CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Review of Education, Pedagogy, & Cultural Studies

Special Issue:
Historical Futurism and Inexorable Materiality in the Age of Generative AI

Although the initial disruption of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) is behind us, we remain plagued by ahistorical and *im*-material narratives surrounding the relationship between humans, technology, and power which obscure problems with techno-solutionism that cut to the heart of the educational project. Dominant discourses across education surrounding the emergence of GenAI frequently focus on the novelty of this technology, leading to endless speculation about GenAI's place in our educational future and relentless injunctions to incorporate it into our practice. The failure to connect GenAI—and the various platforms and software it enables—to both its material and ideological lineage permits the intensification of the techno-rationalization of schools and society to proceed with minimal scrutiny while masking itself as progress. Such future-fetishism currently driving educational policy and practice obscures the perennial nature of our contemporary dilemmas at the same time as it encourages us to accept these circumstances as, to borrow a phrase from Maxine Greene, "hopelessly *there*."[i]

As Jacques Ellul reminds us, the ideology of *technique* runs much deeper than any machine and has long preceded the normalization of digital technologies in our everyday lives. He notes:

> Technique has enough of the mechanical in its nature to enable it to cope with the machine, but it surpasses and transcends the machine because it remains in close touch with the human order. The metal monster could not go on forever torturing mankind. It found in technique a rule as hard and inflexible as itself.[ii]

The ideological and political entanglements of technique, in this broad sense, have a checkered past that extends far beyond the classroom. For example, the Italian futurist movement of the early 20th century lead by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti was both an avantgarde artistic movement as well as a political project with close ties to Benito Mussolini and the rise of Italian fascism.[iii] The futurists, through their art, poetry, and political activities glorified "modernity, speed, violence, war, and the machine."[iv] In Marinetti's 1909 "Manifesto of Futurism," he celebrates the beauty of speed as embodied by the automobile, welcomes war and violence, advocates to "free this land from its smelly gangrene of professors" and "moral feminism" while calling for what we would today consider a form of technological accelerationism. The futurists' coziness with fascism in the early 20th century bears striking resemblance to our contemporary techno-broligarchy's ties to the right-wing political project and its advancement of GenAI in all spheres of public and private life for extractive and violent aims that primarily serve corporate interests in schools and society.[v] When in 1909 Marinetti positioned the futurists as "erect on the summit of the world," who "hurl" their "defiance at the stars!"[vi] his language finds close resonance with the words of Marc Andreesen in his 2023 "Techno Optimist Manifesto," when he declares, "we are not primitives, cowering in fear of the lightning bolt. We are the apex predator; the lightning works for us."[vii] The historical parallels between the Italian futurists and Mussolini and the frontier AI labs and the Trump administration underscore the ideological and political entanglements between narrow visions of technological progress with authoritarianism, epistemological control, suspicion of academics, the prioritization of speed, and transhumanist fantasies of human domination over nature. This historical amnesia can also be found in the failure to connect GenAI and the false promises of personalized learning to

behaviorist "teaching machines" of the mid-twentieth century and the disappointing legacy of educational film and radio that were once promised to revolutionize education through efficiency and scalability.[viii]

Moreover, the discourses of inevitability driving this project reinforce the power of a tech elite who benefit from specialized forms of knowledge (e.g. hidden algorithms, LLM engineering, etc.) mostly inaccessible to the public, even as they increasingly organize and shape public life. In turn, such inaccessibility contributes to the evasion of democratic scrutiny while concealing the material conditions which fuel technological "progress." Consider the juxtaposition of the almost ethereal, immateriality of "cloud-based" technological systems and AI "black boxes" with the rapid increase of massive, energy-consuming data centers. What we are often left with is a picture of technological inevitability that displaces agency for both humans *and* machines. Professional educators, across K-12 and higher education, are simply expected to align themselves with the inevitable change brought on by the force of these technologies or be left behind. At the same time, narratives of technological progress often obscure the agency of the machine, which acts on us in actual, material ways. For example, the intrusion of GenAI into Learning Management Systems and K-12 software jettisons the epistemological authority of faculty through the automation of various teaching activities. The shift to digitally mediated instruction reconstitutes the subjectivity of students and teachers as digital avatars while denying the embodied nature of teaching and learning. Repeated suggestions that GenAI can serve as a "thought partner" or "research assistant" anthropomorphize this technology while reintroducing positivist orientations towards research and knowledge.

As such, this special issue invites papers that take up questions raised and problems posed by ahistorical and immaterial narratives surrounding GenAI specifically, or educational technology in general. We are particularly interested in papers that interrogate discourses of neutrality and novelty surrounding technology in educational settings. Possible entry points include, but are not limited to:

- Historical/philosophical appraisals of technological neutrality, especially within EdTech discourse
- Examinations of technological inevitability and its relation to human-machine agencies
- Critical analyses of the materiality of technology, AI, and machine learning
- Intersections of historical-spatial analysis of digital/virtual education
- (Dis)embodiment in the landscape of GenAI and EdTech
- Neo-Luddite analyses of GenAI specifically, or educational technology broadly, in education
- Critical analysis of LLMs as methodological tools within qualitatively and philosophically grounded educational research

Contributors may be asked to serve as reviewers for other articles in the special issue. Invitations to contribute a manuscript do not guarantee final acceptance. Proposals should be emailed to both morgan.anderson@uni.edu and apickup@aurora.edu.

Timeline:

- **Proposals due (~1,000 words): July 15th, 2026**
- **Decision notifications by: August 1st, 2026**

- ***Draft* manuscripts due by: November 8th, 2026**
- **Reviews and feedback due by: TBD**
- **Final manuscripts due by: TBD**

Guest Editors:

Morgan Anderson is Associate Professor of Social Foundations of Education at the University of Northern Iowa. Her research explores the philosophical, pedagogical, and ethical entanglements associated with technology in educational settings. She is the author of *Public Education in the Digital Age: Neoliberalism, EdTech, & the Future of Our Schools.*

Austin Pickup is an Associate Professor in the Doctor of Education program Aurora University. His research interests focus broadly on educational research, qualitative inquiry, philosophy of education, and critical research methodologies. His work has appeared in journals such as *Critical Questions in Education, The Qualitative Report, Educational Studies,* and *Educational Philosophy and Theory.*

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[i] Maxine Greene, *The Dialectic of Freedom* (New York: Teacher's College Press, 1988), 22, emphasis original.
[ii] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (Vintage Books, 1964), 5.
[iii] See Katia Pizzi, *Italian Futurism and the Machine* (Manchester University Press, 2019); Selena Daly, *Italian Futurism and the First World War* (University of Toronto Press, 2016).
[iv] Jon Mann, "What is Futurism?" (February 1, 2017) What Is Futurism? | Artsy
[v] The White House, "Winning the Race: America's AI Action Plan (July 23, 2025) https://www.ai.gov/action-plan
[vi] F.T. Marinetti, "Manifesto of Futurism," https://designmanifestos.org/f-t-marinetti-manifesto-of-futurism/
[vii] Marc Andreesen, "The Techno Optimist Manifesto," (October 16, 2023) https://a16z.com/the-techno-optimist-manifesto/
[viii] Neil Selwyn, *Education and Technology: Key Issues and Debates* 2nd ed. (Bloomsbury Academic, 2017) and Audrey Watters, *Teaching Machines: The History of Personalized Learning* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2021).