

The New Aesthetic

Theory of Electronic Communications

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November 27, 2012

The New Aesthetic

It's 2011, and I have no idea what anything is or does anymore.

Taylor, in Bridle 2011 [3]

Description

The New Aesthetic is a term coined by James Bridle to describe the blending of the virtual and physical worlds. The New Aesthetic is about the orchestration of pixels and bricks in the same stage. The New Aesthetic is a term used to refer to the increasing appearance of the visual language of digital technology and the Internet in the physical world. In Bridle's own words "The New Aesthetic makes sense of its objects, forms and artifacts. It is an attempt to expand our perspective on what the New Aesthetic might mean, and also consider how media art can re-imagine itself by asking some difficult new questions." [3]

The life that we used to know once upon a time has dramatically changed. We are beyond the tipping point where technology has influenced every industry and fundamentally changed them at their core. Let us not forget that technology is just a tool. It is the process, the systems and actors around it that must adapt to coexist with technology-driven frameworks.

"For so long we've stared up at space in wonder, but with cheap satellite imagery and cameras on kites and RC helicopters, we're looking at the ground with new eyes, to see structures and infrastructures." [7] "The socio-political asymmetries perpetuated by data-mining, the privatized social graph, facial recognition technologies, drone attacks, and camouflage are swept aside by the positive message to make the world "more exciting, make it better." [8] The life that we knew used to be at eye-level. Now we see our world through Google Maps and Google Earth, like birds. Greg Borenstein argues that the New Aesthetic is a "visible eruption of the mutual empathy between us and a

class of new objects that are native to the 21st century." [3] This mindset is based on the Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO), a metaphysical movement that rejects that humans existence is superior over the existence of non-human objects. [11]

Origins

James Bridle introduced the term on May 6th, 2011. "For a while now, I've been collecting images and things that seem to approach a New Aesthetic of the future [...] we've got frustrated with the NASA extropianism space-future, the failure of jet-packs, and we need to see the technologies we actually have with a new wonder. Consider this a mood-board for unknown products." [3] Referring to his Tumblr blog new-aesthetic.tumblr.com, where Bridle has been collecting the New Aesthetic artifacts that cross his path. [9]

In March 15, 2012, James Bridle put together a panel at SXSW to explore topics on pixelation of low-resolution images, 3D printing, and digital maps. In this session, the participants explored the effects of the new media, products and artworks, and discussed the ways in which we are transforming ways of making and doing. [10] The term gained wider attention following a panel at the SXSW conference in 2012. [1]

The past is needed in order to be able to contextualize the present. The present is only meaningful until we think of the future. Looking ahead allows us to drift through the present with unwritten promises of a better and more rewarding future. It is only after we have lived a past, that we can see the present in constant motion. Previous experiences are the only proof of existence that we have. The theme of the New Aesthetic is a collaboration between the human and the machine. It is "a way of seeing that seems to reveal a blurring between "the real" and "the digital [...]" this 'look' is a metaphor for understanding and communicating the experience of a world in which the New Aesthetic is increasingly pervasive." [1]

People

Aram Barthol

Aram Bartholl is a Germany based digital artist that believes that pixels have exhausted their intended binary existence and have now invaded the physical world.

In Maps (2009) Bartholl places actual-size Google balloons in public spaces to investigate the aesthetic of "the red map marker of the location based search engine Google Maps." [19]

'Are you Human?' is another project where Bartholl brings digital artifacts alive into the physical world. He displays CAPTCHA designs as graffiti tags. CAPTCHA is an acronym that stands for 'Completely Automated Public Turing test to tell Computers and Humans Apart' and refers to a test used in computing to verify that the user is indeed a human being, and not a computer generated script trying to force entrance into a system. [20]

Patrick Jean

Patrick Jean is a French 2D and 3D graphic designer and filmmaker. His work is inspired by video-game concepts from his childhood. In 2008 Patrick created a street-art installation in NYC's Lower East Side where pipes are bursting out pixelated waters, instead of the liquid form one would expect. [16] In 2010, Jean wrote and directed Pixels, a short film about an invasion in NYC by 8-bit creatures based on video games such as Space Invaders, Pac-Man, and Tetris. [17]

Marius Watz

Marius Watz is a Norway born, New York City based generative art artist. Generative art is referred to computer-generated art based on parametric instructions or algorithms to

produce aesthetic forms as an output of the system. The art is the system, while the resulting shapes and forms are just a byproduct of the system itself. "Algorithms provide the means to produce specific outcomes, typically through generative logic or data processing. But in the process they leave their distinct footprint on the result." [3]

These common algorithms are a path to exploration and experimentation. The output of these self-discoveries of the algorithm and the process should not equate to the artist's final output or masterpiece. Watz refers to some of these systematic cliches as "The Algorithm Police problematic friends". These common algorithms include circle packing, reaction diffusion, fractals, strange attractors, voronoi diagrams, flocking / boids, and polygon subdivision. [13] With this argument Marius highlights that there are common algorithm out there and people should be able to identify and spot them in the wild, and as creators, to steer away from them.

Some of Marius' current work include 'Probability Lattice', a collection parametric objects made out of ABS plastic, 3D printed on a Makerbot Replicator.

This is the new Aesthetic - human behavior augmented by technology as often as it is disrupted. The New Aesthetic is a sign saying 'Translation Server Error' rather than 'Post Office'. The New Aesthetic is faces glowing ominously as people walk down the street at night staring at their phones - or worse, their iPads.

Marius Watz, 2012 [21]

Examples

The New Aesthetic has not only being manifesting itself in the arts. This phenomenon is also gaining popularity in industries such as fashion, architecture, and advertising. The design of clothes we wear are slammed with *digital-esche* imagery. The buildings that shape our environment are also drifting toward a more *New-Aesthetic* look with

modern architecture. Marketing and sales are also victims of the movement, bringing along the advertising industry.

Fashion

Sha Hwang and Rachel Bim from Meshu make beautiful unique jewelry from maps representing specific places as points in a map. Customers can order from Meshu's website by entering a list of cities. A mesh-like structure jewelry piece is generated with Meshu's custom software, the piece is then 3D printed, and shipped. [14]

Architecture

Our tools should not limit our ability to capture reality or the ability to create new ones. The tools that we use should not have such an imprint on the outcome of the artistic process. "Some architects can look at a building and tell you which version of autodesk was used to create it." The world is defined by our visualisations of it. What they put in, even as place-holders, always ends up getting built. Lorem Ipsum architecture.) [1]

An example of the manifestation of the New Aesthetic in architecture is found on Telehouse West. Telehouse's data center in East London is decorated with a pattern resembling the shape of pixels and their movement traveling in/out of the building. [23]

Advertising

Marketing and advertisement firms have been heavily influenced by this new medium as well. Campaigns all around the world have been borrowing these digital frenzies with means to sell products and services. Some examples are Mexican fast-food chain, Chipotle and Harvey Nichols ad campaign by UAE-based advertising agency Y&R Dubai.

Chipotle PR team utilized the standard 'Lorem Ipsum' text used by the print industry as a placeholder in the production-version brown 'to-go' lunch bags. This manifestation

of what it used to exist only in a digital world is also being spread by trendy marketing campaigns aiming to target *new* tech-savvy crowds.

Harvey Nichols, a luxury fashion retailer is known for bold and sometimes controversial campaigns. In their recent 'Bee Seen' campaign by agency Y&R Dubai, a *New-Aesthetic* look is being portrayed. A beautiful, confident woman is surrounded by 'unknown' shapes that resembling the contour of other women. These subjects are filled in a gray-scale shade and seem to be frozen in space. These subjects also carry a triangle-like pattern, based on a polygon subdivision algorithm. However, what carries the message of the whole ad, is the missing-image icon each of these models have. This is the identifiable icon used as placeholder by browsers when an image has not been found on the server. [22]

Conclusion

New or not new, digital or analog, virtual or physical; regardless of what your personal opinion or biases are towards technology and new media, there is something real among us that lives and breaths with our civilization that cannot be denied or ignored. The drones, the pixels, the server errors, the ones and zeros. They are now part of our community. Our families.

Embrace this unique *new* influence in the work you do and your every day life. Recognize the manifestation of digital beings around your personal physical space and have fun in this playground. Recognize digital cliches and avoid them as you see adequately. The New Aesthetic is here to stay, and this is only the beginning.

You do not need to leave your room. Remain sitting at your table and listen. Do not even listen, simply wait, be quiet, still and solitary. The world will freely offer itself to you to be unmasked, it has no choice, it will roll in ecstasy at your feet.

Franz Kafka

Sources

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[22]: <http://www.yr-dxb.com/> "Y&R Dubai"

[23]: <http://booktwo.org/notebook/secret-servers/> "Secret Servers"

Images

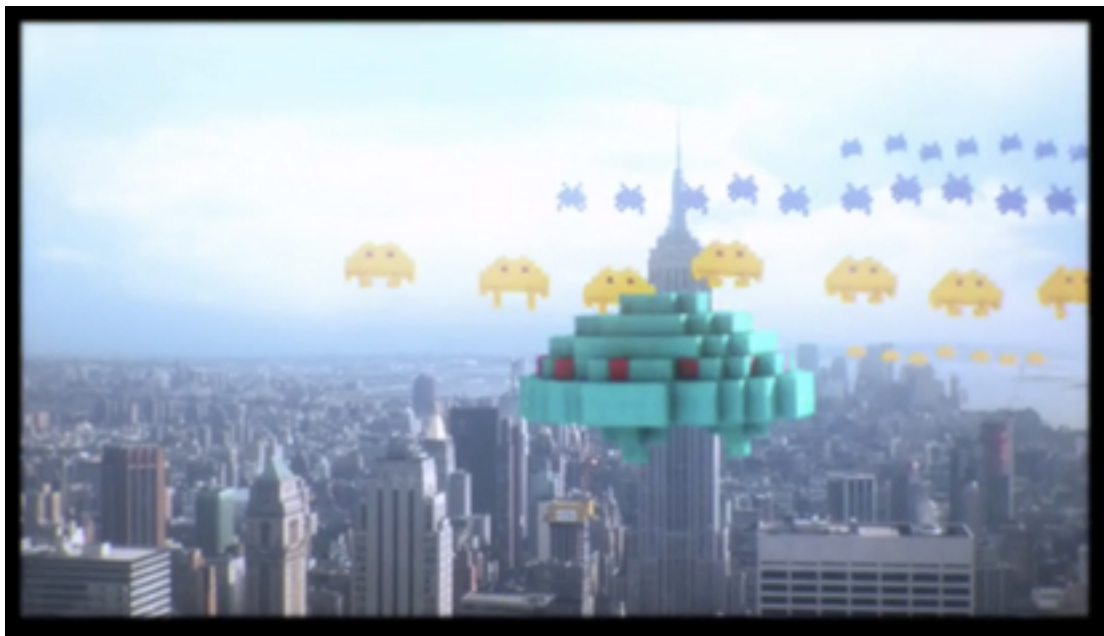
These images have also been collected in a New-Aesthetic Pinterest board:
<http://pinterest.com/luiscielak/new-aesthetic/>



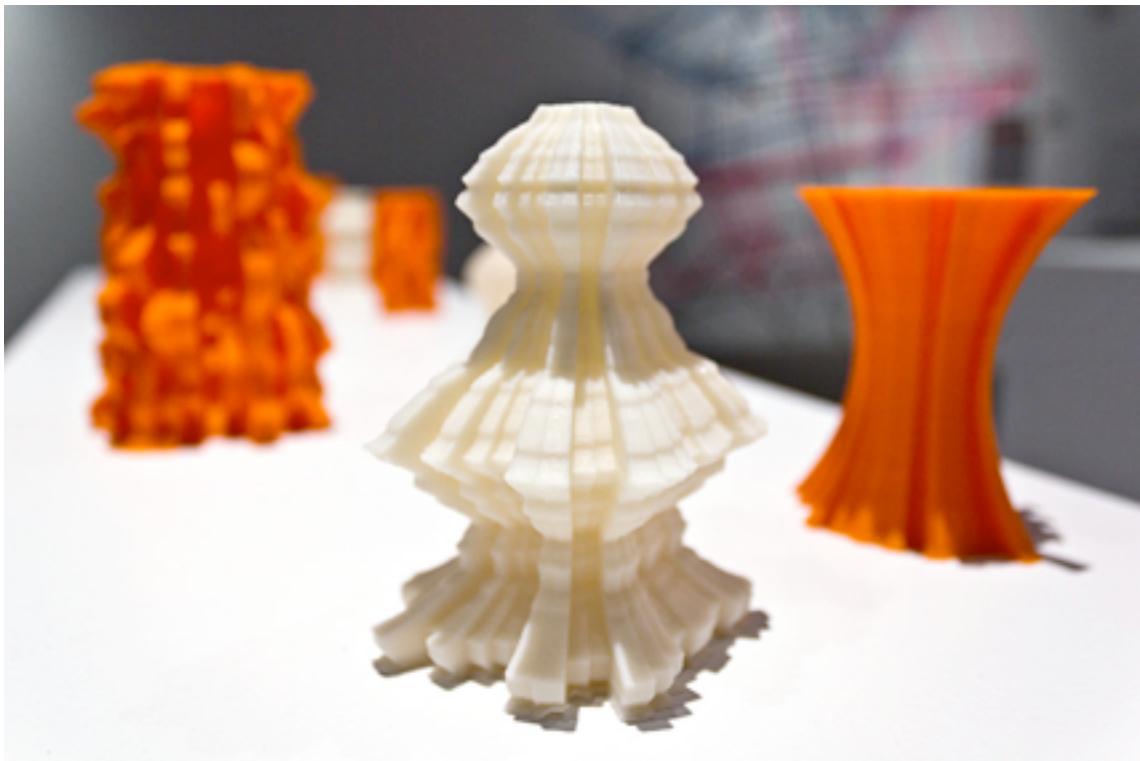
Aram Bartholl



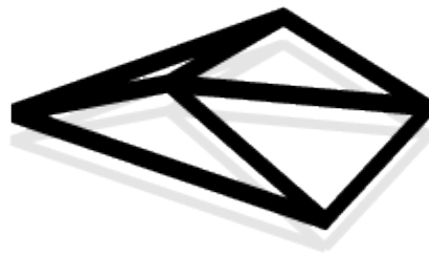
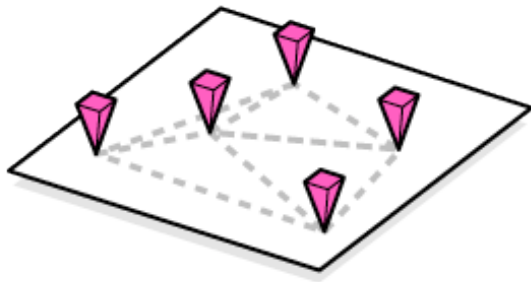
Aram Bartholl



Patrick Jean



Marius Watz



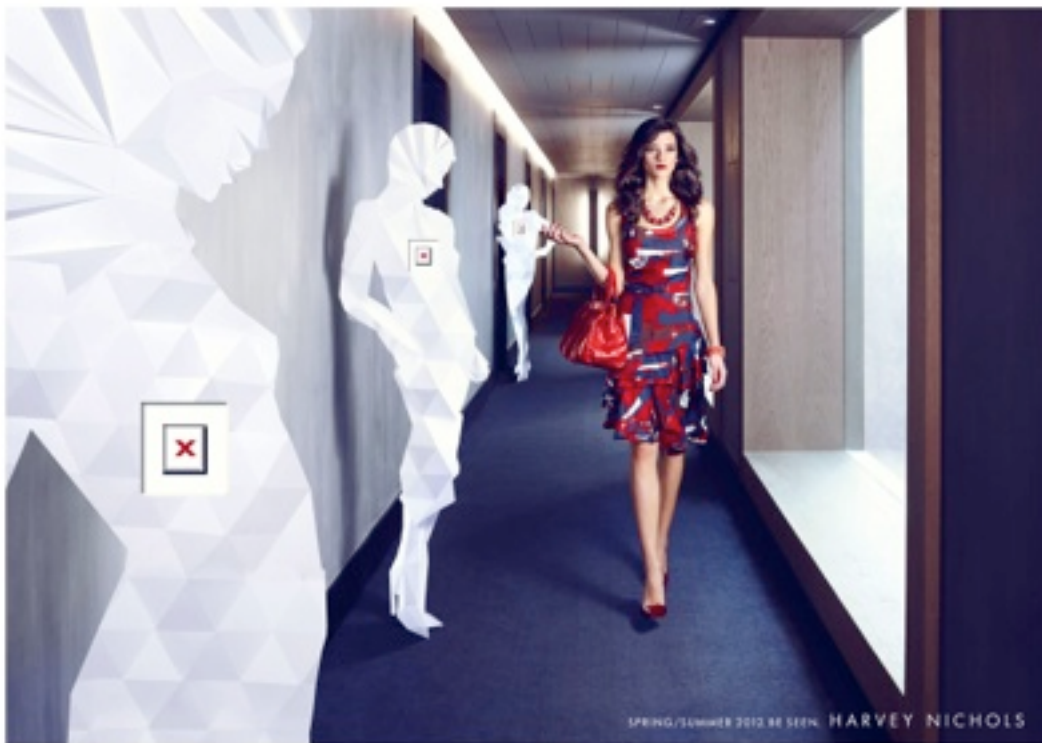
Meshu



Telehouse West



Chipotle Mexican Grill



Harvey Nichols Y&R Dubai