

Digital, Post-Digital and Not Merely Digital: On Technological Practices in and out of the Arts

Jussi Parikka

Professor in Technological Culture & Aesthetics,
Winchester School of Art (University of Southampton), UK, and
Docent in Digital Culture Theory, University of Turku, Finland

An abstract of the keynote lecture Jussi Parikka gave at Kiasma, on 6 April 2017 at the Digital Escapees Seminar, an open discussion forum on science, art and research organised by Uniarts Helsinki, the University of Helsinki and the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma

A range of contemporary art and critical design practices engage with digital technologies in ways that can give excellent ideas for the digital humanities to explore too. The enthusiasm that 'the digital has become a subject of humanities research' should be complemented with



I wanted to take a selfie but I had no face.

Geomancer, 4K video, Lawrence Lek, 2017.

Commissioned for Jerwood/FVU Awards 2017: *Neither One Thing or Another*, supported by the Jerwood Charitable Foundation and the Film and Video Umbrella. Courtesy of the artist



Alex Anikina, a still photograph from *God Afe My Passport CCTV 1-6*, 2015, HD video, varied duration. Courtesy of the artist

the realisation that technical media that were non-digital have been around for a longer time, affecting innovative work in visual and technical arts. Besides an excavation into the media archaeology of for example computer graphics, we can look at the current terms used for the art methodologies that extend into data culture, artificial intelligence and machine vision. The term 'post-digital' is one such widely discussed suggestion. The concept does not mean an interest in what comes *after* the digital, but a realisation that the digital has already been here as material infrastructure, aesthetic repertoire and conceptual focus for at least some decades. From the digital of 8-bit sounds and graphics of the 1980s to the current forms of materially embedded Internet of Things and data applications, this means a shift for various critical arts and humanities work too.

As part of the shift to investigate conditions of contemporary arts and culture, we can turn to artist Trevor Paglen's apt reminder that visual culture has 'detached from human eyes' [<https://thenewinquiry.com/invisible-images-your-pictures-are-looking-at-you/>]. According to Paglen's writing and recent projects, even on the level of quantity, most images are nowadays 'made by machines for other machines' triggering the question, how do we deal with issues of machine vision, big data and other fields of technological systems of seeing that are not devoid of questions that affect political issues? In addition to Paglen many artists, from James Bridle [<http://jamesbridle.com/>] to digital arts and moving image work artists such as Lawrence Lek [<http://lawrencelek.com/>] and Alex Anikina [<http://red-in-blue.com/>], to name a few, have also engaged with issues that are part of the new normal [<https://thenewnormal.strelka.com/>]. The new normal is a term adopted from Strelka Institute for Media Architecture and Design's theme year conceptualised by Benjamin Bratton. The new technologies of remote sensing, data infrastructures, and biotechnologies are not just new but the new normal, and hence part of the everyday horizon of issues. Here lies the extremely interesting question as to what sort of research agendas critical design and art practices in the new normal and the digital humanities can share. In any case, it is effective to understand the various historical contexts in which art methods and technical media have taken place already before we realised the centrality of the digital; and also to realise the ways in which practice-based work is intimately connected to rethinking humanities methods and focus as well.