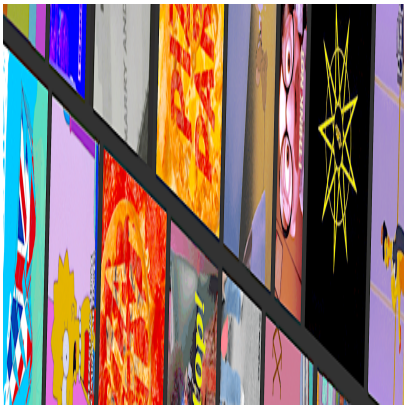


The culture of the GIF

Description

default watermark

GIF image files have 8 bit colour for red (R), green (G) and blue (B), i.e. 256 shades each for RGB. Most smartphone cameras currently provide 10 bit colour. So if you convert your photographs to GIF format they will be of lower quality.

Apart from that the GIF format provides lossless compression. So GIF files are smaller that raw image files. But the main advantages of GIF format is that it stitches together sequences of images to produce animations. These are like short videos that run in a loop endlessly on a web page. Thereâ??s no need to start or stop the GIF to run it. In fact you canâ??t. Nor do they have sound. This makes them useful for those little emojis and reaction clips that you see on web pages, text messages and social media posts.



Digital neons

The GIF (Graphics Interchange Format) was developed in the 1980s, ostensibly to give life to static web pages. Sellers quickly adopted them as a means of drawing attention to their advertisements. Animated GIFs served as the new neon lights of the digital age.

Various websites are dedicated to compiling, searching and displaying animated GIFS, e.g. giphy.com. There you will see nightmare pages of 1-2 second clips lifted from video content, cartoons, real life events, digital drawings, collages, etc.

GIF activists

Thereâ??s a history and culture to the GIF, nicely explained in an article by Kate Miltner and Tim Highfield, who also indicate how GIFs purvey visual memes, promote causes, deliver jokes, troll politicians, etc. The GIF is potentially an activist medium. People also use GIFs to communicate basic emotional states: â??the performance of affect and the demonstration of cultural knowledgeâ?• (3).

As Iâ??ve been investigating hidden images I wanted to see to what extent animated GIFs subvert the human perceptual system. I found many jokey references to subliminal messaging at giphy.com, but none that seemed to exploit flashing images in rapid succession.

Tripping the outdoors

I compiled some pictures from my photo gallery using the *Convert Photos to GIF* shortcut on my iPhone and uploaded it to this blog post. As animated GIFs are relentless and distracting I chose to provide a link to the GIF rather than plant it in this page. Click on the picture below to see the animated GIF.



We are familiar with the rapid succession of images in film, advertisements and music videos and other media, but I suspect most viewers could only stand this in short bursts.

There are 35 images in my animated GIF, each displayed for one tenth of a second. By trial and error this seemed to be the threshold at which I could discern and remember some of the content of individual images, if I stared at the GIF for long enough.

What colour is the butterfly? Is it a butterfly or a moth? How many ducks are there in the water? Is there anyone in the sea? How many stone buildings are there?

There are no subliminal messages, unless you think of the whole GIF as a hypnotic tribute to nature, the outdoors, cats, photography, infinity, or excessive CPU loading.

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Category

1. Culture

Tags

1. cryptography
2. steganography
3. subliminal messages

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