In this chapter I look at the postdigital in relation to the way in which it manifests a real-time phenomenon that affects many fields of contemporary business, social and cultural activity. Technological advancements still to some extent based on Moore’s law are resulting in an exponential increase of the computational capacity of electronic devices. Thanks to powerful processing units and creative software, we can create visual hybrids and perform any kind of media editing and transformation. Visual media became programmable pieces of data which are often perceived as high-definition still images, computer-generated imagery (CGI) or movies. They are displayed on ultra-high-definition retina displays and can be accessed and edited thanks to intuitive user interfaces. However, the very computational materiality of today’s visual media is hidden beneath layers of user-friendly software, hardware, networks, cloud-based processing and storage services.

On the other hand, new types of devices and services have resulted in the continual development of services, platforms and computational devices which foster new forms of cultural and social engagement enhanced by technology. These phenomena occur right in front of us and simultaneously affect many areas of human activity (business, culture, science), on both an industrial and a consumer level of human–computer interaction. We have entered an era of real-time communication and knowledge generation and distribution which is fostered by multi-purpose devices and mobile internet access. Many new ideas are now born due to the inclusive and non-hierarchical models of web-based communication: personal publishing services (blogs, websites), social media and informal discussion groups where both professionals and non-professionals, practitioners and theoreticians alike, share and discuss new ideas (see Berry 2015, this volume).

I want to argue that post-digital aesthetics requires a cross-disciplinary theoretical and practical approach, which addresses both trends described above, going far beyond a mere theory of the ‘beauty’ of digital images.
The New Aesthetic, for example, emerged as a direct result of real-time communication channels enhanced by computational technologies. On the one hand, it can be understood as a useful approach in digital image analysis, as it unveils the simultaneous materiality and instability of contemporary imagery by focusing on the abnormal (image processing errors, glitches, artefacts, etc.). On the other hand, taking into account the origin and development of this ‘vibe’, the New Aesthetic should be considered as one of the manifestations of the radical shift in the emergence of ideas and knowledge distribution in the digital age. The New Aesthetic is based on real-time data generation and distribution, as it was born and developed thanks to internet-based channels of communication and exchange of ideas.

The New Aesthetic as a project was started by James Bridle, a London-based writer, publisher and artist, upon launching a new personal website in May 2011. Nowadays this ‘vibe’ can be generally described as a cross-disciplinary approach to the consequences of human–technology interaction and new non-anthropomorphic agents, forces and computational patterns, present both in the digital sphere and in the physical world. They manifest themselves through visual digital media and new social and cultural practices involving humans and technological artefacts. Bridle’s initial focus on the visual manifestations of the New Aesthetic prompted the blog’s horizontal stream layout containing several types of digital visual media: images, movies, graphics, GIFs – examples of the postdigital which he incorporated into his project. In his first entry, James Bridle wrote:

Since May 2011 I have been collecting material which points towards new ways of seeing the world, an echo of the society, technology, politics and people that co-produce them.

The New Aesthetic is not a movement, it is not a thing which can be done. It is a series of artifacts of the heterogeneous network, which recognizes differences, the gaps in our distant but overlapping realities.

(Bridle 2011a)

I started noticing things like this in the world. This is a cushion on sale in a furniture store that’s pixelated. This is a strange thing. This is a look, a style, a pattern that didn’t previously exist in the real world. It’s something that’s come out of digital. It’s come out of a digital way of seeing, that represents things in this form. The real world doesn’t, or at least didn’t, have a grain that looks like this.

(Bridle 2011b)

In analysing the New Aesthetic, I intend to follow the logic introduced by Vilém Flusser in his Towards a Philosophy of Photography. His approach will be useful both for studying the inner logic of the postdigital (and the relation between computational images and interfaces) and for analysing the