

Max Rynnänen

TEACHING PORTFOLIO

So here I am... after an intensive week of teaching theory and philosophy for dancers, performance artists, film makers and producers in Cesis (Latvia), August 2015 - together with an LA-based film maker, a ballet teacher from Nice and a Latvian film director. This type of cross-disciplinary work is where I feel best at home. And often, when it is time to drink coffee and relax, the best chats take place.



I am **SENIOR UNIVERSITY LECTURER** in **THEORY OF VISUAL CULTURE** at the Department of Art in Aalto University. Most of my teaching is done in the Visual Culture and Contemporary Art (vicca.fi) MA program, where I am also the director (125 students). I teach philosophy of art, film theory, academic skills, art theory and art critique - and often through theme courses. I am also adjunct professor (/ Docent) in *aesthetics* at Helsinki University, and in this sense I have a living relationship to my main alma mater.

So far I have lectured in 18 universities and colleges, without forgetting a broad variety of private organizations/festivals (F.I.T., SPACE), all and all in 9 countries - and close to 100 courses. I have dear memories from e.g. Lancaster University, Trondheim Art Academy, the Royal University College of Fine Arts Stockholm, the Academy of Fine Art and Design Bratislava, Riga Academy of Culture, the Academy of Art in Tallinn, the University of Turku, the University of Lapland, Theatre Academy of Finland, and festivals like Exodos Ljubljana, Homo Alibi Riga, New Dance in a New Venue and New Baltic Dance Vilnius.

(For a concise list of teaching visits, see: <http://maxrynnanen.net/teaching/>)

In this portfolio I have tried to explain what I am doing as a teacher, although I'd rather workshop with you - and change thoughts while sipping coffee!

(For personal information, see the end of the document.)

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1 **TEACHING EXPERIENCE INCLUDING SUPERVISION OF DOCTORAL AND MASTER LEVEL THESES**

I started my teaching career by being twice the tutor in aesthetics during my studies (1996, 1997). In 1998 a friend who was linguist then fixed me classes at Kerava Language School, where I worked for one year (1997-1998) as a teacher of Swedish.

I was surprised about the strength of the ‘aura of the teacher’ – students listened carefully to *everything* I said – but I did not really enjoy teaching language as I was often just supposed to give the ‘right’ answer.

This was to change when I started **teaching scholarly matters**. January 2000 I taught my first university course, as a teacher per hours at Helsinki University. It was a course in aesthetics, more exactly a course in the aesthetics of popular culture, and I felt more at home. There were no right answers anymore, but there were arguments and theories we could discuss and analyze.

Although my career has been very easy going in the long run, as a PhD student I first had funding problems. My topics were fresh, though, as I started with kitsch and camp, so I managed to get a lot of teaching, first in the disciplines of aesthetics and semiotics at Helsinki University. I also had to take a lot of teaching to survive economically, and this is probably how I came to think of myself firstly as a teacher, only after that as a scholar.

I received a **teaching position** as a lecturer in February 2006, at the Department of Art and Media at the University of Art and Design Helsinki (later Aalto ARTS), and started to teach academic skills, aesthetics, urban studies, film theory, history of mass culture and mass media, art critique, and something I called gallery and museum philosophy. For years I was responsible for the Introduction Course of the whole MA program of Visual Culture (to which all the teachers contributed), and now I am doing the same as I am the director of the expanded version of the same, Visual Culture and Contemporary Art (vicca.fi). As the students, who are all artists and most of them political, come from 25 different countries I am well prepared to teach critical international, feminist and critical groups.

Following my (for my age: 45) relatively long and broad history in teaching (18 years), including 12 years as a full-time lecturer/professor (8 years already tenured), I have taught and lectured quite a lot. I have been giving close to 100 courses and over 30 visiting lectures on courses in 14 universities, 5 university colleges and 6 third sector educational agencies – in 9 different countries.

An integral part of my work consists of **workshops and guest lectures for professionals of different arts**. Since the first one in 2003 (Art Educators at the Design Museum Helsinki) I have found these occasions productive for testing new ideas and teaching methods with experienced (and so often very critical) audiences. Mostly I have focused on professionals in dance and theatre in the public talks and educational platforms of festivals (Homo Alibi Riga (theatre, LAT), Homo Novus (performing arts, LAT), New Baltic Dance Vilnius (LIT), New Dance in a New Venue, Rezekne / Cesis / Saldus, and Exodos Ljubljana (SLO, performing arts). Although also the teaching of MA and Doctoral students has to be quite democratically tuned as the students are adults, these gigs, the teaching sessions for (at least in the beginning) unknown professionals are even more about sharing knowledge vice versa.

As a **supervisor** of **MA theses** (~ 14 ongoing / 45 finished) and **PhD dissertations** (1 finished, 2 ongoing) I have always been of the breed that wants to understand where the student is heading, and who then joins this 'trip' as a kind of an executive ('hip hop') producer. I would be a bad supervisor for someone who does not have aspirations to go his/her own way, so I am happy that my teaching position is in an art university unit. My main method with insecure students is to be very warm and spontaneous, to open up dialogue – but in the end I can also crave a lot, especially concerning the student's personal way of thinking. Right now I am besides ViCCA / Aalto ARTS supervising students in fashion (same school), media (same school) and photography (University of Art and Design Bratislava).

When the teaching encourages experimentalism, it is hard **to assess** courses – but sometimes that is of course still important. I try to take a pedagogical stance on this. I tell the students very clearly that my points of view stem from a certain tradition and they might choose another road. (I sincerely believe in multiculturalism in the world of art and scholarly work.) On courses where I give grades, I give the students the matrix I use for the assessment, to make it more transparent. E.g. in a 0-5 point assessment I have often used the following (simplified here): 1 point for sending me an essay (right length) that *makes sense*, 1 for including legitimate thinkers/facts in the text, 1 for a good analysis and use of sources of knowledge, 1 for a good structure, and 1 for 'je ne sais qua', for just being good however hard that is to explain in words. I state clearly that it is good to attend the lectures for a better understanding of me and the traditions I represent so that the student would get a glimpse of the enigmatic issue 'what is really good work'. I have noticed that students like dogmas. This is why I never give extra time for submitting essays for courses. I always make this clear in the beginning of the course, and I have noticed that I still get as many in the end – so I save their Christmas and summer holidays by not accepting late contributions. Assessing MA theses is hard work in this business, but it is a bit easier – as the work is more profound and rich in content than an essay for a course, and because the student really has to dig up knowledge and to work out something on his/her own, there is a lot to grab.

It is easier to assess MA theses for Science Universities (like Helsinki University) because the criteria are very simple, but it is much more rewarding and philosophical work to assess MA theses in an 'art school'. I have been the assessor of 2 PhD theses, one in the University of Eastern Finland (2013, Virpi Kaukio, Environmental Aesthetics) and another in Jyväskylä University (Susanne Ylönen, 2015). My main goal in both cases was to leave a beautiful memory, in the sense exclaimed by the Stoics, later reawakened by Michel Foucault. Academic rituals are intense and focused dialogues, where the candidate is tested, but in the end embraced with the perennial tradition. I have assessed works for visual culture, visual culture and contemporary art, fashion, media, art education, aesthetics and fine arts, and besides Aalto ARTS I have done this for Helsinki University and the Art University Helsinki.

When **teaching professionals** the most important thing seems to be breaking the ice. For example critics – I have taught e.g. critics of the Guardian and the main newspapers of Prague, Riga, Vilnius, Bratislava and Berlin – are often very cynical, which is easy to understand if they e.g. see and write about 250 exhibitions or 150 performances every year. I have been surprising the participants e.g. by bringing in the artist to the sessions where we read critiques of his/her work, a 'trap' which has forced some too routine-based authors to take a new dialogical stance toward the work.

The first lectures for overtly critical participants of my workshops and art students who dread philosophy/aesthetics/theory are very important. I call them *geisha lectures*. On these first lectures I try to softly and as seductively as possible to show what philosophy/aesthetics/theory could be about, and why one could have benefits from studying these disciplines. On these inaugurating lectures I often talk a lot of loose stuff to make it easier for the participants/students to join the discussion.

Often I feel that I am like a theory plumber wherever I am working at. When new discussions are fostered, I am often asked to come to discuss and talk. I like the role, though.

2 DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHING, EXPERIENCE IN COURSE AND CURRICULUM

I have been in the group which built two different MA programs for Aalto ARTS, Visual Culture, and Visual Culture and Contemporary Art, so I have experience and knowledge on program building (and the incredible amount of time it takes).

I have tried to develop myself a lot by experimenting. Usually the major part of my course is based on something I know by heart, and then 20-30 is about trying out new ideas. New forms of teaching are always fun, and they help students to see that doing theory is an art form as well. I have been giving short lectures the length of short films that I have showed (e.g. 4 minutes 13 seconds) and I have lectured by writing with a computer (big size text on the wall).

I am not an active user of technology, but more of a Socratic teacher. I like to have contact with my students, and I like to be present – but later on I often add facts, hints on good literature and other comments to course blogs that I have in the internet.

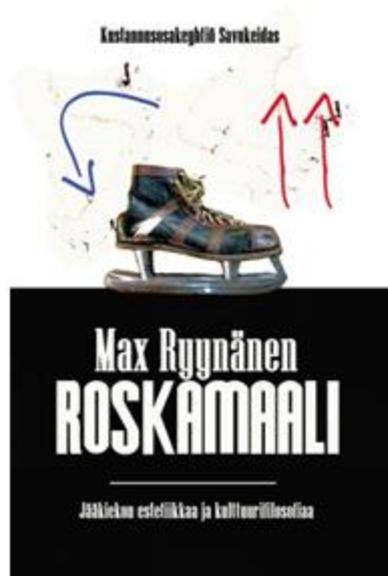
On basic courses I try to keep the stuff stiff enough so that students could climb down in the world of idea history and theory, but I also do thematic courses, where I try to open up new topics or discuss potentials of certain perspective. For an example of this, see e.g. Literary Spaces (<http://literaryspaces2017.blogspot.fi/2016/11/welcome-on-course.html>).

3 TEACHING MATERIALS

I am quite against introduction books. Why? They often give you the idea that you could package theoretical thinking somewhat easily, but as art good theoretical thinking is very complex and you need to study it in detail and as a whole to really get into it. Even on intro courses we read original texts.

On the other hand I have found it nice to write essayistically so that everyone could easily approach the study. In *Roskamaali* (“Garbage Goal”, Savukeidas 2012) I analyzed ice hockey from the point of view of aesthetics and art theory. I was happy that I got response from hockey journalists and hockey players on issues that actually were classical problems of aesthetics – from harmony to the appreciation of movement.

People have all reasons to be afraid of theory. It has often been used as a weapon in snobbery.



4 TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

I don't have any systematic beliefs or ideas about what teaching *should* be. I see it, like art, as an ocean of possibilities that only suffers from too much classification. It is easier to just describe the territory where I am at. It is experimental, dialogical and adventurous. For some students this is not the best way to go, but for most art students it works out better than the traditional idea of a teacher distributing knowledge (well, on some courses this is the best way to do it).

Supervising students is a very interesting task. I currently supervise a dozen MA works and three PhDs. As I said already earlier I often feel like a rap producer, who leaves his trace on the end result – but still is just in the background for the star. This is of course partly due to the nature of teaching in art universities. There is no system of what you should do. The supervision is about trying to help the student to find his/her very original path in research/art – and often this means entering territories that the supervisor is not that familiar with. I try to read broadly to be able to give productive ideas to as many students as possible, but it is quite impossible to know about all the interests students have.

5 PEDAGOGICAL EDUCATION

The first time that I studied pedagogy was on a summer course with Jude Carroll, Jörgen Bang and Kirsti Lonka in Tartu University – summer 2001. It made me think about how to supervise, how to assess and how to teach – better.

Following this good experience I started studying art university pedagogy in Taikopeda in 2005. I made 25 credits of studies in a programme that included people from the Sibelius Academy, the Theatre Academy, The University of Art and Design Helsinki and the Academy of Fine Art.

In 2012 I started in a programme (60 credits) in Aalto University – and this one I finished in late 2015, so by getting myself to become a legitimate teacher according to Finnish Law.

I learned to know many teachers of architecture, photography and other arts, and now I really thoroughly been thinking through what I actually am doing.

Pedagogical Education

2001 University Teaching, University of Tartu. Teachers: Jörgen Bang, Kirsti Lonka and Jude Carroll (3 cr).
2005-2007 Taikopeda (25 cr).
2012-2015 Pedagogical studies for Aalto ARTS (60 cr).

6 EXPERIENCE OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Most theorists work course by course (per hours), but I have been lucky. I have had a steady job (I started 2006 and got tenured late 2009) for 12 years.

I also spent my three first years of teaching as the head of the MA programme for visual culture in the University of Art and Design Helsinki, continuing then for a year and a half as the professor deputy and a year as the vice director of the whole department. 2017 I started again as the head of Visual Culture and Contemporary Art (vicca.fi). Having 130 students aboard and being the supervisor for 6 people working here is quite a challenge, and there is a lot of administration, but it is also very rewarding.

I have actually been very lucky to learn about administrative procedures on all levels. Besides my history as the vice director of the department and the head of two different MA programs, I have been e.g. a member of the education board of my university, and I have been happy to realize that I am one of those people who are able to read, write and do things although they'd have a lot to do also administratively speaking.

7 OTHER TEACHING MERITS

My other teaching merits are of course the talks, lectures, workshops and other forms of teaching that I have been doing outside of my main job (attached to this application). But I have also published on teaching issues. My main interest here has been discussing the role of theory teaching in art universities and debating the role of pedagogy in the art field. These four texts have given me a more clear idea of what I am actually doing.

“Teaching as a Work of Art.” With Taina Rajanti and Pia Euro. In Teija Löytönen (ed). *Synnyt/Births* (Finnish Journal for Art Education) 2015: 2. 41-61.

Art and Education - or the dark side of pedagogy. A dialogue. With Christiana Galanopoulou. *Synnyt/Origins. Finnish Studies on Art*. 2011 September. 1-16.

“Lopputyön teoreettisen osan ohjaamisen erityisongelmia taideyliopistoissa.” [Problems in Supervising Theoretical MA Theses in Art Universities.] *Synnyt* 2007: 2. 54-61.

"Kättilö kasvattajana ja kasvatettavana. Teorian opettamisesta taiteilijoille." [The Midwife as an Educator – and Someone Being Educated.] *Synnyt. Taidekasvatuksen tiedonala* 2006: 4. 34-40.

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Time and place of birth	09 th October 1972, Helsinki
Telephone number (work)	+358-50-3365394
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Degrees	MA (1995-)1999 University of Helsinki, Major: Aesthetics, Minors: Semiotics and Philosophy (accent on idea history) (MCL) Licentiate of Philosophy 2003 University of Helsinki, Aesthetics (MCL) PhD 2009 University of Helsinki, Aesthetics (Eximia)
Exchange studies	Uppsala University (SWE) 1997 Spring Term, Aesthetics (Nordplus) University of Pisa (ITA) 1998-1999 Winter Term, Philosophy (Erasmus) Temple University, Philadelphia (US), 2002 Spring, Philosophy, Visiting PhD Student (Funding: The Academy of Finland)
Later education	Museology and material culture, Basic Studies 25 credits, Turku Open University 2007-2009 Taikopeda pedagogical studies for art university teachers, 25 credits. Organized by Aalto University, the Sibelius Academy and the Academy of Arts Helsinki. Pedagogical Studies (accent on art university teaching), 60 credits, Aalto University (started 2012, finishing August 2015)
Languages	*Finnish Native *Swedish Native *English Excellent *Italian Excellent reading / good oral *Danish, Norwegian Reading skills *French, Spanish, Estonian, German Basic reading skills (I can read a mainstream article but not Heidegger/Derrida) Studies in other languages Chinese (3 years), Japanese (a half year), Russian (2 years)