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Learning | through | a/r/t: Post-digital art education

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As a result of the provocations and instigations of learning through art and 'living digitally' as artists, researchers and teachers at the International Society for Education Through Art (InSEA) 2017 World Congress in Daegu Korea, this crowd-sourced visual essay invited international art and design educators to contribute to a visual-digital response to the question: How democratic is the internet in post-digital art education?

The internet is a tool for democracy. As an educator of artistic education, I am aware of my influence on other educators by the connection between the virtual and the real. I use social networks to share with freedom and immediacy experiences that can inspire others just as others inspire me.

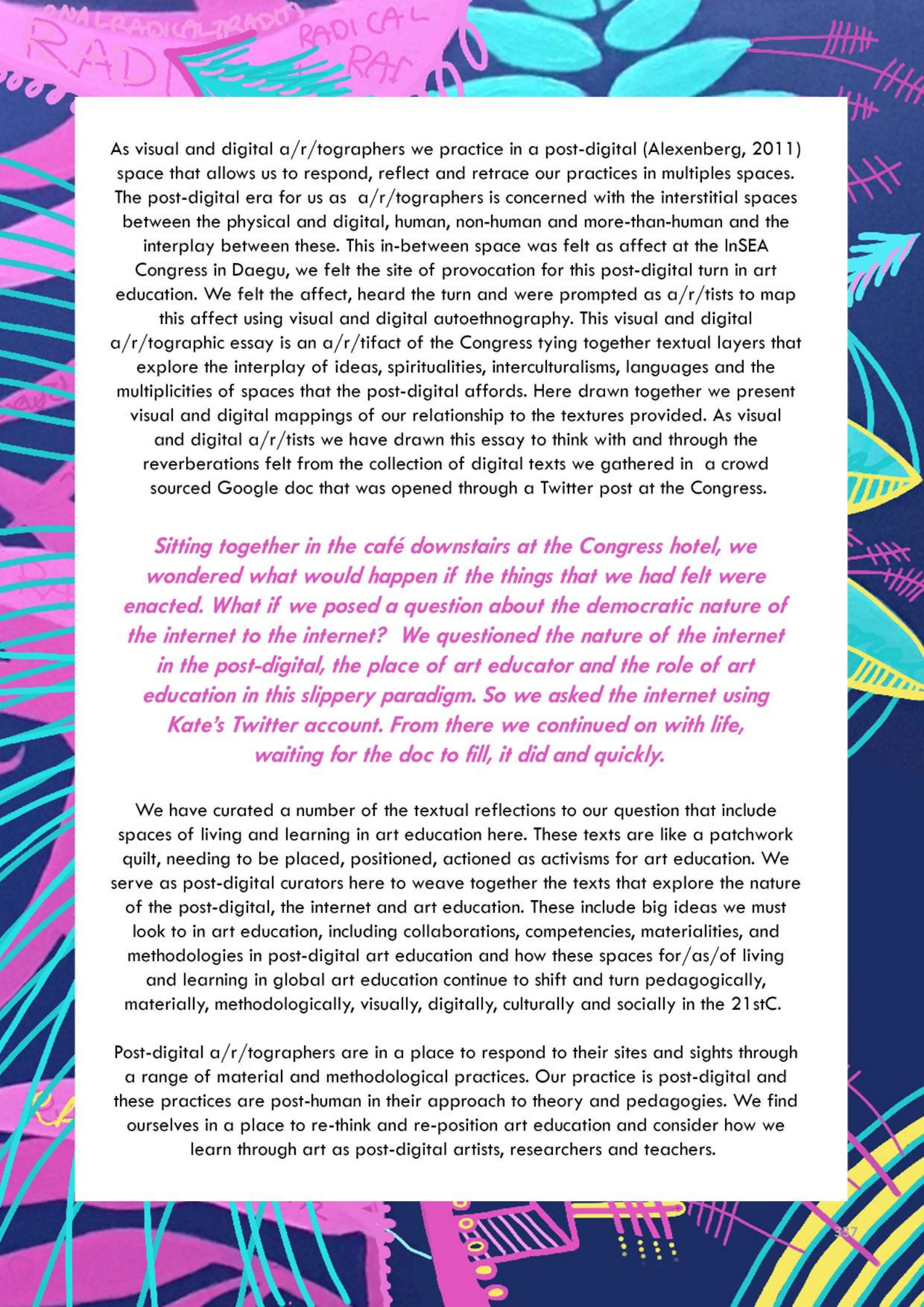


Digital Living and Learning (Assemblages), Digital Drawing, Coleman, 2018

The net has many advantages but also drawbacks. The existence of democracy implies the existence of freedom and equality in a framework of rights and duties. We are free to learn and enjoy, all equally. However not everyone can take advantage of it, some because they can't and others because they do not want to. We have the right to use the internet but also to use it correctly. However not everyone does, some try to manipulate and deceive us.

Everyone has the opportunity to publicize their artistic works without intermediaries and without relying on large economic resources. However not all are good and interesting artists therefore we can find a lot of trash. The internet, allows us an enjoyment and continuous learning about art and education, it allows us a continuous recycling of knowledge.

However not all people use it to learn.



As visual and digital a/r/tographers we practice in a post-digital (Alexenberg, 2011) space that allows us to respond, reflect and retrace our practices in multiples spaces. The post-digital era for us as a/r/tographers is concerned with the interstitial spaces between the physical and digital, human, non-human and more-than-human and the interplay between these. This in-between space was felt as affect at the InSEA Congress in Daegu, we felt the site of provocation for this post-digital turn in art education. We felt the affect, heard the turn and were prompted as a/r/tists to map this affect using visual and digital autoethnography. This visual and digital a/r/tographic essay is an a/r/tifact of the Congress tying together textual layers that explore the interplay of ideas, spiritualities, interculturalisms, languages and the multiplicities of spaces that the post-digital affords. Here drawn together we present visual and digital mappings of our relationship to the textures provided. As visual and digital a/r/tists we have drawn this essay to think with and through the reverberations felt from the collection of digital texts we gathered in a crowd sourced Google doc that was opened through a Twitter post at the Congress.

Sitting together in the café downstairs at the Congress hotel, we wondered what would happen if the things that we had felt were enacted. What if we posed a question about the democratic nature of the internet to the internet? We questioned the nature of the internet in the post-digital, the place of art educator and the role of art education in this slippery paradigm. So we asked the internet using Kate's Twitter account. From there we continued on with life, waiting for the doc to fill, it did and quickly.

We have curated a number of the textual reflections to our question that include spaces of living and learning in art education here. These texts are like a patchwork quilt, needing to be placed, positioned, actioned as activisms for art education. We serve as post-digital curators here to weave together the texts that explore the nature of the post-digital, the internet and art education. These include big ideas we must look to in art education, including collaborations, competencies, materialities, and methodologies in post-digital art education and how these spaces for/as/of living and learning in global art education continue to shift and turn pedagogically, materially, methodologically, visually, digitally, culturally and socially in the 21stC.

Post-digital a/r/tographers are in a place to respond to their sites and sights through a range of material and methodological practices. Our practice is post-digital and these practices are post-human in their approach to theory and pedagogies. We find ourselves in a place to re-think and re-position art education and consider how we learn through art as post-digital artists, researchers and teachers.

Tap tap tap
clickedy clack
Pause breathe
Look wait
and wait.

Wait for a computer to use,
to afford internet, for internet to connect,
for online systems to sync

**Over and over
Over and over
The clicking
The waiting
The frustration.**

The relief when it finally connects
assessment piece submitted
in time (no excuse if it is not)
reflecting that working with the internet
adds levels of difficulty...
Things humans have no control over
collaboration with machines
unseen energy
living and learning
with/in digital spaces.



Wayfinding, Digital Drawing, Coleman, 2018

It has been some time since children and young people, our students, were defined as digital natives (Prensky, 2001). It was also proposed that “the new mode of truth is made present through processes that are closer to rituals and iconographies” (Lankshear, Peters, & Knobel, 2000, p.35) than products to be replicated.

This is their world but who has access?

There are limitations as well as opportunities with changes in pedagogy as we take up digital and online processes for learning and teaching. Experience with the digital world comes with varied internet speed and connectivity and the need for costly equipment that not all students personally own.

As an academic, even my children in higher education in Western contexts on three continents have encountered difficulties completing tasks and presenting work within deadlines. More recently it has been shown that the “prior cultural experiences of using technology in learning” (Boyd, 2012, p.119) is an important factor to consider, as is the personal preference for analog/digital processes.

Art processes might bridge these preferences and give more control to students as they work in-between the real/digital through a combination of digital and materials-based practices (Corinna).



Finding Spaces Between, Digital Drawing, Coleman, 2018

At times, we may feel the urge to think of the internet as an irreversible and unavoidable distraction, an infinitely recurring mediation of experiences that keeps so many young people's eyes glued to a handheld mobile rather than 'reality'. We were warned quite early about this: in the late 1960s, Debord's analysis of an image-saturated world spoke of advanced societies alienated by the commodification of life and an irresistible attraction to the false.

Many statements in 'The Society of the Spectacle' still sound very relevant today. For instance, it is not difficult to think of so many virtual protests and petitions on the social media as "purely spectacular rebellion". The question we could ask in this context is: "Can Facebook replace the streets?" Or: "Can real democracy be exercised through Facebook posts, likes and emoticons as opposed to a fleshier, real-life version of political tensions, alliances, anger and street protest?"

Yet, in reality it is not an either/or question. Art and education cannot escape the internet, even when their structures, themes and references do not seem to be directly related to it. In a sense, its 'democracy' is inescapable; it is now so complicit with our thought processes that many of us always already think in communicative terms.

Of course, this can also mean that some of us have had to realign their aesthetic alliances -- the immediate circulation of a photo of my dinner has become more aesthetically significant than the physical experience of eating and enjoying my meal.

Moreover, as we all know, multiple virtual connections do not necessarily create a stronger sense of social belonging. However, we now inhabit an era of shared experience that could not be experienced in earlier times, and educators cannot avoid engaging with it (Raphael).



The now vs. immediate digital gratification, Digital Drawing, Barrand, 2019



Multiple Visual Densities, Digital Drawing, Barrand, 2019

There is no democracy if we consider the multiple density of visualities and their consumption. We are attracted to images that are connected to our values, but wary that at the same time they may be selling objects and expanding consumption (real or virtual). When we consider the origin and the meaning of word “democracy” we have to observe within the post-digital times, the expansion of individualism, digital collaboration instead of physical collaboration and many other factors related to a different way to teach and learn about and practice.

Art Educators should constantly be aware of their influences on this complex connection between virtual and real and how presence is being developed within teaching/learning processes.

There is a completely different way of thinking about teaching and learning with post-digital generations. How do we teach and learn post-digitally? How do we create space to stop and read or dialogue about complex and abstract concepts in art?

The challenge for Art Educators is how to slow time in the post-digital students life. Neuroscience can help us, but we also have to understand mindfulness. (Flavia).

Timothy: “I may be twisting the original questions around a bit, but I am not so much focused on whether the internet itself is democratic in art education. Instead I am concerned with whether the meteoric rise of post-internet artist practices in the past decade (or two) could inspire a more democratic teaching and learning environment in art. My contention is that

if post-internet practice in contemporary art is positioned as a primary course of learning, particularly in art foundations, our understanding of the instructor/student and individual/collective relationships in introductory art instruction could be re-evaluated and re-imagined.

I've been researching this topic within a pedagogical framework laid by concrete examples from educator Célestin Freinet and philosopher Félix Guattari, which provides the ground for proposing a horizontal approach to introductory art instruction that emerges from the consideration of post-internet art practices as vital to the advancement of introductory art students. Rather than pursuing a top-down instruction similar to the concrete fundamentals of 2-D and 3-D design, foundation courses based on post-internet art practices could productively subvert the instructor/student hierarchy and create a democratic, collective learning experience. The implications for this would require a reconsideration of certain methods of teaching and learning in art foundations research, curriculum design, and the role of the post-internet condition toward transforming art education practices in the 21st century.



Placemaking in Digital Spaces, Digital Drawing, Coleman, 2018



Striking a balance between traditional/radical, Digital Drawing, Barrand, 2019

Art educators must provide spaces for foundational practices and conversations of such ‘internet-aware’ art, which has rapidly proliferated all realms of mainstream contemporary art in the past ten-plus years. These spaces for introductory art education must be considered as a subject of focus itself, just as traditional skill building courses such as 2-D and 3-D design. However, unlike conventional foundations courses, post-internet practices in contemporary art are rarely fixed or stable due to their constantly evolving conventions and the speed with which these shifts emerge. The formal and conceptual topics of current post-internet art practices at one moment might take on a radically different set of skills and conventions one or two years later. The complexity of such formal and conceptual shifts must be accounted for by the instructors of these courses, and as such, instructors cannot teach post-internet art foundations alone.

Instead of adhering to a top-down instruction of the fixed attributes of traditional foundations—in which set rules, skills and conventions are passed from the teacher specialist to the student novice—the elemental building blocks of post-internet foundations will always be in flux.

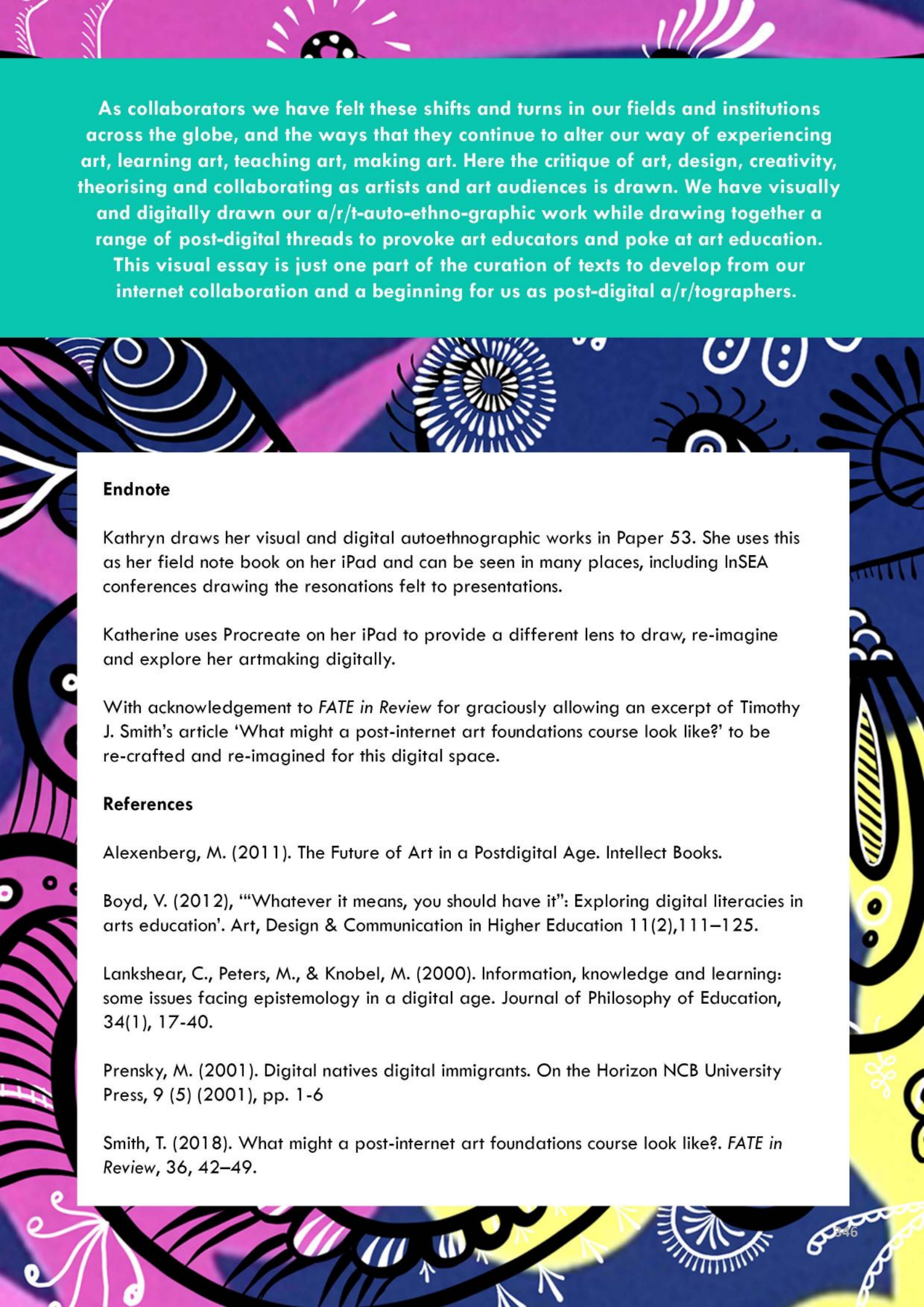
Current high school and university students tend to explore these processes both as artists and as non-art creative users of the internet, and they have been doing so from a very young age. In most cases it would be these internet-aware students who would be more likely to take on the role of skill and technique ‘specialists’ (or at least co-specialists along with the instructor) in a post-internet art foundation course, creating a radically horizontal and democratic teaching and learning environment.

While a 2-D design foundations course would teach concrete, yet vital, age-old fundamentals such as line, shape, texture, value, scale, proportion, or color, a post-internet foundation course would consist of an entirely different set of elastic formal terms, such as modulation, remixing, looping, embedding, scripting, archiving, reblogging, commenting, memes, fails, or defaults, among various additional forms and approaches that are constantly and rapidly evolving (or in some cases, just as quickly becoming outmoded). Thus, a foundation for post-internet art must consider internet-based art production on its own terms, albeit one that shape-shifts, blurs boundaries, and creates productive and disruptive connections with other contemporary art practices. These practices and discourses are vital for the internet-savvy foundations art student, and they should not be postponed until a student progresses to an upper-level 'special topics' course.



Rhizomatic Linking in the Digital Context, Digital Drawing, Barrand, 2019

Contemporary art has been rapidly shifting in the past decade due to the influence of internet-based practices, and it is essential for today's students and instructors to make connections together with post-internet themes in a more democratic engagement and openness as collective learning experiences.



As collaborators we have felt these shifts and turns in our fields and institutions across the globe, and the ways that they continue to alter our way of experiencing art, learning art, teaching art, making art. Here the critique of art, design, creativity, theorising and collaborating as artists and art audiences is drawn. We have visually and digitally drawn our a/r/t-auto-ethno-graphic work while drawing together a range of post-digital threads to provoke art educators and poke at art education.

This visual essay is just one part of the curation of texts to develop from our internet collaboration and a beginning for us as post-digital a/r/tographers.

Endnote

Kathryn draws her visual and digital autoethnographic works in Paper 53. She uses this as her field note book on her iPad and can be seen in many places, including InSEA conferences drawing the resonations felt to presentations.

Katherine uses Procreate on her iPad to provide a different lens to draw, re-imagine and explore her artmaking digitally.

With acknowledgement to *FATE in Review* for graciously allowing an excerpt of Timothy J. Smith's article 'What might a post-internet art foundations course look like?' to be re-crafted and re-imagined for this digital space.

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