

Studies in Art Education

A Journal of Issues and Research

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/usae20>

Review of *Post-Digital, Post-Internet Art and Education: The Future Is All-Over*

Nicholas Leonard

To cite this article: Nicholas Leonard (2023) Review of *Post-Digital, Post-Internet Art and Education: The Future Is All-Over*, *Studies in Art Education*, 64:4, 491-497, DOI: [10.1080/00393541.2023.2255090](https://doi.org/10.1080/00393541.2023.2255090)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00393541.2023.2255090>



Published online: 28 Nov 2023.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



MEDIA REVIEW

Review of *Post-Digital, Post-Internet Art and Education: The Future Is All-Over*

NICHOLAS LEONARD 

Northern Illinois University

Tavin, K., Kolb, G., & Tervo, J. (Eds.). (2021). *Post-Digital, Post-Internet Art and Education: The Future Is All-Over*. Palgrave Macmillan. 308 pp. ISBN: 978-3-030-73770-2

Before I began drafting this media review on a Google Document, I closed various social media platforms on my computer and mobile phone. The social media algorithms were presenting me with news about Jason Allen, the recipient of the 2022 Colorado State Fair’s digital art competition’s first-place award (Kuta, 2022). This story reached viral status after it was revealed that he created the prizewinning artwork with Midjourney, an artificial intelligence (AI) program that turns text descriptions into images. The comments on these articles produced heated debates regarding artistic authorship, originality, and creativity, among other topics (Harwell, 2022). Further, new technologies like Chat Generative Pre-Trained Transformer (ChatGPT) are causing pedagogical issues for educators (NPR, 2023). This recent event is just one of many emerging instances that display the dynamic complexity and entangled becoming of online and offline materials. As art educators, how may events like this influence our approach to selecting and teaching digital art education content and our greater pedagogical understanding of art education?

As an art education researcher interested in exploring the complexities of digital artmaking through posthuman perspectives (Leonard, 2020, 2021), moments like the award-winning art emerging through Jason Allen and Midjourney make me wonder about the qualities of digital materiality, virtual potentialities as objects moving online and offline, and what this could mean for art education. Adding to this research interest, Adobe recently announced their own AI platform, called Firefly. Rather than rushing to resolve how new programs like Firefly should be incorporated by applying reflective practices of previous technologies, I am interested in

investigating how new relations emerge and how these relations can help identify knowledge production and creative behaviors. It was for this reason that I was excited to hear the announcement of *Post-Digital, Post-Internet Art and Education: The Future Is All-Over* by Kevin Tavin, Torsten Meyer, and Aaron Knochel at a virtual National Art Education Association Convention session in 2021.

This open-access book is edited by Kevin Tavin, Gila Kolb, and Juuso Tervo and is part of Palgrave Studies in Educational Futures series edited by Jan Jagodzinski. The text explores the shifting human and nonhuman entanglements and the potential becomings for art and education in a postinternet and postdigital era. The editors introduce the book in a playful way, pondering the question, "How big is the internet?," while simultaneously acknowledging they are writing about, in, with, and through the internet. This recognition of multidirectional and dynamic interactions of changing practices and understandings with and through the internet is a great example of the general approach the editors brought to developing this collection of writings. Rather than collapsing all possibilities of what postdigital and postinternet art education could be, to present a tidy descriptive account, the editors focused on presenting different aims and contexts of art education within the present intersections of postinternet and postdigital times, art, and education.

To support this nonlinear approach, the authors were not held to writing in a uniform way. As a result, the various conceptual frameworks presented by the authors contributed to a more enriching discussion that challenged fixed narratives and ownership of terms. The submissions by the authors exemplified how different theories and practices emerge and function differently for different people. I found that this style of

writing encourages a diffractive reading approach, exploring what differences emerge and how those differences come to matter (Barad, 2007). Keeping in spirit with the approach from the editors, the following media review will resist delineating the post terminologies or collapsing the possibilities of the contributing authors to one authoritative interpretation. What follows is a brief engagement with the range of topics explored in this book in relation to my investigation of AI with the hopes of sparking wonder for continued engagement with these open-access texts for others.

The book is organized into three parts, whose titles present open-ended "how" or "why" questions. Part 1, "How Did We Get Here: Historical, Theoretical, Critical, and Future Oriented Perspectives on Post-Digital, Post-Internet Art and Education," includes writings by Kristin Klein, Robert W. Sweeny, Jan Jagodzinski, Konstanze Schütze, and Aaron D. Knochel. The second part, "Why Is This Important for Art Education? Transdisciplinary Networks, Research, and Subjectivities of the Post-Digital and Post-Internet," includes writings by Grégoire Rousseau and Nora Sternfeld, Torsten Meyer, Paula Kommos, Gila Kolb, Manuel Zahn, and Helena Schmidt. The third and final part is titled "How Can We Create Educational Futures? Classroom and Pedagogical Practices Examples of Post-Digital and Post-Internet Art Education," with contributions from Annemarie Hahn, Timothy J. Smith, Jan G. Grünwald, Tomi Slotte Dufva, and Helena Björk.

In the first part of the book, "How Did We Get Here: Historical, Theoretical, Critical, and Future Oriented Perspectives on Post-Digital, Post-Internet Art and Education," multiple authors present a wide foundational approach to addressing the emerging postdigital and postinternet conditions. Because the authors were not held to a strict writing style, their unique perspectives provide a range of nuanced understandings that are strongly

contextualized within their practice. Further, a notable aspect of these chapters is that their conclusions do not focus on minimizing uncertainty. Rather, they expand research by allowing the reader to ask new questions. This can be seen in Klein's writing, which addresses a range of terms found throughout the book and their various open potentialities for art education. Meanwhile, Sweeny directly highlights the confusing and conflicting entangled experiences of online and offline experiences, and Jagodzinski simply resists a definitive statement about converging media forms to ask where to go next for art education. While none of these authors directly focus on AI, their provocations entice me to investigate my personal exploration of AI through new lenses. Similar to how Schütze takes a new approach to investigating memes and Knochel addresses new possibilities for digital objects and digital fabrication, these chapters encourage me to readdress my understanding of how AI has emerged and functions within society and with other materials.

Part 2, titled "Why Is This Important for Art Education? Transdisciplinary Networks, Research, and Subjectivities of the Post-Digital and Post-Internet," presents more direct consequences and issues of digital technologies within a postdigital, postinternet society. For example, Rousseau and Sternfeld investigate the intersection of open technologies and political agendas within a postdigital society. I found this section to be of particular interest because open AI technologies like Stable Diffusion have produced various legal issues and lawsuits regarding data collection and processing. Meanwhile, other authors highlight issues of human exceptionalism within digital art education pedagogical approaches. To this end, Meyer proposes a new way to conceptualize the human subject within art education, and Zahn presents "media-critical practice" as a new aesthetic practice that is

reflexive-transformative *with* and *in* media rather than being a critique *of* media. These pedagogical approaches within art education provide more direct implications, which can be of particular interest to those who are seeking various ways to conceptualize the agency and influence of AI within education.

Meanwhile, other authors in Part 2 present topics that have more direct interactions with each other. Both Kommos and Kolb explore the significance of bodies and touch through different theoretical frameworks. Here, Kommos addresses the paradox of virtual intimacy and physical anonymity in the postdigital age by referencing postinternet artists, such as Ryan Trecartin, Lorna Mills, Frances Stark, and Ed Atkins. Rather than addressing understandings of body and bodily closeness, Kolb explores how bodies emerge and function differently in digital spaces and the implications of how the body may be used in formal art education. These chapters present intriguing practical questions of how I structure the classroom space for my students to both emerge and function and how contemporary art examples and digital materials can develop our collective tacit knowledge. When reading these chapters, I also found myself exploring the various connections to the earlier writings in Part 1 of Meyer and Zahn who were exploring ways to address pedagogically the human subject within art education.

The final part of the book, titled "How Can We Create Educational Future? Classroom and Pedagogical Practices Examples of Post-Digital and Post-Internet Art Education," continues to expand on various topics presented in the first two parts of the book, such as the use of memes and Instagram, as well as subjectivity within formal digital art spaces. What makes the final part of this book unique is the amount of empirical data shared from various experiences with students in classroom settings, bridging theory to practice from the earlier chapters.

One of the threads weaving through all three parts of this text is the use of memes and Instagram. In Part 1, Schütze conducted thought experiments exploring meme theory, object-oriented ontology, and network effects to conceptualize the various ways that art educators could become connoisseurs of image relations and their structural assemblages. While Schütze's writing provides various theoretical frameworks to address how memes can emerge and function online, Schmidt's chapter in Part 2 narrows the focus to a single theoretical approach of Hito Steyerl's "poor image," which guides the practice in the classroom. Arguing that the copying of images online is now part of the everyday visual experience, Schmidt reinterprets the "poor image" to develop a meme development project. This empirical data can be seen in Schmidt's own Instagram account @poorimagearteducation and the work of her two students who create art history-based memes. This thread of memes and Instagram are concluded in the Part 3 writing by Björk. Björk argues that social media platforms like Instagram have developed a visual language that can be unlearned through a playful defamiliarization. This defamiliarization is accomplished through Bertolt Brecht's German playwright concept of *Verfremdung*, which can open up new forms of critical thinking for how the internet can be a site of learning by exploring the performativity of platforms like Instagram.

By juxtaposing the bundle of works written by Schütze, Schmidt, and Björk against the other topics throughout the book, interesting questions can emerge. For example, if bodies of social media images emerge within structural assemblages that produce various visual languages, how may this be interpreted by Kommos and Kolb who emphasize bodies, or Jagodzinski who questions the merging forms of media, or Meyer and Zahn who question the position of the human subject within art education? The

insights that can emerge on an individual basis can be significant, as they allow for new questions that can be applied to other areas of digital art education. Returning to my interest in AI, how would accounts, such as the late Twitter account Tay.AI, or current AI Instagram accounts like @lilmiquela or @bermudaisbae, which have had drama due to their conflicting conservative and liberal viewpoints (Forstmann, 2018), be understood within the various frameworks presented in this book? Further, as new AI tools are becoming increasingly accessible and applied for users to generate their own social media content, how might the issues presented by Rousseau and Sternfeld expand the discussion to address possible political ramifications of AI-generated deepfakes and #fakenews?

Another thread that was continuously addressed through the book was the questioning of the subject, boundaries, and influence of human and nonhuman entities within various networks and entanglements. This theme emerged through the works of Meyer and Zahn in Part 1 and then Kolb in Part 2. Part 3 of this book acts as a crescendo to this theme as Hahn, Grünwald, and Dufva each address the entanglements and power structures in art education settings. Hahn engages this theme by exploring how digital networks and infrastructures influence the relations between people to people, people to things, and things to things, resulting in a neomaterialist theoretical basis for addressing digital materiality. Meanwhile, Grünwald and Dufva both share, through their own examples, how the role of the digital art educator has changed from the traditional hierarchical power structure as the bestower of knowledge toward creating spaces that allow for new knowledge and concepts to emerge through more-than-human ecologies.

Returning to the emergence of AI like ChatGPT and Adobe's Firefly, the topic of identifying entities and their pedagogical influences can provide helpful starting points

to conceptually placing these AI platforms within educational settings. For example, how may ChatGPT help my preservice art education students generate new knowledge for lesson plans? Or, how can ChatGPT be understood as part of a more-than-human learning ecology, and what forms of judgment should be applied to this new way of generating content? Further, as a digital art instructor, how may Adobe's AI platform Firefly dramatically reshape how I have taught programs such as Adobe Photoshop or Illustrator when text prompts can replace many of the previously steadfast features, such as various selection tools and layer masking? As these AI tools continue to develop and influence the material and social aspects of society, this text provides new avenues to conceptualize these dynamic and entangled changes taking place within the postdigital and postinternet era.

Criticism

The editors acknowledge that the authors are based in Northern Europe and North America, so understanding of the internet and digitality are presented as they are mainly used and understood in the so-called Global North (Kolb et al., 2021, p. 5). Smith's chapter on antiracist and anticolonial postinternet curriculum is welcomed for helping develop a critical consciousness regarding the concepts of identity, ideology, and power relations; the lack of representation of those in the Global South; and those who have been othered through lack of inclusion as the Global North. By acknowledging this fact, a clear course of action presents itself to widen the discussion and seek to include voices and experiences of those not represented when discussing this book.

Because this book references various posthuman theorists and addresses nonhuman agency, it could benefit from Indigenous scholars, who have a long history of identifying the agency of nonhuman

entities and the influences of these understandings. Rosiek et al. (2020) have noted that Indigenous scholars (De Line, 2016; Higgins, 2017; Le Grange, 2018; Martin, 2017; Todd, 2016; Tuck & McKenzie, 2014; Watts, 2013) have published comparisons between Indigenous scholarship and recent posthuman scholarship that can provide a great starting point for seriously engaging these works. Further, other publications like that by Ryan Shin and Xuhao Yang (2021) provide an Eastern Asian and Daoist understanding and approach to posthuman and new materialist concepts.

Specifically addressing digital content, the respectful engagement of various Indigenous ways of knowing through digital bundles as presented by Jennifer Wemigwans (2018) and texts like *Coded Territories: Tracing Indigenous Pathways in New Media Art* (Loft & Swanson, 2014) presents new understandings and approaches for engaging with the internet and digital materials. Further, voices like Murriss (2023), who utilize an agential realist framework to address digital artmaking within a South African context, can strongly align with the various posthuman themes presented in the book while adding the needed Global South perspective.

Conclusion

Each chapter presented in this book challenges narratives and understandings by exploring postdigital and postinternet artmaking. Returning to the award-winning artwork Jason Allen submitted to the Colorado State Art Fair, I feel that each essay presents me with a new relational understanding for engaging with this particular phenomenon of AI art in more nuanced and informed ways. I question how I identify bodies and knowledge creation within my teaching practice, and how these decisions and material entanglements allow certain possibilities to emerge. While this book was not written specifically for addressing

this one narrow topic of AI art, it serves as one example of how dynamic this text can be to help those interested in art education explore new futures in postdigital, postinternet cultures.

Finally, because I have already introduced multiple readings from this book into the graduate-level digital art education courses that I instruct at Northern Illinois University, I expect this text would be well received within higher education, continuing education, and professional development programs relating to digital technologies, artmaking, and education.

Pairing primer readings to address posthuman theorists included within this text would be beneficial for new readers engaging with the content for the first time. Finally, this text could be of interest to art educators who enjoy engaging with recent technological developments and want to incorporate these events within an art education context to develop more informed approaches to addressing the emergence of materials that phase between and through the blurring online and offline realms.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

ORCID

Nicholas Leonard  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9919-9464>

REFERENCES

- Barad, K. (2007). *Meeting the universe halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning*. Duke University Press.
- De Line, S. (2016, July 7). All my/our relations: Can posthumanism be decolonized. *Open! Platform for Art, Culture & the Public Domain*.
- Forstmann, D. (2018, December 10). The rise of cyber models and AI accounts on Instagram. *DataDrivenInvestor. Medium*. <https://medium.datadriveninvestor.com/the-rise-of-cyber-models-and-ai-accounts-on-instagram-82c096a8fce1>
- Harwell, D. (2022, September 2). He used AI to win a fine-arts competition. Was it cheating? *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/09/02/midjourney-artificial-intelligence-state-fair-colorado>
- Higgins, M. (2017). Post-qualitative mo(ve)ments: Concluding remarks on methodological response-abilities and being wounded by thought. *Reconceptualizing Educational Research Methodology*, 8(3), Article 2553. <https://doi.org/10.7577/term.2553>
- Kolb, G., Tervo, J., & Tavin, K. (2021). Introduction: It's all-over! Post-digital, post-internet art and education. In K. Tavin, G. Kolb, & J. Tervo (Eds.), *Post-digital, post-internet art and education: The future is all-over* (pp. 1–24). Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-73770-2>
- Kuta, S. (2022, September 6). Art made with artificial intelligence wins at state fair. *Smithsonian Magazine*. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/artificial-intelligence-art-wins-colorado-state-fair-180980703>
- Le Grange, L. (2018). The notion of Ubuntu and the (post)humanist condition. In J. E. Petrovic & R. M. Mitchell (Eds.), *Indigenous philosophies of education around the world* (pp. 40–60). Routledge.
- Leonard, N. (2020). Entanglement art education: Factoring ARTificial intelligence and nonhumans into future art curricula. *Art Education*, 73(4), 22–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043125.2020.1746163>
- Leonard, N. (2021). Emerging artificial intelligence, art and pedagogy: Exploring discussions of creative algorithms and machines for art education. *Digital Culture & Education*, 13(1), 20–41.
- Loft, S., & Swanson, K. (Eds.). (2014). *Coded territories: Tracing Indigenous pathways in new media art*. University of Calgary Press.

- Martin, B. (2017). Methodology is content: Indigenous approaches to research and knowledge. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 49(14), 1392–1400. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2017.1298034>
- Murris, K. (2023). “This is not a photograph of Zuko”: How agential realism disrupts child-centred notions of agency in digital play research. *Children’s Geographies*, 21(3), 547–562.
- National Public Radio. (2023, February 21). Know it all: ChatGPT in the classroom. <https://www.npr.org/2023/02/21/1158635005/know-it-all-chatgpt-in-the-classroom>
- Rosiek, J. L., Snyder, J., & Pratt, S. L. (2020). The new materialisms and Indigenous theories of non-human agency: Making the case for respectful anti-colonial engagement. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 26(3–4), 331–346. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800419830135>
- Shin, R., & Yang, X. (2021). A Daoist pedagogy encountering new materialism in art education. *Studies in Art Education*, 62(3), 236–249. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00393541.2021.1936802>
- Todd, Z. (2016). An Indigenous feminist’s take on the ontological turn: “Ontology” is just another word for colonialism. *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 29(1), 4–22. <https://doi.org/10.1111/johs.12124>
- Tuck, E., & McKenzie, M. (2014). *Place in research: Theory, methodology, and methods*. Routledge.
- Watts, V. (2013). Indigenous place-thought and agency amongst humans and non humans (First Woman and Sky Woman go on a European world tour!). *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 2(1), 20–34.
- Wemigwans, J. (2018). *A digital bundle: Protecting and promoting Indigenous knowledge online*. University of Regina Press.