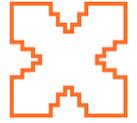


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# Post-Digital Aesthetics in Contemporary Audiovisual Art

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**Keywords:** Post-Digital, Audiovisuals, Media Art, Hybridity, Neo-Analogue, Digital Maker.

This theoretical and practical research aims to analyse current aesthetic manifestations in contemporary audiovisual media art. The concept post-digital is used to describe the current condition characterized by the pervasiveness of digital media technologies in everyday life. Contemporary audiovisual media art practices that engage with the post-digital condition reflect a shift in modes of production from media specificity towards hybridization as a critique of the effects of digital media in society. This results in hybrid manifestations such as neo-analogue practices that blur analogue and digital media, and digital-physical combinations that merge physical materials and the digital domain.

## 1. Research Purpose and Importance

The purpose of my research is to develop artistic projects that engage with the post-digital condition as well as to analyse different conceptions of the post-digital and its current aesthetic manifestations in contemporary audiovisual media art. As the scholar Florian Cramer proposes, the term post-digital is best understood not as the end of or after the digital, but as the continuation of the digital in its “subtle cultural shifts and ongoing mutations” (Cramer 2014, 13). The post-digital condition describes media after its digitization where new hybrid forms appear that are not easily classifiable as analogue or digital (Cramer 2014). Contemporary audiovisual media art practices related with the post-digital forge new hybrid forms, be it by merging analogue and digital media or digital and material realms. As a result, the division between old and new media as well as the digital and physical is blurred.

My main research question is: How do current aesthetic manifestations within the post-digital condition critically engage the pervasiveness of digital media? In order to answer this question, two secondary questions are posed: What are the contemporary audiovisual media art practices that engage critically with the post-digital condition? How do I, through my artistic practice, relate to these practices and engage with the post-digital condition? In this way, the study seeks to pin down creative strategies that artists have been exploring by shifting the focus on digital media specificity and infrastructure towards media hybridization and their broader cultural effects. I aim to contribute to a better understanding of the diversity and specificity of post-digital aesthetics and to highlight how contemporary audiovisual media art practices engage critically with digital and computational technologies so deeply entrenched in all parts of everyday life.

## 2. Background and Related Work

The concept of the post-digital was initially coined by the composer Kim Cascone as the “aesthetics of failure” (Cascone 2000). His understanding of the post-digital term suggests a desire to materialize the invisible or disembodied computational processes of digital media. However, the post-digital as synonymous of glitch art as proposed by Cascone—as “a deconstruction of digital files” (Cascone 2000, 16)—points to a formal approach to digital media infrastructures. Glitch art practices that explore solely computational processes and digital media infrastructures rely on the digital technologies they attempt to criticize. Thus, the post-digital is associated with a disenchantment towards digital media technologies or a time in which our fascination with these devices has become historical (Cramer 2014). It describes the state of media, arts and design after digitization, where new hybrid forms appear that are not strictly classifiable as analogue or digital (Cramer 2014). According to this view, audiovisual media art practices associated with

the post-digital label reject techno-positivist innovation approaches and media-based categorizations. Instead, they seek new hybrid forms, such as analogue and digital media hybrids associated with the neo-analogue practice, and digital making and hacking practices that merge the digital and material realms. Therefore, both the neo-analogue media practitioner and the digital maker can be seen as part of the same post-digital culture of audiovisual production that reinforces do-it-yourself (DIY) creative practices, as a “hacker attitude of taking systems apart and using them in ways which subvert the original intention of the design” (Cramer 2014, 18).

Neo-analogue hybrid practices refuse traditional dichotomies of old and new media. They explore analogue media devices and offline manifestations and, as Cramer suggests, they “can only be meaningfully called ‘post-digital’ when they do not merely revive older media technologies, but functionally repurpose them in relation to digital media technologies”(Cramer 2014, 18). The digital maker merges the digital and material domains while also moving beyond the screen with digital-physical hybrids, or new modes of materiality that blur non-digital and digital, the virtual and the real, as part of the same reality.

These approaches relate to what scholar Matt Ratto calls ‘critical making’, as a methodology that explores the intersection between digital technologies and the human, between online and offline modes of production. Critical making thus emphasizes the process of making as a critical engagement with digital technologies according to “critique and expression rather than technical sophistication and function” (Ratto 2011, 253). Digital making and hacking practices function as alternatives to, and resistance against, the corporate state of digital technology, where software, hardware and the internet are controlled by a few corporations that subject their users to passive consumers of digital media, as subjects that are largely “unaware of the computer as a system that is programmed, that can be reprogrammed at any moment, and that could potentially be programmed or reprogrammed by its users” (Lialina 2016, 137).

This kind of approach beyond the screen is one of the main goals of a post-digital analysis of art, according to theorist Josephine Bosma, as the “merging of machine spaces and art practices asks for a visualization method that is at the same time applicable to science and art” (Bosma 2014, 109). Accordingly, theorist Mel Alexenberg suggests to move away from a single-point perspective in order “to explore postdigital perspectives emerging from creative encounters between art, science, technology, and human consciousness”(Alexenberg 2011, 9). Audiovisual media art hybrids of digital and physical combinations relate to computation critically through practices that are not reducible to the digital domain, or its code poetics and medium specificity. In this way, the digital-physical hybrids are not reduced to the imperceptible computational processes and expose the contemporary post-digital condition, where “[c]omputation becomes experiential, spatial

and materialized in its implementation, embedded within the environment and embodied, part of the texture of life itself but also upon and even within the body” (Berry & Dieter 2015, 3).

### 3. Approach

The research design adopted for this dissertation follows a theoretical and practical approach. It combines qualitative analysis in the development of a theoretical framework, to inform and deepen the understandings of my artistic practice, and an experimental methodology based on creative research of digital and non-digital materials. Through critical analysis of the available literature, the study aims to build a theoretical framework on the concept of the post-digital in order to examine audiovisual media art practices, cultures of artistic production, and methodologies that take critical stance towards media technologies.

I aim to synthesize this research through artistic interventions that explore audiovisual hybrids of digital and non-digital technologies in the form of audiovisual installations and performances. I give emphasis to DIY creative practices such as digital making and neo-analogue media practices to create sound and image hybrid combinations. This includes the experimentation with physical materials and digital media infrastructures, open-source software and hardware in order to explore digital-physical hybrid relations to gain agency over the corporate state of digital media technologies.

### 4. Expected Contributions

The outcome of this dissertation project is both the publication of qualitative research as academic papers and artistic interventions in the form of audiovisual installations, performances and other audiovisual hybrid forms. My research contributes to the current literature on audiovisual media art and the post-digital aesthetics both in media theory and media art practices.

My hypothesis is that a post-digital audiovisual aesthetics moves beyond techno-essentialist creative approaches on the digital medium towards hybrids of analogue and digital media, and the digital and physical domains. This hybridization presents a conceptual and practical transition in creative modes of production focused on media specificity and infrastructure, towards a broader critique of the effects of digital media in society and culture.

### 5. Progress

I have started my PhD research in the winter semester of 2018/19. By now, I have written two papers and produced three prototypes of artworks that keep developing as works-in-progress. The work *Unintended Consequences* is an audiovisual performance and music album that amplifies the electromagnetic fields generated by electronic devices and are visualized in a burst

of colours and glitches; *On A Scroll Through The Cloud* is a computer game suitable for VR installation that plays with the visual surface of the internet's technical infrastructures and its popular imaginary context; and *Deep Touch* (working title) is an interactive networked audiovisual installation of digital-physical hybrids that combines 3D printed objects, data sonification and visualization. At the moment, I am in the process of finishing my PhD project plan and preparing to write the first chapter of my dissertation based on the literature review and the two published articles.

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