on sites such as Tumblr results in a "dematerialisation". By adding an extra half a dimension in the rematerialising of symbols and cultural icons which the Internet has dematerialised, my work further rejects Droitcour's claims of postinternet art reflecting "an Internet where the only change worth thinking about is the extent of an installation shot's reach."¹⁴ Although my work may photograph well front-on, this 2.5D effect can only be experienced in person, emphasizing their materiality as "real-world" objects, and not just a happenstance in the process of creating a digital image.

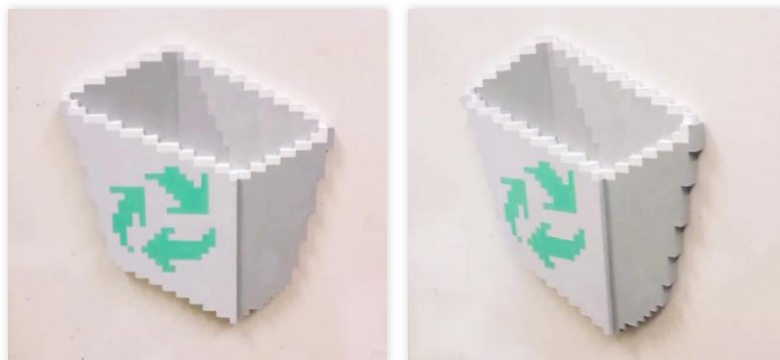


Figure 8.1, 8.2. Photographs of my recycling bin sculpture straight on and from an angle. Lim C, 'Recycling Bin', 2016.

In his essay 'Affect as Medium, or the Digital-Facial-Image', mark B.N Hansen argues that "affect can offer an interface

¹⁵ M Rünk, "Katja Novitskova's Work In A Post-Internet World – the Future In A Mediated Reality < 1/2015 < Magazine - kunst.ee", in *KUNST.EE*, 2015, <<http://ajakirkunst.ee/?c=magazine&l=en&t=katja-novitskovas-work-in-a-post-internet-world--the-future-in-a-mediated-reality&id=1331>> [accessed 26 June 2017].

¹⁶ Steyerl, H., 2009. In defense of the poor image. *e-flux journal*, 10(11).

between the domain of information (the digital) and embodied human experience"¹⁷. Where most postinternet art deals with the nature of its presence rather than the nature of the objects themselves, my work presents texture, visible brushstrokes, and imperfect edges that may only be experienced in the physical rendition of the work. As the audience examines, touches, and even holds these objects, the Internet icons they represent are no longer some disembodied otherworldly concept, but a material item in the palm of their hands. My affective objects do not just open the door between the "virtual" and the "real", but indicate there is no longer a wall between them at all in today's "always-online" world.

¹⁷ M Hansen, "Affect as Medium, or the 'Digital-Facial-Image'", in *Journal of Visual Culture*, vol. 2, 2003, 205-228.

But What is "Post" Internet?

There has been some uncertainty surrounding the term 'postinternet'. Artist Rafaël Rozendaal writes that he finds the word "post" misleading; "It implies that we've moved one step further, beyond the Internet, into new territory."¹⁸ The word 'post' suggests that there is a separation between time spent online and offline, however this boundary has been eroded with the proliferation of personal computers, tablets, and smartphones, and the emergence of an 'always-online' culture. Is there an "after" the Internet, or is there only a "before" and "during"? Following this, does it make sense for us to investigate "internet culture", as "internet culture" increasingly becomes just "culture"?

In his paper 'The Image-Object Post Internet', Artie Vierkant views his work as where "Post-Internet objects and images are developed with concern to their particular materiality as well as their vast variety of methods of presentation and dissemination."¹⁹ In particular, Vierkant's 'Image Objects' exist somewhere between material sculptures and augmented documentation images. Each object starts as a digital file, which is then printed on aluminium material and cut to the form of the piece, similar to Katja Novitskova's works.

¹⁸ Rozendaal, R. (2016). *Rafaël Rozendaal - Post internet art*. [online] Rafaël Rozendaal. Available at: <http://www.newrafael.com/post-internet-art/> [Accessed 22 May 2016].

¹⁹ Vierkant, op. cit.,



Figure 9. A digitally augmented image documentation of Artie Vierkant's work in a gallery. Vierkant A, *Image Objects*, 2011 - ongoing.

Similar to my work, Vierkant emphasizes the difference between the work's online presence and the work's physical presence in the gallery. However, Vierkant does this through digital rather than material processes. Each time his pieces are officially photographed, the resulting images are altered and new works are then built upon these images. Here, the difference between the physical gallery encounter and the countless online variations of the objects offer a critique of the Internet's democratisation of the image. For Vierkant, postinternet art is concerned more with the nature of its internet-influenced reception and social presence than with the nature of the art object itself.

'In Postinternet: Art After the Internet', Marisa Olson states "we are now in a postinternet era. Everything is always already postinternet"²⁰. Olson acknowledges that the impact of the Internet surpasses art which deals with the Internet, and reaches into all of the demands and banalities of today's "always-online" culture. Sociologist and media theorist Nathan Jurgenson echoes this point, stating "we are not

²⁰ M Olson, "POSTINTERNET: ART AFTER THE INTERNET", in *Foam Magazine*, 2011, pp. 59-63, <<http://shop.foam.org/en/foam-magazine-foam-magazine-29-whats-next.html>> [accessed 24 June 2017].



crossing in and out of separate digital and physical realities, ala the Matrix, but instead live in one reality that is augmented by atoms and bits."²¹ As the Internet has become an inseparable part of everyday life, all art created in this era has become postinternet. And so, all art produced in this era is concerned with tearing away the false dichotomy of "online" and "offline", and dealing with the democratised image.

²¹ Juergenson, op. cit.,

The New Aesthetic

Coined by James Bridle, the 'New Aesthetic' refers to the use of the visual language of the digital, networked world in the physical offline. Although the aesthetic itself has been present for much longer, it was not until a panel at the SXSW conference in 2012 that the term gained wider attention. Bridle insists that the New Aesthetic is not a movement, but an aggregator of an aesthetic attribute²².

Like postinternet, descriptions of the New Aesthetic paradigm are varied. Ian Bogost casually describes it as "here's a weird thing a computer left behind"²³, while Bruce Sterling defines it as "the eruption of the digital into the physical"²⁴. Here, both parties identify that the realms of "offline" and "online", "virtual" and "real" are discrete realms, with an interaction that bridges between the two.

These interactions between the "online" and "offline" operate through metaphor. We interface with the digital world through metaphorical signs and symbols—the desktop, the recycling bin, the hand cursor—as they smooth the transition between "reality" and "virtuality", using systems and concepts already familiar to us outside of the screen. By materialising and augmenting the visual language of the digital and Internet, the New Aesthetic deconstructs these metaphors and reveals the bridge between the "online" and "offline" has collapsed. This

²² J Bridle, "#sxaesthetic", in *Booktwo.org*, 2012, <<http://booktwo.org/notebook/sxaesthetic/>> [accessed 7 June 2016].

²³ I Bogost, "The New Aesthetic Needs to Get Weirder", in *The Atlantic*, 2012, <<https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2012/04/the-new-aesthetic-needs-to-get-weirder/255838/>> [accessed 25 June 2017].

²⁴ B Sterling, "An Essay On The New Aesthetic", in *WIRED*, 2012, <<https://www.wired.com/2012/04/an-essay-on-the-new-aesthetic/>> [accessed 26 June 2017].

dichotomy has become decreasingly relevant in our day to day lives, as we now exist in a digitally augmented reality.

I am currently producing larger sculptural pieces ranging from 0.7m to 2m tall, which mimic pixilation, digital noise and colour glitches in line with the New Aesthetic paradigm to draw focus to the poor image as a visual language. Like with Katja Novitskova's work, the audience may walk through, in, and around these large sculptural pieces. As the audience navigates through this space, their perception of the images will shift and transform between a 2D flat image and a 3D sculptural object, much like how our reality is augmented by the digital. My sculptures illustrate how our physical bodies and digital profiles are in constant dialogue, each shaping and shifting the perception of the other.

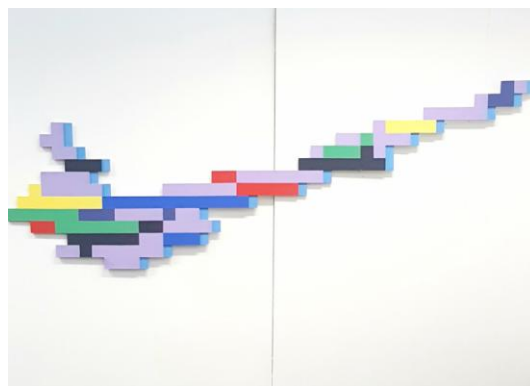


Figure 10. A photograph of my glitchy Nike logo sculpture. Lim C, part of '*i hope sen **P**ai will notice my art*', 2017, acrylic on plywood.

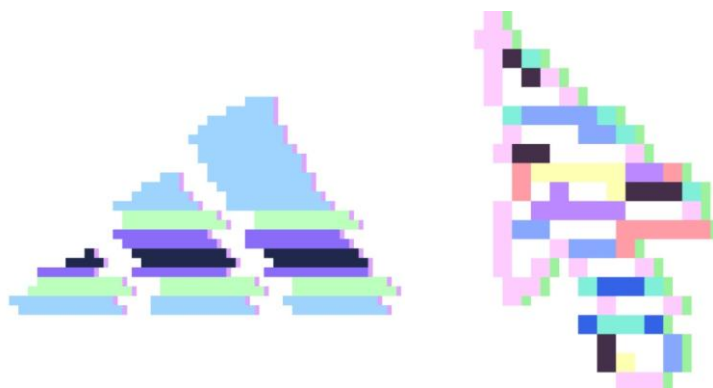


Figure 11, 12. Plans for my glitchy Adidas logo and mouse cursor sculptures. Lim C, part of '*i hope sen **P**ai will notice my art*', 2017.

AMPM studio is a concept store and exhibition space in Taipei founded by artist/designer Dbsk1, and designer Joe Chu. The store specialises in independent designer fashion affiliated with the New Aesthetic and with vaporwave subculture, including the founders' own in-house labels 'Pet Shops Girl' and 'Rotten to the Core'. The pictured 'No Signal 2way crop top' by DVMVGE (Dbsk1 X Petshopsgirl) for sale through AMPM studio makes use of computer-generated imaging, laid over each other to create a kind of cyber collage, reminiscent of analogue TV noise.



Figure 13. DVMVGE, *No Signal 2way crop top*, 2016.

DVMVGE's 'WWiii Spandex Vest Top' features a grid pattern reminiscent of 80s computer graphics. The 'WWiii' graphic parodies Nintendo's 'Wii' logo to resemble 'WWIII', or 'World War III'. On their product page, DVMVGE states this is to represent "the way in which video games and cyberspace have come to determine our identity and even existence, with people's lives now controlled by their digital representation and interaction."²⁵ Notions of emotional detachment through technology, and modern cyber culture being monitored and militarised for intelligence purposes are

²⁵ DVMVGE, "DVMVGE WWiii Spandex Vest Top", in *AMPM*, 2016, <<http://www.ampmxx.com/product/dvmvge-wwiii-spandex-vest-top>> [accessed 22 May 2016].

also evoked through the rest of DVMVGE's 'WWiii' collection. Through their use of New Aesthetic paradigms, DVMVGE's designs bring contemporary digital visual culture into the realm of everyday wearables, illustrating our contemporary digitally augmented world.



Figure 14. DVMVGE, Image of DVMVGE WWiii Spandex Vest Top, 2016.

Semiotics Online/Offline

Skeuomorphic²⁶ design in user interfaces was first popularised by the original Macintosh operating system, where Apple deliberately sought to minimise the awareness of the operating system. For the first time, many users were able to perform basic tasks with a series of mouse gestures and graphic controls, without requiring operating system knowledge or the use of a command-line interface.²⁷ Mimetic signs and icons mediated the interaction between humans and electronic devices, making semiotics play an integral role in human computer interaction.

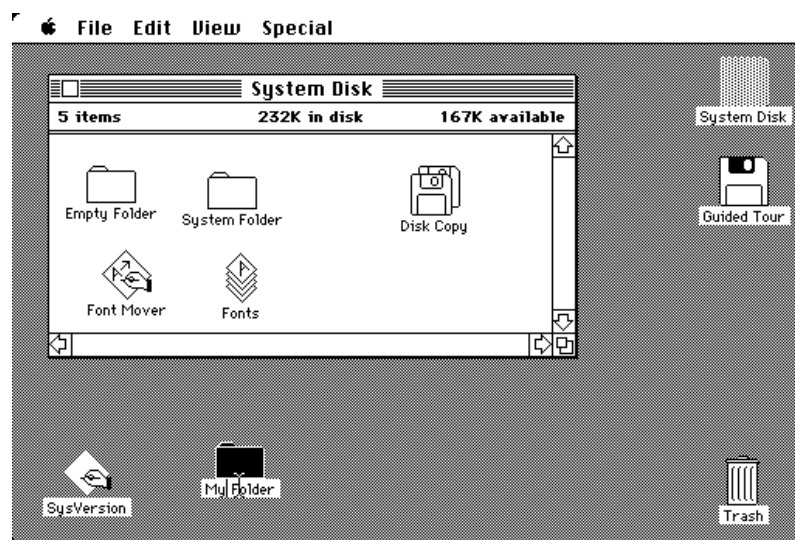


Figure 15. Screenshot of the original Macintosh System Software and Finder, released in 1984.

The desktop and its associated icons are perhaps the most widely recognised examples of skeuomorphic design. Manilla

²⁶ A skeuomorph is defined as a derivative object or image which retains visual signs from the original design. As a design technique, it refers to user interface elements mimicking their real world counterparts. G Basalla, *The Evolution of Technology*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 107.

²⁷ Jakob Nielsen, "Macintosh: 25 Years", in *Nielsen Norman Group*, 2009, <<https://www.nngroup.com/articles/macintosh-25-years/>> [accessed 24 June 2017].



folders store collections of documents, documents may be deleted by dragging them into the trash can, and documents may be saved by clicking on the floppy disk. These metaphors reach beyond being visual representations, and act as metaphorical signs to afford certain behaviours. These signs smooth the transition between "reality" and "virtuality", using systems and concepts already familiar to us outside of the screen.

As we progress towards a generation of ubiquitous computing, visual metaphors become obsolete. The floppy disk as a save icon no longer has a physical counterpart, as the physical floppy disk has been superseded by more efficient methods of digital file storage. However, through repeated usage and circulation, the floppy disk as a save icon—like Steyerl's poor image—has come to mean itself. The digital image no longer relies on some external object to gain meaning, as it itself contains the meaning. The bridge between the "online" and the "offline" has been broken, as the dichotomy dissolves in our digitally augmented reality.

By rematerialising online icons in a pastel, pixelated 2D form, I engage in what Terrance Hawkes calls semiotic defamiliarisation—the renewal of one's perception of a symbol that has become so familiar that it has become routine²⁸. By altering and distorting online icons, I draw attention to how the merging of "online" and "offline" has affected these icons, and how these icons have then in turn become representations of their own conditions of existence.

²⁸ T Hawkes, Structuralism and semiotics, in *London, Routledge*, 1988, pp. 62-67.





Figure 16. Photographs of my floppy disk. Lim C, Part of 'i hope sen *Pai* will notice my art', 2016.

Internet artist John Karel similarly includes online icons in his series of "Skeleton Gifs". Icons from various aspects of Internet culture and social media are paired along with a recurring skeleton character, who interacts with them in a novel and often zany fashion. These gifs are often feature death-centric captions, such as "💎 eternal death 💎" and "💎 save yourself 💎". Here, Karel employs a post-ironic reading of signs—where the object is cynically mocked, but this insincerity may be taken in sincerity or "unironically"²⁹. The use and awareness of the term "post-irony" is becoming increasingly popular, and is especially evident in clinical depression memes, subreddit³⁰ boards /r/me_irl and

²⁹ M Collins, "Post-irony is real, and so what?", in *The Georgetown Voice*, 2010, <<http://georgetownvoice.com/2010/03/04/post-irony-is-real-and-so-what/>> [accessed 23 June 2017].

³⁰ Reddit is a popular social news and web content sharing website that functions like a forum. Reddit content is organised into "subreddits", which are dedicated to specific areas of interest. For example, /r/aww is a subreddit dedicated to pictures of cute things, and /r/The_Donald is centered around Donald Trump.



/r/2meirl4meirl, health goth culture and vaporwave culture. Perhaps this is in response to an awareness of our digitally augmented reality, where we are plagued with the knowledge of every image being a copy of another image, but also an image of itself.

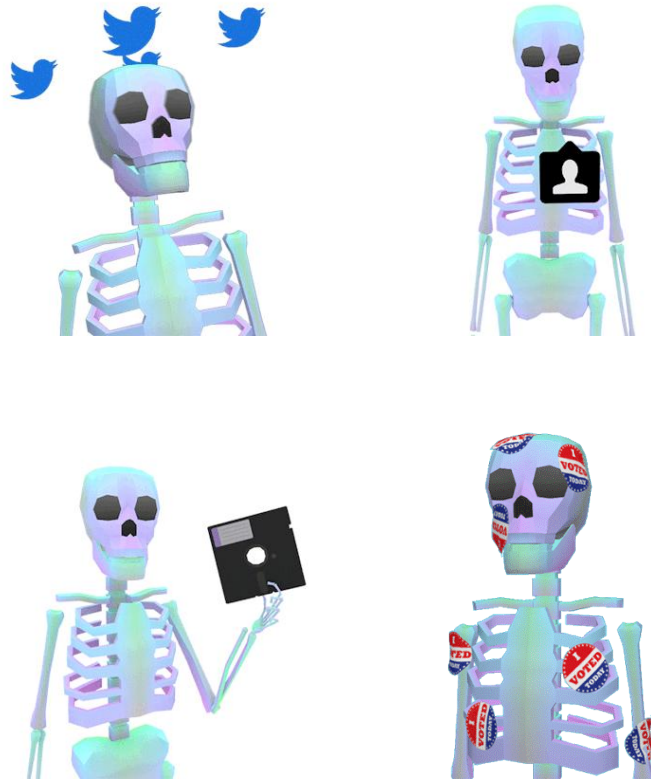


Figure 17, 18, 19, 20. A selection of John Karel's Skeleton Gifs. From left-to-right, top-to-bottom: Untitled, Untitled, [save yourself](#), Untitled, all 2017.

Vaporwave and Health Goth Online/Offline

The Nike and Adidas logos are prominently featured in my work 'i hope senpai will notice my art'. Investigating these fashion label icons is an important aspect of my research, as semiotic analysis between "online" and "offline" aesthetics has allowed me to reinforce that the Internet's democratisation of the image has created a unifying visual language. The advent of social media has vastly reshaped the way fashion is advertised and consumed through activities such as the rise of fashion bloggers, clothing retail through Instagram, and social media marketing campaigns by big-name fashion brands. This has augmented human connectedness, and it is now easier than ever for communities and subcultures to form.

The Nike and Adidas logos have been parodied and appropriated countless times in Tumblr-based web-art and real-life health goth and vaporwave culture. This has resulted in their respective brands' resurgence in popularity in alternative fashion and subsequently mainstream fashion. The simplicity and notability of these logos make them easy targets for artists and designers to use as a symbol for consumer capitalism and popular culture. For example, Internet-based fashion label ABVHVN's 'Sadidas' and 'onFLEEK' clothing collections turn these sportswear logos into symbols of adolescent "edginess". The play on words in 'Sadidas' is obvious, while 'on fleek' is a slang term used to mean something that is "very good", usually used when referring to eyebrows — à la Internet meme "eyebrows on fleek"³¹.

³¹ "Eyebrows on Fleek", in *Know Your Meme*, 2015, <<http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/eyebrows-on-fleek>> [accessed 10 May 2017].



Figure 21. ABVHVN, Image of model wearing *Sadidas Adjustable Hat*, 2014.

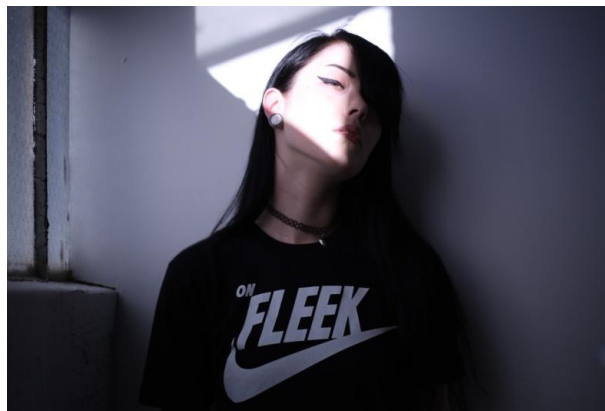


Figure 22. ABVHVN, Image of model wearing *On Fleek Unisex T Shirt*, 2015.

In their untitled Tumblr image post, Tumblr-based artist ataraxia places the Adidas logo behind an image of Benvenuto Cellini's 'Perseus with the Head of Medusa' as a tongue-in-cheek exaltation of the power of the Adidas brand. Meanwhile, fellow Tumblr-based artist saint-vhs has the Nike logo simply sitting in the top-right of their gif artwork 『**AN EMPTY** ボイ ド』, with not much relevance to the surrounding content. Here, the Nike logo is simply used as a motif as is the fashion in vaporwave art. In the fashion of Steyerl's poor image, despite the Nike logo being an iconic fashion symbol, here it has been stripped of all meaning and stands merely for its own existence as an image.





Figure 23. A digital composition featuring Cellini's 'Perseus with the Head of Medusa' and the Adidas logo. ataraxia, Untitled, 2016.

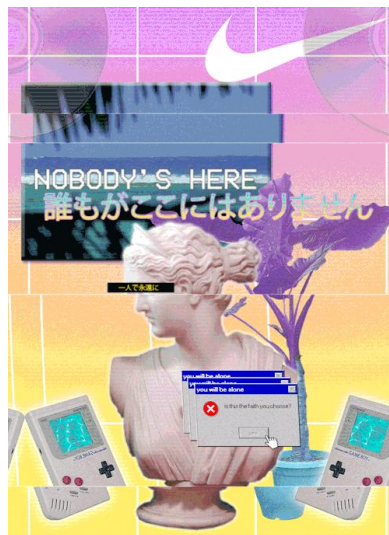


Figure 24. A vaporwave gif featuring a Nike logo and visual elements from 90s technology. Saint-vhs, 『AN EMPTY ボイド』, 2016.

These post-ironic readings of the Nike and Adidas logos are reminiscent of "culture jamming"—a term coined by cultural critic Mark Dery³² to refer to media hacking, socio-political satire, and guerrilla semiotics, all in one. In 'Culture Jamming: Hacking, Slashing, and Sniping in the Empire of Signs', Dery explains how semiotics is employed to "alter our understanding of corporate messaging and capitalist ideology."³¹ Similar to semiotic defamiliarisation, the sign is

³² M Dery, "Culture Jamming: Hacking, Slashing, and Sniping in the Empire of Signs", in *Mark Dery*, 2010, <http://markdery.com/?page_id=154> [accessed 22 June 2017].

altered and repurposed to highlight its hidden meaning. In the case of the Adidas and Nike logos in health goth and vaporwave, a post-ironic reading is employed in response to an awareness of social media being utilised by capitalist structures. Our augmented reality exists not for ourselves, but for some higher capitalist purpose.

This criticism of capitalist consumerist culture is prominent in both health goth and vaporwave. However, as a subculture, health goth's defining feature appears to be its visual aesthetics. The ease of sharing images over the Internet has allowed for this subculture to emerge, without there being any other shared motivations, activities or even geographic placement that traditionally defines a subculture. It seems today's digitally augmented reality the simple act of image distribution and appreciation is enough for a subculture to form.

To investigate health goth and vaporwave's criticism of capitalist consumerist culture, I created a series of pixelated Nike symbols using a range of different colours and materials. I reproduced the same image multiple times and laid them out in a grid to draw attention to the Internet's democratisation of the image, its excess and banality. However, reminiscent of Andy Warhol's 'Campbell's Soup Cans', this drew focus away from my work as an investigation of the art object in relation to our digitally augmented reality in favour of illustrating capitalist consumerist culture.

Further experiments involving the Nike logo included me using a dripping motif in reference to Massumi's remark "It is the edge of the virtual, where it leaks into the actual, that counts."³³ Here, Massumi is interested in the virtual in terms of affects, and believes art to be situated on the border

³³ B Massumi, *Parables for the virtual*, Durham [u.a.], Duke Univ. Press, 2002, p. 43.

between the "actual" and the "virtual" — between the physical moment where the artwork is encountered, and the virtual moment where an affect is stimulated. Although aesthetically pleasing, using this one quote seemed a flimsy excuse to defamiliarise the sign in a way that is not consistent with the New Aesthetic. Additionally, the use of "virtual" here is inconsistent, as my research is concerned with the online virtual, while Massumi is concerned with an abstract intangible implication in relation to affect. So, my Nike logo has been presented in a new light, but to what end?



Figure 25. A photograph of research conducted using multiple variations of the Nike logo. Lim C 2017, glitter and acrylic on plywood, and acrylic glass.



Figure 26. A photograph of research conducted using the Nike logo in different materials, engaging a "leaky" aesthetic. Lim C, 2017, acrylic on plywood, acrylic glass.

These objects do not satisfactorily convey my research regarding the false dichotomy of "online" and "offline", and so I have chosen to not include them in 'i hope senPai will notice my art'.



Why 90s Internet Aesthetic?

Contemporary art has seen an influx of interest in 80s and 90s web aesthetic, music, gifs, and outdated software. In vaporwave culture especially, synthesised 80s shopping mall music is heavily sampled, windows from Windows95 are used to frame visual content, logos from old video game systems are scattered throughout, and visual noise reminiscent of analog television is romanticised. Paolo Magagnoli states that this "archaeological impulse" increasingly stimulates contemporary art, as practitioners excavate fragments of obsolete technology, transforming them into ruins³⁴.



Figure 27. A vaporwave gif that heavily features visual elements from 90s technology. saint-vhs, 『☆°.°.° 静かな夜の涙 ☆°.°.° 』, 2017.

³⁴ P Magagnoli, "The Internet as Ruin: Nostalgia for the Early World Wide Web in Contemporary Art", in *Transformations*, 2017, 1, <http://www.transformationsjournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Magagnoli_Transformations28.pdf> [accessed 20 June 2017].

By "ruin", I refer to Michael Roth's definition where an object framed as ruin is reclaimed "*from* a fall into decay and oblivion and often *for* a form of cultural attention and care that elevates the value of that object."³⁵ That is, symbols from obsolete web design and technology are reclaimed and defamiliarised, with nostalgia and affect. This is not a simple fondness for a past where technology was a slow and inefficient medium. Vaporwave artists employ a post-ironic reading of historic online signs and symbols in response to the increasingly capitalist nature of our current digitally augmented reality—swamped with online advertising and the expectations of social media. The Internet of the 1990s represents a time where the Internet was an esoteric, even underground, medium. But, as we move into an "always-online" culture where the wall between "online" and "offline" has been stripped away, the capitalist market has made the Internet banal.

I created my digital piece 'windows every where' towards the start of my research, where I was still investigating the relationship between the "online" and "offline", unaware of the fallacies of 'digital dualism'—a term coined by Nathan Jurgenson to refer to the bias of viewing the physical and the virtual as separate entities³⁶. I frame the visual aesthetic and technological pitfalls of the Windows95 operating system as ruin, and defamiliarise the window as a visual metaphor. In reference to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's famous ballad 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'³⁷, the text "Windows, windows every where,/ Nor any breeze to feel" satirises "always-online" culture, criticising its notions of excess and banality.

³⁵ M Roth et al., "Irresistible Decay", in *The Getty Research Institute*, 1997, <http://www.getty.edu/research/exhibitions_events/exhibitions/irresistible_decay/> [accessed 20 June 2017].

³⁶ Jurgenson, op. cit.,

³⁷ "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner (text of 1834) by Samuel Taylor Coleridge", in *Poetry Foundation*, 2017, <[Http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/43997](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/43997)> [accessed 19 March 2017].

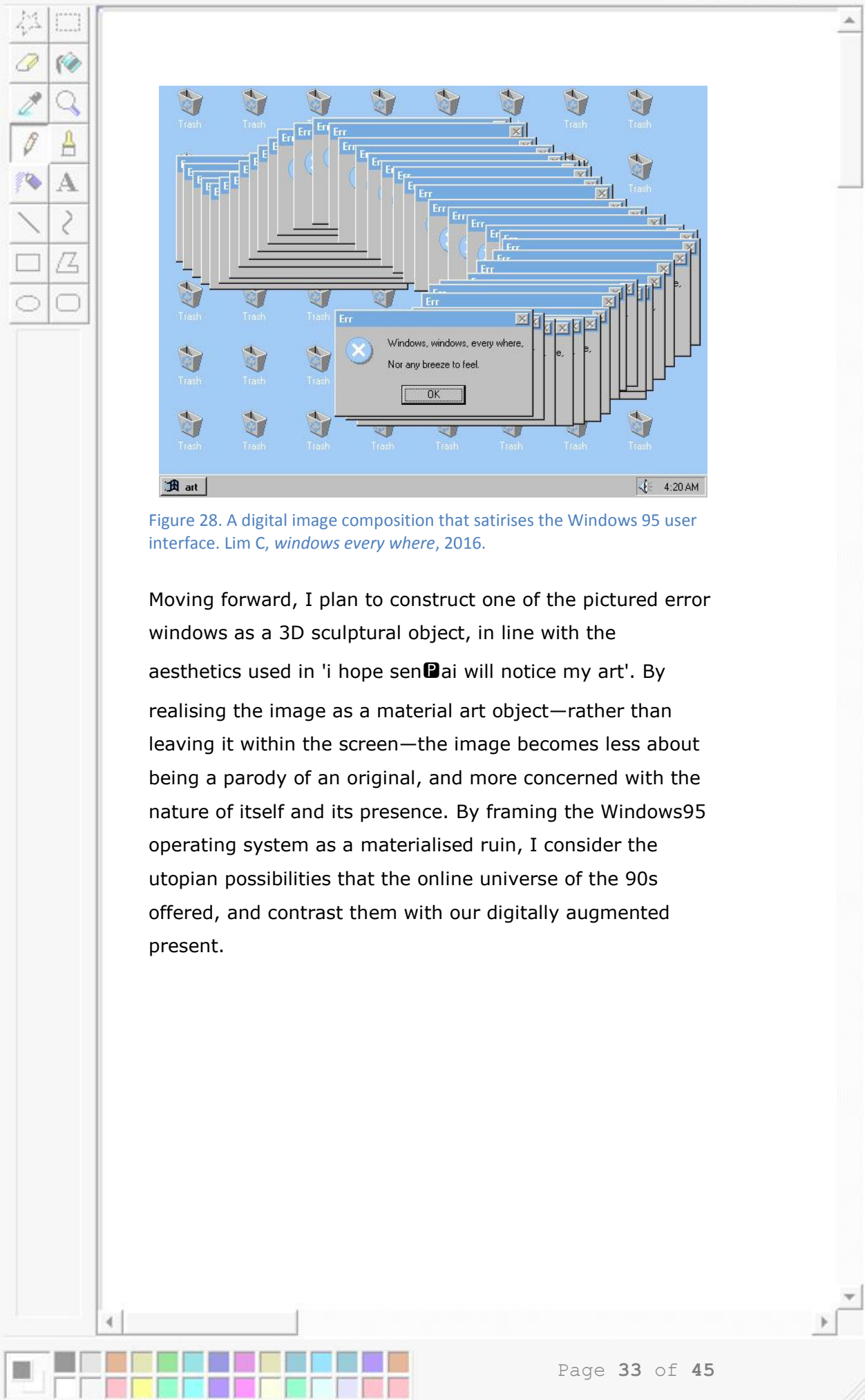


Figure 28. A digital image composition that satirises the Windows 95 user interface. Lim C, *windows every where*, 2016.

Moving forward, I plan to construct one of the pictured error windows as a 3D sculptural object, in line with the aesthetics used in 'i hope senpai will notice my art'. By realising the image as a material art object—rather than leaving it within the screen—the image becomes less about being a parody of an original, and more concerned with the nature of itself and its presence. By framing the Windows95 operating system as a materialised ruin, I consider the utopian possibilities that the online universe of the 90s offered, and contrast them with our digitally augmented present.

Kawaii, Cuteness and Cybertwee

'i hope senpai will notice my art' features a soft, pastel colour palette, reminiscent of the kawaii aesthetic—that is, the quality of cuteness in the context of Japanese culture. Sharon Kinsella writes that kawaii "celebrates sweet, adorable, innocent, pure, simple, genuine, gentle, vulnerable, weak and inexperienced."³⁸ Emerging in the 70s, kawaii culture was initially associated only with Japanese school girls, but later spread through magazines, comics, packaging, and advertising. More recently, the Internet has enabled kawaii to spread throughout the world.

In 2015, kawaii shifted from being a mainstream pop culture aesthetic into being a political tool. Sianne Ngai illustrates that the cuteness in kawaii is an aestheticisation of powerlessness, stating "the cute object is as often intended to excite a consumer's sadistic desires for mastery and control as much as his or her desire to cuddle"³⁹. This secret desire for control makes kawaii the perfect framework for semiotic defamiliarisation, giving rise to the subversive kawaii memes that can be found across social networking sites like Tumblr and Twitter. Political messages such as "clothing is not consent, asshole" are laid in round pastel fonts over sparkly backgrounds. Here, kawaii culture has been augmented by the Internet to become a tool for political discourse. Kawaii embraces the Internet's

³⁸ S Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan" in *Women, Media, And Consumption In Japan*, L Skov & B Moeran (ed), University of Hawai'i Press, 1995, 1995, pp. 220-254,
<<http://www.kinsellaresearch.com/new/Cuties%20in%20Japan.pdf>>
[accessed 20 June 2017].

³⁹ S Ngai, "The Cuteness of the Avant-Garde", in *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 31, 2005, 811-847,
<<http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/444516?journalCode=ci>> [accessed 15 May 2017].

democratisation of the image and resulting post-ironic attitudes for the purpose of political activism.



Figure 29. An image satirising Donald Trump using kawaii aesthetics. Kelty B , *idc idc idc idc idc*, 2017.



Figure 30. A subversive kawaii gif. floralforelsket, untitled, 2013.

One of my art objects features the word 'senpai' in white writing across a pink background, similar to the style used on the cover of Drake's 2015 single 'Hotline Bling'. 2015 also saw the arrival of the 'fuccboi', a derogatory term referring to a subculture of men who lack moral judgement and enjoy wearing brands like Supreme. A style mostly proliferated through the Internet, Gregory Babcock writes on media platform *Complex*; "If the Internet has done one thing for fashion, it's proven how many fuccbois there are in the world."⁴⁰ My 'senpai' work is derivative of Supreme's company logo, which in turn is derivative of Barbara

⁴⁰ G Babcock, "A Field Guide to the Modern Day Fuccboi", in *Complex*, 2015, <<http://au.complex.com/style/2015/03/fuccboi-guide>> [accessed 9 May 2016].

Kruger's 'I shop therefore I am'⁴¹. Here, my work uses kawaii as a device to illustrate the irony of using Kruger's criticism of capitalist consumerist culture to create a logo for a clothing brand. As the Internet has caused the Supreme logo stand for fuccboi culture, my work is self aware of our digitally augmented reality where all images are derivative, but also self-referential symbols of image democratisation themselves.



Figure 31. Digital image that was later made as sculpture. Lim C, *Senpai*, 2016.



Figure 32. The logo of the clothing store "Supreme". Supreme, *Supreme-logo-newyork.png*, 1994.



Figure 33. Kruger B, *Untitled (I Shop Therefore I Am)*, 1987, 111" by 113", photographic silkscreen/vinyl.

⁴¹ B Kruger, *Untitled (I Shop Therefore I Am)*, in , New York, Mary Boone Gallery, 1987.

Cybertwee was founded in early 2014 by media artists Gabriella Hileman, May Waver and Violet Forest, and is described as "if cyberpunk had a cute kid sister who was secretly better at hacking"⁴². The art movement exists as an artistic rebuttal to male-dominated discourse in technology and art, as the Cybertwee manifesto proclaims "Romantic is not weak. feminine is not weak. cute is not weak."⁴³ Indeed, looking at kawaii as a tool for political discourse, the Internet has allowed for feminine strength to flourish. Currently, cybertwee exists as a closed Facebook group and as a Tumblr, but there is talk of using virtual reality technology to create a virtually accessible 3D space. Waver insists "It's important to create spaces where a spectrum of emotional expressions, nostalgia for a gurlhood lived or imagined, tender interactions—things belittled by patriarchy's dominance— can be validated and celebrated"⁴⁴. Here, we see how our digitally augmented reality has allowed femininity to thrive against the masculine-dominated tech world.

My work employs elements of cybertwee—its cuteness, softness, and femininity, in synchronicity with technology and the Internet. Through this, my objects bring forward the social implications of "online" and "offline" no longer being distinct realms.

⁴² From the sidebar description of the ♡♡ cybertwee ♡♡ Facebook group for artists, <<https://www.facebook.com/groups/364238813738395>> [Accessed 20 May 2016].

⁴³ G Hileman, M Waver & V Forest, "the cybertwee manifesto – ♡", in Cybertwee.net, , 2014, <http://cybertwee.net/the_manifesto/> [accessed 22 May 2016].

⁴⁴ G Furino, "How to Build a Safe Space for Earnest, Feminine Cyberpunk", in *Creators*, 2016, <https://creators.vice.com/en_au/article/gvw949/cybertwee-collective-internet-feminist-cyberpunk> [accessed 26 June 2017].

Conclusion

Communications technology is no longer secluded to the domain of programmers and engineers, and is now more accessible and ubiquitous than ever. Forever tethered to our devices, our physical bodies and digital profiles are in constant dialogue. As sociologist and media theorist Nathan Jurgenson states, "we are not crossing in and out of separate digital and physical realities, ala the Matrix, but instead live in one reality that is augmented by atoms and bits."⁴⁵

Responses to this new augmented reality are varied. Internet memes commonly employ a post-ironic reading of signs, where the image object is cynically mocked in response to the knowledge of the Internet's democratisation of the image—where every image is a copy of another image, but also an image of itself. Vaporwave excavates aesthetic elements of 90s Internet with nostalgia. For vaporwave, the 1990s represents a time where the Internet was filled with utopic promise, untainted by the capitalist consumerist culture of our current "always-online" reality. Conversely, Cybertwee sees this "always-online" culture as an opportunity to create spaces where attributes belittled by the patriarchy's dominance—such as softness, cuteness, and romanticism—can thrive. Online connectedness has allowed cybertwee to exist as an artistic rebuttal to male dominated discourse in technology and art.

'i hope senpai will notice my art' pulls visual and ideological elements from these responses, bringing to light the implications of today's digitally augmented reality. My art does not refute these responses or make any value claim regarding the political implications of an "always-online" society. It simply opens a dialogue regarding how the

⁴⁵ Juergenson, op. cit.,



affective art object can make visible our digitally augmented reality.

As Marisa Olson states, "We can now say that all works are postinternet (albeit to a lesser or greater degree of reflexivity) because all works produced now are produced in the postinternet era."⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Olson, op. cit.,



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