

Excavating the ‘Critique’: An investigation into disjunctions between the espoused and the practiced within a Fine Art Studio Practice curriculum

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Abstract

This report presents the findings of a case study excavating the event of the ‘Critique’ (crit), the formative assessment method within a Fine Art Studio Practice curriculum. Arguments informed by critical postmodernism, education theories and contemporary art criticism are utilised to construct a dialectic of higher education, contemporary art and fine art studio practice. An emphasis is placed on the importance of agency, expressed through intentionality and critical thinking, with a recognition of the relationship between ‘the self’ and ‘the other’.

Using critical discourse analysis, the disjunctions between the espoused and practiced curriculum are explored. The researcher analyses how the assessment practices of the case studied are influenced by unexamined agentic factors, such as inter-departmental relations, lecturers’ assumptions and prior learning, and structural determinants, such as the medium-specific Bachelor of Fine Art degree structure and prevailing artistic traditions. The research findings indicate that these are underpinned by tensions between two orientations, the espoused curriculum’s discourse-interest informed by critical theory, and the theory-in-use. The latter is shown to have unexamined modernist leanings towards formalism and a master-apprentice relationship between lecturer and students, which encourages reproduction rather than critical, creative thinking. The dominant discourses in the case studied construct a negative dialectic of the artist-student that can be seen to deny student agency and authorial responsibility. Findings suggest that students experience this as alienating, to the extent that to preserve their sense of self, they adopted surface and strategic approaches to learning.

An argument is made for lecturers’ critically reflexive engagement with their teaching practice, and thereby to model ethical relationships between ‘self’ and ‘other’ during ‘crits’. In addition, emphasis is placed on how assessment practices should be more aligned with the espoused curriculum, so that the importance of a reflexive relationship between form and content, process and product, intentionality and interpretation is acknowledged.

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Chapter One

Introducing the im-possible¹ endeavour of this research project

The endeavour of this project might be termed “making the hidden curriculum visible” in the hopes of finding “a crucial way out of the experience of alienation” (Mann, 2001:17) felt by many students in fine art studio practice. I feel that in many ways this project is a continuation of the ethical responsibility that I accepted when becoming a teacher.

The responsibility of the lecturer goes far beyond the ‘official’ curriculum, since academic, social and personal developments are closely intertwined. Many aspects of the curriculum are ‘hidden’, not just in their messages but in their effects, and the responsibility of ensuring that these are sustaining and enhancing to students’ confidence, self-esteem and development is worthy of greater attention (Pitts, 2003: 191).

I have been impelled by what I experienced as an ethical dilemma. The negative effects of the ‘Critique’ (crit), the formative assessment method used in fine art studio practice (FASP), repeatedly confronted me during my own studies in fine art, then later as a lecturer in the discipline and now as a lecturer in higher education development.

Whilst critiquing my own teaching practice for the coursework component of this Master in Education degree (Belluigi, 2006), I began to suspect that tensions between what is intended/ consciously articulated as the purpose of fine art studio practice curricula, and what is practiced and experienced in teaching and learning relationships may be underpinned by ideological conflict. In my experience, the ‘espoused theory’ appeared to differ from the ‘theory-in-use’ (Argyris and Schon, 1974 in Brockbank & McGill, 1999:28) (see Chapter Two II.4). The reflective impetus of that research led to this more conventionally ‘academic’ research project: a case study to determine whether and to what extent these suspicions were founded, and the writing of this research report, which I hope will encourage reflection and change for other teachers in the creative arts.

In this research report, I draw from arguments informed by critical postmodernism, education theories and contemporary art criticism, to construct, in Chapter Two, a dialectic of higher education, contemporary art and fine art studio practice.

¹ Lyotard’s conception of im-possibility relates to the Mosaic burden of those that ‘witness’ despite foreknowledge of their own failure, striving to represent and to do so ethically. Lyotard draws from Walter Benjamin’s conception of utopia resting on a ‘compact with failure’ or as a ‘telos’ without teleology because emancipation is ultimately an illusion or myth (Bronner, 1991 in Belluigi, 2001: 23) and because representation is ultimately incommensurable (Saltzman, 1999 in Belluigi, 2001: 61). See Adorno’s notion of redemption later in this chapter.

I identified four areas of primary importance for student learning in FASP, which became the focal interstices of my research:

- the reflexive relationship between form & content
- the art making process as a process of learning
- student agency, expressed through a focus on intentionality
- the importance of critical reflection, involving an openness to and ethical concern of interpretation by ‘the other’

My own approach is informed by ‘postmodernism as critical theory’ (Agger, 1992). Much like Jay’s argument for ‘polyscopic vision’ in art criticism (see Chapter Two IV. 1), Schwab (1970 in Terwel, 1999:196) contends that educational research should be ‘polyfocal’ by uniting elements from diverse theories, including personal experience (see Chapter Three I.5.6), into a coherent basis for action. Agger (1992:281) argues for “a literary social science, borrowing from the Frankfurt School’s critical theory, feminist theory, poststructuralism, and postmodernism”. Adorno’s (1978:247) somewhat unconventional plea is for the researcher/historian to adopt the position of looking at his/her subject from the position where the familiar is ‘made strange’, comparative with an imagined reflective state:

The only philosophy which can be responsibly practised in the face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption. Knowledge has no light but that shed on the world by redemption: all else is reconstruction, mere technique. Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light.

In Chapter Three, I discuss the politics and pragmatics involved in engaging with and then representing this research. Informed by critical perspectives on research, my analytical focus is on the “disguised contradictions hidden by ideology” in the hopes of allowing spaces for previously silenced voices (Gephart 1999, url). Such ‘emancipatory knowledge’ carries with it the im-possible assumption of critical theory, that by searching for the deeper structures underlying surface appearances, and by removing tacit ideological biases, the material world of structured contradictions and/or exploitation can be objectively known (Gephart 1999, url). It involves critiquing values and beliefs, structures of feeling and of social relationships which produce visible injustices and malformations (Gibson 1986:12). Assessment inherently involves the assigning of value, and for this reason the crit event provided a focal entry point into the practiced curriculum.

Excavating² the crit

In its everyday usage, 'critical' can be defined as the practice of evaluating an object or situation in accordance with a system of rules, principles and values (Locke 2004:27). For Foucault it involves a systematic, analytical endeavour to reveal the nature of systems of rules, principles and values as historically situated bases for critique. In this research project, I try to operate on a number of levels: looking at the 'critique' in fine art practice and attempting to expose the values, beliefs and assumptions that underpin it, thereby engaging in critique myself, while at the same time being self-critical about the values that underpin my own practice as researcher. Foster (1996:226) asserts:

Etymologically, to criticize is to judge or to decide, and I doubt if any artist, critic, theorist, or historian can ever escape value judgments. We can, however, make value judgments that, in Nietzschean terms, are not only reactive but active - and, in non-Nietzschean terms, not only distinctive but useful. Otherwise critical theory may come to deserve the bad name with which it is often branded today.

Chapter Four is constructed from my analysis and interpretation of the data collected, in response to the focal interstices identified in Chapter Two. Using critical discourse analysis, data collected about and during the event of the 'crit', is used to unlock the unexamined assumptions and beliefs of lecturers and the experiences and approaches of students. Drawing data from various perspectives, I hope in this case study to practice what Foucault calls 'archaeology' as "a way of achieving generality without sacrificing specificity, continuity without sacrificing discontinuity, form without sacrificing dispersion, and focus without sacrificing multiplicity" (Bannet, 1989:106). Despite the limitations of this project, such as time and word-count constraints, I have been committed to keeping the rich detail and *différence* of individual's stories.

Envisioning change

The research report is concluded with an argument for critically reflexive teaching practice, including the potential for lecturers to model ethical relationships between 'self' and 'other' during 'crits'. In addition, emphasis is placed on how assessment practices should be more

² I use this word here, in the title of the thesis and throughout this text, to intentionally link my project with that of the philosophers whose ideas I draw from, mostly the 'work' of critical theorists influenced by Walter Benjamin's conceptions of history. The word 'excavate' links directly to and is commensurate with Michel Foucault's text on knowledge and archaeology. Within this is an assumption on my part that object-subjects are "archeologically written in their deepest being, internally constituted by the changing script of social relations, which never adds up to a fully coherent text" (Eagleton, 1981 in Belluigi, 2001:34). The object of study is treated as a living palimpsest with traces perhaps expunged by over-writing or secreted in ways that can be hopefully be productively retrieved.

aligned with the espoused curriculum, for the reflexive relationships between form and content, process and product, intentionality and interpretation to be acknowledged. Derrida (in Navah, 2001:78) argues against an exclusively negative deconstruction: "what has been called the deconstructive gesture...is accompanied, or can be accompanied... by an affirmation. It is not negative, it is not destructive". I feel it is important that you, as the reader, are aware that this research report is not an attempt to discredit the potential value of the crit method, because I truly believe in its potential to facilitate transformative learning and encourage engagement. It is rather to encourage critically reflexive consideration of its use within the curriculum and socializing practices.

Gunn (2003:277) discusses the value of approaching disciplines from an educational perspective:

By doing this we risk placing ourselves outside of our intellectual homes, creating upsets not only in terms of curriculum and assessment but also of the subject matter itself... such an interface can show how theories from one discipline provide points of contrast and comparison to another, allowing for a more critical reflection on the discipline and subject approaches.

Moreover, I join the few other voices who believe there is an imperative for FASP teachers to take the opportunity to become more informed through research in teaching and learning, and more open to engaging in critical conversations with our colleagues about notions of 'good' practice, so that the quality of student learning is enhanced and imperatives are not determined elsewhere (Davies, 1997, url).

Chapter Two

Polyscopic perspectives

In this chapter, I operate with the belief that the ‘emancipatory interest’ in areas of critical theory (Part I), education (Part II) and contemporary art (Part III) provide an appropriate framework in which to explore notions of ‘good’ practice in teaching and learning interactions within fine art studio practice curricula in higher education (Part IV). While these aspects are presented in separated parts in this chapter, it will become clear that there are interstices and overlaps between them. The chapter is constructed to show how notions such as critical reflexivity, agency and intentionality, relationships between ‘self’ and ‘other’, run as currents throughout.

Part I. Critical theory as postmodernism

I. 1. Ideology

Drawing from Karl Marx’s (in Kilgore, 2001:54) “relentless criticism of all existing conditions”, critical theory contends that what is ‘true’ or ‘given’ is constructed by, and in the interests of, certain individuals and groups. These constructions create structures of privilege and oppression at the expense of ‘others’, causing an imbalance of power. The logic that maintains these structures, what is termed ‘hegemony’ or ‘instrumental reason’, becomes a ‘naturalised’ lens through which people interpret their daily experiences (Kilgore, 2001:55). Critical theorists aim to expose such ‘common sense’ as ideological, because “to grasp that taken-for-granted beliefs are not as ‘natural’ as they appear to be is the first step towards enlightenment and emancipation... the realisation of true interests” (Gibson, 1986:11). Excavating knowledge and social practices to uncover the ideologies that inform them, critical theorists attempt to expose the roots of injustice, oppression and inequality. Critical theory has made valuable contributions to education by encouraging the exposure of hidden structures and forces that deny free choice, such as I attempted to do in this research project.

Pertinent for the educational interest of this research project, critical theorists argue that far from being universal or timeless, knowledge is representational and provisional. All ‘facts’ are socially constructed, interpreted and determined by human interests and therefore far from value-free. What becomes clear from this critical worldview is the indivisibility and reciprocity of theory and practice. Learning becomes a process of challenging and reflecting on what, how and why we ‘know’ certain things, so as to take action and make informed decisions about how to challenge any assumptions or conditions that have the potential to reinforce oppression (Kilgore, 2001:55). Instead of privileging objectivity, this

stance acknowledges and embraces subjectivity, relativity and commitment (Gibson, 1986:4).

I. 2. Agency and human intentionality

In their emphasis on human agency and their recognition of human intentions, powers and purposes in shaping society, critical theorists from the Frankfurt School can be seen to differ from orthodox Marxism's reduction of the individual to a tool of oppressive forces in power. These theorists draw instead from early Marxism which saw people as creative, meaning-seeking and potentially free (Gibson, 1986). The individual's desire to be free informs 'emancipatory interests'. In addition, poststructuralist Michel Foucault's (1986, in Billet, 2006:61) later writings expressed the view that individuals' responses to 'desire', although a socially constructed subjectivity, are emblematic of their capacity for agency and human intentionality.

However Alexander (2005:356) cautions that assumptions by many postmodernists that the student will "embrace liberation as defined by others, whether or not she [*sic*] would choose such a form of liberty for herself", can create ethical problems because they seemingly remove the conditions for agency. These conditions are identified as free will or self-determination; moral intelligence or self-expression; fallibility or self-evaluation (Alexander, 2005:356). Sharing her concerns, Billet (2006:61) suggests a middle road

Just as behaviourism denied human consciousness (Taylor, 1985), accounts that emphasise situational determinism risk denying human intentionality, agency, and identity. Therefore, finding a pathway between social determinism and highly individualistic accounts of cognition is important in understanding their relationship.

'Postmodernism as critical theory' redefines the political, where "the death of the subject is only temporary. Once we historicize subjectivity, we can rethink the modalities of personal and public life in an energizing way" (Agger, 1992:297) (see IV.1). This issue is important because notions of individual autonomy, personal freedom and creativity are central to educational concerns (Gibson, 1986:10). The importance of these notions in terms of the artist-student will be debated and discussed throughout this research report.

II. 3. Emancipatory interest and critical thinking

'Emancipatory knowledge' comes from exploring the misfit between what is said to exist or is 'espoused' versus what is 'hidden' but exists in practice because of the play of power. Rather than simply being exploratory in identifying the bias and distortions that prevent personal

and social growth, critical theory aims to enable change. In arguing that individuals and groups should examine ‘who’ is in control of their own lives, it has as its goal that people will empower themselves and determine their own identities (Gibson, 1986:2). In this conception, knowledge is related to power, in that through emancipatory knowledge the individual can gain power to change his/her position. Moreover, the emphasis is not only on individual empowerment, but on the ability for the individual to create knowledge that will have more democratic interests (Kilgore, 2001:59). As Flannery (2004:317) states

the intellectual is to effect change, to challenge vested interests that would limit dialogue on matters of grave importance and to function as a public witness-bearer¹ to personal and public forms of truth.

A way to ‘rub against the grain’ of such forces of naturalisation or domination, is to challenge existing paradigms through personal reason or what is called criticism, critical reflection (Mezirow, 1981) or critical thinking (Brookfield, 1995)². While some caution that such a practice may lead to another dualism between thought and action, others argue for a more holistic understanding which embraces knowledge, self and the world: what Barnett (in Light & Cox, 2001:14) refers to as ‘critical being in the world’. For the position of criticality to be empowering, and truly emancipatory, it must be *internalised* and *enacted* in some way – it must be reflexive. In this conception, human intentionality is posited as having the potential to act both self-reflexively and critically within society.

Jacques Derrida’s conception of ethical relations between ‘self’ and ‘other’ is reflexive. With the ethical face-to-face encounter there is neither sameness nor radical alterity, symmetry nor asymmetry, identity nor difference in the relation to the ‘other’ (Bernstein, 1991:72)³. Julia Kristeva’s (1991) analysis (after Freud) is that each person recognizes the difference/foreignness within him/herself as a possible ethical condition of his/her being with ‘others’. That this approach to diversity as necessary to becoming critical about one’s ‘self’, is echoed by McEvelley (1996:129):

By learning to appreciate the value stance of another group than the one we were born into we expand our selfhood. In this piecemeal way we can approach the

¹ For more on this Levitical sense of ‘bearing witness’ see Belluigi (2001), where I discuss the artist-historian-exile as ‘witness’ in relation to the burdens of representation ‘after Auschwitz’ and after apartheid.

² Agger (1992: 295) describes how “postmodernism offers Marxism and feminism an internal method of self-interrogation with which to examine fossilised assumptions about the nature of oppressing and freedom. Call this deconstruction; call it immanent critique; or call it self-criticism. Names do not matter”.

³ This relates fundamentally to the politics of representation which is often problematically centred around polar opposites – such as race in the context of South Africa or cultural identity in the context of post-war Europe – rather than recognising the slippage, the neither/nor of such dialectical relations (Belluigi 2001: 4). See Chapter Four II.4 on my discussion of discourses adopted by the School studied in relation to this topic.

project of becoming, not universal in a metaphysical sense, but global in a pragmatic sense.
How such notions are explored in education theory will be explored in the next section.

Part II. Current education theory

II. 1. Constructionism: student-focus and relationship to the ‘other’

With the move away from teacher-centred to student-centred education in recent education theory and practice, there has been a general adoption of constructivist views of learning developed from cognitive psychology (Palincsar, 1998). Different conceptions of constructionism can be placed on a continuum between trivial constructivism’s concerns with the individual construction of ‘correct’ representations of knowledge, to radical constructionism’s rejection of objective knowledge and its argument that knowledge is developed in dialogue and social relations with ‘others’ (Palincsar, 1998:347). This latter emphasis is on both the active role students play in acquiring knowledge and how knowledge is socially constructed, relating to the agentic emphasis and socio-cultural orientation of critical theory discussed in Part I.

One recent shift in both education and contemporary art, has been away from notions of a general, homogenous ‘class’ to the particularity of experience of each individual, with both diversity and commonality valued. Such shifts are underpinned by the ideological influence of postmodernism, particularly critical theory. As the post-colonialist Homi Bhabha (1994:2) finds, “it is in the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest or cultural value are negotiated”. Because of the history of imbalance and cultural schisms in South African society, diversity in terms of race, class and culture are where the lecturer often has to be most sensitive (see Chapter Four II.3.2). Because the constructivist, personal relevance approach “does not imply that one person’s viewpoint is better than another’s” (Toohey, 1999:56), strong emphasis is placed on tolerance for ‘the others’ viewpoint. In addition, if “learning is primarily a direct result of individual differences between students” (Biggs, 1999:61), then recognising and even utilising the diversity within the student group, such as through peer assessment, can have positive benefits to their learning.

II. 2. Transformative learning and meaning making

Cognitive theories were intended to promote a psychology focused on ‘meaning making’ (Bruner, in Palincsar, 1998). Mezirow (1981) contends that adult education should aim to facilitate individuals’ understandings of their experiences in ways that expose reasons for their problems, enabling them to assume responsibility. His notion of ‘transformative learning’ is directly informed by critical theory’s emancipatory interest:

Bringing psycho-cultural assumptions into critical consciousness to help a person understand how he or she has come into possession of conceptual categories, rules, tactics and criteria for judging implicit in habits of perception, thought and behaviour involves perhaps the most significant kind of learning. It increases a crucial sense of agency over ourselves and our lives (Mezirow, 1981:20).

Transformative learning is characterised by a search for meaning in “a process of continually transforming perceptions through reflection” (Martin, 2002:96) where the student’s existing frameworks are challenged and suspended in order for new meaning to be made. When there is contraction between the student’s current understanding and what s/he experiences, the disequilibrium that results challenges the student to question his/her beliefs and to consider alternate options. Piaget (1985, in Palincsar, 1998:350) contends that “disequilibrium forces the subject to go beyond his current state and strike out in new directions”. Thus teachers adopting a constructivist, student-centred approach adopt the role of facilitating their students to develop or change their conceptions or world views (Trigwell, 2001). Changing a frame of reference has affective, interpersonal and moral dimensions (Burton, 2006), which is why personal relevance and learning from experience should be prized in curricula (Toohey, 1999). In addition, situationalism emphasizes that for learning to be ‘authentic’ it should take place in meaningful contexts, in what are called ‘communities of practice’ (Lave, in Terwell, 1999:195).

Research on student learning in higher education has found that students adopt ‘surface’, ‘strategic’ or ‘deep’ approaches to learning at different times (Marton & Saljo, 1984, in Martin, Hounsell & Entwistle, 1997). Biggs (1999:58) calls for an ‘active method’ of learning that requires students adopting ‘surface’ approaches to learning “to question, to speculate, to generate solutions, to use the higher order cognitive activities” necessary for ‘deep’ approach to learning (see Chapter Three I.5.4 & Four III.2). Whilst Haggis (2003:92) is critical of such notions, arguing that “many studies continue to report that students are mainly resistant to attempts to change the way they approach their learning”, Marshall & Case (2005:263) point to studies which have focussed on

the role of reflection and metacognition... suggesting that shifts in approach to learning are not merely passive responses to modifications of the course context but are linked to the students' own self-reflection and sense of awareness and agency as learners.

Mann (2001) asserts that this focus on student approaches to learning should be broadened to include a consideration of their *experiences* of learning, and whether these are 'alienated' or 'engaged' (see Chapter 4 III.1). Coming from the perspective of affective learning, she contends that both the surface and strategic approaches express an alienation from the subject and process of study itself (Mann, 2001:7). While a surface approach is focused on completing the task and is characterised by memorisation, reproduction and little reflection, the student disengages "their being and desires" from the subject of study. A strategic approach focuses on the assessment requirements and expectations but at the cost of students' own commitment and intentions. It positions control or relinquishes power to the perceived demands and criteria for success of external others. Instead, a 'deep' approach to learning can be defined as a "search for personal meaning, based on intrinsic interest, curiosity and a desire and ability to relate the learning to personal experience" (Prosser & Trigwell, in Haggis, 2003:94). It is this 'deep' approach with 'engaged' experiences that 'good' teaching should encourage.

II. 3. Critical thinking, agency & intentionality

The possibility for higher education to function as 'critic and conscience of society' has, in the past, rightly been upheld as being fundamental to the role of a critical citizenry in keeping democracy vibrant and substantive (Singh, 2001:12).

Knight (2001a:7) points out that higher education curricula

are giving increasing prominence to complex learning outcomes and to 'soft skills' - they are claiming to foster inter-personal skill, emotional intelligence, creativity, critical thinking, reflectiveness, incremental self-theories, autonomy and such like.

This is reflected in the Education Department's 'White Paper' (South Africa, DoE, n.p.), where one of the purposes of higher education is described as needing to "contribute to the socialisation of enlightened, responsible and constructively critical citizens" and to encourage "the development of a reflexive capacity and a willingness to review and renew prevailing ideas, policies and practices based on a commitment to the common good" (see Chapter Four II.4.1). I would argue there is conceptual alignment between critical theory's emancipatory interest, emphasis on individual agency and reflexivity, and the 'work' of higher education.

In 'Democracy and Education', John Dewey (1916, in Brockbank & McGill, 1999:24) contends that the essentials for learning are identical with the essentials of reflection: ideas

are tested by the student through application so as to make meanings clear and to discover for his/her *own* self their validity. For students to learn in ways that can be adapted and applied in novel circumstances (as is necessary in art making), they must have some intentionality in the process (Billet, 2006:59). Many emphasize that social and cognitive experiences in education represent interdependent dimensions (Billet, 2000). The process of learning is shaped through interactions between social and individual contributions, yet with individuals playing a highly agentic role in those interactions. This emphasizes the need to engage the student's personal stance in the learning process in order to enable him/her to take on the role of active agent, rather than passive receiver in society (Salmon, 1989 in Mann, 2001).

Barnett (in Brazil, 2004:298-299) urges university educators to adopt a conception of the 'dialogical character' of understanding, where they "help students become aware of understandings that they possess but of which they are unaware", so as to enable them to construct their own voice. Barnett calls this 'a process of becoming', of enabling students to 'come into themselves'. Similarly fine art educator, Tom Hardy (2006:273) adds that the student in fine art studio practice should develop both a 'personal voice' and a critical language with which to speak it (see Chapter 4 II.3.2).

II. 4. Curriculum

Knight (2001b) defines curriculum as a set of purposeful, intended experiences that take the forms of the planned curriculum, the created curriculum, and the understood curriculum. He maintains that effective curricula should have coherence between "the key messages that pervade learning encounters, constituting an *intentional discourse* about what matters and the 'rules of the game'" [emphasis mine] (Knight 2001:370). Where there is no coherence alternate conceptions of curriculum are required, such as the 'espoused curriculum' (what teachers/ institutions explicitly articulate) versus the 'hidden curriculum' or 'practiced curriculum' (which is the actual practice or 'theory-in-use').

According to Dewey (in Brockbank & McGill, 1999:22), the aim of education is to make the process of learning conscious and explicit, emphasizing this process over the content or task (see Chapter Four II.2). With disruptions of traditional notions of knowledge (see I.2.), the focus on content has been replaced by a focus on skills and learning: "Everything which might have been seen as obtaining knowledge—an object of an activity—seems to have moved into an activity mode, where what is important is process" (Marshall, in Lambier, 2005:351). Knight (2000, in Knight, 2001b:375) distinguishes three aspects of this 'process

model': (i) helping students to develop claims to achievement; (ii) providing accounts of 'process standards' (learning engagements and scaffolding); (iii) seeing assessment systems as communication systems. This model can be seen to reject myths of fixed intelligence (see III.1), and espouses the idea that commitment, thinking and effort will lead to improvement. A model associated with Outcomes Based Education (OBE) is Biggs' (1999) 'constructive alignment', where all aspects of teaching practice are aligned with outcomes⁴. This is seen to work constructively when the alignment between objectives, outcomes and assessment is 'valid' and made clear to the students. Arguing against this model, Barnett (in Hussey & Smith, 2003) believes that the strong focus on outcomes leans towards 'instrumental reasoning' (see I.1). Hussey & Smith (2003) propose an 'articulated curriculum' which moves learning outcomes away from the focus on assessment to a focus on the teaching-learning relationship and the practical realities of teaching (what they term 'unexpected learning outcomes')⁵. An important difference between the 'constructive alignment' and 'articulated curriculum' models, is the shift from projecting or determining the student's learning development to the inclusion of the 'voice' of the individual and the student classroom experience.

The agentic stance of critical thinking is echoed in the notion that an effective curriculum should strive to "establish good links between assessment, learning and personal development by, *inter alia*, allowing students some element of choice, encouraging self-assessment and reflection" (Luckett & Sutherland, 2000:107). There is encouragement of the student "valuing while critiquing knowing" (Parker, 2003:539) instead of "doing rather than knowing" (Barnett, Parry & Coate, 2001:436-7). Students are encouraged to examine society and its cultural products (what Adorno calls the 'Culture Industry') so as "to expose the covert values that guide them" (Toohey, 1999:64). Marquez (2006:159-160) makes a case for a nuanced focus that dissolves the dichotomy between knowledge of being and practice of becoming, so that higher education involves giving people the tools to "become somebody, and to become actors in their lives and in the bigger social context".

⁴ Underpinning this model is a hierarchical conception of learning, from basic to complex forms of understanding, articulated in Biggs' (1999) 'Structure of Observed Learning Outcomes' (SOLO) taxonomy.

⁵ In contrast to Biggs' linear model, the 'articulated curriculum' is based on Bruner's (1960) concept of the development process as where "fundamental and structuring ideas are encountered repeatedly in a spiral process involving the redefinition of fundamental ideas and concepts at evermore sophisticated levels of understanding and application" (Hussey & Smith, 2003: 362). This suggests a repeated deepening or a 'drilling down' of understanding.

II. 5. Assessment purposes and principles

Assessment can be divided into formative and summative purposes that are not mutually exclusive. Assessment should be part of the learning process, providing students with information on the quality of their learning and having them play a larger role in assessing their own progress. Since assessment will have a profound influence on how and what students will focus explicitly in their learning - what Biggs (1999:68-9) terms 'backwash' - the teacher should consider using it effectively to achieve certain outcomes. Effective assessments are "intended to generate information about the task (feedback) and about ways of improving performance on similar tasks in the future (feedforward)" (Knight, n.d.:1). This is because the aspects the teacher is perceived to be assessing are interpreted by the students to be what the teacher thinks is important. As in the case of this research project, assessment practices can become sites for research, where analyses of what is valued as important or essential to assess can expose if there is misfit between what is espoused, what is hidden and actual practice.

Contemporary emphasis is on transparency, fairness, reliability and validity as key principles to guide effective and ethical assessment practices. Transparent communication between teachers and students should reflect the aims, outcomes and expectations in the assessment tasks (Biggs, 1999). It is argued that assessment criteria should be explicitly communicated to students both to make teachers accountable and to encourage students' skills of self-assessment. Fairness is an issue of particular importance in the South African context, where students come from a range of backgrounds and diverse secondary school standards, and where HE access has historically been opaque and often 'unfair' (see II.1). A diversity of assessment methods provides opportunities for the diverse abilities of students. Biggs claims that different assessment methods can activate different levels of learning – whether quantitative (increases knowledge) or qualitative (deepens understanding) – and should be designed to bridge the gap between 'deep' and 'surface' approaches to learning (see II.2). Using Mann's (2001) understanding, I would add that assessment environments should create and encourage committed rather than alienating experiences.

The concept of 'reliability' in assessment practices can be defined as the extent of consistency in judgements. Transparency, reliability and objectivity are clearly desirable within assessment practices. However an overemphasis risks limiting interpretation, marginalizing exceptional qualities and consequently 'dumbing down' thought and practice (Moon, n.d.). A different conception of transparency, relevant to FASP, could make explicit the fact that the

criteria are not and cannot cover all angles/ expectations, perspectives and realisations of 'success' but rather are 'indicators' (Knight, 2001a:20) or points of discussion.

Validity can be defined as being "concerned with the accuracy and appropriateness of our methods in truth-seeking in assessment" (Luckett & Sutherland, 2000:106), but where the pursuit for accuracy is not at the expense of those very aspects that are being assessed (Knight, 2001a:14). For assessment to be valid, it should assess the aspects that are considered by the assessor to have value. Central to the contemporary definition of validity is the effect of the assessment method on the fate of the student - that the nature of the inferences made on the results of the assessments are 'safe'. Although both postmodernists and critical theorists argue against modernist notions of authority, elitism and influence, Sullivan (1993:18) warns that teachers who give in to unbridled interpretation where all views are relative, "remain entrapped by theory rather than liberated from it". This debate will be fleshed out in terms of FASP in IV.1 of this chapter, and analysed in depth in Chapter Four II.3.

Arguing for intentionality and agency in the student, Alexander (2005:363) emphasizes the importance of the students' identification with valid and ethical traditions in which assessments make sense:

It... requires students to recognize that in the context of those traditions they have the capacity to err in what they think, feel and do, but that they can also change course and make a difference. This is a source of fear and trepidation, but also of great joy. Cultivating this sort of existential joy is, to my mind, the highest aspiration of any curriculum.

Part III. Visual cultural theory

Tension inherent to two dominant streams of thought in Twenty and Twenty-first Century art criticism, modernist formalism and postmodernist discourse-interest, come to the fore on the issue of content or meaning. Theodor Adorno in *Negative dialectics* (1969, in Belluigi, 2001) cautions that influences, such as this tension, will come out 'negatively' in assessment of artwork⁶. Artists or movements that define a certain style's 'high culture' have significance to students, even those unaware of their existence, because lecturer's judgements have been directly or subtly influenced by those works or philosophies – their 'absence' is embodied through the 'presence' in the shaping and evaluation of aesthetic judgement (Gibson, 1986).

⁶ As an alternative to such 'non-identical thinking', Adorno suggests that philosophically reflexive aesthetic experience is preferable (Belluigi, 2001:24). Reflexivity is discussed in this chapter in relation to social criticism in I.3, the teacher and student in II.3, and assessment of artworks in III.3. See also Chapter Five I.

In this section I briefly discuss philosophies that inform modernist and postmodernist perspectives of artmaking, while, in Chapter Four, I explore their ‘negative’ traces in relation to the case studied.

III. 1 Modernism’s formalist doctrine

Modernism’s formalist approach is rooted in the Romantic tradition (and behind it in Neoplatonism) which desired to see the artwork as transcendently free and beyond contextual influence. By the mid-1960s Clement Greenberg, Susan Sontag and other art critics and historians adopted and furthered this myth in their desire for the ‘sacred’ in a secular age. In this conception, the *form* or visual surface of the artwork alone is its *content*. Rosalind Krauss (in McEvelley, 1996:22) presents the formalist importance given to the perception of ‘feeling’ in a work: “if the work is not a vehicle of those emotions, in no matter how surprising a form, then what one is in the presence of is not art but design”. Critical theorists argue that the ‘danger’ of such myths is that they posit aesthetic experience as escapism, where artworks become “the medium for acceptance, resignation, passivity and reconciliation” (Gibson, 1986:71). Because artworks in this conception are believed to belong to another more personal or spiritual realm of transcendence or enlightenment, they are perceived to be detached from the social complexities of lived experience.

In addition, Romantic myths of the autonomous, authentic, artist-genius unwittingly silence the artist and his/her intentionality, removing social constraints, responsibility and agency (see Chapter Four II.4). Freeman (2006:92) adds that

These romanticized ideas of the artist’s otherness, of art arising out of inspirational leaps taken by the innately creative, remain common currency in our general (in)comprehension of the creative process. As well as providing a somewhat misleading idea of art making, they fuel the belief that creativity is beyond analysis; that the ways of making art are instinctive rather than reflective, and that its processes should remain shrouded in secrecy. For those studying the Arts this is both problematic and reductive.

There are multi-layered arguments against the traces of this formalist ‘doctrine’ that persevere in contemporary approaches to the reception and ‘reading’ of the artwork. McEvelley (1996) makes a number of relevant attacks against formalism’s omissions in terms of content and intentionality, with its claims that a ‘purely optical’ experience can account for the art experience (see Chapter Four II.1). He asserts that no justification is given for the separation of conceptual and aesthetic resonances of artwork. The assumption is that fact can be separated from value, with preference for ‘what’ and ‘how to’ rather than ‘why’ (Gibson, 1986:7). This preoccupation with means rather than aims or ends exposes the

‘instrumental rationality’ at the heart of modernist formalism. Instead McEvelley contends that it is impossible for any reception to exclude elements outside of the physical artwork, and that the artist’s intentions (even if explicitly denied by the critic) cannot be and, in fact, never are ignored.

III. 2 Postmodernism’s discourse-interest

A postmodern cacophony of ‘voices’ speak of how any act of representation is saturated with meaning and implied assumptions about ‘reality’, whether Marxist critics’ excavation of political meaning or philosophers’ examinations for philosophical meaning. The shift from formalist ‘quality’ to neo-avant-garde ‘interest’ is evidenced in the shift from medium-specific to discourse-specific practice in contemporary art (Foster, 1996:201).

In this discourse-specific conception, the artwork creates experiences and reactions which may be either implicitly or explicitly buried in the work. For critical theorists, art is seen as inherently emancipatory, with the potential to acknowledge aesthetic, emotional and spiritual needs. Unlike the escapism of modernist formalism, this occurs through the artwork’s engagement with the world by “acknowledging and encouraging the diversity of human capacity, expression and response” (Gibson, 1986:13). This potential is often unrealised because aesthetics can easily become ‘cultural capital’ used to serve the ideological interests of dominant groups “to exclude and to deny, to defuse protest and liberating impulses, to obstruct the fulfilment of the promise of freedom” (ibid)⁷.

Responding to such an occurrence, the terrifying power and manipulation of images-as-icons by the Third Reich, Adorno called for an anti-theatrical (to use Michel Fried’s term) and ascetic art because it does not create a spectatorial, fetishistic relation with the reader/viewer. Such art exposes the gaps (see *brüche* in Chapter Three I.3) in how it is made, to preclude icon-worship (Saltzman, 1999:20). Adorno is emphatic not only about the potential for art to act as a criticism for the current state of affairs, but also the injunction for art to bear witness to suffering — a site of remembrance as a warning of the dangers in the past reoccurring in the present (Belluigi, 2001:52). Similarly, Hal Foster terms postmodern art ‘anti-aesthetic’, to signal “that the very notion of the aesthetic, its network of ideas, is in question... the idea that aesthetic experience exists apart without ‘purpose’, all but beyond

⁷ Thus while some are optimistic about attempts to create more socially relevant art (Gablik in Sullivan 1993: 10), others are cynical about the social and political agenda of the ‘art world’, reflected in artist Hans Haake’s (in Sullivan 1993: 13) term ‘the consciousness industry’. See my discussion of such simulation in Chapter Four II.

history” (Schiralli, 2002:61). This was later furthered by poststructuralism, where the artwork began to be seen as a readable ‘text’ instead of an unbridled experience.

Discourse-specific practice has artists working with social and political debates, in what Foster (1996:201) calls ‘horizontal’ movements in contrast to the ‘vertical’ formalist engagement with the disciplinary forms of a particular genre or medium⁸. What such practice demands is that “artists and critics be familiar not only with the structure of each culture well enough to map it, but also with its history well enough to narrate it” (Foster, 1996:202). In addition, postmodern art can be characterised by a removal of the formalist separation between form and content (Sullivan, 1993) (see Chapter Four II.1). Contemporary art making demands a reflexive relationship between theory and practice, so that technique is not privileged above concept but rather that they are reciprocally informed by each other. Eisner (1993:9) writes how skills are now needed in representation so that materials, techniques et cetera act as a medium, “something that mediates content”. Such reflexivity is essential to contemporary artmaking: artists are to extend their socially, politically and historically reflexive decisions to the physicality of the work and vice versa. This ties in strongly with elements of the ‘concept of praxis’ where

constitutive elements of praxis are action and reflection... Praxis does not entail a linear relationship between theory and practice in that the former determines the latter; rather it is a reflexive relationship on which each builds upon the other (Grundy, 1987:104).

Instead of art being unknowable and the artist’s process mystical and opaque, the postmodern artist is seen as both subject to social and historical forces, and having ethical responsibilities in his/her image-making (see Chapter Two III.2). Informed by Freudian psychology, ‘inspiration’ is now seen as the realization or ‘trigger’ of ideas that have been dormant in the subconscious. Creative activity is no longer antithetical to analytical engagement (Freeman, 2006:93), but where the artist is a ‘practical intellectual’ engaging actively in critical reflection (Dallow, 2003:49). Fendrich (2005:B6) cautions that even though myths of the Romantic artist have been subverted with postmodernism, many of today’s artists allow themselves to carry the residue of this myth, uncritically believing they are morally superior and more emotionally sensitive than non-artists, and that they are “pitted against a cold and corrupt society” (see Chapter Four II.4). This is where self-reflexivity plays an important part, particularly in education, to prevent self-absorption or tacit acceptance of these myths of creativity which can promote elitism and become

⁸ See Bernstein’s (1977 in Maton 2006) similar approach to structure in term of educational disciplines, which I touch on in Chapter Three I.1.

reductive. Reflexivity is essential in terms of relations with the 'other' where it can protect against exclusion, over-identification and assimilation (see Chapter Four II.3.1).

Part IV. Contemporary Fine Art Studio Practice (FASP)

Learners have an ongoing commitment to challenging their own perceptions and continually remaking their meaning which is a reasonable definition of the fine art process (Martin, 2002:103).

The principle tenets emerging from contemporary art practice that Sullivan (1993:11) reasons should inform FASP education are 'a sense of meaning', 'a sense of connection', 'a sense of doubt' and 'a sense of perspective'. Aligning these with psychological research and education perspectives, he identifies four outcomes for contemporary art education: meaning making, authentic practice, critical reflection and pluralist perspectives. In this section, I examine how current FASP espoused curricula attempt to do what seems, in the Lyotardian sense, im-possible (see Chapter One). Here I draw from Part I-III, in addition to arguments and research of fellow creative arts teachers, to present an affirmative dialectic of contemporary fine art studio practice. This then provides a necessary counterpoint for comparison with aspects of the practiced curriculum analysed in the case study in Chapter Four.

IV. 1. Conceptual outcomes of FASP curricula

Fine art as a subject discipline is concerned with encouraging the development of individual artistic practice which is responsive to social and cultural contexts (Corner, 2005). The student can go through a particularly transformative experience in FASP, where s/he is encouraged to "unlearn in order to learn... unlearning in the sense that you have to critically examine your constructs and be prepared to set them aside and look at things afresh" (Martin, 2002:96). Towards this, critical discourse is centred on the artworks of students and artists, with dimensions of inquiry into social issues (such as race, gender, ethnicity) serving to interrogate, challenge and shape the artist-student's personal and cultural connections (Sullivan, 1993:18). This "look[ing] beyond the structures of their discipline or the interests of the individual to society" is in an attempt to build critical consciousness (Toohey, 1999:65-66). In my experience, content is organized around investigations, themes or projects, with complex concepts such as 'the other' or 'the gaze', chosen "from the pervasive and significant social problems of the day" (ibid.). Such approaches to curriculum come from the belief that "art education can make a difference in student understanding of

and action in the world and that that difference can enrich and improve social life” (Freeman, 2006:314).

Understanding and the ability to communicate through artmaking is developed through learning and experience (Corner, 2005). Such ‘experiential learning’ occurs when students draw on a range of theories and practical skills, exploring the contexts and genres within which they are working and developing their own approach to the embodied meaning of a work of art. Unlike the generally explicit nature of theoretical knowledge, much experiential knowledge is implicit (Mottram & Whale, 2001). Because of FASP’s practical nature, where “knowledge is constructed while interacting and participating in the work” (Pratt, Arseneau and Collins, 2001:8), ‘apprenticeship’ strategies in studio interactions are often appropriate. Vygotsky’s (in Jarvis, Holford & Griffin, 2003:37) notion of the “zone of proximal development” has relevance, where the “learning space” falls “between what they can do on their own and what they can do with expert guidance” (Pratt, 2002:10). While FASP students’ conceptual development can be linked to Bruner’s spiral, the technical skills they learn are often hierarchical in their learning structure, building over a period of time. This is one reason why formative crits are preferable (see IV.2), so that the studio teacher can include in discussions what has been learnt in the long term, which aspects are successful and where improvements can be made (Gordon, 2004:64).

But this type of teacher-student contact has to be limited so that it does not create a master-apprentice power dynamic (see Chapter Four I.1). Because one of the conditions for agency is fallibility and self-evaluation (Alexander, 2005), it is important that at times teachers allow their students to stumble and grope as they pursue their growth (Talbot, 1998) (see Chapter Four II.2). This happens in the studio “by means of concrete experience and experiment, by exercising their faculty for abstraction, bringing into play the body itself, and pursuing goals whose scope and meaning cannot be discovered by anyone but themselves” (Talbot, 1998:141).

Much contemporary art questions the value of the art object itself, extending the notion of art-as-object to include process-as-practice and theory-as-practice (Sullivan, 1993:10). A postmodernist contention is that representation is not only an act of (re)presentation but also invention, and it “provides its own unpredictable options that can only emerge in the course of action” (Collingwood, in Eisner, 1993:7). In many ways, this extends to the representation involved in this very research project (see Chapter Three’s conclusion).

Freeman's (2006) discussion of the parallels between creativity and autonomy has relevance here (see Chapter Four II.4). He points out that autonomous learning or 'meta-learning' (Nickerson et al. in Freeman, 2006:92-93) is one of the central determinants of student creativity. Moreover, much of what the student will need to learn is not how to reproduce technical skills, but how to grow into 'being' a socially critical artist (see III.2). Dallow (2003:49) describes artmaking as an 'indeterminate condition', where art is:

a threshold between conscious thought and unconscious feeling, an opening onto a liminal space where rationality (theory) and irrationality (experience, emotion, art) mix in the individual creative act (practice).

Freeman (2006:99) differentiates between 'weak' and 'strong' acts of creativity. The former is evidenced by students only solving problems to which they are directed (similar to surface or strategic approaches discuss in II.2), the latter when the problem or subject area is opened up to multiple problems and possibilities. The process of 'problematizing' is informed not only by critical theory but also postmodernism, where the learning process involves "the continuous deconstruction of knowledge, of playing with contradictions, and of creatively and productively opening the discourse of a field to an eclectic mosaic of many truths" (Kilgore, 2001:60). The importance of play is given much significance in artmaking. 'Play' here does not mean 'non-serious endeavours' but rather "playing with, trying out, discarding identity, purpose, shape" (Parker, 2003:541). Creativity in this context involves being engaged actively in creating, shaping or interpreting whatever one is doing. Mann (2001) maintains that through this the individual gains a sense of 'self'. What is important to educators is to remember that play can only be made possible within a context of trust and acceptance (Winnicott, 1971 in Mann, 2001:12-13) (see Chapter Four I).

Ideally art education is intended to be experienced as 'luxurious but not elitist' (Talbot, 1998), with enough time and allowance for students to explore their aims and extend their limits, with the 'space' for play, uncertainty, maturation and critical reflection. Aligned with Knight's 'process model' (see II.4), many FASP teachers that adopt this approach of valuing process over or as much as product, have added 'production logs', 'portfolios', or 'creative journals' as additional methods in their assessment of student learning (Gordon, 2004; Eca, n.d.; Dallow, 2003). But most South African Schools of Art have maintained the sole focus of their summative assessments on product or 'assessment by exhibition'. Freeman (2006:99) contends that this results from ignoring or undervaluing the importance of the student's conscious and articulate recognition of the limitations, possibilities and strategies for creating work (see Chapter Four II.3.2).

The 'self': the role of intentionality

Challenges to the author's claim of his/her intention in relation to the critic's judgement, lead to the 'intentionality fallacy' of the poststructuralists. In his essay 'Death of the author' (1967), Roland Barthes declares the intentions and biographical details of the author extraneous to the text, because they impose a limit to the uncovering of multiple layers of meaning. He places interpretative autonomy on the reader and suggests that such 'critical reading' allows for a balance of power and authority between the author and the reader. But if this approach is used exclusively in higher education, it may threaten a re-emphasising of the existing power imbalance between the student-author and the teacher-reader. Unwittingly, there are links to formalism's silencing of the artists' voice (see Chapter Two III.1.), and so blind acceptance can have serious repercussions for developing the artist-students' reflexive 'voice' (see I.2). Instead, Hughes (1999:132) suggests that "in the realm of art education we could consider intention a pressing claim on our judgement of the outcomes of our pedagogical efforts". In his conception of the assessment of student learning in FASP, student intentionality should be taken 'very seriously', with physical productivity a part of the learning process. The interdependence of intention on practice and process are in many ways seemingly 'obvious'. Conceptual and procedural processes are not pre-determinable because they are person-dependant (Billet, 2006:56). This is because to some extent people exercise their own judgement when deciding which problems they will engage in or are worth solving, the degree of their engagement and the approaches they will adopt (see Chapter Four III).

Freeman (2006:97) cautions that "without having some sense of what effect the work is seeking to achieve it can be difficult to determine the work's effectiveness. Assessment then becomes a matter of personal taste and not analytical consideration". Goethe (in Hughes, 1999: 132) proposes three useful questions for what he calls 'constructive criticism': What did the 'author' set out to do? Was his/her plan reasonable and sensible? How far did s/he succeed? Intentionality here is used as a critical tool. This way of examining how a person develops his/her representation can be considered 'a methodological necessity' (Auge, in Dallow, 2003:63), because of its critical stance to creative research. I explore this subject in relation to data collected from the case, in Chapter Four II.3.2

The 'other': The role of interpretation in formative feedback

Informed by the postmodernist drive for the inclusion of what Jean-Francois Lyotard (1984, in Belluigi, 2001:43) calls 'little narratives', which resist incorporation into totalizing

histories of cultural representation⁹, students are encouraged to critically explore, develop and exercise their own ‘voices’ in their artmaking. Talbot (1998:140) holds that the challenge with FASP education is

to foster an individual trajectory that will keep alive the student’s curiosity about life and ideas while paying due regard to individual uniqueness and avoiding both complacency and excessive intrusiveness.

In FASP education, poststructural theories about the perception and reception of artworks, discussed above, inform how the social, historical and cultural context of artworks are assessed (Corner, 2005:336). In this philosophical climate, *différence* replaces identity as the strategy for analyzing or ‘reading’ the subject or ‘text’. The usefulness of such poststructuralist questioning of the singular identity of ‘the self’, is evident in the potential educational value of peer-participation in the formative Critique. Here ‘multiple voices’ of the student’s peers can suggest alternative readings of the artwork-text, making the artist-student aware of how s/he can guide or problematize these readings. As Gadamer (in Grundy, 1987:67) argues, “the process of understanding or interpreting the text is the process of allowing our own prejudices (pre-judgments) to interact *with the meaning that the author of the text intended* so that the text becomes ‘meaningful’ [emphasis mine]”.

This type of critique is defined by Talbot (1998:139) as ‘critical confrontation’ where “confrontation, public exhibition and critical discussion of work... are vital safeguards against the risks of becoming isolated, self intoxicated and inward looking which arise when one puts value, however justified, on individual expression”. A deep approach to learning in FASP should not exclude self-criticality or reflexivity, for the student should challenge his/her own interpretation and meaning-making within the work, balanced with alternate readings such as those presented during critiques. Versus ‘the gaze’ or ‘downcast eyes’ in relation to the artwork and ethical relationships with the ‘other’ (whether the viewer or the represented), Jay (1994:592-3) argues for a ‘polyscopic’ vision and “the multiplication of a thousand eyes” which are dispersed, plural and particular. The aim is for the student to understand and to begin to practise ‘omnivalence’, which can be described as the ability of artists to

hold many different meanings and distil a visual image from these or their ability to see the world as many different meanings and create a variety of images to express these different visions. The idea of omnivalence... does not refute *relevance or worth of subjectivity* [emphasis mine] but refers to a process which

⁹ For Lyotard, the event of performance (not simply the act of telling but the implicit pragmatics of narrative transmission) functions as a figure displacing the scientific claims of narrative theory (Belluigi, 2001:43). ‘Narrative’ is not a concept that allows culture meanings to be unlocked, it is rather the rhetorical figure that opens culture as a site of transformation and dispute. Jay (1994:593) defines this as ‘polyscopic’. See how I have attempted this with critical discourse analysis in Chapter Three I.

includes a broad range and richness of mental activity and recognizes the possibility of the importance of that which may not be expressible or understandable in words (Briggs & McCluskey, in Martin, 2002:104).

Students learn how to self-assess when they engage in meaningful peer assessments. Seeing how a peer has solved a problem or communicated his/her meaning or intention, allows for distance from the inherent subjectivity of their reading of their own work. Value judgements that serve the needs of 'individual selfhood' can be expanded to understanding the constructedness of value, and an opening to the 'other' (McEvelley, 1996:12). Shifts from subjectivity to objectivity are of course not polar, and these forms of assessment enable the students to develop the skills to slide back and forth on this continuum – an important skill for critical thinking in fine art practice. In my experience, even with the best intentions, crit sessions are certainly not easy to facilitate. The teacher must balance being sensitive to the individual and his/her own sense of vulnerability at having his/her interpretation exposed to scrutiny, while helping him/her see beyond subjectivity, to understand what their work may be saying despite his/her intention and where the work's weaknesses and strengths lie. Dallow (2003:61) explains this object-subject position:

The insider's view, in researching the creative journey, might be seen as akin to Zizek's notion of being 'objectively subjective'. The objectively subjective observational position can convey something of the (subjectivity of) creative experience in relation to the specifics of a particular (objective) body of work.

It is this object-subject position which is often open to abuse. Craig (2001:30) argues that there should be consideration of

the play between that which is universal... [and] that which is particular (e.g. unique languages, cultures and ways of experiencing 'others' and the world), as well as how to mix these in ways that will facilitate the creation of fair institutions and a just world.

See how these notions of the 'other' compare to the case study in Chapter Four II.3.1.

IV. 2. The Critique method of assessment

Webster (2005:266) discusses how the initial location of the traditional art 'school' within academia required that the performance of student apprentices be judged by institutionally accepted 'objective' and 'fair' methods rather than at the discretion of individual masters. For this reason, the 19th-century *École des Beaux Arts* adopted a 'jury' system where a panel of 'experts' made a collective judgement about the quality of a student's work, based at that time on a verbal presentation of the artwork made by the student's studio master. This system of assessment by proxy was subsequently adopted in more schools, but in the post-war period was adapted in that the students themselves began to present and 'defend' their own work (*in viva voce*). Crits have remained social, public events with lecturers giving/

guiding oral feedback, including various degrees of peer involvement. In the case studied for this report, the traditional jury system is used for summative assessment, with the post-war model adopted for formative assessments (see Chapter Four I).

The studio and the crit (otherwise called 'jury', 'review', 'dialogue' etc) remain central to the pedagogy of fine art, design and architectural education across the Western world and are held up by many as a paradigm of student-centred learning (Schön, 1983, 1985, 1987, in Webster, 2005). While the crit method is a potential site for critical comment, "the quality of crits is very variable and the practices vary considerably, both within and between courses" (Jackson, 1995, url) (see II.1).

The formative purpose of crits

Crits are not intended as static measures of students' actual levels of development. Rather they are intended to serve formative purposes and act as 'dynamic assessment' (Feuerstein, 1979, in Palincsar, 1998:367), where the learning of the student being assessed is mediated or guided by the teacher to determine the individual's potential to benefit from assistance (Vygotsky, 1986, in Palincsar, 1998:367). In such crits, feedback should have as its emphasis "the promotion of critical reflection, review, adaptation, confirmation or realignment of focus" (Percy, 2003:146) (see Chapter Four I.3). The skills of 'reflection', according to Blauvelt (in Dallow, 2003:53), are not solely for post-production but are crucial to the artmaking process. Crits that are formative are in line with the nature of contemporary artmaking which is about *process*: research, investigation, play, exploration and expression (see III and Chapter Four II.2). Since formative assessment provides feedback on how students can improve, it is necessary for students to honestly disclose their desires, limitations and problems, rather than make strategic presentations to get a better mark (Knight, 2001a:7). Crits which promote such dialogue are arguably far more beneficial to the artist-student's learning, whereas summative, grade-bearing assessments can easily discourage disclosure. In fact, because of the nature of the subject discipline and the emphasis on 'process' together with the individuality of the 'product', summative grades in FASP have for the most part not been regarded, by tutors and often students, as sufficient feedback (Blair, 2006a).

The role of the studio-practice lecturer at crits

Crits undertaken with the staff member who was involved in the studio interaction can allow for inclusion of "the history of the casual, open-ended, and serendipitous moments of

intervention and informal dialogue” that took place within the studio setting (Percy, 2003:149). This has two potential benefits: it can legitimize that lecturer’s assessment of the value of the student’s work in comparison to his/her peers, and make assessment processes less driven by final products than by the processes of making and learning involved in that project. The studio-practice lecturer at crits is likely to be more sensitive to the learning experience of their students, and aware of that fact that

though for many students it is a liberating process, it [the crit] can lead to a confrontation of fundamental beliefs that can have life-changing implications and create considerable emotional turmoil within the individual student going through the experience (Martin, 2002:105).

Other staff members engaged in such crits can serve as mentors, coaches or expert observers rather than as teachers (Sloan & Nathan, 2005:19).

Approaches to assessment

The difficulty in FASP is how to assess creativity, risk-taking, meaning-making and ‘wow’ factors (Gordon, 2004). Reliability is difficult when it comes to such ‘complex achievements’ because “they are fluctuating and contested social constructs, not real and stable objects that we might hope to measure” (Knight, n.d.:4). Knight (n.d.:5) argues these factors should be assessed by judicial or aesthetic judgement which

weighs evidence, following agreed rules, and considers different interpretation before coming to a rule-led verdict on the basis of probabilities or of near-certainty. It is a robust form of judgement that can be used with the full range of human thought and action.

In subjective areas of human experience and expression, ‘connoisseurship’ is considered an appropriate form of judgment. Connoisseurs are “experts with rich knowledge of a field. They offer opinions and argue their points of view” (ibid.). What is essential is that these are individuals “whose knowledge and judgment of the subject area *the student* and the educational establishment will ultimately have to trust as having validity” [emphasis mine] (Gordon, 2004:68). In fact, reliance on connoisseurship requires total trust, because in most cases the examiner is not held to account by anyone but him/herself (Hardy, 2006:271) (see Chapter Four I.4).

A strict definition of connoisseurship suggests the holding of absolute values which is incompatible with current ideas about relativism (Hardy, 2006). This tension is evidenced by shifts in art criticism from modernism’s ‘art history’ to postmodernism ‘visual culture’¹⁰. In

¹⁰ Simplistically stated, art critics are the ‘assessors’ of artwork in the community of practice. Their imagined influence can exert influence at crits, particularly the contention that visual culture theorists

the former, the method of connoisseurship, iconography and iconology has been replaced by looking at artworks as mediums which display and shape cultural beliefs and values (Stankiewicz, 2004). Eisner (in Hardy, 2006:272) argues that

connoisseurship is the art of appreciation. It can be displayed in any realm in which the character, import, or value of objects, situations, and performances is distributed and variable, including educational practice.

Connoisseurship as judgment in fine art brings up concerns about concepts of ‘quality’ and its relation to ‘taste’, which are constructed through the influences of culture, time & place so “that no culture’s idea of quality can claim more validity than another’s” (McEvelley, 1996:127). ‘Good’ quality is an unstable value judgement that a consensus of trained viewers agree on at a specific time and place and subject to their conceptions (affected by conditions such as tradition, class, region, gender, age, occupation) rather than universal standards. These value judgements are subject to the influence of what Adorno calls the Culture Industry (McEvelley, 1996:127). For this reason Smith (in Gordon, 2004) extends the traditional notion of the connoisseur as ‘expert’ to the critic, who has to work at being a reflexive assessor (see Chapter Five I).

According to Knight (n.d.:8-9), when “standards do not guide judgment but legitimate expert decisions”, such assessors “should be disposed to judge performance in the round or holistically”. Smart & Dixon (2002:189) ask, “if when we assess performance we attempt not to feel in order to remain objective, precisely what, why and how are we assessing?”. Interpretative judgement is valid for assessment in the Arts because it does not polarise or create a hierarchy between subjectivity and objectivity (see Chapter Five II). In building his argument for the validity of interpretative assessments, Freeman (2006:96) emphasizes that both teachers and students must remain responsive and receptive to the artwork being assessed, and that this involves both expression and reception in a “negotiation of emotionally complex structures”. Such ‘responsive evaluation’ (Stake, in Eisner, 1993) should recognise that “the marker’s response is still going to be subjective, however hard we may strive to produce criteria that fundamentally propose a consensus regarding creative outcomes and intelligences presented by the assessee” (Ajaykumar, 2003:136).

Eca’s (2002) research on external examination of FASP revealed that the difficulty of a fair assessment in the arts resides in the fact that the value of an artwork depends on the interpretation of criteria. For this reason, the connoisseurship approach should make explicit “that there is a degree to which criteria cannot be unambiguously specified but are subject to social processes by which meanings are contested and constructed” (Knight, 2001a:20).

are known to emphasize meaning over form (Stankiewicz, 2004). See a lecturer’s perceptions that ‘concept’ is given most importance in Chapter Four II.1.

Assessment should be recognised as a socially-situated interpretive practice (Shay, 2004). Because the personal beliefs and expectations of individual assessors are central to the process of interpretation (Smart & Dixon, 2002), more transparency and reflexivity is required of the interpreters in this method (Shay, 2004). Brookfield (in Ainsworth, 2005) refers to this as ‘laying bare our pedagogic reasoning’. What the assessor’s reflexive articulation can do, is to model for the students the thinking and articulation skills required for them in their professional practice (see Chapter Five I). Smart & Dixon (2002:188) declare that such reflexive articulation “might be one of the most crucial life-skills we have to offer our students”. In my experience, such practice creates trust between the teacher and students because judgements become meaningful.

These assessments could at least be criterion-referenced rather than criteria-determined, so that the criteria act as ‘indicators’ to students of the reference points used in the judgement processes (Knight, 2001a:20) and as the basis for the discussion and dialogue of expectations. Arguing that “artistic activity is a premium based upon surprise and generation of creative solutions that are mostly unpredictable”, Eisner (1993:10) feels that neither norm-reference nor criterion-reference assessment is appropriate because they both involve comparison. Contending that negotiated criteria (see Chapter Five II) signal to the student the value of their intentions and reflexivity, Freeman (2006:100) states that

Flexible and creative learning is arrived at through the development of approaches to study that allow for the students’ agendas as well as our own – allied to understanding that scholarship at all levels is at its strongest when it includes intuitive, subjective and creative enquiry, alongside dedicated space for reflective evaluation. And through acknowledging that students learn best when they can address knowledge in ways that they can trust, and realizing that we trust best what we have tested most thoroughly and personally.

In socially critical curricula, constructive alignment would be evidenced by value being placed explicitly on the reflexivity shown by the students. Such curricula would put “the student at the center of the learning process” with assessment that “expects the student to be a passionate and committed creator” (Sloan & Nathan, 2005:19).

Conclusion

In this Chapter, I have shown how my argument of ‘good’ practice within contemporary fine art studio practice in higher education is informed by various overlapping perspectives of critical theory, current educational theory and visual art/ cultural theory. In Part I, I discussed how critical theory aims to make explicit the impact of ideology on human agency and intentionality. Reflexivity is necessary to realise the ‘emancipatory interest’ of critical

thinking, and to ensure relationships between ‘self’ and ‘other’ are ethical. These streams were developed in relation to teaching and learning relationships in higher education in Part II. Constructionist recognition of the importance of social relationships for transformative student learning was discussed and then related to curriculum and assessment practices. Part III briefly considered the two dominant streams of thought in twenty and twenty-first century art criticism, modernist formalism and postmodernism’s discourse-interest. These areas then provided the backdrop for Part IV, which focused on contemporary fine art studio practice. Here conceptual outcomes of FASP studies were related to the ‘self’, in terms of student intentionality, and the ‘other’, in terms of interpretation in formative feedback. The potential of the crit method of assessment to facilitate achievement of conceptual outcomes of curriculum was explored. In this chapter, four areas of FASP were highlighted as important:

- the reflexive relationship between form & content
- the art making process as a process of learning
- student agency, expressed through a focus on intentionality
- the importance of critical reflection, involving an openness to and ethical concern of interpretation by ‘the other’

It is important to note that distinctions between these areas are blurred in practice, and because of their interrelationship, neglect of one aspect may create imbalance in another. In the analysis I present in Chapter Four, I consider how such imbalance can affect student learning. Before that, in Chapter Three, I attempt to lay bare the philosophies and process involved when I researched the focal areas identified by this chapter.

Chapter Three

The politics and pragmatics of method

A researcher's choice of methodology serves to legitimate the grounds for knowledge s/he claims. For this reason, as a critical postmodern researcher, it is important that I attempt to acknowledge ideologies embedded within this research project. I do this while recognising that no discourse, method or theory can claim universal or authoritative knowledge (Richardson, in Holliday, 2002:115) (see Chapter Two I.1).

In Part I of this chapter I attempt to make explicit the philosophical assumptions, values and theories which have underpinned this research project, and how the research process was constructed to suit the research question, participants and the setting. I address some of the problematics of representation in this research report, in Part 2. I conclude with a brief discussion of the politics of presentation.

Part I. The pragmatics of representation

As discussed in Chapter Two I, neo-Marxist critical theorists such as Adorno & Horkheimer (1944) hold that ideology, expressed in social representations such as language, art, religion, knowledge, education, obscures the fact of oppression. The study of ideology is a study of "the ways in which meaning is constructed and conveyed by symbolic forms of various kinds" (Thompson, in Wodak, 2001:9). In this conception, discourse is an artefact of culture which carries ideological power (Holliday 1999:251), and so can be 'read' for 'meaning' (Lankshear et al in Holliday, 2002:14).

Drawing on the work of Michel Foucault, contemporary discourse theorists assume that power relations are unstable, 'dialogic' and subject to change. Individuals construct themselves as subjects in relation to ideological and cultural value systems by selecting, ignoring and appropriating discourses (Smart & Dixon, 2002:186) (see Chapter Four II.4 & III). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), informed by critical theory, aims to make *explicit* the discourses which would otherwise remain implicit, invisible and thereby all the more powerful, and to expose such theories to scrutiny (Locke, 2004:52). By deciphering ideologies underpinning them, discourses can be demystified (Wodak, 2001:10).

The Derridean notion of the indeterminacy of textual 'truth' is that there is inherent failure and even an irony in such attempts: "the idea that something resides in texts awaiting extraction, or revelation, by the application of the correct means of interpretation is precisely

the assumption that poststructuralism set out to problematise” (Patterson, in Locke, 2004, 36). Instead, the *purpose* of the act of analysis is to “enable consideration of the social effects of the meanings a reader is being positioned or called upon to subscribe to in the act of reading, and the contestation of these meanings” (Locke, 2004:9-10). This involves cognitive, social and political analysis with a focus on the intended and unintended roles discourses play in society and its structures (van Dijk, 2001:118). Thus ‘critical’ involves attempting to uncover the social in the data and in the research endeavour itself, through the self-reflective researcher, who attempts to stand at a distance to the data while taking an explicitly political stance (Wodak, 2001:9) (see II.1).

I.1. My *modus operandi* to uncover discourse conflicts

According to Bourdieu’s (1977, in Ashwin, n.d:3) structuralist interpretation of the cognitive unconscious, *habitus* is where individuals’ perceptions of social fields are structured in ways that are largely invisible to agents who operate within them. My initial intention was to do a ‘collective case study’ drawing from fine art institutions across South Africa, in order to investigate whether modernist/ postmodernist tensions were indeed a general condition. Bolton (2006) contends that the modernist paradigm in FASP is structural. Whilst contemporary art practice forces each artist to invent “a personal history of art” (Perl, in Bolton, 2006:61)¹ and it is accepted that artworks have an internal indeterminate logic, art institutions continually assess (judge, accept, reject) art. Bernstein (1977, in Maton, 2006, n.p.) argues that structures of knowledge in intellectual and educational fields specialise discourses and actors in structurally significant ways. Art can be seen to be a ‘horizontal knowledge structure’ with ‘weak grammar’, meaning that concepts are not formally articulated (such as in the sciences), and that different styles and traditions constitute the different ‘languages’ (such as Romanticism, Realism, Modernism, postmodernism) (Bolton, 2006:62). Transmission in art practice can also be seen as tacit (ibid). Maton (2006) suggests that exploring knower structures develops Bernstein’s insights further, looking at how assumptions about the person as student are embedded within such knowledge structures (see Chapter Four II.4). Whilst such structural approaches would indeed have been valid for this project, I felt an exclusively structural or generalising emphasis might not have allowed for students’ voices to be heard – where an important aspect of encouraging change is acknowledging responsibility to improve the *effects* of teaching practice. Foucault shows us how power is exercised from *within* society rather than from *above* it and this is overlooked by both structural and interactional analyses of power (Silverman, 1985:88). Ashwin (n.d:7) suggests that instead of reifying perceptions, practices, discourses and systems into static

¹ See how this relates to discourses emerging from the case study, in Chapter Four II.3.2.

categories, research into teaching, learning and assessment (TLA) contexts in higher education should explore how relationships between them are acted out.

Critical theory offers multi-levelled explanations of social events: (i) the personal and interpersonal, (ii) the institutional, (iii) the structural, material, ideological and historical (Gibson, 1986:14-15). Similar to Ashwin's point above, Gibson (1986:15) believes that teachers need to reformulate these levels to see where they are reciprocally related. Many of my decisions around the methods of this project have been informed by socio-psychological theories of CDA, which acknowledge social conditions of cognition and emotion (Meyer 2001:19) (see I.3.5). In such theories of text-context relations, it is argued that as discourses take place within society, they can be understood in the interplay between social situation, action, actor and societal structures (van Dijk, 2001).

What we usually remember of a discourse is thus not so much its meaning, as the mental model we construct during comprehension (van Dijk, 2001:112). Van Dijk (2001:109) discusses how language users form 'mental models' of contexts, events or situations they speak or write about (see I.2), and so contends that a theory of context provides a theory of relevance. Informed by such notions, I collected data from a single case; within the complex context of FASP at a South African higher education institution; around the event of the crit; from a selection of diverse participants. Because discourse is a communicative event, I analyzed various social representations including conversational interactions, written texts, as well as body language. Instead of doing a comparative case study across institutions, I realised that a single case study would allow me to mine these levels, without sacrificing detail in the name of the general (see II.3). Many researchers share this notion of qualitative research being about understanding the particularities of experience rather than generalising about universals (Erikson, in Maxwell, 1992).

I. 2 Focus: The 'crit' as research site

Digging necessarily disturbs the successive strata through which one passes to reach one's goal. But there is a significant difference between this human archaeology and its material counterpart: culture is pervasive and expresses itself in all acts of human beings, whether they are responding to customary or extraordinary stimuli. *The values of a society lie as much in its dreams as in the reality it has built* [my emphasis] (MacDougall, in Holliday, 2002:147).

According to Van Dijk, mental models form the crucial interface between discourse and society, between the personal and the social. They not only represent personal beliefs, but also personal versions of social representations, such as knowledge, attitudes and ideologies, which in turn are related to the structure of groups and organizations. These may be

expressed directly, in their general, abstract form, such as in statements or documents, and through applications of mental models to specific events or situations (van Dijk 2001:113), such as during a particular ‘crit’. As discussed in Chapter Two, Adorno claims that ‘negative dialectics’ arise from often unconscious allegiances to certain styles, standards and values which are structured by ideologies:

So when a teachers says something about a student’s work, chances are very good that the student will not understand quite why the teacher said what she did, and that the teacher herself will be unaware of the assumptions that led her to make the judgement (Elkins, 2003:171).

Educationalists conceive of their practice by referring to theoretical models based on their espoused philosophies, which may or may not coincide with their theory-in-use (Brockback & McGill, 1999:28). The models, categories and concepts which agents use to structure their interpretation of situations, are influenced in ways of which they are both aware and unaware. This ‘cognitive unconscious’ (Hymes, in Ashwin, n.d:3), or what in Freudian terms would be called ‘preconscious’ (Elkins, 2003:171), determines the relationship between structure and agency. And so the theory-in-use and implicit philosophical model of the person as student (see Chapter Four II.4), may or may not be in agreement with espoused or declared theories of learning (Brockback & McGill, 1999:29). The teacher can become complicit in operating society’s ‘hidden curricula’ by processing ‘docile’ students through the knowledge community. In his Marxist interpretation of schooling as subversive of ‘real learning’, Illich (1971, in Brockback & McGill, 1999:26) finds that students learn ‘process’ more effectively than they learn subject matter through the powerful norms of classroom practice. This tacit or ‘hidden curriculum’ is concerned with inculcating non-cognitive dispositions such as values, tastes and beliefs (Dutton, in Webster, 2005:267) (see Chapter Four I). Without reflexive investigation, “core aspects of the subject can be inappropriately structured and presented to students in a way that doesn’t support their learning and artistic development” (Corner, 2005:335).

In my opinion, this is why it is necessary to excavate the theory-in-use to determine its worth and relevance (Webster, 2005:267). As tacit values, intuition and uncontested traditions influence assessment (Orrell, in Taylor & McCormack, 2005:1), the actuality of assessment processes become sites of research into the theory-in-use (Brockback & McGill, 1999:30). Assessment reveals what the assessors value, transmitting not only what is considered important about the subject, but also an “act of cultural communication transmitting what the collective ‘we’ intends” (Boud, in Gordon, 2004:63). As McEvelley (1996:128) contends,

a value judgement, though not a universal, is still in a sense the highest and purest expression of a culture, and it is valid to appreciate a culture's soul, so to speak, by coming to understand its value judgements, which is to say its connoisseurship.

For this reason, data was collected that focussed on and provided different perspectives on crits as used in the case studied.

I. 3. Units of analysis: *brüche*

According to Clifford Geertz (1973, in Stake 2003:148), the “vitality, trauma and uniqueness” of the case lies within its particularities. Such bounded social settings provide important means for ‘thick description’². Whilst ‘thin descriptions’ reports events in limited terms, ‘thick descriptions’ allow understanding of cultural meanings of acts (Holliday, 2002:78). Observing how connections between people, beliefs and traditions operate within bounded social settings allows ‘collective representations’ of thick description to be revealed (Atkinson & Coffey, in Holliday, 2002:79).

According to Adorno, social representations are not simply ideology. Rather the ‘truth’ content of bourgeois thought lies in the opposite direction: in ‘breaks’ (*brüche*) in its logic, gaps of its systematic unity, a notion furthered by poststructuralists (Belluigi, 2001:32). Post-structuralist CDA reading practices “acknowledge the historical situatedness of texts, gaps in textual coherence, the indeterminacy of textual meaning and ways in which texts encapsulate versions of reality” (Morgan, in Locke, 2004:36). These fractures, ambiguities, contradictions are the philosophical details or ‘units of analysis’ upon which to focus interpretative efforts: “the divergence, the distances, the oppositions, the differences, the relations of its various scientific discourses” (Foucault, in Locke, 2004:29). When looking at the raw data, it was on these *brüche* within the espoused theory and the theory-in-use, which I concentrated.

I.4 From raw data to meaningful understanding

Although the value of empirical work is acknowledged in critical theory, there is a strong argument that it is no substitute for theoretical analysis (Horkheimer, in Wodak, 2001). Empirical data is underpinned by hidden assumptions which the critical researcher must attempt to expose (Kincheloe and McLaren in Locke, 2004:38). This argument is strengthened by understandings of conflicting conscious and preconscious theories in educational practice (see Chapter 3.I). Socio-psychological CDA does not necessitate ‘traditional’ foci of discourse analysis on specific linguistic structures, but can begin with a

² This notion of ‘thick description’ comes from the philosopher Gilbert Ryle, who talks about ‘two boys rapidly contracting the eyelids of their right eyes’. It is intended to provide rich detail, such as context, intentions and meanings (Denzin, in Holliday, 2002:79).

coding for 'content'. Such forms of meaning seem more directly related to the beliefs and ideologies lecturers enact or express (their mental models or negative dialectics) when providing feedback to students about their artmaking.

O'Leary (2004:195) explains that "understandings are built by a process of uncovering and discovering themes that run through the raw data, and by interpreting the implication of those themes for the research questions". The method I used to code such themes is described by Maxwell (1992) as 'categorizing analysis'. In the collector's organizing logic that I adopt as researcher, these artificially constructed labels are necessary to enable a space from which action can spring. Foucault (in Belluigi, 2001:55) warns that "we may wish to draw a dividing-line, but any limit we set may be no more than an arbitrary division made in a constantly mobile whole". For this reason, I explicitly linked and interrelated differentiated aspects within Chapter Four. Instead of claiming ontological authority, I hope such analysis will open up "a *space* characterized by an unstable and complex interplay of discursive relationships" (Locke, 2004:29).

I sorted data from each source into 'organisational categories' based on the adversarial dialectical interplay within the broad topics or themes identified in Chapter Two. The relationships between form and content, process and product, interpretation and student intentionality, became the main section headings of Part II of Chapter Four, with points of focus within each theme becoming sub-sections. 'Descriptive analysis' of thick descriptions of incidents or *brüche* from 'texts' and other social representations filtered information into 'substantive categories' of the discourses involved within such topics. These single-source analyses then led to cross-source analysis with 'connecting strategies' (Maxwell, 2005) to link similar threads and investigate relationships. Various sources, methods and theories were triangulated to gain a more nuanced understanding of the issues (Maxwell, 2005:95), and to minimise effects of both my personal and systematic/ structural biases, in addition to limitations of single sources or methods (see Chapter 3 II.3). 'Theoretical categories' evolved from these, to a discussion about how the espoused and practiced curriculum creates dialectical conflicts, which construct the artist-student (see Chapter Four II).

This process could be seen to involve both inductive (discovering) and deductive (uncovering) analysis. According to O'Leary (2004:197), concepts are deductively uncovered by searching for themes generated from literature, the hypothesis/ research questions, intuitions and prior experiences. As discussed in I.5.6, concepts for the research questions grew out of my suspicions from prior experience (see Chapter One), which were then brought to the surface while critiquing my own practice during the development of my teaching

portfolio for the course work component of this qualification (Belluigi 2006). These concepts were refined and further challenged by the interweaving of concepts and arguments condensed in Chapter Two. Inductive processes involved attempting to look dispassionately at the data and determining whether these hypotheses were founded, and what story this specific case study had to tell.

I may be criticized for conducting what some call an ‘instrumental case study’, which is more concerned with providing insight into an issue or redrawing a generalisation, rather than what can be learnt from the grounded theory of a single case. But as Stake (2003:137) points out, “because the researcher simultaneously has several interests, particular and general, there is no line distinguishing intrinsic case study from instrumental; rather, a zone of combined purpose separates them”.

I. 5 Data collection

When it came to deciding sources and methods of data collection, I aimed to gather data positioned in gaps between theories espoused and in-use, and which would allow insights into possible effects on student learning. Multiple sources and methods were required to explore both declared aims of the curriculum and the underlying, non-observable processes of teaching-learning interactions. In this section discuss how I drew data from academic literature (I.5.1); various ‘texts’ produced by the institution (I.5.2); interviews, discussions and questionnaires with participating lecturers (I.5.3); participating students’ journal and stories (I.5.4); and my observations of crits (I.5.4)

I felt it imperative that both teachers and students were participants in this project. This was to explore dynamic power relations between these groups, and how they “mutually condition each other’s perceptions and practices” (Ashwin, n.d:8). I made use of ‘purposeful’ (Patton, in Maxwell, 1992) or ‘theoretical’ (Strauss, in Maxwell, 1992) sampling of participating teachers and students. As I discuss in more detail in this section, interviews with staff were conversational and more open-ended than the questionnaires I administered to them, to allow for added trajectories. Daily journals mapped students’ experiences of the crit and effects assessment processes had on their approaches to learning.

Disciplines themselves are social constructs, with education involving acculturation of novices into a prevailing knowledge base (see I.1). Whilst documents and statements provided an understanding of the *espoused* curriculum, non-cognitive aspects were unlikely to be exposed (Webster 2005:267). As Foucault pointed out, observations about the nature

of the practices of those in power and their effects, are often far more revealing than their motives. Therefore, data from observed critiques was balanced with data from official documentation and that collected from lecturers and students.

I. 5. 1 Academic literature

Alternative viewpoints of teaching practice were utilized to question some of the assumptions underpinning what I observed and challenge others that I held myself (Ainsworth, 2005, url). Chapter Two's polyfocal perspective allowed the focal range of concerns born from my past experiences and teaching portfolio (Belluigi, 2006) to be brought into sharp relief. In terms of research reports on assessment in cognate disciplines, Smart & Dixon's (2002:186) critical analysis of language within assessment criteria in the Performing Arts certainly influenced my own ideas of 'discourse conflicts' and validated my interest in examining assessment practices. Similarly helpful were Webster's (2005) and Pitts' (2003) studies of the 'hidden curriculum' in architecture and music respectively. Elkins' (2003:170) 'chain of questions', although not incorporated eventually into my analysis, was useful as a starting point, as it suggested a 'no nonsense' manner of dialectic questioning devised by a fellow art teacher.

In a sense this discursive use of academic texts as additional data echoes notions of the 'relational' or collegial role for academics, underpinned by "interdependence, connectedness and responsiveness to others" (Nixon et al, in Ainsworth, 2005) (see Chapter Five I).

I. 5. 2 The School of Art

While collecting data on the espoused curriculum, I found little written documentation produced by the School within the last 5 years and in circulation. I considered the School's brochure (referenced in-text as 'brochure') sent to secondary schools for prospective students, and the School's website (referenced in-text as 'website') which includes a mixture of current and outdated information, parts of which had not been updated for over four years. In addition to general documents produced by the institution of this case study (referenced in-text as 'CSI'), I found a draft registration of the Bachelor of Fine Art (BFA) degree (referenced as 'CSI, 2000') with many errors (even typographic ones), and which had not been completed nor revised after the external audit of the institution, for which it had been prepared (see Chapter Four II.4). I asked studio-practice lecturers to provide me with written communication (handouts, booklets etc) designed for students regarding the course curriculum or assessments. Of those that participated, written documents were used by only

one lecturer in communication with students. Most written exchange between staff and students concerned logistical rules about communal areas.

As Holliday (2002:93) points out, these artefacts of the Department's culture are not valuable for their information but rather the discourses they *project*. This requires the researcher to "behave as she [*sic*] does when she encounters something so new that 'thinking as normal' is replaced by 'asking ethnographic questions'" (ibid.), to address the 'taken-for-grantedness' of texts (see Chapter Four II.1).

I. 5. 3 Lecturers

Biggs (1999) holds that teachers, who have an integrated view of the process of TLA, select subject matter, learning context and methods in an intentionally aligned manner (see Chapter Two II.4). This model of 'constructive alignment' is often used in OBE to define both how to evaluate and improve teaching competency. Saroyan & Amundsen (2001:345) argue that it does not make provision for the unexpected, unexplicit or unexamined, and positions teachers too squarely in the authorial role. Teaching competence is affected by dynamic relationships, some structural and outside of the individual teacher's agency (see Chapter Three II.2). For this reason, my research includes individuals' intentions and, to some extent, ways these intentions are structured by institutions and wider social structures (Ashwin, n.d., 2). Echoing van Dijk's notion of mental and context models, Saroyan & Amundsen (2001:347) argue that the "extent to which conceptions or beliefs, knowledge and actions converge with each other and with the context can be used as a measure of teaching competency". But the purpose of this research report was not to evaluate the competence of the teachers involved. Rather it was to present a scholarly analysis which you, as reader, will evaluate to determine whether what I describe resonates for you in your context, and then perhaps my findings will stimulate reflection in your practices (see Chapter Three II.3).

A teacher is both in authority and an authority. Criticism can be seen as a personal and professional threat. Its predilection for change appears menacing to established order (Gibson, 1986:17).

Because case study research involves considering personal views and circumstances, there can be considerable risk (including embarrassment, humiliation, loss of employment and self-esteem) for participants involved (Schwandt, in Stake, 2003:154). At the start of this project, I approached seven lecturers and found that most, regardless of my assurances of anonymity (see II.2), were concerned about implications of participating in this research. Two of the staff members I approached felt so strongly about this that they decided not to participate.

The five participating lecturers were able to provide a rich diversity of perspectives, all five responding to questionnaires, three engaged in conversations and two participated in interviews. Hammersley and Atkinson (in Holliday, 1991:141) describe as ‘gatekeepers’ those “local personalities who are both accurate informants” and who will allow researchers “into the informal order”. Because of the nature of the project, such access into insights, experiences and practices was essential.

As “subjectivity in aesthetic judgement lies not with individual idiosyncrasy but with selection of tradition(s) within which judgements are contextualised” (Bolton, 2006:72), analysing these individual lecturer’s statements allowed me to dig deeper into their preconscious strata to ascertain ‘negative dialectics’ at play. I had to keep in mind the difference between the teacher’s explanations and unexamined assumptions which the teacher may never have thought about. I was mindful that

a false conception of a phenomenon may be just as important information to the researcher as correct information; it may be an essential aspect of the phenomenon itself that can be understood in this wrong way (Danemark, in Carter & New, 2004, n.p).

Questionnaires & questions

To design a questionnaire for lecturers (see Appendix A), I drew from the data collection methods of Mitroff, Emshoff, & Kilmann (1979) and Maton (2006). Elkins’ dialectical questioning (2003). Statements were formulated as ‘assumptive surfaces’ (Mitroff et al, 1979), developed from aspects of modernist formalism and postmodernist discourse interest discussed in Chapter Two. These assumptions were then ranked (i.e. given value) by participants, what Mitroff et al (1979) term ‘belief assessment analysis’.

This adversarial methodology is suited to treating ill-structured and difficult to define problems (Mitroff et al, 1979:582). Dialectical interplay between statements was designed to present antithetical definitions, which, when ranked, helped me to define the different positions of lecturers, both by what was valued and undervalued. While doing this, I had to keep in mind Derrida’s argument that difference is *neither* one viewpoint *nor* another (see Chapter Two II.3). I encouraged the five participating lecturers to problematise or add to the statements (the electronic nature of the questionnaire allowed for this) and then triangulated this data with that collected by other methods. I reference data collected via this method as ‘questionnaire’.

Interviews

I was fortunate to conduct two interviews with studio-practice lecturers (referenced in-text as ‘interview’). These were recorded, with selected stretches of the conversations transcribed, including references to tonal and other variations in emphasis. This was in an attempt to substitute “the tendency in qualitative data collection and analysis... to concentrate on words, rather than the tone and emotive feeling behind the words, the body language that accompanies the words, or even words not spoken” (O’Leary, 2004:197). In addition, informal verbal (referenced in-text as ‘discussion’) and electronic (referenced in-text as ‘email’) discussions with participating lecturers occurred, as well as access being granted to some participants’ teaching portfolios (indicated by ‘tp’).

I. 5. 4 Students

The task of critical pedagogy is to “expose the hidden tools of oppression utilized by those in power so that students can embrace more authentic ideologies that reflect their own cultural, social, and political interests” (Alexander, 2005:356). CDA focuses on the experiences and opinions of members of groups suffering oppression, and supports their struggle against inequality. According to van Dijk (2001:96),

CDA research combines what perhaps somewhat pompously used to be called 'solidarity with the oppressed' with an attitude of opposition and dissent against those who abuse text and talk in order to establish, confirm or legitimate their abuse of power.

The desire is not to ‘speak for’ (unwittingly silencing) the oppressed (see II.1) but to gain insight into students’ approaches to and experiences of TLA (see Chapter Four III).

Sullivan (1993:19) emphasizes that “student learning in art is a complex constellation of personal proclivities, meaning and outcomes, and these perspectives need to be considered”. I wanted data collected from students to be full of ‘thick descriptions’ for me to ‘hear’ the perceptions and experiences of the participants of the curricula and whose learning is the aim of the curriculum.

I informed Third and Fourth Year FASP students at this School of the project, and eleven of the forty students agreed to participate. These students represented the range of competencies, from those that received high grades to those barely passing. I designed a daily journal for 7 days (3 days before the crit, the day of the crit and 3 days after the crit) in which students were asked to write/ draw/ express their experiences of their learning process over that time (see Addendum B). I received feedback on the journal’s design from

lecturers from multi-disciplinary backgrounds (including higher education, psychology and fine art) and refined the instrument a number of times before it was administered.

At an agreed upon date I met with the students, who then reflected on details recorded in their journals (referenced in-text as ‘journal’) and composed stories (referenced in-text as ‘story’). To ask such disclosure from students, the relationship demanded that I temporarily forgo the role of researcher for listener. Silvermann (2007: 38) notes that for a story to grow, it requires an appreciative, passive listener who exhibits sincere interest “without interrupting to ask questions, and forgoing judgment of the teller and the story's content”. It also meant that I had to ‘listen’ to the whole story and appreciate the difficulties and details.

Journal writing and storytelling

I hoped that the choice of journal writing and storytelling would be ethical in terms of avoiding objectifying the student. Derrida (in Belluigi, 2001:111) argues that by elevating its own record, the group in power de-stabilizes and threatens to extinguish the value of individual memory. But according to Lyotard (in Belluigi, 2001:43), ‘little narratives’ resist incorporation into totalizing histories of cultural representation. With postmodern uncertainty about what constitutes an adequate signifier of social ‘reality’ (Lather, in Chappell, Rhodes, Solomon, Tennant and Yates, 2003:50), such acts of representation acknowledge “absence as an imagined presence” (Simpson, in Chappell et al, 2003:50). Many raise questions about the reliability of these methods, because representational narrative can be defined by its “relative (in)ability to reflect the real” (Rhodes, in Chappell et al, 2003:50).

Students drew from the journals to construct their own stories, and in this way determined the first step of the analytical process. I suggested they write about their experiences in the third-person, and some created names for themselves (such as ‘Beautrice Blue’ and ‘Chloe’). Such writing, as a process of learning, can be understood as a process whereby each individual constructs his/her own meaning through the “transformation of understanding, identity and agency” (Eraut, in Chappell et al, 2003:4). Whilst I would not claim that this project had the potential of ‘consciousness raising’ of the Women’s Movement or ‘conscientisation’ of Freire (1973), I did intend the process to encourage reflection. According to Silvermann (2007:39-40),

hidden below the surface narrative of stories are the assumptions, models, expectations and beliefs that guide people's decisions and behaviours... stories about real or imagined situations tend to capture these underlying assumptions.

Reflexivity can be defined as “the capacity to develop critical awareness of the assumptions that underlie practices” (Edwards et al, in Chappell et al, 2003:4). One way to unearth these assumptions is to approach them as if foreign (Brookfield, 1995:28). This notion was communicated when I suggested students compose stories in the third person – to create aesthetic and contemplative distance. Such ideas about making the familiar strange are heavily influenced by Julia Kristeva’s (1991) argument that the experience of repressed strangeness or the uncanny is central to the enlargement of political imagination (see Chapter Two II.3). Such narrative constructions of ‘the self’ and descriptions of subject positions, allowed for more nuanced insights into students’ experiences (see Chapter Four III).

Parker (2003:539) contends that “the point is not what they end up *with*, but what they *experience* while a student: the life of a scholar in a community practicing its discipline” [emphasis mine]. Such experience is linked to affective aspects of the TLA relationship. Because emotions involve cognitive schemes and prior judgment rules (Austerlitz, n.d., url), they can be studied for their contribution to the construction of the student-instructor relationship (see Chapter Four I.3).

Believing in the importance of experience and the process of students developing as ‘critical beings’ (see Chapter Two II.2), I drew from Mann’s (2001) seven perspectives of alienation to analyze the student data:

1. *The sociocultural context of the ‘postmodern condition’* – Drawing from Lyotard, this perspective holds that because HE requires students to maintain the “inner cohesion” of society, the focus on utilitarianisms, instrumentalism, performativity, skills & competencies is alienating (Frosh, in Mann, 2001:8).
2. *The primacy of discourse to position as subject/ object* – Foucault’s early work (1972) building on Lacan, shows that particular discursive formations position the subject in particular ways that may be experienced as alienating (Mann, 2001:10).
3. *Student as outsider* – Education can be seen as a colonising process where those in power impose their perceptions of reality (Mann 2001: 11)³. The student stands at the edge of the discipline and must decide whether to join and at what cost. The demands of learning the language of rational, abstracting, academic discourse and processes may require students to repress their being as non-rational, creative, unconscious and desiring selves, the very selves which they may need for engaging in learning.

³ See II.1, when I discuss the notion of the émigré consciousness and the researcher.

4. *Bereft of the capacity for creativity* – Because ‘the self’ is contingent on events (Satre, 1962, in Mann, 2001:12) and dependant on others (Winnicott, 1971, in Mann, 2001:12), being is a situation where one’s self is not validated in relationships and contexts leads to a loss of ‘self’, agency and desire (Mann, 2001:12). When such estrangement from the student’s creative and autonomous self occurs, it is replaced by a compliant self.
5. *Exile from ‘self’/ loss of ownership of learning process* – Assessed work can be seen as part of a system of exchange undertaken for strategic reasons. Marx’s four perspectives on alienation shed light on what the alienated experience of learning in higher education might be: (1) *alienation from the product of one’s labour*, where what one produces is in a dominant relationship to oneself, reducing one’s inner life and bringing to the forefront the world of products, outcomes, tasks; (2) *alienation from the process of production*, where work is experienced as external to oneself, to be undertaken at specific times, at the behest of ‘others’ and such that leisure time is the only time one feels ‘at home’; (3) *alienation from oneself as a species-being*, where one feels oneself to be alienated from one’s very self as a human being; and (4) *alienation from other human beings*, where relationships are no longer relationships between individuals but between the positions allotted one by the particular social system, e.g. students and lecturers (Lukes, 1967, in Mann, 2001:13).
6. *Assessment practices ‘disciplining into docility’* – This perspective is drawn from Foucault’s later work (1979), where power in the modern world is seen to be expressed through examination and confession as two technologies of power. Examination makes the individual visible by objectifying and individualising him/her; the confessional creates conversations between a speaker and an ‘other’ who listens, judges and has the power to forgive but requires the confession in the first place. Assessment practices locate the student in a particular hierarchy of success and expertise, which when linked to failure can contribute to alienation.
7. *Self-preservation* – The student feels it is safer to disengage by repressing his/her desire, and approaching the new ordered world from a superficial perspective (Mann, 2001:15).

Mann’s stance is that the student’s experience of alienation in HE is not necessarily inevitable, but that critical examinations of these conditions is necessary to inform radical changes to TLA interactions, as I endeavour to show in this research project. I summarise my findings using this framework in Chapter Four III.1.

I. 5. 5 Observations

Because I was interested in exploring factors that shape the ‘cognitive unconscious’, I could not solely rely on the methods described above for data collection from the lecturers. The explanations generated from these ‘conscious’ accounts most often underestimate the influence of structural and unconscious factors (Ashwin, n.d.:9). In an attempt to “take the researcher, academics and students closer to actual TLA interactions rather than relying solely on academics’ and students’ accounts of these experiences” (Ashwin, n.d.:10), I collected data from observing two crits (referenced in-text by the date of the observation and ‘observation’).

My own concerns about how to record these observations were confirmed when I consulted with participants. Due to the nature of the discipline and its suspicion of surveillance, making observations by writing notes and drawing as an individual was interpreted as less invasive than optical or audio recording devices. Where I could see that my act of observation was shifting the environment, I triangulated with other sources to find out the ‘standard’ practice. In addition I took contextual influences into consideration, such as the time of day, length of crit and what effect these were having on observation results.

Informed by Mann’s (see above) and Bigg’s (1999) theories on student approaches to learning (see Chapter Two II.2), statements made by students at crits were analysed for the depth of their descriptions. This was used as an indicator of whether their knowledge production was at the surface level of positivistic details that could be verified, or whether it was at the much deeper level of meaning-making and critical reflexivity (see Chapter Four III.2).

But it is important to mention that a number of factors influenced this data. Although the crit format may begin with a brief verbal presentation of sorts by the student on his/her work, where s/he has “the opportunity to defend their work, if I can put it that way, or extrapolate on it” (Lecturer 1 interview), these were mostly brief, inaudible or inarticulate. Students’ stress, fatigue, the politically fraught crit environment and other factors, were found to have an incapacitating effect on students’ abilities to articulate themselves (see Chapter Four I.3). For these reasons, while the analysis draws from students’ verbalisations of their learning as to some extent indicative of their approaches to learning, I did not see this as separate from the contextual experiences of their learning (see I.5.4). Student articulation was balanced against the data from the journals and stories to uncover whether and why students choose to adapt their discourses (see Chapter Four III.2).

I. 5. 6 My own experiences & practice

While this research report is bounded in itself, it came from and is informed by the action-research methodology of my teaching portfolio, submitted as the coursework component of this M.Ed (Belluigi, 2006). Before I commenced this research project I spent two years critiquing my teaching practice and attempting to excavate my own assumptions. Many contend that the teacher can unearth the embedded theory-in-use, reflected in the implicit set of beliefs of the educational system s/he is steeped in, by engaging in such reflective dialogue about his/her teaching (Brockback & McGill, 1999:28). Such an understanding is akin to the Marxist 'materialist perspective' of *praxis* which involves a dialectic between doing and knowing (see Chapter Five II).

I believe that the range of my personal experiences as a past student, teacher and practicing artist enriched the study. This positioning of the postmodern researcher/ teacher/ past student/ artist at the threshold of research creates an awkward subject-object position that I would argue is aligned with the approach of the art practitioner-researcher (see Chapter Three II.4). Here 'critical' involves creating a distance from the data, embedding the data in the social, taking a political stance explicitly, and a focus on self-reflection as scholars doing research (Wodak, 2001:9).

Holliday (2002:137) shows that experience can be used as additional evidence and "brings personal presence and ownership to the discussion, which may indeed strike a chord with readers who have had similar experiences, also reminding them that this a 'real world' issue". I have made use of explicit conventions to clearly demarcate and preserve my voice from those of other participants. I included these experiential accounts in ways that do not detract from issues that the 'other' was highlighting.

Part II. The politics and problematics of representation

There is a the danger that this report, as an archived account, may cover up and thereby make absent, the ‘truth’ that it is supposed to be revealing (Van Alphen, 1997:100). This is because of the very problematics of modes of representation. In this section, I consider how I have approached issues of ideological bias, ethics, generalisability, and validity by attempting to be explicitly self-reflective.

II. 1. An openly ideological stance

Whilst I cannot escape subjectivity, I can be explicit about it (Holliday, 2002:147), by defining and defending my sociopolitical position (van Dijk, 2001:96). Such explicit discussions of ‘bias’ are not intended as confessions, but rather to show that “research was undertaken from this value-laden position” (Janse van Rensburg, 2001:11). I believe that this ‘openly ideological’ stance allows for inter-subjective objectivity through dialogue and critique (Lather in Janse van Rensburg, 2001:24), both in my own processes and for you as reader. Morgan (in Connole, 1998:20) believes that such ‘reflective conversation’ between different points of view indicates that “assumptions ultimately mean choice, and that the exploration of assumptions involves the exploration of choice”.

Those cognisant of the politics of representation know that qualitative research in itself is potentially dangerous ideological practice (Holliday 2002: 115). As Elkins (1996:22) warns:

Looking is hoping, desiring, never just taking in light, never merely collecting patterns and data. Looking is possessing or the desire to possess... and there is no looking without thoughts of using, possessing, repossessing, owning, fixing, appropriating, keeping, remembering and commemorating, cherishing, borrowing, and stealing. I cannot look at *anything* — any object, any person — without the shadow of the thought of possessing that thing. Those appetites don't just accompany looking: they are looking itself.

Post-colonial arguments, such as those of Franz Fanon and Edward Said after Foucault, show how “the discourse of the researcher can dominate the research setting, and the cultural behaviour of research participants can be reduced and ‘otherized’” (Holliday, 2002:115). Critical researchers should acknowledge “the contradiction between what we know is true or best and how this knowledge can be oppressive when put into practice” (Kilgore, 2001:55).

As I discussed in Chapter One, my choice of research site (the crit) was driven by what I perceived as an obligation to ‘bear witness’. As time passed from my student days and my

position changed, it would have been easy for me to leave behind my own troubling experiences and those of my peers who were sorely affected by an 'education' in fine art and not to connect this with experiences of current students I teach. Terdiman (in Belluigi, 2001:11) warns "the myth of progress makes the loss of memory less troubling". In some sense, the sense of resentment from my student experiences kept alive the ethical responsibility to try to *do* something to change the TLA interactions for the better. Govier (2002) terms this the 'paradox of resentment'. Influenced by post-Holocaust ethics of the Frankfurt School, I felt that my task as a critical researcher was to "assist in 'remembering' a past... in danger of being forgotten, to struggle for emancipation, to clarify the reasons for such a struggle and to define the nature of critical thinking itself" (Wodak, 2001:9-10).

As a researcher, I am informed by the ideas of Adorno, Derrida and Said on the argument for 'critical distance' of the ethical witness (Belluigi, 2001:50-51). The research experience can be approached as a stranger explores a new culture (Schutz, 1970, in Holliday, 2002:185)⁴. In many ways, this has been my experience and my *modus operandi* as explained in this chapter, when articulating from a critical distance the endeavour of this project, sources and methods of data collection, the process of analysis and the politics and problematics involved. I also attempted to take on the discipline of *making the familiar strange* (Holliday 2002: 93). C. Wright Mills (1970, in Holliday 2002:22) believes that this develops a 'sociological imagination' in researchers, and that "by their reflection and by their sensibility, they realize the cultural meaning of the social sciences" and of their place within this meaning.

II. 2 Ethical obligations

Consent was received from participating individuals, who were informed of the nature of the research and their right to withdraw. Every attempt has been made to protect the anonymity of participants and the institution involved.

Stake (2003:155) argues that while guidelines for the protection of human subjects should be observed, this does not mean that sensitive issues should be avoided. Certainly, a number of issues emerged during the collection and interpretation of this data, not least of all because 'crits' occupy contentious, difficult terrain. I have tried to handle these sensitively and ethically.

⁴ This notion echoes Adorno's plea (see Chapter One) and Julia Kristeva's notion of making the familiar strange (see Chapter Two I.3). Interestingly it also mimics one of the conditions for alienation (see Chapter Three I.5.4).

A valid concern is whether or not it is possible to re-present the meanings of participants' responses (McCormack, 2003, url). Interpretation is as flawed as memory, translation and recollection, involving projection, subjective re-construction and manipulation by the interpreter (Belluigi, 2001). But whilst no representation can ever be commensurate with or appropriate to its subject, the Lyotardian metaphoric of im-possibility insists on attempting to 'bear witness', even with foreknowledge of failure (see Chapter One ft.1).

II. 3 Generalisability and reliability

Acknowledging the social constructedness of my research and my own 'common sense' assumptions, entails admitting the provisionality of my findings (Kincheloe & McLaren, in Locke, 2004:36). In an attempt to ensure 'internal generalisability', I tested and triangulated data (Briggs, in Maxwell, 1992). I checked for false inferences, rival explanations and negative or discrepant evidence through 'connecting strategies' (see I.4).

In terms of reliability, 'complete' discourse analysis is not a feasible option (van Dijk, 2001:99). Many argue that attempts to ensure reliability or generalisability, can draw attention away from important aspects necessary to understand the particular case (Stake, 2003:141), so threatening validity (Maxwell, 1992). Horkheimer (in Wodak, 2001:9-12) believes that no single method of research could produce final or reliable results, and in fact could create a distorted picture. Instead, several methods of inquiry should complement one another. As there is no single theoretical perspective or method which researchers working within CDA adopt (Meyer, 2001:18), many argue this necessitates "a broad, diverse, multidisciplinary and problem-oriented CDA" (van Dijk, 2001).

Whether any case is generalisable or reliable is questionable, because even with the best intentions, research is constructed by the researcher: "the report will be the researcher's dressing of the case's own story... the researcher ultimately decides the criteria of representation" (Stake, 2003:144). In addition, while I guide or facilitate your construction of knowledge, in the process of reading, this case study will become part of a combination of studies in your memory (Stake, 2003:146-7). Some productive connections may be made with similar occurrences in your own practice. This is in the hope that confronting contradicting interpretations

allow readers to transcend their narrow, ideologically based views of social phenomena, to de-reify social structures that were previously seen as immutable to change, and to envision and enact social changes to redress basic inequalities and contradiction in capitalist society (Gephart, 1999, url).

II. 4 Critical validity

Some argue that only *inferences* drawn from data can be valid or invalid, not the data itself (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, in Maxwell, 1992). The impact of agentic and structural factors on both the participants' and the researcher's cognitive unconscious raises issues about validity (Ashwin, n.d.:4-5). Interpretative validity does not apply only to conscious concepts of participants, it can also pertain to their unconscious intentions, beliefs, concepts, and values - to their 'theory-in-use' as opposed to their 'espoused theory' (as discussed in Part I). Others argue that accounts will differ due to differences in the perspective and purposes of the observers and that these are 'descriptively valid' (Maxwell, 1992). As Janse van Rensburg (2001:11), states

as observers and interpreters of the world, we are inextricable part of it; we cannot step outside our own experience to obtain some observer-dependant account of what we experience. Thus, it is always possible for there to be different, equally valid accounts from different perspectives.

Validity is based on the understanding that the researcher has of the phenomena studied, relative to the purposes and the contextual circumstances. This aspect of interpretative validity raises another category of understanding and validity: 'theoretical validity' (Maxwell, 1992) or 'critical validity' (Erikson, in Maxwell, 1992). When analysing the data, I considered impressions, recollections and various discourses about the context and events without necessarily adhering to the mental models of participants or my readers (Carr & Kemmis, in Stake, 2003:150). In this way, qualitative case study involves balancing observation with reflection. But Bleakley (1999) contends that research should involve more than "the interiorising and subjectivising" of introspective reflection. He proposes an 'holistic reflexivity' that includes the aesthetic (sensitivity, complexity) and the ethical (caring, indeterminacy). This ethical dimension necessitates a shift from descriptive reflectivity to critical reflexivity "where the latter theorises (problematizes and relativises) action as it happens, reflecting on action against value perspectives" (Bleakley, 1999:328).

Kincheloe and McLaren (in Locke, 2004:38) argue that traditional notions of internal and external validity may need to be replaced by 'critical trustworthiness'. I endeavoured to ensure this by discussing emerging conclusions with colleagues and students, including my supervisor as critical reader from an higher educational perspective, and a critical reader from an HE art and design background who has researched the 'critique' method.

Conclusion: The politics of presentation

Holliday (2002:115) encourages the researcher to be vigilant in monitoring the ideology of his/her own language in the written study. This is a reflexive exercise that allows me as the researcher to identify unexamined assumptions emerging from the discourses I use, and to address them. Despite my acknowledgement of the identity effects of writing, I would be deluded to think that such effects can ever be entirely self-determined. Structural and agentic factors also impact on my role as researcher (Ashwin, n.d.:10). On a large scale this acts itself out in the social science orientation of this research report (evident in this interest in methodology) and conventions, which differ considerably from my Arts and Humanities academic background. Another difference is in the style of writing I have consciously adopted within this text, which I would like to briefly address here.

Writing from the perspective of CDA, van Dijk (2001:97) contends that “esoteric style is inconsistent with the fundamental aims of critical research, namely that it can be shared with others, especially also by dominated groups”. I know that many readers from fine art and critical theory backgrounds may criticize both this perhaps patronizing assumption, and my adoption of writing style. This is because ‘communicative’ styles are fundamentally contrary to the writing texts of theorists such as Foucault and Derrida, which heavily influence CDA and indeed my own critical orientation. Like art forms (see Chapter Two II.2), their experimental texts explicitly focus the reader's attention on the process of reading (in both senses), thereby forcing the reader to consider the texts as constructed objects in their own right, and refusing passive acceptance. Bannet (1989:9), explains that

they are designed to prevent the reader from looking *through* them at some external referent; they are designed to make the reader look *at* them and to work at them, actively involving him/ her in their construction or recreation.

This research report is written in a language and style more acceptable to those from an Anglo-American educational background. This is largely because the text will be submitted for the awarding of an educational qualification, and will be assessed by persons from this background. In addition, the possibility of this text not simply envisioning but encouraging change in FASP TLA practices, hinges on engagement by practitioners within these communities. Whilst I raised similar concerns in my teaching portfolio (Belluigi, 2006), for argument to have gravitas in the higher education community, research has to appear valid and conform to academic conventions. It also has to be accessible to lecturers and students within the creative arts, in the hopes that such engagement will perform an act of ‘teaching’, as Eisner (in Stake, 2003:145) describes:

Teaching *didactically*, the researcher teaches what he or she has learned. Arranging for what educationalists call *discovery learning*, the researcher provides material for readers to learn, on their own, things the teacher does not know as well as those he or she does know.

The pragmatics, problematics and politics of the research methodology discussed in this chapter, as applied to data collected from the case, will be explored in the following chapter.

Chapter Four

A representation of my interpretations

This section presents my analysis of data collected. In this chapter I explore disjunctions between the espoused FASP curriculum and assessment practices of the ‘crit’, in the hope that the theories-in-use may be exposed. Whilst I have attempted to be ‘true’ to the data, this analysis is an act of interpretation and is therefore subject to contestation and critique.

In Part I, assessment practices of this School of Art are placed within a brief historical context. Espoused assessment methods are then juxtaposed with how they occur in practice, with a focus on factors that impact on the effectiveness of formative feedback. In Part II, underlying assumptions of these practices are explored in terms of the relationships between form and content, process and product, intentionality and interpretation. It looks at how the dominant discourses construct a negative dialectic of the artist-student. Part III involves a consideration of the effects of crits, as they are implemented at this School, on students’ experiences of and resultant approaches to learning.

Part I: Placing the case in context

I.1. Historical context

Socializing practises such as art teaching are grounded in prevailing artistic traditions (Pariser, 1999:37). Until the late 1990’s, this School of Art was influenced by the teaching style of Victorian drawing academies, which focussed on acquisition of technical skills through direct observation of the subject. This tradition,

in a pictorial and philosophical sense... recognizes no conceptual problem with the reproduction of visual reality as a commonly held certainty, and the artist’s role is one of a technician and craftperson who through their skills reinforce the dominant visual construct (Sloan & Nathan, 2005:19).

During their BFA degree, students were taught drawing for one year and then majored in distinct ‘discipline’ areas according to medium, namely painting, sculpture, print-making and photography. This involved the teacher-student model of the ‘master-apprentice relationship’ which posits the lecturer as expert and student as novice to be inducted into a prevailing culture (see Chapter Two IV.1).

The influence of modernist formalism and the later movements and philosophies of postmodernism, caused shifts away from this dominant style (see Chapter Two III). In documents providing information to prospective students, they are told that “the department

has a dynamic and up-to-date curriculum” (School brochure) that has been “restructured... to reflect contemporary trends in the discipline” (School website). Currently, in the first two years of their BFA, students are introduced to mediums and specialise in their third year. Similar shifts occurred nationally, in response to international trends towards discourse-interest, where “making art in a contemporary context is not something ‘purist’” (School website). The espoused curriculum presents itself as aligned with contemporary approaches, and so unlike the previous aims of the School, “Our goal is not merely to produce specialist painters and sculptors, but rather to develop creative individuals with the technical skills and imagination to generate innovative responses to the visual world of the 21st Century” (School website) (see II.4). Throughout this Chapter, I return to the espoused curriculum’s adoption of a postmodernist, contemporary art discourse and how this is/ is not reflected in practice.

The broader history of the crit in FASP was outlined in Chapter Two IV. 2. About 30 years ago, crits at this School were used for one-on-one studio crits (these still take place informally on occasion); specialist discipline crits (which now occur formally in only two discipline sections); and a twice-semester crit to provide “an opportunity for students to bring in what they were doing outside the studio to get feedback” (Lecturer 1 interview), which was open to the public as an exhibition. While the first two crits involved small groups of students with the relevant studio-practice lecturer, the latter crit involved the whole School, with all staff and students present. This crit was conducted by the Head of Department (HoD), a graduate of the acclaimed Royal Academy who was regarded as “an accomplished artist” (Lecturer 1 interview). Here the crit acted as “an important symbolic ritual in which ‘apprentices’ (students) repeatedly present their habitus, a notion of identity that includes cognitive and embodied aspects, to their ‘masters’ (tutors) for legitimization” (Webster, 2005:265) (see Chapter Three I.2). One of the interviewees reflected on his/her experience of this latter crit as a student two decades ago,

when I look back on it, it was very ego driven. A macho kind of performance kind of thing. And it often could be [hesitates] quite, uh, destructive even derogatory sometimes... I think you felt quite relieved if your work wasn’t spoken about sometimes... it certainly could be quite intimidating (Lecturer 1 interview).

In time, other studio-practice lecturers began to participate in giving feedback. Under a later HoD, crits transformed into the current method, where “the gladiators forum was done away with, and [was replaced by] more section crits and group staff crits that would go to the different areas” (Lecturer 1 interview).

One of the School’s current articulated aims is “to ensure that each student realises his or her full potential” (School brochure) through “exposure to a rich and challenging range of

learning experiences” (School website) (see IV.2). The claim to offer ‘support’ in teacher-student interactions is evident in phrases such as “the art-making environment at [CSI] is a supportive one” (School brochure), “a supportive environment, which encourages creativity and personal development” (School website), “a flexible and supportive framework” (CSI website), “a supportive learning environment” (CSI, 2000:6). This certainly would suggest an alignment in intent with current notions of ‘good’ practice in FASP curricula (see Chapter Two IV. 1.).

The School, although claiming to have an ethos of support and enthusiasm, is not perceived by most of the student respondents as such. One student described it as “the cold, critical and pedantic art department” (Chloe’s story). In students’ stories, lecturers are often given names: the assessors involved in the crit sessions are called the “über-intimidating Ferocious Five” (Beatrice’s story), one studio-practice lecturer is “The Boss” (Leonardo’s story), another is “the MONSTER” (Chloe’s story). Such naming and objectifying the lecturer as ‘other’ might be a developed survival tactic in response to the experience of the alienation when the student’s ‘self’ is dependant on, but not validated, by their assessors (see III.1).

In her study of the architecture review, Webster (2005:265) found that

far from being a celebration of student achievement, the review was experienced by the students as a frightening event in which staff used their power to coerce students into *reproducing* staff-centred constructions of architectural habitus.

Here assessment functions as a socialising process where such encouragement of ‘reproduction’ instead of ‘finding one’s own voice’ (see II.4), which is not dissimilar to the master-apprentice relationship which two out of five of lecturers perceived as an important dynamic.

In fact, official documents refer to *teaching* more than student learning. In terms of the School’s “teaching approach” (School brochure), the reader is told that the students are “superbly taught” (School brochure) by “practising artists who exhibit their works regularly” (School brochure) “who enjoy sharing their knowledge” (School brochure). This suggests a ‘performance model’ of teaching (Morrow, 2007). In this Chapter, you will see that despite recent changes, the crit is experienced by many lecturers and students at this School as “a performance” (Lecturer 3 tp) where “the power dynamic is wrong... it’s too much about the authoritarian nature of the engagement” (Lecturer 4 interview). This performativity is further exacerbated by political tensions between staff “which play themselves [out] as mini ‘soap operas’” (Lecturer 3 tp).

I. 2 Assessment practices of “a dysfunctional family”

As discussed in Chapter Two IV. 2, the format of formative crits begins with each student presenting his/her verbal discussion or ‘defence’. This discussion varies in length, depth and detail (see III), followed by questions, comments and suggestions by staff members only. From my observations, the duration of crits of individuals’ works varied, the first five crits were around 30 minutes but by the end of the three hour plus sessions, 3-5 minutes were being spent per crit. Works were shown in students’ studios. These crits occur twice a semester on an ad hoc basis, rather than responsive to the students’ cycles of reflection (see II. 2). The peer group of that year, all studio-practice lecturers and the HoD were present. Peer participation and assessment has not integrated into the format (see II.3.1).

The twice yearly summative assessment looms large over the formative crits. These are modelled on the ‘assessment by exhibition’ method, i.e. artworks displayed without the student present (see Chapter Two IV.2). Grades awarded mid-year are used as indicators of progress; students can choose to amend works shown until the end of the year, where final marks are decided by studio-practice lecturers and the HoD. Here the studio-practice lecturer may represent his/her student’s work, which

can work both ways. Because you might get a lecturer who will speak to the work favourably and support the students’ work and their ideas, and assist the other lecturers if necessary understanding where they are coming from. But in another situation the lecturer just keeps quiet and doesn’t say anything and everyone looks and ‘what the hell is this about, this shite?’ and they get a bad mark... when we approach it as a group of staff assessing it, you’re assessing essentially the work on the wall. And there can be a slip there (Lecturer 1 interview).

As discussed in Chapter Three I.5.2, I found very little in current official documentation or any informal handouts which informs students of how assessment in FASP of this School occurs. Participating lecturers indicated that communication of assessment expectations for Third and Fourth Year students is not done explicitly. It is presumed that the student will learn through formative feedback at crits and from the grades given at the end of each semester. But as I discuss in 1.3, many factors affect students’ abilities to evaluate such feedback.

On a fundamental level, this lack of communication and transparency is problematic. Discourse is “the primary symbolic, mediational tool for cognitive development” that must be *communicative* if it is to be effective for learning (Palincsar, 1998:361). According to OBE schema, departmental documentation & discussions are meant to communicate what is “appropriate, what the objectives are, where all can see where they are supposed to be going

and where these objectives are buried in the assessment tasks” (Biggs, 1999:60). Most FASP educators are wary of this OBE perspective. There is a concern that “at their most detailed extreme, assessment criteria will detract from the challenge of the task for a student as they tell a student what to do to gain high marks” and that the appropriateness of assessment practices is dependent on different contexts and disciplines (Moon, n.d.:19). What Moon argues for, and I have attempted in my own practice, is an “informed balance”, which considers how the key assessment principles of reliability, transparency, fairness and validity relate in practice (see Chapter Two II.5). It is of concern that a blanket rejection of OBE might be a convenient manner of adhering to uncritical practices that threaten to disempower the student.

In this School, one studio-practice lecturer per discipline (i.e. painting, photography etc) supervises a small number of students through daily or thrice weekly studio interactions. Because of this, the studio-practice lecturer often has intimate knowledge of the student’s learning process (see Chapter Two IV.2). The importance of this relationship to student learning is not reflected in the value attributed by other lecturers to that person’s teaching. Although three out of five lecturers indicated it was important that the “aims/ criteria that the studio-practice lecturer communicated to the student(s)” be taken into consideration, in practice studio-practice lecturers’ criteria for projects are “most often not discussed” at assessments (Lecturer 1 interview). Variation in the value attributed to the studio-practice lecturer’s criteria may be dependant on the political influence of that individual.

Educational studies have shown that social status within the group affects which feedback is persuasive (Russell et al, 1990, in Palincsar, 1998:351). In the absence of a shared understanding of assessment approaches, the tacit criteria of certain lecturers over others dominate, as one of the lecturers described:

There has never been a discussion in my Department around the issue of criteria and assessments. What officially exists on paper in other courses that I do not co-ordinate is as foreign to me as is to the students. When I arrived at X [School] I had constructed certain criteria for students to judge their own works but it was never discussed at any stage with staff how and against what we assess student work. I soon discovered there was this norm ‘out there’ in the great abyss, that we were measuring students against. X [dominant lecturer] knew what this was, we had to try and find out what it was ourselves and could only throw in our two cents worth to try and challenge this (Lecturer 3 tp).

A strongly hierarchical social structure, which encourages passive compliance, is argued by many to be non-conducive to transformative learning (Forman & Kraker, in Palincsar, 1998:351) or creativity. This is exacerbated in the context of FASP, because this hierarchical structure is felt mostly within assessment practices.

Relations between staff were cited by both staff and students as having an effect on the teaching-learning environment, most notably during assessments. One lecturer expressed although s/he would like to discuss ideas with colleagues on how to improve assessment practices, but “for that to happen there has to be a kind of collegiality and a trust” (Lecturer 1 interview). These “personal and departmental politics” (Lecturer 1 interview) play out among the staff as if a “dysfunctional family” (Lecturer 4 interview). They also impact on which members are invited and involved in crits themselves (Lecturer 1 interview). In addition, data collected for this study reflected that political tensions were seen to have an effect on which feedback is given more prominence. One lecturer spoke about how “we all have our kinds of allies, like there are people that I’ll listen to more carefully in the crits than others. And I know I am guilty of that. I’m sure the students do that too” (Lecturer 4 interview). The dominant person’s feedback is most often adopted regardless of whether the content of that feedback is relevant to the student’s learning (Russell et al, in Palincsar, 1998:351).

Political tensions not only impact on which feedback students and lecturers ascribe value, but are perceived as often motivating the feedback itself:

The feedback they receive is at times also politically motivated, in other words, the feedback would be implying something about their lecturer or the way in which their lecturer teaches. These types of underhand comments lead to very tense and at times embarrassing dynamics which play themselves as mini ‘soap operas’. Students learn this behaviour whilst at the same time feel that their work is not being assessed and that the feedback they are receiving is tainted and problematic. The students often tell me that the crit is a time for staff to argue amongst themselves. This is often the case when staff begin discussing issues completely unrelated to demonstrate their bravado or snobbery regarding a particular subject (Lecturer 3 tp).

The hierarchical positioning of lecturers was evident during crits. I observed that when there was a disagreement of opinion during crits, lecturers would often move to stand near each other and speak over the other lecturer. Sometimes faces were pulled and eyes rolled in response to an opinion expressed by a colleague. It also became apparent through the body language which staff were considered to be more influential. Students and studio-practice lecturers often directed discussion at these lecturers. Whether or not student queries during crits were discussed with the relevant studio-practice lecturer was seemingly dependant on that person’s relationship with those who held power. A student expressed frustration with these political tensions, “I always find crits taxing on my emotional and physical stability. I find the whole process of negotiating personalities very difficult” (Selai’s journal). It is possible that students strategically adapt their approach to artmaking to satisfy the implicit criteria of those lecturers perceived to have the most influence when assigning grades (see III.2).

I.3. Feedback

It is generally accepted that feedback is critical to learning through assessment (Taylor & McCormack, 2005). As will be discussed in II.2.3, the potential of feedback to present the student with multiple readings of his/her artwork as a 'text' is important. But in her extensive research on the crit, Blair (2006b, n.p.) found that "students' interpretation and understanding of verbal formative feedback at the crit is not always the same as that perceived by their teachers". A crucial aspect of how verbal interactions will affect cognitive change is to be found by how learning is co-constructed (Forman & Kraker, in Palincsar, 1998:351). A person's ability to adapt and succeed is dependant on how s/he acquires and utilizes evaluative information (Sully de Luque, 2000:844). Where dialogue involves insufficient interaction or where social structure permits compliance, an individual's cognitive conflict may not be enough to result in conceptual change. In crits, factors that may not be as influential in written feedback come into play.

Factors that influence the effectiveness of verbal feedback

A number of participating lecturers articulated that they try "to be as encouraging and nurturing as possible while at the same time being honest" (Lecturer O questionnaire), which is often difficult since such feedback is given without time for reflection (Taylor & McCormack, 2005:3). In the statement below, a lecturer acknowledges the responsibility to make feedback constructive and transparent, but how this does not always correspond to practice:

I think it is imperative that that the lecturers balance the need to offer honest critique (in terms of saying that a work is unsuccessful, for instance) with the need to be constructive in doing so. I don't think that we, as a department, always get this balance right. I also think that we have a responsibility to explain ourselves, and this doesn't always happen either (Lecturer 4 email).

During the two crits I observed, when an artwork was perceived by lecturers as successful, it was given very little feedback at all. Despite claiming that "staff members use encouragement to elicit excellent work and to ensure that each student realises his or her full potential" (School brochure), the opportunities presented in these crits for sharing the 'secrets of success' or as a motivating factor were rarely utilised. One student's story provides insight into how s/he experienced this:

I know they trust my technical ability which is nice to know. It scares me that they have so much confidence in me though. Since 1st year I haven't received much feedback because they seem to trust that I'll make the right decisions on my own. BUT I am not a superhero. I struggle. I need advice. I need guidance, It's almost like it's easier for them to say, 'Don't worry, X will figure it out' so they

don't have to spend the energy guiding me. But then again, maybe I can do this on my own, maybe it's only me who doubts myself (Selai's journal). Studies indicate that feedback on assessment is experienced affectively (Taylor & McCormack, 2005), and that crits particularly are experienced by students as exceptionally emotional (Blair, 2006b). Many staff indicated they are sympathetic to the stress (Lecturer 1 interview), emotion (Lecturer 1 interview) and often trauma (Lecturer 4 interview) of the event. Taylor & McCormack (2005:2) note that "what might appear to be commonsense 'in theory' becomes complicated in practice by the feelings experienced by the giver and the receiver". One lecturer said that "the anxiety of the students often clouds their own vision. So they come out of the crit, not knowing really whether it was positive or negative or, they can't seem to read the lecturers' responses sometimes" (Lecturer 4 interview).

The sense of having the 'safe space' of their studio invaded during crits also affects students' perceptions, "it is not so much what people say, but the mere fact of the lecturers being in their space and it being a very vulnerable space to be in" (Lecturer 4 interview). One student described the studio environment before a crit: "sickening tenseness in the air, people... flurrying about haphazardly around [the] studio like headless chickens" (Terry's story). Another described it as "the cold dark X studio", adding that "it isn't actually cold or dark, it just seems that way to Beatrice because of her general attitude to the space" (Beatrice's story). An analysis of students' body language during crits indicated that they felt uncomfortable and defensive. When having their work 'critted', many stood with arms folded, avoiding eye contact, behind tables or furniture and at times visibly shaking. At one of the crits observed, a student even brought his/her dog on a lead, suggesting a need for defence.

Studies have shown that student perceptions of feedback as 'negative' may have more to do with the nature of delivery or its relevance to the student's learning at that particular time, rather than what is said (Black & Wiliam, in Blair, 2006b). Non-verbal cues also affect students' experiences of crits. A student described how as s/he was speaking during his/her crit,

I looked up at X who has an expression on his face like he wanted to vomit on my x [artworks]. That was the end of me. As soon as ~~the crit~~ my crit ended I burst into tears and sobbed for a while.... I'm a sensitive person. I will cry. I cannot help it. I HATE IT! (Selai's journal).

A lecturer addressed the subject of delivery:

I have issues, and I will continue to have issues with the way in which people frame responses to students. Because I think a lot of people forget what its like to be in that exceptionally vulnerable space. You know? When as a student you don't have the overriding self-confidence to being a successful artist or whatever, to stand in front of your work... sometimes I think 'Oh god, do you have to be so

clumsy in the way that you say things?', even when I agree with the thing that being said (Lecturer 4 interview).

Often subject matter students explore in their artmaking make them vulnerable, as they expose their private fears or desires are exposed to a 'public'. If they experience ridicule or humiliation, it is possible they will avoid such subject matter in future works for self-preservation (see Chapter Four III.1). During my observations, humorous comments were made at the expense of students being critted. In one artwork, the student had represented his/her naked body in a distorted manner, wanting to explore "how other people see my body". One lecturer asked what seemed a clarifying question, "how *you* see your body?" to which the student answered that it was how she sees her body. The lecturer in power then laughed and said in a ridiculing manner, "is *this* how you would see your body?" with most of the other lecturers and some students laughing too. The student then looked down, and cleared his/her throat (10 May observation). While such joking is sometimes explained as an attempt to diffuse tension, in my observations it was clear that students mostly found them a social practice that they felt forced to engage in. After one lecturer's joke during a crit, whilst people were still laughing, one of the students moved over to me and said, "I am so *over* this" (10 May observation), in a manner that indicated irritation. Such interaction was often disruptive, occurring between members of staff in a way that undermined the student or another lecturer as it could be overheard and sometimes was even shared with other students.

My analysis of the data confirmed that student learning is not just reliant on the nature or quality of the feedback given, but broader factors such as power relations (Devas, 2004, in Blair, 2006b, n.p.) and stress (Pope, 2005, in Blair, 2006b, n.p.) which impact on 'the self' (Kluger & De Nisi, in Blair, 2006b, n.p.). Misunderstandings of formative feedback, negative experiences or stress interfere with students' cognitive resources and the resultant level of learning (Blair, 2006a, n.p.), as is reflected in this extract:

When they finally get to his work he no longer has a clue what exactly it is he wants to say. Suddenly all the attention is on him, and before he even gets an opportunity to speak negative remarks come from X and X, offsetting [the student] a great deal. He tries to explain what he is doing and it feels like everyone is getting lost while he speaks (Student's story).

There is a latent perception, inherited from how lecturers themselves were taught, that feedback in crits should be harsh, even if demoralising, to prepare the student for professional practice:

I think for them to learn [hesitates] that [in] the kind of discipline or sector they are working in they will come under *crit-i-ci-sm* is important. To learn how to handle criticism is a necessary skill... when you put up an exhibition... it's

preparing you... Sometimes you might get a bad crit, sometimes you might get a good one. That you have to learn to differentiate between that. Sometimes somebody is just a shit critic or doesn't like your work. Whatever it might be. I think that is important (Lecturer 1 interview).

This lecturer's accentuation of the word 'criticism' seems to suggest, without differentiating between negative or constructive criticism, that criticism and not *critique* is the function of the crit (see Chapter One & Chapter Two IV. 2). The result are eschewed perception that a 'positive' crit is one without negativity, as reflected in this student's comment, "I think everyone really benefited from the feedback of the staff and students. They didn't kak all over us, please excuse the french" (Student's email).

I. 4 Patterns emerging from student stories and journals

Recognition should be given to the role of feedback on students' motivational beliefs and self-esteem (Juwah et al, in Taylor & McCormack, 2005). Studies show that negative, non-constructive feedback has a de-motivating effect on students (Kent, in Blair, 2006b). Drawing from students' journals and stories, a pattern can be seen to emerge in terms of immediate effects of the crit on students' engagement with their artmaking. A more detailed discussion of students' experiences of and approaches to learning is discussed in Part III.

In the three days leading up to the crit, data collected from students indicated that their anxiety grew as they completed last minute work, a number working through the night. Over half the students met with the lecturer in that time to make contingency plans, with half of these interactions leaving students feeling that the studio-practice lecturer had withdrawn his/her support.

On the day of the crit event, all students indicated high levels of anxiety and sometimes even panic as the crit approached. Students, who had work to show and who had prepared what they were going to say, indicated that they were feeling more confident. During individual crits, most journal entries reflected confusion, extreme nervousness and anger, with relief and exhaustion characterising immediate emotions once it was over.

Out of the eleven students who participated in this project, only one engaged with artmaking in the three days after the crit. As one lecturer laughing explained, "sometimes people's negativity puts the student in a position where they start disliking what they have done. I don't think it is healthy to have a hate relationship with your own art, ever" (Lecturer 4

interview). This reflects how motivation and performance are significantly influenced by feedback (Sully de Luque, 2000:831).

Most students indicated they were exhausted after the event and needed a break. Data collected from two students indicates some reflection occurred during this time, “Did very little practical work, but idea expansion progressed. Slowly. Back to the drawing board really, but to rethink what I already had” (Penny’s journal). Many though did not reflect at all, “He intended to work... but since his idea seems to suck so much he doesn’t see that there is anything he can do” (Student’s journal). Most of the participating students were extremely upset. One felt that what s/he did would never be good enough, another described him/herself as crying for three days afterwards; others used various medicators, such as binge eating, cigarettes and coffee. These excerpts reflect the emotional state of many of the students:

Didn’t want to work today – didn’t know what to do → felt too lost to try and work (Student’s journal).

Didn’t do art today... Very stressed... really worried (Student’s journal).

I’m not surprised. I usually cry a bit afterwards. I just find the whole process very draining and terrifying. I cry for the release (Selai’s journal).

Over half the students actively sought interaction with their studio-practice lecturers after the crit, and many noted disparity with their perceptions of feedback given at the crit. In these interactions, the studio acts as a ‘safe space’, where aptly-named ‘post-mortems’ (Lecturer 4 interview) or ‘debriefings’ are “aimed at largely undoing damage that has been done at the crit” (Lecturer 3 tp). Though not acknowledged publicly, data collected from teachers and students indicated that these occur in all discipline sections at this School.

Such sessions allow studio-practice lecturers to guide students’ evaluations of feedback, in ways that should occur in a *formative* crit,

it is an opportunity for me to clarify *my* understanding of what transpired and for the students at a very kind of raw level still to process what was said, and to, you know, in a very kind of immediate fashion think about, ‘no, this does work for me’ or ‘it doesn’t’ or whatever (Lecturer 4 interview).

In this role, the studio-practice lecturer could be seen as a critical friend to the student (see Chapter Two IV.2). The type of feedback provided here seems more in response to the espoused theory of supporting and nurturing,

one makes the safe space and in the context of the safe space things are said... to me it is absolutely necessary that they trust me, they trust each other before they go about the business of getting the job done. I can tell them that their works are not doing the thing that they want them to do, and it does not come from a

hostile place. So, the sorts of post-mortems that we conduct are honest but never hurtful (Lecturer 4 interview).

Certainly, some of the students seem to experience it as such. But an alarming pattern emerges from their stories, most clearly evident in this one:

I spent the whole weekend stressing about what to do and wishing that I could just speak to my lecturer and ask X for some guidance as [how] to deal with the crit, wanted to know where to go from here. I was a stress ball by Monday morning, and nothing that my friends or mother said helped, [I] just needed to talk to my lecturer. But then on Monday morning when I did speak to X, things didn't go as I thought they would. I went there expecting X to say that it was terrible, because that's how I felt that it went. But X told me that X doesn't know what I'm taking about, that in actual fact it went well! I was so cross with myself, I was so upset all weekend for no reason. Had I known that it had in actual fact gone well I would never have felt the way I did all weekend (Student's story).

Whilst the studio-practice lecturers' intentions seems benevolent, the repetition of this cycle of building up and breaking down, could be interpreted as manipulating and abusive. My analysis of data collected from students seems to indicate that such cycles remove student agency and desire, thereby encouraging a strategic approach (see Part III).

Part II. Relationships blurring dichotomies

In this section, I look specifically at the central *punctums* of this research project in order to tease out the dialectics that underpin FASP education as practiced in this School. The relationships between these aspects are reciprocal, so that when one dominates it often does so to the detriment of 'the other'. I firstly consider how the School approaches the relationship between form and content, finding a modernist discourse of medium-specific quality. I then consider process and product, looking at whether risk and experimentation are acknowledged as important in assessment practices. In the third section, the relationship between interpretation and intentionality, involves discussions of 'multiple voices'. In the last section of Part II, I attempt to expose the negative dialectic of the artist-student, emerging from approaches to creativity and criticality. Throughout Part II, I have interwoven concerns about how 'self' and 'other' interact, a crucial concern of critical postmodernism, and so in II.4.2 I look specifically at the School's adoption of certain discourses in terms of this relationship.

II. 1 The relationship between form and content

The School's brochure claims that there are "opportunities for artists to make major contributions to the development of society" (School brochure). The draft registration

document states that students will “demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of contemporary art making, within the context of the student's individual art practice and an appropriate area (or areas) of critical theory within which the subject of the work is located” (CSI, 2000:2). Such statements suggest that the School is informed generally by critical theory, and that social and political concerns have relevance to student learning and artmaking.

Critical theory... seeks to locate artistic work in its social context, to consider author and audience in the light of history, to seek the social shaping of criteria for aesthetic evaluation, and to identify the social purposes and interests served (Gibson, 1986:12).

One lecturer highlighted that “a broad message communicated through the teaching and learning at the department is the importance of creating critical and self-reflexive work which is embedded in art and visual cultural theory” (Lecturer 3b questionnaire). But the lack of embeddedness in critical theory becomes clearer when two out of five lecturers indicated they ascribed little or no value to subject matter students explore having social/political relevance.

In terms of students making socially critical artwork, one lecturer noted that “you do get some students who feel quite passionate about some things or what have you, but many of them are quite apathetic... it's a change in times as well. But it's how it's encouraged” (Lecturer 1 interview). If ‘facilitating’ transformative learning (see Chapter Two II.2), should the lecturer not complicate the student's every day understandings, to encourage critical thinking and ethical artmaking (see IV)?

With postmodern art, emphasis is on the reciprocal nature of form and content, to which aspects of the espoused curriculum appear aligned. Lecturers responded unanimously that it is important that students create relationships “between medium/ technique and content”, because at the end of their fourth year, students are assessed by “a body of work to be exhibited as a whole, that is consistent conceptually and technically” (School website). On the departmental website it is claimed that the curriculum “provides comprehensive tuition in the practical and theoretical or historical aspects of the visual arts” (School website). But these aspects are structurally separated into two majors, Fine Art Studio Practice (FASP) and Art History and Visual Culture (AHVC), without direct interrelation between them (Lecturer i interview).

The very first exit level outcome of the draft BFA registration document states that on completion of the degree “the BFA graduate is competent to apply specialist artistic knowledge and skills to the initiation, planning and production of creative visual problem

solving in a specific medium or range of medium” (CSI, 2000:2). Instead of a discourse-interest (see Chapter Two III.2), the word ‘specialist’ suggests a medium-specific orientation that is reflected within the structure of the degree itself. Another exit level outcome is “competence in the initiation of self-directed visual investigation and the *resultant* physical problem solving” (CSI, 2000:2). Here the suggestion is that content precedes rather than is reciprocally related to, form. In this section, I consider how form in this case study is given dominance, often without the student being taught the necessary technical skill base to ensure fair results or empowered to achieve his/her aims. Because meaning making is separated from student intentionality, form becomes interpreted by the assessors as content.

‘Quality’: a medium-specific orientation

Within the BFA degree at this institution, the curriculum itself is medium-specific in orientation. In the first two years of FASP, students get to ‘try out’ all of the disciplines on an elective basis and then major in their third and fourth years, so that “each student is based in a specialist media area (Painting, Photography, Printmaking, Sculpture)” (CSI, 2005:161). This excerpt suggests a medium-specific rather than discourse-interest orientation:

The first year course serves as an introduction to a variety of media, including drawing, sculpture, painting, photography and video. It is designed to facilitate the student’s ability to define his or her preferred medium, while also developing an appreciation of the possibilities of different media. In second year students have the opportunity to choose between two media offered concurrently by different lecturers each term. In third year students specialise in one of the core disciplines (painting, sculpture, photography or printmaking), and continue their training in this specialist area in their fourth year. These disciplines are not seen, however, as strictly differentiated, and students are encouraged to explore their interests in whichever medium is most suitable for the project they are working on (CSI website).

The isolation of medium-specific sections into buildings physically apart from each other, and political tensions between staff members often seem to make hollow the claim that

if, for example, you choose to major in painting, we would have no difficulty if you wanted to produce some works in three dimensions, or to make a print, or to work with photography, computers, video or indeed any other medium of your choice (School website).

Although it is recognised that “today the distinctions between media are blurring” (School website) and it is claimed that the degree offers “the opportunities and versatility associated with interdisciplinary study” (School website), interdisciplinary movement is the rare exception rather than the rule.

Four out of five lecturers in the sample indicated it is important that students are “highly competent in a specific medium (& its related skills)”. In addition, “the *quality* of the visual

form of the work” drew a unanimous response from lecturers in terms of the importance ascribed for assessment. I would argue that some students pick up on this, so that “by the time they come to fourth year they play to their strengths” (Lecturer 1 interview), by developing the skills necessary to ensure the *form* of their work is ‘evocative’ or ‘beautiful’ rather than of *meaning* to them (see II.4). This is the result of a medium-specific rather than discourse-specific FASP education.

Technical skills

In many cases students have to be persuaded that the technical skills, although are not assessed separately, are vital for successful completion of works of art. If students strategically approach learning by looking at assessment it becomes difficult to give this importance and then to constructively align the course. On another level it is implicit in the discipline that the student needs to be technically proficient, but this leads to being technically proficient in only ‘one’ area (Lecturer 3 tp).

What is of concern is the accent on form during assessments, with recognition neither of technical nor conceptual skills proficiency. This disjunction between conceptual and technical skills may be a result of the end product or artwork being placed above the process of meaning making (see II.2). In other words, the artwork’s form is rewarded when reflecting ‘quality’ without the necessary skills being rewarded as the student learns. The fact that technical skills are not explicitly valued is seen by many studio-practice lecturers as not rewarding the learning process:

Expressing yourself in a new medium... is a steep learning curve technically sometimes, before you can express yourself fluently. If you are learning how to do a X it is actually quite a hard medium, and it can be quite beautiful. But you’ve got to climb that hill first. So maybe this X [artwork] you are looking at isn’t great as a piece of work, but what they learnt from doing it, you’ve got to accredit. I think sometimes there isn’t an understanding of that (Lecturer 1 interview).

One of the studio-practice lecturers expressed frustration with current assessment practices,

I am a firm believer... [that] half of what I teach has to be technical facilities and essentially medium. That you are giving the person the vehicle to actually express themselves. You can have the greatest fucking ideas in the world, if you don’t have the means of expressing it, it’s useless. In the same way, you can have the greatest best technique in the world, if you don’t have the ideas, it’s also [useless]. So it’s message and medium, it’s message and medium [hand gestures a balancing scale], it’s continually message and medium and they have to work together (Lecturer 1 interview).

In addition, the four outcomes articulated in the School’s draft BFA registration document relate to purely technical skills, in a manner which suggests that such skills are neutral in terms of the values and assumptions about reality that underpin them (see II.4).

Conclusion: Form as content

A modernist assumption emerges from an analysis of data collected, that content of work is evident in form alone. One lecturer admits this, “I know it sounds like a horrible cliché but the good work does speak for itself in a lot of instances. And doesn’t really need or warrant that kind of discussion. I mean if it’s strong, if it’s convincing stuff, it carries that weight” (Lecturer 4 interview).

During observations, I noticed that some feedback was directed towards contextualising work, such as “I wonder is there is a way to draw [attention] to context of your family” (10 May observation); “re-photograph them to reference the context” (18 May observation). In the first exchange, the suggestion is that the work should be contextualised in the ‘personal’ (see II.3.2), the last comment indicated the student should quote the literal context of the source image that was being replicated without concern for issues around reproduction (see II.4.1). Most often such contextualisation was seen as a light reference or an access point for the reader, instead of a challenging or questioning of the discourse, such as “it is enough to refer” (10 May observation), “very suggestive, title makes it too overt” (18 May observation).

Most feedback focused on the form of works without discussion of the content. Positive feedback related mostly to this, depending on what the lecturers’ found ‘enticing’ or ‘evocative’. All participating lecturers indicated that it was important that “the student produces art that is visually impressive” and that the visual surface of the work should have impact in terms of “whether it moves/ evokes feelings in the viewer”. This last phrase implies a strong modernist impulse towards treating the viewer on an emotional level rather than as a ‘reader’ (see Chapter Two III.1). One of the lecturers pointed out that this response often comes from individual tastes, “clearly I will be drawn to an aesthetic that appeals to me, but any efforts to reward this must be tempered by the recognition that there are other aesthetics which are equally valid and equally appealing to others” (Lecturer 4 questionnaire). That an artwork should *appeal* to the viewer is one that is modernist in orientation (see Chapter Two III.1). As is the separation of form from content, evident in these statements made without explanation:

Lecturer: I like the look... (18 May observation).

Lecturer: ...these are definitely visually more engaging (18 May observation).

Lecturer: ... very suggestive, title makes it too overt (18 May observation).

While lecturers may claim “technical skills and creative development are viewed as interdependent, and of equal importance” (Lecturer 1 questionnaire), in practice this is often not the case. Some lecturers argue that emphasis is placed on content or ‘concept’ without adequate attention given to students’ development of technical skills, while in practice it seems that the form of the work is often determined through lecturers’ interpretations

according to the dominant aesthetic or individual tastes (see II.3). This would suggest that neither form nor content is valued as integrally related to meaning making processes or student intentionality, but rather that form is interpreted as content.

The School's preoccupation with form could be underpinned by modernist 'instrumental rationality' which divorces fact from value, with a preference for fact (see Chapter Two 3.1). According to Gibson (1986:7), "it is a kind of intellectual activity which actually results in the decline of reason itself, and it therefore stultifies, distorts and malforms individual and social growth". This 'reason' is the type that Derrida warns against, which even if presented with the best intentions, seeks to appropriate, contain, dominate, suppress or repress what is perceived or presents itself as 'other' (Bernstein, 1991:71). Data analysis shows that this focus on instrumentalism and performativity, when separated from a student's desire, was often experienced as alienating (Frosh, in Mann, 2001:8). In the next section, I consider how the assessment drive towards product over learning and meaning making process is also underpinned by instrumentalist rationality.

II. 2. The relationship between 'process' and 'product'

Unlike the linear emphasis of modernism, postmodern art is characterised by a sense of 'play' and experimentation, and an acknowledgement of the importance of risk and failure to learning (see Chapter Two IV.1). With life-long learning, there is recognition that learning processes are often unpredictable, with options emerging during action and in response to contexts (see Chapter Two II. 4). Emphasizing that the 'process' model is "more appropriate to thinking about learning in higher education than any rivals based on Enlightenment rationalism and hubris", Knight (2001b:379) describes how it is informed by complexity theory in that effective means (the processes, messages and conditions) will justify the ends. Aspects of the espoused curriculum being examined in this case study created the impression that the art product, artmaking and learning processes are all given importance. According to the School's brochure, one of the aims of the curriculum is "to elicit excellent work and to ensure that each student realises his or her full potential" (School brochure). Although some studio-practice lecturers indicated that there should be a balance between process & product, one noted that "it is just a difficult one to assess in a crit system, and the kind of assessment situation that we work in" (Lecturer 1 interview).

Formative assessments are meant to present an opportunity for the student to discuss how s/he has developed in his/her learning from previous projects and crits, with assessment considering "individual growth or progress as well as absolute achievement" (Pratt,

2002:12). In fact, all participating lecturers indicated that they believe that “the learning process of the student” and “the change/ growth the student underwent” are valued as essential in formative and summative assessment. Such an approach would be aligned with the espoused claims to ‘support’ students on their ‘journeys’ (see I.1. & II. 3. 2).

Experimentation and process are integral parts of creative processes of learning. For Satre “meaningfulness can be seen to reside in creativity and play, whereas meaninglessness resides in order, work and discipline” (Wilson, in Mann, 2001:11). Experimentation and process are linked to autonomy (Winnicott, in Mann, 2001:12) and developing evaluation skills, as this lecturer acknowledges:

I feel it is important for students to develop *independent* and *self critical* skills (technically and conceptually) which they can *apply* to their art making. These skills are developed and have to be nurtured. They are developed, I feel, by *re-visiting* subject matter and the *processes* involved with making an artwork. This way a student can, with guidance, constantly *develop* a concept and learn that *re-working* an idea develops it enriches the work. Additionally the student will *develop* her/his technical skills by *trying out* various ways in which to execute the idea. Having experienced this *process* will increase the confidence of the student, allowing him/her to work gradually more independently for the following assignments (Lecturer 3b questionnaire) [emphasis mine].

Of the participating lecturers, all indicated it was important that “the student feels confident to play”. One lecturer added “[Play is] absolutely essential. I tell all my students that, in X [medium], their most frequently asked question should be ‘I wonder what would happen if...?’” (Lecturer 4 questionnaire). In addition, all lecturers indicated it ‘essential’ that “the student takes risks and pushes his/her own boundaries”. From discussions with lecturers, it became clear that experimentation was billed as what students do when developing, i.e. in early processes of learning equated with immaturity. It was not something that would be given value at the end of the degree where the student exhibits his/her ‘mastery’, a modernist emphasis on quality. One lecturer argued that “at a second, early third year level that is important, I mean to engender an experimental and innovative approach is important, but to try stuff, push boundaries and that kind of thing” (Lecturer 1 interview).

Although all the lecturers indicated that “evidence of experimentation” was valued in assessments, an analysis of the data indicated that this does not occur in practice. Experimentation is not recognised as one of the implicit criteria,

I know that I place a lot of value on experimentation, but I know that other lecturers do not. In this case, I cannot expect to see, and subsequently reward, the same levels of experimentation from all the students at the crit (Lecturer 4 questionnaire).

Students are graded solely by the method artefact displayed. Asked why a ‘work-in-progress’ submission, acceptable within contemporary artmaking, would be judged negatively, a lecturer explained:

I think there is a sort of lack of commitment. At some point a person has to make decisions, as much as the process is play and experimentation is exciting, it can also be apathetic. So there is a question of allowing things to happen and then making decisions which can push the thing in one direction rather than another (Lecturer 4 interview).

My own perceptions are shared by Davies (1997, url), who claims that

making sense in art and design is a risky business even for competent students. As the emphasis has always been on the artefact as the principal criterion of success, rather than what a student has actually learned as a result of the project, experimentation in sense-making can only go so far.

In fact, the data collected from this study confirms Dineen, Samuel & Livesay’s (2005:165) findings that summative assessments often undermine the creative process. The excerpts below, chosen from a discussion with one lecturer, gives an indication of the contrary relationship summative assessments can create with process.

I am quite reticent to get students talking about what the thing is going to end up being, because to me it circumvents a lot of the exploration, the sort of ‘happy accidents’... I found that by shifting that emphasis slightly, students do feel more enabled to open the process of communicating rather than shutting it down or feeling inhibited in terms of a predetermined end point that they have to work towards (Lecturer 4 interview).

as much as I love process, process towards some end is also important and I think the students also know that (Lecturer 4 interview).

process itself is directed towards an end, so there is still an overall conception of what the overall exhibition is going to be, but how one arrives there is open ended (Lecturer 4 interview).

This drive towards production also resulted in very little feedback or interaction in formative assessments devoted to challenging assumptions implied by the artwork/ student. In addition, often no time was devoted to placing the work in a context – whether in terms of the subject matter, the student’s intentions or the lecturers’ interpretations. Lecturers’ comments during crits were mostly task-focused, such as “you need something to show for assessment” (10 May observation), “instead of redoing the project, for assessment see what you can do with what is here” (18 May observation). Most comments indicated instrumental rationality where fact is often separated from value and focus is on ‘how to’ to the extent that the art product is privileged over learning/ meaning making processes.

When examining the data, it became clear that some studio-practice lecturers encourage students to experiment or be ‘in process’, in a manner that suggests they may not be unaware

of the backwash of the degree submission exhibition on assessment practices. But students seemed well aware of disjunction between espoused encouragement of risk taking, and the constraints of assessment practices which do not make allowance for failure. This adds stress to this student's experience:

The lecturer in his arty way had said 'Just do it! It doesn't matter if you bugger it up! That's how you learn!', just that sentence sent the perfectionist Chloe into a panic frenzy, just do it? How could she just do it, it was half a years worth of work, what if it was a mess? How would she fix it? How would the assessment go? Would she pass? (Chloe's story).

That the crit as implemented at this School has lost its emphasis on developing and guiding learning and art making processes, is clear from this student's statement, that "his idea was kind of still in a development process where outside criticism isn't very constructive" (Student's story). Participating students often felt alienated from the artmaking process, because of externally imposed constraints:

Sam was not feeling in the mood to paint today, but she knew she had to. If Sam didn't paint today, then she would be even more nervous for the crit (Sam's story).

Today... the process was quite slow and frustrating, and I feel that the more I look at the images the more they irritate me, and more they make me feel like I'm going to be sick... Feel like I have so much to do in such a little time. I must just remember that need to do things properly and carefully instead of just rushing to get finished before crit. AM glad with work that I have so far – just a little bored with looking at the same ~~fucking~~ images (Student's journal).

Chloe disheartened and panicked slumped down onto the chair in front of her six foot X [medium] and started laboriously [working on] a small section at the top, avoiding the section that she was dreading (Chloe's story).

As I discussed in Chapter Two IV.1, experimentation and play require students to feel safe to take risks with foreknowledge that they may fail. The next section considers my analysis of on how learning and failure are approached by the School.

Learning and failure

An exit level outcomes is that students should be able to "Demonstrate an understanding of the ever-expanding and ever-changing nature of knowledge and appreciate the need for life-long learning [see II.4.2]. In order to meet this outcome, learners will... demonstrate an awareness of human fallibility" (CSI, 2000:3). According to Corner (2005:340)

A central factor in the teaching of fine art is the notion of learning through failure. This means that, as the students explore and experiment with materials, research the cultural and symbolic genre that they are a part of and learn how to articulate their own ideas through the use of form and materials, they come to understand that the creative process is difficult and challenging. It requires the artist to be prepared to take a whole range of risks and chances within the work as they wrestle with combining all these elements.

Many of the studio-practice lecturers recognise, through their own experiences as practicing artists, that the artmaking “process will inevitably be difficult and the student should be allowed to struggle with the process as long as they are guided along the way and they get sufficient feedback allowing them to learn from their images” (Lecturer 3b questionnaire). With certain mediums, the process of artmaking is itself messy and requires foresight and patience to envisage how the work will evolve, as a lecturer explained

some of these processes allow the works to look like an absolute disaster and then it comes out of that somehow. Probably cos I’ve worked on it [the medium] so long, I have more of an ability to see a positive, a light at the end of tunnel. So a lot of my colleagues, they look at it in its current state and go ‘oh my god’, unable to project a happy ending onto the narrative (Lecturer 4 interview).

The comment “I don’t want him to fuck up the X [artwork]” (10 May observation) was made by a studio-practice lecturer in response to a colleague’s suggestions. It was provided as the only reason why a student should not experiment with the medium in a way that was more integrated to the student’s subject and intention, rather than as realistic (see II.4.1). One lecturer commented on such feedback in our discussions:

I think that there is a lot of pessimism and what pessimism does is that it often doesn’t give students the benefit of the doubt. Now often when students are making works that are in progress, they are asking you to envisage an end result which is potentially there... So I am quite reticent to say something negative, or anything that will shoot down the process at that stage. But other people aren’t as generous (Lecturer 4 interview).

As discussed in 1.3 & I.4 of this chapter, negative feedback in the midst of the artmaking and learning process most often has adverse effects on learning, motivation and confidence. Data collected from student journals and stories indicated that many students felt alienated from the product of their labour:

All I want to do is paint a giant FUCK in the middle of a canvas! (Chloe’s story).

[This] is where I am at in my art process at the moment, kind of in the middle of nothing actually. Just want to get this project over with so that I can start a fresh one (Student’s story).

One lecturer described that crits “can get dreadful in that respect... to be able to be creative you have to have self-confidence” (Lecturer 1 interview). The timing of crits can have negative effects on students’ learning. One lecturer described how “there have been instances in the past, when a student was midway through a process the lecturers saying ‘god no, it’s not going to work, it’s a disaster. Cut it up’” (Lecturer 4 interview).

To survive such feedback, students learn to become good at hiding their inabilities and deficiencies (see III.2), but

if we are genuinely going to help students to become active students who can operate independently we are going to have to find ways of enabling them to be open and honest about their beliefs without feeling that they will be humiliated by their peers or downgraded by their teachers (Davies 1997: url).

A fundamental way to do this, would be to structure the curriculum so that both processes of learning and final artwork are valued (see Chapter Five II).

Conclusion: Can the process be evident in the product?

In assessment, all of the lecturers ascribed importance to “the actual artwork/ object as it looks” and “art that is visually impressive”. Many contended that the process was evident in the product itself.

I think ultimately one has to mark the work that is presented, but the student’s own learning is invariably evident within the work, as a sub-narrative of sorts... I think one sees, there are little clues as to the student’s investments, and I think if you are a sensitive enough reader you’ll pick those up... It’s a very kinda vague thing, you know, I don’t know how one would identify it specifically (Lecturer 4 interview).

I would argue that such arguments expose a modernist emphasis on the optical experience of the artwork (see Chapter Two III.1). A professional ‘finish’ or look is one of the few implicit criteria that came across clearly at this School. One lecturer’s claim that “I often look at things like attention to detail and finish as evidence of the student’s investment and care in the work” (Lecturer 4 questionnaire), might sound like commonsense at first, but suggests an aesthetic or ‘look’ so that a work’s form may not be aligned with its content. In this case study, emphasis on a ‘clean’ aesthetic was coupled with a discourse of ‘professionalism’. This too links closely with the modernist emphasis on ‘quality’ over meaning making, as found in II.1. Coupled with a ‘clean’ finish is the dominance of Western realism, i.e. representation of reality as close as possible to the ‘original’ subject (see II.4.1).

According to Hardy (2003:340), “the imposition of a house style smacks of cowardice”. This is because the surety of certain styles remove all possibility of the student’s, and in turn the department’s, failure. But in so doing, a certain executable endpoint removes much of the experimentation and innovation while learning, thereby thwarting the student’s autonomy and his/her ‘voice’ (see Chapter Two II.4). This student’s perception of the studio-practice lecturer’s role reflects this:

X’ll never say it outright, but his aesthetic is always there, imposing itself on us. Now I understand that that is the way supervision works, that you don’t just get a

person, you get an aesthetic too, but how hard it is when you disagree with the aesthetic and the person fundamentally (Student email).

II. 3 The relationship between interpretation and intentionality

Without an investment in meaning making, transformative learning will not occur. I would argue that meaning making is directly linked to student intentionality, autonomy and creative critical thinking (see Chapter Two I.3, II.3 & IV.1). This is similar to many lecturers' espoused theories:

It is crucial for me that students go through a self-concept change of sorts – where they immerse themselves in their work and there is an investment in the process of artmaking as it becomes meaningful to them. In other words – this is who they are and this is how they behave in the world. They are linked to 'identity of artist'. They are a part of that community. They know the language and ways of behaving within it (Lecturer 3 questionnaire).

When lecturers from this study were asked to indicate the level of importance they would ascribe to the student's commitment to making meaning, four out of five indicated it was important. One lecturer wrote that s/he tries to "encourage the student to work with subject matter that they felt very passionate about. It is my belief that if an artist has an idea or vision that they feel intensely about they will find the materials and the images to best communicate those ideas" (Lecturer 0 questionnaire).

This section considers how the subject of interpretation and intentionality is approached during formative and summative assessments. I argue that poststructural readings of 'interpretation' and the intentionality fallacy have been misappropriated to suit the interests of the lecturers in power (see Chapter Two IV.1). Agger (1992) argues that such constructions posit postmodernism as ideology and not critical theory. How lecturers handle intentionality and interpretation, models their approaches to the relationship between 'self' and 'other' (see Chapter Five I).

II. 3. 1 Making interpretations

[A]s a living, socio-ideological thing, language for the individual consciousness lies on the borderline between oneself and the other (Bakhtin, in Palincsar, 1998:361).

The importance of feedback for an artist-student's growth and in turn the development of the artwork cannot be underestimated. Artwork exists in a relationship of interpretation and projection by its viewers. Hearing the perceptions of diverse readers helps the artist shift and re-evaluate aspects of the artwork to more appropriately communicate meaning. As one

lecturer describes it, “artmaking is a form of communication and it relies on an author-viewer dynamic and to deny that part of it is to become incredibly narcissistic” (Lecturer 4 interview).

In Chapter Two IV.1, I explained how multiple viewpoints by ‘other(s)’ can create ‘critical confrontation’ of the student’s representation to act against a narrow focus on the student’s own intentions or interpretation; to encourage more ethical practice; and to develop his/her critical faculties. But for this potential to be realised, transparency and diversity of interpretation is necessary, as is the student’s position of agency to choose from the feedback provided and adapt the work according to his/her decisions. Not only should feedback come from lecturers, but also other students, who, while assessing their peers’ works, develop their own internal standards and ability to evaluate. In fact, “the ability to evaluate the outcome of their art making process” (CSI, 2000:2) is one of the outcomes of the degree.

Student participation

Studies show that student learning is in part dependant on the *nature* of student participation during interaction (Terwel, 1999:197). The School’s website states that “interaction, collaboration, and critical discourse between students at all levels” are actively promoted”. Although one lecturer identified “input from their peers” (Lecturer 1 interview) as crits’ primary education benefit, I found that peer-participation does not happen in practice. This, despite the fact that all of lecturers indicated that it is important that the student considers others’ viewpoints and that the “student draws from various sources to get feedback (lecturers, laypeople, peers etc)”. On this issue, the espoused and practiced curriculum comes into sharp relief.

The students themselves are to some extent blamed for not interacting in crits,

As a lecturer I find that frustrating, when somebody’s work is being spoken about or you’re trying to articulate yourself... and there is all this other talk going on in the background and students aren’t really interested. I personally find that quite disheartening (Lecturer 1 interview).

During my observations, it was quite clear that most students were disinterested in the individual crits of their peers. I observed students reading novels; moving in and out of the room, milling about; talking on mobile phones, with each other, with lecturers who were not participating; playing with a staple gun, a dog, each others’ hair; lounging on couches, chairs, with their backs towards the crit event; at some points students were up to 6m away from the artworks, where it was impossible to see or hear anything; often most students did not even look at the work. When reprimanded by lecturers or asked to quieten down, students would stand silently for a while, with arms folded and blank faces. In the last hour and a half of the

one crit, most students visibly expressed gestures of frustration – yawning, throwing their hands up and looking pointedly at their watches. In addition, at least one third of students at the observed crits left after their work was critted. ‘Terry’ wrote about this in her story,

They arrived at the crit just in time to join the first painter’s critique. Terry was bored already. It was four o’clock and they weren’t even half way through all the students yet. She noticed how so many people were disinterested and distracted while others were being critted. She hoped that people would respond with more interest to her work but somehow she thought that the case would remain the same for everyone.

By their Third and Fourth Year, students were no longer trying to participate in crits. This may be due to the political tensions and hierarchical nature of the crit environment, another major reason may be the lack of value demonstrated by lecturers. During my observations, only on two occasions did a lecturer try to elicit student participation. One student wrote that, “we aren’t even encouraged anymore to ~~add to the~~ contribute to the crit as students so I find myself getting very nervous, bored and distracted” (Selai’s journal).

Lecturers also communicated an undervaluing of student participation through their body language and other non-verbal factors. Most often lecturers’ bodies would form physical barriers between students and the individual speaker’s work, effectively cutting the two parties off from each other and often unwittingly preventing the student’s peers from being able to see the artwork being critted. Even though the readings of ‘multiple voices’ of artwork has been given much emphasis in contemporary postmodern artmaking, when it came to summative assessments, four out of five lecturers indicated that peer feedback was given little or no value, with the remaining perceiving such inclusion as negative. I would argue that students pick up on this, with assessment serving as an implicit guide as what to find important.

Feedback from lecturers

Whilst feedback is usually given by five studio-practice lecturers and the HoD, student participation in crits is minimal. Some of the staff involved in the research indicated it valuable that *lecturers* provide readings of their work, “I think it’s good, [hesitates] it’s good to get a variety of inputs from staff. I think the students need it” (Lecturer 1 interview), because of the diverse perspective they can present:

if they [students], from a first year level, they actually realise that, ‘Look, you are going to get a whole lot of different inputs and what you need to do is to take all of them seriously in terms of being lectures’ opinions of what could possibly work or be solutions or what have you, and try the ones that you think have potential or what have you, but at the end of the day you are the one who is going to have to decide what you are going to have to do. But it’s giving you possibilities, it’s

widening your scope of possibilities that your work could go' (Lecturer 1 interview).

Although viewpoints presented were perceived as helpful in some cases, a number of the lecturers recognize that for many students the diversity of feedback is difficult to negotiate:

as staff we disagree on viewpoints about artmaking and what is valued. That one has to 'find' one's way through the messages that are being communicated...[on the one hand] a myriad of possibilities are at their disposal for the artmaking process – they have to make crucial decisions on how these are going to influence and negotiate the reading of their works and the meaning thereof. On the other hand – a surface approach would be to execute what X has suggested – resulting in making art for X (as X is the dominant voice). Thus confusing and alienating signals are sent out to students (both those who are succeeding and those who are struggling) (Lecturer 3 questionnaire).

Data collected from students confirmed this experience:

When the lecturers started talking to me I started to feel so overwhelmed. They all had such different ideas and point of views, was getting so confused. X told me that it needed more, that it was missing something but that X is not sure what, this just made me so upset, how am I meant to know what X wants from me if X doesn't know what X wants from me! I know that's the point, that I'm meant to figure that out on my own, but how am I to do that! ... This made me so scared, our crit [mid-year summative assessment] is in a week and they expect me to now try and change so much of it! (Student's story).

During observations, I too found the feedback often contradictory and difficult to follow, even with my own knowledge as a teacher of FASP. An example was when a lecturer expressed, "I find those melodramatic" as if this were a negative comment, but after a bit of discussion by other lecturers made an about-turn for no apparent reason, stating that "I want it to be more demonstrative, more dramatic" (18 May observation). I found that to determine whether a comment was indicating a strength or weakness of a work, required triangulating verbal feedback with non-verbal cues such as tone, intonation, facial gestures and body language.

The importance of having an evaluative dialogue with students is stressed by many educators (Dineen et al, 2005:165). In their study, Taylor & McCormack (2005:3) found that "effective feedback assists design students to form accurate perceptions of their abilities and to establish internal standards against which they can evaluate their own design work". For internal standards to be developed, transparent discussions around the criteria for success are necessary (see Chapter Two II.5). Yet as discussed in I.2, studio-practice lecturers' criteria are not taken into consideration during assessments, nor other criteria explicitly discussed. Tacit criteria depend on that which is communicated in opaque ways, negotiated

between lecturers and communicated to students within the fluid and fraught arena of the crit. One student questioned the validity of feedback presented,

I sometimes feel that the group of lectures can contradict each other and during each crit not all the lecturers, who will become markers, give enough input. I think there should be a more of an equal contribution between lectures, otherwise its one person's opinion and how valid is that? (Student's story).

Such distrust of validity is concerning in a connoisseurship method (see Chapter Two IV.2).

Feedback is delivered in a manner that does not encourage students to self-assess their work or that of their peers. In I.3, I pointed out how students' abilities to evaluate the feedback are affected by factors such as the power dynamics between teachers themselves, between teachers and students, the manner in which feedback was delivered and the stress that students were experiencing. The selected extracts below attest to students not being able to evaluate feedback in a productive or meaningful way:

My actual crit went on forever! None of the lecturers agreed – X said not deep enough! Needs more – doesn't know what though... Felt like it went so badly – so upset... Cried for an hour when talking to my digs mate → just felt confused as to how it went – not sure what they want from me? What am I meant to do now? Should I change it? (Student's journal).

I started off enthusiastic and excited, but now all I see is grey! I'm hoping my mood will change dramatically very soon! Exams are just around the corner and I need to get my butt in gear NOW or else I'm screwed!... I'm all confused about my work. I don't know where to go from here. Too many suggestions were given, so now I've almost completely lost direction. I don't remember what exactly I wanted to do and why. I need to figure that out NOW! (Beatrice Blue's journal).

When lecturers seem unconcerned with student intentionality (see II.3.2) or uninformed about where the student is 'at' at the time of the crit, it may be inevitable that much of the feedback will be perceived as negative. According to Taylor & McCormack (2005:2),

When teacher feedback is vague, judgemental, ill-timed or person-focused, rather than task-focused, students receiving feedback on an assessment task can be embarrassed. They can feel diminished, discouraged and dejected by the feedback they receive. These feelings can be accentuated when students perceive the feedback they are receiving is *unrelated to their learning needs*.

The lecturer as uncritical of 'self'

One of the exit level outcomes is that on successful completion of the degree, students should be able to "co-operate with others to pursue the common good. In order to meet this outcome, learners will... be aware that judgements have moral and ethical implications and will act accordingly where appropriate" (CSI, 2000:3). By modelling critical and reflexive thinking; being explicit and reflexive of one's assumptions as an assessor; and truly attempting an ethical relation to 'the other', lecturers can help students achieve this outcome

(see Chapter Five I). In my analysis of the situation, data collected does not reflect the ethos of this outcome, most particularly in terms of judgments and their resultant implications in crits. The student as 'other' in the teacher-learning dynamic is not given a voice, nor are his/her peers, and even individual lecturer's voices are plagued by power dynamic.

A general lack of self-criticality by lecturers seemed to underpin the formative assessment process – not only in terms of how readings are constructed and therefore open to projection, influence and therefore question, but also how, as assessors, they might be *judging* rather than offering interpretations of the work. At issue is “whether the watcher’s interpretation can be valued above the intentions of the watched” (Freeman, in Smart & Dixon, 2002:188)? One lecturer reflected on the power of such ‘interpretations’:

X [dominant lecturer has the overriding say over the work (the students at least have this perception). I explain at length the issues of interpretation and intention in artworks, but if they perceive that X does not like their artwork, they internalize this as their work having no value, which is an educational disaster (Lecturer 3 tp).

In an opaque assessment system with a discourse of control (see III.1) that allows for power imbalance, what results are student ‘defences’ or explanations rather than honest discussion, met by instructions and judgements rather than interpretation and formative feedback. This approach neglects to recognise how artwork

exists in a context of both the viewer’s and the artist’s sensibilities, with all the conditioning and acculturation involved in them - it exists, in other words, not as an isolated absolute or an end in itself, but as a rounded cultural object which relates to philosophy, politics, psychology, religion, and so forth (McEvelley, 1996:43).

During formative assessments, each individual crit begins with the student’s explanation that is intended to place the assessors in context. This does not occur in summative assessments, but four out of five lecturers indicated that the wider context of the artwork (subject matter, discourse, genre etc) was important for summative crits. The perception is that such information is evident in the work itself (see II.1 & II.2) or can be accessed via the studio-practice lecturer’s recollections, which s/he may represent during summative assessment. One lecturer explained that “I think [clears throat] each of us does then represent the student because we are in the best position to articulate what they’re on about” (Lecturer 4 interview). Some of the lecturers are critical of the role they are playing in this politics of representation, as it “influences the way in which other staff would assess the work. This is a problem as I become the ‘public relations’ figure for each student, having to represent each of them fairly and equally” (Lecturer 3 tp). Power dynamics are exacerbated as

studio-practice lecturers ‘speak for’ their ‘apprentices’ and unwittingly silence them. Such representation then continues into external assessment (Lecturer 4 interview).

Four out of five lecturers perceived their personal interpretations important for formative or summative assessment. One lecturer added, “this should not be reduced to a personal matter. In other words, I would need to recognise that MY interpretation is one of many” (Lecturer 4 questionnaire). Despite this claim, data indicates that, not only do lecturers generally disregard student interpretations (see II. 3. 2), but two of lecturers ascribe little or no value to their colleagues’ opinions/ viewpoints. It could therefore be surmised that many rate their individual readings as more important than those of ‘others’. Three out of five indicated that ‘objective’ interpretations are of moderate importance. It is alarming that none questioned the implied assumption that ‘objectivity’ is even possible – especially in the absence of criteria. Moreover, such ‘objectivity’ is the perceived value of the external examiner who assesses the artefact without explicit criteria (Lecturer 4 interview).

Often what seemed to be suggested was that ‘successful’ art requires a fine, nuanced balance, as indicated by hyperbole when something was “too fashionable” or “too romantic” (18 May observation). Because the criteria for determining this are not explicitly discussed, the ability to evaluate such feedback is not developed in students but rather judgement rests with the dominant lecturer(s). Positive feedback is also mostly unqualified and unexplained, such as “some lovely stuff” (10 May observation), “I think it is absolutely perfect” (10 May observation), “I like those... very successful... hmmm” (18 May observation).

Political imbalance between lecturers, who are meant to act as assessors, creates scenarios where ‘tastes’, preferences and pressures exerted by individuals play a large role. One lecturer explained that “what one derives a sense of satisfaction from is often different from one lecturer to another” (Lecturer 4 interview). Student success sometimes depends on determining what ‘satisfies’ an individual assessor, rather than facilitating students to achieve their own aims. From my observations of crits, lecturers offered their likes/ dislikes as the only discernable reason or explanation for their feedback. This is often explicitly stated, such as “I don’t like it... I am not convinced” (18 May observation) or “[that’s] irritating me” (10 May observation).

In addition to individual assessors’ tastes not being interrogated, student learning is not measured against his/her own standards of meaning making nor that of his/her studio-lecturer’s criteria:

Sometimes someone will instinctively not like it from their own aesthetic viewpoint and say, 'I think it's terrible' and you think 'I'm not asking you to hang it in your lounge. But it was part of the project, and this was the parameter of the project, and this was the answer, and it's actually quite technically accomplished'. And that you actually accredit things that you considered important when setting the project (Lecturer 1 interview).

Just this last crit, the [summative] assessments, I had to get vocal with X in terms of defending a second year student's work that X hated and saying you know, it's not necessarily my cup of tea but it's actually very technically accomplished (Lecturer 1 interview).

Moreover the majority of lecturers responded that it is important that there be evidence in formative and summative assessments that the student applied their suggestions. A coercive manner of providing feedback is described, "the result is that suggestions are made in crits on the implicit basis of 'do it because I say so' or 'do it because I know better'" (Lecturer 4 feedback). Sensitivity to this issue is well articulated by Grundy (1987:69),

in a realm where interaction occurs between participants who have unequal capacities for the understanding or meaning-making, the right of the participants to be regarded as subjects, not objects in the interaction is acknowledged.

Feedback should act as proposals of possible readings, not "unqualified recommendations", but rather "provisional specifications" on how the student could improve (Grundy, 1987:71). Agency is thwarted when the student becomes the executor of the teacher's instructions, "in assessment situations, to mark somebody down, because they are following one person's *instructions*, hmm, is not fair, even though you disagree with those *instructions*" [emphasis mine] (Lecturer 4 interview).

When social status is used as an educational strategy, as seems to be the case in these crit practices, it threatens to become indoctrination. According to Mezirow (1981:20),

education becomes indoctrination only when the educator tries to influence a specific action as an extension of his will, or perhaps when he blindly helps a student blindly follow the dictates of an unexamined set of cultural assumptions about who he is and the nature of his relationships.

One lecturer at this School argued, "in assessments, in particular, I think it is crucial not to hold students accountable for the values imparted by their lecturers" (Lecturer 4 questionnaire). I would argue that it is the lecturers themselves who should be more cognisant of the values they impart (see Chapter Five I), and that they should be held accountable for them.

Such interaction between staff and students links to wider contextual concerns about diversity in South Africa. An imbalance of power, such as a 'master-apprentice' relationship, must be accepted as 'natural' for such a situation to go unquestioned. Twenty-five years ago the student group was considered a relatively homogenous group of young, white, middle to

upper class individuals, so that ‘the student’ was presumed to be similar to the lecturers. In fact, treatment of the student as ‘self’ has never been a true reflection of the power dynamics – the student as ‘apprentice’ is an ‘other’ who must perform certain tasks, learn certain skills and undergo rituals to be inducted as a ‘master’, of which only a few managed. In the current climate, where the student body is becoming increasingly more diverse (in terms of race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, et cetera) but where the staff remain predominantly white middle class, it suggests the dominance of one group over another, which either silences difference or encourages assimilation.

II. 3. 2 Student intentionality

I very much believe as an art lecturer you are a facilitator, you are helping to facilitate the young artist’s vision and creativity (Lecturer 1 interview).

The subject of authorship, intentionality and interpretation and the impact of this relationship on FASP education has not been explicitly discussed by the assessors in this School. Analysis of data collected indicates that no shared understanding of ‘intentionality’ exists, as many lecturers were not made to engage with this subject during their own FASP studies. The few familiar with the subject, were taught it from the perspective only of *reading* and not *making* art.

At times, formative feedback provided by lecturers at crits related to how the work was/ was not communicating the student’s intentions: “I am really struggling to see what I am meant to see” (10 May observation), “seems right for what you want [the] work to do” (10 May observation). In the few such occurrences, when exchanges reflected the lecturer was cognisant of what the student was hoping to achieve, the students were more responsive, indicating that such feedback was received as relevant and appreciated. Mostly student intentionality was broached in a crude, surface fashion, such as by asking “how conscious is that?” (10 May observation), or “is this your intention?” This usually resulted in a ‘yes’/ ‘no’ answer in response. ‘Intention’ here is meant as intentional or conscious decision making. In other instances it is conflated with a student’s impetus (Lecturer 4 interview), but in most instances it is separated from the meanings made (i.e. interpretations) of the work. In the crits I observed, students were rarely questioned on the level of meaning making.

Students are expected to “demonstrate an ability to verbally articulate their understanding of their individual creative aims and intentions” (CSI, 2000:2). One lecturer explained why in formative assessment such articulation is taken into consideration,

Simply because there is so little to look at, because we provide them feedback and that stuff, it is important at that stage to have a sense of whether the work fits with the students vision of the work [hesitant], I think there we do take that kinda thing into account (Lecturer 4 interview).

In my analysis, what this suggests is that the form of the product at summative assessments will suffice. The student's intentionality as artmaker, i.e. how s/he made critical choices and amendments to guide or trigger responses in terms of the readers' interpretations of levels of meaning in the work, is not included in any assessment criteria. Rather, lecturers indicated that, for formative and summative assessments, value is given to "how the work 'stands' despite/ regardless of the student's intentions". While three out of five indicated this aspect is of 'moderate importance' in formative crits, this shifted to 'essential' for summative assessments. Here the form of the work, the artwork as product, is rewarded regardless of whether this product is aligned with what the student was hoping to communicate to viewers. For example, if the form is perceived as "beautiful", or is read as critical to a dominant ideology in a way that the lecturers perceived as successful, even if the student has no clue what that reading is, it could get very good marks. In such instances, the student is left having to decide whether to abandon his/her own desire, to be rewarded by those in power.

As a way to explain this exclusion of student intentionality from assessment processes, one lecturer argued that "the student should be committed to creating scenarios that invite/inspire interpretation, but the meaning is not the student's responsibility" (Lecturer 4 questionnaire). While there is little doubt that artworks are open to interpretation, cultural theorists such as Adorno (see Chapter Two I.2 & III), would argue that there certainly is an ethical responsibility that sits squarely on the artist's lap, and that this should be instilled in artist-students. Relinquishing of responsibility to the reader seems modernist in ethos and may be detrimental to the learning process (see Chapter Two IV). Students should, as they progress through their degree, learn more and more about how they can guide and trigger certain readings, and this is often why feedback from 'multiple voices' is valuable to create distance from their own reading as a 'self', to be aware of readings of 'others'. It is questionable as to how the curriculum would empower students towards making art that is successful in communicating what they want it to communicate, albeit a life-long and impossible task, if intentionality is undervalued and assessment practices do not involve negotiated criteria. According to one lecturer, this is the crisis of this School's approach,

Why make art if it is not from within you? This is where the crisis of 'self-concept' comes in. We cannot expect to make students things that they aren't. They need to bring themselves forward – so they can be guided and aided (Lecturer 3 questionnaire).

“Isn’t the personal political??”

A ‘personalised’ discourse is found in both the espoused curriculum and in the theory-in-use. The School supposedly has “a supportive environment, which encourages creativity and personal development” (School website) and “develop[s] individual visual syntax and technique” (School website). Scaffolding of learning throughout the degree leads the student to this pinnacle: “in the third and final year of study, students’ journey toward formulating their own philosophy and approach to art making” (School website), so that Masters students will explore their “own personal approach to the discipline” (School website). A statement on the website suggests that,

BFA students, meanwhile, will find in the Art History & Visual Culture courses various concepts, themes, contentions, arguments, discourses and sites for intervention, which they might want to explore at a *personal level* in their practical work [emphasis mine] (School website).

Students are supposedly given the “freedom to pursue their personal visions” (School website) – a doubtful notion considering the type of authoritarian, coercive feedback given, but moreover problematic in terms of the impact of such responsibility-free education on questioning the ‘self’. But as mentioned in the previous section, in this curriculum the student is relinquished of responsibility and thereby denied agency for meaning making in the artwork.

This marriage of ‘the self’ to personal expression is evocative of “the humanist notion of an essential-self revealed through a series of expressive actions [which] is central to the way the artist has come to be understood and cherished in western modernism” (Addison, 2007:11). A statement made by one of the lecturers further clarifies this link between this ‘personal’ discourse and modernist notions of autonomy and creativity,

artists are in many ways selfish people. We make art for our selfish issues, [if] we’re doing it for other reasons then there’s already a question mark in my mind, ‘why you’re doing the work?’... your initial impulse is to make art for yourself and your own gratification and enjoyment, but there is an expectation, that one then shares it and goes public. That’s where you start exhibiting and you get other people (Lecturer 1 interview).

For a curriculum to be transformative each individual student should draw from his/her “own diagram of the interacting aspects of knowledge, ‘self’ and action. What kind of learner is s/he? What kind of engagement is s/he particularly energized by, particularly good at?... How do her or his intellectual concerns inform her/his ethical, political, religious and personal life?” (Parker 2003: 541-2). When asked to indicate whether subject matter students explore should have social/ political relevance, one lecturer marked this as of negative value for summative assessments, and added “isn’t the personal political??” That the psyche and the family are political agenda items is an important acknowledgment in both

left feminism and Western Marxism (Agger, 1992), and perhaps an assumption informing transformative learning. What I would argue is problematic within this case study was how ‘personalising’ a representation without self-critical examination by the student was considered acceptable by lecturers during crits.

One lecturer, when providing a student whose artwork was treading on politically incorrect ground with this easy option, instructed “personalise it, it is stereotypical otherwise” (18 May observation). In fact, in each of the cases where this was suggested, the *political* aspect of ‘personal’ was left unexplored, and an important opportunity for transformative learning lost. Such occurrences were prevalent, to the extent that it was noted as a dominant feature of the School’s graduates the previous year by the external examiner (Lecturer 3 discussion).

Instead, postmodern notions of the personal-political thematic, are fundamentally involved with criticality and a concern for ethical relations with ‘the other’. This critical postmodernism

refuses to dispense with a concept of the subject; instead, together, these theoretical currents suggest a notion of objective subjectivity, of historical subjectivity, and a notion of intersubjectivity (Piccone, 1971) that provide a semblance of radical energy in an overstructured, overdetermined world (Agger, 1992:298).

Approaching this subject from another angle, in the next section I consider the relevant discourses within the School and how they act to construct the artist-student.

II. 4 Dominant discourses

This section considers how discourses emerging from the espoused curriculum and theory-in-use conflict around notions of creativity and critical thinking, and how this conflict can be seen as a result of a wider context. Drawing from my analysis of the data, in II.4.1 a negative dialectic of the artist-student is exposed, which is very much opposed to postmodern notions of the ethically aware image-maker (see Chapter Two III.2). In II.4.2, I suggest that conflict between these espoused discourses and the School’s actual practices may be due to a strategic adoption of politically-expedient discourses prevalent within higher education in South Africa.

II. 4. 1 Constructing a negative dialectic of the artist-student

Creativity and criticality

Sloan & Nathan (2005:19) claim that “creativity or imagination is central to the arts, and fostering this capacity in students through the critique is at least as important as developing mastery of skill or technique” (see II.1).

Drawing from the myth of the artist as creative genius (see Chapter Two III.1), modernist FASP teacher, Ruskin, contended that artists are found and not made (Hardy, 2003:338). A similar modernist notion of creativity emerged during a crit when a studio-practice lecturer told a student that “we can only help you so far... You cannot teach creativity, you must come with creativity” (18 May observation). A part of this modernist myth is that the artist exists, and can make art, autonomous of his/her context (see Chapter Two III.1). Interpretation is left to the art critic or historian, the artist simply transmutes what inspires or wells up mystically from within. Works emerge from instinct or intuition without being questioned or interrogated for the assumptions or ideologies they may suggest.

All participating lecturers indicated it important that “the student acts on his/her instinctual ‘feel’ for the subject”, without problematising this further. Certainly, while non-rational processes are valid in postmodern artmaking, to suggest a student need not be aware of his/her subconscious processes or discourses s/he may be unwittingly appropriating, is in no way empowering them. Coupling this with the notion that students are not responsible for meaning in their artwork (see II.3.2), removes not only authorial responsibility but, to some extent, authorial agency.

The espoused curriculum appears to link criticality with ‘the self’ in specific outcomes, such as students should “demonstrate a capacity for independent thinking and learning” (CSI, 2000:2); “independent, critical thought” (CSI, 2000:5); and the statement that “along with this broadening personal dialogue, the development of important abilities of self-criticism are encouraged” (School website). But as is discussed in II.3.2, ‘personalizing’ was found to often be at the expense of self-criticality. As I discuss in III.2, student articulation at crits indicated surface or strategic approaches to learning. Similarly, lecturers most often made suggestions or offered options without explanation, reason or justification (see II.3.1). Such unself-critical feedback was often focused on the form than the content of students’ artworks (see II.1), possibly because the drive of crits are towards summative assessment and preparing the artwork-as-product for assessment by exhibition (see I.2). As found in II.1,

most of the questions and discussions, posed by lecturers to students not from their sections, were about technical concerns. These involved the 'how to' of students' plans for summative assessment, such as amount of output, sizes of works, display or framing, and time constraints. The majority of time spent was focused on these issues, with very little discussion or challenging of students' rationale in relation to these 'technical' aspects.

In the espoused curriculum, student independence and agency are considered important. Students are supposedly "encouraged to make decisions and are supported in their decision making" (Lecturer 4 questionnaire). But student authorship and intentionality was found in II.3 to be superseded by assessors' interpretations, suggestions and even instructions. According to Hardy (2003:340),

if we want students to gain some sort of personal insight, whether spiritual or temporal, through art making then we must teach in the truest sense rather than instruct. The mere regurgitation of our own prejudices and methodology can only act as a constraint to insightful learning.

This certainly would not encourage strong acts of creativity (see Chapter Two IV.1)

It should be noted that some lecturers did perceive it important that students

discover their own way and make up their own minds in terms of the decisions they have to make regarding their work. That there is no right answer or resolution to a problem. That a myriad of possibilities are at their disposal for the artmaking process – they have to make crucial decisions on how these are going to influence and negotiate the reading of their works and the meaning thereof (Lecturer 3 questionnaire).

For this to happen consistently, the curriculum should encourage deep approaches to learning, where risk and failure are conceived as part of learning processes (see Chapter Two IV.2). Individual lecturers, in their comments, seemed to understand that "students need to be responsible but they need to have agency in doing that" (Lecturer 4 interview). In addition, some recognised that independence is developed when students are given ownership of their own artmaking process. For one lecturer, the diversity of student work suggests ownership and that "a student has found their [*sic*] own voice, as corny as that sounds" (Lecturer 4 interview).

Reproduction

Instead of students 'constructing their own voice', a strong reproductive ethos emerged from my analysis of the data. Similar to the Victorian drawing school of old (see I.1), one medium-specialization is described as where

we train our eye to see... translate the appearance of things before us... The main focus of the X [specialisation] course is to develop primary skills like observation,

and technical facility, while at the same time demanding a continual critical appraisal of what one is doing, and how one can do something more precisely or interestingly (School website).

What is of interest here is how the word 'critical' is used so broadly that it can be linked to precision which would be a technical concern of reproduction, and being of interest to the viewer, but not challenging or questioning assumptions. In fact, two of lecturers indicated it important that "the student can reproduce a certain/ look/ style" (see II.2).

During my observation of crits, more value seemed to be given to styles of realism without critiquing their reproductive properties (see III.2). Goodman (in Navah, 2001: 77) discusses how Western realism's codes are easy for the viewer to decipher and retrieve information. The style seems 'real' or 'naturalistic' because the viewer is too familiar with (and therefore unaware of) this representational system. The uncritical adoption of this style by students is therefore problematic, as it in no way encourages the viewer to become an active reader. Instead, postmodern 'languages' involve eclectic selection, synthesis, appropriation of traditions, layering of texts and hybrid styles (see Chapter Two I.1). Artworks often have 'double-coding', which can be defined as "a strategy of communicating on various levels at once" (Jenks, in Bolton, 2006:64), often quoting and reappropriating discourses. This 'archeological art' exposes what lies beneath or determines the artistic appearance of a particular style, by utilizing the rules that establish art's discursiveness (Kuspit,1993:529). But as Sigmund Freud suggests with psychology, Walter Benjamin with history and Michel Foucault with knowledge, the pull or gravity of the repressed can only be uncovered by a kind of archaeological excavation (see Chapter One ft 2.). In this way, more active engagement is demanded from the 'reader', with the artist exposing the *brüche* of their making (see Chapter Two III.2).

In statements made by lecturers at crits, distinctive bias towards modernist notions of artmaking emerged. When critiquing a student's work, for instance, it was considered negative that it "looks like a constructed photo" (18 May observation). In another instance, a student was warned that his/her work was a "very loaded image" (18 May observation). In terms of the few positive comments that were made, when the word 'beautiful' was used (a strong signifier of successful aesthetic achievement) it was mainly in relation to technical aspects of the work, such as "lovely... beautiful shapes" (10 May observation), "drawing is beautiful" (10 May observation), "technically, [it is] between bottom shot. I like it. They both are quite beautiful, doesn't look like [intended subject matter]... I prefer that you cannot see it... just a matter of principle" (18 May observation). Such feedback suggests students should not create images to be 'read', but rather should aim to create an *experience* for the viewer,

and could be interpreted as modernist. This is perhaps a result of the medium-specific orientation of the curriculum, and a lack of student agency and responsibility.

In a number of observed exchanges, the student's agency was entirely denied and suggestions were given against his/her desires in a manner that was unexplained. This was perhaps because of the lack of value ascribed to student intentionality in summative assessments (see II.3). The backwash seemed to result in crits that were often insensitive to the relevance of feedback to the student's learning process and was experienced as ineffectual and confusing. One student felt that "the crit seems to have been a bit silly, like they completely missed the point of what he was doing and therefore couldn't give him any helpful advice" (Student's story). In Part III, I discuss how other students experienced feedback as alienating, and so adopted surface or strategic approaches to learning by taking the lecturers' suggestions. In the next section, I briefly consider how the adoption of a critical discourse in the espoused curriculum may have been strategic.

II.4.2 The School's strategic adoption of a critical discourse

Foster (1996:xvi) claims that "there is this fundamental stake in art and academy: the preservation, in an administered, affirmative culture, of spaces for critical debate and alternative vision". In relation to critical distance and the university, Derrida (in Peters, 2004:42) contends that the university should be 'unconditional', meaning "it should have the 'freedom' to assert, to question, to profess, and to 'say everything' in the manner of a literary fiction". This notion contrasts with pressures from global market capitalism and existing socio-political power structures "for an education system which is controlling, and reproductive and where knowledge is a commodity" (Martin, 2002:100). In this section, I argue that the School's espoused curriculum indicates strategic and perhaps uncritical adoption of certain politically expedient discourses.

As discussed in II.4.1, the aim to develop both creative and thinking skills is often articulated in official documentation, where "courses promote creativity and innovative thinking" (School website); providing students "scope to develop their creative and intellectual abilities" (School website). An exit level outcome is that students should "have gained experience in a variety of generic and transferable skills, particularly creative thinking" (CSI, 2000:2) and "familiarity with lateral thinking and innovative problem solving" (CSI, 2000:1). Such consistent links, made between creativity and thinking in the School's documentation, may have been adopted from the academic discourse of 'the reflective practitioner'. According to Smart & Dixon (2002:191), this concept associates

processes of learning with the development of a capacity to be objective about our creative activities. Indeed, without reflection, the whole notion of assessment-as-learning-tool becomes nonsensical.

Whilst all participating lecturers indicated they consider it 'essential' that "the student thinks critically and self-reflexively", it would seem that most often such terms are bandied about, without much interrogation or implementation of TLA strategies that would facilitate this.

In this School, critical thinking is seemingly important for art criticism (AHVC) but not integrated with conceptions of creativity for art making (FASP). In AHVC, postmodern notions of critical thinking are developed when students engage with "the multiform ways in which art, among other media and visual practices, represents, constitutes and also critiques dominant social ideas and values" (School website). However in FASP, a discourse of reproduction, responsiveness and tolerance to context rather than criticality is suggested in the statements below, where students should

produce art works which embody and reflect the culture and context of their production (CSI, 2000:2)

[be] aware of the complex nature of Southern African society and able to incorporate this appreciation into their analysis and solving of visual problems (CSI, 2000:2).

These statements should be seen in the broader context of the need for higher education to be seen as 'embracing' the national political dispensation in South African post-1994, and so are presenting a discourse responsive to diversity (see Chapter Two II.3). 'Transformation discourse' is noticeably absent in these documents. Singh (2001:8) argues that

transformation has been used as much to denote the repositioning of higher education to serve more effectively as the 'handmaiden' of the economy as to signify the drive to align higher education with the democracy and social justice agenda of a new polity as in South Africa.

The absence of any references to social transformation within the School's documentation is indicative of either an 'ivory tower' understanding of its role in society, or buy-in to corporate styles of 'discourse of excellence' (Readings, 1996, in Light & Cox, 2001:3). In terms of the latter, the institution is described as being "a top-rate university" (School brochure) that "emphasises quality education" (CSI, 2000:5), and the School has an "enviable reputation" and "a history of success" (School brochure). According to Light & Cox (2001:3), as "excellence is not so much concerned with 'what' but rather 'how', it brings a whole new way of conceiving higher education. It is a way less encumbered by issues of cultural significance or educational value, as by issues of social and economic effectiveness and efficiency". Such an instrumentalist focus matches other modernist discourses operating with this School (see Chapter Two I.1; II.4; III.1).

I believe that the absence of a critical social discourse may be indicative of the School's approach to diversity or responsiveness to 'the other'. As evidenced in approaches to interpretation during assessments practices (see II.3), this involves an opaque top-down relationship amongst lecturers themselves that is often insensitive to the maker's intentionality and exclusionary of his/her peers' feedback and participation. Considering the nature of assessment practices in this School, it is questionable whether "moral and ethical implications" of judgments will be acted on by students. The disregard for peer assessment and 'multiple voices' will do little more than have students "recognise and acknowledge different perspectives and values" (CSI, 2000:3), and encourage them to adapt strategically to survive (see III.2). In practice, it emerged that 'professional finish' as a label for a certain aesthetic is rewarded by some assessors (Chapter II.2). Perception of what is currently aesthetically prevalent or sought-after in galleries seeps into assessment criteria, "I think that the department aims to produce students that could exhibit successfully at contemporary galleries" (Lecturer 0 questionnaire). Again, this would reflect a non-critical approach to the Culture Industry (see Chapter Two II.4). A lecturer argued that s/he is

not convinced that the art students are making now has necessarily got such a critical image. I think sometimes it masquerades as having such, but that they are either ignorant to it, or have been given sometimes the solutions that make it look or masquerade as if its doing that (Lecturer 1 interview).

As found in II.4.1, instead of a socially critical curriculum, one of reproduction emerges. Such uncritical approaches to creativity and criticality deny student agency in constructing his/her 'voice' in an informed and ethically aware manner. Whether such strategic adoptions of discourses by the School resulted from a sense of alienation (see Chapter Three I.5.4) is an area for future research. Harding & Taylor (2001: 78) warning that higher education institutions, to transform and comply with national quality assurance requirements, may adapt principles for self-regulation of the Foucault's panopticon. How students have responded to their experiences of such conflicting discourses is explored in the next section.

Part III. Student experiences and resultant approaches

Prospective students are told that "studying Fine Art at X [CSI] is a wonderful and enriching experience" (School brochure), with a curriculum that "aims to empower students" (School website) and "to maintain the highest degree of learning" (School website). Ideally, formative assessment should increase students' confidence and "intrinsic motivation, leading to increased creativity" (Dinen et al, 2005:165). This would necessitate the lecturers having an understanding of what students want to do – because intentionality is linked to personal meaning making. One studio-practice lecturer acknowledges that the crit may have adverse

effects on student learning, “the exercise is not only tiring for all but the environments themselves can promote or hinder the actual type or nature of assessment that is taking place” (Lecturer 3 tp). However, stories students told suggest that they experienced varying levels of alienation, perhaps because of disjunctions between the espoused curriculum and theory-in-use.

III. 1. Student experiences of the learning process

Already in third and fourth years of study, data reflected that some students had learnt the *modus operandi* of the School as they progressed through the years, and no longer felt outsiders to it (see Chapter Three I.5.4). For most students, though, the repression of their personally valued aims and qualities could be seen to still cause frustration (Gibbs, in Smart & Dixon, 2002:193) and feelings of alienation (Mann 2001).

Bereft of the capacity for creativity

A sense of loss, agency or desire results from power dynamics where the student’s sense of ‘self’ is not validated through the crit event or by the lecturers as assessors, on which it is dependant. This creates a schism from the student’s creative, agentic ‘self’.

Data collected reflected the sense of turmoil that the event created,

Its 2:15 pm and I need to get going because I want to have something to show the lecturer’s tomorrow! Damn, I hate crits!! Make me very very very very very nervous. I don’t like the pressure that’s put on me, AND they ain’t very ‘fond’ of me, so, I hate crits! Would rather pretend I was sick so that I didn’t have to go through with it!... DAMN CRITS! (Sam’s journal).

I woke up in the morning feeling petrified, you know that feeling when you get up in the morning and suddenly it hits you that you have something on that day that you don’t want to deal with... By the time we reached the X studio I felt sick to the stomach (Student’s story).

A number of student stories indicated how dependant and anxious students were to get the approval of the lecturers, such as this one:

The problem was not so much finding something that would get the approval of a lecturer that was of secondary importance. Rather he was struggling to find something that he really believed in and thought could work, and now that something has finally been found the fear of it being rejected is all the greater, since he has grown quite close to his idea through reading, and thinking about it all the time... he is quite happy with it, however if this gets rejected he feels like he has good reason to freak out! He goes up to see X [studio-practice lecturer], but X is busy. The waiting is always terrible; anxiety seems threefold when you standing around like this... A kind of sadness fills him, he isn’t sure about exactly

what he is doing anymore and where exactly this idea is going or if it is even any good (Student's story).

For many, their sense of 'self' was indeed dependant on the validation by the lecturers, most notably the studio-practice lecturer:

The next day excited with her idea, after sitting outside the studio for half an hour, she plucked up the courage to walk in... As she had suspected, all X [studio-practice lecturer] said was that it didn't comment on anything. 'It comments on me DAMMIT!' thought Chloe (Chloe's story).

Such stories indicated that students were often put in positions where their selves were not validated. Often students felt that lecturers were not responding to their individual needs, even though some lecturers acknowledge that "trust is the basis for any kind of honest and sensitive interaction between student and lecturer. Students absolutely have to believe that I have their best interests at heart" (Lecturer 4 email). One student psychoanalyzed a dominant lecturer, perhaps to distance herself from 'taking him personally':

I hate the ways the lecturers' own issues and insecurities have to influence us. X is obviously an insecure X [wo/man] but X's expressions and comments still cut deep even though I can rationalise where they come from. X makes X strong in making others weak (Selai's journal).

For many students a lack of validation creates an experience of alienation,

The criticism ends up confusing him and leaving him feel demoralised, like nothing he has done has been worthy of time. 'Why am I making art?' he wonders. He goes back home feeling desolate, not knowing why he ever decided to [make] art. He feels completely unmotivated to create at all (Student's story).

To cope with such a sense of estrangement, students often become compliant, "he has a problem with this kind of procedures but it has to be done" (Student's story). This leads to the next discussion on the student's loss of ownership in the learning process.

Exile from 'self'/ loss of ownership of learning process

Perhaps because of the School's strong value of the artwork as 'product' (see II.2), most students indicated that at some point in the build up and aftermath of the crit event, they experienced alienation from their artworks, from their artmaking, from their 'selves' or from other people. In terms of feeling subordinated to the product of his/her labour, a student explained that, "the whole process of trying to find an idea that was suitable to the original project briefing started to seem more and more daunting to Penny and she almost wanted to give up on the work entirely" (Penny's story). The following two extracts express alienation from the process of artmaking,

I am so worried that it will not be done in time, and the even more frustrating thing is that there is nothing that I can do about it. Feel like I'm just waiting for a lost cause. I am so worried (Student's story).

Sir Edward Knight is not feeling too good about the crit because the drawing he has to do is intimidating. He has a short time to complete it and it has to look great to get the lectures on his side (Sir Knight's story).

This perspective of alienation is also characterised by a separation between work done for assessments in the studio and leisure time elsewhere:

In the afternoon, again a bit of work gets done. However come late afternoon and Leonardo is throwing his toys out the cot; he is not loving life and X [medium] at the moment and is frustrated with his work. He realises things are not going to get better so decides to leave and go and blow off some steam (Leonardo's story).

The student may feel alienated because relationships are not between individuals but roles or positions within social systems. Two students' reflections below indicate how some experience their own positioning compared to their peers in the social hierarchy of the crit:

MY CRIT: don't think it's fair that I'm expected to have a minimum of 10 X [artworks], when 'other' people in my class only have to do 3 4 or 6! That's rubbish and VERY unfair! (Sam's journal).

In her art department, there are a selected few that are seen as art Gods, Sam was definitely not one of them. This didn't upset Sam in the sense that they didn't like her because she didn't care about that, what upset Sam was the fact that she could X [produce] as much as she liked, but no matter what, the lecturers had their favourites and no matter what Sam did or how well she did it, just because she was Sam, the lecturers didn't give her much attention or take her seriously. Sam wishes she could prove herself to them, but knows she can't (Sam's story).

It feels as though because I was previously a fuck-up, I have to keep proving myself even though it's pretty clear that I've worked my arse off. They didn't even acknowledge that! When we moved on to other classmates who hadn't been doing any work all year and did last minute works (what gave me fuck-up status last year) people smiled and joked with them. Their works were praised and they weren't told to do massive body of works as 3 or 4 were sufficient! I realise that art is totally subjective (or crits rather) it's all about how much they like you (Beatrice Blue's journal).

After they pick at her and her work, Beatrice's new-found confidence plummets and she is left feeling small and exactly what she was glad she hadn't felt for a while? Beatrice Blue was screwed. The F.F praise and applaud her peers and it almost seems like a cruel joke from the heavens for being too cocky. Beatrice feels as though she has to keep trying to prove herself over and over to her lecturers and that no matter how much she puts her ass on the line, they don't acknowledge it. Once you are a 'C' student it is hard for them to see you in any other light. So Beatrice concludes that it is as much about how good your work is, as it is about how much the F.F likes you (Beatrice Blue's story).

The nature of TLA interaction is complex, particularly the role of the studio-practice lecturer. When observing the crits, I noticed that if 'on the spot', most students looked to lecturers

they perceived as sympathetic, but that various strategies were adopted by studio-practice lecturers during crits, in terms of whether to provide or withdraw support. I observed many a staff member standing away physically from particular students, whose works were being received negatively (10 May observation). A lecturer relayed a similar observation,

my heart broke because this student was standing there and then it was just this confrontation in a sense, where this person [the studio-practice lecturer] seemed to be backing away more and more, and this sense of an opposition of this person [the student] all on their own and all of the lecturers, was quite evident to me at that stage (Lecturer 4 interview).

During my observations, students whose works were perceived as progressing successfully would get some form of support from studio-practice lecturers, such as by referring to their studio discussions (see Chapter Two IV. 2). In some cases, support was expressed subtly, through body language and discourse studio-practice lecturers adopted. Other support was more overt, such as one studio-practice lecturer's interruptions of feedback of other staff, or those who literally speak for the student, explaining his/her rationale, time constraints et cetera.

A number of students noted how differently studio-practice lecturers behaved within the crit environment. Many lecturers were aware of such perceptions. One told me that students often imply "why didn't you defend me in the crit, you know what I've been doing?" (Lecturer 1 interview). Another studio-practice lecturer explained:

I think the power dynamics are out of kilter. I mean I try to buffer, and I know I do, I am first to admit that I am quite protective over my own students. I don't like to see them being dismissed or laughed at or ridiculed or put under duress... So I do stake my claim next to the student. Obviously I have had conflicts of interest where I've wanted to be the authoritarian one saying 'but you haven't been in the studio'. So it is much easier to do with students one feels very supportive of, [which is] not always the case, there are students who let you down (Lecturer 4 interview).

In most cases, lecturers addressed those present with the student referred to in the third person rather than directly. Here the performance aspect of the crit became clear, where it was questionable whether the process was about facilitating student learning. The public nature of the crit was used by some as an opportunity to exert pressure on the students, "I think you should do more. You have a lot to catch up" (10 May observation); "it must happen within a week" (18 May observation). Some of the studio-practice lecturers used language that suggested the student was at fault or hiding something, using the crit as an opportunity to publicly shame them. 'Debriefings' are used by some to mend these relationships (see 1.3 & 1.4).

Assessment practices 'disciplining into docility'

Instead of a developmental emphasis at crits, a discourse of 'assessment as control' emerged from the data. One lecturer spoke of "the doctor's rounds" as a way of describing the teacher focus of crit sessions (Lecturer 3 discussion). Another argued that: "my own sense of crits - for what it is worth - is that they are the least of all teaching tools. Instead, formal crits are part of a control or check system. They are not where the teaching takes place" (Lecturer 2 email). Parker's (2003:530) warning that the "desire for control... is not and never should be part of any sort of and any level of education" is apt in crit contexts where having more knowledge as the 'expert' or connoisseur can lead to an abuse of power and control.

Processes of examination makes the individual visible by objectifying and individualising him/her. In his study, Davies (1997, url) notes the humiliation many students felt because of the public scrutiny of their artworks. 'Sam' describes that this was why she "hates crits, not only do crits make her nervous but they also tend to make her grumpy. She doesn't want to stand in front of every one and try to explain her work to people that already think that they have an idea of who she is and where she's coming from" (Sam's story).

Assessment creates conversations between the student as speaker and the assessor as an 'other' who listens and judges. Many students indicated how this power dynamic was unsettling and affected their abilities to articulate themselves, "I usually end by saying the most ridiculous and pathetic things. I always feel inferior and nervous" (Selai's journal). Because of implicit power dynamics, students often felt unconfident to speak or afraid they may be perceived as challenging judgements of the 'masters' (Davies, 1997, url). One lecturer noted how s/he had similar experiences "as a student at X [another institution], put more than two lectures in front of me and I was traumatised just by virtue of the accumulative nature of these authoritarian figures" (Lecturer 4 interview). Moments in students' stories reflect a sense of being at the mercy of the assessors:

Leonardo explains his work, and then the fire from the lecturers proceeds (Leonardo's story).

The day of the art school crit...scary. Yes, it is nerve racking to show work that you have spent so much time and thought on to a group of lectures who judge it in under a minute. One can't help getting nervous about this whole process (Student's story).

Penny started to stress severely because there was a school crit in less than a week. She had virtually nothing to show the large council of lecturers whom she feared would have nothing good to say about her work at all (Penny's story).

That the emphasis is on product or form, instead of process (see II), can be seen to exacerbate student anxiety.

In this dynamic, lecturers acting as assessors have power to ‘forgive’ but require ‘confession’ in the first place. In FASP, this is where assessors need to be careful and sensitive because students often explore subjects that are not typically communicated in public spaces, as discussed in I.3. For example in the crits I observed, one student was exploring her own ‘body dismorphic disorder’, another the recent death of a close family member. In the case of the latter, the dominant lecturer insisted on disclosure even though the student asked, “is it totally necessary?” ‘Chloe’ described her anticipation of the confessional nature of the crit, “to the best of her ability she tried to describe the frustration of the previous... waiting with baited breath to be torn to shreds by the lecturers” (Chloe’s story). This interaction created great anxiety,

He keeps thinking over and over about how he is going to justify himself to the other lecturers and fears the black stares he might receive in return. He gets a bit of insomnia from the worry. Half the time the idea seems really good to him and then the rest of the time it seems like it really isn’t working. Like a swinging pendulum with infinite energy to keep going his mind oscillates between these two positions every five minutes as he wonders how he is going to convince the lecturers that what he is doing is good. He really just wants affirmation that this is working (Student’s story).

One of the lecturers reflected that “the process of the ‘art school crit’ can be a very trying and traumatizing event for both the assessors or judges and the assessed or the judged” (Lecturer 3 tp). These assessment practices can be seen to position the student in a particular hierarchy of success and expertise (see I.2), which when linked to failure can contribute to alienation.

The stress of a crit is not very conducive to idea thinking and ‘creative problem solving’. Nevertheless she worked and did something, anything that she could present to the lecturers... She tried everything she possibly could...She failed and this made her miserable. She honestly did not know what she was going to do (Penny’s story).

Self-preservation

Strategies adopted for self-preservation may result from repeated experiences of alienation. To preserve his/her sense of ‘self’ it is safer for a student to disengage by repressing his/her desire, and approaching learning from a superficial perspective (Mann, 2001:15). I found that the crit method as utilised in this School did not encourage commitment or engagement with the student’s desire or meaning making. In section III.2, I discuss how the majority of students adopted surface or strategic approaches to learning, while a few manage to continue with deep approaches to learning, despite the crit event. Students generally adapted how they articulated themselves at crits, picking up the skills necessary to perform or protect

themselves within this social structure. One student's story indicated that this is perceived as positive:

Sir Edward Knight work changed during third year when he started to understand the concept of 'art' better and had a good understanding of what the lectures expected from him. At this point his rapport with the lectures had grown and these crit sections became less and less intimidating... Sir Edward Knight is a bit of a joker and likes to have a bit of a laugh with all the lectures and students during his crit, A bit of an ice breaker. Sir Edward Knight got some really useful ideas thrown at him and everything went really well. His crit went really well besides the fact that he had little work done... Sir Edward Knight is really really happy with the way the crit went and his confidence had grown even more. Sir Edward Knight just needs to pull his finger out and get some work done before assessment. This was the only thing the lectures were worried about (Sir Knight's story).

Most students that recognised they have strategically adapted themselves are embittered by what they perceived as the hollowness of the crit ritual, as these students described:

Personally, I'm learning the fine art (pun intended) of crits. I treat it like a performance, or a presentation, even a lecture. I spend a lot of time scripting what I am going to say, which is great because I can just read the script in the crit and not look at anyone's face (X normally has a very foul expression on his face, I hate looking at X when X is looking sour and unhappy) (Student's email).

It is Wednesday, the day before Beatrice's long-dreaded crit... Is she to invent a whole new string of fiction that justifies her work or is she to re-tell her previous concoction (Beatrice's story).

All three of these students were top-achievers that had learnt not to treat the crit as a place of honest disclosure but rather to approach it strategically. They can be seen to have developed a 'false self' to survive the assessment practices (Winnicot, in Mann, 2001:13).

III. 2 Approaches to learning

According to Corner (2005:340), "fine art learning experiences... need to be set in a cognitive framework that allows the student to reference, explain, interpret, evaluate, experiment and assess their creations and artistic development". In this School, evaluative processes are most often left to the student to engage in a way that is not explicit but norm-referenced,

even if they [students] don't do it consciously, I think on some level they test themselves against their peers. By looking at the amount of work someone had done and the amount of work they have done, and the kinds of levels of engagement, conceptual things that have gone into some work and not others (Lecturer 4 interview).

Initially I intended to draw on student articulation at crits to determine their approaches to learning. I was informed by notions that descriptive articulation is linked to less beneficial educational gains and a more positivistic stance than interpretative discussion, which is

generated by analysis and explanation, and at the level of meaning-making can result in knowledge-production (Palincsar, 1998). But I realised that student articulation at crits should be seen in the context of how their experiences (see Chapter Four III.1) may have influenced their approaches to disclosure and adoptions of discourses at crits.

Surface approaches to learning

Indications of surface approaches to learning can be characterised by descriptive discussions, memorization or reproduction with an absence of reflection, and a focus on completing the task at hand. Importantly, a surface approach to learning can be evidence of a student's experience of alienation, where s/he is distanced from his/her being and desires (Mann, 2001).

Most students provided basic descriptions of their artworks, such as “these are portraits of my extended family.... I want to paint all of them..... and that's that” (10 May observation). One student simply held up his/her work without speaking, while most students' discussions involved what it would look like at the end. Many focussed on how they would complete their artworks for assessment, rather than reflecting on the process of learning. The bulk of such descriptions included explanations of how the work would be made, without discussion of why it was being made, the subject the student was exploring or what meaning the student was trying to convey. When explanations were given, students would keep these on the surface, with such comments as “I like the way...” or “that will look nice” (18 May observation). But as noted in II.2, this focus on the end product and surface interpretation was found in lecturers' feedback too.

There was much evidence of reproduction (see II.4.1) without thought or reflection by the students, and often without being challenged by the lecturers either, such as when a student stated “I aim to make them as photo-real as possible” (10 May observation), without discussing why this style was chosen. The prevalent adoptions of Western realism were not problematized either (see II.4.1). It is possible that students noticed that mastering certain styles is rewarded more than experimenting or trying to determine which style is most appropriate to the subject. One lecturer stated that his/her colleagues' feedback in crits often encouraged such an approach:

when they [lecturers] realise that maybe the student has not pulled this off, that they struggle to be experimental or to work in some other way, is then ‘well then rather work like this, like traditional, or make prints like this... because you can do it’. It's almost like giving the student then the solution you know. ‘If you want to get your degree, then just now do it like this, it's a safe kind of route to go’ (Lecturer 1 interview).

One lecturer expressed frustration that students seek such clear guidelines from lecturers: “students actually want to know, what must I do to fix it, they want a pat on the back or they only want to hear good things about their work” (Lecturer 1 interview).

Strategic approaches to learning

Students can choose strategically to produce that which is rewarded by assessors. This approach is characterised by a focus on assessment requirements and expectation, often at the cost of the student’s own desire. The School’s emphasis on product at the expense of the learning process (see II.2), in addition to the positioning of assessors’ interpretations as more important than the student’s intention (see II.3.2), encourages this approach.

As found in Part III.1, data indicated that students looked to lecturers as ‘others’ to approve, validate and guide their work. This was evident at crits in the questions students asked, most often to the dominant lecturer, such as “that better? If I pushed that?” (10 May observation), or “should I not carry on?” (10 May observation). A central characteristic of the strategic approach is evidence of knowing assessment requirements. The lecturers’ rewarding of production is reflected in this student’s journal entry, “for once I’m not nervous about the pending crit, because I feel that I’ve done *a lot more* than anyone else is expecting of me and also a lot more than most of my other classmates” [emphasis mine] (Beatrice Blue’s journal). Students’ adoption of strategic approaches were often at the cost of their own commitment and intentions (see II.3.2). In one exchange, the student seems to have expected this to occur,

Student: I was thinking of doing it in a theatre?
Lecturers: hmmm
Student: Ok, that’s a no (10 May observation).

From interactions at crits, students learn what pleases the assessors. According to Davies (1997), this is the danger of strategic approaches to learning, “planning work to please the teacher rather than trying to make sense of a complex world” (url). Such compliance would most probably result in ‘weak’ acts of creativity (see Chapter Two IV.1).

Deep approaches to learning

Deep approaches to learning are characterised by curiosity and desire, where learning is related to personal experience. Because a search for personal meaning might be a simulated strategy in this FASP curriculum (see II.3.2), I interrogated such approaches for evidence of

risk, experimentation, desire or commitment. Deep approaches were not clear from students' articulation at crits, possibly avoiding disclosure for self-preservation (see III.1), however it emerged in some students' journals and stories.

A search for meaning and authorship is recognised as important in this 'Penny's' reflections, "this is where the first problems appeared – at the very beginning. Penny should have... asked herself the most crucial question any artist could have asked: 'what do I want from this work?'" (Penny's story). A sense of curiosity and desire was reflected as balanced with strategic thinking in this story, "I kinda promised to have a certain artwork ready by midyear assessments. It's a very tough goal to attain. I know I can and how I'm feeling today (so flipping excited about creating) I think it is attainable" (Selai's journal). In one student's story commitment is evident, even at the expense of achieving high marks,

she later decided that it was better to use her original idea and know that her mid year assessment wasn't going to go well. Rather use that idea, the one that means something to her. And do it properly in the second half of the year. The other ideas were just forced. This helped her to relax a bit... Walking into the art department at night she always had the urge to run... Once inside the fear disappeared (Chloe's story).

One lecturer discussed how s/he separates mark allocation from an indication of value of the students' accomplishments, "the student should complete his/her BFA or MFA with a keen sense of accomplishment and ownership of his/her work – regardless of the mark awarded" (Lecturer 4 questionnaire). This may derive from the noble notion that students should not aim strategically for good marks but what they can learn. It indicates, unwittingly or not, a lack of value in implicit criteria. It also encourages students to disregard that which is valued by the School itself as they attempt to explore their own meaning making. 'Selai' notes how difficult it is to separate feedback from the crit from his/her own sense of accomplishment,

I would like to pretend that I don't care about the crit, but I do. I care because I want to be an artist, a practicing artist (and that's all) for the rest of my life. – so obviously take advice and criticism to heart. I'm not just getting a fine art degree to then carry on after varsity in a completely different field. This is my life (Selai's journal).

This extract provides a glimpse of how strongly a student's self-concept can be intertwined with their studies in FASP. Disciplines and discourses form boundaries that include or exclude, support or position identities (Becher, in Mann, 2001:11). It is for this reason that it is important to consider, as in III.4, how dominant discourses within this School may operate to construct certain types of students, and in turn, certain types of artists.

Conclusion

This chapter considered data gathered from various participants in an attempt to gain an holistic understanding of the espoused and practiced curriculum of one case study.

In this School, I found that form dominated and was often interpreted as the content of students' artworks. In addition, the art product was found to be privileged over processes of learning. Underpinning assessment approaches, an instrumental rationality was found to be more concerned with the 'what' of lecturers' interpretations of the products' form than the 'why' of students' intentionality, meaning making and learning processes. I attempted to place the School's practices within the wider context of power dynamics, which were shown to disallow fruitful discussion between staff themselves, and between staff and students at crits.

In II.4 I exposed what I believe is the negative dialectic at play in assessments, a modernist conception of the artist-student which is contrary to the espoused curriculum's conception, where creativity and criticality are at play. I have tentatively suggested that the espoused curriculum is indicative of this School's strategic adoption of certain discourses within the wider South African higher education context, which perhaps betrays an unethical stance to socio-political relationships between 'self' and 'other'.

The chapter ended with a focus on students' experiences of alienation and their resultant approaches to learning. It was found that most students experienced some degree of alienation, with the effect that many students adopted surface or strategic approaches to learning. Not only is this often detrimental to the student's self-concept, but it is certainly contrary to the espoused aims of this FASP curriculum.

The crit method, "so cherished by many teachers as being a good example of open and explicit sharing of success" (Davies, 1997, url), would have to be reconsidered if such disparities between what is intended and what is experienced are to be addressed. According to Horkheimer (in Wodak, 2001:1), to "draw consequences for political action from critical theory is the aspiration of those who have serious intentions, and yet there is no general prescription unless it is the necessity for insight into one's own responsibility". For this reason, I do not claim to be sure of ways to resolve such dilemmas, but rather hope to illuminate some constructive possibilities in the next chapter.

Chapter Five

Envisioning change

My analysis in Chapter Four leads me to conclude with suggestions on how learning experiences of FASP students can be improved, highlighting the importance of reflexive practice and TLA interactions that align conceptual and actual criteria.

I begin with an encouragement that we should ‘practice what we preach’, by being critical about and aware of the politics of our practice, methods and most importantly our assessments. How we model this aspect, such as how we articulate ourselves at crits, could demonstrate how to relate ethically to ‘the other’. More attention should be given to how we support student learning through constructive feedback at crits. I end with a plea in II, that assessment processes should recognise relationships between form and content, process & product, intentionality & interpretation in ways that are aligned with the espoused curriculum. There should also be consideration of how the conceptual outcomes of FASP education, articulated in Chapter Two IV.1, can best be achieved (Sullivan, 1993:11).

Part I. Reflexivity of FASP teachers

In Chapter Four II.4, I highlighted how dominant discourses can operate to construct a negative dialectic of the artist-student which is contrary to the espoused curriculum, in this case in the tradition of the creative Romantic genius. From his study of crit interactions, Elkins (2001:176) found that

excavating the assumptions are often real surprises. An artist who thinks of herself [*sic*]as postmodern might also make judgments that depend on some very old-fashioned assumptions... It is the nature of axioms and assumptions to catch us unaware (they are, after all, ‘unexamined’), and it stands to reason that the general operative principles of our intellectual lives should be older, more dated, than the neologisms we have picked up from the latest art magazine.

In current educational theory, reflective practice is considered a fundamental skill for lifelong learning that is essential for teachers who hope to be effective in fostering student learning. The argument, informed by critical theory, is that teachers should examine and make explicit their own beliefs, values and ideologies because

people do not passively receive information from their senses; rather they actively construct ideas and generate meaning from sensory input by interpreting the input on the basis of existing ideas and previous experience (Posner, in Toohey, 1999:55).

Research into our teaching practice and those of fellow teachers can be helpful. One of the ways to go about reflective practice is to engage in critical conversations with fellow FASP teachers. Instead of working in an isolated manner, colleagues could define learning outcomes together, in relation to subject areas and TLA settings (Hussey & Smith, 2003:358). One participating lecturer expressed a desire for such collegiality,

I think it is really a crying shame that as a School, as a staff, we don't have discourse and discussions amongst ourselves, in terms of 'what are our unique selling points? What could or should make our art school different?' Not that there will always be consensus about it, at least you talk about it. Where do we aim to go, in five years or ten years, where we might be... let's share some commonalities in terms of vision (Lecturer 1 interview).

Fullan (in Carlson et al, 2000:114) argues that "without collaborative skills and relationships it is not possible to learn and to continue to learn as much as you need in order to be an agent for societal improvement". This could be a fluid process, dependant on research, action and reflection, which would require staff & student support. It would hopefully go some way towards developing shared understandings of outcomes, criteria, and approaches to encourage meaning making within student learning and artmaking

Facilitating learning

In constructivist conceptions, the lecturer is no longer an expert in authority but a developer or facilitator of the process of growth (Dewey, in Brockback & McGill, 1999:24). Careful consideration of this role is necessary if FASP teachers claim to be facilitating deep approaches to learning rather than encouraging reproduction or indoctrination. As shown in Chapter Four III, lecturers' feedback and behaviour at crits and summative assessments created a negative backwash on the teaching-learning relationship. As Mann (2001:17) argues, "we need to be alert to our own positional power, and the complex relations of power that exist within teaching/learning processes".

Instead of lecturers as 'experts' within strong hierarchical social dynamics, a 'socially critical approach' to curriculum positions the teacher's role as aiding students to a deeper understanding of where their views originate; challenging their preconceptions and stereotypes; guiding consideration of other possibilities (Toohey, 1999:65). As fellow FASP educator Hardy (2003:340) argues,

If we want students to gain some sort of personal insight, whether spiritual or temporal, through art making then we must teach in the truest sense rather than instruct. The mere regurgitation of our own prejudices and methodology can only act as a constraint to insightful learning.

Going a step further, Lambeir (2005:355) argues that being an educator

means to be a live example... Taking this kind of risk transforms the relationship into a personal encounter and engagement, which is an opportunity to free education partly from its mechanistic, cognitivistic and dull character. One way to practice such teaching, would be by modelling criticality and ethical relations with ‘the other’, as I discuss in the next section.

Modelling behaviour at crits

If we expect our students to be self-critical, then as teachers “we should practice what we preach” by being self-reflexive about the roles we play in potentially engaging or alienating students’ from their processes of learning. Such criticality would involve

development of the capacity to become aware of the conditions in which we work, and of the responses we make to them. Such awareness, and the capacity to act on that awareness, must arise out of criticality – the capacity and opportunity to question, examine, uncover, reframe, make visible and interpret (Mann, 2001:17).

As assessors, we should attempt to engage in ‘strong evaluation’ (Taylor, in Alexander, 2005:355), not dissimilar to ‘strong’ acts of creativity (see Chapter Two IV.1). In this conception, connoisseurs do not just express their own personal or collective tastes or desires, but assess the quality of those judgments. To do this, they need to go beyond the narrow confines of ‘self’ or community or expression. Whilst the notion of connoisseurship can include the critic (see Chapter Two IV.2), I would argue that there should be a balance between assessment as judgment and as *facilitation*. For this to happen, assessment tasks have to balance lecturers’ interpretations with student intentionality, as I discuss later in this chapter. This is so that the structure of the course more appropriately reflects its aims.

I believe that crit scenarios provide fertile ground for teachers to model and encourage the use and understanding of ‘academic discourse’ to students by posing ‘higher level questions’. This would indicate to students that “they cannot simply ‘dip in’ to debates, they must learn to use the discourse to make meaning of their own” (Northedge, 2003:179). It would push students not to adopt surface/ strategic approaches in their articulation at crits. The skills of articulating an interpretation and stance in terms of arguing its validity, is central to the role of the professional artist (Percy, 2003:148). In fact, one of the exit level outcomes for the BFA degree is that students should be able to “communicate effectively. In order to meet this outcome, learners will... present material/ construct arguments in an organised and articulate manner” (CSI, 2000:3). Students who do not learn this skill may be hampered in their abilities to communicate with their community of practice – gallerists, other artists, collectors, art critics and historians etc. Facilitating students’ articulation and preparation for crits, makes the assessments more authentic.

When students have to authentically demonstrate their mastery of an idea, concept or skill in a manner that is both rigorous and worthy of professional critique, schoolwork becomes real work. It matters (Sloan & Nathan, 2005:20).

As discussed in Chapter Four I, students' abilities to evaluate feedback depend in part on how they understand this information as relevant to their goals. One of the lecturers described how valid suggestions can enable the student to make their own decisions rather than replicate a lecturer's suggestion,

For my part, I try always to articulate the reasons for my suggestions. In other words, I try to explain as clearly as possible: 'If you do this, it would shift your work in these ways, and that would be potentially interesting because...' etc. I have found that this generally leaves a student more empowered to move forward: even if he/she does not take up my suggestion, he/she may take up the reasoning behind my suggestion, and apply it in finding his/her own solution. Ultimately this seems a far better outcome than if a student simply sees him/herself as a conduit for my ideas (Lecturer 4 email).

The importance of open discussion is not only about transparency or disclosure, but providing students access to how to interpret feedback. Not only do prescriptions create experiences of alienation (see Chapter Four III) but they also reduce judgment, thereby removing much educational benefit of crits. For this reason, feedback should be designed to act as proposals of possible readings and not instructions. As Knight (2001a:20) points out, "in formative assessment ambiguity can be more useful than certainty – ambiguity invites thought and discussion whereas clear-cut judgments by those in authority tend to discourage discussion and encourage outward compliance". For this to happen though, students would have to feel that their opinions are valued and valuable to the learning process, as indeed their interpretations can provide multiple perspectives (see Chapter Two IV.1). Moreover, to actively evaluate feedback, requires students to participate more fully in their own crits and those of their peers, because "the way to make criteria and standards visible to students is to immerse students in activities where they have to use them, ask them to create feedback statements and asking them to make judgments" (Sadler, in Carlson et al, 2000:111).

Ethical relations between 'self' and 'other'

Not only would student participation in crits develop their own evaluation skills, it would also demonstrate a more ethical approach to the teaching-learning relationship than the current practice at this School. Instead of assessments being 'done to' students (Carlson et al, 2000:105), crits should provide students with the opportunity to share their processes and concerns with 'others'. With this comes the inevitable tension between duty to 'others' and duty to 'self' (Cole, in Sumison, 2000:171). One way to demonstrate the benefits of taking some responsibility for the learning of their peers would be for the lecturer to model a

supportive approach as is claimed (Chapter Four I.1 & II.3). Noddings (in in Sumison, 2000:171) suggests a conception of ‘professional practice grounded in caring’, which

entails being receptive and responsive to others’ needs and desires and requires a ‘commitment of self’ to others... [It] implies a willingness and ability to be available to others, to give generously of oneself to others, and to distance oneself from one’s own needs and desires. It necessitates: stepping outside one’s own personal frame of reference into the other’s.

Recent feminist psychology conceptualizes caring relationships as those that are “*mutually* engaging and rewarding” (Bateson, in Sumison, 2000:174), rather than one-way exercises. Here lecturers would have to forego their own desire imposed on students for willingness to facilitate students’ achievement of their intentions. This relationship would involve just enough support (neither excessive nor lacking) for the student to feel safe enough to play (Mann, 2001:13). For such relations to occur, a safe space would need to be established for crits and a supportive ethos created through valid constructive feedback,

If students are learning in a supportive and what they perceive as a non-threatening environment, then motivation is likely to be higher and they are more likely to ‘make sense of the tasks in hand’ (Marton & Saljo, 1976) and learning is more likely to take place (Blair, 2006a, n.p.).

Part II. Assessment practices which recognise reflexive relationships between form & content, process & product, intentionality & interpretation

Whilst the agentic aspects discussed above are very important, they may remain largely ineffectual without ‘structural’ support via realignment of TLA interactions with the conceptual criteria of the curriculum. Assessment practices create backwash on students’ approaches to learning, as evident in the negative effects to student engagement of this School’s application of the crit method (see Chapter Four III). That such experiences of alienation are not isolated occurrences is reflected in many studies. Informed by students’ stories (see Chapter Four III), I would agree with Mann (2001:17) that we should rethink “the potential[ly] heavy hand of our assessment practices in the delicate world of the student’s self; and... the complexity, uncertainty and threat of the learning process itself”.

Knight (2001a:8) asserts that “there is a good case for seeing formative assessment as an extremely powerful contributor to student learning. You could almost say that that makes it more important than summative assessment”. The explicit integration of assessments within the curriculum should be recognized as integral to learning processes, rather than extraneous methods for control (see Chapter Four III. 1). But any such changes should not be taken lightly, for as Gibbs (1999:52) notes

students are tuned in to an extraordinary extent to the demands of the assessment system and even subtle changes to methods and tasks can produce changes in the quantity and nature of student effort and in the nature or learning outcomes out of all proportion to the scale of change in assessment.

For this reason, consideration should also be given to the timing and placement of the crit method within the wider processes of students' reflective learning.

Such reconsideration would necessitate critical engagement with curricula development through evaluation processes, involving realignment of the espoused and practice curriculum. A crucial concern is TLA interactions could better practise the postmodern awareness of the nuances involved in meaning making, both in processes of learning and artmaking. Education literature suggests that creativity in students is promoted by supportive, student-centered environments that value divergence and diversity (see Chapter Four II.3); encourage playfulness, risk-taking and experimentation (see Chapter Four II.2); and important for this study, assessment practices that focus on positive feedback and diagnostic evaluation (see Chapter Four 1.3) (Dineen et al, 2005:159). If misalignment continues, between the espoused and practiced curriculum on issues such as form and content, process and product, intentionality and interpretation, students may "lose their capacity to connect with their own desire, voice and language" (Mann, 2001:12). Rather experimentation and play can be seen to draw on the student's whole personality, as processes through which they gain a sense of 'self' (Mann, 2001:13). Barnett (in Mann, 2007:18) describes students' desire to invest their thinking, 'self' and action in their studies as 'critical energy'.

Lecturer as 'critical friend' in formative assessments

Hussey and Smith (2003:358) encourage a loosening of control by the lecturer because "in order to engage students deeply and significantly with the material and to create the conditions in which they can construct their own understandings s/he must relinquish some degree of control over the focus and direction of classroom interactions and activities". What this implies is that teachers shift their roles from 'masters' of modernist ilk to a more balanced power relationship, with the teacher as guide, mentor and critical friend (see Chapter Two IV.2).

For this to happen, transparent discussions around criteria or indicators for assessment should involve both staff and students. One of the effects of the communication of assessment criteria is that students comprehend "the extent that a particular sector of their

world has changed and is now coming under their control” (Biggs, 1999:66). This shifts power dynamics, as students have criteria against which to make arguments about how they may have achieved outcomes, instead of having to accept feedback based on some vague imposed individual or collective preference or unconscious negative dialectics. Such discussions could actively include discussions about socio-cultural influences of interpretations. This would acknowledge the political nature of “a process of meaning-making which recognizes meaning as a social construction” but where students and teachers are “claiming the right to determine meaning themselves” (Grundy, 1987:116).

Negotiating criteria

I would argue that a highly beneficial manner of approaching criterion-referenced assessment, within the connoisseurship of FASP, is to negotiate them with students. In the process, students would be able to identify areas of importance in their own learning which would benefit from development or improvement. This would not only reward what students see as important learning achievements but also highlight these areas as foci to teachers, who can help problematize and be more supportive of students’ learning processes. Such an approach

acknowledges that the student may be interpreting the assignment in an unforeseen, but perfectly legitimate way. The assignment becomes less limited to a prescribed format. This method has been found particularly successful with third-year final project students, who are producing personal and detailed pieces of work (Gordon, 2004:68-69).

Moreover, negotiated criteria can acknowledge student intentionality. This would require rethinking the nature of artistic learning and the role of teachers in a manner which is more congruent with the espoused curriculum. For this to occur,

curriculum thought must assume that teachers and students possess agency, that they are capable of self-determination, self-expression and strong evaluation... The point rather is that human agents have the capacity to subject their beliefs, desires and actions to particular sorts of evaluative judgment, and to choose whether or not to believe, desire, or enact them based on those judgments (Alexander, 2005:364).

Here “an emancipatory interest... engages the student not simply as an active rather than passive ‘receiver’ of knowledge, but rather as an active creator of knowledge with the teacher” (Grundy, 1987:101). The potential educational benefits of valuing student intentionality and agency are many (Hughes, 1999:132): (i) reduced dependency on teachers to produce the problem, dictate methods, materials and mode of execution, and assess work; (ii) responsibility placed on students to take charge of their own work and establish their own criteria: (iii) increased motivation and a more engaged experience; (iv) allowance for a

diversity in the range of discourses, materials, et cetera which should result in a greater variety of artwork. This would allow for alignment with the postmodern, critical theory orientation of the espoused curriculum, and for

a wider, more inclusive, view of what constitutes art making and a form of assessment which will allow for ‘the little narrative’. If students are to be allowed to work on personal paths of research under a system which genuinely values any approach if ‘appropriate to intentions’, all these objectives will follow naturally in the wake of the student’s enthusiasm and self-esteem – if they have experienced a full grounding and safe experimental haven in the art room (Hardy, 2006:273).

Such inclusion of student’s intentionality, if underpinned by ethical relationships between colleagues, the studio-practice lecturer and his/her student, and the student and his/her peers, might allow for shifts in the teaching-learning relationship “towards the criterion of justice as a value in education, rather than the criteria of either truth or performativity” (Mann, 2001:18).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have suggested that one way out of such ethical dilemmas would be to become more reflexive in our practice as teachers of FASP. This would necessitate attempting to be more explicit about our assumptions as individuals, which models or traditions of TLA interactions we adopt, and the negative dialectics we carry or have inherited as assessors. I suggest that we should communicate to and encourage such reflexivity in our students, by modelling self-critical behaviour. The crit event is a prime opportunity to do this, through feedback, student participation and interpretation, in ways that attempt ethical relationship between ‘self’ and ‘other’.

Tensions in this School, between the espoused postmodern curriculum, which supposedly blurs distinctions between dichotomies of form/ content, process/ product, intentionality/ interpretation, ‘self/ ‘other’ and creativity/ criticality, and the practiced modernist curriculum, which posits each aspect as distinct and polarized, were shown to have negative effects on student learning (Chapter Four III). In the second part of this chapter, I suggest more consideration is given to developing the curriculum in a more reflexive manner. In addition, an argument for the studio-practice lecturer to take a more dominant role, as the student’s ‘critical friend’ within crits and in the processes of negotiating assessment criteria, is made. I also propose that student intentionality should be balanced in a more ethical and constructive manner with interpretations of assessors. In this way, discourses in TLA interactions will themselves be more intentional (see Chapter Two II.4).

Although I do not claim that the particularities of this case can be generalised (see Chapter Three II.3), there is much anecdotal evidence and research which suggests that students' experiences of alienation in FASP and with the crit method, certainly in 'Western' art schools, are far too often the norm. The analysis of data from this case study confirmed my own suspicions (Chapter One). These research findings point towards the need for what is espoused to be practiced in FASP, and in this process for the artist-student to be more enabled within and empowered by the curriculum.

**Addendum A – Questionnaire administered to participating lecturers
Teaching Fine Art Studio Practice**

1. Describe how you see your *own* role in teaching fine art studio practice

(such as your philosophies and opinions about art/ teaching etc, or your day-to-day practice, art movements/ aesthetics that influence you etc).

Attach additional info / images if necessary – or just type over this and it will ‘stretch’

2. In terms of your art students, indicate the extent you think it important that:	STRONGLY OPPOSE	NEGATIVE	LITTLE/ NO VALUE	MODERATE IMPORTANT	ESSENTIAL
The student feels free to make artwork without social constraints or concerns					
The student feels confident to ‘play’					
The student considers others’ viewpoints					
The student researches the chosen subject matter in-depth					
The student works to meet your or other lecturer(s) expectations					
The student can honestly disclose any artmaking problems					
The student thinks critically and self-reflexively					
The student can reproduce a certain/ look/ style					
The student draws from various sources to get feedback (lecturers, laypeople, peers etc)					
The student sees your relationship as master and apprentice					
The student adheres to your/ other lecture(s) suggestions					
The student is committed to making meaning from artmaking					
The student has enough ability across mediums to vary according to subject matter					
The subject matter the student explores has social/ political relevance					
The student perceives your role as an art critic					
The student produces art that is visually impressive					
The student has a sense of ethical responsibility in his/her artmaking					
The student problematizes themes/ genres/ mediums/ subject matter/ discourse					
The student develops and masters a consistent style					
The student sets his/her own goals/ aims for each artwork					
The student takes risks and pushes his/her own boundaries					
The student acts on his/her instinctual ‘feel’ for the subject					
The student creates a relationship between medium/ technique and content					
The student sees you as a critical fellow artist					
The student is highly competent in a specific medium (& its related skills)					
The student has a relationship of trust between you and/ other lecturer(s)					

Additional comments:

3. Please indicate the <i>value</i> of the following, i.e. what you reward more in terms of the feedback/ marks you give: For 'Art School Crits'	STRONGLY OPPOSE	NEGATIVE	LITTLE/ NO VALUE	MODERATE IMPORTANT	ESSENTIAL
Artwork that challenges dominant assumptions					
The artwork's context (subject matter, discourse, genre etc)					
The opinions of the students' peers					
The learning process of the student					
The aims/ criteria that the studio-practice lecturer communicated to the student(s)					
An aesthetic you find compelling					
Evidence of experimentation					
Your interpretation of the work					
Artwork that makes the viewer think/ empathise with 'the other'					
The actual artwork/ object as it looks					
Objective interpretations in terms of art criticism					
Workbooks/ Portfolios that provide evidence of artmaking process					
Evidence that the student applied your suggestions					
The impact of the visual surface of the work (whether it moves/ evokes feelings in the viewer)					
The opinions/ viewpoints of your colleagues					
The conceptual import of the work					
Artworks that look as if they could be exhibited in contemporary galleries					
The students own criteria/ aims/ intentions (why they made the work)					
How the artwork was made					
Artworks you have to 'read'					
The quality of the visual form of the work					
Evidence of the student's critical reflection					
The student's independent learning					
The relationship of techniques/ medium to subject matter					
The change/ growth the student underwent (whether in one work or over a period of time)					
How the work 'stands' despite/ regardless of the student's intentions					

3. Please indicate the <i>value</i> of the following, i.e. what you reward more in terms of the feedback/ marks you give: For Assessments	STRONGLY OPPOSE	NEGATIVE	LITTLE/ NO VALUE	MODERATE IMPORTANT	ESSENTIAL
Artwork that challenges dominant assumptions					
The artwork's context (subject matter, discourse, genre etc)					
The opinions of the students' peers					
The learning process of the student					
The aims/ criteria that the studio-practice lecturer communicated to the student(s)					
An aesthetic you find compelling					
Evidence of experimentation					
Your interpretation of the work					
Artwork that makes the viewer think/ empathise with 'the other'					
The actual artwork/ object as it looks					
Objective interpretations in terms of art criticism					
Workbooks/ Portfolios that provide evidence of artmaking process					
Evidence that the student applied your suggestions					
The impact of the visual surface of the work (whether it moves/ evokes feelings in the viewer)					
The opinions/ viewpoints of your colleagues					
The conceptual import of the work					
Artworks that look as if they could be exhibited in contemporary galleries					
The students own criteria/ aims/ intentions (why they made the work)					
How the artwork was made					
Artworks you have to 'read'					
The quality of the visual form of the work					
Evidence of the student's critical reflection					
The student's independent learning					
The relationship of techniques/ medium to subject matter					
The change/ growth the student underwent (whether in one work or over a period of time)					
How the work 'stands' despite/ regardless of the student's intentions					



4. What broad *messages* or *values* do you think are communicated through the teaching and general atmosphere of the department?

Thank you for your input. Please email this to Dina @ D.Belluigi@ru.ac.za


Addendum A




Addendum B

Below is a replica of the 'journal' booklet I designed for collecting data from students.

<div style="text-align: center;"> <h2 style="margin: 0;">Journal of an Artist-Student</h2>  <p style="margin: 0;">Portrait of _____</p> </div>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div style="width: 48%;"> <p style="font-size: small; margin: 0;">The Purpose of this Journal</p> <p style="font-size: x-small; margin: 0;">This is a journal for you to sketch your experiences over the period of one week. In these pages, record the daily details and events of your artmaking and learning process. The purpose of gathering information in this booklet is for you to draw from and remember, when you reconstruct your week into a story that will be written once the week has passed. So don't only write, but 'collect' fragments of your thoughts, emotions and associations during the day as it progresses so that there will be detailed richness and complexity to the story you tell.</p> </div> <div style="width: 48%;"> <p style="font-size: small; margin: 0;">The background</p> <p style="font-size: x-small; margin: 0;">This page is for you to write what you think is important to understanding your current artwork, and why you are making it (such as your aims/ intentions).</p> </div> </div> <div style="margin-top: 10px;"> <p style="font-size: x-small; margin: 0;"><i>Express what ever you think will reflect the artmaking day that you have had.</i></p> <p style="font-size: x-small; margin: 0;"><i>This is about your journey.</i></p> </div> 
<p style="text-align: center; margin: 0; font-size: small;">7 May</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p style="text-align: center; margin: 0; font-size: small;">8 May</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p style="text-align: center; margin: 0; font-size: small;">9 May</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p style="text-align: center; margin: 0; font-size: small;">10 May The Day of the Crit</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p style="text-align: center; margin: 0; font-size: small;">11 May</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p style="text-align: center; margin: 0; font-size: small;">12 & 13 May</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

The above examples are to indicate how the journals were customised visually according to the discipline-specialisation of each student. From left to right are pages from the sculpture, printmaking and photography journals. The booklet shown in its entirety (previous page and above) was for painting students.

<p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p>	<p style="text-align: center; margin: 0;">Reflections on the past week</p> <p style="font-size: 8px; margin: 0;">You can use metaphors, image associations, whatever you like, to describe your learning journey over the past week. You started off feeling... and now feel...</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p>
<p style="font-size: 10px; margin: 5px 0;">Please meet at the Computer Lab to write the 'rich story' of a week in the life your character, an artist-student.</p> <p style="margin: 5px 0;">Date: _____</p> <p style="margin: 5px 0;">Time: _____</p> <p style="font-size: 8px; margin: 5px 0;"><i>Bring this journal for your recollections. Scans will be made of the journals, which will then be returned.</i></p> <div style="text-align: center; margin: 20px 0;">  </div>	

<h1 style="margin: 0;">Journal of an Artist-Student</h1>  <p style="margin-top: 10px;">Portrait of _____</p>	<p style="text-align: center; margin: 0;">The background</p> <p style="font-size: 10px; margin: 5px 0;">This page is for you to write what you think is important to understanding your current artwork, and why you are making it (such as your aims/ intentions).</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">_____</p> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;">  </div>	<p style="font-size: 10px; margin: 5px 0;">Please meet at the Computer Lab to write the 'rich story' of a week in the life your character, an artist-student.</p> <p style="margin: 5px 0;">Date: _____</p> <p style="margin: 5px 0;">Time: _____</p> <p style="font-size: 8px; margin: 5px 0;"><i>Bring this journal for your recollections. Scans will be made of the journals, which will then be returned.</i></p> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 20px;">  </div>
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