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Make It Real and Get Dirty!
On the Development of Post-digital Aesthetics in Music Video[1]

Under the imperativist title "Make It Real and Get Dirty!" we will consider the development of several forms of post-digital aesthetics in music video. We will first look at two examples for an interrelation between post-digitality and realness—the latter term here used to describe a material, tangible reality. Then we will attempt to more closely define the semantic range of the post-digital, before we finally follow the development of post-digital aesthetics in music video from a historical viewpoint based on a choice of various characteristic videos.

An especially apposite example for a work with post-digital properties is offered by Ferruccio Laviani's hand-carved "glitch" furniture.[2] These pieces appear as if they had been struck by digital interferences or a loading error, since they display the distorted shapes typical for such kinds of digital hang-ups. They are completely made from wood, though, and transfer a digital aesthetic, or rather an aesthetic of digital error, to an analog material. This process is typical of post-digitality: the digital becomes a tangible experience.

Our second example leads us deep into the domestic struggle we experience when trying to cope with the growing digitization of everyday life, as evidenced in a US television commercial for Photo Pearls.[3] This spot shows how a digital photo—usually a seamless visual continuum—is broken down digitally, not into harshly square pixels, but into agreeably soft circles. Piece by piece, these representations of the smallest digital entities are then reassembled to re-create the image out of small beads. While created as a tangible analog relief made from plastic, the resulting image is still clearly based on a digital pixel aesthetic.

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1   This text is a translation of Holger Lund: "Make It Real & Get Dirty! Zur Entwicklung postdigitaler Ästhetiken im Musikvideo." Daniel Kulle / Cornelia Lund / Oliver Schmidt / David Ziegenhagen (eds.): *Post-digital Culture,* Hamburg, 2015, http://www.post-digital-culture.org/hlund. Translation: Lutz Eitel.

2   Ferruccio Laviani, "glitch" furniture from the Good Vibrations collection for Fratelli Boffi Products, Milano 2013, http://www.laviani.com/good-vibrations —accessed May 25, 2017.

3   N.N., "Photo Pearls," television commercial, n.p., ca. 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8hMsyrK415w; see also: http://www.photopearls.se/ —accessed May 25, 2017.

These two examples have been chosen because they relate to different social groupings and because they evidence an attempt to deal with the growing digitization of life by imbuing it with a certain aesthetic. The immateriality of the digital is suspended and its apparently seamless visual continuity forced to crack. In the end, this leads to analog products that are aesthetically derived from digitality, that cannot exist or be understood without digitality, since—even though the objects are analog—they are aimed to look and feel like digital objects.[4] Here we arrive at one of the fundamentals of the term post-digitality, recently described by Benedikt Köhler: "Like most other 'post' terms, this one is rather prone to misunderstandings, or even seems to provoke them. Post-digital does not imply that digital technology and digital media are no longer important today. The exact opposite is true. Deep and lasting digitization is the required precondition for the post-digital state."[5]

Köhler and also Martin Recke expand the term post-digitality, taking it to describe a state of society[6] and not just to define a certain kind of media use or media aesthetic. Post-digitality does not belong in a specialist realm for elites but—as our two introductory examples have shown—in our common social sphere as a phenomenon which involves digitality and the way we use it, as well as its deficits or aspects that we experience as deficient.

Seen like this, post-digitality offers a way of coping with digitality.[7] So where exactly do we find digital shortcomings and problem areas, and what strategies do we have to overcome them?

Digitality forces entities to disassemble, since they have to be fed into binary digital code. The integrity of any entity is necessarily shattered to allow for digital processing and representation. Analogicity appears real to us because in mathematical terms it offers an indiscrete continuum of values—such as seamless acoustic, visual, and haptic values—so the growth of digitization, segmenting everything into the discrete, binary code of the digital, makes us cling to the ideal of this real, unfragmented whole which is the analog. In her seminal study on film, Susan Hayward diagnoses a fundamental inadequacy of digitality under the heading "Digital Cinema/Post-digital Cinema."[8] She centers the inadequacy of the digital on its "perfectibility," "cleanliness," and "immateriality,"[9] which for her is "in denial of the human touch,"[10] provoking the reverse "need to re-introduce humanity."[11]

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4   Cf. Andrews 2002.
5   Benedikt Köhler, quoted in Recke 2012 (transl. by the author).
6   See Recke 2012.
7   Cramer also suggests seeing the prefix "post" not as an antithesis (as e.g. in the pairing of terms modernism vs. postmodernism) but as the continuation of an argument (like in post-punk or post-colonialism). See Cramer 2013.
8   Hayward 2013, pp. 104–108.
9   Ibid. pp. 106f. For a similar view see Andrews 2002. He likewise connects the digital aesthetic to the idea of perfection.
10   Hayward 2013, p. 107.
11   Ibid.

As we will see, one can discern four related media strategies especially, if not exclusively, developed in music video. When one feels a need "to re-introduce humanity," a first possible counter strategy would be to produce everything with purely analog means. Accordingly, we see a return to analog synthesizers and a bric-a-brac aesthetic in both music and video. The instrument builder Korg, for instance, newly produces an analog instrument, the Volca from the Analogue Synth Series (2013).[12] And an example for bric-a-brac aesthetics is delivered by the video that Lamar & Nik have created to music by Lushlife, titled "Magnolia" (2012).[13] Neo-analogicity as a form of anti-digitality, we could describe the attitude displayed here.[14]

A second possible strategy would be to simulate analogicity by digital means, for example by digital simulations of analog synthesizers or bric-a-brac aesthetics. Here again analogicity is a form of anti-digitality, except that in fact digital tools are used to simulate the analog. This is what for example the Roland MC 303 Groovebox (1996) does, which simulates the analog sounds of the old TB 303 model from 1982 with digital samples.[15] A related approach can be found in Astu Prasidya's video to Filastine's track "Colony Collapse" (2012).[16] Digital filters are used to treat the materiality of the image, to apply artificial aging and simulate analog film stock. We might actually already speak of post-digitality here, as the digital is used to simulate the analog and suggest realness.

A third possibility sees the creation of "handmade-digital" hybrids. Digital technology is used more or less openly, but primarily as a tool to focus on actual reality, on human events, and their obviously human, often hand-made processing or development.[17] The audiovisual performance "Asynthome" (2010) by Transforma and Yro offers an example for this.[18] Human actions are digitally recorded by human actors and are digitally processed immediately on stage. This situation falls even more obviously under the term post-digitality, since the digital is intentionally used to gain or retrieve a quality of realness for analog human actions.

A fourth and final strategy lies in a phenomenon that could be labeled hyper-digitality. Mostly its digitality is exposed very openly—which goes contrary to perfect digital illusionism and its seeming immediacy, and points to the inadequacies attached to the digital. An example can be found in Markus Wambsganss' video to "Miko" (2007) by Michael Fakesch, where the video image is markedly pixelated.[19] Other cases display

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12   See Korg, "Volca Series," n.p., 2013, http://i.korg.com/volcaseries —accessed April 22, 2015.
13   *Magnolia,* directed by Lamar & Nik, music by Lushlife,
        https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bhVgQW3UhFM —accessed May 25, 2017.
14   Cf. Cramer 2013.
15   See "Roland MC 303 Groovebox," n.p., 1996, https://www.roland.com/us/products/mc-303/
        —accessed May 25, 2017.
16   *Colony Collapse,* directed by Astu Prasidya (aka Tooliq), music by Filastine (feat. Nova), n.p., 2012,
        https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DXLED5HuI8o —accessed May 25, 2017.
17   Cf. Lund/Lund 2012, p. 132.
18   See Transforma & Yro, *Asynthome,* Berlin, 2010, http://transforma.de/projects/asynthome/ —
        accessed May 25, 2017.
19   *Miko,* directed by Markus Wambsganss, music by Michael Fakesch, n.p., 2007,
        https://vimeo.com/2159849 —accessed May 25, 2017.

a self-reflexive hyper-digitality, which does not deny its digital origin but playfully exploits it, for example in a video by Dent de cuirs for Modeselektor's "Evil Twin" (2012).[20] We will take a closer look at these examples later on.

All of these strategies aim to eradicate the insufficiencies of digitality. This need to "re-introduce humanity" can lead to some very strange consequences. Even companies that previously existed only digitally on Internet platforms, such as Zalando and Ebay, suddenly have opened street stores, where they become non-virtually real, tangible, approachable. Their newfound material integrity gains them the "human touch" of the analog.[21] It appears that the progress of digitization has grown to such an extent that in a parallel development the post-digital age has already begun through re-analogization or hyper-digitization. According to Hayward, this movement runs counter to digitality by stressing imperfections, dirtiness, and a more or less crude materiality, as some of the above examples have already shown. Related to Hayward's approach in his focus on imperfections, Kim Cascone already in 2000 connected post-digitality to an "aesthetics of failure," where digital errors and impurities, so-called "glitches," are used intentionally.[22] To what extent we can develop a post-digital aesthetic imperative—a combination of "make it real!" and "get dirty!"—from these thoughts, will be discussed later.

But before we analyze in more detail the development of post-digital asthetics via re-analogization and hyper-digitization in music video, let us take a look back at "digital cinema," as defined by Lev Manovich.[23] The genre's complex interplay between the analog and digital precedes the ideas of post-digitality and its medial strategies introduced above. As early as 1995, Lev Manovich wrote: "Digital media redefines the very identity of cinema."[24] This is because indexical analog cinema, which Manovich understands as a "recording medium," changes its identity due to a loss of indexicality (in the sense of Roland Barthes). Computer-generated images and digital postproduction have transformed film "into something which has perfect photographic credibility, although it was never actually filmed."[25] Which means that indexicality at this point is no longer valid. Manovich here places special emphasis on the fact that digital images can be created by "manual construction" with the help of software. He sees that as comparable to image production in the pre-cinematographic films of the 19th century, which were based on analog hands-on animation techniques. He comes to a surprising conclusion: "Cinema can no longer be clearly distinguished from animation. It is no longer an indexical media technology but, rather, a sub-genre of painting."[26] "Digital cinema" contains analog,

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20   *Evil Twin,* directed by Dent de cuir, music by Modeselektor, n.p., 2012,
        https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Sp8Vhwts6U —accessed May 25, 2017.
21   See N.N.: "Vom Online-Shop zum Laden um die Ecke," Blogpost May 03, 2012, http://www.marketing-
        fish.de/all/vom-online-shop-zum-laden-um-die-ecke-5948/ — accessed April 22, 2015.
22   Cf. Cascone 2000.
23   Manovich 1995.
24   Ibid.
25   Ibid.
26   Ibid.

pre-cinematographical elements that are just as analog as the paintings and graphics that offer a point of comparison to Manovich. The loss of indexicality is a result of a loss of materiality, tangibility, real existence, but this goes along with a return to handicraft through animation, building an "elastic reality," as Manovich puts it.[27] A re-existentialization of this elastic reality, we might argue with Hayward, could be achieved through the four medial strategies outlined above.

Ian Andrews has noted that digital aesthetics, from their beginnings, emulate "as much as possible analogue sound and technology."[28] This probably has two reasons: On the one hand this emulation indicates perfection and superiority, proving that as the better technology the digital can also include the analog. On the other hand there are Andrew's examples from the field of music, where the sound appears "warmer, fatter" if it is modeled after analog sound.[29] Andrews reaches a no less surprising conclusion than Manovich: "The digital has developed an 'analogue aesthetic.'"[30] He argues: "Post-digital music has developed a distinctly 'digital' aesthetic, one that centers around sounds and timbres that could only be possible with contemporary digital equipment certainly."[31] The so-called glitch aesthetic mentioned above can serve as an example here.

To summarize the above: Digitality has led to an analog aesthetic of the digital, which is a view similar to Manovich at least regarding the media of production. Post-digitality, on the other hand, has led to a specifically digital aesthetic within the wider post-digital field. These thoughts will help us to better understand the medial strategies already outlined.

"The genre of music video has been a laboratory," Lev Manovich writes in his text on "digital cinema."[32] For Manovich, the end of an indexical "cinematic realism" goes hand in hand with the birth of music video: "Probably not by accident, the genre of music video came into existence exactly at the time when electronic video effects devices were entering editing studios."[33] And indeed the visual development of music video by and large follows the growing electronization of the music. The same goes for the digitization of music itself, especially if we look at the digitally based genres of techno and house during the 1980s. As soon as software development allowed for it, digital images—which in the beginning were so pixelated to be immediately recognizable—were used to accompany digital music under a digital aesthetic, be it at raves or for visualizations of digital electronic music on DVD. This development continued into the 2000s. One instance is Madame Chao's untitled video to Darshan

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27   Ibid.
28   Andrews 2002.
29   Ibid.
30   Ibid.
31   Ibid.
32   Manovich 1995. This is especially valid since digitality has taken over music earlier than other aspects of life.
33   Ibid. This is historically verifiable; cf. e.g. video works by Michael Leckebusch for the Beat Club program on Radio Bremen/WDR. Beat Club channel on Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/beatclub?hl=de&gl=DE —accessed May 25, 2017.

M. Lopez' track "Benno/Bodo" from 2002.[34] Here the digital aesthetic of the images reflects that of the music, down to the frequencies and amplitudes. Around the same time, we can already see first developments of quite different couplings, that of digital music with analog image materials. A good example for this is offered in the video "Melt 2000 Mix" by Your Mum with the accompanying music mix by Rita Ray, also from 2002.[35] Analog film stock, clearly discernible as such from its scratches and impurities—no matter if actually produced on a digital simulation filter or with real analog film stock—is coupled with digitally based music. The analog image aesthetic and the digital aesthetic of the music are intentionally contrasted with each other, while the music's African roots and its trance function are foregrounded. This example corresponds to the first medial strategy outlined above: the return to analog materials. It does not lead to a hybrid, but instead an analog visual aesthetic is put alongside a digital acoustic aesthetic.

It appears that openly digital pictorial worlds, which we might expect to fit digitally based music perfectly, did not survive beyond the 2000s to a significant extent. After that, the avant-garde of digital music increasingly preferred visualizations that were either showing analog, hand-made characteristics or were completely produced in an analog way. Paper and cardboard, pens and scissors started playing a role in music video, Polaroid or Super-8 looks came up, machines and technoid futurist visions were complemented with landscapes and animals or even replaced by such. A striking example for this development is Kristofer Ström's music video to "Hitchhiker's Choice" (2006) by Minilogues.[36] A characteristically minimal track of digital music, very typical laptop music, is combined with stop trick animation based on drawings done by hand. While the analog aesthetic is central here—the hand, the drawing, the manual linework—still the director deliberately and obviously uses the possibilities offered by digital recording and digital post-production. What we have here is an aesthetic of the "handmade-digital," a hybrid of analog and digital elements. Ström's video proved so popular and successful that two years later an homage to it was produced in modeling clay, a change of medium that meant even more handiwork. Thus the original video was re-analogized through painstaking manual labor and then digitized again for "Hitchhiker's Choice in Clay" (2008) by Carrie and the Fam.[37]

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34   Untitled video, directed by Madame Chao, music Benno/Bodo (Action Wheels Remix, 2001) by Darshan M. Lopez, on the compilation V.A., *Exotic Robots – RECreate,* Atmospherex – DVD6054X, 2002, see http://www.discogs.com/Various-Exotic-Robots-RECreate/release/903138 —accessed May 25, 2017.

35   *Melt 2000 Mix,* directed by Your Mum, music mix by Rita Ray (Rashid & Krishna, Bushmen of the Kalahari (Quando remix); Siya Dengelela (Hwnni), Sangomas; Biosphere (Geir Jenssen), Bushmen of the Kalahari (Sanscape Mix), 2000, on the compilation V.A., *AV:X.08 Mixmasters – Episode Four,* Moonshine Music – DVD MM 89110-9, 2002, see http://www.discogs.com/Various-AVX08-Mixmasters-Episode-Four/release/235048 —accessed May 25, 2017.

36   *Hitchhiker's Choice,* directed by Kristofer Ström, music by Minilogue, n.p., 2006, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u46eaeAfeqw —accessed May 25, 2017.

37   *Hitchhiker's Choice in Clay,* directed by Carrie and the Fam, music by Minilogue, n.p., 2008, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8yK249UWDxM —accessed May 25, 2017.

Beside these two strategies—a return to the analog and an analog-digital hybrid—the additional strategy of hyper-digization has established itself. It goes hand in hand with an intentionally used digital low-fi or low-res aesthetic. As an example let us take a closer look at Markus Wambsganss' video for "Miko" (2007) by Michael Fakesch.[38] The video tells the story of a stalking, where a young girl is followed by a person that never becomes visible, the person who films the events. As the video was filmed on the camera of a mobile phone with a vga resolution of 15 fps, the digitality of the image is never hidden but, on the contrary, exposed very explicitly, as an aesthetic position countering perfectly illusionistic digital image worlds. Exposing digitality in a "grainy clouds of pixels"—in the words of Ian Andrews[39]—critically reflects on the medium, which further lends the stalker's images from a mobile phone camera a much greater authenticity than a high-resolution, polished version of the stalker narrative could ever offer. In the chosen low-res format, the realness of events becomes much more believable and can be constructed more pointedly.

As mentioned before, defects and impurities are central elements of Cascone's concept of post-digitality, elements of what Hayward sees as the "human touch." The aesthetic imperative of "Get dirty!" can be achieved either through lo-res hyper-digitization or digital filters that simulate analogicity. A work that "gets dirty!" on several layers, is "Colony Collapse," created by Astu Prasidya to the music of Filastine in 2012.[40] Digital filters make the film look purposefully old, worn-out, analog, which is typical for post-digitality. Hayward sees their inability to age as an essentially anti-human characteristic of digital productions.[41] Digital files can be played endlessly without any loss in quality. In Filastine's video, analog effects contribute to an artificial aging process that digital productions through their medial determinedness can never truly experience. The analog and the old—this opens up connections to the phenomenon that Simon Reynolds christened Retromania in 2011.[42] Indeed a certain retro orientation can be seen in post-digital strategies not just in the arts but in many social areas, at least where they tend toward re-analogization. We can see that in Filastine's video: while the music offers contemporary digital computer sounds, the video suggests that these sounds were created by an old drum set, old megaphones and microphones, as well as an old analog synthesizer—none of which was actually the case. The instruments presented let the music age virtually just as the image filters do, and junk objects and spaces full of garbage elaborate on the aesthetic imperative of "Get dirty!" Nothing here is supposed to appear as clean, as digitally recorded in a studio, as treated with digital effects or altogether produced digitally. On the contrary, the ensemble of aesthetic effects is there to suggest maximum authenticity, maximum realness, everything is supposed to look old, analog, and rubbishy, just as "real" music once was, when it was still played by raw youths in raw moves in raw places and it was still called rock 'n' roll. Simon Reynolds would

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38   See note 18.
39   Andrews 2002.
40   See note 13.
41   See Hayward 2013, p. 107.
42   Reynolds 2011.

probably agree—starting from an implicit consensus that only the old can be real und true, post-digital and retromaniac tendencies coalesce.

Two more examples for this tendency are Tuomas Vauhkonen and Jeremias Nieminen's video for "Catchin' the Vibe" (2013) by Quasimoto's (aka Madlib) and Nic Hamilton's video for the track "Grey over Blue" by Actress.[43] In "Catchin' the Vibe," artificial analog video interferences and shreds of 8-bit imagery are combined with a scenery full of garbage in which a junk-collecting main protagonist starts baking a strange dirty kind of cake. That cake turns out to be a vinyl record, which can be pushed by a dealer on the black market in best hiphop style. In "Grey over Blue," a dystopian scenario is created through digital means. Long tracking and top shots are accompanied by slow, ambient-echoey music to explore a black and white and gray and rust-brown steampunk world of debris, which appears very analog. It is a post-human world without any form of organism, without any life and movement. Even film itself seems to have reached an end, since everywhere in the garbage are quadrangles that remind us of image frames. Post-digitality, dirt, and retro styles are equally combined in these examples.

Let us finally return to the post-digital strategy of hyper-digitization. Not the low-res version this time, but a self-reflexive thematization of digitality, where again digitality is explicitly exposed. In Dent de cuir's video for "Evil Twin" by Modeselektor from 2012,[44] digital process and digital result are amalgamated in a combination of end product and its own making-of. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin have coined the term "remediation," which is apposite to our discussion of "Evil Twin" and its use and treatment of digitality.[45] The term is based in a double bind of the interrelationship between hyper-mediality—which has mediality as its theme—and a transparent immediacy that negates all mediality. Hyper-mediality in Dent de cuir's video begins with a windows style—several open film frames placed across a desktop—signaling the use of digital media. Events within the frames have a transparent immediacy, since digitality here is used for an appearance of real events. Interestingly the action moves between windows, or between a window and the desktop layer, which moves the action beyond all realistic plausibility. This self-reflexive play produces realisms only to subvert them by breaking up the re-presentative layers between frames or between a window and the desktop. Objects and musical instruments shown in the video are similarly fragile, since contrary to a digital high-res aesthetic they are made from cardboard, following the bric-a-brac aesthetic discussed above. On a representative level this approach is post-digital, though not without irony, since analog or digital devices are not presented directly themselves, but by way of their very analog cardboard replicas. Thus, Dent de cuir's video offers a kind of medially self-reflexive play in which post-digitality is treated with marked irony. An aesthetic of the "handmade-digital" has developed here and

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43   *Catchin' the Vibe,* directed by Tuomas Vauhkonen and Jeremias Nieminen, music by Quasimoto (aka Madlib), Los Angeles, 2013, https://vimeo.com/72058644; G*rey over Blue,* directed by Nic Hamilton, music by Actress, 2013 , https://vimeo.com/82546862 —accessed May 25, 2017.
44   See note 19.
45   See Bolter/Grusin 1999.

reflects on its own post-digitality: as a paradox, self-generated attempt to achieve an unfragmented, true and real analogicity through the means of digitality, which of course fragments truth and realness by default. On the other hand: maybe it is exactly this paradox effort which offers a new kind of realness? Maybe the realness of the irony is the topic here? Dent de cuir's video offers a brilliant conclusion, since—again following Andrews—the aesthetic of the analog appears in the digital, and the aesthetic of the digital appears in the post-digital, which itself is thematized by the video's self-reflexivity. Post-digitality here can be understood as combination and reflection of analog and digital aesthetics—and Dent de cuir's video has moved an essential step forward to emerge from the "laboratory" as which Manovich has characterized "the genre of music video."

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