# Ethics in Higher Art Education

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### Abstract

In this chapter I discuss the dissonance between ethical endeavours of higher art education and the aspirations of the neoliberal university. I start by exploring why art education should be ethical and how the ethical responsibility is revealed in the actions of artists, activists, curators and educators. I argue for particular ethics, following the thinking of Emmanuel Levinas. The collaborative nature of artistic creation has become a basic characteristic of the 21st century, through participation, community projects, collaboration and simply "doing together" (Bishop, 2012). In these events, artists, educators and curators are considered as collaborators and producers of situations. In this chapter, I offer a critical framework for community-based thinking, presenting, exploring, and critiquing contemporary and collaborative art practices. Ethical responsibility is discussed in relation to the role of participants and their possibilities of agency, through the concept of empathy. While empathy seems a topical and extensively used contemporary approach, it contradicts the neoliberal worldview and universities. I will discuss the tension between ethical education and neoliberal values that often marginalise knowledge as irrelevant in subjects that are not human, white, heterosexual, and able-bodied (Fraser & Taylor, 2016). In brief, this chapter discusses the attempt of neoliberal universities to prioritise able bodies over marginalised ones, and productive bodies over nurturing ones, and how that might be in contradiction to the ethical, critical and societal attempts of art education.

## 1 Introduction

A university has an obligation to constantly and critically reflect on the sociocultural environment and make an impact on society. According to the philosophy of radical pedagogy (Freire, 2001; McLaren, 2002; Giroux, 2011), the university remains a unique place to prepare students to understand and influence the larger social forces that shape peoples' lives. The university's role is to help students to critically examine relevant questions and help them develop a

broader understanding of what it means to live in a global democracy and how to develop a sense of social responsibility (Izak, Kostera, & Zawadzki, 2017).

However, universities – where many art educators are currently educated – have become very different places, where knowledge production is similar to commodity production, where things are prepackaged for sale to be easily disposed in students' minds. Izak et al. (2017) referred to Ritzer, who wrote about the phenomenon 25 years ago: "Knowledge is now considered to be a resource to be sold, measured, submitted to systems of ranking and accreditation and efficiency-oriented streamlining and impersonal control" (Ritzer, 1993, p. 8). What does this type of knowledge production mean in terms of art teaching and art education in universities? Is it possible to satisfy and fulfil the requirements of a neoliberal university – in curriculum design, for example – and at the same time develop artistic knowledge production? Is artistic and art educational knowledge production a relevant part of a neoliberal university? Is there still a need for a resistance to the new university?

Individualism is deeply rooted in the Western notion of what it means to be human. In fact, it is so well rooted that it is difficult to identify its ideological foundation. This ideology has taken many forms during history but has perhaps been taken furthest within the neoliberal hegemony (Aaltola & Keto, 2017). Individualism is a crucial part of the neoliberal era, including the idea that almost everything should be able to be examined and scrutinised on an individual, even personal level. In this chapter I discuss some of the ethical challenges of Western humankind in the neoliberal era, and how it might be difficult to develop an ethical and empathic relationship to the world when *self* is the measurement of the world and *I* am in the centre of it.

While the world is becoming increasingly black and white (for example, in politics, in educational and other forms of capital, and in the distribution of wealth, food and water), we should be able to create discourses with complexities and with multiple voices, including marginalised ones. Social, cultural and educational institutions should be able to answer to the ethical needs of people other than middle-class, middle-aged, white, and male. Institutions should be able to include crucial questions and imagine alternative futures and relevant knowledge also for non-abled bodies, non-white subjects, and non-human lives (Fraser & Taylor, 2016). This includes also shifting from solely human-centred thinking towards considering the lives of non-humans, such as non-human animals (Kallio-Tavin, 2019). This important part of ethics of non-human should be considered as an essential part of education, along with social justice matters. Effectivity and proactivity, which play key roles for neoliberal universities, have never been a guarantee of quality and value for art and its education. Values are elsewhere. Perhaps art educators are in a pivotal

position to create new practices in higher education in an ethical and critical manner. Bold and big strategies are needed.

## 2        Artists, Educators, Ethics and Institutions

Emmanuel Levinas's (2008) ethics and responsibility are founded on the idea of asymmetry instead of reciprocity. He argues that what I can demand from myself, I cannot demand from the *Other*. The radical responsibility requires I to put the Other before I, without an expectation that the Other will do the same. Levinas emphasises that ethics should not be related to one's own experiences or based on one's own needs, because the Other is always more than my subjectivity can comprehend. The Other is also always radically different and therefore always strange. Levinas refers to thinking that limits our conception of other people through our own sameness as 'totality' or 'economy' (Levinas, 2008, p. 51). Totalising is the opposite of *infinity*. A totalised world is the conceptual totality mastered by I, which means that it is mastered in only one way. The I that is at the centre of mastering a world in which there is a certain sameness of things and events, all of which are in their place conceptually, creates a certain familiarity or domesticity; that is, a managed home, or an *oikonomos*. This prevents I from experiencing the infinity of the other's world. This is the world in which most of us try to live unless, for some reason, we push ourselves in more ethical directions.

Responsibility is one of the most important elements of ethics (Levinas, 2009) and is also at the core role of (art) education. Art education that follows (Levinasian) ethics reaches beyond the self and respects the other's radical difference. Such a pedagogy might include elements of uncertainty, vulnerability, and non-knowing (Kallio-Tavin, 2013; Heimonen, Kallio-Tavin, & Pusa, 2015a, 2015b; Saarinen, Ojala, & Palmu, 2014). It may extend to include subjects that are so different from the self that they are different species, non-human, such as non-human animals, plants and other ecosystems. Empathic thinking is critical when it includes simulation, in addition to or instead of projection. While in projection a person concentrates on trying to understand *how I would feel in their position*, in simulation theory, empathy consists of efforts to see the world from the other's position (Stueber, 2010). Responsibility, solidarity and empathy should go beyond personal exchange and be included in institutional practices. Art educators have often sought to make a difference from within institutional practices (Tavin & Ballengee Morris, 2013).

Many artists, arts activists, curators and educators who work with people consider ethics and responsibility to be among the most important factors of

their work. The collaborative nature of artistic creation has become a basic characteristic of the 21st century, through participation, community projects, collaboration and simply *doing and thinking together*. "Collectivity and collaboration have been some of the most persistent themes of advanced art and exhibition-making of the last decade" (Bishop, 2012, p. 12). Collaborative art practice is often considered an artistically and politically critical and progressive practice. Artists, educators and curators are considered collaborators and producers of situations. This work differs from that of the traditional individual studio artist and renews the idea of what an artist might do together and with the community and as a member of society. Artists "are interested in devising social situations as a dematerialised, anti-market, politically engaged project to carry on the avant-garde call to make art a more vital part of life" (p. 13).

Working together requires a continuous self-critical perspective. Forming groups of people based on their social status or affiliation with a marginalised group, naming them based on that status or affiliation and perhaps not granting them full agency, are all significant dangers of participatory work (Kallio-Tavin, 2013, 2018). Natalie Bayer adds to this critique when she writes, "Furthermore many projects labeled 'participatory' don't really think about their methods and precise aims. Often they haven't thought about how to accommodate diverse participants and their visions" (Bayer, Kazeem-Kaminski, & Sternfeld, 2018, p. 26). Similar to the ethical struggles between artists and participants, Nora Sternfeld discussed how too many compromises are made in the critical practices of cultural institutions and with the market (Bayer et al., 2018). The ways in which people are represented, included, involved and given (or denied) agency is a crucial, ethical and perpetual issue.

Criticism has also been directed towards how right-wing, neo-liberal, and consumerist culture has dominated the art world through art market-centred thinking. At the same time, neoliberal practices have started to benefit from participatory methods. What started as a critique and an alternative practice to the mainstream art market's practice has lost its critical edge and unfortunately serves the market surprisingly well (Raunig, 2013).

It is important to acknowledge the flexible nature of neoliberal and market-centred thinking and recognise how practices that are meant to be ethical and critical might be adopted and changed into something else to benefit somebody's interest and profits. It is crucial to try to develop ethical, critical and collaborative art practices and be self-critical and self-reflective about the goals of the practices. Some critical questions towards one's own collaborative practice might be: What are the politics of the collaboration? Whose interests, agenda, ideology or orientation are being met when working and thinking

together? Who funds the practice, and for what reasons? How are participants chosen and what kind of agency are they able to practice?

In addition to their responsibility towards learners, collaborators and participants, art educators face increasingly complex situations within democratic and radical education and critical and socially just practices. Ethical responsibility should reach further than just face-to-face situations with students, participants, collaboratives, and reach the institutional practices. Levinas emphasises how the ethical relationship to the Other is more complex than just a relationship of two persons. The *Third* (*le tiers*) ensures that ethics is also political (Simmons, 1999). For Levinas, the Third helps us see ethics in a larger context of justice and politics, including the institutional practices where we practise our professions. Although a deeper analysis of Levinasian ethics on the Other and the Third is beyond the scope of this chapter, I find the concept of the Third to be an important philosophical critique of institutional practices, especially in higher education. It directs attention towards ethical and structural practices beyond singular and personal situations. After all, there are examples of institutions that have successfully made an effort to find alternative practices to the neoliberal university model (see, for example, the École de Recherche Graphique). I continue with the ethical discussion of the friction between the ethical responsibilities of art educators, some of which are described above, and the demands of the new university, where some of us are currently practising our professions. As my argument follows, artists and art educators working in collaboration with communities have created working methods that could be useable in higher educational institutions. These methods include ethics, responsibility towards others, and empathy. My purpose is to ponder the future of topical and contemporary art educational and ethical questions in corporeal institutions, such as neoliberal universities. The new situation seems foreign to many of those who are working in universities because, for example, of the loss of "academic freedom, self-governance, social responsibility, and knowledge as a public good" (Ergül & Coşar, 2017, p. 5). According to Fraser and Taylor (2016), the impact of the neoliberalisation of universities is being examined especially in Australia, New Zealand, the USA, Canada and Finland.

## 3        Universities Going to the Market

> Under casino capitalism, higher education matters only to the extent that it promotes national prosperity and drives economic growth, innovation, and transformation. (Giroux, 2011, para. 3)

Indeed, the university has gone to the market. Anybody who has worked in a university for a long period of time has seen a rapid change from focusing on public interest and the obligation to teach students to how to think critically about serving private market interests (Izak et al., 2017). University work now focuses on measurable results, international rankings, and positive branding, and is modelled by a "utilitarian set of parameters: academic performance, self-monitoring, accountability, auditability, flexibility, rankings, profitability, privatisation, competitive funding schemes, and so on" (Ergül & Coşar, 2017, p. 5). Departments function as small business units. Faculty members are assessed based on criteria such as number of articles, number of exhibitions, external funding achieved, and other key performance indicators. Although these indicators are not new per se (for example, the pressure to publish has been a common practice for a long time, especially for scholars working in universities in the US, the UK and Australia), some market-driven practices affect everyday university life differently than they did previously. This change has been drastic in countries such as Finland, where university legislation underwent a change in 2010, allowing universities to change their organisational model from public to private foundation (Finlex, 2009).

Ergül and Coşar (2017) went as far as to state that the university as we have known it has come to an end. They refer to Alvin Burstein's (2016) warning: "The danger today is not just the erosion of academic freedom and tenure, but the fate of general education, increasingly eroded by the pressure to produce job-ready graduates" (p. 1). The requirement for job-ready graduates, which used to be the essential difference between higher and vocational education, has become a major influence on the quality of higher education. In the fields of art and art education it is crucial to educate professionals whose actions are based on critical, ethical and philosophical thinking, not on a fixed toolbox. To be able to work ethically, ready-made answers must be resisted.

Academic fields have become battlefields characterised by competition and time pressure. "In order to hold on to their jobs, neoliberal selves must become flexible, multi-skilled, mobile and be able to respond to new demands and situations (Sennett, 2005)" (Budak, 2017, p. 42). There is also a constant threat of budget cuts and cost-cutting exercises, to the detriment of the quality of the work itself. Özgür Budak (2017) wrote about survival strategies that faculty members need to adopt and asked:

> How can academics reconcile the pragmatics of a flexible labor regime with the established norms that shape the collective self-esteem of the cultural producers? [...] Finally, can we identify an ethos that reconcile and legitimizes the conflicting roles and strategies academics are being forced to adopt to stay afloat in the academic field? (p. 42)

The conflict between professional identity and career strategies might create a dual identity of two simultaneous and parallel identifications and behaviour models; one is the essence of the profession, which includes resistance within academic work, and the other is practised daily in administrative work and meetings. The former might include critical, democratic and feminist ideology and might critically question the practices of a neoliberal university (such as by writing this chapter, although it also has the advantage of results in indicators), and the other settles with time-consuming, bureaucratic oversight in a flexible and adaptable manner, at least partially enjoying the multiple possibilities of the global university markets. Shore (2010) identified this situation as *schizophrenic*,[1] emphasising the radical detachment of a political worldview and actual political work ethic. Davies (2005) identified a practice of *dual language* that covers the conflict of playing along and, at the same time, defending the autonomy of the university. Overall, flexible faculty members may not speak about this conflict very often: they might be too busy to benefit from the possibilities of the neoliberal university and they might feel that it does not work in their favour to "appear so negative" (Frazer & Taylor, 2016, p. 17). These issues are rarely spoken of in academia because they tend to be treated as individual and personal features rather than structural ones (Gill, 2010). This is where the Levinasian ethical concept of the Third becomes important. To be ethical and to take responsible decisions, leaders in higher education should consider these issues as structural and as larger institutional conflicts rather than individual problems. The ethical dilemma that this conflicting dual identity produces also rouses the students' curiosity. Working with dual language and dual identity transmits a message to the students and indicates the direction that universities are pointing out for them. Because of the ethical responsibility towards students, the structural characteristics of neoliberal universities should be discussed openly and more often with the students.

The survival strategy supports faculty members who fit well into a competitive environment and are willing to live with this dual identity. Others might not survive. This atmosphere affects the selective processes used in job recruitment. Certain qualities and modes of operation are preferred to others. For example, we rarely see people with disabilities in leadership positions, but we often see white, middle-aged males as heads of department, deans and university presidents. Currently, in the School of Arts, Design and Architecture at Aalto University, for example, four out of five heads of department fit this description. As Fraser and Taylor (2016) put it:

> Following Conzales and Nunez (2014), we see neoliberalism resting upon the idea that 'all goods and services can and should be treated as if they

have an exchange value', tied to positivist, quantitative epistemologies; and marginalizing of other forms of knowledge relevant to and/or produced by subjects that are not human, white, middle class, heterosexual, able-bodied, and male. To paraphrase Hawkins et al. (2014, p. 331), the neoliberal university considers certain bodies *'out of place'* (italics in original) and prioritizes 'productive bodies' over 'nurturing' ones. (p. 3)

It is crucial to think about the selection of individuals and, for example, the criteria for tenure, as structural practices. Although the above-mentioned criteria are not directly listed (white, middle class, heterosexual, able-bodied, and male), these criteria often influence the selection process. Here the university reflects an image of the world's division of power. In addition to undesirable individuals, there are methods and fields of study that might not be as welcome in a neoliberal university. Art and design departments and schools might make exceptions. However, when looking at the university as a whole, certain areas, such as artistic research, along with arts-based research, ethnography, and other qualitative research methods, are given less funding than fields like technology and industry-related research. This has raised concerns, not only for art, but also for "critical pedagogy and how (so-called) marginal research topics are largely unwanted" (p. 15).

## 4 Art Education in the Neoliberal University

Art practice, the quality of what we consider to be art and how art is taught to future artists and educators are partially formed in the theories and practices of universities and academies. The impact of neoliberalisation goes "beyond interpersonal or the administrative to determine the very generation and dissemination of knowledge itself" (Fraser & Taylor, 2016, p. 1). How do choices that are inevitably driven by neoliberal values affect and form what we understand as art? How will institutional values direct education and curricula in the future? Naturally, art educational institutions have always been driven by certain values and dissension is based on pre-determined values. For example, some artistic media, such as painting or sculpture, were given an essential role for centuries and considered important for all art students to learn. Now it seems that these particular media are facing difficulties. Art made with cameras and computers are certainly suitable for contemporary art market purposes. They travel well and do not require a lot of space to be produced. While I am personally very intrigued by video art (it is one of the main media of my practice) and have nothing against any particular art form or medium,

I am sceptical about the lack of medium diversity in neoliberal art and design universities. What does it do for artistic knowledge production and dissemination of knowledge itself if the solutions for artistic knowledge production are communicated by way of neoliberal values? Furthermore, what is the place and purpose of art education in the new university? What might be the ethical challenges and important questions for art educators to keep in mind when working in a neoliberal institution? How can they think bold and plan big strategies driven by ethical and critical values?

Scholars have made several suggestions about how to respond and resist the neoliberal university when imagining the future university. There have been a few suggestions from art-related fields and from other critical thinkers, some of whom have been persuaded to be radical from inside the institution (Mouffe, 2010). Many of these suggestions are related to the use of time. Ergül and Coşar (2017) discuss academic work(ing) together and slowing down as an alternative to neoliberalisation:

> The alternative lies in slowing down, sharing responsibilities without calculating the hours, minutes and seconds required for the work, sharing responsibility without calculating the speed of working/burdening, and finally reflecting on our respective academic-political stances that resonate cooperatively through the work at hand. (p. 13)

Arts educators Tavin, Tervo, and Löytönen (2018) suggest opening time and space for learning without predetermined application, as an open question towards the present, as something that happens only after students have learned something. The time of learning should not be fixed and education should not be reduced to mere courses and credits. They refer to Tyson Lewis's (2014) concept of *studious play*, which opens up a free, even strange use of the signs, things and words of the world.

> Rather than rejecting old models for learning in favour of new ones, learning *qua* studious play offers a possibility to *suspend* the traditional function of words, images and practices in disciplinary education here and now and open up their applicability to unknown, even strange uses. (Tavin et al., 2018, p. 252, original emphasis)

Another art educator, Dennis Atkinson (2011), also suggests working with the unknown, while writing about pedagogy that is yet to become. This kind of pedagogy seeks non-chronological approaches to the time of education and suspends the predetermined applicability of learning (Tavin et al., 2018). It is

clear that this kind of pedagogy resists job-ready graduates and other practices of neoliberal universities. Resistance, activism and working with the unknown are part of what many art educators do in their everyday practice and teaching. While slowing down and trusting the unknown can be understood as forms of silent resistance, some art educators trust more active resistance. In other words, artist activism and political creativity of being and doing in the university can vary from small gestures to more substantial forms of activism (Biesta, 2011).

Art educator Dipti Desai (2017) writes about artistic activism in dangerous times and about the strength of artists, activists and educators who practice a pedagogy of hope and make it possible to imagine a more just future. These kinds of activities take place in K-12 classrooms, as well as in "museums, public spaces and social movements" (p. 136). Similarly to Atkinson, Desai emphasises how we need to question the naturalised way of seeing the world that we take for granted. Such questioning is also important to Levinas (2009), who describes how unethical behaviour is easy and effortless, while ethical behaviour requires more work. Similarly, we often settle too easily with projective empathy, reflecting our own ideas, experiences and personality onto others without pushing ourselves to simulate others' actual existence. By teaching art and art education students in universities, artist activism as well as passivism in the form of slowing down, are important ethical components of art educators' work. Desai (2017) recommends that art educators critically question the forms of artistic representation and explore who it engages, who it serves, and with what kinds of consequences. The emphasis is not on the artistic outcome as much as it is on the process, when exploring the topic of interest, "such as homelessness or gentrification through a critical pedagogy lens" (p. 137). After all, universities used to be places where students stood up and protested for important matters. University teaching should focus on getting the students to become interested in matters that do not directly involve themselves, contrary to what neoliberal individualism suggests.

## 5      Conclusions

Art educators often agree that art education has the potential to engage people and have an impact on people's lives. Researchers in other fields have also recognised the dimension of art and arts-based research (Chemi & Du, 2018), which could be utilised by other fields, through multi-, inter-, or transdisciplinary research practices. Some have suggested that the purpose of using

artistic methods would be to expedite non-artistic projects. Arts-based projects are sometimes criticised for not being driven by truly artistic means (Varto, 2017). These voices seek pure artistic-centred research, rather than using art for other purposes. Some other sources see arts-based practices as an opportunity to enable tools to increase creativity in learning processes (Chemi & Du, 2018). Art educators will need to weigh carefully what kind of research practices and what types of collaborations are worth investing in. This is an especially intriguing question when it comes to funding and deciding on hiring, or tenure positions. These considerations might take place in subjects of dual identity.

In this chapter, I have discussed the attempts of neoliberal universities to prioritise able bodies over marginalised ones, and productive bodies over nurturing ones, and how that might contradict the ethical, emphatic, critical and societal attempts of art education. Ethical questions remain relevant, such as how to prepare students to ethically and responsibly encounter participants in art projects and learners in art educational situations in the current era within neoliberal universities.

Empathy is not actually part of the school or university curriculum. Empathy is well-suited to promotional texts for politicians and in the social media, but when it comes to serious choices in society, 'hard' science and subjects such as entrepreneurship usually win out. As a school subject art is often connected to learning empathy, care and developing emotions, along with learning skills and aesthetic values. On the other hand, art has a long tradition of individual master artists, and art history includes narrations of successful artists' biographies. These success stories are based on narrations of successful individuals rather than groups or collectives. Perhaps the time for new stories has arrived, as well as old stories that are told in a new way in this new situation. Perhaps doing together, slowing down and standing up will be re-included in the art education curriculum.

Togetherness and a sense of belonging are important for many artists and educators in these (dangerous) times and serve as a counter-practice to individualistic aims. While some participatory activities have not always been ethically successful, and while the markets are adopting collective tools for their own purposes as discussed above, the potentiality of community projects, collaboration, collectivity and doing together still include an important nucleus of ethicality. As an ethical pedagogical project, and as a core work for art educators, I see a need to push these practices further. These practices of artistic and art educational collaboration offer insights into alternative futures. They may also offer alternative futures to higher education and might even offer hope for a more just and ethical future for all.

## Note

1  Shore's term is widely used in the literature on neoliberal universities and is therefore worthy of mention, although it is highly problematic from disability studies perspectives.

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