

Preparing for the postdigital era - Version 0.1 June 17th, 2009

"We are stuck with technology when what we really want is just stuff that works" Douglas Adams

In an attempt to negotiate a shared language and vision for future work/projects building on the Open Habitat project we found ourselves establishing a common frame of reference. This is a first move towards trying to shift our thinking away from the simple digital/analogue distinction of technology towards a less divisive and more nuanced context for work; a human context that focuses on the *essence* of our work rather than the appearance. This concept paper is the record of two days of discussion at Cumberland Lodge.

The intersection of technology and the social has often been a driver of social change. The mainstreaming and mass production of powerful digital tools has had a profound effect on the way that we live and learn. These digital tools have allowed us to speed up communication, publish our thoughts in any number of ways and allowed for new complex forms of collaboration. The speed and reach of this transition has had a profound effect on what it means to be a participant in society. The speed of the change, however, has left us with the mistaken belief that social change was somehow 'created' by the digital rather than simply played out on a the canvas of the digital; that the digital itself is the main driver of change. We would argue the opposite. This ontological error has had us move towards placing technology at the forefront (think e-learning as distance learning) and moving our focus away from the people involved in these processes; the needs that they have and the skills that they bring.

Not only is the digital subservient to the social, it is, in some ways (and soon most ways), transparent. We are moving towards a postdigital age where the tools driven by the microprocessor are common to the extent to which they will no longer be noticed. As the 'digital' calculator and the 'digital' watch have become calculators and watches, so will the ebook become a book and IM become 'message': the 'instant' will be taken for granted. Things digital will be accepted alongside our other technologies and the slate swept clear of many of the distracting dualisms (and technological factions) that pervade the educational discourse. The postdigital frees us to think more clearly and precisely about the issues we face, rather than become tied to an obsession with, and the language of, the new. It allows is to take a broader approach to the challenges and opportunities we face. Removing the focus on the digital leads us to see the division between the 'digital' have and have-nots not in terms of their lack of access to digital technology, but in terms of their lack of access to economic, social and political power.

Discourse in the area of social innovation has been dominated in recent years with the interminable discussion of the next new 'digital technology' to take over the internet space, a resolution of which does not seem to be (and probably can not be) forthcoming. We would argue that this is because the digital era is fading away, causing the stagnation of the digital discourse. The question of 'the next new technology' (meaning digital) is really only of interest to venture capitalists and pundits looking to secure their future funding. The social experiences that are encapsulated by (at the time of writing) microblogging may continue on the inside of that particular space or move to another, but they are experiences that

while supported by a certain technology are no more about 'the technological' than the telephone. These technologies enable, they do not create. Their power, therefore, arises in the act of their colonisation, or appropriation, by people into their lives; when they cease to be technology and become simply "stuff that works". This move is the result of the critical shift implied by the second wave of adopters of 'digital technologies'. As digital technology is culturally normalised it becomes ever more transparent. For example, our mobile phone becomes an extension of ourselves, just as the pen and the book did in their turn. The concept of the postdigital is not a rejection of the difficulties presented in reducing barriers for adoption, but rather a realisation that the focus on the digital as "other" creates a higher barrier, a presumed anticipation of difference which makes it more difficult for the newcomer to normalise to the new.

The transition to a postdigital way of thinking allows for that previously coded as 'digital' to be woven into the wider discussion of social dialects that people bring to their acts of collaboration. One of the things we've learned from social research is that people tend to go online to find people they know and tend to replicate, at least in part, their social performances online. These performances, the communities that they occur in and the dialects that they represent and produce should be the critical loci for research in the postdigital age, not the technologies themselves. Texts have been recorded in spaces like Facebook and MySpace that have previously been the content of private conversation and casual face-to-face interaction. We have the (mis)fortune of having a record of the social grooming of our time, which, sadly, is often misinterpreted as a degrading our social intellect. It is a manifest record of the facile "Hi how are you? Fine thank you"s of the older generation, which, when recorded 6 billion times might appear facile, but is, in reality, simply a confirmation of social connectedness worn smooth in repetition.

In learning particularly the postdigital signals the end to interminable debates of the benefits of 'elearning' 'eknowing' 'blended learning' and a host of other digital ways of thinking. It posits that these distinctions only cloud over the lessons that can be learned and the value that can be garnered from the ecologies in which we live and learn. Mobile learning, at the time of writing, is a victim of this kind of digitalism. Mobility in learning should refer to location independence, or widening participation. The term and the agenda has been hijacked by "e-learning specialists" and "digital gurus". Mobile Learning has become a discussion of different mobile applications and application platforms and has moved away from the discussion of whom these applications need to be serving. The MUVE may offer a clear advantage in exploring gender over a dress shop in a downtown mall, but those advantages are about access and enabling rather than about any inherent value in the technology. The space being explored is a social space, not a digital one. Whatever the next digital technology may be is already at risk of the same treatment: becoming the focus of concern rather than the platform upon which change is enacted.

We hold out hope for the postdigital era. We hope that it provides the framework for an environment that is good enough, firstly, to hold an individual as they identify and develop authentic personal experiences, and secondly, to stimulate that individual to extend her/his questioning and actions in the world. In this way, as their social experiences stray into what are now called digital spaces, the digital is secondary to the relationships that form and develop, and the activity that takes place, in an environment. A central actor in the postdigital era, is, therefore, a significant, more-experienced other against whom the individual can securely test their authentic experiences. Within the postdigital era, the personal and emotional comes to the fore, and anchors cognitive development.

It is important to see the elements of what was known as 'the digital' as some of the enablers of the postdigital, in framing a person-centred, flexible pedagogy nested within a

set of truly social spaces. The demand is then for capable educators, who can act as mentors in inquiry-based approaches to personal development, and thereby enable individuals to make decisions and become themselves. Postdigital aims to throw off the yoke of digital dogma, where the language of a perceived digital elite drives not only development, but also skews innovation, where innovation is only seen as being that associated with the "latest" technology. The obsessiveness associated with digitalism seeks to see innovation as the search for meaning (or use) in the newest technology. Innovation in a postdigital era is more effectively articulated as being associated with the human condition and the aspiration toward new or enhanced connectedness with others.

52group. This is a draft. it will change over the next few weeks and will be expanded. It should be seen as a public presentation of 2 days of brainstorming rather than a published document.

citation for this document should be

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http://docs.google.com/View?id=aqv2zmc9bgm_51ft65rbn2 date accessed.

Special thanks to Nancy White for her excellent advice.

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Following



Rereading "Preparing for the postdigital era" (2009) written by me, @davecormier @Lawrie @HallyMk1 @markchilds @iantruelove I feel we are only just now responding to these themes at institutional level.

<https://twitter.com/daveowhite/status/928567154290642945>