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“It’s Just Such a Strange Tension”: Discourses of Authenticity in the Creative Arts in Higher Education

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Abstract

This paper explores the conflicts engendered during the artist’s formation due to repeated submission to assessment in formal creative arts education. In a comparative qualitative study of two visual arts practice undergraduate curricula, the underlying interpretative approaches to intentionality were uncovered to comprehend the impact of the hidden curriculum at those higher education institutions. Across both sites, nominal authenticity emerged consistently as the most valued criterion which artist-students referenced in their self-assessments of the success and quality of their artworks, and of their identities as members of the professional community of practice. This criterion for self-assessment ran parallel to, and at times against, the persistent disregard of the artist-students’ actual intentionality as a valid referent within the summative assessment practices of both the academic institutions studied. Within this paper, constructions of creativity, authorship and the relationship of these to interpretation, set the scene for exploring the traces, slippages and nuances

between the discourses of authenticity which emerged. Drawing from empirical qualitative data generated from artist-students, artist-academics, curriculum documentation and observations of assessment, the contexts around these emerging discourses are discussed, and their significance for the novice artist's experience, and the agency of artist-teachers, explored.

Contextualising Conflicts within Discourses of Authenticity

Authenticity is a slippery, complex and difficult concept informed by differing constructions. Largely treated with unease in contemporary literary criticism, authenticity has been variously positioned, from as acting as a sign of 'western' individualism (Assmann, 2014) to performance for communal subjectification (Straub, 2014). This continuum is echoed in higher education, where discourses of authenticity are associated with student voice, will and desire for engagement (Wimpenny & Savin-Baden, 2013) within student-centred approaches; and relate to curriculum-determined objectives, where learning activities and settings are aligned with culturally-derived practices characteristic of 'real-life' professional contexts (Cumming & Maxwell, 1999). Experience of these latter contexts proactively shape individual identity (Becher & Trowler, 2001) through 'authentic assessment' which mirrors the judgement and interpretation processes prevalent within professional practice (Ashford-Rowe, Herrington & Brown, 2014; Billett, 2012). There is a concern that the evolution of discourse of authenticity in relation to 'student voice' may be similarly underpinned by instrumentalist goals and/or "a search for objective truth over time" (Nelson, 2015, p. 2).

In the trenches between these many positions and orientations, this paper traces constructions of authenticity which emerged during a study of the interpretative approaches to assessment in the practice-based discipline of fine art. A 'Sense of Being' (Reid & Solomonides, 2007, p. 28) mediates the complexities of an artist's engagement with their practice. This includes, the practical aspects of artmaking; the situated and relational contextual nature of the reception of their work and their identities within the community of practice; and the dis/equilibrium and un/certainty experienced during transformative learning. Such intrinsically motivated affective states, of a flow between the person and their process of learning, impact on the development of confidence, imagination and self-knowledge in creative learning (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). As such, in creative arts practice particularly, the novice artist's self-concept and meta-cognition are strongly intertwined with their notions of professional practice. These are reinforced by artist-teachers and mentors who may work alongside the novices as critical peers. In art education, this relationship is complication where those persons are placed in a position of judgement over the often highly personal and/or highly invested work, particularly when it is 'submitted' for academic assessment purposes. What is often not considered against educational purposes are the underpinning frames of reference utilised within the

interpretative approaches of western-informed academies. Their constructions of creativity position the artist, and in turn the authorship of an artwork, within interpretation. In the section following, I briefly outline such constructions and positioning as there is cause for reconsidering how such interpretative frames operate in the formation of artists.

Reconsidering intentionality and interpretation in the assessment of students' creative practice

A way of framing approaches to interpretation, which relates specifically to authorship, is whether they are *intentionalist* or *anti-intentionalist*. Intentionalist models ascribe importance to the author's (real or imagined) intentions to make the work and engage with the subject, and/or to related authorial knowledge when determining a text's meaning. Three dominant intentionalist approaches which act as umbrella categories for the many are, (1) 'actual intentionalism' (where 'correct' interpretation reference the author's 'actual' intentionality for the artworks' meaning and rejects unintended interpretations); (2) 'hypothetical intentionalism' (which holds that interpretation should reveal what could have been meant, with the actual author's intention one of many other possible readings); and (3) 'value maximisers' (wherein the aim of interpretation is to provide valuable ways of reading the work, which may or may not correlate with the author's intentions) (Davies, 2010). Anti-intentionalist notions are underpinned by constructions of authorship and readership on a continuum: from extremely monological and autonomous, to relational and contextual. Included within anti-intentionalist approaches, are those which position the text itself as locus of meaning, and those which position interpretations of the reader as all important. Extreme anti-intentionalism holds that authorial intentions are irrelevant to, and never decisive of, a work's meaning. While literary criticism has focused on this divide, between those who value authorial intention as relevant to interpretation and those who do not (Burke 1995), there has been a dearth of similarly concerned research in the assessment of creative practice in the academy.

A less prevalent approach calls for situating the author reflexively. This relates intentionality to concerns with intertextuality, readership, and the significance of how artists, texts and readings *operate in context* (Burke, 1992). It is from within this philosophical tradition that this paper emerges – a tradition of *situating* rather than *detaching* the subject from the text and world (Burke, 1995). Against the postmodern dispersal of authorial agency, are a number of feminist and postcolonial demands for authorial agency and responsibility. An example of this can be found in the criteria for social justice art education (Dewhurst, 2011). However, neither deterministic nor reflexive models are given as much credence as the *authority* of the reader or the critic in anti-intentionalist models. These dominate contemporary art and literary criticism both beyond and within the academy.

Contemporary art criticism has a characteristic distaste for intentionality, perhaps because it carries associations of the mish-mash of Romantic and Humanist constructions of creativity prevalent in populist understandings of what it is 'to be' authentic (Freeman, 2006). Both constructions draw from biographical, psychological, historical, impressionistic or empirical knowledge of an actual author (or artist) as a central determinant for the interpretations of creative works. Romantic constructions are underpinned by liberal notions of individuality and innovation, where the beautiful is seen as a successful expression of the artist's intentions. In Humanist conceptions, 'the self' is equated with 'the author' as the source and centre of the creative work, to challenge the authorial centrality of the divine in a bid to positioning progress as that enacted through human effort and agency.

Tragic historic events, political and economic interests in the 20th century generated the impetus for shifts away from such constructions of creativity in critical analysis (Habib, 2005) and in adult education (Usher, Bryant & Johnston, 1997). Notions of creativity as inexplicable expressions of the autonomous individual who creates an autonomous artwork, which is authentically bounded, have been consistently challenged. Contemporary notions emphasize collaborative creativity, and a concern for how creative artefacts operate in context and are received by others (Krausz, Dutton & Bardsley, 2009). No longer posited as antithetical to analytical engagement, creativity is twinned with critical thinking (Belluigi, 2009) and associated with responsibility (Feldman & Benjamin, 2006).

Moreover, critical analysis is seen to have freed interpretation from the determinism of intentionality. By problematising simplified relationships between author, historical subjectivity, and the artefact as text (Preziosi, 1989), the role or act of authorship is created *through interpretation* to transcend, and even negate, the biographical subject of the actual artist. The translation of this to assessment practices in creative arts education, positions the assessor as a potential co-creator of the students' artwork. Extreme applications absent the necessity of authorial knowledge – knowledge of the students' intentionality and process – from the assessment of the work's success. In earlier studies I had undertaken, I had found that approaches to intentionality and interpretation had been imported from literary criticism studies, without due consideration of the impact of such approaches on the student experience (Belluigi, 2008, 2011). Art historians and critics may be exempted for concerns about the impact of their interpretative approaches on the artmaker. However, teaching staff should arguably be cognisant of the potential 'backwash effect' (Biggs, 1999, p. 68) of summative assessments on the formative learning of their students. This term encapsulates a recognised phenomenon, where the teleological and strategic product-orientated curriculum constrains the developmental processes of the students' social formation and learning during their studies, for the gatekeeping function of academic assessment.

In this paper, I re-present the terrain of fissures which was unearthed in relation to discourses of authenticity, during a project concerned with the problematic of authorship for artists' development (Belluigi, 2015). In the following section, I outline the research strategy of that exploratory study. I then outline the ways in which authenticity was denigrated within the espoused discourses, including the formal curriculum content and assessors' explicit declarative statements, due to current dominant notions of interpretation discussed above. I then present an analysis of primary data which indicates that, despite, and often in resistance to, the institutional structures and the pervasive power of assessment cultures, there (1) was a degree of student agency to position authenticity as the most poignantly substantive criterion within their own referential frameworks for their self-assessments as artists; in addition to (2) studio supervisors' expressions of solidarity to negotiate the alienating conflicts this engendered. These discourses emerged in ways which suggested that the notions that underpinned them were fluid, messy and taken-for-granted; yet they were of given considerable significance for those who tried to grasp them – artist-students and their artist-educators engaged in creative practice.

Methodological Approach

This paper is nested within a larger project which considered the significance of interpretative approaches on the conditions for the creativity of the student-artist, their process and creative artwork in the domain of fine art studio practice (Belluigi, 2015). To do so, I conducted a comparative case study of two visual art schools (AS), generating empirical data over a two-year period, to explore interpretative structures and cultures at institutional level. I purposively chose two sites as 'representative' curricula of western-oriented art schools which differed in their approaches to intentionalism (AS1) and anti-intentionalism (AS2). Both schools offered a range of contemporary creative arts practice methods and mediums, including that which falls within the plastic and digital arts, sculpture, photography, video, painting, print making, performance art and public art.

The location of AS1 was in England and AS2 was in South Africa. The significance of differentiated higher education systems within each national context and larger geopolitics between them, outlined within Belluigi (2016a), has not been included within the scope of this paper. This is because the discourses of authenticity, which are the subject of this paper, cut across both contexts. The project had pertinence to my concerns as a researcher in the global South. Many English-speaking settler colonial contexts which had initially been informed by English traditions of art education and assessment, continue to be influenced by British art education (Stankiewicz, 2007) and maintain strong links with Anglo-American artistic identity. The educational development discourses which had been influential within the UK (AS1) post-massification, had been largely ignored within South Africa art education at that time (AS2) perhaps due to a resistance to democratising academic spaces and/or erosion of

academic autonomy. Analysing assessment enabled the exploration of the tacit and habitual ways in which the hidden curricula in/formed the development of students' creativity and critical judgment as future artists (Belluigi, 2018b), and exposed the meso-curriculum of their teachers' formation as artist-academics.

The questions which framed the project were: which interpretative approaches were practiced within formative and summative assessment practices? And, what was the significance of these approaches for the conditions for creativity of the artist-student? The central understanding gained from this project have been reported (Belluigi 2016a; 2017a; 2017c; 2018b), with findings shared with participants and curriculum-developers in both institutions, and with educators in various fora (such as Belluigi, 2018a).

Triangulated data about the espoused and practiced curricula of the two schools were required to fully explore the substratal, interconnected layers of culture, structure and agency in relation to authorship and authority. Following ethical clearance at both institutions, all staff and students involved in the final year of undergraduate studies at the two institutions were invited to participate. Nine of the 16 practice-based staff and 10 of the 65 final year students at AS1 chose to actively participate; all 5 practice-based staff and 16 of the 17 students at AS2 participated. Key insiders included staff respondents, including those who taught on the ground, the directors of study, heads of department, programme coordinators and internal moderators.

The high participation rate of AS2 enabled further in-depth single-case comparative studies of those practice-based teachers' micro-curricula practices. This informed an analysis of the ways in which individual educators' agency interacted within structures and cultures, outlined in the section 'Agential responses of supervisors'. Throughout this paper, the different roles of educational staff within the art schools are delineated using particular terms, informed by my review of literature across international contexts on studio education (Belluigi, 2016a). When identified as 'supervisors' this is to identify the role enacted by staff when in direct supervision of a student's creative arts practice; those identified as 'assessors' are staff enacting an assessment of a work of a student other than those they had supervised; and 'moderators' identify staff when performing the role of moderating grades. The situatedness and interrelatedness of staff members and students in their contexts enabled me to acknowledge how they were discursively positioned (Belluigi, 2016b), while analyzing the significance of the interpretative approaches they adopted in the various roles they performed, as I outline within this paper.

Data was generated utilising questionnaires, interviews, and email correspondence for staff participants; and questionnaires, arts-based focus group interviews, and follow up email

correspondence for student participants. The arts-based method, known as visual narrative small group discussions (Meistre & Belluigi, 2010; Belluigi, 2018a), involved participants individually authoring a story with a selected sequence of provided imagery in response to prompts, which they interpreted to a small group of peers. Excerpts of the recorded discussions and scans of the stories, selected for inclusion in the two sections of this paper titled 'student experiences', are representative of the dominant experiences of students in that school. This was confirmed by those peers present; by patterns of prevalence within the stories shared across small group discussions; and explanations provided by students within questionnaires and email correspondence.

Analysis of curriculum documents and references made during 11 formative (during the year) and summative (final grade-bearing) assessment events at both schools, were included in this analysis. Assessment events in this domain involve a collective judgment and thus are of a public nature, with oral discussions to substantiate claims which I recorded. Formative assessments included the artist-student being assessed, the artwork(s), supervisor(s), additional staff, and the students' peers; summative assessment events were undertaken by a panel of experts, including studio supervisors, assessors and moderators. Where internal moderation involved individual assessment, I requested the moderator use a talk aloud protocol to enable me to record the references articulated.

In my analysis, I distinguished narrative or discourse as a product from the act of narration as an embodied social practice composed by intentional agents (Sclater, 2003). I utilised 'acts of narration' for what participants articulated, and 'discourse' for wider representations. This was to acknowledge the interdependence which shapes a person's psychosocial subjectivity; their situatedness in immediate social experiences and discourse; and constitutedness in postmediate experiences (Billet 1998). Instead of taking agency as a given, I attempted to question "the conditions of its possibility" (Butler, 1992, p.13) for creativity in studio practice. Conceiving of discourse as an artefact of culture to be 'read' for both meaning and significance, is a socio-cultural critical discourse analysis approach (Wu, 2010). Deliberate mis-reading of rhetorical power-plays allowed me to identify and categorise espoused and practiced interpretative approaches, to ascertain the ways in which the discourses operated in practice. I mapped the interpretative approaches to a framework I had developed for this purpose (Belluigi, 2017b). This was then followed by a consideration of their significance for the conditions of the creative triad of person, process and product considered conducive in that domain (Belluigi, 2013).

Following on from this analysis, I interacted with staff in report-and-respond processes (Stronach & MacLure, 1997) by disseminating my triangulated interpretations of both the mapped interpretative approaches and the schemas of the conditions for creativity, to enable

further probing discussion, comment and/or challenge, in an inclusive and dialogical manner. In the following section, I begin with the student perspectives of one of the most critical events of their education calendar, to foreground their experiences as of central validity to studies in this area of enquiry.

Exploring Emerging Discourses of Authenticity

The final year exhibition is *the* event of the undergraduate fine art calendar. This students' self-assessment of her submission exhibition is illustrative of how many of the students in this study described self-assessing their artworks' success.

I was so so so happy with my show. I feel that it turned out exactly the way I imagined it in my mind, and I think that is what you essentially hope for in the end... I have never felt more proud and accomplished to have created what I did. The show had the feeling that I wanted to express to the viewers. (Student, AS2)

Neither deterministic nor *laisse faire*, for the majority of students there was an explicit desire for their artistic strategy of *how the work was viewed* to be realised. Twenty of the 21 students, who respond to a questionnaire emailed the week after this summative assessment, indicated that they would ideally have wanted their actual intentionality to be taken into consideration for summative assessments.

Responses to this issue of how their work was received by viewers and by assessors, and how it affirmed their own identities, was strongly affective. In light of the force of this conviction, I carefully re-considered my analysis of the data that had been generated to that point. I presented an initial analysis of emergent discourses of authenticity, which I discuss in this paper, to the participants for further probing and insights.

I was to discover much when opening that fissure. Regardless of whether the artist-student had preference for anti/intentionalist interpretative approaches to their work, particular notions of authenticity were integral to their reflective, meta-cognitive engagement with their artworks and their sense of its success - in terms of their authorial strategy for the way it would operate in the world. Self-assessments of their work were most concerned with what is termed 'nominal authenticity' (Dutton, 2003), i.e. how the work relates to their actual intentionality as the artist. Akin to therapeutic notions of authenticity as "the person as his or her own author" (Schmid, 2001, p. 217), it was integral to developing their sense of authorship. Additional discourses emerged in flux alongside this notion, differing and at times oppressive of the nominal authenticity which the majority of those participants, both students and staff who identified as artistic practitioners, valued for their artistic practice.

In the analysis that follows, I offer an account, firstly, of the discourses utilised in the curriculum and assessment structures and cultures of each of the two schools. I then consider the artist-students, with a discussion of their expectations followed by their experiences at each of the schools. I then turn to the teaching staff who interacted with these artist-students formatively, their supervisors, and analyse their agential responses.

Discourses utilised within the structures and cultures of the art schools

To explore the ways in which what was espoused played out in practice (Dixon, Hawe & Parr, 2011), I considered the assessment structures of each school which I will now discuss in more detail. AS2 adopted the anti-intentionalist assessment structures traditional in creative arts higher education: at the end of the degree, a summative assessment-by-exhibition of a solo show of artworks, for the most part excluding any matter related to the artist-student or the process of their learning. Explicitly deviating from this norm, AS1 espoused an intentionalist structure through inclusion of additional material in the summative submission, such as research logs, sketch books, portfolio. In addition, the assessment of the 'person' was explicitly articulated as 'studentship' in the assessment criteria of AS1, with a weighting of one fifth of the grade. During interviews, the curriculum developers explained that these additions were made in response to student-centred educational development. Ascribing value to the learning process and to the ways of being of the student, was an attempt to counterbalance the traditional anti-intentionalist emphasis on the product on display.

Observations of assessment practices revealed that, despite the structural differences outlined above, the underpinning interpretative cultures at the summative assessments of both institutions were dominantly anti-intentionalist. As an example, the 'artist's statement' was particularly revealing of the influence of culture and structure at the two schools. A convention of professional exhibitions, this written text is utilised by the artist, gallery or museum to guide viewers' engagement with the work.

Displayed on the wall of the final graduation show at AS2, was a cursory artists' statement. In interviews, staff admitted to heavily editing the text, if not composing it themselves, as the purpose it served was for public engagement rather than for academic assessment. During the assessment process itself the artist's statement was not given consideration, which AS2 staff considered appropriate.

In contrast, the expectation at AS1 was that students would substantially develop a lengthy artist statement over the duration of their final year, supported by professional practice workshops. I questioned staff about whether they perceived the statements to be reflective of student intentionality or strategically tailored in the interests of a more favourable assessment. Responses included that reflections that learning to do various things with the statement was

of benefit to students' later professional practice, when they would engage with different audiences (such as funders, gallery audiences, art critics). However, when speaking in the role of supervisors, a number of AS1 staff were confident that their students' understood that the artist's statement was intended to be 'authentic' in terms of being genuinely aligned with their intentionality as 'nominal authenticity'. As one supervisor (AS1) put it:

What we hope is that it's not formulaic and they're not playing any kind of game but they're really... 99% of these personal statements that they're introducing in their portfolio are in a voice that they feel comfortable with.

In the interviews with AS1 staff, the artist's statement and additional material included at assessments, were described "as working as a whole" to tell "the story of what their [students'] work is and aims to be". I triangulated these staff members' conscious understandings of the curriculum structure, with what was given valued at the summative assessment culture. I observed that, to varying degrees, this material was physically engaged with by the AS1 staff during the assessment process. However, its content was rarely referenced, discussed nor given weight during grading processes.

Given marginally more reception by all members of the panels were references to "the conviction" or "the sincerity behind the thing". These could be categorised within a discourse of 'expressive authenticity' (Dutton, 2003), in that aspects *within the artwork* were interpreted as indicative of the artist-student's sincerity, genuineness or passion. It is important to note that such authorial intention was not ascertained in reference to the actual student-artist or their strategy, which would have been outlined in the artist's statement, but was constructed through the assessor-as-interpreter's projections on to the minutiae of the artefact before them. As such, these dispositions and assumptions about the makers' relationship to the work was surmised through hypothetical intentionalism. Another interpretative approach evident in the references made by staff during summative assessments, particularly those who acted as supervisors within the studio, was value-maximising. The best possible reading for assessment was utilised strategically, regardless of the veracity of the statements in relation to actual intentionality.

In formative assessments, discourses of authenticity associated with personal relevance and commitment were evident at both schools; however, these arose in relation to the choice of *subject matter or content* of students' practice-based research projects. Staff participants at AS2 confirmed that there was an anxiety around the politics of representation in the South African context, and thus students were validated when confining their explorations to their own racial, ethnic and/or gender demographic. Staff at ASI held that the gentler, often

appreciative tone of formative feedback in that context had more to do with student satisfaction and a growing consumerist orientation, than a concern with authenticity.

Staff were both observed, and confirmed being cognisant of, utilizing discourses of nominal authenticity within the confines of formative feedback communicated one-on-one with their students. In the safe space of the studio, staff felt less constrained and could speak as 'fellow artists'.

I often tell my students, 'integrity': what will keep you sane when you're lying awake at night at some space 15 years from now, is not the sound of your pool pump because you are selling major works and you can afford one, but whether or not you have done what you really want to do and I mean there's irony in that. (Staff participant, AS2)

However, these staff members self-censored such discourses when acting in the role of 'assessor'. Such shifts were indicative of role conflict between professional and academic identities (Bellugi, 2017a). Observations of formative assessments in the semester preceding final submission, indicated that such discourses were relegated lower value than strategic necessity by supervisors. Participating staff confirmed my interpretation that they foregrounded artist-students' attainment as 'students' when summative assessments neared, over and above their development as artists. Later, when observing summative assessments at both schools, I noticed inconsistencies in the reception of work produced by students who had persevered with their authentic desires in the face of opposing feedback from their supervisors. If the submitted artefact was seen as successful then such authenticity was rewarded, with adjectives including "decisive", "vision", "authentic", "courageous", "integrity", "honesty" used to describe such students. However, if the submission was judged unsuccessful, students were constructed negatively as "stubborn", "uncritical", "not able to listen". Such retroactive constructions of the student were dependent on the success of the final artefact (and thus exhibited hypothetical or value-maximising interpretations), rather than characteristics of perseverance or authenticity.

Student expectations

Consistent across student expectations at both schools was a presumption of alignment between the interpretative approaches they had experienced at formative stages and those adopted for summative assessment.

Thus, AS1 students were insistent that their intentionality would function as an integral part of summative assessments, referring to how they had communicated it within various formative assessment events, including individual studio conversations with their supervisors, and had

articulated it explicitly within the additional submission material.

As the anti-intentionalist culture was explicit in the formative panel feedback at AS2, those students who perceived that actual intentionality was not of concern to staff had come to that conclusion from experiences of extreme alienation during formative assessments, and from having relinquished their desires in the face of the anti-intentionalist backwash from the summative assessments. When further probing AS2 student responses, it emerged that those who felt supported by their supervisors had some belief that their actual intentionality would be referenced as a criterion in summative assessments.

Of course X [studio supervisor], who I worked with closely through the year, understood everything I was trying to do and helped me a lot with getting my ideas across. (Student, AS2)

In the following sections, I outline the significance for students, of being put in a position where the student felt conflicted about whether to follow their internal motivations underpinned by nominal authenticity, or adopt those externally imposed. Dominant in the cultures and structures of summative assessment at these schools, as discussed in the section above, nominal authenticity was of prime importance to students' own evaluation of the artworks' success, and through this, their self-construction and identification as artists. It on this issue that the distinction between the positionality of the artist, as artist-student or as artist-assessor, seemed most at odds. While students hoped to develop their own authorship, albeit within the bounds of contemporary artmaking and interpretation, assessors divorced the submission from the student and excluded actual intentionality when evaluating the work. Even the most vehement anti-intentionalist critics, Wimsatt & Beardsley (1946, p. 468) who coined the term 'the Intentionality Fallacy', were careful to differentiate between the purpose of interpretation for art criticism and interpretation which informs the composition of artworks.

Student experiences: AS1

Across the range of 'success' in terms of academic grades, AS1 students experienced conflict between what they saw as internally and externally motivated approaches to artmaking.

When I do this for the course, I feel like a tit if I done it 'cause... I don't know why I done it, I'm just doing it, just tick the box. (Student, AS1)

Performing for and producing what was externally required for a system of exchange (Lukes, 1967), and having that validated by experts and relationships within that system, resulted in

what a number of students described as "harsh judgment" that both they and their work were inauthentic.

In one story, a student described how his initial self-assessment of "the kind of art that they like on this course" diminished following the realisation that he had produced it for the external affirmation of the teacher. He interpreted the encouragement of staff as dangerous for this own development and expressed feelings of embarrassment and foolishness ("an elephant arse, a giant arse"). In another student's story (see **Error! Reference source not found.**), uncertainty in the face of such a conflict was revealed: between her desire to exercise her own agency as an artist to evaluate her own work, and the risk that failure that may result from such self-imposed independence from those in power.

Using the images available:

4. Use this space as an opportunity to express something you have not had an opportunity to 'say' about your fine art studies this far.



Your words:

lost, ability to ignore or follow instinct or rebel?
 stress shows an understanding that you rebel
 against your self - own judgement. Spillage - to ignore
 of care only for your own thought. Charit-
 inding is being scared to create, mess up, fail
 or be disliked.

Figure 1. A student described fear and isolation resulting from such conflict.

One student described how he initially decided to defer to the authority of staff as part of the process of his learning. When repeatedly "told" to make a work that he felt was invalid, he found himself deeply ambivalent:

Do I then go for that because I've been told by the tutors? Or do I want to make a piece of work because I want to make it and I want to make this out of this? That was my question. Do I make it work for me or for the grades? (Student, AS1)

Common across such narratives was the loss of ownership and sense of discomfort with being positioned as pedagogised subjects rather than future artists. For many, such positioning was destabilising, resulting in a loss of confidence and sense of achievement.

I live in this constant state of “Should I be doing what the tutors tell me just because they’ve told me?” Or “should I be doing what I think is right?” And like every decision is like “have I done this cause this is what I want to do?” Or “because somebody else has told me that this is what I want to do?” (Student, AS1)

To visualise the effects of her vulnerability and unease with assessment pressures on her own identity, the above cited respondent chose a dark image of a tangled, discarded hosepipe as a non-mimetic self-portrait as her response to the arts-based data generation method. She pasted this, with dramatic effect, in a deliberate misfit with the outlines of the last empty frame, leaving the rest of her narrative bare (see **Error! Reference source not found.**).

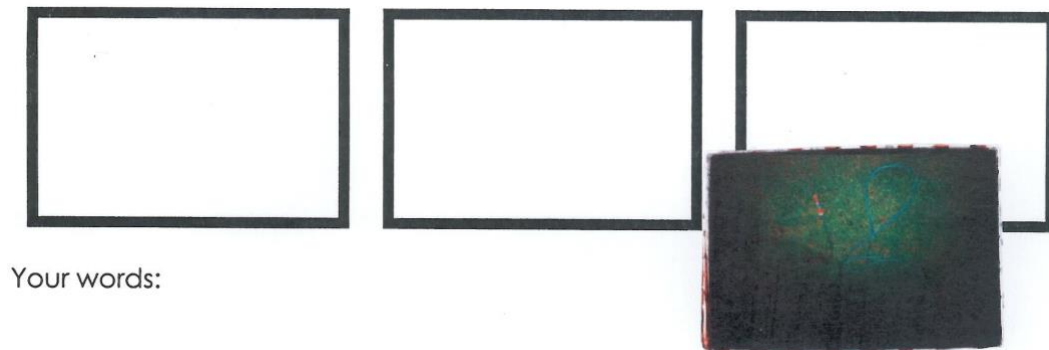


Figure 2. A student’s visualisation of the effects of this discourse conflict on her identity.

When discussing this visualization within the small group discussions, she explained that while she tried “to do good art” with a sense of personal integrity, she perceived it as a personal weakness when she chose to be strategic to “get grades”.

A discourse of *authenticity as resistance* emerged in contrast to strategic adoptions of the interpretations of staff members. This discourse has not been noted as prevalently emerging from students themselves in studies on strategic approaches to learning (Entwistle, 1988; Mann, 2001). Experiences of alienation as a result of repetitions of this experience led some students to question those in positions of authority within the school, at times leading to eruptions in assessment events, as recounted in a small group discussion.

I said, "I don't want to do X to make my grades better, I want to do X because I'm maybe interested in it". But that's what I felt like they were saying to me, maybe I should do X so that it would look better as a final grade. (Student, AS1)

Another student spoke about how her criticality towards her supervisor's authority over her work ("take it as gospel") grew as she neared the final summative assessment, with her "feeling a real antagonism".

Perhaps because such questioning occurred at undergraduate level, it had the effect of causing uncertainty and dis-engagement with the process of making and the product of their labour for many of the students. For instance, one student had found that such meta-level reflective engagement about his studies creating unwanted doubt, "Do I actually like art?" and I hated that".

However, in two of the small group discussions, students noted how their perceptions of and responses to the feedback of staff had changed over the course of their studies. A minority felt able to "fight against it or say, 'Actually we've got our formed views'", particularly in times when the feedback was perceived as irrelevant ("we know we can't take this criticism as much on board because we know what we want to do"). Describing such cases, students drew on discourse of nominal authenticity through which they had developed "a more grounded sense" of how to evaluate staff feedback. One student articulated having developed this capacity, of having "a greater ability to self-evaluate my own work", from his resistance to the dominant discourse in the feedback provided. A paradoxical finding emerged within AS1: those students whose stories indicated the development of meta-level thinking, were in the main those who had experienced some conflict with what they saw as 'authentic' aspects of their process. For instance, on reflection after submission, one student described the process of coming to a sense of his own integrity and ownership as a fraught one ("downwards spiral", "depression") characterised by resilience ("my own determination"). His self-assessment of his final show indicated a sense of having maintained his nominal authenticity and thereby his identity being validated.

I managed to develop my works and myself as an artist figuring out what I actually wanted to do, instead of doing what I thought I wanted to do or what others thought that I should do! (Student, AS1)

Such meta-level thinking was most often unsupported by, and rarely aligned with, interpretation within teaching interactions and assessments.

Student experiences: AS2

Students' desires and intentionality were explicitly disregarded within interpretation by the summative panel at AS2, a clear difference to AS1's espoused intentionalist approach. Regardless of this, as authors of their own work, nominal authenticity was as highly valued by these students. Echoing a number of similar descriptions of AS1 students, alienation arose most dominantly as a result of the artwork becoming a product in the assessment system of exchange.

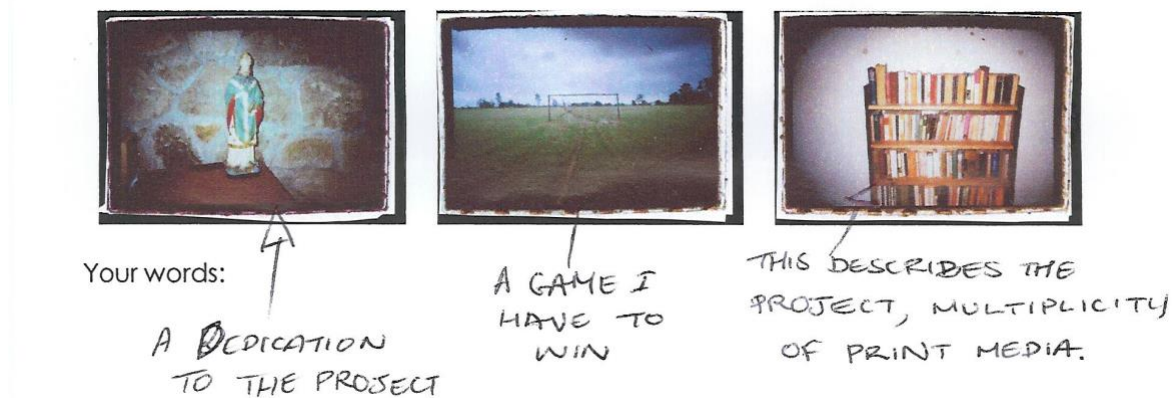
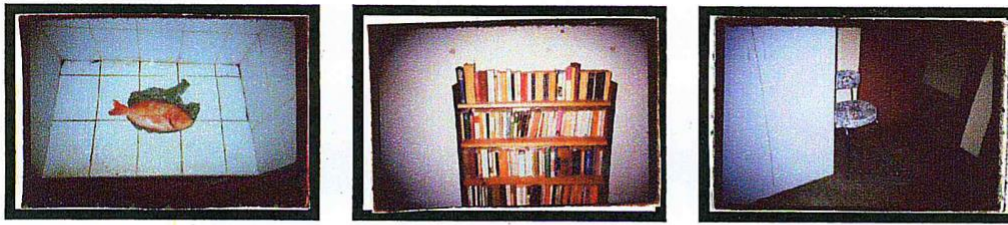


Figure 3. A complex duality is represented in relation to student engagement.

Describing the ambivalence of her undergraduate experience, one student spoke of “an almost religious” relationship she felt with her practice, in conflict with the assessment culture which required students to strategically manoeuvre to succeed in “a game that you have to try and win” (see **Error! Reference source not found.**). Another student noted how her uncertainty about the reception of the work, and whether it would be validated or not, created a tension as to whether she should remain committed to the work or begin to distance herself from her desires. She represented such alternating experiences of engagement and alienation through the metaphor of the back-and-forth motion of a swing.

Repeated exposure to their intentionality being ignored or invalidated in assessments by staff, led to many students adopting a defensive stance of self-preservation (Cohen & Taylor, 1993). A prevalent response were those students who consciously identified with Romantic constructions of the isolated, emotional artist pitted against a hostile world and its viewers. Another acknowledged response that students noted, was burying the desire to make art as an act of self-preservation. For instance, in the small group discussions two students spoke about how their studies, which they had thought would lead to their development as contemporary artists, had resulted in a loss of confidence to practice in any capacity within the art world. **Error! Reference source not found.** is one expression of this response.



Your words:

Although I've learnt a lot, and am entirely grateful to have studied what I love, I am very ~~quite~~ aware of myself and don't ever want to paint for anyone but myself after I obtain my degree.

Also, has made me look at my life in a very different/^{new} way ... scared?? alone?

Figure 4. A student's representation of having her nominal authenticity repeatedly invalidated.

In other instances, bowing to feedback which infringed on the autonomy of their artmaking was seen as bringing its authenticity into question. An example was cited by a student, describing an aesthetic sensibility he had strategically tried to impose on his work to receive external validation, and one he perceived to be "more authentic" and "pure".

Uncertainty is, I think, like definitely the downfall in my development of my art-making process, because when I stay true to what I think is going to be good or what I would like, it seems to work out a lot better than trying to force what I think is someone else's views. (Student, AS2)

External influence was constructed as a conscious, teleological imposition on the form of his work, compared to an unconscious, organic emergence in dialogue with its materiality. In studio feedback, his supervisor privileged "process-based intuitive work" as "less of an artificial way of thinking about things, so more of an honest response". Such othering of conscious influences as external to the monological self is aligned with the Humanist tradition

of adult learning and artmaking. At this school there was evidence that the student negotiation of the discourse conflict was influenced by their supervisors in various ways, possible reasons for which I outline in the next section.

A number of students explained that they felt they had developed the agency to choose their own desire over that of the assessors. A student who had been strongly encouraged by staff to adopt a more expedient interpretation of her research subject, shared her experience.

I wanted it to be sort of hopeful and they don't like that. So I'm going along with what I enjoy, but it's just such a strange tension. (Student, AS2)

As I discuss in the following section, in my analysis of the micro-curricula studio interactions, a number of students had been enabled to make such difficult decisions by their supervisors, who rewarded them in various ways, including affirming the “integrity” of such choices. For instance in the above case, the student's supervisor had constructed her choice as being valid because it upheld her relationship with the subject, rather than bowing to the assessors' agendas to adopt and adapt to their value-maximising reception.

Agential responses of supervisors

An important consideration in this discussion is how teachers, those responsible for the assessment for learning in this age of assessment accountability (DeLuca & Johnson, 2017), acted in terms of these discourses and in light of these experiences.

Across both schools, the embedded referential frameworks created role conflict for the practice-based staff (Belluigi, 2017a). An in-depth analysis of the supervision relationship was undertaken at AS2. Despite its explicit anti-intentionalist summative approach, the school's intensive student-supervisor contact allowed for opportunities where individual staff could exercise their agency to act as fellow artists in support of students' negotiation of their nominal authenticity.

Student stories and staff interviews indicated that, as practice-based teachers, supervisors recognised the conflict that the school's anti-intentionalist approach engendered, particularly between student's nominal authenticity and the strategic pressures of the assessment gaze. They articulated to the researcher and sometimes their students, that these had similarities with conflicts they themselves experienced either previously as students or in their professional practice. All staff I interviewed expressed feeling various degrees of a moral obligation to support students, despite their own roles as assessors and their own implicit endorsement of the anti-intentionalist structure. Despite an individual's hope that “in

undergrad we try to develop their own voice and way of working", during the interviews the staff acknowledged that summative assessment complicated the development of student authorship. To combat this, a number of staff emphasized 'ownership' over 'results' in their studio discussions when acting as supervisors.

We discuss the ideal marks and achievement... whatever you're doing you're making it yours and meaningful, and if it is that way, number one, you're not going to care about marks and number two, your work is going to be better. (Staff transcript, AS2)

One supervisor chose to repeat the "mantra" to her students that "getting an A and being an Artist is not necessarily the same thing". A hierarchy, of integrity over strategic approaches, was constructed when supervisors spoke consciously on the subject. One staff member described a continuum, with integrity as personal wellbeing in opposition to "selling out" to more expedient routes. She felt that one of the benefits of the small numbers and the student-supervisor relationship was that she could utilise her validation as social capital, to encourage students to "be true to their integrity" even in the face of lower grades. All the staff expressed a realisation of the long-lasting effects of such validation. One supervisor succinctly articulated how he tried to guide the student in ways the school was unable.

I'm not going to make them change something radically to get better marks, or whatever. 'This is you, this is your work. You leave here hopefully intact with your sense of self and enjoyment and wanting to do something, a project. And you have some ownership over it, and it's yours'... Outside of that framework and outside the scheme of marking and assessment, my position is [that] I want to award the student, acknowledge the student, what they've achieved. (Staff transcript, AS2)

Confirming arguments which recognise the affective role of supervision (Ochsner, 2000), participating students revealed that when a student perceived that their nominal authenticity was validated by the supervisor and that they were thereby protected to take risks, they were better able to choose their own desires over and above the pressure of the panel. Whilst in such supervisors' care, students predominantly described feeling engaged with their artmaking process and learning. A presumption of support for actual intentionality based on the one-on-one formative guidance of such staff members in the studio, led students to believe that the supervisor was invested in supporting nominal authenticity. This perception served to develop students' confidence in their authorship, validating their processes and identities, as they approached the liminal space between academic and professional practice on completion of their degree.

However, the consistency of such validation varied between individual supervisors. When erratic, as was the case with two of the supervisors, students made risks uncertain of how to calculate the costs of failure and insecure about the solidarity of their supervisor at public assessment events. The formative feedback of these two supervisors evidenced a conflict between the espoused 'integrity' discourse which they held dear as practitioners, and the pressures of teleological, deterministic backwash of the anti-intentionalist summative assessment expectations. The majority of their students described instances or periods of feeling coerced by these supervisors to relinquish their desires for strategic gain. It is noteworthy that these two staff members were the newest to academia, both intimating during interviews to being uncertain of their investment in that discourse community and particularly in its assessment processes.

The conditions individuals within the same context were able to establish, depended on their capacity to apply the principles of solidarity, hospitality, safety and redistribution of power, to alleviate experiences of alienation and increase student engagement (Mann, 2001). The application of such principles requires enabling curricular cultures and structures within which teaching, learning and assessment are situated. It is probable that with increased experience and reflection the two newer supervisors would learn to establish more conducive conditions in the studio for their students, as such capacity develops from opportunity, experience and scholarship (Mann, 2001).

Conclusion

Fine art studio practice staff and students have long acknowledged that success in the academic framework counts less in the long term in that domain than perhaps in any other (Parker, 1953). The emergent discourses of nominal authenticity, expressive authenticity, authenticity as resistance and authenticity as integrity, were identified in the primary data and analysed in the sections above. These confirm that the tensions between external and internal motivation and validation continue to be a source of disquiet in creative arts higher education, because the problem of authorship and interpretation is intractable.

This study provides insights into the importance placed on actual intentionality for the artist-student, and the cost of related risk-taking to their learning, grades, and even mental health. At this formative stage in the development of their authorship, the undergraduate students participating in this study were strongly informed by, and generated, discourses of nominal authenticity. Data from both schools indicated that whilst some students were engaged with and sometimes even proud of their creative work, most often there were strong experiences of alienation as the artwork became a product of exchange for assessment purposes. Most of those who bowed to imposed pressures relinquished their desires and often suffered emotional alienation from process and/or product, and particularly from themselves and their identities

as artists, as they judged such strategic actions harshly. This affective aspect proved most influential for student engagement.

Students at AS1 were comparatively more confident, perhaps as a result of the independence-oriented curriculum and the appreciative formative feedback culture. However, it should be noted that such confidence in their own abilities to evaluate their work did not necessarily mirror the grades they were awarded, as the central criterion students used for their self-assessments were not aligned with the interpretation approach of their assessors. Students at AS2 were more fearful of the assessment culture which was explicitly anti-intentionalist. As mediators of the different interpretative communities and discourses, supervisors' inconsistencies created experiences of alienation, as the process and products of students' labour were positioned between conflicting motivations without a sense of solidarity or calculated risk. The metaphor of assessment as linguistic or bad translation (Elkins, 2001) is pertinent, as staff and student participants did not openly acknowledge operating within and under different discourses. However, students whose nominal authenticity was consistently validated within principled supervisor-student relationships, felt enabled to resist strategic pressures, cope with such uncertainties, and be more secure in their own evaluations.

In psychotherapy, differing notions of authenticity are given complexity to help the person become cognisant of how the reception of their intentionality is embedded within communities and contexts (Schmid, 2001). Authenticity in this sense is not a nostalgic desire to bridge the gap between the autonomous self and the world beyond, but rather situated, complex and continuous negotiations between "multiple forms of ethical accountability" as artists (Braidotti, 2014, p. 251). Assessment discussions could be shifted towards more 'authentic assessment', in terms of artist-educators foregrounding the tacit referential frameworks utilized in professional practice for the purposes of *genuinely* enabling assessment for their fellow artists' learning (Swaffield, 2011). This may enable students to grapple more productively and less detrimentally with the *complexities* of interpretation in contemporary art, and to make more informed decisions about the risks and costs involved.

Novice artists' investment, coming to voice, and meta-cognition, may be better fostered by acknowledging and incorporating the student's desire for nominal authenticity *in dialogue with* the complications of reception. Indeed, lessons could be learnt from the evaluation processes of critical academic development in higher education. The authenticity of the account which academics construct in their teaching portfolios is recognised as playing a role in the quality of the development of their thinking and practice (Belluigi, 2016b; Trevitt & Stocks, 2012), which in turn strengthens their capacity for agency to impact shifting assessment practices and policies.

Competing Interests

The author declares that she has no competing interests.

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