

### 3. Glitch Aesthetics

We have already seen some of the intrinsic visual qualities of glitches, In the general examination of visual glitches, this chapter deals with two areas:

1. It looks at how glitch aesthetics feature in a wide variety of established formal practices and perspectives.
2. and it probes the surrounding philosophies that give this genre a higher sense of purpose.

“On loop-finding-jazz-records, Jan Jelinek seems determined to show that mistakes can be beautiful, too - as formally pretty as if they weren't mistakes at all.” (Finney, 2001)

#### 3.1. Formal Aesthetics

##### 3.1.1. Subjectivity : differing views on beauty

Whether it is Bachelard, Baudrillard, Adorno or McLuhan, subjectivity reigns in the discussions of Aesthetics and there are plenty of <sup>24</sup> arguments to counter any claim made by one person. Any views expressed on the Glitch-alike are also a result of subjective thought.

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<sup>24</sup> For further reading you may want to refer to Aesthetics and Subjectivity - From Kant to Nietzsche by Andrew Bowie, Manchester University Press, 2nd edition (July 2003)

### 3.1.2. Situational perspective, dealing with contextual meaning

It is hard to consider much of modern art today without taking into account its situation and placement. The situation a work has been placed in and its properties in space, often hint at how we should go about reading it. Sometimes art is about taking something out of its original context and recontextualising it. In the case of the glitch, the process of capturing glitches in their original habitat, creating Glitch-alikes and placing them within a suitable viewing environment, is as much about its end situation or the repurposing, as it is about tweaking visual characteristics or using it to convey meaning through choice of subject matter.

Situation can also greatly enhance meaning, especially when the work is geopolitically charged. Glitches can therefore fuel highly subversive works in an image conscious society.

### 3.1.3. Glitch, creativity and commercial process

There is evidence to show that even commercial artists who are heavily duty bound find accidents and glitches to be a creative force in their work.

Stefan Sagmeister recently admitted that he has started to involve mistakes and accidents in his work. When asked about accident and chance he mentions a point that "when I accept the accident I give it a chance. Example: Projects [sic] comes back 'wrong' from the printer. Often wrong is just that, wrong, but every

once in a while wrong is better.”<sup>25</sup> This acceptance of the glitch is conceivably a matter of personal preference for most mainstream commercial designers and an acceptance that they may not openly admit to, but Sagmeister’s response shows that even the best in this field are influenced and inspired by glitches.

#### 3.1.4. Relation to artistic practice -

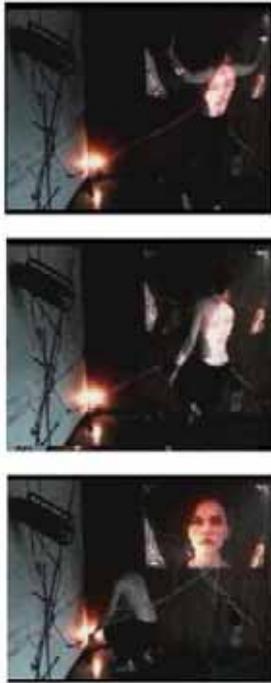
“There are several ways of dealing with anomalies. Negatively, we can just ignore them, just not perceive them, or perceiving we can condemn, positively we can confront the anomaly and try to create a new pattern of reality, in which it has a place.” (Douglas, 1966 cited in Fer)

In the process of creating glitch-like imagery, the exploratory and often raw nature of the glitch is an unshakeable fact. It provides a plethora of creative possibilities that artists have utilised in the past and will undoubtedly keep on using. Others attest to this fact as well by saying: “The glitch can be seen as: 1. a digital art aesthetic, 2. or as a component of the creative process.” (Fo.AM, 2000)<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> <http://www.sagmeister.com/>

<sup>26</sup> see appendix for full text.



Hoek / Rumba #2  
by Frank Stassen  
(1999) -source : park.nl

We can see how the glitch is used in music and the realm of the static or moving image, but it has the potential to extend into other areas of creative performance, such as dance. Frank Stassens dance pictured above may not be purely glitch related but it certainly has the capacity of showing how elements of visual Glitch-alikes are entering and influencing an artistic practice such as dance. In fact, this effect has been explored by 'Amanda Steggell' and 'Per Platou' since as early as 1995. Their collaboration in 'M@ggies Love Bytes' was an early dance and theatre performance which played with the "notions of connection and disconnection", over the physical and virtual plains. According to the project notes "fluctuations, in transmission and reception rates between the geographically separated

participants are embodied in the expression of the performance, and define the dramatical development of the piece".<sup>27</sup>

### 3.1.5. Relation to Painting

Perhaps the experimental aspect in the practice of painting is the closest link to the Glitch-alike, for example, in painting we may not may not be sure of the full effect of a particular colour choice until we experiment with it and see the final composition.

Leonardo Da Vinci insisted that 'that painter who has no doubts will achieve little', and he advised artists to seek out inspirations for their paintings in the stains on walls" (Briggs, 1994)

As described in Chapter 2, "even the obsessively rectilinear Dutch modern painter Pieter Mondrian left drips and faint wavers in his straight lines to indicate the presence of the human creator behind the abstract mathematical shapes" and "...Michelangelo hewed his sculpture by following the grain in the marble" (Briggs, 1994)

~~Turner, the painter of the industrial revolution apparently had bad eyesight, a pair of glasses recently auctioned at Sotheby's, show the extent of a possible eye condition, in his case a cataract. Mc Gill says, his theories do not diminish Turners~~

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<sup>27</sup> M@ggies Love Bytes: <http://www.notam02.no/%7Eamandajs/>

genius, "The paintings are superb" — but there's no mystery why he painted that way: he was painting exactly what he saw."<sup>28</sup>

### 3.1.6. Relation to photography and Film

Celluloid film and gelatin prints are both synonymous with "film grain". Film grain is a well known quality of analogue photography and cinematography that has pride and place in the manuals of film aesthetics. If we consider the objective of film as a tool with which to capture the essence of reality in the most accurate way possible, then this imperfection inherent in the physical medium of film can be construed as a pure 'glitch-like' feature of film.

Indeed this appreciated glitch aesthetic of chemo-mechanical reproduction also has a whole culture behind it. The random detail is much sought after, to the extent that an image reproduced without these visual artifacts is considered quite bland and unrealistic. It is possibly lacking 'Aura' which Walter Benjamin claims is missing in a highly reproducible work. (see *Art in the Age of mechanical reproduction*.)

The director Steven Spielberg even refers to it as "a magic about chemistry and film". He talks about the molecular grain of film and goes on to say "The screen is alive, the screen is always alive with chaos and excitement, and that will certainly

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<sup>28</sup> Guardian Nov 18 2003

be gone when we convert to a digital camera" (Kennedy, 2002).<sup>29</sup>

### 3.1.7. Relation to Screen: Film

There are three main aspects to the use of Glitch-alikes on screen, to convey meaning or emotion, sublimate or to faithfully reproduce a particular film style.



Screen Caps from the Film Armageddon.

### Films<sup>30</sup>

The meanings or emotions implied when a Glitch-alike is used in a film, are numerous. It could even be argued that the glitch's emotional appeal lies in the

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<sup>29</sup> Perhaps Spielberg is referring very accurately to high resolution digital cameras. As it can be argued that today's digital film has a grain of its own with its low resolution, compression artefacts and jaggedly aliased curves. – In 2003, at a DRU Huddersfield seminar, when I spoke to Alexei Shulgin he mentioned his past experiences in photography and personal appreciation of camera glitches as well.

<sup>30</sup> Many thanks to Tristan Spill, of tristanspill.com for pointing me in the right direction and reminding me of all these glitches that I'd taken for granted.

very fact that they are used in intensely emotional scenes in popular films.

Vanhanen (2001) takes a direct approach and identifies how "In science fiction, ghosts in machines always appear as malfunctions glitches, interruptions in the normal flow of things." I have identified some other direct and indirect usages of the glitch below:

1. In Darren Aronofsky's ' $\pi$ ' the glitch not only sought to show the main character's struggle with his physical condition. It also imbued a sense of conflict and uncertainty over the ideas expressed. In Tristan Spill's words "the effects were used to convey a state of psychosis". (Spill, 2003)

2. In the Blair witch project, the flashes and flutters used at the end of the film irrefutably intensified the emotional sense of fear and peril.

3. In Donnie Darko, the theme of the film is a glitch in the space-time continuum.

<sup>31</sup> In a scene where there is a knife blade hitting the bathroom mirror, it induces intense flashes that show how the lead character is aware of the supernatural being who is trying to help him rectify the time glitch. Glitch-alikes are also used by HiRez<sup>32</sup>, on the website accompanying the film and that of "Requiem for a Dream" to enhance and convey the interactive narrative.

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<sup>31</sup> Thanks to Jen Southern, who mentioned this point which I was actually missing, that the film subject itself can be construed as dealing with a glitch.

<sup>32</sup> Computer Arts Special. (2000) Article on Design Studio Hi-Res

4. In *Fight-club*, the subliminal effects of flash glitches enhance characterisation and invade the preconceived sense of time and location in the film. The film also directly alludes to the subliminal effects of image flashes in cinema, within the plot.

5. In *Armageddon*, the Glitch-alike is also used to good effect. The in film communication video screens are wrought with interference. In a sequence in which mission control on earth are trying to communicate with the asteroid drillers, the communication glitches convey realism in the depiction of technology, and by accompanying the lead characters last lines being uttered their metaphor of disconnection and death take centre stage.

6. In *Minority Report*, the use of Glitch-alikes are essential in conveying realism in the holographic technology portrayed, without the glitches in the hologram projection, that particular item of technology would seem a bit out of place for the audience, as the film isn't set that far into the future.

In many older films made in the 80's and 90's, the interface between humans and computers is often portrayed as one that is wrought with static. In numerous films<sup>33</sup>, the instant a computer display terminal is turned on, static or noise is fills the screen briefly and disappears or plagues the communication or operation.

This could have been to show the viewer very visually that something is being initialised, or that there is an obstruction in the way of communication. It could

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<sup>33</sup> *Wargames*, *Alien*, *Blade-Runner* to name a few.

also have been used to show weak signals in communication over long distances or to add tension to the possibility that the technology portrayed might not work. Or more suggestively "Through a malfunction, a glitch, we get a fleeting glimpse of an alien intelligence at work." (Vanhanen, 2001)

In all the above examples, the screen directors are therefore relying on perceived notions of how technology works, or how metaphors of failure can be interpreted, and addressing it with Glitch-alikes to enhance their stories.

#### **3.1.8. Relation to screen: The small screen, war reporting.**

One area where the authenticity of the work relies on inherent glitches in the work, are frontline war reports. The erratic camera movements, and even the blood splattering against the lens can be construed as elements of glitch that are consumed with the work.

Incidentally, its potential abuse was demonstrated in a film. In "wag the dog", smoke and shaky camera moves of war reportage were being recreated in a studio as part of a government cover-up in the storyline.

"JFK" also fabricated glitchy camera footage, mimicking qualities inherent in the actual footage ~~was interspersed with the real documentary footage of the assassination. was used.~~ This caused a lot of controversy when the film was released and perhaps it actually altered many peoples interpretation of a real event.

#### **3.1.9. Section on Advertising**

“the natural glitch causes immediate interest” (Eide, 2002)

There is something seductive about technology for which we have no control over, it presents the interesting unknown. In my personal observations, some car adverts and alcoholic beverages are trying to craft fashionably cool images of their products by using Glitch-alikes in their advertising.

Angela Lorenz<sup>34</sup>, suggests in the case of the visual glitch, marketing executives are exploiting styles they see without considering or promoting any experimentation, according to Lorenz, they “try to make themselves appear more interesting / appealing to a “young” audience by hopping onto a certain “trend” “. (Lorenz, 2003. personal communication)

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<sup>34</sup> <http://www.alorenz.net>



Reef Vodka advertisement.



Absolute Failure was commissioned by the Sculpture Society of Ireland in conjunction with Absolut Vodka in 2000. the result is an online installation featuring a series of 1,000 images which loop - seemingly endlessly - in and out of phase. Source Fällt <http://www.fallt.com/absolutefailure/>

### 3.1.10. Section on Web Design

[Waiting to hear from odopod, who recently did glitchy redbullcopilot, talk about HiRez who did requiem for a dream site and many others where the glitch figures largely in the conveyance of meaning]

### 3.1.11. Relation to invention

There are dozens of examples throughout history of inventions that came about as a result of a physician or chemist discovering something by accident, while they were trying to do something else.

Let me give an extremely simple personal example.: The electricity supply is wrought with dozens of surges and spikes which manifest themselves made the hifi in the turn off in the room I was in, I glanced over and I saw my

~~infra red enabled java phone, this made me think maybe I can write a java app to turn the hifi on in the morning as an alarm.~~

## 3.2. Glitch Philosophy

### 3.2.1. Fetishisation

In this dissertation, the study of the glitch can in parts be seen as developing understanding of a 'fetish'. Much in the same way that "Fetishism manifests itself masterfully around the automobile. The possession of 'autonomy of movement', 'speed', 'power' " (Velásquez, 2000) the core reasons for computerisation or the subsequent consumption of computing periphery and imagery, can be regarded as a fetish.

In terms of glitch imagery becoming fetishised, at first glance this point may seem relatively paradoxical and conflicting to Velasquez's claim, here apparently the error or weakness inside the computer becomes fetishised not its seemingly positive and constructive traits such as the conveyance of perfect images. But according to some, visual glitches can expose the power of computer<sup>35</sup> technology, they reveal the background processes and are therefore positively fetishised.

### 3.2.2. High and Low Art

In the introduction to his book Visual Digital Culture (2000), Andrew Darley states that "in the nineteenth century the idea of the 'artist as genius' and the

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<sup>35</sup> Tristan Spill comments already mentioned in 2.2.2

distinction between 'light' and 'low' form of art, was consolidated." He then goes on to say "within this evaluative framework the newer technologically informed and commercial modes of culture, photography, the cinema, the amusement park - came to be regarded as manufactured diversion; mere ephemera, forms of pure spectacle. "

Even today, in the post modernist, post industrial reality such evaluation continues to exist, in that glitch art can be considered as pure spectacle, as a vapour trace of digital technology, as digital 'trash'. However, such interpretations have little impact on the philosophical or critical understandings of glitch art or indeed the practice of creating Glitch-alikes.

### 3.2.3. Ars Accidental

“Our century is the century of huge accidents: the Titanic and Chernobyl.” (Paul Virilio)

The notion of the accident in art deserves its own account in glitch aesthetic discourse, where the result of an experiment or an accidental discovery can be appropriated in the work of art.

Sometimes its status is summarily defined as the happy accident and this notion spans across decades of artistic practice. Notable visual artists like Jackson Pollock are famously known for incorporating risk and chance in their work. This relinquishing of control and affinity to chance, by the abstract expressionists such as Pollock is seen as an action that brings their paintings to life and imbues a lasting energy in their work.

In summary:

~~The aim of this chapter was to answer the question, why do we find imperfection beautiful. Whether we consider Glitch philosophy to be regarded as finding beauty in error~~

~~To me~~ The area of Glitch Aesthetics seems to be less about why the glitch is beautiful and more about whether its use is justified. As outlined in this chapter, the scope of glitch infiltration in different modes of formal practice is

very wide reaching. In the section titled Glitch philosophy, what I have discussed are different concepts that affect philosophical interpretations of the Glitch. The Glitch has no direct philosophy of its own other than its 'existence' and reasons behind its fetishisation and evaluation of Aesthetic response to the glitch remains largely subjective.

~~if we begin to discuss the philosophy of imperfection, then some would dispute the glitch is not an imperfection. We should look at the glitch as a framework of interrelated concepts that borrows its philosophy and appropriates ideals when necessary.~~