



Manifesto for a Theory of the New Aesthetic



The New Aesthetic is not a single aesthetic. Drone technology produces its own visual aesthetics. Google Maps produces its own visual aesthetics. Generative Processing code produces its own visual aesthetics. Glitches across various media, compression algorithms, and hardware displays produce their own visual aesthetics. These myriad aesthetics are each as singular and unique as the entangled culture/nature histories which led to the development and deployment of these various technologies and their gradual accumulation into human-sussable images.

The New Aesthetic is not a new flavour of aesthetics. At best, and properly understood, it is a new way of understanding aesthetics altogether, one that renegotiates the relationship between human-subject and non-human-object. Perhaps we need a less historically-encrusted word for this 'new' relationship than 'aesthetic'. But let's keep 'aesthetic' for now. It forces us to revisit Kant, Schiller, Freud, Heidegger, and Whitehead.

A PROCESS WITHOUT A SINGULAR AESTHETIC INTENTIONALITY

The NA image is like outsider art incidentally created by systems.

The New Aesthetic is indifferent to mimesis. The NA image is not the re-presentation of an object. The NA image is the incidental visual residue of the performance or enactment of a process. The process never intentionally alters itself in order to achieve the 'goal' of the NA image. The NA image is a trace, a remnant, a remainder, a residue, a (potential) clue. The 'subject' of the NA image (when assessed, rightly) is the process itself. In this sense, the New Aesthetic is akin to process art. If we substitute 'world' for 'studio' and 'human/non-human entanglements' for 'artist'.

New Aesthetic images can teach us humans a New Aesthetic. But as we listen to this New Aesthetic, what we are hearing is neither the pure voice of nature nor the disordered voice of machines. We are hearing to systems in the world – a world that we are co-creating, a world of which we are always already a part (never apart).

The most intriguing thing about the New Aesthetic is that we all now get it: aesthetics of the new aesthetic are hearing to systems in the world – a world that we are co-creating, a world of which we are always already a part (never apart).

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MANIFESTO FOR A THEORY OF THE 'NEW AESTHETIC'

The New Aesthetic is technology accumulated to such a degree that it becomes an image. The New Aesthetic (NA) image is a special kind of image – an image which is bodily, affectively sussable by humans.

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The New Aesthetic image, in-and-of-itself, is kind of cool. Cooler yet is the way in which the NA image reveals the historical forces that have come together to 'produce' it in stasis. Coolest is the way in which the NA image reveals how things are currently coming together in process; and how things may possibly come together in the near future.

New Aesthetic images aren't representative, analogous, archetypal, emblematic, or symbolic of any thing else. They are the actual traces and residues of processes and relationships – traces that have arrived in the visual realm and have entered humans via their eyes. NA images don't symbolise or represent the processes that have led to their creation. Instead, they are incidentally thrown into the world by those processes. The way backwards from the images toward the processes themselves is much more complicated than simply intellectually thinking about what these images look 'like'. We initially apprehend NA images bodily and affectively. They are freaky. They trip us out. Only later are we able to reflect on them analytically, letting their own systemic contours and folds guide our theoretical thought.

NEW AESTHETIC IMAGES ARE AFFECTIVELY SUSSSED BY HUMANS, NOT BY THINGS

It bears repeating: 'Things' don't affectively suss New Aesthetic images. Only humans 'get' NA images. There is no machine 'aesthetic', no robotic 'vision'. Humans invent aesthetic theories regarding the interpretation of machine-generated images. Machines do not invent aesthetic theories regarding the interpretation of circuit-generated images. Likewise, no rock ever invented an ontology. Humans develop ontologies which include rocks. Humans may even philosophically speculate what ontologies rocks might invent. But rocks-themselves do not invent rock-centric ontologies. Nor do rocks-themselves philosophically speculate what ontologies dirt might invent.

If there were a clear dividing line between humans and things, then the 'aesthetics' of the New Aesthetic would lie mostly on the side of humans. Between humans and things, there is no clear dividing line.

The most intriguing thing about the New Aesthetic is that we all now 'get it' affectively via NA images. Our human bodies have a way of 'getting it' before our human intellects do.

New Aesthetic images can teach us humans a New Aesthetic. But as we listen to this New Aesthetic, what we are hearing is neither the pure voice of nature nor the disordered voice of machines. We are listening to systems in the world – a world that we are co-creating, a world of which we are always already a part (never apart).



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