

## Post-National Art Education (in the Multiversity)

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It is a great honor to receive the USSEA 2017 International Ziegfeld Award. I am especially thankful to Paul Duncum, a close friend and mentor, for nominating me, and to all my friends and colleagues who offered their support. It is a privilege to follow in the footsteps of great art educators who received this award, such as Glen Coutts, Denis Atkinson, and Helen Illeris. Like many of us, they are entangled in different local, regional, and international art education networks.

My current position at Aalto University, in Finland, is “*Professor of International Art Education*.” The title originated at the time when Aalto University was in its early stages of internationalization—when there were very few non-Finnish or non-Finnish speaking academics, etc.—when the institution was trying to broaden their perspective, and be included in the global conversation. While I have spent most of my professional life as an art educator in the U.S., my recent experience in Finland, and professional work throughout the world, has helped me to understand the concepts of *internationalization* and being *international*, differently. Or, perhaps I should say I am not sure anymore how I understand those terms. For example, when I am asked what “*Professor of International Art Education*” means, I am often at a loss for words—saying something like, “I don’t know.” Although I could lament this confused state and simply move on to another topic, I prefer it to manifest into

something that interferes with my own understanding and comfort zone; to do something to me, for me, or with me (yes, even in a Lacanian sense).

I want to use this acceptance speech, to explore how these moments of enunciation, misunderstanding, and confusion might diffract the idea of “international art education.” According to Haraway (1992) “diffraction is a mapping of interference, not of replication, reflection, or reproduction. A diffraction pattern does not map where differences appear, but rather maps where the *effects* of differences appear” (p. 300). In line with Haraway’s concept, while I am still interested in what the differences *are* between “national” and “international art education,” (as in the differences between the National and International Ziegfeld Award), I am more interested about the effects of the difference—or, what difference does for art education.

When I look at my own business cards (or, should I say when they look back at me), I think about the meaning of international and internationalization, and how the geographical and political borders drawn throughout the twentieth century have shifted, and continue to shift. Notwithstanding the *Trumpeted* claims of resurgent nationalism, I am confronted by the underlying presupposition of the demise of the nation state as we have known it, and contrariwise escalating forms of globalization. For example, I think about some of our art education colleagues who work at universities that, in a sense, no longer exist solely in one place or another, but have multiple campuses, projects, and spaces of existence around the world. Without forgetting the corrosive neo-liberal and late-capitalist propensities, I still try to

imagine how the productive and agential qualities of this dispersal challenge the very concept of a university (including my institution, Aalto University). Perhaps in addition to traditional universities, we are moving toward “multiversities,” (Lars Bang Larsen, personal communication, December 18, 2014)– hybrid entities, where connections, entanglements, and post-disciplinary practices are pervasive through the collapse of physical space in networked culture. How would a *Professor of International Art Education*, like myself, map the interference of the multiversity and its attendant concepts?

One way to think about this is to strike-through my current professional designation, *Professor of International Art Education*, and change it to, *Professor of Post-National Art Education*. Although this gesture of erasure didn’t quite have the desired effect on the term aesthetics,<sup>1</sup> ten years ago (as Paul Duncum knows very well), perhaps this time it marks *my* field of international art education as empty and speculative, and my fixed positionality in that field as impossible and indeterminate. This is not a nihilistic argument that nothing matters, or a lessening of the need for art education in particular regions or states, or at the global level. It is not a plea to dismantle any organization or denude its power.

*It might* be, however, a push against the concept of a unified field that is imagined by difference and defined by topography. *It might* expose the confusion I have when trying to explain what I am, what I do, where I am, and which category (or region) I identify with, in terms of art education. *It might* illuminate rather than conceal the

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<sup>1</sup> See Tavin (2007) for a discussion on the striking through of aesthetics in art

challenge of identifying the “*what?*” and (especially) the “*where?*” of InSEA USSEA, NAEA, CSEA, and all the \_AEAs in the U.S., as well as the regional vs. world congresses, and so many other organizations and events tied to particular regions.

What does *National*, for example, mean in NAEA? Should I feel more excluded, now that I am a recognized international art educator? Does it signify the marginalization of art education outside of the U.S? Does it mostly refer to North American theory and practice? If so, what are the effects of difference? As someone entangled in many different art education networks, I often sense the tight grip of sovereignty from a national art education, and the blistering faith in unified individuals in that tightly-tied field, knotted together with all the taken-for-granted assumptions of who we are, where we come from, and where we might go. As a *Professor of Post-National Art Education in Aalto multiversity*, I might feel the permanent tension between art education’s determination (to do “something”) and indeterminacy of the parameters of the field (to be “somewhere” doing something), especially through topographical parameters.

Perhaps we need more post-national art educators who put together so-called super-sessions across the spectrum of conferences, or speak-out in special issues on post-nationalism in high-ranking journals, or we need additional awards for the post-national art educators, or we just take part in a broader movement that challenges national and regional thinking. And, while many of us are under enormous, and serious, threats—politically, pedagogically, economically, etc.—in this current era of increased nationalism, neo-nationalism, and radical

conservatism, the solidarity as art educators might be strengthened not only through local organizations, but also by the reality that everything effects everything, and no one teacher or organization is autonomous from anything, any more.

It may not be enough, however, to rethink our role as professors and academics, and the role of organizations for post-national art educators. Perhaps we need to also challenge the concept our students in general, and of autonomy of our students in particular. Are many of our “students” still the same subjects, seeing and being seen in visual culture, as they were described by Paul Duncum, myself, and many others in the first part of this century? Or, are they now more like seen and knowing participants, intra-acting within an infinitely reproducible circulating global system, that is always on-line, not dependent on physical space or geography fixity, and guided by the vectors and velocities of material and immaterial networks (Barad, 2003)? I am not sure these newly configured subjects need to be taught how to critically gaze at images that expire as soon as they are considered (perhaps this is post-visual culture?). Of course, this is not to suggest there is a universal condition or shared set of circumstances for all art students, everywhere (not at least due to different resources and power). However, it may be the case that for many children and youth in 2017, it the ubiquity of the global “now,” and the conditions, circumstances, events, climates, connections, cuts, interruptions, and ruptures constitute a diffraction of “the student,” we once knew and relied on for our international art education.

As a newly self-appointed *Professor of Post-National Art Education* in Aalto Multiversity, I do not wish to simply celebrate globalization and change, or be seen to merely be against the the idea of any national organization or a singular student, positioned in a particular place. Like other posts (postmodernism, posthumanism, and even post-truth) I would like my new post (job) to be after something—not just in terms of linear time—but following some sense of tension or disturbance, that in turn causes me to *be* after something, or, it (being "international" in this case) being after me (as in chasing me). As Malik states:

If we are. . .post-whatever — if we are now post- everything — it is because historically-given semantics don't quite work anymore. . .the "post-" is a way in which we recognize the present itself to be speculative in relationship to the past. . .The "post-" is also a mark of the deprioritization of the present.

(Avanessian & Malik, 2016, p. 6)

In sum, if international art education emerges and collapses through the indeterminacy of determinations, then how might its diffraction—not quite working anymore— point to the effects of its difference? And, how might these effects lead to something else—for the university and multiversity, and for post-international art education, where, perhaps, we are already exceeding the future of the past?

## References

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