



## Review of Petar Jandrić and Derek R. Ford (Eds.). (2022). *Postdigital Ecopedagogies: Genealogies, Contradictions and Possible Futures*

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### Introduction: It Does not Have to Be This Way

Perhaps surprisingly, the new book *Postdigital Ecopedagogies: Genealogies, Contradictions and Possible Futures* (Jandrić and Ford 2022a) may bring solace to a reader who feels jaded and overwhelmed by current environmental and sociopolitical crises. The overall direction of the book is optimistic. It is not unrealistically so, and the route to that conclusion does not negate the deep feelings of discontent and anxiety nor suggest that they should easily dissipate. The book instead offers the possibility of exodus—through reconfiguration of alternatives—and postdigital ecopedagogies will be key in supporting that, along with knowledge about how we got here and what is constraining us from seeing the alternatives. Attention to postdigital ecopedagogies extends the work of the recently published companion collection, *Bioinformational Philosophy and Postdigital Knowledge Ecologies* (Peters et al. 2022), which establishes the presence of convergences between biology, information, and society.

The book contains 14 very different chapters. In addition, it has a Series Editor's Preface, Foreword, Introduction, all incorporating good overviews of the content, and an Afterword that brings out its implications. This structure is helpful for orientating the reader in such a complex work, as is the division into three main sections. It is tempting with an edited book containing a range of chapters to read them out of sequence, perhaps starting with writers already known, or with particularly

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enticing chapter titles. That would be okay here: each chapter arguably embodies a microcosm of the key point ‘it doesn’t have to be this way’ and each can stand alone. However, a reviewer feels some responsibility to the reader in respecting the sequence determined by the editors and I am glad that I did. Combined with a fairly slow reading, this approach has brought some themes sharply into focus, and I have ordered my own impressions to highlight them:

- Thinking with postdigital ecopedagogies.
- Discerning the effects of time on our lives and ecologies.
- Challenging containment and limits for our postdigital practices.
- Acknowledging the roles of malfunction and failure in ruptures and continuations.
- Managing exodus while sustaining ecological learning.

I saw these recurring themes as some preoccupations for its writers—and now for its readers, reviewers, and disseminators. There are other important themes in the book too; these, though, are the ones that supported my route to the optimistic conclusion.

## Thinking with Postdigital Ecopedagogies

It matters what ideas we use to think other ideas (with). (Strathern 1994 in Haraway (2016))

The first chapter of the book (Jandrić and Ford 2022b) was previously published in the journal *Postdigital Science and Education*<sup>1</sup> and was circulated by the authors in the call for papers for their edited book. This was an invitation by the editors to take their ideas and run with them—I see this as a request to ‘think with postdigital ecopedagogies’.

The construction ‘thinking with...’ specifically occurs in two chapters: thinking with biopolitics studies (Bourassa 2022) and thinking with the backyard (Bazzul and Triggs 2022). While reading these chapters, it occurred to me that ‘thinking with...’ is an apparently simple but powerful pedagogic device that is relevant to the whole book. The construction can be rendered more complex by the words that follow it but *postdigital ecopedagogies* is a term that is deconstructed throughout. It covers a broad spectrum of uses (which can be contradictory) and can be applied retrospectively to bring past and future thinking together.

In the first chapter, Jandrić and Ford (2022b) trace a development from the critical pedagogies of Freire and Illich to embrace environmental education, and subsequently the effects of postdigital and bioinformational forces. The resulting complexity provides some contours for the rest of the book. Critical pedagogy did not anticipate fully the newer forms of bioinformational capitalism and colonialism, nor the viral impacts, both biological and technological, of contemporary cultures. Many collective responses are emerging that demand ‘a complete reconceptualization and

<sup>1</sup> See <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42438-020-00207-3>.

reorganization of the educational process overall’ (Jandrić and Ford 2022a, b: 14) from theoretical, ideological, political, and identity perspectives that are sometimes contradictory but may all have something to contribute to postdigital ecopedagogies as they develop.

So, how are the writers thinking with postdigital ecopedagogies? In Tables 1, 2, and 3, named for the three sections of the book, I show the chapter titles for ease of reference throughout the review. I have added a column with my view of how authors are thinking with postdigital ecopedagogies—what the phrase is encouraging them to do. This is just one reading, of course; the authors may have had other intentions and emphases, but I hope I have not misrepresented them.

Part I (see Table 1) maps out the context of the book, and two kinds of postdigital ecopedagogy appear in chapter titles: attainment and progress (Hayes 2022) and anti-capitalist (Ford et al. 2022). On the face of it, neither of these themes would seem to be directly about the ecological crisis. Nor do they have to be; the editors’ introductory chapter refers to ecopedagogies as ‘educational praxes that are not strictly about or for the physical environment’ (Jandrić and Ford 2022a, b: 4). Hayes (2022) does make frequent reference to the physical environment, though, and points to the liberating effects of an ecological lens on progress. Ford et al. (2022) discuss Marx’ view that nature and humans are abstractions, but their main emphasis is on the constraining effects of capitalism. Their recognition of the existence of capitalist postdigital *ecopedagogies* is important to establish: postdigital (eco)pedagogies have been around for some time.

The following chapter, by Richard Hall, does foreground the environmental crisis and capitalism’s role in environmental degradation—as well as the University’s ‘contribution to capitalism’s social metabolic control’ (Hall 2022: 65). Like Ford et al. (2022), Hall (2022: 69) wants to remove the limitations set by capitalism to release the ability to think and to ‘know the world otherwise’. Finally, Carr (2022) asks how postdigital ecopedagogies might help counter anti-democratic democracy sustained by wealth concentration and militarized institutions. He believes they can, and suggests influencing environmental movements and Green parties, thus ending part I on an optimistic note.

Part II (see Table 2) focuses on what postdigital ecopedagogies can actually do, especially in relation to resistance to imperialist and colonial practices. The pandemic features strongly in four of the chapters. For Bourassa (2022), the pandemic has provided further evidence of the ‘postdigital meantime’ — ‘an ideological and temporal formation of late capitalism that offers the future as nothing other than an extension of the present’ (97). This is a useful if uncomfortable example, relevant to all contemporary readers, whatever their views on the need for medical and political constraints generated by the pandemic. Bourassa offers a number of pedagogical tools for moving forward. For Misiaszek et al. (2022), the pandemic was a significant backdrop to their case study, as were other disruptive events at the time. As the authors demonstrate, ‘[i]n that context, generating a loving kindness and warmth with one another was absolutely vital’ (135). This chapter, too, provides valuable frameworks, tools, and techniques for supporting students in identifying and questioning things that they had previously never been exposed to: ‘Why weren’t we taught this?’ (133).

**Table 1** The educational and intellectual coordinates of postdigital ecopedagogies

Authors	Title	How they think with postdigital ecopedagogies
Peter Jandrić and Derek R. Ford	Postdigital Ecopedagogies: Genealogies, Contradictions and Possible Futures	The editors invite engagement in dialogue through context-setting and provocations to others to think with <i>postdigital ecopedagogies</i> (Jandrić and Ford 2022b).
Sarah Hayes	Postdigital Ecopedagogies of Attainment and Progress	Sarah Hayes gives an overarching example of <i>postdigital ecopedagogies</i> that could affect universities in general and also individual students. She proposes ‘new ecopedagogies of attainment, achievement and even failure’ (Hayes 2022: 36) for inclusivity and wider participation. In doing so, she challenges the neoliberal picture of linear progress through time—the great chain of being—and suggests that we need to ‘stalk’ academic policy that depends on automation to demonstrate ‘progress’ with widening participation. The progress of the students themselves has also become commodified, often through inadequate understanding of technology. Hayes reminds us that we are not chained to this view of progress.
Derek R. Ford, Katie Swenson, and Megan Fosher	From the Knowable and Transparent Individual to the Secret Thought of Individuation: An Anti-Capitalist Postdigital Ecopedagogy	They identify and deconstruct restrictive capitalist <i>postdigital ecopedagogies</i> , challenging views on transparency, individuality and knowledge. In proposing an anti-capitalist postdigital ecopedagogy, the authors are not opposing or denying transparency, individuality and knowledge, but are instead showing how they can be reconceptualized through seeing ‘the unfinished process of individuation and asserting <i>thought over calculation</i> ’ (Ford et al. 2022: 43).
Richard Hall	Compositing the Anti-Human University	He relates the ideas in <i>postdigital ecopedagogies</i> to the ‘deeply pedagogical, urgent and revolutionary’ question ‘How shall we live?’ (Hall 2022: 62) He proposes ‘compositing’ the exploitative surplus-driven world-as-is (especially as it applies within the University) as a way of recovering important experience and liberating intellectuality.

Table 1 (continued)

Authors	Title	How they think with postdigital ecopedagogies
Paul R. Carr	<i>Insurrectional and Pandoran Democracy, Military Perversion and the Quest for Environmental Peace: The Last Frontiers of Ecopedagogy Before Us</i>	Paul Carr (2022) wonders whether <i>postdigital ecopedagogies</i> can counter the instances of anti-democratic democracy that have recently resulted in insurrection, evidence of different rules for ultra-rich, and pervasive militarization—and ultimately, the destruction of the environment. He believes postdigital ecopedagogy is the answer.

**Table 2** Postdigital ecopedagogies in global anti-imperialist, anti-colonial, and decolonial struggles

Authors	Title	How they think with postdigital ecopedagogies
Gregory N. Bourassa	Biopolitics, Postdigital Temporality and the New Chronic: Pedagogical Praxis Within, Against, and Beyond the Meantime	Bourassa suggests <i>postdigital ecopedagogies</i> are needed to ensure that when we are in 'a state of exception' (as in a pandemic) we know to look out for it becoming permanent. He offers biopolitical studies 'for thinking with and against our present moment' (Bourassa 2022: 98) and decolonial theory for disentangling assemblages that have become our only way of doing things. He also provides the constructs of 'the meantime' and (exo)ecopedagogy (Ford 2019) to help us to expose and negate such states of exception.
Greg William Misiaszek, David Yisraeel Epstein-Halevi, Stefan Reindl, and Tamara Leann Jolly	Ecopedagogy Disrupting Postdigital Divides of (Neo) Coloniality, (Eco)Racism, and Anthropocentricism: A Case Study	The authors demonstrate <i>postdigital ecopedagogies</i> through a case study of teaching about socio-environmental divides. They show that ecopedagogical literacies can counter oppressive and anti-environmental uses of technology that are claimed to be developmental. Students are taught to 'read for' such problems (Misiaszek et al. 2022: 124) and to work towards imaginaries for a just and sustainable world. They are also willing to include examples where the pedagogies have failed or not yet succeeded.
Curry Malott	Pan-African Socialism and Postdigital Considerations	Curry Malott (2022) responds directly to the invitation (Jandrić and Ford 2022b) for new and liberatory <i>postdigital ecopedagogies</i> . He adopts their broad definition of the term retrospectively to conceptualize pan-African socialism. This brings new insights into the movement's history and mutual relationship with Freirean thought. His exploration of the music industry through this new lens highlights the interplay between what is continuous and what is discrete: continuing cultural life can resist colonial alternatives.

Table 2 (continued)

Authors	Title	How they think with postdigital ecopedagogies
Hugh O. Burnam and Maureen S. Brett	The Postdigital Settler Spectacle: An Educators' Dérive to Unveil a 'New Colonizer' During Covid-19	Burnam and Brett (2022) use <i>postdigital ecopedagogies</i> to support their decolonized pedagogic framework exploring implications of emotions derived from their walks during the time of the pandemic. In contrast, a highly-publicized space journey by Jeff Bezos happening at the same time highlights ethical and political questions about colonization.
Sara Tolbert, Mahdis Azarmandi, and Cheryl Brown	A Modest Proposal for a Pedagogy of Alienation	Three academics originally aimed to provide 'a messianic utopian vision for <i>postdigital ecopedagogies</i> (Tolbert et al. 2022: 195) but end up with a more realistic pedagogy of alienation, recognizing rage and disrupting complacency. Their experiences of hybrid teaching during the pandemic prompted this alienation, and reinforced concerns about decolonization of the curriculum.

The last two chapters of part II both contain autoethnographic accounts of responses to being in specific places during the pandemic. Burnam and Brett (2022) combine postdigital ecopedagogies with the effects of the pandemic and the ‘post-digital settler spectacle’ of Jeff Bezos’ triumphalist space excursion. Like other authors, Burnam and Brett ‘think with’ a range of additional lenses: a decolonized framework, the pandemic, the theory of the *dérive* (walking and reflecting) to ‘identify, disrupt and resist the spectacle’ (189) of the ultra-wealthy colonizer whose privileged lifestyle is accentuated by the pandemic. The key contribution of ecopedagogies here is to suggest that ‘use of tech, while inherent to the settler project of capitalism, has the potential to perpetuate inequities or to address it’ (174). In the final chapter, Tolbert, Azarmandi, and Brown (2022), describing themselves as ‘new settlers,’ find their hybrid teaching during the pandemic leads to alienation and loss of connection, reinforcing feelings brought about by neoliberalism and consumerist complacency in the face of attempts to decolonize the university. Their hoped-for utopian message about the potential of postdigital ecopedagogies does not materialize. However, their proposed pedagogy of alienation may give grounds for hope as well as embracing anger. They describe their venting sessions as ‘a process of transition and reorientation’.

The middle chapter of part II (Malott 2022) discusses neither the pandemic nor the environment, yet it provides a valuable link between the other chapters, especially relating to colonialism. His direct response to the editors’ call to contemplate new ecopedagogies finds resonances with previous struggles. He also ‘thinks with’ a reading of music production and shows how appropriation of oppressors’ technology (e.g., the phonograph) has allowed oppressed African people to continue and develop their own culture and resist colonial reproduction of the status quo. He focuses on the notion of ‘timbre’ (coming to voice) and uses the blurring of the digital/analog distinction to allow for both ruptures and continuations—a theme of all chapters in this section and indeed the book itself.

For readers keen to see what a postdigital ecopedagogy might look like, part III (see Table 3) is where to find them. Brown (2022) provides three examples from architecture, noting the problems of radical education in the face of professional accreditation and frameworks. But he cites Richard Kahn (2010), as others in the book also do, with respect to the importance of ecopedagogy in education for sustainable development. The reader hopes, with Brown (2022), that environmental concerns can be ‘signature pedagogies’ for architecture in the future and a second wave of ecopedagogies can learn from the successes and failures of the first.

Escaño and Mañero (2022) have two interesting examples: a MOOC and an audio visual project. The MOOC is based on a European project ECO: e-learning, co-operation, and open data. This is further indication that the three letters—eco—whether a prefix or an acronym, do not necessarily refer directly to the environment, nor even to ecology, even though they simultaneously invoke both when they appear. And the environment is inevitably a focus of such a project, especially in its utopian aspirations for ‘the construction of shared reality aimed at common good’ (240). The *Quadraginta* project, which collectively and creatively reflects on COVID-19 is an excellent example of an alternative to the ‘catching up after lockdown’ narrative highlighted in Sarah Hayes’ early chapter when she suggests ‘a more wide-open perspective might place value on other things that those

**Table 3** The aesthetics of postdigital ecopedagogies

Authors	Title	How they think with postdigital ecopedagogies
James Benedict Brown	Towards Second-Wave Architectural Ecopedagogies	<p>'Postdigital' already has a particular usage in the discipline of architecture and Brown (2022) critiques the narrowness of its application in general in the field. This is part of his concern over the current state of academic and professional architecture. However, he finds three examples of the first wave of <i>postdigital ecopedagogies</i>: Arcosanti—a new ecological city in the Arizona desert, the vision of the charismatic but contentious Paolo Soleri; Women's School of Planning and Architecture, an egalitarian learning environment separate from normative architectural education; The Centre for Alternative Technology, which did become a mainstream educational establishment. There is a pressing need to learn from these experiences.</p>
Carlos Eseauño and Julia Mañero	Postdigital Intercreative Pedagogies: Ecopedagogical Practices for the Commons	<p>Eseauño and Mañero (2022) augment the term <i>postdigital ecopedagogies</i> with notions of creative interdependence and knowledge as belonging to the commons. Sustainable production of knowledge is tricky; capitalism's attempts to constrain it have plenty of antecedents, with moves to turn what's public and shared into private and exploitable. They share two examples: Social Massive Open Online Course (sMOOC)—with the slogan 'free culture from education' and Quadráginta, an audio-visual project responding to the pandemic.</p>
Nomi Brynjolson	Ripple Effects: New Frameworks for Learning in Postcommodity's Sound Art	<p>Brynjolson (2022) applies the term <i>postdigital ecopedagogies</i> to the work of an art collective in Canada, Postcommodity, who have themselves often used the term 'pedagogy'. She explores several installations where the artists put an alternative world view into capitalist or colonial buildings and edifices. They see their sound installations as creating a pedagogical dialogue rather than being confrontational. There are debates about containment and complicity.</p>

Table 3 (continued)

Authors	Title	How they think with postdigital ecopedagogies
Jesse Bazzul and Valerie Triggs	Malfunctioing Right in Our Backyards OR The Strangeness of Ecological Awareness	Bazzul and Triggs (2022) don't actually use the term <i>postdigital ecopedagogies</i> but they clearly belong to this book, even though they express themselves very differently. Their own object for thinking with is the backyard, which they use to think about ecological awareness, pedagogy and climate change: 'a malfunctioning climate is a large-scale version of how all entities and objects function' (263). They also use alchemy symbols, poetry and other art forms. They conclude that 'mediation comes before being' (271) and we should stop seeing the environment as a container.

students have been doing, experiencing or contributing’ (Hayes 2022: 31). Quadraginta demonstrates such a perspective, as well as making the case for the need for intercreativity and knowledge as belonging to the commons.

Brynjolson’s (2022) fascinating account of sound installations similarly expands the scope of postdigital ecopedagogies and her discussion of their reception highlights that her contribution and others are not just about display but also about the debates and dialogues that such initiatives engender. Like Brown (2022), Brynjolson (2022) is prepared to say what did not work well and makes some useful points about containment, complicity, and the difficulties of resisting these. These suggestions that things sometimes fail set us up well for the final chapter where Bazzul and Triggs (2022) claim that ‘things become evident when they don’t actually “work”’ (263). And while these authors do not contribute any examples of postdigital ecopedagogies, they do offer the profound insight to take forward that ‘[t]he performativity of malfunctioning is the educative responsibility of pedagogy’ (271).

The analysis above shows there are at least 14 different ways of thinking with postdigital ecopedagogies. They vary in part because the authors add other theories and examples to think with, but also because the term itself encourages variation. As I suggested at the start, there are other themes that caught my attention and I address these more briefly in the following section.

## Common Themes: Temporality, Containment, Failure, and Exodus

### Discerning the Effects of Time on our Lives and Ecologies

Hayes’ (2022) chapter questions the pervasive idea of attainment as time-limited, linear, cumulative, and reaching pre-set goals both for the university and for each of its students. She cites Bowler’s book *Progress Unchained* (2021) with the idea of ‘unchaining’ from a ‘temporal chain of being’ to accept that progress can be ‘open-ended and unpredictable’ (Hayes: 2022: 31). Time is thus revealed here as something that has become commodified and that currently constrains how we think about progress, though it does not have to.

This is a fundamental point also relevant to the main author to raise the issue of temporality: Bourassa (2022) on biopolitics, postdigital temporality, and the new chronic, where we end up in the ‘meantime’. The meantime is an outcome of ‘the new chronic’: a construction from Cazdyn (2012) who draws a parallel with capitalism from the medical drive to manage disease by containing symptoms rather than effecting a cure or allowing a natural death. If capitalism is a disease, the regime that supports it leaves ‘the left’ with no choice but to manage its symptoms. The ‘meantime’ in such a system means that the future can only be a reproduction of the present: there is only one right way to manage the condition. The ‘state of exception’ in a pandemic and other crises is a form of the meantime that legitimizes many potentially nefarious uses of technology, legislative, and political powers.

This disempowers other forms of thinking and tends to privilege the western status quo which has apparently emerged from its own temporal chain of being through

thinking and scientific praxis. I am oversimplifying Bourassa's (2022) work here, but the need to recognize both his position and Hayes' (2022) is also discernible in other chapters, especially those authors who write about the 'time of the pandemic.' Temporality also has a bearing on the next theme that emerged in my reading.

### **Challenging Containment and Limits for our Postdigital Practices**

Temporal constraints are not the only limits affecting us though their linearity, chaining, and ability to contain may be present in some of the other forms that of constraint that show up. In this short subsection, I identify some of the challenges and remedies I have noted when the authors have been faced with containment.

Remedies might include hacking to reveal the potential of the technologies that attempt to define and restrict us, augmenting the 'transparent' data with 'the opacity' of thought and recognizing the value of transgression, risk, and even contagion (Ford et al. 2022). Hacking the potential of technologies is also recognized by Curry Malott (2022) as a means of augmenting and developing the 'timbre' of the voices of oppressed people. On this theme, there is a relevant and memorable quotation from Freire with emphasis added by Misiaszek et al. (2022: 121): 'it is *not possible* to kill or blot out the creative, re-creative and receptive force of consciousness'.

Yet dominant powers will attempt to blot this force out through mystification and Misiaszek et al. (2022) offer techniques for bridging and disrupting divides that cause such mystification. Hall (2022) tells us we can avoid the closed and one-sided system wrought by capital, making sure the necessities of life are available to everyone and refusing the closed ways of knowing and being that caused problems for people in the first place. Several authors, including the editors, warn us of the dangers of being complicit in capitalist forms of postdigital ecopedagogies, so being aware of and alert to any attempt at containment or horizon setting will be key. This book should help, including the Bazzul and Triggs (2022) recommendation to get rid of the idea of the environment as a container. It is instead continually the result of mediation and always in a state of flux.

### **Acknowledging the Roles of Malfunction and Failure in Ruptures and Continuations**

Several authors recognize the value of learning from errors and failure: for example, Hayes (2022) proposes it, and Misiaszek et al. (2022), Brown (2022), and Brynjolson (2022) each acknowledge it in their respective chapters. But the topic particularly belongs to Bazzul and Triggs (2022) whose ideas about malfunctioning are both thought provoking and pleasurable (which is what they intended): 'things become evident when they don't actually "work", when they are excessive in their workings, when we are compelled to attend differently to what we used to think of as uncommunicative materiality' (Bazzul and Triggs 2022: 264). By attending to their backyards, their pedagogies, and the environmental crisis, these authors have given us even more to think with. Rather than managing the symptoms by

pretending things are working, we need to be willing to attempt to cure the problem or find an exit.

## Managing Exodus While Sustaining Ecological Learning

I found myself nodding in agreement as I read the Afterword by Colin Chambers (2022): ‘Towards an Ecopedagogy of Revolutionary Optimism in the Age of Climate Crisis’. Though I did look for responses to climate change in the chapters myself, I appreciate the sentiment in ‘It may not be pedagogically and politically useful to *only*, and *ad nauseum*, point out the compounding climate catastrophes that are occurring as a consequence of our fossil-powered energy regime.’ (Chambers 2022: 281)

While many chapters do mention climate change, its cause was not the key point of the chapter. The authors’ ‘thinking with postdigital ecopedagogies’ (and a variety of other things) has proposed many more sophisticated versions of my own naive summary ‘it doesn’t have to be like this’. I am thus receptive to the logic of revolutionary optimism heralded by Chambers and hopeful that the time is indeed right for revolutionary optimism. Chambers’ powerful example that proposes that ‘it is easier to change the actions of a handful of fossil capitalists than millions and millions of working people’ (Chambers 2022: 283–284) may as yet require an exit from the ‘meantime’ it is currently in, but Bourassa thinks it can be done: ‘exit refuses the capitalist, colonialist, and imperialist modes, temporalities, practices, and offerings of bioscience, biomedicine, and biotechnology, and instead wagers on a surplus of alternative knowledges and ways of being to affirm and sustain life’ (Bourassa 2022: 96–97).

This does not mean throwing out bioscience, biomedicine, and biotechnology but rather it ‘disentangles’ them from capitalism leaving them available for use. This is what Bourassa, Ford (2019) and others call exo-exopedagogy and it may be the way forward.

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