



Green and Black Light by Chandam Suman

**Cultural and Pedagogical Inquiry:
Special Issue, Summer 2022**

**Posthumanism:
A Desire for a New Humanity**

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Posthumanism: A Desire for a New Humanity

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As we write this introduction, we face challenging times where geo-political, pandemic, and anthropocentric issues dominate the world stage. These challenges filter down and influence national and local policies impacting individuals' day to day lives, in some cases producing conflict and disagreement. It is easy for these issues to dominate public consciousness where we can feel overwhelmed and helpless. As we grapple with the complex issues we face, Rosi Braidotti (2020) reminds us "materially embedded differences in location...separate us but also...stress the shared intimacy with the world that creates a sense of belonging together, within webs of ever-shifting relations" (p. 466). It is with this in mind that we present the first edition of this special issue.

As conveners of this special issue, we turn to posthumanist, new materialist, feminist materialist, and agential realist theorising to provide alternative visions for our multiple future(s) (Barad, 2007; Braidotti, 2013, 2019; Haraway, 2016). Our rationale for developing this special issue using these relational and entangled theories was to provide readers with opportunities to think education differently by:

- Opening up possibilities for including non-human and more-than-human objects, matter, and things as vital ontological players in the production of experiences;
- Paying attention to the ways in which bodies matter and how some bodies matter more than others;
- Providing an alternative to Cartesian dualist thinking that is based on Eurocentric and enlightenment logics of colonialism and extraction.

As we consider the theory-praxis potential of these posthumanist and materialist theories, we need to remember the legacies and inheritances that we owe to previous scholarship. It is important to recognise that relationality and connectivity in research is not new; Indigenous and Global Majority scholars have been living-with and working-with with these types of theorizations for millennia. We also must acknowledge some of the critiques of posthumanist and materialist theories that can privilege those who have the power to speak (Bhattacharya, 2020, 2021). These critiques also suggest structural issues and struggles facing individuals and communities that are

marginalised, negated, and risk being erased (Chakravorty Spivak, 1993; Jackson 2015; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). Furthermore, they warn that the supposed *novel-ness* of these theories do not sufficiently acknowledge critical Indigenous scholars and scholarship (Jones & Hoskins, 2016; King, 2017; Todd 2016).

This special issue presented us, as editors and educators, with an opportunity to collate a partial and situated response to some of the issues and challenges that face humanity (Haraway, 1998). The collection of papers in a double special issue focus on how posthumanist and materialist theory-praxis can be employed to reimagine education and educational research. The papers in this first issue are from a range of established and emerging researchers and scholars working across a range of educational backgrounds. The connecting feature of all the papers is the commitment the contributors have to entangling with posthumanist and materialist thinking, doing, and ethics. This highlights a connection to relationality within and between bodies. The papers are playful, capacious, and speculative. However, they do important posthumanist and materialist work to acknowledge the micro-moments of educational experiences and how they impact on an expanded form of subjectivity. All papers focus on aspects of posthumanist and materialist theory in relation with education, education research, and curricular or systemic barriers to posthumanist- and materialist-informed educational change.

As part of our own ethical commitments to the relationships between authors, editors, and peer reviewers, we adopted Strom and Mills' (2021) ethical peer review process. We encouraged reviewers to adopt an affective and relational position to peer review by taking a dialogic approach, using affirmative language, and providing supportive and collegial feedback. We want to thank the authors and peer reviewers for engaging positively and generatively in this process. We hope that those involved in this special issue and other editors will consider this approach in future. We also employed affirmative ethics in our roles as editors of the special issue; this approach allowed us to think both relationally and critically about working with each other and how we worked with the authors that appear in these two issues.

There are fourteen papers in this issue. They have been grouped thematically which we hope will provide you with a movement through the ideas and concepts the authors present. Each paper takes an aspect of educational practice or research and draws on a range of posthumanist, new materialist, feminist materialist, and agential realist theory to articulate and illuminate the power of these concepts for their chosen topic. The first theme is that of ethics where **Katie Strom and Tammy Mills** build on their earlier work on ethical peer review. This new paper puts Braidotti's (2019) notion of affirmative ethics to work practically as a means of reshaping academic culture to one of collegial support. Telling the story of the creation of their alternative peer reviewing process, the authors describe an affirmative peer reviewing practices workshop where they presented the vision and tools for conducting supportive, rigorous peer reviews. Underpinned with an affirmative ethos and a belief in the potential of informal mentoring and transdisciplinary connections, this paper offers practical insights into how posthuman thinking can be put to work for doing academia differently. **Kathryn Bateman, Brandon Sherman, and Sophia Jeong** write from the position of science teachers and put to work Barad's (2007) agential realism to consider the entanglement of policy and practice in a US school. Here, classroom practice, scientific standards, and educational policy are understood as diffracting rather than clashing. They are also understood as co-constitutive affective atmospheres that can differ from moment to moment rather than as fixed hierarchical systems. This understanding comes with the

realisation that classroom spaces comprise multiplicities of shifting assemblages, and, as such, we must live with the incompleteness and limitations of our knowledge of the world. However, by exploring affective intensities and flows, new insights and new ways of thinking, seeing and being with human and non-human others can be revealed.

The second theme draws on Derrida's (1994) concept of haunting and hauntology, where ghosts and hauntings engage in "an ongoing conversation with the ghosts of the past, aiming at inventing a different future rather than fixing the past" (Bozalek et al., 2021, p. 1). **Jo Albin-Clark** reimagines a ghostly data haunting, a data-ghost, that highlights how data can become a splinter, an annoyance, and a botheration that returns to haunt us as a ghostly entity (Benozzo et al., 2013). The author writes the article in the form of a narrated playscript with accompanying visualisations, that unfold and reframe the data-ghost's before life, proposal, emergence, and sticky haunting. These hauntings are linked to a research study of documentation practices in early childhood education that imagine the documentation as ghostly matters. Through this process, the author considers how ethical response-ability with the non-human is embodied and affective, thereby revealing temporal and intensifying potentialities that make it possible to see documentation practices dislocated from policy frames and within different spacetime-matterings. **Magali Forte's** creative piece is written using two-column text and double exposed photos to recount the author's haunting by a specific research moment of ethical consequence. The paper documents how she developed her own praxis because of this haunting. Her post-qualitative inquiry highlights the challenges of researching and how messiness in research can provide productive opportunities for thinking otherwise about knowledge production (Fairchild et al., 2022). The author recounts how thinking-with Haraway's (2016) notion of "staying with the trouble" led her to better understand and articulate a decolonizing approach in educational inquiry and practice with Indigenous peoples and children (p. 4).

The multiple and diverse nature of classroom(s) is the third theme. **Kelly Demers** connects teaching and learning to art as a mode of inquiry in her paper. She analyses the impact of a course she designed and delivered to teacher educators that aimed to disrupt traditional humanist notions of education and learning. She outlines how students became attuned to posthumanist concepts, such as immanence, assemblage, nomadic thinking, experimentation, becoming, and becoming imperceptible through the artistic focus of the course which provided new possibilities for teaching and learning practice. **Thomas Albright's** study explores a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) project through Barad's (2007) concept of intra-action and Bennett's (2010) thing-power. The YPAR project aimed to increase students' democratic involvement in scholarly processes by increasing their involvement in curriculum and assessment design. Albright troubles the familiar humanistic interpretation of student voice and agency by introducing non-human agents such as desks, handouts, and time. The intra-actions of these elements with the unfolding of the project reveals important insights regarding the extent of schoolification, the power of material objects, and the limitations of time and class size. Music education is the focus of **Carolyn Cooke's** paper which troubles the neo-liberal configurations of music education as skill-building, standardisation, and cognitive processing. The author reimagines music-making as a *sympoiesis* that shifts understandings of music-making to a dynamic relationship between human and non-human bodies (Haraway, 2016). By viewing teaching as an improvisatory act, the author proposes that the humans involved in the music-making become minoritarian, thereby shifting power to both the human and non-human elements involved in the process. **Joanna Hume's** paper considers the expansion of forest school practice in educational settings highlighting how the

Cultural and Pedagogical Inquiry, Summer 2022, 14(1), pp. 1-7

ISSN 1916-3460 © 2022 University of Alberta

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outcomes-driven UK education system may be a motivating force behind teachers' desire to escape into the forest. Working with the nature documentary, *My Octopus Teacher*, the author employs this film to exemplify how posthumanist concepts can reimagine forest school as a positive disruptive force. They argue for a change in the way learning is conceptualised and that the radical potentiality of forest schools can disrupt boundaries that limit the existing education system. Entanglements of sound and noise see **Natasha Rennolds** exploring how noise radically affects, and is entangled with, other bodies in the formation and maintenance of educational relationships. Drawing on concepts of intra-action and attunement, noise is seen as an active agent that necessarily shapes learning environments (Barad, 2007). Through the story of young people travelling by bus on a local trip, the author pays attention to the ways in which taking a posthumanist theory can render the familiar unfamiliar. It reveals how noise can facilitate and obstruct relationship-building and how, through these noticings, we can learn from our own pleasures and discomforts and acknowledge that meaningful experiences are not only created by human effort. **Ruth Churchill Dower** puts to work agential realism to articulate how young children who do not usually speak outside of the home are able to communicate in a multitude of different ways (Barad, 2007). The author proposes that there are other, more expansive, spaces for kinaesthetic and sensory attunement which show that young children, diagnosed with selective mutism, have a lot to say. Thinking-with Haraway (2016), Barad (2007), and Puig de la Bellacasa (2017), the author questions how damage narratives in early education that tie individualised, non-conforming identities of not-speaking to pathologised stakes could be untied through movement-kinships, such as the sensory-kins that emerge through the bio-sensory registers of dancing socks.

The fourth theme connects the writing of Ursula K. Le Guin to educational research theory and methodological praxis. Taking up Le Guin's (2019) carrier bag theory of fiction and Haraway's (2016) kin-making, **Liz Latto, Julie Ovington, Louise Hawxwell, Jo Albin-Clark, Philippa Isom, Sharon Smith, Sarah Ellis, and Jo Fletcher-Saxon** write about how a kinship developed between them during the COVID-19 pandemic and how they came to carry each other's stories. In carrying each other's stories, they not only learned about ethical response-ability and responsibility to their fellow bag ladies, but also how they became affected by them. This paper provides links to their bag lady blogs throughout the piece and highlights a special connection to a piece of sculpture that became part of the bag lady matterings. **The Play Tank Collective** engaged with Haraway's (2016) idea of a *PlayTank* (as an alternative to a *Think Tank*) and with Le Guin's (2019) *Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* to entangle with critical posthumanist educational methodology. Through collaborative, speculative, and playful approaches to inquiry, the authors provide an account of their anarchiving playful practices and propose ana-play to engage with colonial legacies and violences that are silenced by Eurocentric visions of play. The outcomes of this paper focus on how intentionally incorporating affirmative ethics into play can provide increased opportunities for collective flourishing and response-ability.

The final themes link to the ways in which bodies are racialized and how objects become an intrinsic part of the research process. **Shiva Zarabadi's** paper focuses on the racialising assemblages experienced by British-Bangladeshi Muslim schoolgirls and recounts their embodied and embedded experiences of racial harassment in London. The author attunes to the emergence of objects, spaces, times, and feelings in the everyday ordinary lived experiences of the schoolgirls. This attunement revealed how embodied and embedded senses of belonging and empowerment were experienced through the agential and vital materiality of a wall, Brick Lane, and a sewing machine. Here different material forms of becoming, belonging and empowerment were made

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possible by attuning to the relationality between the human, non-human, and other than human bodies and how these manifested in the schoolgirls racializing assemblages. In the final paper, **Carol A. Taylor, Hannah Hogarth, Elisabeth Barratt Hacking, and Eliane Bastos** develop a posthuman object pedagogy to contest the ontological positioning of objects as inert and dead, and to attend to the quiet but powerful work they do (Taylor, 2013, 2017). Objects are often seen as mundane, as background and as such, are often discarded as unimportant. They are often silent in education practices which focus on reason, logical argument, and the mind. The authors argue that posthuman object pedagogies can contest the ontological positioning of objects. They use four object encounters to re-evaluate common understandings of the work objects do, and in doing so, recast educational research as intra-acting agencies. The diffractive moves made with the four objects provide a theory-praxis that enables educators' ways of doing educational research otherwise.

At the start of this introduction, we proposed that engaging and entangling with a posthumanist theory-praxis held potential for educators wanting to do education differently. We feel the papers in this issue provide evidence that is provocative, challenging, and push the reader to think differently about affirmative and ethical posthumanist, new materialist, feminist materialist, and agential realist entanglements with education and research. We hope you enjoy reading the papers in this first issue and that you can find something useful and thought-provoking to bring to your own thinking and practice.

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