



**“I don’t need them to like it, I’m gonna do it anyway.” A Lacanian
Discourse Analysis of Agency in Art Education.**

Nina Zeldin-Steinmann

Supervised by: Dr. Geoff Bunn

April 2018

“I don’t need them to like it, I’m gonna do it anyway.” A Lacanian Discourse
Analysis of Agency in Art Education.

ABSTRACT

Higher education institutions have been forced to implement highly structured neo-liberal pedagogies that oppress agency, and result in impoverished learning (Friere, 2000; Mann, 2001). However, art schools may still promote agency and critique (Adams, 2013). Lacan’s four discourses have previously been applied to education (Johnson et al., 2014; Langer et al., 2018), but never to art education specifically. Lacanian discourse analysis was applied to understand five students’ experiences of art school. The research aimed to answer the following; Have the art students successfully progressed through Lacan’s four discourses (1959, 2007); Were the students able to express the optimal forms of agency (Subversive and Sublime) as discussed by Langer et al. (2018)? Did their education allow them to nourish their *objet a* (Johnson, 2014)? Individual analysis of the transcripts provided narrative descriptions. Implications of this research are outlined, including a recommendation to all education to look to the methods of art schools. A reflexive analysis was also carried out.

KEY WORDS:	ART EDUCATION	AGENCY	LACAN	ARTISTS	HIGHER EDUCATION
------------	---------------	--------	-------	---------	------------------

***“The great value of art practice is its force to challenge thought to think, to be disobedient, to disturb vision to see, to destroy practice in order to make”
(Atkinson, 2018:7)***

Introduction

Since the 1970s, many UK art schools have closed down or been absorbed into general higher education institutions (Banks and Oakley, 2016). Nevertheless, the number of students graduating with art and design degrees continues to rise, up 10.5% since 2007 (UniversitiesUK, 2018). The Young British Artists (YBAs) famously rose to fame in the 1980s, after forming friendships in the art schools they studied in across London (Tate, 2019). Their schools rejected traditional mediums such as drawing, painting and sculpture, encouraging them to embrace postmodern practices (Tate, 2019). The YBAs subsequently utilized shocking and unusual imagery to subvert the experience of the viewer, and have continued to contribute to the art world (Tate, 2019). This illustrates the power of art education; the nourishment of students who go on to create new ways of seeing (Eisner, 2004). Researchers have argued that instead of the common dismissal of art education, its techniques should be embodied in other forms of education (Read, 1944; Eisner, 2004; Atkinson, 2018).

Many idealised skills are nurtured by art education. For example, artistic creation requires the ability to make critical judgments about work, to understand consequences of artistic choices, and to attend to the way something ‘feels’ (Eisner, 2004). Artists are expected to argue for the validity of their work without succumbing to expectations (Eisner, 2004), strengthening their ability to express agency. Furthermore, evolving art movements require disobedience; artists need to break the rules of the masters before them (Atkinson, 2018). Arguably, agency and room for disobedience should be embraced by all education so knowledge can continue to evolve (Friere, 2000; Johnson, 2014; Atkinson, 2018).

Agency and Creativity

The concept of agency can be overly individualistic, lacking any critical perspective of the influence of others and the environment around us (Frosh, 2016). Alternatively, Langer et al. (2018) recommended use of a Psychosocial definition of agency when studying students. Agency in this case is not seen as valued individualism, but as students developing the ability to go above and beyond their education in the form of critique, and following their own desires (Langer et al., 2018). Ideally higher education produces students that can express agency, and this is seen as necessary for success and employment (Langer et al., 2018). However, agency is often suppressed in higher education by over-prescribed pedagogies (Friere, 2000; Mann, 2001; Vassallo, 2012; Langer et al., 2018).

The development of creativity is understood to be situated in cultural and social experiences (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). Accordingly, creative development has been fundamentally linked with the expression of agency (Mann, 2001). For example, the capacity to be creative is linked to learning environments (Mann, 2001).

Play enables creativity, and needs to be underpinned by a context of acceptance, trust, and safety; integral aspects of the learning environment (Winnicott, 1971; cited in Mann, 2001). Play is only possible in an environment where support is not too much, or too little (Winnicott 1971). Mann (2001) pointed out that higher education is often dominated by teachers, preventing play and creativity. In university settings, learning involves transmission of 'correct' knowledge and concluding with the 'correct answer', removing space for creativity (Mann, 2001). The lecturer who knows too much is providing too much support, stealing any opportunity to be creative (Mann, 2001). The power dynamic that exists between tutors/ lecturers and their students can create pressure and remove the possibility for an educational experience that isn't pre-determined, also stifling creativity and agency (Mann, 2001).

Unfortunately, neo-liberal changes in government policy concerning education are increasingly relying on economic rationales (Friere, 2000; Mann, 2001; Vassallo, 2012; Pring, 2015; Atkinson, 2018; Langer et al., 2018). Science, economics, technology and maths (STEM) subjects are favoured for their employment prospects more than art and humanities, subjects that often critically examine society. Consequently, art education is forced to adopt highly governed pedagogies (Atkinson, 2018). Friere (2000) criticised this style of education as perpetuating oppression. For example, over-prescribed pedagogies do not provide opportunities for agency, instead viewing students as "'empty vessel'" to fill up with knowledge (Friere, 2000:79). This results in dependence on educators and those in power, and the inability of students to think differently to society's accepted norms (Friere, 2000).

Rather than developing agency, students have had to rely on impoverished learning techniques (Mann, 2001; Langer et al., 2018). For example, attempting to guess and fulfil what tutors want (Mann, 2001). However, if agency is so important to creativity, art education should provide the right balance of power and opportunities for agency. Research has continued to illuminate art education's understanding of what is needed for the development of creativity. Recent reviews have exemplified the positioning of tutors and students (Fortnym and Pybus, 2014). Art teachers in Europe applied their own creativity to their pedagogies, adopting words like "facilitating" and "guiding" and abandoning the self-image of expert (Fortnym and Pybus, 2014:4). Curriculums were made flexible, studios were promoted as collaborative environments, and attention paid to student's diversity (Fortnym and Pybus, 2014). Furthermore, art students are encouraged to work *with* their tutors rather than positioned as empty vessels to fill up (Friere, 2000). Time allowed for tutor-student interaction demonstrates the importance given; one-on-one interaction is frequent, often for substantial periods of time (Fortnym and Pybus, 2014).

Hopefully art schools are continuing to reject neo-liberal styles of education. Glaveanu and Tanggaard (2014) described why creativity and neo-liberalism are juxtaposed. The co-construction of a creative identity is based on interactions with peers, educators and society (Glaveanu and Tanggaard, 2014). This identity relies on opportunities for "struggles and acts of resistance" i.e. the ability to express agency (Glaveanu and Tanggaard, 2014:13). Neo-liberal pedagogies that transmit knowledge and foster dependence do not allow disobedience, so would suffocate creative development (Friere, 2000; Atkinson, 2018).

Nevertheless, art education has not completely avoided the effects of neo-liberal policy. Reduced funding has forced institutions to widen access to their

courses, resulting in fewer staff, reduced contact hours, and less general resources (Dineen and Collins, 2005). Additionally, increased monitoring has proliferated amongst staff, as accountability is favoured over trust (Dineen and Collins, 2005). Furthermore, Adams (2013) discussed the neo-liberalization of creativity that has already overtaken art education in secondary schools. Although the arts are not driven out of the curriculum completely, the removal of social critique and lack of examination of subjectivity and interrelations does not allow actual creativity (Adams, 2013). Instead, the arts in lower education have become immersed in neo-liberal values such as competition and entrepreneurship (Adams, 2013). Critical analysis and discussion of social issues is a focal point of so many important artworks. Removing this opportunity, even in lower education, demonstrates exactly the suppression of new thought and societal change highlighted by Friere (2000). The development of agency is vital to creativity, and both should be embraced by all education.

Lacan's Four Discourses in Education (Lacan, 1953, 2007; Johnson, 2014)

The development of agency can be examined through a focus on social structures and power (Frosh, 2016). Lacan's four discourses are a helpful Psychosocial tool to examine the space allowed for agency in education (Johnson, 2014). Studies of creativity in the West mainly implement experimental and psychometric techniques, fixating on cognitive processes, and viewing creativity as an individual experience (Policastro and Gardner, 1999). Furthermore, the research cited above mainly used the perspective of teachers. Alternatively, Psychosocial research into the experience of art students could provide information about how creative skills are nurtured by university education, and have implications for the development of creativity outside art schools (Frosh, 2016; Salazar, 2015).

This paper applies Lacanian discourse analysis to students of art school, an approach not previously undertaken according to the authors knowledge. Rooted in Lacan's psychoanalytic practice, Lacanian discourse analysis incorporates a critical study of how the psychological and social are related (Frosh, 2016). Lacan understood discourse as formed socially through language and the meaningful organisation of space (Neill, 2013). Lacan's theory described how social relationships create particular social orders (Bracher, 1994).¹

The Four Discourses²

The Master's discourse (Appendix 3) is exemplified in higher education when the lecturer positions them self as the source of all possible knowledge (Johnson, 2014). The student is solely seen as a being to 'fill up' (Friere, 2000). Anything that the student produces, (e.g. *the objet a*, see Appendix 1) can only be enjoyed by the master. Vassallo's (2012) critique of self-regulated learning identifies the inherent contradiction in attempting to produce agency whilst participating in a Master's discourse. Despite the association in pedagogic literature between self-

¹ See description of the signifiers and social orders in Appendix 2-6.

² See Appendix 7 for Langer et al. (2018) four-factor model of agency.

regulated learning and empowerment, the act of *teaching* self-regulation actually suppresses agency (Vassallo, 2012). Following pre-determined instructions, whether for 'self'-regulated learning or not, produces individuals who are defined by their master's discourse, only seeking to adapt to it, resulting in dependence (Freire, 2000).

There are examples in art education of tutors in the position of the master, and the consequent negative effects. McCartney and Lake (2018) discussed a 'crit facilitator' who positioned them self as expert. The 'crit' is supposed to be a workshop for students to discuss their work collaboratively, however, the 'facilitator' often shut down the students. Subsequently, many were less confident to speak. As such, art education is susceptible to the master's discourse (Swann, 1986; Flynn, 2005).

The University discourse (Appendix 4) is present when there is no opportunity for the student to challenge what they are taught (Johnson, 2014). Langer et al. (2018) interviewed psychology students, and discussed how engagement with the students' own desires was suppressed in the University discourse. The student is only allowed agency within the boundaries of bureaucracy, with the university defining their *objet a* for them (Langer et al., 2018). A student is often hystericized by the bureaucratic demands of the University discourse, for example, word counts and deadlines (Langer et al., 2018). Hystericized students may avoid challenging work, fail to engage with feedback, or carry out other deliberate self-sabotage (Langer et al., 2018; Zepke, 2017).

Art schools at least claim to work on a different basis. Chelsea's Fine Art BA posits that it's students can expect:

"Significant control over what you learn, and the pace you do this at..." (UAL, 2019)

Moreover, Manchester Metropolitan University's Fine Art BA states that they aim to create students that "engage and question", and explore the "broader social, political and community context" (MMU, 2019). If art education adheres to these promises, the discourse of the Master and the University may not be the only possibilities.

The Hysteric's discourse (Appendix 5) occurs when university lecturers and their knowledge are questioned; their values are no longer accepted as truth (Johnson, 2014). In this discourse, the subject exercises **Subversive Agency** (Langer et al., 2018). This is seen in students challenging their tutor's/ lecturer's, misbehaving, causing controversy, or showing distress in the classroom (Johnson, 2014). Unfortunately, disobedience, critique, and struggle are often suppressed in higher education (Langer et al., 2016).

Alternatively, in the world of art 'hysteria' and struggle are recognized as relevant to the creative process, and disobedience admired (Glaveanu and Tanggarrd, 2014; Atkinson, 2018). Experimentation is encouraged, and new ways of understanding those around us are valued (Atkinson, 2018). Change and new knowledge are characteristic of evolving art movements; new styles have come from

an artist choosing to disobey those before them (Atkinson, 2018). The structuring of art education should allow student's evolution into questioning, creative, agentic artists. Collaborative critique provides the perfect conditions for the students to move through the Hysteric's discourse to that of the Analyst, but the operation of power can affect the outcome (Lee, 2017). Unfortunately, the power structures present in the art world are sometimes replicated in art school and the discourse of the Hysteric is suppressed (Lee, 2017).

In the Analyst discourse (Appendix 6) the *objet a* is finally embodied and used to address the subject, or the world (Johnson, 2014). If a student in higher education has embodied their *objet a*, it is desire which propels them and they display **Sublime agency** (Johnson, 2014). Johnson (2014) discussed a creative writing student that asserted a controversial opinion, challenging the audience. Consequently, the audience transcended all their known ways of thinking about the topic (Johnson, 2014). This phenomenon may be recognized in the work of artists. An artist aims to put forth their own vision, often subverting that of the viewer; controversy is common in the art world (Walker, 1999). Producing an artwork can be understood as producing a new viewpoint; a new 'master signifier'. Arguably, adopting the identity of an artist is entering into the Analyst discourse and expressing Sublime Agency.

For example, neo-liberalism may emphasize 'following the dream' but this is contradicted by use of economic policy and shaped by a capitalist imagery of wealth and possession (Adams, 2013). Pre-determined neo-liberal pedagogy rejects democracy through its embodiment of capitalism and the subsequent suppression of agency (Adams, 2013). The entrepreneurial self is idealized, necessitating acceptance of the university's *objet a* (Langer et al., 2018). This is enough for some, but is not expressing the agency that universities supposedly foster (Langer et al., 2018). However, those who are to identify as an artist must reject this ideology, and ultimately express more agency. Adams (2013) discussed the marginalization of the arts. Arguably, in allowing agency, the arts are the remaining support of democracy, and the belief in education for all (Adams, 2013). This study will examine art student's embodiment of their *objet a* through use of Lacanian discourse analysis.

Research questions

Have the art students moved through Lacan's four discourses to the Analyst discourse (1953, 2007)?

Were the students able to express the optimal forms of agency (Subversive and Sublime) (Langer et al., 2018)?

Did their education allow them to nourish their *objet a* (Johnson, 2014)?

Methodology

Participants

Five participants were recruited on an availability basis, depending on their participation in an undergraduate Fine Art degree in England. Recent graduates were recommended to me by friends. Participants were emailed an information sheet and a consent form, and provided fully informed consent (Appendix 8-10). The interviews were recorded on a mobile device.

Data Collection Method

The research adhered to the British Psychological Society and Psychology department of Manchester Metropolitan University guidelines (BPS, 2018; MMU, 2017). Semi-structured interviews were used to allow the interview to progress naturally. These lasted between thirty to fifty minutes. The interviews took place on the MMU campus, in cafes in London, or in their home depending on convenience. I began each interview by explaining my interest, then asking general questions to establish rapport. The pre-determined questions were focused on the student's experience of undergraduate education (Appendix 11). Questions covered experiences of art school, structured around Lacan's four discourses. The participants all responded enthusiastically. The interviews were transcribed using Microsoft word, as true to their speech as possible (Appendix 12).

Data Analysis Method

The analysis method followed Neill (2013) and Langer et al. (2018) recommendations for the application of Lacanian discourse analysis. I was not seeking to uncover truth, rather to disrupt knowledge and explore meaning (Langer et al., 2018). Neill (2013) conceptualised a way to use the tools provided by Lacan to carry out discourse analysis. However, not all of the steps described by Neill (2013) were possible to follow due to the limited scope of this research. I was able to adhere to his conceptions of how an analyst should position themselves in relation to the text. As a discourse analyst I accepted that the meanings I found emerged as a result of my readings. Furthermore, there is not a universal discourse that can be found (Neill, 2013). I returned to the text several times to allow all possibilities. I accepted that I am addressing the text underpinned by my own knowledge. For example, I was applying my understanding of Lacan's four discourses to answer my proposed questions, but there are many possible understandings of the interviews.

Analysis

I have discussed the five participants individually, with references to shared experiences. Development of agency was affected by their education including relationships to tutors, access to resources, learning curves, and perceptions of the identity of 'artist'. The last two questions of the interview focused on their final projects and their drive to complete them.

Catherine

Catherine was a passionate and dedicated student. She had struggled with the medium she wanted to present her work in, and contradictory advice from tutors.

“I literally felt like I was pulling my hair out... and I’d speak to like ten different tutors and they’d all say different things [sic]” (lines 458-460)

Whilst holding her art school in high regard, she also criticized the way education was structured, although felt comfortable confronting her course leaders.

“I feel like I could challenge them... like I would always sort of talk to the head of year about how problematic... the grading thing was [sic]” (lines 130-132)

An important learning curve was the realization that tutors’ advice was rooted in their own values, with help from her personal tutor.

“the second kind of thing [learning curve] was a conversation with Sam [dissertation supervisor]... making sense of realizing that people had values [sic]” (lines 448-449)

Her positive experience was influenced by the equal power dynamic with her personal tutor.

“it’s like not really a relationship between a tutor and a student, you can completely challenge what they’re saying and question them” (lines 118-120)

She valued interaction with her fellow students and took criticism in her stride. She questioned the heightened university fees but saw the experience as valuable.

“it’s really important to be able to talk about your work critically... like constant conversation... and I feel like that really excited me... it’s very... communal [sic]” (lines 153-157)

“should I really pay nine-thousand pounds to you know, like obviously have a studio space that’s great... but I personally think it was one of the best experiences I’ve ever had, so I felt like it was worth it” (lines 362-365)

Catherine’s *objet a* was located in her research and how she could realize it in her final show.

“it’s just something that like I was interested in seeing, and questioning, so that’s what pushed me to do it” (lines 560-561)

The Hysteric’s discourse and Subversive agency were shown in Catherine’s desire to learn, question, and produce new knowledge. Her degree allowed her to develop Sublime agency; Catherine was driven by her *objet a*, confidently adopting the identity of an artist whilst not concerned with fulfilling expectations, and using her art to address the world.

Milly

Milly was the only participant still undertaking their degree. She implicitly identified art education as non-vocational, in her discussion of her previous teaching course as a “vocational course” (line 398). Her confidence allowed her entry into the Analyst discourse, but this could be suppressed by her desire to prove the worth of art education. She felt that the University discourse was full of confusing contradictions.

“I’m quite different and some people in an art context don’t warm to me because... I like to speak about art in a kind of like colloquial and casual way because I’m not from an art background (lines 98-100)”

“I think that they just want you to be a fully developed artist... but it’s like why would we even be here, but I think that I’m more aware of the money because I wasn’t pushed into it” (lines 391-394)

Like Catherine, it was important that the cost was rationalized. Milly saw the worth of her education in the facilities and materials provided.

“you really have to try and work out what you’re actually paying for... you can paint anywhere, whereas ceramics, having access to glazes, having access to a kiln, is quite insane” (lines 63-76)

However, Milly became hystericized by her struggle to find the right support. She felt the need to succumb to the requirements of the University discourse, but she always questioned this, often leaving her stuck in the Hysteric's discourse.

"...very much thought my tutor was like on my side, really liked my work, then got a grade so much lower than I thought, she just kind of was quite mean in my feedback" (lines 121-123)

"I just don't understand like how my work can improve 'cause I'm putting everything into this" (lines 133)

She realized that her tutor's criticisms of her work were rooted in their opinion, and this strengthened her desire to change the art world.

"I don't need you to like it, I don't need them to like it, I'm gonna do it anyway" (lines 103-105)

"I know what it's like to go into a gallery and feel really intimidated... I just think I very much want to be able to make work, or even just get to the point where I'm established enough to create a space where that can happen" (lines 552-559)

The hurdles she faced only made her more determined to change the art world, which became her *objet a*. She demonstrated Sublime agency in her frequent rejection of perceived expectations, instead choosing the practice she desired.

Lexi

Lexi accepted the limits of the University discourse. She felt she could satisfy the university, whilst also carving her own way. She was mostly happy with the way her education was structured, empowered by "feedback learning" that enabled her to "work on her own ideas" (lines 5-9).

"they wanted a certain way for you to do the research, but I still didn't feel limited with that, I think that was just a way for them to be able to mark you [sic] (163-169)"

She felt frustrated by the lack of safety compared to design courses. With the help of her tutor, she incorporated illustration, defining fine art in her own way and locating her *objet a*.

“I’m more interested in like using art to be involved with loads of people in different aspects of life rather than just making work for myself to sell... I was trying to discover how art could be used in different areas, of life, and also employment life [sic] (lines 72-76)”

Her positive relationships with tutors helped her rationalize the cost.

“obviously uni was very expensive... ‘cause I think I had a personal relationship with my tutors that like made it feel less like that because I know that they were genuinely invested in us [sic]” (lines 300-303)

Valuing criticism, she developed confidence in her practice. Lexi concluded she was knowledgeable enough to make judgements of art.

“I quite like being challenged and I quite like challenging people” (lines 218-219)

“I’m sure there would be people that would say that some things in my work don’t work, but for me those pieces have worked because I think it’s more just like the execution or feeling like everything’s balanced” (lines 135-140)

Lexi’s *objet a* had been located in her degree show. She calmly concluded that although she was not satisfied, she would have never been.

“I would always like imagine the private view... it was a bit of a disappointment because I’ve built it up so much... but... I always accepted that I think I’ll never be fully happy [sic]” (lines 362-373)

Lexi was accepting of what the University discourse could and couldn’t give her, and knew what she wanted from it. She pursued her *objet a* whilst accepting its impossibilities, suggesting a calm expression of Subversive agency. Furthermore, she displayed Sublime agency in creating her own definitions of what ‘worked’, grown from the confidence her education allowed.

Taylor

Taylor's art school was part of a formidable university and incorporated exams each year. She was surprised by the stark contrast from previous education at first, but positively reflected on the opportunity for agency it provided.

“they were like yeah, just do whatever you want, and I was like well no I need some help... if I were to go back now, I'd be way more prepared, and I'd probably enjoy [it] [sic]” (lines 56-57)

Taylor became hystericized by the contradictions in the University discourse, her comparisons to other degrees at the university, and the cost.

“your studio work... you wouldn't get a mark, but obviously your studio work at the end of the year would be marked, and that was really frustrating” (lines 161-163)

“they'd have like 2 essays a week and... like 4 tutorials a week it was like really learning based, but ours was like, oh you can just do whatever you want and you hardly saw anybody, and I was like ‘why am I paying the exact same when I can get far less than you guys!?’ [sic] (lines 243-252)”

Taylor discussed the struggle to engage with aspects of art school that were highly structured and controlled.

“everyone avoided the crits like the plague... when I got to my third year they made it mandatory” (lines 196-202)

Like Catherine and Lexi, similar interests and the discussion of ideas were valued in tutors.

“she was completely like yeah you can do this and this, and just threw in loads of ideas, and you could just have a really good talk with her”

When she decided to focus on the topic that interested her, she felt the most engaged, and embraced the tutors support.

“I figured out how to make art that I love, and I got a lot of support from my tutors at that point, and I found them to be at their most helpful” (lines 287-293)

In the end, she decided that she wanted to embrace the art world in a way that incorporated her *objet a*. She wants to critique based on her identity to confront the art world itself.

“critiquing the art world from a feminist perspective was really fun”

“I wanna do art, I wanna be a curator, but I wanna specialize in like queer art feminist art, but specific like, because I did my dissertation on, the influence of lesbian feminist art”

Taylor quickly realized the limits of the University’s discourse and became frustrated when comparing her resources to those of other degrees. In her choice to allow her work to embody her *objet a*, she flourished. She now seeks to engage in cultural criticism of the art world itself, displaying Sublime agency.

Jackie

Jackie always wanted to study art, but did not see it as vital to a career as an artist, instead embodying her *objet a* in her choice. She knew the limits of education, but like the other students, was surprised by the freedom.

“it was quite nuts from going from college where it was... just being drip fed of what to do all the time and then we just suddenly got given a lot of free reign [sic]” (lines 39-43)

She was critical of the imposed bureaucratic tasks, particularly an assignment that involved planning four months ahead.

“we’d look at each other like obviously we’re not gonna follow it and it was just a piece of shit... it was so infuriating, like the extra bits on the side” (lines 104-110)

For Jackie, the artistic identity could not be adopted within an institution that sought to make money.

“I thoroughly thought of myself as a student... a lot of people are like yeah we’re just erm, you know this is just a business, and it’s like yeah but shits shit innit, like everything is some kind of like money sponge at the end of the day” (lines 350-355)

However, she felt that the tutors were not only seeking to uphold the institution. The power structure in their relationship was equal.

“it was quite like a friendly approach like they’d always send emails like oh this is right up your street!” (lines 238-252)

She found it easier to connect with the technicians and residencies who supported her agency.

“[the graduate residencies were] always like, even if you don’t agree with the teacher... just do what you wanna do [sic]” (lines 169-171)

Unlike the other students, the cost had little importance in her pursuit of her *objet a*, and her biggest concern was her accepted peers viewing her work.

“it was just like oh my god, everyone is gonna see this... I want it to be good, I value it, I want to like it, I think I’d just feel really demoralized if I hadn’t put any effort into my final piece [sic]” (lines 516-520)

After graduation, she returned home and is continuing to develop her practice whilst now fulfilling her definition of freedom.

“now like I know I really do have free reign, I really do have my own freedom”

Jackie had embodied her *objet a* and entered into the Analyst discourse before her entry into further education. She understood art school as worthwhile, but a suppressant of her Sublime agency. Overall, she made use of the resources provided but could only identify as an agentic artist on her own terms.

Discussion

The present study has added to the existing literature to show that power structures in art school influence students' ability to express agency. Previous research had identified the negative outcomes of the neo-liberalization and marketisation of higher education and the resulting suppression of agency (Pring, 2015; Mann, 2001; Friere, 2000; Langer et al., 2018). Despite reports of funding cuts in art school (Dineen and Collins, 2005) the art tutors' conceptualizations of teaching suggested that art school continues to nourish agency. The present study found that the students struggled at various points throughout their education, often in response to bureaucratic demands, lack of support, or contradictions in the discourse of the University. However, when the structures of support were appropriate, and the *objet a* could be embraced, the students all expressed Sublime agency.

Atkinson's (2018) discussion of disobedience and Lacan's (2007) discourses of the Hysteric and Analyst highlight the abilities that are nourished in art school. All students were situated in the Hysteric's discourse throughout their interviews, critically reflecting on their course and questioning the master signifiers. The Analyst discourse was also accessed intermittently; the students defined art for themselves and sought to change the art world. Overall, the interviews demonstrated the students' development and use of Subversive and Sublime agency (Langer et al., 2018). This included the students confidently critiquing and questioning established norms, values, and ways of seeing (Langer et al., 2018). Furthermore, adopting the identity of an artist itself is arguably an expression of Sublime agency under the current idealization of the pursuit of wealth (Walker, 1999; Adams, 2013).

An opportunity to pursue the *objet a* was present in the work the students were assigned, particularly the final projects. The students were given the chance to engage and find meaning in their education. However, when the *objet a* was obstructed by the University discourse- for example, by bureaucratic tasks- the students became hystericized. Fortunately, questioning and critique is embraced in art school, and space for 'hysteria' is allowed. Unlike many universities where difficulty is concerning (Langer et al., 2018), the students could pursue their *objet a* from agentic positions, whilst encouraged to criticize even the school itself, and with support when necessary. Future research should consider difficulties in education as a subject to confront, rather than unsuccessfully remove.

As previous research suggested, the participants were influenced by their psychological and social experiences and perceptions (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999; Frosh, 2016). Other students undertaking their course were used for support and critical feedback, in formal settings such as the 'crit', and informal such as the shared studios. However, like many students, the high cost of education shaped their perceptions (Langer et al. 2018). Although the space given to them by the school was always deemed helpful in the end, some felt disappointed by the lack of resources or support when considering the cost and in comparison to other subjects that received 'more'.

The students' experiences were also shaped by their tutors. Previous research has identified that all students need a specific amount of support (Swann, 1986; Friere, 2000; Flynn, 2005; Mann 2001; McCartney and Lake, 2018) and the

interviews show the precarious power balance between tutors and students. The students discussed the importance of sharing topics of interest with their tutors, and being able to challenge and be challenged by their tutors. The participants wanted to work with tutors, and be supported in their interests, not have topics imposed onto them. The ability to overcome masters was not provided by the university asserting 'correct' knowledge, rather the tutors creating an equal balance of power.

This research has important implications for the teaching styles adopted in all education. The concern is currently focused on what *should* be learnt, rather than *how* people learn but this implementation of neo-liberal policy suppresses agency by determining the nature and outcomes of education (Atkinson, 2018). Specific pedagogical styles, including those with a psychosocial understanding (Langer et al., 2018) should be further researched and implemented. For example, the flexible curriculums typical of art courses (Fortnym and Pybus, 2014) provided opportunities for creativity and critical thinking. Rather than pedagogical uniformity, education in general should be seen as the "preparation of artists" (Read, 1944; cited in Eisner, 2004:4) as seen in this study.

There will always be some students who are more able to express agency than others, but this can be reduced (McCartney and Lake, 2018). For example, if the 'crit facilitator' has too much power, this can cause anxiety in the students (Lee, 2017; McCartney and Lake, 2018). Additionally, the 'crit' should be restricted to a group of 10, to provide more comfort for participation (McCartney and Lake, 2018). Similarly, Taylor struggled to engage with the 'crits', relating this to how they were structured.

Although the art school arguably institutionalizes critique, the extent of critique supported subverts the discourse of the University. Students continue to question the values of the institution itself, as well as confronting issues in the wider world. The present study highlighted the difference between the University discourse that is described by Lacan and descriptive of many higher education institutions (Johnson et al., 2014), and the discourse of the art school. When students critiqued their university in Langer et al. (2018), they were hystericized and their *objet a* was outside of the university. For example, students were focused on what they were going to do once their degree was out of the way (Langer et al., 2018). However, in the present study, the students continued to pursue an *objet a* related to their art education. The art world, and the art school, confidently rotates through the discourses, allowing new master signifiers to be born. The YBAs for example, once seen as the pinnacle of cutting-edge art and social critique, firmly in the Analyst position, are now seen as old 'masters' of postmodern art and taught as a history lesson (Tate, 2019).

However, the art world still encompasses master signifiers that continue to art school (Fraser and Rothman). Previous research discussed art students who felt disempowered by their ethnicity (Fraser and Rothman, 2017). The students in this study were all white, and did not experience issues concerning their ethnic identity. Furthermore, due to the scope of this research, gendered experiences could not be discussed, and future research should consider the influence of gender on artistic work. To fully understand power and agency in art schools, further research needs to investigate intersectional issues.

To conclude, the findings of this research add to the understanding of power in education and the related development of agency. Although art education is susceptible to damaging power structures (Lee, 2017), the present study shows that when opportunity for critique and pursuit of the students' *objet a* is embraced, art school can continue to support agency. Higher education institutions should look to art education for advice, if agency is truly the goal. Hopefully art education will continue to nourish its agentic students, and they will continue to subvert society's narratives.

Reflexive Analysis

Reflexivity in all qualitative research is essential (Finlay, 1998). Finlay (2002) discussed different types of reflection to engage in. When implementing psychodynamic methods, Finlay (2002) recommended intersubjective reflection. The relationship between the researcher and the interviewee should be examined, for example, the transference from the analyst to the analysand (Finlay, 2002). Furthermore, Finlay (2002) also discussed reflexivity as social critique; reflecting on the social construction of power. As I believe Lacan did, I combined the examination of relationships with an examination of power for this reflexive analysis.

Transference often occurs between a researcher and participant (Finlay, 2002). For example, my *objet a* was formed by my experience of education leading me to critique neo-liberal policy. After my initial readings and conversations with art students, my goal became to demonstrate that higher art education nourishes agency. I expected to find the art students in the discourses of the Hysteric and the Analyst, and it is likely this affected the interviews. I engaged with some responses more enthusiastically, for example, saying "that's so interesting!" or "that sounds annoying!". It is likely that my desires and goals formed my research, and may have been transferred onto the participants. However, part of my *objet a* was also to have a trustful interpretation of the transcripts, so I repeatedly returned to the interviews to dislodge initial understandings.

However, I still believe the students demonstrated agency during the interviews. We were the same age and gender, so I had minimal power. If they had no response to a question, as it did not cover an aspect of their experience, they said so. Milly told me afterwards that it felt like she was on my 'podcast'. I understood this as a recognition of the comfortable power balance, but again my *objet a* may be coming to play. Nevertheless, I feel that the interview process itself further demonstrates how agency can be allowed in interactions based on equality.

References

Adams, J. (2013) 'The Artful Dodger: Creative Resistance to Neoliberalism in Education.' *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 35:4, pp. 242-255.

Atkinson, D. (2018) *Art, Disobedience, and Ethics: The Adventure of Pedagogy*. (eds) Jagodzinski, J., Bracher, M. London: Goldsmiths.

Bailly, L. (2009) *Lacan: A Beginners Guide*, London: Oneworld Publications.

Banks, M., Oakley, K. (2015) 'The dance goes on forever? Art schools, class and UK higher education.' *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 22:1, pp. 41-56.

Bracher, M. (1994) 'On the psychological and social functions of language: Lacan's theory of the four discourses.' In Bracher, M., Alcorn, M.M., Corthell, R.J., Massardier-Kenney, F. (1994) *Lacanian Theory of Discourse: Subject, Structure, and Society*. New York and London: New York University Press.

Bracher, M. (2006) *Radical pedagogy: identity, generativity, and social transformation*. Springer.

British Psychological Society (2018) *Code of ethics and conduct*, Leicester: British Psychological Society.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1999). 'Implications of a systems perspective for the study of creativity.' In R. J. Sternberg (Ed.), *Handbook of creativity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dineen, R., Collins, E. (2005) 'Killing the Goose: Conflicts between Pedagogy and Politics in the Delivery of a Creative Education.' *NSEAD*, 24:2, pp. 43-52.

Eisner, E. (2004). What can education learn from the arts about the practice of education? *International Journal of Education and the Arts*, 5:4.

Finlay, L. (1998) 'Reflexivity: an Essential Component for All Research?' *British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 61:10, pp. 453-456.

Finlay, L. (2002) 'Negotiating the Reflexive Swamp.' *Qualitative Research*, 2:2, pp. 209-230.

Flynn P. (2005) *Critting the 'crit' in the education of architects: from Bauhaus to Bolton Street*. Dissertation. Dublin Institute of Technology.

Fortnym, R., Pybus, C. (2014) 'Challenging fine art pedagogies.' *Art, Design and Communication in Higher Education*, 13:1, pp. 3-6.

Fraser, P., Rothman, R. (2017) *Beyond Critique: Contemporary Art in Theory, Practice and Instruction*. New York and London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.

Frosh, S. (2016) 'Towards a Psychosocial Psychoanalysis.' *American Imago*, 73:4, pp. 469-482.

Glaveanu, V.P., Tanggaard, L. (2014) 'Creativity, identity, and representation: Towards a socio-cultural theory of creativity.' *New Ideas in Psychology*, 34, pp. 12-21.

Johnson, T.R. (2014) *The other side of pedagogy: Lacan's four discourses and the development of the student writer*. Albany: SUNY

Lacan, J. (1953) 'The function and field of speech and language in psychoanalysis', In J. Lacan (2006) *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English (translated with notes by B. Fink in collaboration with H. Fink and R Grigg)*. New York : Norton.

Lacan, J. (2007) *The other side of psychoanalysis: the seminar of Jacques Lacan, seminar xvii*. London: W.W. Norton.

Langer, S., Bunn, G., Fellows, N. (2018) 'Towards a Psychosocial Pedagogy: The 'student journey', intersubjectivity, and the development of agency.' *Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning*, 13:1.

Lee, M. (2017) 'Decoding the neoliberal subjectivity in adult learners.' *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 36:1-2, pp. 145-163.

Manchester Metropolitan University (2017). Ethics. <https://www2.mmu.ac.uk/research/our-research/ethics-and-governance/ethics/>

Mann, S. J. (2001) 'Alternative Perspectives on the Student Experience: Alienation and engagement.' *Studies in Higher Education*, 26:1, pp. 7-19.

McCartney, E., Lake, F. (2018) ' "It was just too much" : Exploring the learner's experience in crits.' *Centre for Excellence in learning and Education*.

MMU (2019). *MMU Vision & Values · New Staff · Human Resources · Manchester Metropolitan University*. [online] Available at: <https://www2.mmu.ac.uk/humanresources/new-staff/mmu-vision--values/> [Accessed 21 Mar. 2019].

Neill, C. (2013) 'Breaking the text: An introduction to Lacanian discourse analysis.' *Theory and Psychology*, 23:3, pp. 334-350.

Parker, I. (2005) 'Lacanian Discourse Analysis in Psychology.' *Theory and Psychology*, 15:2, pp. 163-182.

Policastro, E., Gardner, H. (1999) 'From case studies to robust generalizations: An approach to the study of creativity.' In R. J. Sternberg (Ed.), *Handbook of creativity* (pp. 213-225). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Pring, R. (2015) 'The teacher as high priest and usherer in of the Kingdom of God.' *Power and Education*, 7:1, pp. 19-28.

Read, H. (1944). *Education through art*. London: Pantheon.

Salazar, S.M. (2015) 'Studio Interior: Investigating Undergraduate Studio Art Teaching and Learning.' *Studies in Art Education: A Journal of Issues and Research*, 55:1, pp. 64-78.

Swann C. (1986) 'Nellie is dead - Art and design education.' *Designer*, pp. 18-20.

Tate. (2019). *Young British Artists (YBAs) – Art Term* | Tate. [online] Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/y/young-british-artists-ybas> [Accessed 25 Mar. 2019].

UAL (2019). *Chelsea Fine art*. [online] Available at: <https://www.arts.ac.uk/colleges/chelsea-college-of-arts/courses/short-courses/search-by-subject/fine-art> [Accessed 21 Mar. 2019].

UniversitiesUK (2019). *Patterns and trends in UK higher education 2018*. [online] Available at: <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/facts-and-stats/data-and-analysis/Pages/Patterns-and-trends-in-UK-higher-education-2018.aspx> [Accessed 21 Mar. 2019].

Vanhuele, S. (2016) 'Capitalist Discourse, Subjectivity and Lacanian Psychoanalysis.' *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7, pp. 1-14.

Vassallo, S. (2012) 'Critical Pedagogy and Neoliberalism: Concerns with Teaching Self-Regulated Learning.' *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 32, pp. 563-580.

Walker, J.A. (1999) *Art and outrage; provocation, controversy, and the visual arts*. London: Pluto.

Winnicott, D.W. (1971) *Playing and Reality*, London: Tavistock.

Zepke, N. (2017) 'Student engagement in neo-liberal times: what is missing?' *Higher Education Research and Development*, 37:2, pp. 443-446.

Appendices

Appendix 1

The *Objet a*

Bracher (1994) defined the *objet a* as the "lack of being that causes all desire" (p.114). The *objet a* is not attainable, rather something we seek that forms our relations with the world (Lacan, 1953). The *objet a* is shaped and enjoyed differently

depending on its position in the discourse (Bailly, 2009). For a student to develop higher levels of agency, the *objet a* should be mobilised (Langer et al., 2018). It should be what drives the student, or ideally what they embody to address others (Johnson, 2014). Importantly, the *objet a* can never fully be known, as it is formed by those who view it (Bracher, 1994).

Appendix 2

Organisation of signifiers

Social orders are reflected by the organisation of signifiers in each discourse (Bracher, 1994). Each discourse is made up of four positions:

agent --- > other

truth // product

The **agent** seeks to address the **other**. This reflects social bonds, and incorporates Lacan's reminder that the message is never received how it was intended; a discourse can never fully be known (Vanheule, 2016; Neill, 2013). For example, a student will never completely know what their university expects from them (Langer et al., 2018). This message is motivated by a **truth** (Neill, 2013). The agent's message to the other creates a **product**, but something always escapes and the product is never a direct consequence of the truth shown in the double bar (//) (Neill, 2013). Four potential signifiers can fill each space, producing four models of discourse (Neill, 2013).

Appendix 3

The Discourse of the Master

S1 → S2

\$ // a

This discourse occurs when the master signifier (S1) is in the subject position. The position of truth is occupied by \$, representing the divided self that is repressed by S1; they are never in control despite his pretence (Johnson, 2014). S2 in the position of the other can only mirror the master's knowledge, producing an *objet a* that only S1 can enjoy (Johnson, 2014).

Appendix 4

The Discourse of the University

S2 → a

S1 // \$

This discourse places knowledge (S2) in the position of the agent (Appendix 2). S2 forms the other's *objet a* for them (*a* in the position of other) (Bracher, 1994). The master signifier (S1) occupies the position of truth, hidden beneath the knowledge. S1 of the institution, for example, all that it stands for, is embodied by S2 (Bracher, 1994). Hidden beneath the bar is the produced divided subject, hysterical and confused (Bracher, 1994).

Appendix 5

The Discourse of the Hysteric

\$ → S1

a // S2

The Hysteric's discourse occurs when the divided subject (\$) is in the position of agent (Bailly, 2009). Hidden underneath \$ in the truth position is the *objet a*; the subject is driven by desire and uncertainty and they question the master signifier (S1 in the position of other) (Bailly, 2009). The subject questions the master, and they can only respond by piling more knowledge on. In this discourse, new knowledge, new signifiers can be produced (S2 in product) (Bailly, 2009).

Appendix 6

The Discourse of the Analyst

a → \$

S2 // S1

The agent had embodied their *objet a* (*a* in agent) and is underpinned by knowledge (S2 in truth). A new perspective and a new master can be produced (S1 in product), although they do not seek to occupy the position of master (Johnson, 2014).

Appendix 7

Langer et al. (2018) described the types of agency that are allowed by each discourse in education. In the discourse of the master and the university, the agency is impoverished.

Langer et al. (2018): A Four Factor Model of Agency

	SUBSERVIENT AGENCY	SUBSISTENCE AGENCY	SUBVERSIVE AGENCY	SUBLIME AGENCY
--	-------------------------------	-------------------------------	------------------------------	---------------------------

Lacanian Discourse	Master	University	Hysteric	Analyst
Lacanian Matheme	$\underline{S1} \rightarrow \underline{S2}$ $\$ \times a$	$\underline{S2} \rightarrow \underline{a}$ $S1 \times \$$	$\underline{\$} \rightarrow \underline{S1}$ $a \times S2$	$\underline{a} \rightarrow \underline{\$}$ $S2 \times S1$
Pedagogical gain	Skills	Knowledge	Meaning	Citizenship
Fate of the student's <i>objet a</i>	The Master steals the student's <i>objet a</i> .	The University defines a proxy <i>objet a</i> for the student.	The student is motivated by but is unaware of their <i>objet a</i> .	The student embodies their <i>objet a</i> .