

Digital Visual Culture: Of Possibilities and Power-Ups

Robert Sweeny (Editor)

To cite this article: Robert Sweeny (Editor) (2014) Digital Visual Culture: Of Possibilities and Power-Ups, Art Education, 67:2, 4-5, DOI: [10.1080/00043125.2014.11519258](https://doi.org/10.1080/00043125.2014.11519258)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043125.2014.11519258>



Published online: 16 Nov 2015.



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



Article views: 90



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Digital Visual Culture:

The gray box sat on a wooden desk, in a room reserved for the gifted program, glowing with a ghostly aura in the darkened space. I would race through my daily activities just to have the opportunity to enter this sanctuary, away from the whizzing dodge balls and skronking recorders that made up much of my daily life as a 5th grader. I, maybe more than anything, wanted to access this room, this glowing box, to disengage from my surroundings and immerse myself in the images on the screen, the pixellated ghosts that swarmed and swirled as I gobbled power-ups to turn the tables on Blinky, Pinky, Inky, and Clyde. **Pac-Man.**

This was my first experience with the computer in an educational setting. This desktop computer, an Apple IIe, was, notably, not used for word processing or mathematics, for graphic design or researching world cultures. It most certainly was not used for real-time communication or social networking. It was used as entertainment, as a mindless distraction from the world of playground fights, vocabulary drills, and classroom crushes.

The 5th graders of today undoubtedly become familiar with computers at a much earlier age, in their many forms and with quickly multiplying functions. However, a similar allure has been maintained: to detach from one's immediate environment, and to escape into a virtual world. Contemporary networked digital experiences offer new opportunities for disconnection and engagement, allowing users to talk with a friend across the room or across the country, to view a webpage that reflects the personality of the user, and, perhaps, to play an "old school" game like Pac-Man.

These contemporary experiences relate less to specific media processes and technologies and more to what I have referred to as a *digital visual culture*. This issue of *Art Education* is dedicated to the discussion of digital visual culture. The authors writing within speak to a great number of issues related to

this topic, in ways that reflect its contemporary relevance, its complexity, as well as its common-ness.

Jeremy Michael Blair describes his research in stop motion animation and autoethnography, in "Animated Autoethnographies: Using Stop Motion Animation as a Tool for Self-Inquiry and Personal Evolution." Blair suggests that the synthesis of these two methods can allow for reflection and resolve in future art educators: "Animated autoethnographies are designed to celebrate error, confess incompleteness, express regret, exhibit imperfection, and embrace not knowing so that preservice art teachers can be better prepared for the imperfect and humbling world of teaching."

In "Blogging, Zines, and Narratives: New Dialogues in Art History," **Rebecca Belleville** reports upon the infusion of digital technology with teaching Art History in her high school art classroom. She describes the complex intersections between a historical past and a technological present, speaking to the social and cultural conflicts that can arise, while also noting the urgency of such approaches. As she writes: "Our students have a right to access art history in a way that is meaningful and relevant to their 21st century lives, which I believe involves varied approaches to understanding artists and their artwork."

Of Possibilities and Power-Ups



Eric Engdahl explores possibilities for Alternate Reality Gaming (ARG) in his article, “Alternate Reality Gaming: Teaching Visual Art Skills to Multiple Subject Credential Candidates.” Describing the development of two ARGs, Engdahl highlights the potential for transmedia experiences in the art classroom, and how this potential will continue to unfold: “I believe that future students will help us discover the full potential of ARG, especially as the born-digital kids enter teaching programs. If the current generation of educators is, in Marc Prensky’s terminology, ‘digital immigrants’ (2001), then we must learn from the different brains, new knowledge, and experiences of the natives so that we can teach them more effectively.”

In “Four Approaches to New Media Art Education,” **Manuelle Freire** and **Erin McCarthy** offer the reader an overview of current art educational research that is influenced by new media art. “[I]t is crucial that educators develop and share art-teaching strategies that acknowledge the work processes that the digital technologies allow, as well as the unique aesthetic qualities of new media.” Freire and McCarthy suggest four approaches that can lead to this development: Collaboration, Appropriation, Programming, and Intervention.

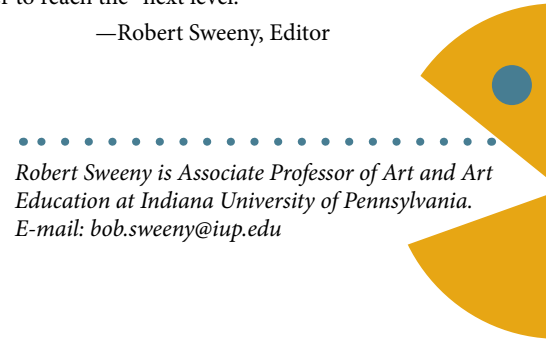
Paul Duncum draws upon complexity theory in his analysis of participatory youth culture and digital media, in “Youth on YouTube as Smart Swarms.” In this article, Duncum offers suggestions for educators interested in the acknowledgment of youth culture, while addressing aspects that might be seen by some as antithetical to the educational process: “To employ YouTube is therefore inherently to acknowledge the power of commercial interests and the ambiguities this brings to one of the primary educational tasks: producing citizens prepared to reject the unfettered hedonism of the marketplace and embrace a sense of collective responsibility.”

In “Art Treasure Quests in Second Life: A Multi-Literacy Adventure,” **Mary Stokrocki** shares her pedagogical explorations taking place within the digital virtual environment Second Life. As she describes, this virtual world (VW) can become the space for individuals to learn about various

aspects of art through engaged, ludic activities. She writes that her students were “able to navigate the links and follow procedures to find the artworks, use extemporaneous role-play, contribute to small group discussion with some critical awareness of VW ethical limitations, establish their own art quest, and later engage in social networking with each other.”

These articles present a glimpse of current art educational research and teaching. Explorations of digital visual culture such as those presented in this issue can offer art educators the opportunity to rethink traditions within the field, develop new strategies of production and critique, and to make fruitful connections with other fields. At a moment when public education is coming under fire, it may be relevant to look to technological models that are collaborative, dynamic, and socially engaged. This process will inevitably push art education further from a traditional center that many find comfortable. Though potentially unsettling, this decentering can also be productive; in the creative and critical acknowledgment of digital visual culture, art educators can face the haunting presence of the unacknowledged, the unnamed, the traces of previous teachings and technologies that influence and inhabit the field. Pedagogical strategies that link to digital visual culture can allow art educators to “power up,” gobbling ghosts of retrograde practices and restrictive ontologies in order to reach the “next level.”

—Robert Sweeny, Editor



*Robert Sweeny is Associate Professor of Art and Art Education at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.
E-mail: bob.sweeny@iup.edu*

Correction

In the January 2014 article “Assessment and Next Generation Standards: An Interview With Olivia Gude,” the paragraph discussing the influence of Visual Culture theories (page 10), the Pre-K standard should have been stated as “Distinguish between images and real things.”