

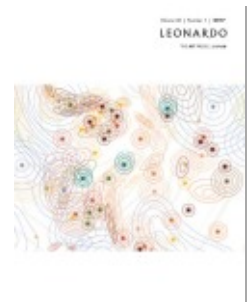


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## Exhaustion Aesthetics

Carolyn L. Kane, Cory Arcangel, Jon Satrom, Rosa Menkman, Team Doyobi,  
Andrew Benson



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## Exhaustion Aesthetics

In the clean, slick and fast-moving audiovisual content of commercial media and tech platforms (Netflix, IMAX, etc.), colossal numbers of liquid crystals seduce the eyeballs of millions of viewers, bathing them in a magical, 24/7 world of liquefied aesthetics. In contrast, the lesser-known DIY genre of glitch art subverts this promise and pursuit. That is, glitch art is difficult to look at for prolonged periods of time, communicates little content and provides even less meaning and apparent significance. Why then are so many young artists across the globe increasingly attracted to this disruptive and noisy aesthetic?

Defined as the artistic use of compression artifacts and related digital errors, glitch art emerged in the 2000s and has since become a set of vernacular media art effects, featured in digital videos by artists, net art, digitally manipulated photographs and the work of industry professionals and amateur media makers alike. Despite its rapid claim to 21st-century fashion, however, the technique has received little scholarly or curatorial attention. *Exhaustion Aesthetics*'s online exhibition counters this by offering a key selection of contemporary glitch artworks, created predominantly by new media or self-identified glitch artists. In my larger book project (*High-Tech Trash: Beautiful Failure from Eco-Art to Visual Noise and Chroma Glitch*), I connect glitch art trends to a history of the avant-garde, analyze this style from a formal perspective and connect it to other forms of failure and breakdown in global culture. In this curatorial gallery, I link glitch art style to a lifestyle transformed and conditioned in and through the database economy.

Esteemed scholar Jonathan Crary has argued that the particular operations and effects of a new technology or network are less important than how their rhythms, speeds and formats of accelerated and intensified consumption reshape experience and perception. Considering the substantial developments in new media and global networks accumulating in the 21st century, new rhythms, speeds and formats of consumption can be identified in everything from work, socialization, travel, entertainment, grocery shopping, driving and research to one's sex life. Put differently, there is hardly a place or time where the new rhythms of pervasive networks and data do not watch, gather and inform who we are and what we do. The condition was described by Gilles Deleuze in 1991 as the "society of control," characterized by an evisceration of private space, individual or personal psychic life, or any ability to step outside of the increasingly pervasive algorithmic regimes of command and control that structure

and orchestrate our existence. Glitch art, I submit, is one set of responses to these ubiquitous and insidious conditions.

The energy and rhythm of the colorful graphics on the one hand mimics the ongoing demand for increased sensory absorption and attention opportunities in media culture writ large. The form's nonstop abstraction and failure to produce closure speaks to Crary's observation that the once-unquestioned human right to sleep has now become a special privilege and luxury. Glitch art expresses a mass cultural and physiological exhaustion in 24/7 society. If code, signal processing and network flow have become the dominant tropes of our time, then it is perhaps only through error, failure and breakdown that one may find a temporary reprieve.

The works included in *Exhaustion Aesthetics* all draw on this notion of reprieve from normative cultural functioning in different and unique ways. These five international artworks include New York-based artist Cory Arcangel's *Data Diaries* (2003), in which each day for a year he placed the data from his computer's memory into QuickTime, directing the program to treat the data as a video file; Chicago-based glitch artist John Satrom's *Windows Rainbows & Dinos* (2010), a 13-minute single-channel comic video drama that takes place on a Macintosh desktop; Dutch-based glitch artist Rosa Menkman's *Dear Mister Compression* (2010), in which the red-and-orange contours of Menkman's face are juxtaposed with cool purples and a white, text-based love poem generated by the computer; Team Doyobi's (Alex Peverett and Christopher Gladwi) *Art of Memorex* (2012), a four-minute music video featuring multicolored glitch artifacts in varying sizes and pattern formations intercutting scenes of a surfer riding ocean waves; and San Francisco-based artist and software creator Andrew Benson's *Status Update, 2am* (35 seconds) (2011), a portrait of the artist awake at his computer at 2 A.M., accompanied by a morass of audio distortion and abstract colored textures.

CAROLYN L. KANE

Assistant professor, Professional Communications,  
Faculty of Communication and Design, Ryerson University  
Email: <carolyn.kane@ryerson.ca>

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*The accident doesn't equal failure, but instead erects a new significant state, which would otherwise not have been possible to perceive and that can "reveal something absolutely necessary to knowledge."*

—SYLVERE LOTRINGER AND PAUL VIRILIO [1]

## DATA DIARIES (2003)

Cory Arcangel

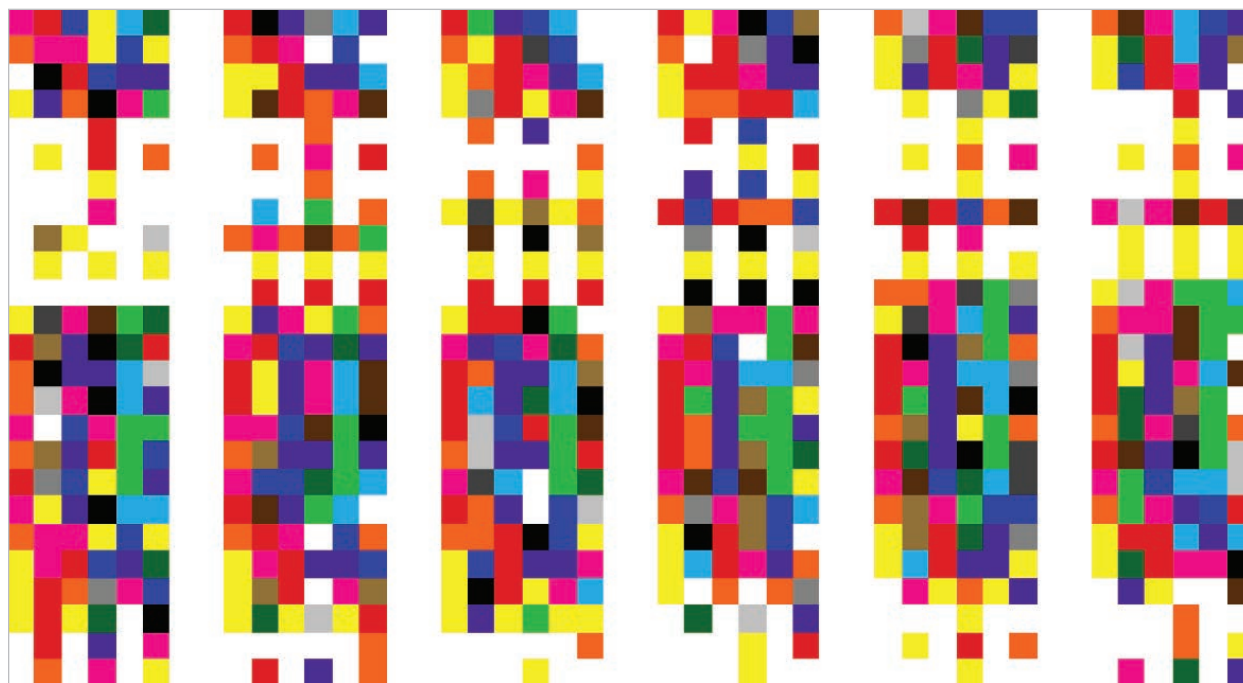
Cory Arcangel is a leading exponent of technology-based art, drawn to video games and software for their ability to rapidly formulate new communities and traditions and, equally, their speed of obsolescence. In 1996, while studying classical guitar at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, Arcangel had his first high-speed Internet connection, which inspired him to major in music technology and start learning to code. Both music and coding remain his key tools for interrogating the stated purpose of software and gadgets.

Reconfiguring web design and hacking as artistic practice, Arcangel remains faithful to open source culture and makes his work and methods available online, thus superimposing a perpetual question mark as to the value of the

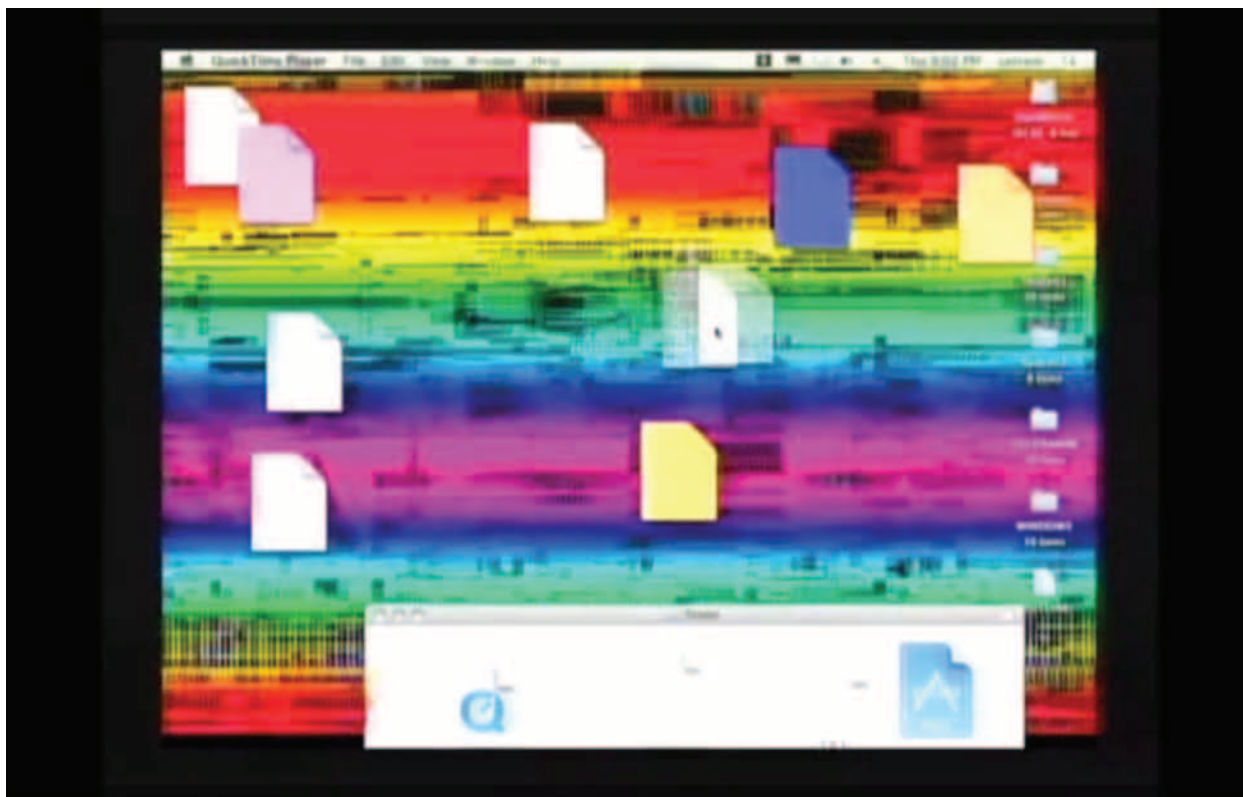
art object. He lives and works in Brooklyn, New York [2]. Arcangel describes the creation process of *Data Diaries*:

The old QuickTime file format had a great error-checking bug. If you deleted the data fork of a movie file and left the header, QuickTime would play through random access memory and interpret it as a video as defined by the header. So, for this project, I converted the RAM of my computer into a video for every day of a given month. All aspects of the video (color, size, frame rate and sound) were determined by modem speeds of the day, as the videos were debuted and distributed via the Web. That is, they were just small enough to stream in real time (no small feat!) over a 56k modem in 2003, giving users a pretty good viewing experience [3].

*Data Diaries*: <<https://vimeo.com/128674124>>



Cory Arcangel, *Data Diaries* (still), 2003. 62 single-channel videos, color. A pioneering example of and precursor to much contemporary glitch art. (© Cory Arcangel. Commissioned by New Radio and Performing Arts, Inc. [aka Ether-Ore], for its Turbulence website. Made possible with funding from the Jerome Foundation. Courtesy of Cory Arcangel.)



Jon Satrom, *Windows Rainbows & Dinos* (2010). A 13-minute single-channel comic video drama that takes place entirely on a Macintosh desktop. (© Jon Satrom)

## WINDOWS RAINBOWS & DINOS (2010)

Jon Satrom

Jon Satrom is a Chicago-based glitch artist who undermines interfaces, problematizes presets and bends data. He spends his days fixing things and making things work. He spends his evenings breaking things and searching for the unique blips inherent to the systems he explores and exploits. By overclocking everyday digital tools, Satrom kludges abandonware, funware, necroware and artware into extended glitchy systems for performance, execution and collaboration. Satrom's art is a subtle critique and parody of the day-to-day struggle the user experiences when trying to make their computer work for them [4].

For this piece, Satrom performed an intriguing deconstruction of the

Mac OSX interface and Microsoft software package by breaking down the visual interface of what we have come to accept as the access portal to the functions of "easy-to-use" domestic consumer digital software [5]. Interfering with official norms of visual language introduces questions relating to the power of software companies such as Apple and Microsoft to control when and how we use digital technology, not to mention the implicit and often invisible limitations created by this closed-source programming environment.

*Windows Rainbows & Dinos* is a delightful 13-minute demonstration of the Mac OSX system malfunctioning as it copies files and folders and

makes blips and noises like a cancer of 0s and 1s over the desktop stage. In a surprising midpoint, two GIF-style animated dinosaurs are seen having sex, a hilarious "Monty Python-esque surreal injection into the sterile visuality of the software interface" [6]. The Sisyphean drama of control technology ends with the realization of comic futility. Satrom's work is an effective application of Brechtian techniques of direct address for the digital age, of estranging reality in the process of revealing the means of digital production and reproduction.

*Windows Rainbows & Dinos*: <<https://vimeo.com/15821484>>

## DEAR MISTER COMPRESSION (2010)

Rosa Menkman

Rosa Menkman is a Dutch-based glitch artist and theorist who focuses on visual noise artifacts, resulting from accidents in both analogue and digital media (such as glitch, encoding and feedback artifacts). Although many people perceive these accidents as negative experiences, Menkman emphasizes their positive consequences. These artifacts facilitate an important insight into the otherwise obscure alchemy of standardization via resolutions: the creation of solutions or protocols, and their black-boxed, unseen, forgotten or obfuscated compromises and alternative possibilities [7].

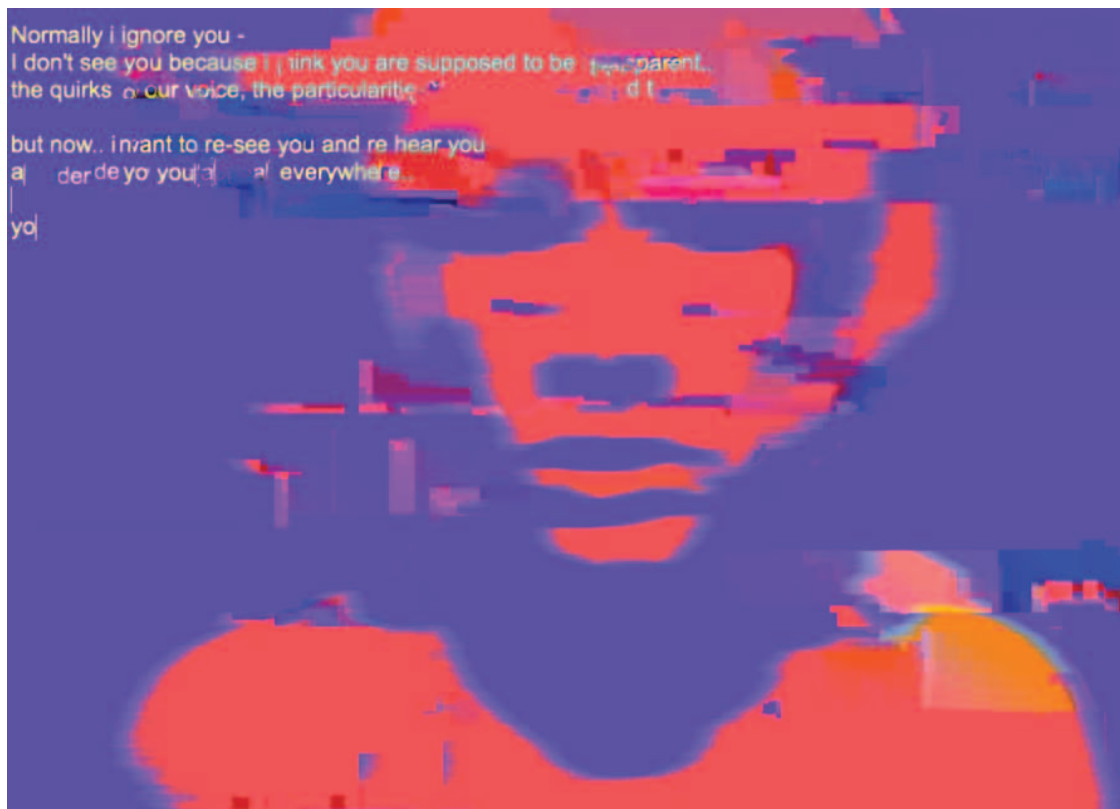
While Menkman has produced a prolific body of glitch art, *Dear Mister Compression* offers a particularly poetic take on the issue of digital errors as compression artifacts. As the red and orange contours of Menkman's face are seen, positioned to the right of the frame, the image is juxtaposed with cool purples and a white, text-based love poem on the left. Excerpts read:

Normally I ignore you  
I don't see you because I think you are supposed to be  
transparent  
the quirks of your voice, the particularities of your looks  
but now . . . i want to re-see you and re-hear you

and suddenly you appear everywhere. . .  
your constructions are starting to constitute myself  
they emerge inside me  
you create a space in which i voluntarily degrade myself  
i am halted by your presence  
I have to make drawings of you  
The day that i understand i could not live without you.

The piece acknowledges the thickness and materiality of data emerging "inside" one's psychic experience without mourning a purer human past. To make this a love poem for the computer, the artist painted herself white, in the attempt to "blank" herself, to get lost or erased between the lines of the vertical blanking interval, that flickering time difference between the last line of one frame or field and the next frame or field rendered on a display. Menkman has also explained in public talks and personal chats that this white painting resulted in an extreme allergic reaction to the face paint that threatened her eyesight, temporarily blinding her, in a literal whiteout and erasure. One finds a further confluence of emotional and technological states in this lived, broken world of chromatic glitches [8].

*Dear Mister Compression*: <<https://vimeo.com/11147006>>



Rosa Menkman, *Dear Mister Compression* (2010). In the video, the red and orange contours of Menkman's face are juxtaposed with cool purples and a white text-based love poem generated by the computer. (© Rosa Menkman)





Team Doyobi (Alex Peverett and Christopher Gladwi), *Art of Memorex* (2012), Skam Records. A four-minute datamosh of multicolored digital artifacts in varying sizes and pattern formations intercut scenes of a surfer riding the ocean waves. (© Alex Peverett)

## ART OF MEMOREX (2012)

*Team Doyobi*

Team Doyobi (Alex Peverett and Christopher Gladwi) are an electronic music duo specializing in “audio cross breeding.” Their work draws on various influences and music genres. A reflection of having grown up during the home computer boom of the 1980s, their aesthetic is shaped by Commodore Amiga home computers, public domain software, collages of IDM (intelligent dance music) beats and melodies with 8-bit samplers, car-boot-sourced IDM, creative thinking and cheap and accessible technologies. Over a decade of collaborations has resulted in a unique sound of lo-fi, glitch-addled yet soulful dance music that has gained them a reputation as one of U.K. IDM’s hidden gems. After producing several homemade cassette releases under the name “Doyobi” (picked at

random out of an inherited Japanese phrase book), they shifted their focus to live performance [9].

The *Art of Memorex* is a 4-minute music video featuring multicolored glitch artifacts in varying sizes and pattern formations intercutting scenes of a surfer riding ocean waves. The piece is excerpted from their album *Digital Music Volume 1* (Skam Records, EP, 2012). The artifact-interruption emulates David Carson’s surfer grunge aesthetic of the 1990s, re-choreographed to an upbeat techno track with slick and smooth interior tenor.

*Art of Memorex:*

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fggB9NZjJrg>>

## STATUS UPDATE, 2AM (2011)

Andrew Benson

San Francisco-based visual artist Andrew Benson has developed a highly technical yet extremely colorful new media art practice interweaving altered electronics and software that he is constantly refining and developing. He tends to work with MIDI files, pixels, video loops, animation and illustration, combined with live performance to create “trippy video loops” launched online and during live performances. His hardware go-tos include a MacBook Pro 2.4 GHz; Altered PS3eye camera; Unibrain

Fire-I Board camera; Canopus ADVC-110; Korg NanoKontrol; various custom controller circuits and sensors; Arduino, Teensy and AVR microcontrollers [10].

*Status Update, 2am* is a portrait of the artist awake at his computer at 2 A.M. The piece begins with a morass of audio distortion and abstract colored textures. In the background one can make out Benson’s figure as he attempts to rise from a presumed sleep. Colored triangles and shapes in the foreground appear “attached” to his hands and body as he moves,

lightly pulling him forward. This effect, used frequently in Benson’s work, is generated through Jitter (or Max), a motion tracking software made by Cycling ’74 that allows programmers to visualize 3D or 2D movements or sound processes in real time. Benson uses this capacity to create the sense that he is controlling and sculpting the glitches with his hands. Once upright, he peers wearily into his computer’s screen.

*Status Update, 2am:*  
<<https://vimeo.com/21744340>>



Andrew Benson, *Status Update, 2am* (2011). This portrait of the artist at his computer at 2 a.m. was made with Max SP, a motion-tracking software. (© Andrew Benson)

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## References and Notes

- 1 Sylvere Lotringer and Paul Virilio, *The Accident of Art* (Semiotext(e): New York, 2005) p. 63.
  - 2 <[www.lissongallery.com/artists/cory-arcangel](http://www.lissongallery.com/artists/cory-arcangel)>.
  - 3 <[www.coryarcangel.com/things-i-made/2003-002-data-diaries](http://www.coryarcangel.com/things-i-made/2003-002-data-diaries)>.
  - 4 <[www.saic.edu/profiles/alumni/jonsatrom/](http://www.saic.edu/profiles/alumni/jonsatrom/)>.
  - 5 In his Q&A Satrom claimed that he was influenced by 1990s net artists such as Jodi and Nato software authored by the Netochka Nezvanova collective, whose website deconstructed computer interfaces and showed the audience how the magician, or wizard behind the screen, works.
  - 6 <<http://jonsatrom.com/-/windows-rainbows-dinos/>>.
  - 7 <<http://aboutrosamenkman.blogspot.ca/>>.
  - 8 Rosa Menkman, *The Tipping Point of Failure* (PomyLka), exh. cat., curated by Michał Brzeziński (28 October 2010–4 December 2010), Galeria NT / Imaginarium, Łódź, Poland.
  - 9 <[www.skamshop.co.uk/team-doyobi/](http://www.skamshop.co.uk/team-doyobi/)>.
  - 10 <<http://codame.com/artists/andrew-benson>>; <<http://pixlpa.com/>>.
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