

From Analog to Post-Digital?

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This exploration delves into the dynamic shift from analog to post-digital approaches, unraveling the intricate journey of an artist navigating through evolving creative landscapes. It intricately examines the blurred lines between traditional and digital mediums, probing the depths of artistic expression in the contemporary era. Through introspection and experimentation, the artist grapples with questions of identity and purpose, weaving together disparate elements to form a cohesive artistic vision. Embracing the ethos of post-digitalism, the artist surpasses conventional boundaries, forging new paths of interdisciplinary exploration.

Over time, art has accumulated numerous styles and movements. Many of these are well-defined, with clear boundaries, but what about the new styles, those that have recently emerged and are in a continuous metamorphosis? Who defines them and how much should an artist relate to that definition or to a specific style? For me, the clear delineation of artistic styles stopped somewhere after the emergence of Dadaism or Surrealism, a fact that can also be seen in how I relate art to artistic genres.

In the first years of college, I was told that photojournalism suited me, then experimentation, only to find out that neither of these truly characterized me. Then came the Dadaist style and photomontage, minimalism, studio photography (although I was completely against it), alternative photography, and finally, conceptual art. These "boxes" with labels made me increasingly confused and uncertain because none of them fully represented what I do. For this reason, I chose to limit myself to a single word that made sense to me at that time - analogic.

For me, this term does not only refer to the use of analogue techniques in photography or graphics, but rather to a more *primitive*, more sincere approach. A process in which manual work is important, and the brain tries to find new solutions to innovate, without relying so much on technology. Seems impossible, right? After all, even now, as I write, I have the handwritten ideas sheet next to me, but I write on a digital tablet, using Chat GPT at the same time for corrections, translations or to find information in the fastest way possible.

I sincerely believe that things are no longer black and white, neither in art nor in everyday life. But what do we call these gray areas that seem to have not yet been placed in a well-defined box? It remains a transitional space, where everything is interpreted through the prism of subjectivity and starts from a few basic rules?

Recently, I discovered a new concept that can define a box I could fit into - Post-Digital. The first question I asked myself with a laugh was: from Analogue to Post-Digital? What happened to Digital? Of course, things are not so simple, and analogic does not mean something old, just as digital doesn't just refer to a computer. I found an analogy that Florian Cramer made in the article *What is 'Post-Digital'?*, which said that cinematic film on celluloid is neither analogue nor digital, thus being a hybrid. To understand it more easily, we can say that Digital is made up of discrete, countable units, while Analogic is made up of variable units. Thus, the film has emulsion formed from undifferentiated spots, arranged in an organic, even chaotic way, unlike the digital sensor formed from ordered pixels. The film as a whole has well-defined frames, numbered, making it both analog and digital at the same time - hence hybrid. Confusing, right?

Post-Digital describes the relationship between art and digital technology, with the emphasis on understanding the subtle place of digital technology in artistic practice. Hybrid approaches are beginning to emerge, where analog and digital techniques are combined, blurring the boundaries between the two. The impact of digital technology on society is being sought, and the works themselves are no longer tied to a screen or a medium, with artistic vision and intention being what matters. Additionally, there is interdisciplinarity - the blending of art with different disciplines and approaches such as science, technology, philosophy, etc. In practice, the emphasis is on a maturation of the relationship between art and digital technology.

Post-Digital = Still Digital = continuation of Digital + beyond Digital

The Romanian artistic academic environment touches very little on these sensitive subjects, which is why my first interaction with this concept was in the Post Digital Intersections project. This environment briefly explores the contemporary art scene, and many artists at the beginning of their journey encounter difficulties in self-discovery. Although a style does not characterize an artist, I sincerely believe that categorization, even if vague, can lay the foundations of an artistic path, one that an emerging

artist greatly needs. New generations are increasingly moving away from tradition and past-imposed canons, which is why art is no longer just what hangs on the wall. Thus, an artist who has just graduated from an art school can easily find himself in a position where he feels that what he does does not integrate anywhere.

From the beginning, defining the term Post-Digital was a difficult one, making me reconsider many aspects that I thought were clear. Although I can say that I understand the elements that make up Post-Digital, one thing is sometimes unclear to me: Is my work Post-Digital? This question makes me analyze my own creative process behind a work, which for me starts from a relatively analogic point, reaching (hopefully) Post-Digital.

Over time, I have come to the conclusion that a project in which I truly feel involved is one where the idea starts from an analogic process or technique. Whether it's cyanotype, silver print on different materials and media, or any other alternative photography technique, laboratory experimentation guides the beginning of a project for me. Although when I have an idea, I don't know what the final project will look like, I can say that the desire to try new things and to "break" things are what arouse my curiosity and interest. For example, the project I am currently working on started from the simple desire to print (analogically) images on stones. Why stones? It just sounded cool. But from a simple experiment in the laboratory to forming a project with a strong and coherent concept, there is quite a long way to go. There are many ways to find a concept, but for me, these questions were the ones that guided me throughout the process - *Why?*, *How?*, *When?*, *Where?*, *For whom?*. Plus, other adjacent questions, which often drive you crazy just because you don't yet have a reason you could justify.

Starting from the question *why?*, combined with *on what stone?*, I reached an introspection that had to have any other answer than - because I want to/it looks good. Slowly, I realized that the stone had a strong influence on my life, being surrounded by it since I was little, and the fact that I want to work with this medium is not accidental. I chose a stone from the village where my grandfather spent part of his life - a quite special stone, used in many fields. The question *why?* appeared again. The answer was quite easy to find, being related to the memory I have with that place and the person I associate it with. I can already say that I had a fairly stable starting point, but there were still many questions to which I

had not yet found the answer. One of these was *What image do I print on the stone?* Contrary to my expectations, the answer was not easy to find. I knew I needed a photograph that would have an impact, but I didn't feel that photographing the village, different houses, or people made sense. In practice, memory was a vast subject in which we were looking for a thread to grasp, but everything was too unclear.

Returning to introspection, I reached a new conclusion - I chose the stone because I associate it with "home." From that moment on, everything began to revolve around the affective memory associated with home. In this context, my desire to play with the image and the stone gained a little more clarity, but again, the question of *why?*, and more importantly, *why this memory of the place is interesting?*, arose. The answer came with the realization that there are many people who feel estranged, as well as individuals and families who have lost this home for various reasons. I began to observe how the loss of a home influenced the new generations and how the elderly recounted memories from those places.

Having relatively answered *why?*, the question of *what?* followed. Being about memory, something that is not visible and palpable, its transposition into the visual artistic medium is difficult. I chose to focus on the present and what is now in place of the house, thus photographing these locations. Wanting to emphasize how each person remembers (differently) this house, I chose to draw a composite sketch of it through the lens of memory. *How?* was the second question. I had reached a point where I needed to combine two visual media - photography and drawing. Collage was not an option that seemed useful in this serious and sober context, and intervening over the photograph didn't excite me so much. I was at a point where the "static" environment no longer made sense to me, and a simple drawing could not tell a story that had so much impact. Although the project started from a purely analog medium, the need to use the digital was felt, so the visual recording of the memory drawing process was necessary. With these visual and auditory components, the project gained an extra layer of clarity. But again, the question of *how?* (*how will they be integrated?*) followed. One of the options that I liked the most was projecting this video clip onto stones. Using this digital projection of an analog process forms a parallel between memory and the present, between what is palpable and what is the imaginary universe.

Of course, the creative process raises many more questions than the ones I have briefly developed above. The issue of exhibition space arises, that is, where you will exhibit and why. You have to pay attention to every detail in that room. For example, if I want to exhibit these memory stones in a room where the walls are yellow, would it be a good idea to paint them before the exhibition? Probably not, because the smell of fresh paint does not evoke a memory from 20 years ago or a warm and welcoming home. But what if I want to project a video clip on the floor? Do I have a way to hang it from the ceiling in the position I want? There will probably be a solution, but these things need to be thought out in advance. The same goes for if I want to use an audio component - where do I place the speaker? Why? How can the location of the speaker influence the viewer? But what about the volume of the sound? Every aspect must be processed and thought out so that the visitor can understand the message and the state you wanted to create as well as possible.

If we return to the vague definition above of the Post-Digital, can we consider that this project fits into the Post-Digital box, right? No longer being a work related to a traditional medium (whether analog or digital), transdisciplinarity appears easily. But what would happen if this project were taken further, adding elements of advanced technology? Or a scientific concept like plasma? Would this project become part of the Art-Science box?