

the proverbial line in between has become so blurry it's hard to still call it a line. Things have clearly become more complex, elaborate, or true and untrue at the same time. (This seems to be a law of nature: the longer something exists, the more complex its existence becomes.) So we could draw a parallel from Plato to Walter Benjamin, Baudrillard, or anyone else talking about 'the original', and see that the subject has only grown through the invention of the internet, genetic modification and mass production. And this development is naturally in sync with globalization and the subject matter of postmodernism: more information, more hybrids. Things became murky or indistinct, which made it harder to talk about something, about one thing, to talk only about 'the apple'.

Thus the topic of hyper-connectivity became so huge, larger than life, and obvious that we could easily dismiss it as being irrelevant. That, however, does not mean it doesn't have to be dealt with. Because closely related to this, is the fact that postmodern thinking brought back the Socratic notion of 'knowing that you are not knowing', caused by the realization that there is so much to know and so many different perspectives exist, an important notion in this context, but one that potentially creates inertia as well. To have an

## start

I remember being inside of the Gasometer close to Oberhausen. A huge cylindrical building used to contain gas and now a grand exhibition place. When I was there Christo & Jeanne-Claude had wrapped up most of the internal part of the building, which the visitor could enter and walk through a seemingly endless white space. More exciting to me however was the part around the "balloon" where people could go on the balustrade far up. Here all the sound produced in the building arrived and circled in loops for a little while. If you clapped your hands it would reverberate and the sound would slowly change, becoming more and more compressed. William Basinski's 'Disintegration Loops' in real life. And what struck me at the time was how aware this situation made me of the material of the medium, steel in this case, making every sound more tinny or canny over time. It is riveting to notice how something changes when it recurs once, twice, and how the container, the space, influences it. The repetition is there, but it's not an exact copy.

This essay is a meandering through the mechanics of (re)mediation, which can be understood in the broadest



sense. I will focus on the concepts of emulation, plasticity, superposition and the glitch. Emulation can be seen as a form of reverse engineering, where things from the past can be revived or seep from the digital sphere into the physical world. I believe this is a relevant phenomenon in today's age, because it creates new appearances made possible by digital developments. Through the passing of time things evolve and deviate, not only organic things but also manufactured things, as repetition always involves "accidents". These I will call the glitch. In this process unexpected and fascinating developments occur. Think of the platypus, or e-cigarettes with Bluetooth function. The same, but much wilder, goes for quantum physics (including superposition) or life on an extremely small scale, where things behave in a slightly counter-intuitive manner. Therefore, my thesis will also involve the notion of plasticity, as described by theorist Catherine Malabou, and the importance of realizing that something changes every time it comes back around, that everything is unstable, and thus the attraction of possessing a certain elasticity as an individual.

Then, this essay could also be understood as a kind of plea against our need to distinguish – in particular between object and subject, or solid and fluid relations. Because in our time,

overview but no stance can be tricky, because you might forget about your own agency in the process. Of course not acting is also an action, but an action that creates less, less entropy. So then the questions are: how can we oversee these relations and maintain a sense of empathy, to make choices while not-knowing? How can we be part of an ecology with things being virtual? Can we understand the agencies involved without losing our own? Let us circle around these questions, passing through the concepts of plasticity, emulation, superposition and the glitch, while using Jean Baudrillard's classic *Simulacra & Simulation* as a vantage point.

Screenshot from Carl Sagan's *Cosmos*: a Chinese star sign depicting a carriage for the emperor with two servants (representing the constellation of Ursa Major). In the West, the star sign is seen as a big dipper, a plough or a big bear.

"It is always a question of proving the real through the imaginary, proving truth through scandal, proving the law through transgression, proving work through striking, proving the system through crisis, and capital through revolution (...) – without taking into account: the proof of theater through anti theater; the proof of art through anti art; the proof of pedagogy through anti pedagogy; the proof of psychiatry through anti psychiatry, etc. Everything is metamorphosed into its opposite to perpetuate itself in its expurgated form."<sup>2</sup>

Here Baudrillard points at this distinction. Our minds are capable of turning things around; of seeing a Wittgensteinian duck instead of a rabbit or believe in something that does not exist, phantom pain for example. Or the fact that we often begin to fully appreciate something when it is not present anymore. So we can say that, for us, everything is in flux, everything can become the opposite, its own anti. And it is this (shadow) interplay between our perception, the virtual, and the 'what is physically there' that Plato wrote about long ago – almost using the 'what is there' as a synonym for 'the original'.

<sup>2</sup> Baudrillard, p. 19

looks pretty similar to this milk snake. The coral snake's red and yellow bands are adjacent, while the milk snake's red and black bands are adjacent. Distinguishing between the two, therefore, is often taught with the mnemonic device "red touches on black, friend of Jack / red touches on yellow, kill a fellow".

Thus, the difference between the two is minimal enough for other predators to mix them up and believe the Texas coral snake is not perilous, which is exactly when the snake would poison them. That is the reason it mimicked the Mexican milk snake's pattern, to use the information there already was, create confusion and profit from it. Or maybe more likely: the Mexican milk snake copied the Texas coral snake, so predators stay at a safe distance. Either way, it seems that DNA of the Texas coral snake *understands* it is advantageous to mimic another harmless snake. Which, of course, is simply part of how survival, and thus evolution, works, but then you could almost argue that 'life' itself is conscious, blurring the line "between cause and object, between subject and object: precisely the distance of meaning, the difference, the smallest possible gap".

## the distance between

"Now, one must conceive of TV along the lines of DNA as an effect in which the opposing poles of determination vanish, according to a nuclear contraction, retraction, of the old polar schema that always maintained a minimal distance between cause and effect, between subject and object: precisely the distance of meaning, the gap, the difference, the smallest possible gap. It is this gap that vanishes in the process of genetic coding, in which indeterminacy is not so much a question of molecular randomness, as of the abolition, pure and simple, of the relation. (...) In fact, this whole process can only be understood in its negative form: nothing separates one pole from another anymore, the beginning from the end; there is a kind of contraction of one over the other, a fantastic telescoping, a collapse of the two traditional poles into each other: implosion – an absorption of the radiating mode of causality, of the differential mode of determination, with its positive and negative charge – an implosion of meaning. That is where simulation begins."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra & Simulation*, 1981, p. 23

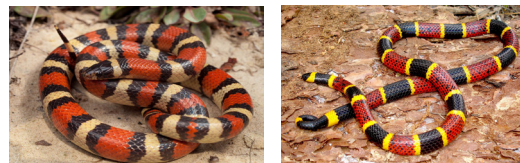


This fragment can be seen as the core of Baudrillard's renowned treatise. Also the perspective that he uses throughout his writing becomes apparent here. It is precisely this perspective I would like to counteract. Because, why can this "whole process only be understood in its negative form"? It could be seen as a pretty bleak prospect, but once you would let go of the desire to distinguish – real from fake, original from copy, mountain from hill – it could pull away the tablecloth, with the plates and glasses still intact. Besides, we could argue that everything has always been a compound, an amalgamation of chemical elements, micro-organisms and physical laws. Only in our minds we can singulate, quantize (!) an object; define something as being 'an apple' and nothing else. But in the physical matrix it's a different story. There are so many factors involved, that indeterminacy is always at play – even in a highly minimized or closed-off environment. This is mainly caused by the "molecular randomness", resulting in a seemingly eternal distance between a virtual projection, an expectation, and the physical outcome: a point in space-time, the event. Perhaps this is the only true distinction we can make. Which is why I'd like to focus on it for the coming segments. To quote Baudrillard again:

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Plaster casts of a baguette  
trading their nutritiousness  
for (near-)timelessness.  
Found in the studio of  
Johan Buskov Romme.

This desire, this ability to differentiate, is one of the main features of what we call consciousness. And many inhabitants of the animal kingdom also possess this quality (or complexion). Creatures such as the chameleon are peculiar in this sense, and it seems that plants too can, instinctively, trick other organisms into believing something is real, by using camouflage or, in other words, by *mediating* a concept. Because these aesthetical but functional choices can be seen as a sign of the awareness that camouflage contributes to the chance of survival. As an example: on the left, you see the harmless Mexican milk snake and, on the right, the deadly Texas coral snake.



The Mexican milk snake has distinct red, black and cream coloured banding, which sometimes leads to it being called a coral snake mimic. In some localities, the cream coloured banding can be more yellow, and in other areas it is more orange. It is not venomous, contrary to the coral snake which

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As said before, we are capable of experiencing things that are intangible, which is why this gap exists in the first place. We understand quotation marks, mathematics, and language in general. And this could be called consciousness, but maybe 'empathy' is more useful here. We relate to the cat because we understand it to some degree, or we want to think we do. We relate to ourselves because we understand ourselves more than other people. Certain things we understand less and therefore feel less empathic towards...

Movies also work in this way, or any mediated experience: we understand what happens on the screen, or what it conveys, because we want to understand it – because we chose to go to the cinema; even though we know it is two-dimensional. Then, there are limits of course, like seeing violence on the screen: not feeling pain makes some sort of detachment inevitable, because we do not understand it on an empirical level. These experiences, the traumas of observing something, do have consequences and are tangible on a neuropsychological level. On a microscopic scale, the seemingly infinite distance between the imaginary and the real seems to be more elastic, so let us zoom in a bit.

## plastic amphoras

"Gregor Samsa changes form; we will never know what he looked like before but in some ways he remains the same, awaiting meaning. He pursues his inner monologue and does not appear to be transformed in substance, which is precisely why he suffers, since he is no longer recognized as what he never ceases to be. But imagine a Gregor perfectly indifferent to his transformation, unconcerned by it, now that's an entirely different story!"<sup>3</sup>

The subject of plasticity, from the Greek *plassein*, meaning to take or receive form, to mould or to give form, is one that has a few different contexts. It is an important term in the science of the brain, where it is used to describe the flexibility of the synapses and the various parts of the brain, often dubbed neuroplasticity. This is a relatively new field because people, or scientists, used to think that the brain became an entirely static entity after adolescence. Now we understand it as a hyper reflective system, as reflective as any healthy society or micro-organism. Also in philosophy plasticity has been used

<sup>3</sup> Catherine Malabou about Kafka's *Metamorphosis* in *Ontology of the Accident*, 2012, p. 18

material. In a text called 'The Order of Material' Georges Didi-Huberman takes wax as the main example:

"Each time we recognize a material quality in wax, we immediately see another material quality that is exactly the opposite. (...) This plasticity itself consists, therefore, of a paradox of consistency, linked to the fact that wax – whether it is liquid, pasty, solid, or even brittle – remains wax. [Thus] in one sense, plasticity means malleability. (...) In another, plasticity means *instability*. The paradox of consistency imposed by the plasticity of wax may therefore be understood as the possibility of a coming and going between resemblance and formlessness."<sup>5</sup>

It is fascinating to see how close this paradoxical notion is to Baudrillard's argument of how "everything is metamorphosed into its opposite to perpetuate itself in its expurgated form". We can understand plasticity as a highly reactionary term, dependent on our observation and empathy. Because the wax stays wax, its molecular system does not change. Which again brings us back to the gap between the real and the imaginary: there is a difference between looking at a fact on a

<sup>5</sup> Georges Didi-Huberman, *The Order of Material*, p. 46-47



rational level and attempting to discard the rational knowledge to see how it really is. Of course these two are always intertwined. In a sense this gap could be translocated to the camouflaging snakes mentioned before, the model and the mimic, and other eternal opposites such as the guest and host, day and night, right and wrong, female and male, coffee and milk, black and white, etc., that cannot exist without each other. This is exactly what has become apparent, that it's become more and more difficult to distinguish when we have genetically modified flowers, instant cappuccino powder and chewing gum with lemon taste.

Still, even if there is no difference between, say, the Wikipedia page of the Taj Mahal and the monument itself, there are different kinds of simulation that we can more or less detach from each other. To begin there is the term 'skeuomorphism', which consists of the Greek *skéuos*; *σκεῦος*, container or tool, and *morphé*; *μορφή*, shape, which is defined as 'an object or feature which imitates the design of a similar artefact made from another material'.

Skeuomorphism is a form of mimesis, a specific kind of simulation. One that lacks the texture of the original. It mostly applies to many modern day digital design choices, like the early iPhone application 'iBooks', which simulated a wooden

by Hegel to define subjectivity, by Heidegger to talk about the metamorphosis of being and now by Catherine Malabou to be able to use this new scientific knowledge in a socially or politically active context.

"The subject is not supple and soft, and it is not rigid either; it is something in between. The subject is plastic. Plastic, if you look in the dictionary, means the quality of a matter, which is at the same time fluid but also resisting. Once formed, it cannot go back to its previous state. For example, when the sculptor is working on the marble, the marble, once sculpted, cannot be brought back to its original state. So, plasticity is a very interesting concept because it means, at once, both openness to all kinds of influences, and resistance."<sup>4</sup>

Malabou advocates a certain awareness of the mind, with which we could shape the brain and give its influences their proper place. For her 'flexibility' is a passive term, subduing our subjectivity, so we have to become plastic in order to resist or cope with certain external forces. Then, very similarly, plasticity is used in art theory, regarding the properties and poetic implications or connotations of a

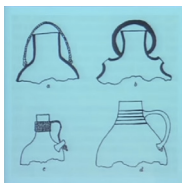
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<sup>4</sup> Noëlle Vahanian, "a conversation with Catherine Malabou", p. 6

A photograph of a piece of colored agar that used to be about 2 meters and is now just 2 centimeters (in two weeks).

Non-verbal organic protest, as seen in the canteen of the Gerrit Rietveld Academie, 2015

bookcase. But one of the earliest cultural examples of this can be found in the Roman amphora, which, at some point in time, attained a handle instead of the rope wound around it. The amphora's neck still kept its shape however, for decorative purposes, and also to keep its visual indicator intact. To make the transition into 'the new' smoother. In the case of the amphora, the shape is maintained, but not the material of the rope, nor the width of it. It seems to be a way to make change visual, to make instantly clear what it is. It seems that when something loses a part of its texture, and thereby its third dimension, it makes up for it by utilizing a part of the conceptual sphere; the virtual dimension. Then what remains is the signifier, a functional gesture towards the past.



A related term here is 'emulation', originating from the Latin verb *aemulari* meaning 'to rival'. Now its meaning is mostly 'to match' or 'surpass'. In computing however, an emulator is

remediation of a product or action. To build a mechanical version of an animal would be simulation, to grow a real-life version of the animal by genetically replicating its DNA would be emulation. It is more and less apparent at the same time. And, maybe therefore, it seems like such a counterintuitive idea that we can use modern technology to recreate and re-appropriate 'the past'. It reminds me of a passage in Deleuze's *Difference & Repetition*, in which he talks about growth:

"Since every quality is a becoming, one does not become taller than one was without at the same time becoming smaller than one is in the process of becoming. We cannot avoid this by distinguishing times, since the distinction between times is subsequent to the becoming which, at the same time, posits both the movement by which the new present is constituted and the movement by which the former present is constituted as past."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference & Repetition*, 1968, p. 236



hardware or software that enables a computer system, called the host, to behave like another computer system, called the guest. An emulator enables the host system to run software or use peripheral devices designed for the guest system. Usually, you would need a specific piece of hardware to run the software designed for it, like a chicken egg needs a mother chicken to hatch. That would be the classical way. Now we have incubators to bypass and divert the process to arrive at the outcome from another direction. If stretched a little bit, you can see this happen in different fields. Think of the buildings in the centre of Dresden that were rebuilt recently, identical as to how they were before the Second World War. They are not the same buildings, nor a simulation of the previous iteration, even though they used the same stones from the old construction. It is a totally new situation, one that never existed before, but *emulates* to be the same.

Similarly, we can think of denim jeans with holes or tears in them as a design element. They emulate a certain lifestyle, roughness, carelessness, but are ready-made, there for you to purchase and embody. It is similar to skeuomorphism, in that it transparently pretends to be something else, but there is a crucial contrast here: while simulation can be seen as an imitation of a situation or process, emulation is the

An electric water boiler (also called a thermo pot) mimicking a 19th-century tea pot and exemplifying the concept of skeuomorphism.

An item from *Animal Crossing*, representing a beehive. In the game, these are collectables and can be sold. This beehive has undergone severe deviation and now just seven bees are able to live inside it.



aware of this arbitrariness? Or what if you simply want to keep the cat in the dark?

“There is no real, there is no imaginary except at a certain distance. What happens when this distance disappears, to be reabsorbed on behalf of the model? Well, from one order of simulacra to another, the tendency is certainly toward the reabsorption of this distance, of this gap that leaves room for an ideal or critical projection.”<sup>7</sup>

According to Baudrillard the imaginary only exists if a certain distance is added. So when spun around a little, one could say that we are able to create this gap ourselves by *taking* this distance. Then the agency would lie in the act of distancing ourselves from the real, deliberately making a spatial distinction in order to observe and decide. In observation one can see what should be improved (or downgraded), because you can compare it to the idea of how it should be, how something should function. That is the necessity of distinction. To separate grey from gray, is to be able to realize that grey should actually be a bit more gray. Otherwise every single thing will remain in superposition

<sup>7</sup> Baudrillard, p. 80

## superposition

Thus, when you do not distinguish between past, present and future, growth is simultaneously a decline and disintegration a development. Here again we have the paradox of consistency, with both of the ends on the same spot. It demonstrates the plasticity and instability of any definition. In this sense, our consciousness is like wax. Soft and malleable. This paradox also articulates an important phenomenon as described in quantum mechanics, called superposition. (Easily confused with ‘superimposition’, the overlaying of two or more two-dimensional surfaces, for example in film editing.)

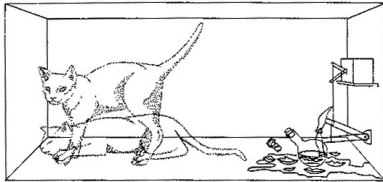
Superposition states that an atom can be at two positions at the same time, in an excited state and a non-excited state at the same time (measured by the waveform  $\Psi$ ). This has been exemplified by physicist Erwin Schrödinger in 1935, in a thought experiment involving a cat, poison, a Geiger counter, radioactive material and a hammer inside a sealed container. The amount of radioactive material was minuscule enough that it only had a 50% shot of being detected over the course of an hour. If the Geiger counter detected radiation, the

begins and when you have no clue exactly what there is to see, you start to investigate; your awareness increases, because anything could be part of the work. So when you don't know what there is to observe, where do you look and what do you see?

In a sense, John Cage, and many of his contemporaries, already used this method to ask similar questions. But in his work the frame is very much defined. You know that nothing scripted, or scored, will happen in the next 4 minutes and 33 seconds, but you can predict somebody will cough or make a squeaking sound with their chair. An example of someone blurring the frame a bit more is Tino Sehgal, who creates performances in museums in such a way that they are or become sometimes indistinguishable from the actions of the public. Recently, he used more than thirty persons that were switching between sitting down collectively, chasing after each other and singing together. At times people from the audience would become the performers, and perhaps also vice versa, making it unclear what ‘the performance’ consisted of, because the content is always changing while its container is plastic.



hammer would smash the poison, killing the cat. Until the system collapsed into one of the two configurations, it would be impossible to predict its fate – the cat would exist in a superposition of simultaneously being both alive and dead. However, this is only happening in your mind, in theory. On a macro scale, nature does not wait for you to make a decision of course and so the cat could have been dead for some time before you went to look.



Thus, the moment you define something, as being one thing and not the other, your reality gets compressed into it – you decide whether it's an increase or a decline. This is similar to George Didi-Huberman's example of wax and to the method of extrusion: you start out with an aluminium bar, which is still able to be many kinds of things, then you press it through your mind, shaping it into one thing and not the other. All that is needed in this case is the agency and the creativity to decide upon something. But how to decide when you're

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forever. To observe is to define. However, this remains strictly personal, even if it would be totally clear how something should function. To another person this distance will imply something else. So is it also possible, in the process of creation, not to take this distance and leave it to somebody else, say the observer, to define it?

This again relates to the topic of plasticity: the idea of a plastic container, that the observer can shape into what they want it to be. The observer functions like a quantum mold, pushing the material through him or herself, making a reality out of it. It is all about scriptedness, how much of something is written or projected upon someone's mind before the act of observation.

I remember the Austrian pavilion during the Venice Biennale of 2015, a very plain, minimalist building, reminiscent of Le Corbusier. Concrete and geometrical. The artist, Heimo Zobernig, intervened in the structure by adding and subtracting doorways, making the space revolve differently. But if you, like me, never saw this building before, you wouldn't know where to look. There was no sculpture to be found, no paintings, no music, nothing but the structure, so you become unsure where the work ends and the not-work

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In the case of the Austrian pavilion however, it is less demanding of your attention than something in motion. You know it won't change, so time stretches out for you to study it. However, while you are examining it, more and more details appear, like noticing other stars once you start looking at one. So it seems we become more focused in the apparent absence of information, or a solid object gains depth over time. Even if it is uncertain what is really there, we still knead our observation into a comprehensive reality. And often one very close to ourselves.

A screenshot from *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*, depicting the protagonist standing in line at a bus stop. People in the game (CPUs) are always there, waiting for the bus to come. Only the person playing the game knows it will never come.

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which shows us precisely how far a product, the result, can be stretched. The repeated use of a mould or container, visualizes the glitch inherent to the system. As the essayist Paul Virilio put it: “the invention of the ship was also the invention of the shipwreck”. Thus, it looks like things still change also without the determining act of observation, because repetition imposes a certain change or inconsistency. After a certain amount of repeating things start to deviate from the original situation.

To illustrate: to get inside the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, you used to get a sticker of a certain colour with the logo of the museum on it. You had to put this sticker on your clothes for the security to see you have legitimate entry. A conventional, linear method would be to pay and enter. At the front of the Palais de Tokyo however, a bit on the left, stood a motorbike parked on the sidewalk. This motorbike was completely full of stickers that people put on it when leaving, so anyone could take one and enter the museum for free. This is a simple example of something that is undermining a clearly defined, scripted system: a *glitch*. The original definition of it is a ‘sudden surge of current’, hence ‘malfunction’ or ‘hitch’ in astronautical slang. The term is believed to have entered common usage during the space race of the 1950s, where it

## slight deviation

But what if there would be no observer? If there is no one to see ‘it’? Can you determine that at some point in time something happens to the cat of Schrödinger’s thought experiment, if no one opens the container? To begin of course there is the inevitable disintegration, imposed by the arrow of time. Furthermore, as mentioned before, any living thing existing for a while will adapt itself to the environment. It will slowly change its DNA after a set amount of repetitions and accidental mutations. This is not unlike the 100th window theory, formulated during the early stages of the internet:

“The proverbial hundredth window represents the most vulnerable link in a system. It derives from an allegory relating castle windows to potential security holes. If even one out of a hundred windows is left open, security becomes compromised.”<sup>8</sup>

These flaws or bugs that occur subsequently define the system and its enclosure, blending together with the idea of

<sup>8</sup> Lori Fena & Charles Jennings, *The Hundredth Window*, 2003



This kind of deviation is also what is called ‘generation loss’. The loss of quality between subsequent copies or transcodes of data. Anything that reduces the quality of the representation when copying, or would cause further reduction in quality on making a copy of the copy, can be considered a form of generation loss. Strangely enough however, copying a digital file itself incurs no generation loss: the copied file is identical to the original, when a perfect copying channel is used. Thus, in the digital dimension one can eliminate the chances of deviation and prevent something from changing itself, even if you would copy something a thousand times, it will still remain the same. This, of course, is also a slightly different context than producing something from a mold, but it is interesting that in this case the digital world differs from the physical one. In a similar way you could imagine the exact same object time and time again, without it becoming another object – while in the physical world any repetition would change the content. So here again we end up with the eternal distinction between the ‘real’ and the ‘imaginary’. Although now it is rather odd, why would the digital be the same as the imaginary? Linguistically they are connected, through the word ‘virtual’, but there has got to be a better reason.

the medium being the message or the design being the container that becomes pervious at times. They make the subject differentiable and therefore unique. For example, you recognize it is your mobile device by the customizations that you have applied, because it has a serial number, but also by the abnormalities that are inherent to your specific copy of the line of production. The artist Heike Bollig has been collecting and beautifully documenting examples of these errors. She wrote a short text about it:

"In fact, the evaluation of errors very often shifts between a tendency to categorise them as taboo or to glorify them. Be it for the purpose of increased effectiveness, to ensure that the global economy runs smoothly (ISO Standards) or in an artistic context: the error is very often understood as a subversive-provocative element. This might be due to its potential to function as a tool to break open the existing aesthetic consensus."<sup>9</sup>

She notes that putting emphasis on the flaw can be interpreted as politically encouraged or subversive, but what the flaw highlights above all is the aesthetic quality of failure

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<sup>9</sup> Bollig/Buchmaier, *Holes in our pants*, 2007

was used to describe minor faults in the rocket hardware that were difficult to pinpoint. Now its meaning has become somewhat broader and the word is also used in robotics, videogames and as a term for a digital, fragmented kind of aesthetics. In this sense however, a glitch could be any kind of diversion from the linear flow. Skyping with a bad connection creates a wholly different experience for example. Or if you would watch a ninety-minute movie that takes three hours to watch in total, because of the buffering time, and all the while you are having conversations about the movie itself while it loads. Similar to fetching your baggage on the airport; it is very much part of the transportation as well.

So then, a glitch can be understood as a deviation in movement or in time. To give another example: think of any handwritten word. The trajectory or pattern of a movement that is made to communicate something is specific and personal. If the movement is interrupted, when it is lagging or it takes a detour, the signs become harder to decipher and as a result one could image that its *viscosity* increases: the texture of the material becomes less liquid, thicker and thus harder to work with. Therefore, it seems that not completing something, or diverging from the original, disintegrates the meaning and at the same time highlights the material itself. Just like the aforementioned reverb inside of the Gasometer.

#### Masaccio, The Tribute Money, Florence, 1420s

The painting is part of a cycle on the life of Saint Peter, and describes a scene from the Gospel of Matthew, in which Jesus directs Peter to find a coin in the mouth of a fish in order to pay the temple tax.

## a reason

"Everywhere, in no matter what domain – political, biological, psychological, mediatized – in which the distinction between these two poles can no longer be maintained, one enters into simulation, and thus into absolute manipulation – not into passivity, but into the differentiation of the active and passive. DNA realizes this aleatory reduction at the level of living matter."<sup>10</sup>

It seems like Baudrillard states that DNA *realizes* the existence of simulation, or that it gets "reduced" because we are able to genetically modify things. To him 'life' is becoming part of the human machine. Here I would like to argue the reverse: that any living thing can never be a simulation, because it is guided by quantum laws and is deviating, not a copy, but always unique. A modification of the DNA, or the growing of it in a lab, would be close to emulation because you would not focus on recreating something, but rather on creating something new. Which mimics certain characteristics of what was there before. But, life is something so complex, something we are still quite far from understanding

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<sup>10</sup> Baudrillard, p. 23

imaginary and the digital, or the virtual, that they both do not behave on a quantum level and exist in some kind of sandbox, a safe and simulated space not influenced by mysterious forces.

"The imaginary was the alibi of the real, in a world dominated by the reality principle. Today, it is the real that has become the alibi of the model, in a world controlled by the principle of simulation. And, paradoxically, it is the real that has become our true utopia."<sup>13</sup>

To summarise: to Baudrillard the only distinction we can make is between the real and the imaginary. Everything else is also its opposite at the same time, due to the plasticity of meaning as defined through your observation. Because of this, the distance between the real and the imaginary becomes actually much smaller than it seems; it is more of a hyper reflective loop. So maybe the only distinction we can make at the moment is between the virtual and the organic, or the quantum. Whether something has DNA, living material, or whether it is a representation of something living. It is about striving for the complex and the noisy. But then, to

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<sup>13</sup> Baudrillard, p. 82



function outside of the virtual sandbox and keep this “true utopia” in sight, we would have to accept that ‘real life’ is something unpredictable and unstable, and thus become plastic enough to cope.

Still, how can we oversee all these relations and maintain a sense of empathy or understanding? In what way can a kind of indeterminacy be beneficial? As said before, it seems to be a matter of agency, of internalisation and therefore a strictly personal one. If you don’t know where to look, you become aware of where you *do* look. So, if you want the content to be multi-reflective, your container has to be plastic, and if you want the observer to undertake action, there has to be an element of opacity or openness. Indeterminacy, or unresolved complexity, as a form of obstruction – a sort of glitch, making you take a step back to observe and create your own narrative. Just to see for yourself if the cat is still alive or not.

completely or emulating properly, mainly because of these quantum laws. Quantum mechanics only functions on a sub-atomic level, which is why we are only now beginning to understand it, but a billion molecules make up something bigger that is influenced by these intangible processes that also unconsciously guide us. (Like a citizen of Flatland, trying to understand a three-dimensional object moving through its world.) For example, physicists now suspect DNA is being held together by what is called quantum entanglement, which is also probable to play an important role in for example photosynthesis<sup>11</sup> and bird navigation<sup>12</sup>.

Thus, we could maybe see this complexity as the source of the gap between the real and the imaginary. The real being something that is not a simulation, not a copy of anything, because it behaves in such a way that is unique, multifaceted and theoretically in different *positions* at the same time. The imaginary however, will always be a simplified version (even if it contains an infinite number of elements, an apple is just an apple) and can be copied many times without changing at all, thus repetition being more of a concept than a true phenomenon. Maybe this is also the correlation between the

<sup>11</sup> [phys.org/news/2014-01-quantum-mechanics-efficiency-photosynthesis.html](http://phys.org/news/2014-01-quantum-mechanics-efficiency-photosynthesis.html)  
<sup>12</sup> [wired.com/2011/01/quantum-birds/](http://wired.com/2011/01/quantum-birds/)

Ever changing affordances  
in The Hague, 2016

A cube of grass turfs in Oosterpark,  
Amsterdam: repeated flat surfaces  
making up a three-dimensional shape.



# QUOTATION MARKS

between manifestation &  
materialisation: a meandering  
investigation into the semantic  
mechanics of mediation



Thom van Hoek 2017  
Materialisation in Art and Design  
Sandberg Institute



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“Wat ik mijn levenlang al probeer te betrappen, en wat mij steeds weer ontglipt, is het verschil tussen de voorstelling en de werkelijkheid.”

– Harry Mulisch, *Het Woord bij de Daad*, 1968

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THAT AWKWARD MOMENT  
WHEN YOU REALIZE

THAT THUNDER AND LIGHTNING  
ARE THE SAME THING

Intentional negative spaces.  
Photo by Thomas van Huut,  
in The Hague, 2016





An ancient doorway  
blocked in a similarly  
ancient way. Ostia  
Antica, Roma, 2016

A staircase made  
accessible for bikes in  
a simulative way.  
Circo di Massimo,  
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