



When did we become post-digital?

## Description

Eighteen years ago Nicholas Negroponte wrote in *Wired* that “the digital revolution is over.” Digital technology was already so woven into the fabric of everyday life that it no longer needed a special label, nor social commentary, nor propagandists (like Negroponte). It had gone the way of the *plastics* business — once regarded as revolutionary, but now taken for granted, and unremarkable.

## Glitch

In 2000, sound artist Kim Cascone adopted Negroponte’s message to justify his (Cascone’s) approach to music making — mixed media and mashed up. This was post-digital culture. The composer-performer could bypass technical theory about digital signal processing (DSP): “Sometimes, not knowing the theoretical operation of a tool can result in more interesting results by ‘thinking outside the box’” (16). Embrace the tools, and their peculiarities, and don’t get hung up on expert digital knowledge.

The adherents of post-digital cultures relax the idea that digital technologies access precise, faithful and true representation and expression. Just as people enjoy old media’s quirks and imperfections, so too an artist can work with digital glitches. Knotted wood grain, squeaky guitar frets, peeling paint, the patina of age and the textures of natural materials have their digital equivalents.

Post-digital cultures place digital media amongst other media. You need the right tools for the job. Don’t go for the hi-tech option just because it’s available — and certainly not to impress your audience.

Post digital culture is not against digital technologies, though it continues various anti-industrial threads from the Arts and Crafts movement and Romanticism. Now [magazine journalists](#) write about post-digital cultures, [advertisers](#) pick up on it, and there’s an online journal [APRJA Postdigital Research](#). A recent book, *Postdigital Aesthetics*, explores these themes further.



## Common sense

To my way of thinking, the post-digital is really just some common sense wrapped up as [zeitgeist](#), and pitting itself against the "straw man" of the digital true believer. Is it a further example of a discipline staking out a space that bypasses complex and nuanced intellectual and social development around the heterogeneous business of computer science, digital media, and 50 years of critique? Is it an arty zeitgeist thing that claims to speak for a mood of the times (pre, present, or post) that many of us don't recognise?

Who are the post-digitals: artists, art audiences, consumers, markets, businesses, academic institutions, technologists, bureaucrats, students, the rich, the poor, generation Y, leaders, followers, the common folk? Next post: Am I post-digital?

## Bibliography

- Berry, David M., and Michael Dieter (eds). 2015. *Postdigital Aesthetics: Art, Computation and Design*. Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan
- Cascone, Kim. 2000. The Aesthetics of Failure: "Post-digital" tendencies in contemporary computer music. *Computer Music Journal*, (24) 4, 12-18.
- Negroponte, Nicholas. 1998. Beyond digital. *Wired Magazine*, (6) 12. [Online](#).

## Notes

- Image is of front door to an artist workshop ([Shok-1](#)) in Shoreditch, London.
- Search for Kim Cascone's music on Youtube.
- I introduced the *post-digital* to a friend who thought that's when you go to the post office or use email, depending on which is most suited to the task at hand.
- An example of post-digital advertising strategy-speak in 2011: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TnLv5dW\\_pM8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TnLv5dW_pM8)

## Category

1. Nature

## Tags

1. techno-utopia
2. Zeitgeist

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