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Review of Tyson E. Lewis and Peter B. Hyland (2022). *Studios Drift: Movements and Protocols for a Postdigital Education*

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DOI

[10.1007/s42438-023-00394-9](https://doi.org/10.1007/s42438-023-00394-9)

Publication date

2023

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

Postdigital Science and Education

Citation (APA)

Marin, L. (2023). Review of Tyson E. Lewis and Peter B. Hyland (2022). *Studios Drift: Movements and Protocols for a Postdigital Education*. *Postdigital Science and Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42438-023-00394-9>

Important note

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Review of Tyson E. Lewis and Peter B. Hyland (2022). *Studious Drift: Movements and Protocols for a Postdigital Education*

Minneapolis, MN and London, UK: University of Minnesota Press. 98 pp. ISBN 9781452967080 (E-book)

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Accepted: 1 February 2023
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Keywords Studying · Learning · Studio · Drift · Educational protocols · E-studioing · Online education

Dismantling the Learning Metaphysics

Studious Drift: Movements and Protocols for a Postdigital Education (Lewis and Hyland 2022) continues Tyson Lewis's theoretical project of dismantling the learning metaphysics, this time in the digital sphere. The object of concern here is e-studying or digital studying. Lewis has shown elsewhere, in an article written with Christopher Moffett (Lewis and Moffett 2021), that the university lecture can be circumvented and profaned by turning attention to the students' gesture of notetaking. Lewis and Moffett invented a protocol of notetaking in which students were asked not to take notes as they usually do, summarising the lecturer's words. Instead, students drew diagrams, wrote marginalia, and noted their thoughts. The exercise was meant to focus the student's attention on the act of taking lecture notes, showing its strangeness and beauty as a gesture freed from any outcome. The article showcasing this experience, filled with diagrams and drawings (Lewis and Moffett 2021), makes for one of the most beautiful and radical recent publications in the philosophy of education. A logical next step was to tackle online education as a space of possibility: to enable study experiences while subverting the productive logic of learning.

Lewis and Hyland (2022) begin by showing a potential in online education that is not yet visible due to the exclusive focus on e-learning platforms. Given that online education is still new, by advocating for e-studying, Lewis and Hyland effectively open up the possibility of doing something else in this educational space. They show that e-learning is not the only way to think about online education — albeit it is the

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dominant tune we have all heard. They free the very idea of online education from its implicit connections with the learning apparatus and the learning metaphysics in which higher education is steeped in. The aim is to show that ‘the metaphysics of learning’ can be suspended through online study practices, hence that there can be digital education outside e-learning.

Lewis and Hyland (2022) place the educational challenge of our times in overcoming the overwhelming logic of learning which colonises the public discourse on education: ‘at its base, the problem stems from the overwhelming hegemonic dominance of the discourse and practice of learning in all sectors of education’ (Lewis and Hyland 2022). Learning is a peculiar mode of thinking that has colonised universities with its calculative logic: ‘Learning is the economization of education where education becomes concerned with planning and calculation’ (Lewis and Hyland 2022). In this growth logic, there is no education without learning, meaning a learner that acquires knowledge and competencies by achieving learning outcomes as milestones. The logic of learning is a logic of summiting, of climbing upwards. It resembles the logic of infinite economic growth, which has triggered ecological disasters and climate change (Raworth 2017).

What’s in the Book?

Studios Drift (Lewis and Hyland 2022) reads like a handbook of sabotaging learning to make education possible. The first chapter introduces the reader to the metaphysics of learning that has colonised most educational spaces today and argues why this metaphysics needs to be subverted through acts of sabotage in the same vein as pirating and hacking. In Chapter 2, the authors describe a new form of online education called e-studioing or making a studio in a digital space. Lewis and Hyland (2022) use the concepts of potentiality and impotentiality from Agamben, and the pataphysics of Alfred Jarry, to ground this new educational form theoretically. They describe a specific space–time configuration that is distinctive for studying. The logic of learning (and e-learning) is visible in the movement of summiting that is achievement of a (learning) goal through progress:

At first, the aim is distant, and seems insurmountable. But through consistent, willful experiences, the aim can be approximated one step at a time. Fatigue might set in as the learner continues the arduous summiting process, but the will simultaneously develops its own fortitude and resiliency. (Lewis and Hyland 2022)

As a movement in space and time, learning is experienced as progress and growth through resilience and effort. To oppose summiting, the authors present drifting as the aimless movement that best captures studying. However, drifting has a very similar structure to aimless browsing or surfing the Internet: ‘Browsing lacks both (a) an overtly intentional directionality and (b) the appearance of willful struggle that is involved in learning-as-summiting’ (Lewis and Hyland 2022). Using this distinction, they set up the problem of e-learning as ‘how to ensure the possibility of summiting (which is effortful and directional) within an environment that lends itself to effortless and directionless browsing and surfing’ (Lewis and Hyland 2022). It

seems that in the very medium of online space, with its collection of hyperlinks and never-ending possibilities of browsing, the summing of learning is subverted. This struggle that e-learning faces, as it is always threatened by browsing, is also a potential to enact studying online. As Lewis and Hyland (2022) argue, the online medium is ripe for enabling study, which is recognisable through the movement of drift.

The book's title is *Studios Drift*, which is also the authors' novel conceptual contribution to the philosophy of education. Drifting is a particular educational movement seen as a continuous movement made by the studier between manuscripts, aimless wandering, reading bits and pieces here and there, following one's intuition. Drift is the opposite of summing: 'These recursive movements of back and forth drag on for "long hours" in an indeterminate manner, and through this prolongation, there is no clear or easily determined sense of development, growth, or progress' (Lewis and Hyland 2022). Studying is radically open-ended and lacks criteria for success. University education, although it is often colonised by the logic of learning, has moments of studios drift emerging in its lectures, laboratories, or studios.

The book is a proof of concept showing that studying can be done in online spaces, provided that we have the proper protocols in place, namely protocols modelled after studios and studioing practices. Chapter 3 contains the actual demonstration. Using Studio D,¹ an online study space and its experiments enacted during the pandemic, the authors show how e-study emerged. After describing several protocols of e-study and their educational experiences, the authors conclude that it is possible to subvert the logic of e-learning through e-study. '[D]igital technologies meant for e-learning can become a way to intensify and extend studios drift, becoming a means for virtualizing the studio as the space and time of an impossible institution' (Lewis and Hyland 2022).

The Question of Protocols

The book reads both as an elegant conceptual analysis and a call for action to subvert the logic of learning through study and studioing protocols. The theoretical parts of the book are crafted with mastery, hinging well together in an assemblage of concepts. Meanwhile, the practical aim of providing a manual of educational sabotage through protocols could have been more persuasive, at least for this reader. While I recognise the experimental ethos of working with protocols in education, which I encountered in the work of other contemporary philosophers of education (such as Masschelein 2019; Hodgson et al. 2018; Schildermans 2021; and others), I also wonder whether there is perhaps a loss somewhere along the way in focusing exclusively on protocols as procedures while ignoring deliberately any desirable ends.

Lewis and Hyland (2022) — together with their guests — conceived of the protocols from Studio D as ways to subvert learning and lay bare the learning apparatus's machinery. Yet in reading the student's reflections and explanations delivered after performing some of these protocols, I was struck by the impression that the students

¹ See <https://onstead.cvad.unt.edu/studio-d>. Accessed 31 January 2023.

did learn something. When students reflect on their experience, they do not use the same sophisticated language as the philosophers of education who designed those protocols, thus making me wonder whether the subversion is not in the eye of the beholder — the designer of protocols in this case.

While the students were not asked to achieve a particular learning goal but to merely follow their curiosity by engaging in a protocol, it is hard to argue that they did not learn something. This difficulty in grasping whether students perceived these experiences as study rather than learning speaks to a fundamental ambiguity in studying. The problem with study protocols is that these have no condition of success and, hence, no condition of failure. The protocols can be engaged with deeply, but these can also be ‘phoned in’ by the students, writing something to fulfil the minimal class participation criteria.

I agree with Lewis and Hyland (2022) that studying is a wandering movement with no end in sight, that it refuses completion, and that its only end is exhaustion. One can study a verse from Homer all one’s life and still be far from the end of completing the study. However, the problem, as I see it, is that the meaningfulness of this study practice can be judged only from a first-person perspective, namely of the student alone. As a teacher, it is almost impossible to say whether your students engaged in studying when completing those protocols or whether they performed the moves dictated by the protocol to get it over with. Lewis and Hyland (2022) could reply that as educators, we should not care whether the students performed or engaged deeply with the protocol, since we should refuse the role of the teacher as enforcer, using grading as punishment or reward. To this, I agree. Nevertheless, there remains a feeling of uneasiness.

Sabotage or Empty Gesture?

As I am writing these lines in January 2023, Chat GPT² is the talk of the world, depicted as the next innovation threatening to implode educational institutions. Chat GPT allows students to bypass the reading and writing assignments and simply deliver a text generated by a machine learning algorithm that crafts answers seemingly human enough to fool the instructor. The problem with Chat GPT lies in the effortlessness of the entire endeavour. Can there be education without effort and attentive engagement? Studying requires effort and persistence, albeit with no end in sight. While Lewis and Hyland (2022) reject the logic of summitting characteristic of learning, together with its narrative of effort and mastery as self-improvement, there is still an effort and *askesis* implied in study practices.

With Chat GPT and similar tools, the educational experience is in danger of becoming fundamentally solipsistic. It is only the student that knows if they experienced something or whether they simulated the entire journey. Students can complete a task (‘Write a reflection on ...’) while entirely disconnected and disengaged. They write words that are not their own, bypassing any effort needed for studying. But this is also the case with the e-study protocols showcased in the book.

² See <https://openai.com/blog/chatgpt/>. Accessed 31 January 2023.

There is a point where studying and learning can dissolve into simulation and empty gestures if we only rely on first-person accounts of the educational experience. The protocols in this book have the potential to dismantle the learning apparatus by sabotaging it, but also, at the same time, these have the potential to reduce educational experiences to empty and meaningless gestures. The problem is conceptual and not unsolvable: we need something else in addition to sabotage and open-endedness to distinguish studying from learning, while also allowing for some effort and self-transformation of the studier. We need an approach for distinguishing the effort of studying from the summing of learning from a third-person perspective. We need to find a way of moving the language of studying beyond sabotage to something meaningful without succumbing to the learning apparatus with its infinite logic of productivity.

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