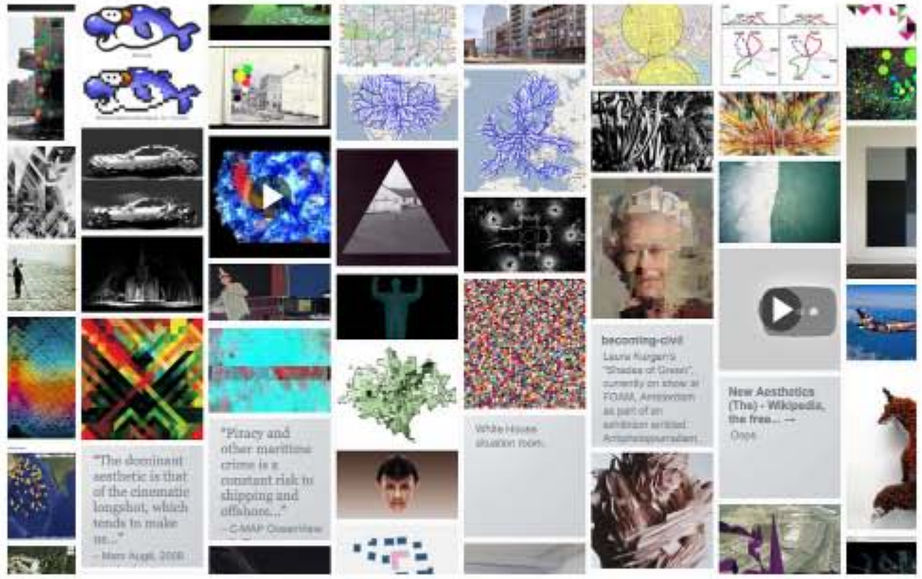
The machine gaze

As the boundaries between digital and physical dissolve, can the New Aesthetic help us see things more clearly?

by **Will Wiles** 3,900 words **Read later or Kindle**



The world through robot eyes. ***Image courtesy new-aesthetic.tumblr.com***

Will Wiles writes about architecture and design. His debut novel, Care of Wooden Floors (2012), won a Betty Trask award. His second novel, The Way Inn, will be published by Fourth Estate in June 2014.

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Shoreditch, east London, is home to a remarkable cluster of technology start-ups. Dozens of web and 'new media' firms, including Last.fm and TweetDeck, set up shop here and make this grimy but beguiling district their home. No one decided this would happen. It was urban alchemy — the chance intersection of multifarious factors of money, technology, education, culture, time and space, which locked into a temporary virtuous feedback loop, long before the politicians arrived and tried to take credit. Although bathed in broadband glow and old-media hype, what these companies actually do is ancient, primal: they build tools. Within a few blocks are hundreds of people devising new applications for digital technologies — new ways of bringing the electronic global network to bear on life.

It's in these streets that the boundary between the digital and the physical is at its most porous — in the devices and the minds of a far-seeing local population who are among the first to understand that there might not be a boundary at all. And strange phenomena can