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If the Future Is Software-defined, What To Do with Our Hands?

Post-digital Commons and the Unintended from a Design Perspective

Earlier this year, when I was still reading and gathering material for this article, I went for a walk in my neighborhood in Berlin-Wedding, trying to clear my head. Instead I came across the following situation that immediately triggered a series of more or less serious questions and ideas linked to the post-digital discourse that was unsettling my mind:



Photo: Holger Lund

What does “dataREAL”¹ mean? Does it imply that some data is not real, un-real? And if so, what would real data compared to unreal data be? Normally, the zeros and ones of digital data are considered to be immaterial and data certainly doesn’t ring your doorbell when it comes to your home. So what does it mean when data announces its visit at your entrance door? Is it a promise or a threat? Will the data

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- 1 Internet research later revealed that there are several companies called dataREAL; we probably are dealing here with the one based in Berlin, specialized in heating and measurement technology—an information which is, however, not included in the announcement, leaving us to speculate about its meaning.

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be able to enter the house even after 8 pm, when the door is locked? And more importantly: what shape does data take when it materializes and pays you a visit? As funny as the idea of data knocking at your door and wanting to have coffee with you may sound, it is exactly what, figuratively speaking, happened around 2000 when suddenly knit smartphones and crocheted laptops entered the field of our visual perception.² Bearing in mind that the term post-digital came up at about the same time,³ we probably could characterize these “strange hybrids”⁴ retrospectively as forerunners of today’s post-digital condition. The digerati of the time, however, would never have thought of calling them post-digital. If anything, they would have called them analogital, as Verena Kuni has pointed out.⁵

This appears only logical, considering that at first the term post-digital, as introduced by Kim Cascone in 2000, didn’t actually refer to the materialization of analog-digital hybrids, but to something happening within the logics of the zeros and ones of computer music: the “incidental sound”⁶ of a glitch or other forms of “‘failure’ of digital technology.”⁷

The concept, however, found its way into other contexts, and when about ten years later it suddenly turned up and was massively used in the design and art worlds, it often referred to what Russel Davies has summed up as “digital moving to real.”⁸ In the following, this article will examine the different forms this ‘moving to real’ has taken and still takes in the design context. It will focus on three areas, where we can observe how ‘moving to real’ has developed a considerable impact on design, either in the form of a certain concept of the post-digital or, more implicitly, as ways of working and thinking. The areas that will be analyzed are not located on the same level of the very broad category of the ‘design context’ that we have introduced, but they are linked by the importance they attribute to physical materiality and bodily experience, even if with sometimes opposing objectives, as the analysis will show. In the business-oriented discourse of design, marketing, and consulting agencies, the objectives—and consequently the grasp on the concept of the post-digital—lie within the logics of a rather uncritical capitalist consumer culture. In contrast, questions of the role of manual aspects in design and the bodily presence in shared spaces and shared resources as commons shed a more critical light on the problem.

The aim of this article is, in a first step, to analyze existing approaches to the post-digital in the field of design, the tension between the different approaches but also their common features. Some core aspects of design under post-digital condi-

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- 2 See also Verena Kuni’s description of the process: “concepts and objects, which until then had only existed as data, were literally spatialized (placed into three-dimensional space).” (“Vor allem aber wurden allenthalben Konzepte und Objekte, die bis dahin nur als Daten existiert hatten, wortwörtlich in den Raum gestellt.” English translation mine). Kuni 2014.
- 3 See Kim Cascone’s text on the “Aesthetics of Failure” from 2000.
- 4 “Merkwürdige Mischwesen” (English translation mine). Kuni 2014.
- 5 Ibid. For the notion of “analogital” see also Verena Kuni’s text on “(F)Analogital” in this publication: <http://post-digital-culture.org/kuni/>.
- 6 Cascone 2000, p. 14.
- 7 Ibid., p. 13.
- 8 Davies 2009, figure 3.

tions will be developed by investigating the role of the hand, taking up ideas of Sennett and Flusser, whereas the work of *Brave New Alps* and Rasmus Fleischer's "Post-digital Manifesto" will help us to explore the growing interest in shared spaces and resources and their political implications. By discussing these questions against the backdrop of the general debate of the concept, the article also hopes to contribute to further developing the concept of the post-digital.

THE RISE (AND FALL) OF THE POST-DIGITAL IN MARKETING AND CONSULTING—OR, ARE WE LIVING IN A POST-DIGITAL AGE?

The concept of the post-digital had its heyday in marketing and consulting around 2010, shortly before a more concentrated academic discussion started.⁹ The acceptance of the term within this field, however, was not unanimous and positions went from complete acceptance to critical rejection, as headlines of articles such as "The Post-digital Age Is Here"¹⁰ and "Are We in a Post-digital Era? No Way!"¹¹ show. The latter position has become consensual in recent theoretical publications, but with a slightly different argumentation: whereas Dennis Wetzig in his preparatory article for the Next Conference 2012 in Berlin took the term post-digital literally and argued that we couldn't speak of a post-digital era because there were still other digital paradigm shifts ahead of us,¹² more recent critiques often address the prefix 'post,' which inscribes the term in the Hegelian logics of historical teleology. By doing so, it confirms the logics of the "digital phantasma"¹³ and of technological progress linked to it. This leads to another argument against the declaration of a post-digital age, which criticizes the term for being reductive in the sense that "'digital' becomes the master signifier for the situation we are living in. It is also reductive of the past since the digital becomes the more significant recent historical development, which is leaving out alternative conceptualizations of what the past could be."¹⁴

So instead of seeing the term as equal to the 'big' post-terms—such as post-modernism—recent theories propose a more nuanced approach. On the one hand, the 'post' in post-digital can be seen as the sign for "digitality in a crisis"¹⁵—in the same way post-modernism meant modernism in a crisis for François Lyotard—a crisis that opens the way for "critical thinking about the digital"¹⁶ and a critical review of notions connected to the digital, such as new media.¹⁷ On the other hand, Florian Cramer proposes to think of the post-digital more in the sense of terms such as post-

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9 See also Conrads and Morlok in their "Einleitung," in Conrads/Morlok 2014.

10 Nicholas 2010, p. 18.

11 Wetzig 2012.

12 Ibid.

13 "Digitalphantasma" is Jan Distelmeyer's term. Distelmeyer 2014.

14 Kristoffer Gansing in *postdigital?*, 2014.

15 Siegfried Zielinsky in *ibid.*

16 Gansing in *ibid.*

17 Cramer 2014.

punk, post-communism, or post-feminism, terms that can't be "understood in a purely Hegelian sense of an inevitable linear progression of cultural and intellectual history. Rather, they describe more subtle cultural shifts and ongoing mutations."¹⁸ This brings us back to the "strange hybrids," which indeed are characteristic for a concept of the post-digital that describes a shift toward a critical review of the ideas of technological progress associated with digitalization, and that also leads us to rethink the relationship of the digital and the analog.

It is this process of rethinking the relationship between digital and analog working processes that made the term post-digital so welcome in the field of marketing and marketing-related design agencies, who always strive for new ideas and looks to attract target groups. The urge to step out of the realm of the zeros and ones and instead leave traces in the material world again took over right at the moment when "digital felt normal,"¹⁹ or, in other words, when screens were "getting boring" and it became "really hard to impress anyone with stuff on a screen any more."²⁰ Especially for the digital natives, who have grown up surrounded by digital devices, "simple stuff with objects looks like magic."²¹

The objects, however, are not necessarily the same as before the advent of the computer, they are informed by digital processes as well as the aesthetics of certain software and digitally-conceived products. The most important idea for marketing seems to be that "the best work in this post-digital age blends digital with physical"²² and thus uses all possible tools and media together, no matter if analog or digital. Which also means that campaigns are aimed to create physical experiences for the consumer again. A prominent example for this approach is the Nike Chalkbot campaign by Wieden & Kennedy Portland premiering during the 2009 Tour de France: anyone could send messages via digital media, which were then printed out on the tarmac by a computer-controlled printing machine.²³

Some agencies not only realized the blending of analog and digital approaches in their campaigns, they adopted the concept of the post-digital as conceptual basis for their work; the Berlin-based agency Aperto even founded a magazine called *postdigital*.²⁴ The magazine is available online as a PDF download and as an app, and in a print edition. Apart from being available in different media, the blending of analog and digital approaches becomes most obvious in a certain retro aesthetic, which is by no way original as all elements have been used in a variety of campaigns by other agencies: handwriting or digitally faked handwriting, the illusion of handicraft such as cut-out paper negligently pasted on another piece of paper and throwing shadows, cut out and thus irregular letters, or, more specifi-

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18 Ibid.

19 Nicholas 2010, p. 18.

20 Davies 2009.

21 Ibid.

22 Nicholas 2010, p. 18.

23 This campaign is also mentioned as exemplary by Jeremy Nicholas in his article on the Cannes Lions festival in 2010. For more information on the campaign see e.g. Sweney 2010.

24 See www.postdigital-magazin.de – accessed: June 11, 2015

cally, letters carved into an apple, to name just a few. Apart from articles dealing with digital developments, the topics of the magazine follow the same logics of a certain retro trend, a nostalgia for everything analog: there is an article on music cassettes, for example, another one deals with a “nostalgia for the handmade.”²⁵ There is, however, no article dealing about the more theoretical aspects of the term and concept of the post-digital. A short introductory note speaks of the “dialog between the analog and digital worlds,”²⁶ a very summary description that is repeated various times in different issues of the magazine in these or other words. Up to now, four issues have been produced, the last one in 2013. This is an interesting indicator, because the year 2013 marks the culminating point for the rising importance of the post-digital as a concept in marketing and consulting. Again, Aperto offer an interesting example: in 2013, a statement on their website, under the header “campaigning,” labeled their business attitude as “post-digital,” mixing digital media with the “possibilities of traditional communication.”²⁷ When I went back to the website in early 2015, the image was still the same, presenting campaigning as a collaboration of design, public relations, digital communication, and event. What had changed was the text: although the idea of combining digital and analog approaches was still there, the term post-digital had made way for “cross-media campaigns with a focus on a digital approach.”²⁸ Later in 2015, only the latest claim of the agency, “How & Wow,” still prevailed while the old website had been replaced by a new one for the “digital age.”²⁹

This rise and sudden fall of the post-digital as a sort of ‘buzz concept’ can also be retraced in marketing and consulting publications that constitute a discursive point of reference for marketing- and consulting-oriented design agencies. The main topic of Deloitte’s report on *Tech Trends 2013* is “elements of postdigital [sic],”³⁰ the report examining five forces—social, mobile, analytics, cloud, and cyber—and their workings in businesses on their way to the “Postdigital Enterprise™.”³¹ There is no real attempt in the report to further define the concept of the post-digital; the understanding of it is implicitly developed throughout the report by various elements that define the enterprise under post-digital conditions. So there are, implicit theoretical positions taken: according to the “Preface,” we live in a post-digital era, which, like

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- 25 “Die Sehnsucht nach dem Handgemachten” (English translation mine) by Karina Kliczkowski. <http://postdigital-magazin.de/magazin3/> – accessed: June 11, 2015.
- 26 “Dialog zwischen analoger und digitaler Welt.” <http://postdigital-magazin.de/archiv/> – accessed: June 11, 2015.
- 27 “Die Einstellung von Aperto Plenum geht mit einer postdigitalen Haltung einher. Die heute selbstverständliche Aufmerksamkeit und Auseinandersetzung im Umgang mit digitalen Medien verbinden wir mit den Möglichkeiten klassischer Kommunikation [...]” www.aperto.de/start/leistungen/campaigning.html – accessed: July 7, 2013.
- 28 “Crossmedial integrierte Kampagnen mit digitalem Schwerpunkt.” www.aperto.de/start/leistungen/campaigning.html – accessed: January 14, 2015.
- 29 http://www.aperto.com/en/about?_ga=1.168787687.755048401.1421764648 – accessed: April 08, 2015.
- 30 Deloitte 2013, no page.
- 31 Ibid. In marketing and consulting, the first four forces, more explicitly defined as social media, mobility, analytics, and cloud computing, are also subsumed under the abbreviation SMAC.

the “post-industrial era, reflects a ‘new normal’ for business and a new basis for competition.” The ‘new normal’ implies that we take up the challenges of the digital developments, just as in “post-industrial times, we didn’t forego industrialization, we embraced it. The Postdigital era is similar, but with digitalization at its core.”³²

Thus the affirmative attitude of embracing the challenges of progress is not tainted by any critical approach to the consequences of digitalization. Another publication from 2013, the KPMG/CII report for India, entitled *The SMAC Code: Embracing New Technologies for Future Business*, emphasizes these logics by showing the development of enterprise from the pre-digital through the digital and then to the post-digital era.³³ The main differences between the digital and the post-digital era seem to be, firstly, the assumption that in the post-digital era the digital divide is going to be diminished³⁴ and, secondly, the role of the consumer. The latter seems to have played a major role in the changes from digital to post-digital: “Enterprises in the post-digital era have been forced to adapt to the changing marketplace, with ‘digital consumers’ riding the wave of social media and mobility to emerge as more informed decision makers.”³⁵ This suggests that the enterprises have not played a very active part in embracing post-digital developments that rather seem to have befallen them like some sort of fatality caused by the so-called digital consumer. The latter, it seems, has driven the enterprises to change their approaches, toward structural innovation as a bottom-up process and toward adopting the SMAC model, for example.³⁶

While design only plays an implicit role in the KPMG/CII report, it is a constitutive element of the Postdigital Enterprise™. The Deloitte report dedicates a whole chapter to “Design as a Discipline,” which claims that “design should be much more than a project phase.”³⁷ “Design as a discipline” is based on design thinking, but defined as a “systemic expansion” of this approach, which “shifts from separate, adjunct processes to being embedded in overall solution delivery.”³⁸ Even if this approach puts design at the heart of the Postdigital Enterprise™, it does not explicitly refer to the elements of the post-digital, the blending of digital and analog techniques central to the discussion led by design agencies during that time. If there is a link to the question of ‘moving to real,’ it is to be found in the chosen method: design thinking as such is rooted in the physical world since it is based on the co-presence of people in a physical space to discuss and reflect the project phases—often with analog methods and analog tools.

The idea of “design as a discipline” actually promises a more in-depth discussion of the role of design in the Postdigital Enterprise™. But even if freeing design from its subordinate role in big companies, from being “relegated to a phase of a project, or

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32 Ibid.
 33 SMAC Code 2013, p. 5ff.
 34 See *ibid.*, p. 7.
 35 *Ibid.*, p. 8.
 36 *Ibid.*, p. 7.
 37 Deloitte 2013, p. 27.
 38 *Ibid.*, p. 28.

a silo of activity, with fixed inputs and outputs to the rest of the organization,” surely offers an interesting approach, it remains within the ideas and borders of consulting language in the Deloitte report. The concept of “design as a discipline,” for example, is not further linked to academic discussion of the topic or phenomena such as “the spread in comprehension and extension of the term design.”³⁹ These are, however, at work when design serves as an “overall solution delivery.”⁴⁰ This becomes more comprehensible when we consider the fact that two years later, in the 2015 report by Deloitte,⁴¹ the word post-digital does not appear anymore. The ‘trend’ was over, new buzzwords had to be invented.

Why then did we dedicate a lengthy chapter to this short episode in the career of the concept of the post-digital? On the one hand, it is important to review this episode, short as it may be, because it has shaped most people’s understanding of the post-digital in a certain way. We could even go as far as asserting that this affirmative, teleological use of the concept has blocked a more fruitful discussion for some while. On the other hand, the massive use of the post-digital as a rather flat buzz concept in marketing and consulting may account for a certain allergic reaction to the concept when used in a less marketing-oriented or more academic design context, a reaction that the author of this text had the occasion of witnessing more than once.

So, what is to be done? Should the concept be dismissed once and for good in the design context? Or are there maybe other approaches to the concept that promise to show more profundity and persistency?

POST-DIGITAL AS RE-DIGITAL

A project that has to be mentioned here is the one started by Franziska Morlok and Martin Conrads at the University of the Arts in Berlin parallel to the heyday of the post-digital in marketing and consulting, but with a very different perspective. The first step of the project was a seminar with students and a resulting exhibition, “Post-digital Is Better,”⁴² in April 2013, for which the students explored the concept of the post-digital with design and art projects in different media. The exhibition as well as the discussion held at the opening also became part of the second step, the book publication *War Postdigital besser?* (Was Post-digital Better?, 2014). In the book, researchers and designers from different backgrounds were trying to find answers to this question, some of which laid tracks that will be taken up later in this article. Lately, increasing interest in a discussion of the effects of digitalization can be observed in design schools—at least in the German-speaking context.⁴³ Design stu-

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39 Latour 2008, p. 2.

40 Deloitte 2013, p. 28.

41 Deloitte 2015.

42 See http://www.designtransfer.udk-berlin.de/en/archiv/_postdigital-ist-besser/ – accessed: June 11, 2015.

43 This summer’s theme of the lecture series “Stilvorlagen” at the University of Applied Arts Hamburg is “Umbruch” (turn/change), it is the result of an MA course, exploring how digitalization

dents seem to reflect more and more on their own working methods and processes as well as on the media techniques by which they are shaped. They are fully aware of their own interest in analog techniques such as serigraphy or risography, which might have been declared obsolete once. And if this interest is not sheer retromania⁴⁴—which probably, at least partly, it is—they are often drawn by the concept of the post-digital as a possible answer to the question of how to describe the conditions of design they are working in and with.⁴⁵

While the prefix ‘post’ usually is seen as a sign for something in crisis,⁴⁶ Morlok and Conrads maintain that the transition to the post-digital does by no means mark a crisis in graphic design but that, on the contrary, graphic design can shape this transition and make it visible and tangible.⁴⁷ How is that possible? Maybe the real ‘revolution,’ the real crisis has been the digitalization of graphic design, when all the steps of the working process suddenly could be done with the help of one single machine and whole professional branches such as typesetters seemed to become obsolete. And maybe after that the transition to the post-digital was a sort of reconciliation of old and new working methods. But is it really so?

A closer look at some approaches dealing with the post-digital in design will hopefully lead to a more thorough understanding of the situation. We can observe that the prefix ‘re’ plays an even more important role than ‘post’ in this whole discussion, avoiding the straight line of teleological progression to the post-digital as its characteristic movement. Manuel Bürger proposes to re-instate the human being as the central element of the design process—though always in connection with the digital devices that can’t be assumed away anymore.⁴⁸ Thus his is not a nostalgic proposition to return to pre-digital times; Bürger makes a case for giving room to human imperfections, to human failures as a positive value. In reference to Cascone, he compares them to the element of the offbeat in music, something irregular that has to be artificially re-introduced in music software.⁴⁹ Being offbeat would seem to be the condition of the post-digital. Design that addresses the human being as a responsible partner can use unpredictable situations and contexts generated by human

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continues to change the designerly work process. The same question is discussed by the working group “digital.print_publishing” at the Kunsthochschule Kassel, to name just two institutional examples.

44 For an analysis of “retromania” see Reynolds 2011.

45 While the author of this text must consider that her working on the concept of the post-digital and disclosing it to students may incite them to investigate it themselves, the relatively large number of students’ essays and MA thesis dealing with the concept, even if the seminars had no special focus on the subject, speaks for a thorough interest on the part of the students.

46 See this article, p. 3.

47 The German original uses the term “medialer Umbruch” (medial turn). Morlok/Conrads 2014.

48 Bürger 2014.

49 Ibid. The importance of failures or errors for the creative process had been established long before the concept of the post-digital became more prominent. The Akademie Schloss Solitude, for example, launched its new program “arts, science & business” in 2003 by asking what could be achieved by an error (Was kann ein Fehler?). Recent years, however, show an increasing interest in the role of failure (and chance) in the creative process in students’ works, which parallels the interest in the concept of the post-digital.

imperfection for a mature design. Bürger even goes as far as to declare that the ideal design process works through “excessive demands.”⁵⁰

This argument reminds us of Richard Sennett’s “experience of learning from resistance.”⁵¹ User-friendliness tends to make us passive: “In so-called smart buildings, the inhabitant can be rendered more passive than in structures that require interpretation because they are not legible, straightforward, easy [...]”⁵² The building that resists our attempts to immediately understand how it works is more challenging and thus more stimulating, whereas “the easy building, street or computer kernel ceases to function like a laboratory [...]”⁵³ Resistance and its resulting difficulties are not only to be understood as intellectual problems, but also in a very material sense. Sennett criticizes that “in everyday life we have become desensitized physically”⁵⁴ and consequently highlights the importance of the hand and the sense of touch.⁵⁵ Although by no means identical, Vilém Flusser’s analysis of the transition from the analog to the digital domain points in the same direction: in a world dominated by computer programs, we still have the impression of making free decisions, but in reality we live in a “society of programmers who are programmed,” in an endless “regression from [...] the programmers of programmers of programmers,” resulting in a sort of “programmed totalitarianism.”⁵⁶ In the future, human beings won’t be able to perceive these mechanisms, and totalitarianism will be “visible only in the embryonic state it is in today.”⁵⁷ The impression of our free decisions is based on the (apparent) choices the programs allow for: our decisions are acted out by our fingertips pressing the keys.⁵⁸

As in Sennett’s critical approach to the seemingly user-friendly world, the hand plays a central role in Flusser’s analysis: if in computerized society all the bodily and mental action seems to have concentrated in choices carried out by the fingertips, from a historical perspective it is really the hand that “characterizes human existence in the world.”⁵⁹ It is through the hand that we grasp the world and handle it, both in a material and mental sense. This mechanism, however, doesn’t apply to the world of zeros and ones anymore, as the latter is not dominated by things, but by non-things, such as computer memories, that “cannot be held in the hand”⁶⁰ and

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50 Überforderung. Ibid.

51 Sennett develops these ideas mainly in his book *The Craftsman* (2008); he gave a sort of short introduction to them in a lecture he developed especially for a design context: Sennett 2011, p. 6.

52 Ibid., p. 9.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid., p. 2.

55 For an in-depth analysis of these arguments see Jana Herwig’s article “There Is No Facebook Protest. On the Resistance of the So-Called Digital” (Es gibt keinen Facebook-Protest. Zum Widerstand des sogenannten Digitalen), in Lund/Lund 2014, pp. 64–75.

56 Flusser, *Non-Thing 2*, p. 93.

57 Ibid., p. 94.

58 See *ibid.*, p.92.

59 Ibid., p. 90.

60 Ibid., p. 91.

are “impossible to get hold of.”⁶¹ While things disappear, the advent of non-things is accompanied by a “mountain of junk”⁶² leading to the devalorization of all things.

If some aspects of the picture that Flusser paints will have changed since the first publication of his articles on non-things in 1993, this picture nevertheless proves helpful for our analysis of the post-digital in design in several aspects. Supposing that the revival of analog techniques in design is not just some retromaniac fit, the motive of the “hand” can be revealing: it not necessarily symbolizes the wish to go back to a status before the introduction of digital tools, but rather a moment of critique. In this view, the hand’s ability to move, to act, to grasp things, and to alter them freely stands for creative choices that are not exclusively made within the range of tools offered by the common image editing programs, they include the struggle with analog material that is so important to the creative process according to Sennett. The hand, however, is much more than that: it builds a bridge to the mind, as Christine Fritsch points out in her MA thesis on “The End of the Digital Utopia. Re-Analogization in Graphic Design” from 2015, drawing a connection between Flusser’s theory and the re-appearance of analog techniques in graphic design.⁶³ As psychologists and neuroscientists have found in their research on handwriting, there is a close relation between the gesture of writing and processes of mental stimulation in our brain.⁶⁴ This leads to the assumption that scribbling and drawing on paper or another material support might actually lead to different, maybe even more experimental kinds of creative ideas than the mouse click. Soft- and hardware producers, however, are conscious of this problem and, for some years now, have been developing interfaces that try to offer more gestural possibilities.

Even so, this might not be enough to reconcile designers entirely with their digital tools. Most of them wouldn’t dream of ceasing to work with the computer, but the interviews with designers led by Fritsch in the framework of her MA thesis reveal that they feel something is missing.⁶⁵ This is not an entirely new diagnosis concerning the digital domain: Susan Hayward, for example, develops similar considerations in regard to cinema.⁶⁶ Consequently, the re-turn to the ‘handmade’ can be seen as a critical approach to the digitalized design process.

At first sight, this return can easily be dismissed as pure retromania, nostalgia, or even conservative traditionalism, and the fact that designers mostly seem to have found satisfactory ways to combine analog and digital methods in their daily design practice does not give the impression of a very active critical debate. However, as already mentioned above, there is growing interest in this debate and there is, in

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61 Flusser, *Non-Thing 1*, p. 86.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 87.

63 Fritsch 2015, *passim*.

64 These facts have become common knowledge by now and have found their way into newspaper articles. See e.g. Konnikova 2014.

65 As Fritsch only interviewed a restricted number of Austrian designers, the interviews are, of course, not representative, but they reveal some shared patterns of problems. Fritsch 2015, p. 71.

66 Hayward 2013, p. 106f.

fact, much more at stake than only the question if the pencils and brushes used in design should consist of wood and hair or of zeros and ones. The critical potential of the concept of the post-digital can be used to work on the much wider question of how designers want to work in the future and, consequently, what society they want to create their design in and for.

CONSUMERISM VS. PRACTICE OF FREEDOM

At first sight, the post-digital doesn't show a strong critical potential toward the existing capitalist system, in a way it even integrates in the logics of capitalism rather well, as our analysis of its career in marketing and consulting has shown. And even the nostalgic return to offline media such as vinyl is "not just 'artistic' or 'radical' or a 'new avantgarde' [sic]," but has to be seen as part of a "new consumption logic,"⁶⁷ as Kristoffer Gansing points out. While this is certainly one aspect of the post-digital seen as a "broader cultural movement,"⁶⁸ the concept can also be used to question these central workings of our social and economic system, as Siegfried Zielinsky argues. He believes that, "having in the background our experiences of going through telematic networks, going through the priority of digitality etc.,"⁶⁹ we will be able to develop new and different forms of sociality, collaboration, and cooperation. Especially in the art and design world, he perceives an increasing interest in the possibilities to create new communal work.

Alternative economic and thus also alternative design strategies are at the core of Brave New Alps—that is the designers Bianca Elzenbaumer and Fabio Franz—work. In their theoretical articles and practice-based projects, they question the design system and its values, but their search for answers and alternatives points far beyond the design field. Their practice-led research project "Designing Economic Cultures" (2011–2013), for example, addresses the question which "strategies socially-engaged designers can adopt to deal with socio-economic precariousness and market constraints."⁷⁰ In 2012, a part of the project led them to work with a group of people from the West Bank's refugee camps. While addressing concrete concerns of life in the camps, the project and the eponymous publication *Commons and Commoning* also developed a more general discourse about commons and the act of commoning. Offering three concrete starting points for designers—that is resources, people, and lines of action—commons can also become the basis for new design values and practices that show a way out of the market-driven individualized competition and the crisis-ridden capitalist market itself.⁷¹ Such a radical change of design practices

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67 Gansing in postdigital?, 2014.

68 Ibid.

69 Zielinsky in *ibid.*

70 <http://www.brave-new-alps.com/designingeconomiccultures/> — accessed: June 11, 2015.

71 These ideas are, among others, developed in the article "Designing Economic Cultures. Alternative Wertepraktiken für Designer_innen," published in *Lund/Lund* 2014.

has to start at the very beginning, with design education, which should become a “practice of freedom” oriented toward collective work and exchange of ideas.⁷²

Although *Brave New Alps* clearly include analog as well as digital commons in their reflections, they never directly allude to the concept of the post-digital. But in other texts explicitly referring to it, we find similar preoccupations: in his *Post-digital Manifesto (Det Postdigitala Manifestet, 2009)*⁷³ Rasmus Fleischer links the question of making music under post-digital conditions to the question of where this music is allowed to take place in the material world. He stresses the importance of physical presence, the taking place of music with both musicians and listeners being bodily present because, for him, “a post-digital sensibility of music comes with an inherent questioning of the ownership of the spaces where music takes place.”⁷⁴ In more general terms, this points to the highly politicized questions which are at the heart of today’s critical urbanistic debates: to whom does urban space belong and who is granted access to which spaces? Is public space still part of the commons, or has it altogether been commodified and turned into a “corporate commons”?⁷⁵

THE UNINTENDED AS SUBVERSIVE POWER

In his keynote lecture on “Loitering, Littering and Lettering: The Unintended Commons” for the conference “Post-digital Review: Cultural Commons” at Transmediale 2015,⁷⁶ Nishant Shah has analyzed space, especially public space in India, as an example of how commons tend to be defined in a restrictive way. Following the violent attack on a woman in New Delhi in late 2013, there was a strong public demand to make public space safer for women—because women were “moving with intention, with purpose,”⁷⁷ in short, because their use of the commons was useful, mostly in economical terms. The bodies protesting for a safer public space and more rights for women, however, were severely oppressed by the police. Shah proposes to interpret the official comments in the sense that these bodies were not only producing litter—as often happens during big demonstrations—but that they were considered to be litter, using the public space in a ‘non-intended’ way. Close to the question of littering is the question of loitering, which is often not tolerated in public spaces. Shah sees the question of loitering, of using the commons freely as “bodies without intentions, bodies in pause, bodies without actions, bodies that loiter, bodies that lit-

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72 See *Brave New Alps*, Design Education, 2014.

73 The first version of the manifesto was published in Swedish in 2009 (see: <http://www.rasmusfleischer.se/skriverier/postdigitalt-manifest> –accessed: June 11, 2015), an English excerpt has been published in the *e-flux journal* under the title “How Music Takes Place: Excerpts from ‘The Post-digital Manifesto.’”

74 Fleischer 2013, p. 7.

75 *Brave New Alps* 2012, p. 56ff.

76 See <http://www.transmediale.de/content/the-post-digital-review-cultural-commons> – accessed: June 11, 2015.

77 I am very grateful to Nishant Shah for very generously sending me his manuscript. Shah 2015, p. 2.

ter, and bodies that letter and matter”⁷⁸ as a central idea for defining the post-digital commons: in contrast to more traditional descriptions of the commons as a defined right to something, or a simple resource, the post-digital commons have to be unintended, because the unintended has the power to subvert the mechanism and logics at work in the (often already commodified) physical commons. The role of the digital commons would then be not to form “merely an extension of the intentions of the commons, but a space from which to ask critical questions of it.”⁷⁹ By combining the physical and digital commons to a post-digital commons, this approach shows how the concept of the post-digital not only critically reflects on the way we deal with the digital domain but also opens up new ways of thinking society. The post-digital as the offbeat element, the element that offers resistance, as the unintended—this line of thought is surely worth being explored further and seems a promising field in which to develop the critical potential of the concept of the post-digital, so it might in the end stop sucking and become really useful.⁸⁰

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78 Ibid., p. 5.

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80 One of Cramer’s crossheadings reads: “Post-digital: a term that sucks but is useful.” Cramer 2014.

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