Mentor's Introduction for Aaron Knochel

Kevin Tavin

**Associate Professor,
The Ohio State University**

What might it mean to consider how new media *performs with us*, as co-collaborators in the art classroom? What will change as we reconceptualize ubiquitous software programs, such as Photoshop, as non-human actors, collaboratively constructing our social field? And, what might it mean for teaching visual culture, when we "see" how visuality is deployed as the visual construction of the social through network ontology? Aaron Knochel investigates these and other questions in his dissertation, through a deep and textured exploration of the relationships between actor-network theory, visuality, and network ontology.

I have known Aaron for almost a decade, and watched his ideas grow and modify. In 2000, in Chicago, Aaron was a student in my course on curriculum theory. At that time he conveyed to me his interest in critical pedagogy and the impact of new media and digital technologies on art education. Over subsequent semesters, I witnessed Aaron synthesizing, in new and exciting ways, the discourse on critical pedagogy and new media with democratic praxis in the art classroom. Following his time in Chicago, Aaron continued to forge connections between visual culture, interactive media, and network technologies to prepare students in South Korea with digital literacies for the new century. More recently, during his PhD studies at The Ohio State University (OSU), Aaron began to question differently the social and pedagogical relationships that developed between himself, his students, and digital media in a general education course for students completing their liberal arts requirements. Aaron's dissertation builds on his previous work as in Chicago, as teacher in Korea, and his work as a graduate teaching associate at OSU. In this sense, he demonstrates a remarkable ability to reflect upon, problematize, and translate prior knowledge and experience into new research and practice.

His dissertation focuses on an analysis of visuality and actor network theory (ANT) to benefit art education pedagogy in a changing technological ecology. His dissertation topic is a unique comparison and contrast between sets of theories and provides a reconceptualized view of learning in digital visual culture. Yet, his dissertation goes beyond simply rethinking pedagogy—to the very idea of what constitutes the "social"—to a different ontology between social agents and actors in and outside of art education. In this sense, his research is primarily about the ontology of networked subjects and actors intimately bound up in the co-construction of the social and the visual. Aaron's work can only help enrich the understanding of learning, meaning making, and "being" subject of and in art education.

Aaron's personal and pedagogical interests, past and future research agendas, and critical competencies demonstrate achievement of an exceptionally high quality. It has been a pleasure to work with him and learn from him. It is with this great delight that I introduce Aaron Knochel's essay in this collection.