

## Thematic Issue on Posthuman Arts Education

# ARTS EDUCATION IN A MORE-THAN-HUMAN WORLD

## **EDITORIAL**

**HENRIKA YLIRISKU** 

henrika.ylirisku@helsinki.fi

University of Helsinki

TOMI SLOTTE DUFVA

tomi.slottedufva@aalto.fi

Aalto University

MIKKO SNELLMAN

mikko.snellman@utu.fi

University of Turku

DOI

10.54916/rae.145827

DATE OF PUBLICATION

20/06/2024



Once upon a time,

in a world where change danced on the horizon like leaves in the wind,

there were art teachers, artist-pedagogues, artists, and art educational researchers,

who read themselves into the posthumanist theories. Or maybe they engaged with the key ideas of these theories through their colleagues,

or from random YouTube videos.

Or maybe they ended up following the call of vital materialities, or became attracted by encounters with other-than-human species

(clicks of cameras capturing fleeting moments, water droplets dotting on snow,

or the whispers of limpets clinging to rocky shores).

In any case, something in the world made them think differently their understandings of learning, pedagogies, art practices and research.

This resulted in creative experimentation, rigorous rethinking of existing practices, and negotiating ethical responses to the messy, complex entanglements in the more-than-human worlds.

This thematic issue of Research in Arts and Education explores the intersections of posthumanism(s) and arts education. With posthumanism(s) we refer to a broad

theoretical/philosophical movement that can be considered as a working title (Snaza & Weaver, 2015) or an umbrella term (Ferrando, 2013) connecting different trajectories and approaches from a wide range of genealogies and disciplines, such as critical posthumanism, new materialisms, agential realism, material feminism, affect theory, philosophy of immanence, socio-material perspectives, actor-network theory, non-representational theory and beyond. Jusslin and colleagues (2021) gather these theories through the concept of post-approaches.

Even though posthumanist theories are not congruent with each other, they share a relational and material understanding of the world (Braidotti, 2013). They move beyond the anthropocentric narrative that "posits humans as makers of the world and the world as a resource for human endeavors" (Bolt, 2013, p. 2). Furthermore, they challenge categorical divides between the human and the nonhuman, namely other species, materials, and technological devices (Braidotti, 2013). Thus, posthumanist theories highlight understanding of knowledge and being as constantly becoming and intrinsically entangled.

While posthumanisms intersect with other critiques of humanism, including decolonial thought, feminism, and critical race theory, and thus attend to questions of ethics, power relations, and politics, it is important to note that approaches coming from the outside of Eurocentric, humanism-bound theoretical tradition should also be acknowledged. There are many indigenous epistemologies and cosmologies that never parted from the entangled view of the world and if these views are not accounted for, posthumanisms run the risk of becoming yet another form of colonialism (e.g. Kuokkanen, 2000; Sundberg, 2014; Todd, 2016). In this thematic issue we, as guest editors, aim to make space for critical research that takes into account marginalized knowledges. This includes for instance research focusing on morethan-human relations and non-human agencies typically left aside of attention.

Posthumanist theories have had a major impact on our own research, as well as on our artistic and pedagogical practices. When inviting contributions on the topic Posthuman Arts Education, we were curious to see how others, working with these theories, have put them to work in varying (art) pedagogical contexts and their research. What kind of practices, questions, speculations, imaginaries, provocations, affects, potentials, and tensions are set in motion?

We decided to call this thematic issue *Posthuman Arts Education* knowing that posthumanist art education is an unestablished field open for speculative experimentation and various conceptualizations. The contributions of this thematic issue join an emerging art education scholarship that draws from major theorists of posthumanisms, such as Barad, Bennett, Braidotti, Deleuze and Guattari, and Haraway. During the past decade art education scholars such as Garoian (2012), jagodzinski (2013), Hickey-Moody &

Page (2015a), Hood and Kraehe (2017), Trafi-Prats (2017), Hellman and Lind (2017), Keifer-Boyd and colleagues (2018), Rousell and Fell (2018), de Miles and Kalin (2018), Garber (2019), Schulte (2019), and others, have paved the way for rethinking materiality, learning, art and art pedagogies in the age of planetary emergency.

With the call for papers, our goal was to reach broadly art educators and other scholars intersecting posthumanist theories, arts, and their education in their practice. We were delighted to receive a large number of proposals and are honored to present this thematic issue to the readers of Research in Art and Education. The issue consists of nine manuscripts – four research articles and five visual essays – from authors based in Finland, Sweden, Norway, the United Kingdom, and Canada. The proportion of visual essays is high because we wanted to support experimental and creative ways of conducting and sharing research. In line with Braidotti (2013), we consider the arts to have equal capabilities with critical philosophy to create new ways of thinking, perceiving, and sensing.

The contributions of this issue cover various educational and pedagogical contexts, and they attend research in the fields of visual art education, music education, dance pedagogy, childhood education, and educational philosophy. Some contributions focus mainly on artistic practice and research with no direct connection to pedagogical discussion. Furthermore, inter- and transdisciplinary perspectives

are present in many of the contributions. The (human) participants in the activities discussed in the contributions range from children, university students, researchers, artists, and adults with intellectual disabilities, to more-than-human entanglements and assemblages of various material actants such as Demodex mites (a type of mite living inside of human hair follicles), limpets, limestone rocks, cameras, YouTube videos, massage balls, and metal nails.

We acknowledge that besides the use of technical equipment such as cameras and social media videos, the contributed manuscripts did not delve further into the technological entanglements between humans and more-than-humans, such as machine learning, post-digital assemblages, or algorithmic mediation of everyday life. Nevertheless, we hope that the published manuscripts will spark readers to engage with such technological entanglements in the future. For example, a critical assessment of machine learning, what Katherine N. Hayles (2017) calls non-cognitive cognitizers, offers one fascinating starting point.

Olisimme myös toivoneet, että olisimme voineet tarjota teemanumeron lukijoille suomenkielisiä artikkeleita, jotta posthumanistisesta teoreettisesta ajattelusta ammentavaa taiteen ja taidekasvatuksen tutkimusta julkaistaisiin myös muulla kuin tutkimusmaailman valtakielellä, englanniksi. Tässä emme valitettavasti tällä kertaa onnistuneet.

In what follows, we discuss themes connecting the articles and essays of this issue, and finally, introduce the contributions.

### Artistic practices beyond anthropocentrism

Timothy Smith, in his visual essay, states that the art-making process can be considered a collaborative creation where the distributive agency of authorship among the vital materiality is at work, and the human artist is just one actant among many. Also, other artists and scholars have challenged the Western anthropocentric conceptualizations of art-making that focus on personal, individual expression in artistic, creative processes (see e.g. Rousell & Fell, 2018). The ontological privileging of the human over matter thus produces isolated selves, and frames artistic, creative practice as the production of isolated art objects, art projects, and art activities (Garoian, 2012). In line with Smith (in this issue), Hood and Lewis (2021) argue that since many artists are attuned to "the agentic powers of the more-than-human sphere" (p. 224), they can teach others important lessons in perceptual sensitivity to more-than-human agencies and the vitalities of materiality. Art, in this sense, is not that much about human control over materiality, but a zone of contact with the strange, not fully understandable agencies of things (Hood & Lewis, 2021) and becomings. These vital materialities might break through human perceptual grasping, "show us new ways of being" (Hickey & Moody, p. 5), and

even momentarily capture the human (Hood & Lewis, 2021, p. 224) – as Smith compellingly describes in his essay.

In a similar vein, other authors in this issue support an understanding of artistic practice that is based on acknowledging "non-human and material elements, resources, tools, and environments" (Jaakonaho in this issue) through which artistic practice take place. Nikki Rotas (in this issue), in turn, suggests that the arts through the lens of a post-framework "attend to the relation between human/non-human, the material/immaterial, the social/cultural," and through focusing on these relationalities, encourage "new forms of engagement with the world" that go beyond dichotomous thinking.

Activating these understandings often benefits from theoretical and conceptual assistance. Anna Vladimirova (in this issue) offers an illuminating example of this in her visual essay, where she introduces non-anthropocentric photography of dots. Dots might typically be considered as self-contained symbols "with fixed, definite borders and rigid structure." Vladimirova shows how the theory of trans-corporeality (Alaimo, 2010; 2016) helps her to think of dots beyond their borders and to pay attention the more-than-human relations the dots emerge from and are a part of. Trans-corporeal theorizing enables her to consider human bodies as porous parts of the material flows of the Anthropocene. Furthermore, she points out that the entanglement of human and nonhuman entities is never innocent.

To ensure accountability in artistic practice, art-related research, and pedagogies, it is crucial to attend to the ethics and politics arising from these entanglements.

## Rethinking art pedagogies and research with/through posthumanist theories

According to Rotas (in this issue) "pedagogy and art are entangled practices and modes of thinking that are already in act." Following Manning (2016) she calls for an understanding of posthuman art education as an experience grounded in the process of learning – a process that is material, non-linear, relational, and pays attention to what gets produced in the middle of making. Her view resonates with other art education scholars who conceive posthuman pedagogies as open, continuously created, and recreated processes (Hickey-Moody & Page, 2015b, p. 15) that are neither predefined nor controllable (Hellman & Lind, 2017, p. 219). Nonetheless, this does not mean that art pedagogical processes should be considered aimless or intentionally vague. Rather, they are ethically and politically responsible practices that aim to advance ecological and social justice, as well as cultural diversity. As posthumanist theories propose, this should also include other-than-humans (see also Snaza et al., 2014). It thus matters what kind of topics art educators, artist pedagogues, and others working with arts and education choose to study, how they design their pedagogical settings, and how they encourage, navigate,

negotiate, provoke, and respond to the unfolding of events. By working 'in the midst' (as Rotas in this issue refers to Manning, 2016), posthumanist arts education sets in motion new becomings as well as new forms of co-learning and co-creation that go beyond representation (Hickey-Moody & Page, 2015b; Jusslin et al., 2022; Rousell & Fell, 2018).

Simon Ceder and tina carlsson in their article use workshops as hands-on, experiential arts educational events that "productively blur the distinction between education and art." Through these workshops they aim to create playful, performative settings for embodying human and non-human entanglements. Ceder and carlsson focus on the embodied and affective aspects of the workshop in a similar vein that Liisa Jaakonaho pays attention to affects, touches, and movements between humans and material objects in her study. Putting bodies, affects, and sensations at the heart of art pedagogical activity emphasizes the entanglement of human and non-human bodies and highlights the importance of sensing bodies in knowledge production (see e.g. Hickey-Moody & Page, 2015b).

The contributions of this thematic essay showcase the profound implications of posthumanist theories on research methodologies. In the contributions, methodologies such as diffractive (Kvile), artistic and performative (Jaakonaho), research-creation (Rotas), and art-based assemblage (Garbett) are employed. In their efforts, authors in this issue are reconfiguring their research settings to highlight that

human beings are not only 'participants' in their projects, and to invent new methodologies that allow them to experiment and create "both with what is (already) at hand and by bringing that which might (or might not) be useful, *because you don't yet know*, into the orbit of research" (Taylor, 2016, p. 18, italics in the original). The authors describe their research as embodied and embedded (Rotas), situated and affirmative (Ceder & carlsson) activities that seek to bring the material and more-than-human agencies to the fore (Kvile).

Research in the posthumanist theoretical terrain provokes scholars to develop innovative concepts (Murris, 2021). As an example of this, we raise Synnøve Kvile's article, where she introduces *childmusicking* through which she studies the relations of music and children underlining that they are not separate from one another. Also, in Helen Garbett's visual essay, new concepts are developed: *Limpeteering* functions as a practice of limpet-orienteering, as "way-finding activities where limpets act as a navigational aid and lead the way."

Furthermore, Garbett's contribution demonstrates how posthumanist research can make practical provocations, and thereby impact communities and societies beyond traditional ways of reporting research. Through arts-based research events, Garbett aims to stimulate public dialogue to raise awareness among wider audiences about limpets, which are typically considered uninteresting and irrelevant

nonhuman organisms. Furthermore, she believes that artistic research events can activate affective power and foster a sense of curiosity that has the potential to change the relationships of those (humans) taking part with the morethan-human world.

As Braidotti (2019) argues, posthumanist thinking "builds on the parallelism between philosophy, the arts, and science" (p. 143), which allows going beyond traditional interdisciplinarity. Developing new kinds of interdisciplinary and even postdisciplinary alliances is crucially needed in a time characterized by multifaceted challenges that exceed the grasp of Western divisive epistemologies (Oppermann & Iovino, 2016). Therefore, in this thematic issue, several authors highlight interdisciplinarity as an essential aspect of their practice. Curator-researcher Nina Liebenberg in her essay employs curatorial as a method that allows bringing together practitioners from different fields. She showcases how configuring and reconfiguring collaboratively produced materials allows "for new meanings to emerge and for new ways to talk" about human-plant relationships. Rotas, in turn, discusses tensions emerging between two disciplines, science and art, in the context of elementary school in Canada. Even though there are attempts to integrate science and artistic practice, she argues that the arts are still often diluted into a skill to be learned, rather than being acknowledged as processes of co-composing knowledge with the material world.

## Ethics in arts and their education in the age of the ecological crisis

As Carol Taylor (2021) argues, knowledge-making and thus, research, are "political, ethical, and critical enactments" (p. 23). Therefore, it is not surprising that discussions around ethics are central in the contributions of this thematic issue. Posthumanist theories call for cultivating research that is accountable (responsible) and responsive (responseable) since they "emanate from actual situated practices and material arrangements and how these might enable or constrain flourishing and living well in the world" (Bozalek, 2021, p. 135). This kind of ethics moves away from principle ethics (Bozalek, 2021) and universalizing right-based discourses (Taylor, 2016, p. 15).

Authors of this issue draw from various conceptions of posthuman ethics in their contributions. Ceder and carlsson lean on Braidotti's affirmative ethics when developing affirmative iterations: the planning process of situated arts education workshops. The point they make about the relationship of ethics, creativity, and critique is important to arts education more broadly. They suggest that "building on a conscious approach of posthuman ethics, opposition, or critique, does not need to be restrictive or negative, but rather to create something that produces affirmative empowering alternatives."

Also, Kvile's decision to bring in knowledge from 'missing people' (Braidotti, 2019, p. 162), 9–10 years old children in this case, into music educational research is affirmative ethics in action. Braidotti refers to 'missing people' as real-life subjects whose knowledge has traditionally been overlooked in dominant knowledge-production practices and excluded from official cartographies (p. 162). Jaakonaho employs feminist care ethics to negotiate her position as an abled person, conducting academic research in a set-up involving disabled participants. Perceiving the situation as asymmetrical, leaning on ethics as situated and embodied has allowed her to explore the momentary interactions amongst creative movement groups as ethically significant potentialities.

In the article by Jan Varpanen, Johanna Kallio, Antti Saari, Sonja Helkala and Liila Holmberg, ethics unfold as a life-affirming practice they call 'the art of existence'. They claim that the ecological crisis "places and unavoidable ethical imperative for the conscientious adult: to learn an art of existing in a way that supports life instead of destroying it." They bring together the Foucauldian concept of care of the self which focuses on self-cultivation, and feminist ethics of care, and particularly Puig de la Bellacasa's (2017) notion of care as a way of rethinking the relations between the human and the more-than-human. With this move they seek to conceptualize "self-cultivation where care for the self and care for others become inseparable." Even though their article does not discuss artistic practice or art education per se, their philosophical thinking offers inspiring food for thought

for scholars, art teachers, artist, and art pedagogues particularly because they highlight the interconnectedness of care and aesthetics. To Varpanen and his colleagues, aesthetics is "a celebration and affirmation – even love – of live."

In our turbulent, exhausting times (Braidotti, 2019) there is a need for navigational tools that help negotiate the complex, messy assemblages in which learning and teaching take place. Furthermore, there is a need for alliances and collaborations that encourage working together on what art and art education can become in the future. We hope the contributions of this issue offer the readers stimulating insights and want to warmly thank all the authors and peer reviewers who contributed to the birth of the issue.

#### Contributions

The thematic issue is opened by an article by Simon Ceder and tina carlsson, who present a study of the iterative and affirmative development process of art-based workshops aimed at engaging participants with more-than-human experiences. They use playful 'walk-shops' that included pretend play and immersion with microscopic nonhuman animals to reorient arts education beyond anthropocentrism: towards embracing situatedness, complexity, and uncertainty.

Synnøve Kvile's article offers an inspiring example of how post-theories compel the researcher to rethink how to do

research while taking seriously the relational onto-epistemologies and their entanglement to ethics. She uses Barad's (2007) concept 'spacetimematter' to disrupt the Western conceptions of children and music, inviting the reader into a childmusicking journey, where music making, dancing and children's everyday lives intertwine with technology and the climate crisis.

In her article, Liisa Jaakonaho explores the dynamics of various agencies within dance-based, creative movement groups that she facilitated in a day centre of disability services. She illustrates how, during the artistic research process, ethical considerations and methodological experiments directed her attention to the intra-action between human and nonhuman agencies, such as balls and fabrics. Jaakonaho advocates for paying attention to the affective, reciprocal, and ethical dimensions of artistic activities and art education in order to enable them to become more inclusive and less human-centric.

Jan Varpanen, Johanna Kallio, Antti Saari, Sonja Helkala and Liila Holmberg present a philosophical article delving into the care of the self by bringing together the Foucaldian notion of care of the self and the feminist ethics of care. Within the context of adult and self-education, the authors advocate for an 'art of existence' as a practice, understood in terms of care, that functions as a compass "for leading an ethically sustainable life in the shadow of the

Anthropocene." Inspired by Foucault, they argue for conceiving one's life as a work of art.

Timothy Smith portrays in his visual essay a transformative encounter that led him to question the habitual assumption of photography practice as a possibility of capture – a practice that seeks systematically seizing, collecting, and framing phenomena. During a walk to an Irish mountain, Smith's camera shifted from being a passive instrument that he has full control over, to a co-collaborator obtaining agency/vital materiality in the assemblage of the event. In the essay, Smith argues that photography has world-making capabilities beyond representational, that can be activated in a human-nonhuman assemblage of vital materialities to become a generative and creative force.

In her visual essay, Anna Vladimirova thinks-with photos of various dots through posthumanist and new materials theories. Following the relational movements, dotting, and the agential capacities of dots allows her to trace the multispecies and trans-corporeal relations dots are a part of. Furthermore, noticing and attending to dots unfolds as a form of more-than-human counter-mapping. Vladimirova suggests broadening place-responsive pedagogies in the context of environmental art education by paying attention to place-making with more-than-human others.

Helen Garbett presents an arts-based research process studying the relationships between humans and limpets over time. Drawing from new materialism, Garbett crafts a 'research assemblage' consisting of her interdisciplinary, socially engaged artistic practice and the relations activated during these events. Compellingly, Garbett presents a limpet-focused contemporary Wunderkammer and other meandering storylines of the project. She aims to "engender a sense of curiosity, wonder and enchantment" toward the more-than-human world through the affective power of the Wunderkammer.

Nikki Rotas explores tensions emerging between science and arts in the context of interdisciplinary STEAM learning in an elementary school by employing research-creation as a theoretical and practical tool. Through images of children's exploration of abstract painting with magnets, washers, bolts, and nails, she argues that posthuman art practices are speculative, affirming, and minor, and thus they offer childhood education a provocation: there are "imperceptible moments of learning that operate at the level of barely there."

Finally, Nina Liebenberg portrays a collaborative project between students from two art universities and plant science researchers. As a curator and researcher, Liebenberg aims at combatting the limitations arising from discipline-specific 'attentional subcultures' that may develop into blind spots. She connected the participants through fieldtrips, workshops, and making of exhibitions, focusing in the essay on three moments of curation that prompted the participants to create new understandings about human-plant relationships.

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