

ARCHIPELAGIC IMAGINARIES: A WORLD-CENTRED ART EDUCATION AT THE END OF THE WORLD

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ABSTRACT

This paper sets out to explore a shift in educational subjectivity that is appropriate to the Anthropocene era, which is split between modernist conceptions of rational, autonomous subjectivity and contemporary conceptions of adaptable, precarious subjectivity. The rational autonomous subject of modern education remains the ideological blueprint for much educational policy and theory in the western world today. The *ontopolitical* shift towards precarious subjectivity in the Anthropocene prompts a new conception of educational subjectivity beyond the valorised attributes of self-investment, self-interest and market return. Responding to this situation, we need to understand the ‘environment’ as an arbiter of educational subjectivity beyond the ‘market’ ontologies of the Human Capital Subject. While this might seem to imply a rejection of human agency, the aim in this paper is to explore an expanded, fluid concept of educational agency that is appropriate to dominant modes of governance in the Anthropocene and yet does not give up entirely on autonomy. The paper develops a pedagogical framework for the Anthropocene through the twin concepts of ‘archipelagic thinking’ (Glissant) and ‘world-centred’ education (Biesta). Linking postcolonial discourses on Archipelagic thinking to educational discourse, the first half of the paper maps out the co-ordinates of a ‘world-centered’ education. The second half of the paper transposes these theoretical mappings onto the methodological ground of contemporary art education, through a curricular overview. This section explores the development of an Archipelagic Art Education in the West Cork Archipelago (Ireland) as a concrete example of world-centred education in the Anthropocene.

While islands may have seemed relatively fixed entities when the discipline began aggregating in the 1980s it has become apparent that islands are increasingly in flux. Aquape-lagic relations are shifting and reconfiguring at rapid rates. To be an islander is, increasingly, to live in flux. To be an Island Studies scholar is, increasingly, to be scholar of flux.
P. Hayward¹

¹ P. Hayward, *Aquapelagos and aquapelagic assemblages*. Shima: International Journal of Research Into Island Cultures. 6., 2012, pp. 1-11.

Acknowledging the immense work that has been done by island studies scholars all over the world in the last twenty years, this paper considers how some of the central concepts developed within island studies can be helpful for thinking about pedagogical practices in artistic education. Concepts such as *Nissology* (McCall), *Tidialectics* (Brathwaite) and *Archipelagic Thinking* (Glissant) have gained a contemporary currency today due to the rigorous work of key academics such as Godfrey Baldacchino, Grant Mc Call, Christian Depraetere, Elizabeth De Loughrey, Carol Fabotko, Johnathan Pugh and many others. However, while Island Studies has emerged as a respected academic discourse in the last number of years it is still a relatively marginal discourse in academia, with ‘archipelagic studies’ emerging only formally in the past few years (Pugh). For example, in the 2011 issue of the *Island Studies Journal* (ISJ), a group of prominent Island studies scholars called for an ‘Archipelago Studies’ stating that “What remains largely absent or silent are ways of being, knowing and doing—ontologies, epistemologies and methods—that illuminate island spaces as inter-related, mutually constituted and co-constructed”².

A similar statement could be made about art education today, where discipline specificity, egological teaching and commodification have reduced art education to an ‘isolated isle’, or ‘silo’³ within the University sector. As a consequence of such ‘island pedagogies’, competitiveness and protectionism rule. Designers guard against artists, studio practitioners guard against theorists, theorists guard against historians and art institutions guard against each other. Thinking beyond these atomised positions, and in reference to the above quote, we could start by suggesting that, ‘what remains largely silent today’ about *art education* ‘are the ways of being, knowing and doing - ontologies, epistemologies and methods - that illuminates *artistic spaces* as inter-related, mutually constituted and co-constructed’⁴. This proposition suggests that we must necessarily move beyond traditional artschool models that are over-determined by the museum-consumer circuit, towards more ‘worldly’ artistic ‘ontologies, epistemologies and methods’⁵. The following paper expands on this proposition through the development of a world-centred pedagogical programme that is relational and archipelagic in its form.

² E. Stratford, G. Baldacchino, E. McMahon, C. Farbotko, A. Harwood, “Envisioning the Archipelago”. *Island Studies Journal*, 6 (2), 2011, pp. 113-130 (119).

³ www.forbes.com/sites/brentgleeson/2013/10/02/the-silo-mentality-how-to-break-down-the-barriers/.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

ARCHIPELAGIC IMAGINARIES

There are a number of key developments which have motivated an increasing awareness of island culture which are important for thinking about art education today. The first of these emerged out of post-colonial discourses in Caribbean literature which proposed an alternative configuration of western globalisation based on a complex set of relations between locality and world. Arguing against traditional colonial representations of ‘center’ and ‘periphery’, poets Édouard Glissant and Kamau Braithwaite emphasise a global relationality that posited ‘flow’ and ‘dialogue’ against ‘stasis’ and ‘dialectical thought’. Within this context Glissant and Braithwaite challenged the image of the island as an isolated inward looking entity, arguing instead for the inter-dependent, rootless subjectivity of the archipelago as an anti-dote to the boundary-drawing, colonial project of ‘continental thinking’⁶,

With continental thinking, the mind runs with audacity, but we then believe that we see the world as a block, or at large, or at once, as a kind of imposing synthesis, just as we can, by way of general aerial views, see the configurations of landscapes and mountainous areas as they pass by. With archipelagic thinking, we get to know the rocks in the rivers, assuredly the smallest rocks and rivers⁷

As suggested by Elizabeth De Loughrey, the image of the ‘isolated isle’ was formed around a colonial politicisation of the sea, she writes ‘one of the central but unacknowledged ways in which European colonialism has constructed the trope of the isolated island is by mystifying the importance of the sea and the migrations across its expanse’⁸. Similarly, Paul Hayward has conceptualised this emphasis as the ‘*aquapelago*’ to give greater critical prominence to the sea as a living space *with* islands rather than a navigational space *between* islands⁹.

Another important way to engage critically with such representations of islands as ‘isolated isles’ is through the lens of ‘Archipelagic Thinking’. In the Pacific Islands, Professor Epeli Hau’ofa illustrates Archipelagic Thinking when he writes that ‘there is a world of difference between viewing the Pacific as “islands in a far sea” and as “a sea of islands”¹⁰. Where the first emphasises dry surfaces in a vast ocean far from the centres of power, stressing the smallness and remoteness of islands, the second is a more holistic perspective in which things are seen in the totality of their

⁶ E. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997.

⁷ E. Glissant, *Philosophie de la relation: poésie en étendue*. Paris: Gallimard, 1997, p. 45.

⁸ E. De Loughrey, *Routes and Roots. Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007, p. 2.

⁹ P. Hayward, “Aqualpelagos and aquapelagic assemblages: Towards an integrated study of island societies and marine environments”. *Shima: The International Journal of Research into Island Cultures*, Volume 6 Number 1, 2012.

¹⁰ E. Hau’ofa, *We are the Ocean*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008, p. 31.

relationships. Within Island studies, ‘relationality’ is an important concept that unsettles ‘western binarism’ and provides an “alter/native” historiography to linear models of progress¹¹ that standardise island spaces through colonial expansion and modernisation.

Thinking with the archipelago denaturalizes space so that space is more than the mere backcloth for political or ethical debate. Instead, reflective of a spatial turn in thinking, it emphasizes more fluid tropes of assemblages (Tsai, 2003), mobilities, and multiplicities associated with island-island movements¹².

To understand art education through the lens of archipelagic thinking would be to support a fluid and flexible understanding of educational subjectivity, one which is embedded in an entangled locality and linked globally through the expanded flow of relations and networks. Whilst this relational dynamic is a key characteristic of archipelagic education, it is important to acknowledge that, as Johnathan Pugh has suggested, the relational turn in archipelagic thinking has taken on a very different focus within the context of climate change¹³. Highlighting the various ways that islands and archipelagos have become tangible representations of climate emergency, Pugh notes that, historically, islands were perceived as retreats for cosmopolitan subjects to escape the excesses of urban pollution, which they in turn ‘have paid the greatest price through sea levels rising’¹⁴. Reflecting on this problem in her key text *Wishful sinking: disappearing islands, climate refugees and cosmopolitan experimentation* (2010) Carol Fabotko argues that islands are increasingly subject to an eco-colonial gaze which reconfigures them as laboratories for experimentation with ‘end of the world’ scenarios, what she calls ‘canaries in the coalmine of the Anthropocene’¹⁵.

Referencing the writings of Walter Benjamin, Elizabeth de Loughrey has turned to the concept of allegory to expand on these new imaginaries, arguing that allegory allows us to ‘parochialize’ the Anthropocene through “a multiscalar method of telescoping between space (planet) and place (Island) in a dialectic or *tidalectic* way to see how they mutually inform each other”¹⁶. This is, of course particularly, relevant to Islands which have always been attractive spatially as microcosms of the continent or the world but in much more manageable ways. Within this context then, it is

¹¹ E. De Loughrey, *Routes and Roots*, p. 2.

¹² J. Pugh, “Island Movements: Thinking with the Archipelago”. *Island Studies Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2013, p. 10.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ J. Pugh, D. Chandler, “Islands of relationality and resilience: The shifting stakes of the Anthropocene”. *AREA. Critical Approaches to Island Geography*, Volume 52. Issue 1, 2018.

¹⁵ C. Fabotko, “Wishful sinking: disappearing islands, climate refugees and cosmopolitan experimentation”. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint: specialises in the study of development, change and underdevelopment*, 2010, 51 (1), 47-60.

¹⁶ E. De Loughrey, *Allegories of the Anthropocene*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2019, p. 2.

necessary to create a dialogue between the relational and the ecological dimensions of an archipelagic art education.

EDUCATION IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

The idea of the Anthropocene derives from the work of the Nobel-prize winning chemist Paul Crutzen¹⁷ who argued that we have left the Holocene (the official present epoch, which began at the end of the last Ice Age 11,700 years ago) and have entered a new geological epoch. Because of the environmental effects of industrialization, population growth, and economic development, this is the first epoch to be anthropogenic. One of the key issues of the Anthropocene is how to reimagine humans in biological or even geological terms, and to place our industrialised moment in an evolutionary and geological timeframe. This crisis brings the visual and plastic arts into renewed correspondence with the social and earth sciences and with the humanities, a correspondence shaped and galvanised by a shared purpose. The Anthropocene has changed the conditions and parameters of perception. A key problem is how to experience or gain a sense of living in a toxic, diminishing world. In many ways this is also a pedagogical problem, about how we teach planetary processes, geological timescales, and global economic processes in a way that motivate students rather than overwhelm them.

It has become evident that, while STEM and social sciences have dominated environmental scholarship and remain the principal disciplines for knowledge of the natural environment, any meaningful response to climate change/migration, biodiversity loss, pollution, etc. will require large cultural transformations. As anthropologist Anna Tsing remarks, “For the first time in my lifetime, natural scientists are looking for help from humanists in knowing the world”.¹⁸ Artists and educators, along with other humanists, must now think across spatial and temporal scales, from a planetary ‘shared sense of catastrophe’ to more local historical and cultural contingencies.¹⁹ Responding to this crisis in *The Anthropocene Crisis and Higher Education* (2016), Delphi Carsten calls for a transversal pedagogy that can navigate the static disciplinary boundaries between the sciences and the arts and inform students about the Anthropocene through different perspectives.

This ‘onto-epistemology’ (a way of being and thinking) favours inclusiveness, flexibility, mutability and multiplicity, acknowledging the entangled kinships between

¹⁷ P. Crutzen, “The Geology of Mankind”. *Nature* 415, 3 January 2002.

¹⁸ A. Lowenhaupt Tsing, “A Feminist Approach to the Anthropocene: Earth Stalked by Man”, talk given on 10 November 2015 at Barnard College, New York: <https://bcw.barnard.edu/videos/anna-lowenhaupt-tsing-a-feminist-approach-to-the-anthropocene-earth-stalked-by-man/>.

¹⁹ D. Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History: Four Theses”. *Critical Inquiry* 35, 2009, p. 222.

humans and a multitude of non-human others. Such an uncanny aesthetic formulation, moreover, requires coming to terms with uncomfortable knowledge about the unhinged world that humans have brought into existence.²⁰

A similar response has been taken by the Mac Plank Institute in Berlin, who in 2016 set up the Anthropocene Curriculum, which aims to ‘make previously uncharted, transdisciplinary connections visible and to experiment with new forms of higher education’²¹. For Ronald Barnett, referencing Deleuze and Guattari’s work on the uncanny, the unhinged ‘strange world’ of the Anthropocene prompts a ‘new universal’ for the ‘supercomplexity’ of global climate uncertainty ‘that opens up unfamiliar spaces and calls for a will to learn even amid uncertainty’; a pedagogy which encourages students ‘to come into new modes of being’²². On the philosophical side of this shift contemporary philosophers of education such as Philippe Meirieu and Gert Biesta have begun to argue that education is a space where students can learn to ‘exist in the world without occupying the center of the world,’²³. For Biesta, the main barrier to a ‘world - centered’ education lies in the emergence of consumer models of education which an emphasis student-centred learning as student/consumer “satisfaction”²⁴. Significantly, the consumer model of education is mobilised by a ‘language of learning’ that replaces the traditional, reciprocal relationship between teacher and student by an economic transactional one,

The main problem with the new language of learning is that it has facilitated a re-description of the process of education in terms of an economic transaction, that is, a transaction in which (1) the learner is the (potential) consumer, the one who has certain “needs,” in which (2) the teacher, the educator, or the educational institution is seen as the provider, that is, the one who is there to meet the needs of the learner, and where (3) education itself becomes a commodity—a “thing”—to be provided or delivered by the teacher or educational institution and to be consumed by the learner.²⁵

²⁰ D. Carstens, “The Anthropocene crisis and higher education: A fundamental shift”. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 2016.

²¹ https://www.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/2014/anthropozoen_curriculum/anthropozoen_curriculum_1.php.

²² R. Barnett, “Recapturing the universal in the university”. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 2005, p. 37.

²³ P. Meirieu, *Pédagogie: Le devoir de résister [Education: The duty to resist]*. Issy-lesMoulineaux: ESF éditeur, 2007, p. 96, quoted in C. Naughton, G. Biesta, D. R. Cole (eds.), *Art, Artists and Pedagogy: Philosophy and the Arts in Education*. London-New York: Routledge, 2017, p. 15.

²⁴ G. Biesta, *Trust, Violence, and Responsibility: Reclaiming Education in an Age of Learning*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 1-5, 2002).

²⁵ G. Biesta, “Against learning. Reclaiming a language for education in an age of learning”. *Nordisk Pedagogik*, Vol. 25, 2005, p. 19.

While the consumer model of education has its formative development in the late twentieth century its guiding ideological concept, Human Capital, has been around for much longer. Initially proposed by Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) as an economic response to dwindling planetary resources through industrialisation²⁶, the concept of Human Capital lay dormant throughout the first half of the twentieth century, until it was revisited by the Chicago School of economists such as Theodore Shultz and Milton Friedman in the 1950's. Expanding on the idea that education needed to be opened up to the possibility of financial speculation Theodore Shultz and Milton Friedman encouraged individuals to consider *all* activities, domestic or otherwise, as a form of investment in their own stock²⁷. Emphasising 'rational choice theory', Gary Becker described how individuals who invested time and money to acquire skills, knowledge's, and attributes were more likely to maximise their return on those investments, in the marketplace²⁸.

Questioning the various ways that individuals are prepared for these environments through educational institutions, adult educator Ian Baptiste highlights how human capital is intimately linked to education as the training ground for survival in the market economy. Using the figure of the *lone wolf* as an exemplary image of human capital subjectivity Baptiste explores how a pedagogical programme suited to the human capital subject would be characterise key three key principles. Firstly, they would have to be 'apolitical' because, according to the rules of the market 'consensus would be assumed a priori, not sought through political struggle' and where, 'little or no attempt would be made to interrogate learners needs, to question their appropriateness, to ascertain how they are formulated, or to determine whose interests are best and least served'²⁹. Secondly, an education by human capital must be adaptive and promote adaptive learning so that the subject is 'sufficiently flexible in order to stay one step ahead of the fluctuations and instabilities of the market'³⁰. Finally, a pedagogical programme adapted toward the advantage of the lone wolf would be fundamentally individualistic, where 'each learner would simply stock up enough ammunition and face the world as an educational Rambo'³¹.

In debates about environmental crisis, economic austerity, and developmental education, 'resilience' has also emerged as a keyword. For example, we are told that

²⁶ A. Smith, *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations*. Edited by E. Cannan. London: Methuen, 1904.

²⁷ P. Bouchard, *Human capital and the knowledge economy. Contexts of Adult Education: Canadian readings in adult education*. Toronto: Thompson Publishing, 2006.

²⁸ G. S. Becker, *The Economic Way of Looking at Life*. Nobel Prize in Economics documents 1992-1, Nobel Prize Committee.

²⁹ I. Baptiste, *Educating lone wolves: Pedagogical implications of human capital theory*. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 51, 2001, p. 196.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

West Cork beat the recession through resilient creativity³², the ‘shell-shocked’ residents of Paradise, California, are lauded for their resilience in the face of destructive wildfires³³ and current Irish educational policy promotes resilience as a requirement for wellbeing³⁴. These are now familiar stories of how the resilient subject makes do, adapts, and survives. For political scientist Julian Reid, adaptability, utility maximisation and market flexibility are the economic pillars of a neo-liberal subjectivity that came to be defined in the late 20th century as the ‘development- security nexus’³⁵. Highlighting neoliberalism’s capacity to appropriate its external antagonisms Reid argues that the emerging ‘resilient subject’ did not develop out of classical neo-liberal politics, but rather out of the alternative, oppositional discourses to neo-liberalism of sustainable development who take their concept of resilience derives directly from ecology, referring to the ‘buffer capacities’ of living systems; their ability to ‘absorb perturbations’³⁶. Significantly within this analysis Reid argues that the ‘resilient subject’ is increasingly equated with the poor and the vulnerable and with environmental disaster³⁷. Whilst resilience is vital to face the growing difficulties of the Anthropocene, the concern here is that current discourses which couple an ecological subject with an economic subject replace the imaginative capacities and political tools of collective bargaining with those of individual survival and adaptation to the market economy and ecological crisis. As Julian Reid suggests,

The resilient subject is a subject which must permanently struggle to accommodate itself in the world. Not a subject which can conceive of changing the world, its structures, its conditions of possibility. But a subject which accepts the disastrousness of the world it lives in. Building resilient subjects involves the deliberate disabling of the political habits, tendencies and capacities of peoples and replacing them with adaptive ones.³⁸

Challenging the emergence of these adaptive subjectivities within economic and ecological discourse, David Chandler identifies three dominant modes of governance appropriate to the Anthropocene, they are, *Mapping, Sensing, Hacking*³⁹. Pointing away from modernist understandings of governance, each mode provides a “distinct conceptualisation of governance in a world framed as complex, entangled

³² RTE, July 2018.

³³ *The Guardian*, November 2018.

³⁴ Department of Education and Skills, *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice, 2018- 2013*, 2018.

³⁵ J. Reid, “The disastrous and politically debased subject of resilience”. *Development Dialogue*, 58, 2012, p. 4.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ D. Chandler, *Ontopolitics in the Anthropocene. An Introduction to Mapping, Sensing, Hacking*. London-New-York: Routledge, 2018.

and unpredictable”⁴⁰. Where *Mapping* gathers historical and ‘empirical knowledge’, *Sensing* engages with contemporary ‘creative assemblages’ outside of empirical data, and ‘emphasizing an intuitive experiential response to the complexity of the environment’⁴¹. Finally, *Hacking* encourages imaginative action and ‘new creative ways of engaging on the basis of repurposing, repositioning and finding the play in already existing arrangements and practices’⁴². While these modes of governance define our responses to the Anthropocene as affirmative of the Anthropocene, they should can also be understood as critical concepts to explore new modes of educational subjectivity beyond “resilient subjectivity”. In the second half of this paper, these modes of governance will be used schematically to develop a curricular framework that is ‘world-centered’.

WORLD CENTRED EDUCATION

In a short reflection on art education in schooling, *Letting Art Teach (2018)*, Gert Biesta defends art education against its instrumentalisation in current educational policies and practices, where art is validated through either economic or developmental logics. Alternatively, Biesta makes an existential case for art as a way for students to have a unique dialogue with the world outside of standard forms of educational measurement⁴³. World-centered education challenges the dominant expressivist approaches to art education ‘which argue that the primary educational value of art lies in the opportunity for students to express their unique identities. Such approaches ignore the ways that the realities of the world exist beyond individual desires and challenge the logic of the ego’⁴⁴. To get beyond such ego-logical forms of learning and teaching the teacher must take on the responsibility of turning their students attention toward the world, to open themselves to being taught by the world.

Importantly for Biesta, to be taught by the world is to be in dialogue with the world, and this dialogue can help students to be in the world in a ‘grown-up’ way. However, this grown-up-ness is not couched in developmental terms, it is not about forming a developmental trajectory through key stages, towards a final end or goal. It is rather, a mode of being, ways of existing. In this sense, the infantile mode of being ‘is totally determined and controlled by our desires, by pursuing our desires and fulfilling our desires’, whereas a grown-up mode of being would refer to a mode

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ G. Biesta, *Letting Art Teach: Art education ‘after’ Joseph Beuys*. Arnhem: ArtEZ Press, 2018, p. 70.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

of being where ‘we are not subjected to our desires –where we are not the object of our desires’ and where the key educational question is “whether what I desire is what I should desire, whether it is desirable for my own life, my life with others, on a planet that only has a limited capacity for fulfilling our desires”⁴⁵ It is within this context that Biesta refers to Gayatri Spivak’s formulation of the educational process as the ‘uncoercive rearrangement of desires’⁴⁶.

Contrary to constructivist modes of education where the student is the ‘event’, in a world-centered education the event exists only as a possibility of interruption of the student’s sovereignty, through their dialogue with the world. Supporting an encounter with the world means supporting an encounter with, what Deborah Britzman calls “difficult knowledge”⁴⁷. Negotiating “difficult knowledge” is often slow and inefficient and because of this it risks exclusion from the optimized curriculum. For these reasons, the educational task must be to provide consistency between the interruption of the event of ‘difficult knowledge’ and the enquiry of student, through three interlinked processes, “trust without ground (learners willing to take a risk); transcendental violence (teachers asking the difficult questions); and responsibility without knowledge (teachers taking responsibility for the ‘subjectivity’ of the student)”⁴⁸. In this sense then, an ‘evental education’ can be understood as an intervention into the ‘subjectivity’ of the student to enable a shift to a new ontological ground, one which is equal parts: subject / world / economy.

To support this aim, a *World Centered* theoretical framework could be based on Gert Biesta’s ecology of educational practice, through three key educational dimensions: *qualification, socialisation, and subjectivisation*⁴⁹. Through *qualification*, students would gain the skills and knowledge needed to develop an economically sustainable life. Through socially engaged practices students would contribute to the social life of the community, develop new relational intersections between the arts, their institutions, and their localities. Finally, through critical art practices students would realise their imaginative capacity to develop a critical agency, to speak back to the community and the world. Bypassing the often-reductive binary discourses in education between economy and society this framework encourages ‘complexity’ and ‘balance’ as guiding tools for educational purpose.

An appropriate model of educational subjectivity for the Anthropocene, a World Centered education re-centers the world and the environment as active

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ A. Pitt, D. Britzman, “Speculation on qualities of difficult knowledge in teaching and learning: An experiment in psychoanalytic research”. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 2003, p. 16.

⁴⁸ G. Biesta, *Trust, Violence, and Responsibility...*, p. 32.

⁴⁹ G. Biesta, *Beyond learning. Democratic education for a human future*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

agents in the formation of educational subjects. Whilst it is important to support the emergence of subjectivity and agency in these educational contexts, it is equally important that a world-centred response to the Anthropocene recognises the agency of non-human actors. Educator Karen Murriss has sought to do this by rethinking educational subjectivity through an agential, inter-species framework based on the work of Karen Barad who argues that “agency is an enactment and that matter is a relational and active participant in the world’s becoming”⁵⁰. Challenging the ‘human exceptionalism’ at the heart of Biesta’s ethics of subjectivity, Murriss points towards a crisis within modernist epistemologies of nature and environment, which ‘assumes that the knowing subject has so-called ‘objective’ access to this world ‘out there’, at a distance’⁵¹. Emphasising how critical posthumanists like Barad have expanded our language capacity to include interspecies being she writes, “we can now describe much more intricately and robustly how human beings – not just their minds but their bodies, their microbiomes, their modes of communication and so on – are enmeshed in and interact with the nonhuman world”⁵².

Managing the tension between these educational epistemologies (Modernist/Anthropocene) and their attendant educational subjectivities (rational/ adaptive) is an important educational challenge in the Anthropocene. The next section will map out a curricular framework that attempts to navigate these tensions in a productive manner through a world-centred education.

MA ART AND ENVIRONMENT (MAAE)

Developed out of an already established BA in Visual Art on Sherkin Island (West Cork), the MA Art and Environment aimed to explore Archipelagic Thinking as a philosophy of relation/becoming that can support socially engaged arts methodologies for navigating local environments. These aims are developed through three key dimensions: (1) *Programme Philosophy*. Developing an innovative intellectual framework for navigating environmental change. (2) *Conceptual Grammar*. Developing socially engaged, artistic research practices within archipelagic contexts (3) *Object of Study*. Establishing sustainable educational provision for the study of environmental arts across diverse island communities. The following curricular overview outlines how these elements have been instrumentalised in the development of an archipelagic art education for the Anthropocene.

⁵⁰ K. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007, p. 136.

⁵¹ K. Murriss, “Reconfiguring educational relationality in education: the educator as pregnant stingray”. *Journal of Education*, n.69, 2017, pp. 117-138.

⁵² N. Lennard, C. Wolfe, “Is Humanism really humane?”, Interview with Cary Wolfe. *The New York Times*, Jan. 9, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/09/opinion/is-humanism-really-humane.html>.

Programme Philosophy: Archipelagic Thinking: The concept of the archipelago will be used as both a specific and a generalizable geo-historical framework for mapping local communities and environmental habitats on Islands. Pedagogically it is understood as a heuristic or methodological framework for expanding relational and socially engaged practices within the Anthropocene. Through these practices the programme will engage with islands as models of coexistent environmental praxis rather than temporary sites of aesthetic excavation.

In his macro-use of the concept of archipelagic thinking, Glissant argued for a perception of the world beyond dialectical thinking, beyond continental/island separation, for a ‘world in relation’⁵³. In his micro-aesthetic deployment of the concept, Glissant explored disciplinary transgression between academic disciplines and art forms, composing poem/philosophy/story in a process of ‘creolisation’⁵⁴. The curriculum architecture of the MAAE will develop a similar ‘creolisation’ of disciplinary border transgressions, between island communities, art forms and academic research. This composition of theory and practice is explored through multidisciplinary methods that will equip students to engage with island communities and develop new forms of spatial aesthetic research. Within this context the MAAE programme will develop models of contributory research across multiple regions, opening up new spaces for dialogical exchange, and providing a mechanism for:

- Knowledge sharing across disciplines, with Isolated Islands.
- Support Island governance in order to connect local and international communities.
- Create new forms of artistic research and education that illuminate the value of archipelagic thinking for the Anthropocene.

Taking a transdisciplinary approach this project will produce new research capacities in environmental art, digital pedagogy and philosophy through the *Conceptual Grammar* of Socially Engaged Arts Practice, Artistic Research and Contributory Research.

Conceptual Grammar. Artistic research is a fluid form of embedded research that enables interdisciplinary engagements between artistic practices and academic discourse. A significant methodology for broadening perspectives of traditional approaches to globalism, Artistic research incorporates unpredictable entry points and emphasises unforeseen consequences that are continually (re)creating, (re)articulating and (re)imagining new forms of engagement in the public realm. Within this shift there has been a deepening engagement within the visual arts within the social

⁵³ É. Glissant, *Treatise On the Whole World*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

sciences, environmental sciences and education, contributing critical perspectives to these subjects. Specifically, in the ‘pedagogical turn’⁵⁵ artists have reconfigured the structures, frameworks and methodologies of educational practice through the aesthetic ideals of social sculpture and public pedagogy⁵⁶. Due also to globalisation, these artistic practices have expanded beyond traditional boundaries and borders⁵⁷. Understood as the ‘relational’ or ‘social turn’, these expanded practices have brought artists into contact with non-traditional art communities where social engagement and relational forms have become central to the artist’s operational toolbox.

Expanding on these shifts, the framework of archipelagic thinking as a ‘relational form’ enables a move from the concrete local to the metaphorical and the macro. It is this multi-scalar concept of network that makes the archipelagic an appropriate contemporary imaginary for thinking relational practice and education in the Anthropocene. Contributory research is premised on collaboration, creativity, and intervention to systematically re-value the acquisition of knowledge through research activities that occur outside of centre/periphery binary definitions of research. The incorporation of artistic methods into research is not meant to merely illustrate island culture but participates in the co-production of knowledge with multiple island communities through creative methodologies. In this sense, the MA Art and Environment will function as a practice of what Kamau Brathwaite called, *tidalectics*; that is, as “technologies for un-islanding”⁵⁸.

Object of Study: Environment: As E. De Loughrey has suggested, to understand the future of island culture in the Anthropocene we need to first develop an archipelagic history of the structure of world history, which she calls *Archipelagraphy*⁵⁹. *Archipelagraphy* can be understood as a theoretical framework for thinking the historical relation between continents and islands, ‘a shifting history between colonial power, economic expansion and environmental change’⁶⁰. Engaging with the concept of *Archipelagraphy* across multiple geographical sites, MAAE will foster knowledge exchange between different island cultures with established artistic structures and practices, through a unique set of pedagogical approaches. Through a world-centered pedagogical framework, the MAAE will support collaboration and

⁵⁵ M. Wilson, P. O’Neill, *Curating and the Educational Turn*. London: Open Editions, 2010.

⁵⁶ <http://theoria.art-zoo.com/i-am-searching-for-field-character-joseph-beuys/>.

⁵⁷ M. Kwon, *One Place after Another. Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002.

⁵⁸ J. Pugh, J. “Island Movements...”, p. 148.

⁵⁹ *Routes and Roots. Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*

communication between archipelagic regions, enhancing connectivity and creativity within island communities, through ‘nissological knowledge’.

Originally coined by A. A. Moles⁶¹ and later popularised in the 1990’s by Christian Depreatere, the concept of Nissology can be understood as “*the study of islands in their own terms*”⁶². It is a concept that developed in response to the often reductive and phobic perspective of islands as ‘insular’ and ‘backward’⁶³. As suggested by Edmond & Smith, the archipelagic approach sees the island as “a model, rather than simply a site” of investigation, it reinforces ‘the theoretical, metaphorical, real and empirical power and potential of the archipelago: of seas studded with islands; island chains; relations that may embrace equivalence, mutual relation and difference in signification’⁶⁴. Contrary to the ‘continental’ view of island culture, *nissological* approaches to island knowledge focus on the complexity of islanders relation to environment, migration and flow.

Combining historical discourses on Archipelagic thinking with current environmental, social and humanistic research on the Anthropocene can challenge key problematics in the western perception of the Anthropocene and provide an alternative image of heterogeneity and plurality to the mainstream image of homogeneity and generality (since the very term “Anthropos” indicates a general humanity responsible of climate change and the damage of biosphere). Taking a transdisciplinary approach this study will develop novel forms of problem-driven research involving various social, scientific, epistemic, and political re- configurations⁶⁵. Through the curriculum structure of *Mapping, Sensing and Hacking* the theoretical dimension of archipelagic thinking will be transposed to the methodological ground of the programme

CURRICULUM STRUCTURE: MAPPING, SENSING, HACKING

Similar to William Pinar’s disciplinary conception of curriculum, the processes of *Mapping, Sensing, Hacking* form both vertical and horizontal engagements with curriculum and knowledge production. In Pinar’s model the vertical conception of knowledge concerns the intellectual histories and contexts of a particular enquiry (Mapping), whereas horizontal explorations are informed by circumstantial and experiential learning (Sensing & Hacking). At the centre of all of these processes is an

⁶¹ A.A. Moles, “Nissonologie ou science des iles”. *L’espace Geographique*, 1982, 11, No. 4, pp. 281-289.

⁶² G. Mc Call, “Nissology: A proposal for consideration”. *Journal of the Pacific Society*, 1994, no. 63-64 (vol. 17, 2-3).

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ R. Edmond, V. Smith (eds.), *Islands in History and Representation*. London-New York: Routledge, 2007, p. 3.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

ethos of problem-posing and problem-solving, which seeks to engage students critically through the following modules.

Module 1. Mapping: The first module introduces students to the key historical themes, debates, and conceptual frameworks that have emerged in the environmental arts over the past fifty years. It maps the historical relationship between art and environment up to the present, focusing on key events, discourses, and practices. These histories will explore aesthetic, social, and political intersections between multiple disciplines and practices focused on the Anthropocene: biological and earth sciences, anthropology, visual art, design, and political activism. In addition, students will be introduced to empirical studies of the current environmental crisis from the biological and earth sciences. Using mapping as ‘diagrammatic methodologies’ students will develop fieldwork on human and natural ecologies throughout the archipelago. These fieldwork methodologies will introduce students to the interdisciplinary character of the environmental arts and provides a theoretical framework for critical reflection on the key themes, concepts, and practices introduced throughout the module. Following this interdisciplinary mixture of historical narrative and empirical study, students will be required to ‘cognitively map’ areas of contemporary environmental art practice and discourse and thereby build a theoretical framework for fieldwork in the second semester.

Module 2. Sensing: There are two key aims in the first module the first is to map the discourse of Environmental Arts, the second is to introduce students to techniques of deep mapping and other diagrammatic methodologies for understanding local environments. The second module *Sensing* focusses on sensing and recording the environment, linking the mapping of the first semester to student-led fieldwork. Such fieldwork is essential to an eco-social art practice that engages with human and non-human actors in the environment. Sherkin Island and the West Cork Archipelago will provide the domain for this fieldwork. Students will be taught the skills necessary to gather and process data in their chosen area of concern. Modules 1 and 2 provide students with a rigorous introduction to the environmental arts and a space to engage with experimental methodologies in specific contexts. Together, these modules form the basis of a praxis-oriented engagement with the environmental humanities, which is further synthesised in the third module, *Hacking*.

Module 3. Hacking: In the *Hacking* module the students will begin to develop a material response to the environment which conjoins their sensing of the environment with the theoretical frameworks developed in the *Mapping* module. Bringing together the theoretical explorations in Module 1 and the experimental investigations in Module 2, the final module supports students in realising a large-scale, eco-socially engaged arts project in an archipelagic context, to evaluate the efficacy of

that project using theoretical frameworks developed throughout the first two modules, and to develop a substantive engagement with key stakeholders in the research context.

CONCLUSION

To think the world as an archipelago, is to think difference beyond political and geophysical borders, as a fluid historical relation between land and sea and sky. This paper has explored how archipelagos have an allegorical potential to model, communicate and represent the scalar complexity of the Anthropocene and how study in those contexts can be conceived as a means to overcome the standardising image of the network, which tends to reduce the strategic resonance of local realities, by favouring the general structure. Such a general structure often undermines a real and genuine expression of differences. Alternatively, the archipelagic dimension highlights the role of localities (local institutions, local form of knowledges, local practices, local educations, etc.) as agents of the constant transformation of the relations between the partners, where the promotion of a multiversal (and no more simply universal) framework within differences can proliferate. Within this context the MA Art and brings together the ecological educational subject of a world centred education and the patchy, entangled environment of the Anthropocene. Within this context, the MA Art and Environment will develop pedagogical platforms for connecting island communities, environmental action and artistic research. These archipelagic research platforms will act as multi-scalar counter-mapping frameworks that can simultaneously enable a (re)territorialisation of empirical, historical, political narratives while allowing for concrete spatial and relational interventions into local communities, on islands, with islanders.