Counter Hegemony in Post-compulsory Art and Design and Gallery Education, through Sartre and Foucault

Miranda Matthews

Department of Educational Studies, Goldsmiths, University of London, United Kingdom

Dr. Miranda Matthews, Margaret McMillan Building, Goldsmiths, University of London, New Cross, London, SE14 6NW

m.matthews@gold.ac.uk

(+)44 7949 652403

Miranda Matthews investigates issues of agency, focusing on art education. She applies comparative philosophy through empirical research. Matthews works on strategies for addressing representation and diversity in learning in the arts. Matthews is a Lecturer in Art and Education at Goldsmiths, University of London.

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Austerity politics in Britain are edging towards compressed learning and teaching identities, driven by competition for resources and normative standards. Policy changes since 2010 have impacted particularly on the arts, and have had an adverse effect on cultural diversity across society. This situation has international resonance for those encountering protectionist reactions to globalisation. Practitioners in creative fields face dilemmas of agency, as they seek to maintain the presence of their roles, and ability to make choices. This paper focuses on how practitioners in post-compulsory art and design and gallery education challenge hegemonic constructions of the self through practice. It reflects on Herne's (2006) study of relational differences between teachers and gallery educators, raising points for connective interventions as boundary work. A comparative lens draws upon theories of agency to support critically engaged practice. Empirical data is investigated through Sartre's concept of free will, and Foucauldian negotiations of autonomy.

Keywords: agency, art education, counter hegemony, gallery, post-compulsory, Foucault, Sartre

Introduction

The current conditions for art education in England, in what might be termed an era of austerity, can be observed to reflect hegemonic positions that suppress the diversity of creative identities and learning choices (Adams, 2013). In the neoliberal crisis of democracy (Maisuria, 2014), the National Curriculum is being narrowed to a 'core' of five academic subjects via the English Baccalaureate or 'EBacc' (Warwick Commission, 2015; National Society for Education in Art and Design, 2016). Cuts in

the cultural sector have also taken a high toll, with large public galleries such as the Arnolfini in Bristol having lost their 'National Portfolio' funding. These reactions to national deficit and to the globalisation of standards in education, ignore the contribution made by creative fields in Britain to a vibrant, productive international presence. At this time boundary work becomes increasingly important. This research of counter pedagogies between formal and non-formal art education seeks to locate areas of concern and creative action (Atkinson, 2011; Herne, 2006; Sartre, 2010) while recognising ongoing differences.

Encountering limitations on the forms of learning that can be experienced in education and culture, questions of agency arise and we may seek to understand the forms of resistance that practitioners take in response. My question here is: how can practitioners exercise choice in their approaches to art education, and how do they challenge hegemonic constructions of the self in doing so?

To define the terms used in this article: *power* will here be explained as being administered through regulatory control measures, such as methods of assessment and performance management, which instigate processes of normalisation (Foucault, 1980, p. 107). Such processes favour dominant groups and ideologies, forming a *hegemony* or hierarchy of social organisation, as can be observed in the cultural and historical contexts of education. This hierarchy conditions the ways in which practitioners and students view themselves, and their capacities. I will therefore explore resistance to the regulation of subjectivity in educational settings, and assess the potential for *agency* – as freedom of self-definition for creative practitioners.

Research data from respondents working in post-compulsory and gallery art education for young people aged 16-19 will be analysed, to interpret parallels and differences in their experiences, with reference to Steve Herne's boundary research

between teachers and gallery educators (2006). Having observed that practitioner respondents had a tendency to resist normative constructions of their working roles, I apply a comparative theoretical lens to bring emancipatory philosophy into the sphere of practitioners' available means of resistance. Foucault's theorisation of negotiated autonomy within institutional frameworks will be discussed, in relation to Sartre's presentation of the free subject in learning.

The empirical research began through my work as an art teacher in London schools and sixth-form colleges (2003-14). The social context for issues arising in the data can be tracked through the increasing focus on school academisation and institutional micro-management. In 2010 the Coalition government removed authority from regional jurisdiction and handed it to school senior management, with distance steering from central government (Wilkins 2016). Through this process of devolution, teachers have arguably become more disempowered. The current focus on 'academy' schools, independent from local authorities, has concentrated power for school governance in the hands of senior management and the 'experts' (Ibid, 2016) brought in to lead multi-academy trusts. Teachers' working conditions are no longer assured as academies can vary expectations of the teaching role according to their own criteria, including roles in post-compulsory education. Teachers have also been subjected to a drive to implement performance related pay (Department for Education, 2013) which further conditions their working identities (Ball and Olmedo, 2013) curbing forms of self-representation in their 'situated context' (Edwards-Groves et al. 2010, p.47). In response to this intensive regulation of creative subjectivities, I set out to listen to practitioner experiences (Back, 2007) both inside and outside the walls of formal education.

The Comparative Lens

In addressing the relationship between theory and practice, I support the argument that practitioners in education can be empowered through theory, and the reflexive processes that are involved in praxis (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1997). The application of theory through empirical research in creative education can therefore be a form of reclaiming agency for practitioners. This research explores how a comparative theoretical lens can provide critical tools for building a meta-discourse to the conditioning aspects of educational environments, as a 'space around the self' (Foucault, 2005, p.223).

In agreement with Burman (2016) I will present a case for Foucault's ongoing and emerging relevance for education in the 21st century. However I also agree that 'we need more, as well as more than Foucault' (Ibid. p.1). Sartre can add to understandings of creative interventions in hegemony and relational agency; this theory is under-represented in the field of education, with some notable exceptions (Detmer, 2005; Howell, 2008; Papastephanou, 2009; Thornton, 2013). Sartre's emphasis on the free subject as it interconnects with social responsibility (Detmer, 2005), is a position which engages with the impetus for changing limiting situations. Foucault has had substantial input to research in education (see Atkinson 2002; 2011; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1997; Ball 2013; 2015; Peters, 2003; Usher & Edwards, 1996 and Wilkins, 2016). In this paper I will extend Foucauldian theories of education via comparisons between formal and non-formal art education, focusing on current relevance and emancipatory potential.

A comparative perspective of Sartre and Foucault as 'tool kits' is new ground in educational research ('boites-à-outils', Caddeo, 2014, p.1). They are often placed in opposition, presenting Foucault as a theorist of epistemology and intersubjective power relations, and Sartre as a philosopher of the free individual. However there is connectivity, as evidenced in their lifetimes through points of politicised collaboration, for example their work on the leftist *Liberation* journal (Flynn, 2005). Existing

literature affirms the emerging post-structuralism in Sartre, through the observed plurality of freedoms and multiple shifting subjectivities, and the existential direction of Foucault's later return to subjectivity (Caddeo, 2014; Farrell-Fox, 2003; Flynn, 1997, 2005; Seitz, 2004).

There are further connections between their theories that relate to education: Foucault's subject obtains a critical distance from 'points of insertion' in the institution (Foucault, 1969, p. 118) through stepping back and reflecting on her/his circumstances. Sartre had theorised the concept of the subject's 'point of insertion' in society (Sartre, 1968, p. 62) focusing instead on the individual as being directed towards a certain social class, by the position of their family (Flynn, 1997). Farrell-Fox notes this correspondence in interpreting the subject as Sartre, like Foucault, 'provides a deeper understanding of sources of control and alienation' (Farrell-Fox, 2003, p.101).

Possibilities of connections with other theories, may occur to readers. This is an emancipatory benefit of a comparative approach, rather than a theoretical 'monograph', as it opens an expansive dialogical theory/practice relation. Some may find a resonance with Freire's belief in the struggle for emancipation as 'a necessity for all human beings' (Roberts, 2015, p. 385), or see similar expressions of freedom in Holt (1977) and Rancière (1991), as discussed by a participant in post-compulsory education. Perhaps we could locate parallels in Anna Craft's possibility thinking approach for 'radical openness' (Hempel-Jorgensen 2015, p. 546). The shared aim here is to realise life-transforming possibilities in learning. What I think is at stake here in the theoretical comparisons that I will make between Sartre and Foucault is the subject's self-recognition, as they seek meaning within roles that are defined through the complex networks of social influence. Foucault describes 'the fine meshes of the web of power'

woven up from the 'grass roots level' (Foucault, 1980, p.116), which need to be challenged from this level to release strands of agency.

Sartre & Foucault: Concepts of Subjectivity

There are three forms of subjectivity that can be identified in Sartre and Foucault, which will later be explored as they appear in the data. (1) The *socially constructed subject* of Foucault's power/knowledge work. The subject is enacted through intersubjective power relationships as: 'manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body' (Foucault, 1980, p.93). These institutional forms of power exact transparency from the subject (Foucault, 1980, p.154), and precondition the enactment of coercive forms of truth (Foucault, 1980, p.93). Possibilities for resistance occur through the subject's development of a critical perspective on their role within the institution

(2) *The subject with free will* is the existential subject who can make their own choices. The subject has the agency required for resistance, but their consciousness needs to be attuned to the ideologies that surround them, in order to make a 'free commitment' to 'realising a type of humanity' (Sartre, 1973, p. 47). Free will is indivisible from social responsibility, and the consciousness that emerges through struggle (Sartre, 2008) to clear the path for freedom in 'an environment to be changed.' (Sartre, 2003, p. 527). This is an incentive to consider the subject with free will in pedagogical situations, where awareness of the self in relation to others is crucial (Detmer, 2005).

In *Being and Nothingness* (1943/2003) Sartre presents the subject as formed in a relationship between three modes of being: *being-in-itself* - the past, the embodied, the pre-conscious; *being-for-itself* - the present, thirst for knowledge, connection with the outer world – which is felt by the subject as a *lack*, and *being-for-others* - the subject's

relationships with others. Existential freedom is potentially available to all: it is formed through self-expression and engagement in countering social inequality. Sartre considers the rigidity of institutions, as they ignore the needs of individuals and become 'practico-inert' (Sartre, 2004) throwing a concealing mantle of power over precarious conditions, to silence voices of resistance who protest in 'good faith' (Sartre, 2003).

(3) *The reflexive subject* has self-awareness, which enables dissociation from social control. Foucault later became more interested in possibilities for agency. He explored the reflexive subject in 'technologies of self' corresponding with Hellenistic and Roman philosophy. Techniques of self include the care of the self, knowledge of the self and parrhesia, which translates as 'speaking frankly' (Foucault, 2005, p.164). The technologies of self can be compared to Sartre's reflexive subject, which exists through 'presence to' self and others (Sartre, 2003, p.144) as a form of self-awareness. Foucault advises that we should, create a space for reflexive subjectivity as 'Presence of self to self (Foucault, 2005, p.223), so that the subject can plan a route for self-realisation. In parallel, the Sartrean reflexive subject can clear obstacles and transform the *contingency* of his/her given situation – to intervene in what might or might not happen (Freadman, 2001).

A key difference is that Foucault chronicles transhistorical power struggles, and unlike Sartre presents the possibilities for navigating power networks, such as educational hierarchies, as interpersonal mechanisms (Foucault, 1980). However this extrication of the subject from the social machine requires the critical awareness that is obtained through his later considerations of reflexive 'technologies of self'.

Considering how we may further value and empower the critical input of practitioners in forming such concepts of agency, the potential contribution of the focal theoretical positions is here investigated through the perceptions, experiences and

motivations of two key research participants in post-compulsory and gallery education. In addition to recognising the input of two practitioners through reflections that may be observed with two philosophers of note, there are further reasons for the respondents' relevance to this study, which will be explained in the next section. These practitioners can be seen to have taken important stances in response to the different hegemonic structures of schools and galleries, however their pedagogies are also analysed for supportive connections.

Methodology

The research in discussion is drawn from a larger project that investigated definitions of freedom and autonomy among three research groups of practitioners in post-compulsory and gallery education, sixth-form students and policymakers for art education, applying philosophical concepts to inform interpretations of the data. The research plan for practitioners in art education included interviews of ten participants: 5 sixth-form teachers of art in three London sixth-form colleges, a Head of Art in an independent school, 2 gallery educators and 2 artist educators. The indicative sample connected with respondents in different institutional hierarchies, for an investigation (Wengraf, 2006) that could be reflected on through my position as a teacher/researcher (Kincheloe, 2003). The project also comprised longitudinal observation at my workplace: 'The Sixth Form College' (2007-14) and practice-based investigation through my own teaching. Thematic analysis was used to locate engagements with issues of practitioner agency, and to explore how the subjectivities behind the participants' responses (Holstein and Gubrium, 2003) could relate to the comparative theoretical lens.

This research engages practice with theory, exchanging developments in both areas as they are interrelated; it can therefore be viewed through a praxis research

approach. In relation to definitions of praxis research explored by Kemmis (2010), who discusses methodologies for participatory research, the analysis presented here represents an 'interpretive hermeneutic' approach to the practice of others. As I was still a teacher in post-compulsory education when gathering the data (2009-12) I also investigated theory through my own practice from a 'critical emancipatory' position (Kemmis, 2010, p.19) which I think enabled a greater reflexive awareness. In dialogue with the recommendation for researchers to consider Carr's concept of 'practical philosophy' as an agential response to 'current existing conditions and circumstances' (Ibid. p. 19), I here develop the potential for theory to be applied with a 'presence-to' (Sartre, 2003, p.144) counter-hegemony in education.

Discussions with participants were semi-structured around open questions, beginning with: 'How did you arrive at your current role in art education?' Participants were informed of the substance of the research, as an investigation of freedom and autonomy in art education. Extending considerations of researcher transparency, participants were also sent the full transcripts of their interviews so that they could amend or withdraw statements. All identifying data has been anonymised.

When analysing the interview transcripts and coding emerging themes, I found frequent tensions between institutional expectations of the educator's role and the participants' perceptions of their decisions and self-definitions. This problematic varied in depth of expression among the participants, as did the extent to which they would discuss their challenge of the institution. Those who felt more comfortable in expressing their disagreements with aspects of the power discourses in operation were the participants who had already voiced such concerns in their workplace. Their relative ease of communication informed my analysis, and sensitivity to those practitioners who may have felt compromised by reflections on their workplace.

The six teacher participants in my research began in arts practice and then went into teaching. They did not consider themselves 'teacher-teachers', as Carla put it, who have chosen a career in teaching from the outset, and formed themselves into that role. Sam trained to teach because he felt he could make a social intervention in that way. Mack went back to the council estate where he was raised, with a Fine Art degree, and found that teaching was the only way he could escape unemployment. The gallery educators, although working outside the National Curriculum and the standardising demands made of Art Teachers, were also subject to the hierarchy of one institution – unlike the more mobile artist educators. For this reason among others that I will now identify, I will base this discussion on an in-depth study of responses from 'Sam' a sixth-form teacher and 'Julia' a gallery educator. The focus participants experienced very different working environments, but there were some similarities in their pedagogical approaches. I have therefore pursued the rationale that an analysis of their transcripts could enable the development of methods for applying the comparative theory, as it would be supportive of practice in both formal and non-formal art education.

In addition the approach to this research centred on an exploration of parity between practice and theory, and between the roles of the researcher and the respondent. Since Julia and Sam were the only two participants to discuss how they applied theory in relation to their own practice, the balance of equality between researcher and respondent could be most clearly evidenced.

I will now analyse themes identified in the data in two sections. I discuss the conditions experienced in participants' working environments, and their perceptions of the effects of these environments on people working and learning within them. Then I investigate their counter hegemonic approaches to learning in the arts.

Experiences of the working environment and its effects

Sam had entered teaching intending to make interventions of art practice in the school environment, but he experienced schools as sites of confinement rather and took some 'time out' studying architecture. He then took up a post as a sixth-form art teacher and found more personal creative fulfilment in this role. However he described continued encounters with mercenary institutional regulation, such as enforced staff reduction: having to reapply for his own job in competition with a colleague, who was a friend. They had both resigned and sought work elsewhere.

Sam expressed concern at the lack of value for teachers as a form of cultural poverty. He also reacted strongly against the behaviour management procedures of secondary schools, connecting these forms of social conditioning with the passivisation of learning and formation of teachers as *trainers* for students. He said:

> I still think that a lot of state education is really, really poor especially for secondary school. Yes it's just, I mean the kind of thing we've seen with the school visit here this morning. It's just crowd control really.

The term 'crowd control' signifies surveillance, it sounds impersonal but is seen to be practiced with strategic impact upon individuals who stray out of line. Sam expressed anxiety about institutional regulation giving examples such as schools bringing in 'fingerprinting for library books' which he said would make children 'used to this kind of loss of their rights.' In relation to his role as a sixth-form teacher he acknowledged being 'tied by the rules of the college'.

The institutional control that Sam discussed could also be observed in Julia's presentation of her workplace. As she talked about her experiences of 'The Gallery as an institution, the term 'non-formal' education took on a less binary opposition to 'formal' education since regulation through the hierarchies of organisational structures

was clearly present. When asked if there had been projects she would have liked to run, but could not teach in the gallery environment Julia said:

> It can be quite a confining environment The Gallery, but there are things you can do. There are a number of things that are difficult to do. Some of them are to do with disrupting the status-quo. Young people are allowed to speak, but only to a certain point. I would have liked to do a project where they re-write the labels that sit next to the work. We did quite a lot in the beginning, but we weren't allowed to put labels up anywhere the public could see.

In this account of her experiences in working at The Gallery, Julia expresses her frustration with the limitations imposed by the 'front of house' management, which condition the behaviour of young people towards acceptable interaction with the artworks, and also condition the parameters of her approaches as a practitioner that she can make visible. Comparisons could be made with formal education here, but unlike the behaviour management policies of schools and colleges, these conditioning forces are hidden.

> After years of working in this environment there are understood codes of practice. But once we start widening our education programme we realise that there are unwritten codes.

The behaviour codes in galleries are presented by Julia as being inscribed by layers of acquired cultural capital: 'The Gallery' actively seeks participation from young people who have not yet had access to such experiences, and is therefore faced with disruption to the polished interface of expectations.

The focus practitioners reflected on the mechanisms behind institutional projections of how they *should be.* Sam was asked to discuss how he encouraged students to take ownership of their work, at this point Sam observed the effects of the education system upon subjectivity in discussing his view of 'education types.'

> I think education people do have this strange sort of attitude sometimes that students can't do things for themselves: that everything has to be taught at them. I think if you're constantly worried about [teaching students to be independent] as a teacher, and you constantly think you're in charge of all that then, you know, that's what they get at school…You know, there's a bell every hour, they have to sit in rows.

He has a perception of the norm of 'education people' as a *type of person,* a subject with attitudes about learning that exclude the agency of the student, as their own volition is erased. This education 'type' is seen as needing to be 'in charge' of others, organising their days into lessons as time-bound units, and normalising them as a depersonalised row, with no room for divergent creative thinking. This view presents a strong reaction to experiences of compulsory education, we could acknowledge that school teachers can explore forms of creative resistance, if they have chosen to stay in this environment.

Sam expressed his disagreement with what he portrays as a production line ethos, which he sees as dividing students into socio-economic groups, saying: 'I mean what are the origins of state education? I'm sure it's just like training people to work in factories?' Students entering sixth-form education are divided by their level of study, and whether their courses are academic or vocational, as are the teachers responsible for courses within this hierarchy. For the teacher participants, the academic/vocational dichotomy represents different constructions of the subject in learning, and different modes of address from the teacher. In this sense practitioner subjectivity is formed around the accepted discourses of practice for the type of course they are permitted to teach. Vocational Art and Design courses are traditionally seen as more intellectually limited than A Levels, requiring more practical teaching skills than the reflective work associated with A Levels. In the current context of selection of 'academic' students through achievement in the EBacc, the division is increased.

Referring to Julia's perspectives from non-formal education, the restrictions on subjectivity in gallery education were not focused on levels of study, but were related to the *value structures* of The Gallery as an institution, as reflected in the regulation of how the institution is viewed by the public. Julia's representation of her role in art education presents a similar evacuation from the formalised subjectivity that Sam perceives in schools: the term 'teachers' for her represents non-reflective pedagogies and a lack of awareness of conditioning processes. Julia defined her difference from mainstream education through the terms used to outline her role.

> Actually we don't call it 'teaching' in the gallery: people who work in the gallery are not 'teachers.' So we call it all sorts of other things: 'educator', 'engagement', other words. In that, in that role you're aware that you're changing somebody; that actually the process of being in this cultural environment, with these things, seems to have an effect on them.

This appropriation of terms to register the *meaning* of the self in context can be related back to Julia's dismay at the limitations placed on the young people's use of 'labels' as text to place next to the artwork. The ascribed meaning of language, its presence and forms, are constructed as either empowering or normalising.

At this point I will introduce the comparative lens, applying the theory as it can provide critical tools for interpretation. Both Julia and Sam find they are at odds with the regulatory processes of the institution: Sam as expressed through his disillusionment with the controlling forces of education as 'crowd control' and Julia in relation to the 'confining' parameters set by The Gallery's image conscious marketing department. Sartre defines the rigidity of institutional hierarchies through the concept of the *practico-inert* (Sartre 2004, Papastephanou, 2009): the status quo is maintained through the subject's adherence to the institution as a managed form of professional security. The focus participants note the passivising constructs of the institutions they work in

and are frustrated by the lack of mobility between the institutional divisions. Julia talks about young people in the widening participation programme being encouraged to speak out, but only 'up to a certain point' and the function of 'vetting meetings' in which power can be enacted to 'block ideas.' Sam talks about being bound by institutional 'ties', the restrictive division by age group and the socially dividing concepts of ability within formal education.

To further theoretical exploration of social division, I will refer to Sartre's later development of philosophy around mechanisms for social control in which he identifies the selective processing of students towards 'practical knowledge' (Sartre, 2008, p. 232) defining, 'a priori the future of an abstract but awaited man [or woman].' (p. 237). This projected definition of the future self is enacted through conditioning processes that aim to form preconceived subjectivities or 'useful citizens', as a justifying value of education.

Pursuing the comparison between Sartre and Foucault, in relation to the hidden agenda of the educational environment, the research data indicates that a critical awareness of the conditioning processes operating in the institution is a factor in enabling self-definition within that environment. Those who can become aware of their strategic placement in the educational setting, their 'points of insertion' can then begin to shape a more fulfilling path. Regulatory practices in education are experienced as insistent 'power through transparency' (Foucault, 1980, p.154), as Julia conveys in describing the Gallery's surveillance of text-based learning activity in which young people were rewriting the information placed next to the exhibited artworks. These demands of the subject exact an efficient 'machine', in this case for regulation of public information, which Julia testifies as constructing a 'sanctioned' form of truth (Foucault, 1980, p.131).

Foucault's early power/knowledge work aims to identify mechanisms of social control exercised through 'systems of dependency' (Foucault, 1969, p. 118). In education these discourses of systemic regulation, perceived in assessment processes, performance management and what Julia describes as 'codes of behaviour', span out from the ingrained cultural layers of *Discipline and Punishment* (Foucault, 1977). A normalising zone of control or a 'field of surveillance' is produced that traverses the subject (Foucault cited in Rabinow, ed. 1991, p. 201). These normative codes are also expressed through the defining terms of the field, as language forms the key to acceptance or dissociation.

The participants' struggle for ownership of identity is defined through discourses of difference. Julia in non-formal gallery education created a concept of self through terms which are separated from the identity of the 'teacher', representing a discursive position which was acceptable to the sphere she worked in. Interpreting Sam's use of language from a post-structural perspective, the signifiers 'education people' and 'teaching at' someone, position the institutionalised teacher as a stereotypical normative subject; while the learning subject is a passive Other. Sam does not want to be an enforcer of education, but a supporting structure for students' self-fulfilment: he wants to 'step back' and enable the students' creative engagement.

Having noted that the term 'education people' is used as a foil to define Sam's difference from the norm, we can also view this identification through alterity via Sartre's theory of subjectivity. The Other is here placed in conflict with the self, as 'a refused self' (Sartre, 2003, p.308) or 'critical mirror' (Sartre, 2008, p. 25). This refusal offers a buffer zone of resistance for Sam who wants to escape the outlined definition for his role, and the limited expectations for the vocational students he teaches. For Julia also, this stereotypical formal 'teacher' subject is characterised as an Other, whose

passive inertia sinks into the unreflective mode of *being-in-itself*. They build opportunities for students to engage in more critical discursive processes, and welcome the less orthodox interests of young people. In doing so they set out to activate their own and the students' thirst for new learning experiences, which to use Julia's term 'stirs up' the energising drive for new experiences that Sartre terms *being-for-itself.*

It can be argued that resistance to normative methods of practice, and definitions of practitioner subjectivity depend upon the provision for difference among learning subjects (Atkinson, 2011). Conceptions of the self as educator are predicated for Sam and Julia on the positioning of the self towards the learner. It is also interesting to note the similarities in Julia and Sam's rejection of the formalising term 'teacher', and to consider the implications for this in parallel boundary practices (Herne, 2006).

Transformative actions: Agency and Self-definition

To preface this exploration of action taken by the participants to challenge the institutionalised self, it needs to be observed that these art educators are not attempting to cause riot and obstruction in their workplaces, but rather to effect changes that they could demonstrate to be more fulfilling than the normative expectations. Sixth-form teacher Sam pushed the boundaries of the art and design curriculum, while acknowledging the institutional 'ties' as he called them. As Course Leader for BTEC Level 3 Art and Design he worked to provide the means for vocational students to choose from diverse pathways into creative degree courses. Sam preferred to change teaching content every year rather than rely on static practice. He also drew on a wide range of unconventional sources: for example Art and Design students were introduced to Orwell's *Animal Farm,* Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* and Foucault's concept of the Panopticon as an architectural construct to centralise power.

Sam said of the students that, 'They come in very passive' after having 'their freedoms bashed out of them' in schools, and he resituates the role of the practitioner as being proactive in planning and flexible in response to learners.

> When you're designing creative projects, you want your creative thinking to sit a little bit in the background, and let theirs come out of it. At the start of the project you are much more teaching them as a group. At the end you're much more teaching them as individuals… You write your tasks that you want to do, but you have to be flexible. They might not do that… so you've got to kind of find out their interests and tie their interests into it somehow.

Sam aims for a responsive approach which incorporates students' interests, in contrast with pedagogies formed by routine or attendant upon managerial instruction. In this way his own greater agency is a movement away from the centralised position of the teacher, towards co-emancipation of educator and students. Discussing his experience of educational policy, Sam presented his interest in radical pedagogies which unseat the hierarchy of education, and of the teacher as leader of the learning process, citing Holt (1977) and Rancière (1991) as influences on his practice.

> Have you heard of John Holt?... It sort of makes you feel more positive on teaching, because it can be really oppressive…It's about having your own freedom to like invent your own strategies, and not feel like everyone has to be at a certain stage by a certain age, because so what if they're not?

He ventured this theory as it liberates him from the normative structures of formal education which he finds 'oppressive', such a non age-banded learning and movement away from the dominant teacher as 'trainer'. This self-instigated urge to read theory and use it to move out of non-reflective definitions of the teaching subject corresponds with the forms of self-awareness in art pedagogies that Julia aimed for in gallery education.

Julia talked about her discovery of theory in relation to practice on her MA in Fine Art. She tracked this theoretical support of art pedagogy as a method of empowerment for contextually situating her work:

> Theory has always informed my practice, in all the different roles because it's only then that I can make sense of what I'm doing: if I understand how it sits in a broader context.

The motives of Sam and Julia can be observed in their actions to move their practice past the remit of the institution, and to assert its integral relevance for social engagement. Julia said she wanted to 'stir them up': to motivate the young people at The Gallery out of a passive interface with the artworks in the collection. Her perception of her role was that it had made a long-term difference to the Youth Art participants.

> Usually people are with us for about two or three years, so they learn all sorts of things about how this institution works, and that changes their view of the world, so it's valuable in different ways to do with who they become.

It was important to Julia that the young people learned the forms of negotiation that are involved in selecting ideas for display in the public realm, critiquing and presenting artwork. These processes would enable them to form discursive representations of themselves to others. Julia's definition of 'soft skills' here corresponds with Sam's concept of a pedagogy for flexibility of action and self-representation.

When asked what they valued most in the teaching of art, both Julia and Sam noted 'critical thinking' as of greatest importance: as Sam said, 'you've got to keep questioning your values'. In providing the freedom for young people to participate in learning in the arts Julia set a counterbalance to imposed values that have not been

critically explored. She talked of a participant who had been a law undergraduate, but then changed course to take an art degree because the Youth Art programme, 'had opened her eyes to how she'd been forced to drop art.' Here we can see Julia's self-defined role emerging through her negotiation of pressures both external to and within the institution.

Implications: Meeting points for practitioner agency

Analysing the data as it relates to the question I raised initially in this paper, it could be said that the extent to which practitioners can reclaim agency over institutionalised structuring of the self is variable according to the subject's prioritisation of this process, and the level of subjection experienced. However Sam and Julia, in their respective fields of post-compulsory and gallery art education, arguably demonstrate theoretically informed practice, which builds waves of resistance. Such critical praxis can be used to analyse the 'given situation' within institutional frameworks, thereby identifying obstructions to 'creative actions' (Sartre, 2010, p. 163-164) which could be taken to transform conditions for practitioners and students.

Sam's self-representation locates him as a subject who is able to reconfigure the impact of institutional hierarchy, through willing himself out of positions of subjection. He positions the role of the educator as the responsive creator of planning processes, and not the instrument of performance criteria: 'You write your tasks that you want to do'. He refuses to let his practice settle into the repeated patterns which Sartre would term *being-in-itself.* Sam feels trapped by such practice, which is comforting to some as, 'the security offered by the beaten track' (Papastephanou, 2009, p. 455). For Sam liberation as a practitioner occurs through constantly moving freedom as praxis.

Sartre saw praxis as 'the development of living action in everyone' (2004, p. 106). These actions for freedom come to life upon personal reflection, which might take

the form of a diary entry or inclusive critical discussion about artwork and its contextual references. Sam says of the students that, 'They come in very passive' after having 'their freedoms bashed out of them' in schools. He tries to engage learners by giving them access to different learning environments through course trips, offering a wide range of stimulating resources. Creative action such as this mobilises the *being-for-itself* of students in art projects, which is the mode of self that is experienced as a thirst for the unknown: it takes the subject out of their passivity as the self-absorbed *being-in-itself* - 'bashed' into taking comfort in a confined cognitive space.

Proactive engagement can also be observed in Sam's adaptation of teaching content in the light of student responses. He says, 'the creative thinking is just more on the spot thinking on your feet, as you respond to things. You can't predict how people are going to work with stuff.' The existential subject acts upon their situation, to form reality in the process of making decisions and *doing*: 'I realise a project in so far as I give it being, but I also realise my situation in so far as I live it and make it be with my being'. (Sartre, 2003, p. 203) This form of subjectivity is a multifaceted existence, in which there are many possible outcomes for the self (Thornton, 2013).

Julia's work with young people at The Gallery is presented as a form of reciprocal empowerment, in building discursive critical responses that unpick the conditioning factors of the gallery environment: 'They learn all sorts of things about how this institution works, and that changes their view of the world.' This statement can evidently be related to Foucault's critique of the institution as machine. Sam and Julia noted critical thinking as being of foremost importance in art education. With a view across Foucauldian theory, the earlier power/knowledge perspective emerges in their questioning of the possible influences on learning identities (Atkinson, 2002).

We could also interpret the emphasis on emancipation through Sartre here, as the young people are empowered to form their 'own opinions'. The association of emancipation with informed responsibility recurs in Julia's discussion of a participant in the Youth Art programme who, 'had opened her eyes to how she'd been forced to drop art'. In cases such as this, the concept of the existential free subject with social responsibility is a relevant critical tool (Detmer, 2005). The young person has made a 'free commitment' to learning in the arts, with a more informed choice based on direct experience of art practice.

Julia's representations of her experiences demonstrate that discourses of regulation permeate institutions outside the formal parameters for education. However Sartrean free will can appear particularly at odds with state education: the cultural knowledge of teachers does not have parity in social status with gallery education, and there are fewer teachers applying emancipatory theory; their focus is more frequently on subject knowledge as pedagogical credibility (Herne, 2006). One might ask how a teacher could really have free will when they have to meet the stipulations of exam boards and the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted)? To address such issues, existentialism focuses on *possibilisation* (Sartre 2003) through 'free thinking' as a form of problem-solving which can release creative ideas.

If we critique the utopian position through Foucault, or change emphasis, Sam's underpinning theory would tend to support the argument for practitioners using theory as a critical tool, to materially redress the historical and political power/knowledge gap (Foucault, 1980). These amplified voices act to reveal the 'hidden transcripts' to hegemonic discourses (Scott, 1990), thereby promoting learning as a more egalitarian intersubjective exchange (Atkinson, 2011). A Foucauldian interpretation of the function of emancipatory theory for Sam as a teaching subject, is that he clears a space around

himself through theorisation of practice, to secure a critical purchase on his functionality within the institution. This space is used to interrupt the normative division of teaching roles and learning subjects.

For a Foucauldian perspective on action for agency, which can be compared with the existential subject's ability for self-definition, we may move out from the earlier critical reflection on the subject's 'insertion' in the institution. In his lectures at the College de France (1970-1984) Foucault tracked the history of ideas around freedom of speech and self-governance. The later Foucauldian subject has the potential to shape the self, in the *art of life* (techne tou biou); he asks, 'couldn't everyone's life become a work of art?' (Foucault 1983, ed. Rabinow 1991, p. 350). This concept is arguably of current relevance for inclusive art education, and for wider social equality in putting forward cultural 'counter memories' (Foucault, 1977b). It is also useful in illustrating the benefits of providing access to creative thinking across the curriculum, since life itself is a vitally creative process.

Foucauldian 'technologies of the self include the care of the self, self-knowledge and parrhesia, which as discussed earlier is 'the technique' of freedom of speech (Foucault, 2005, p. 242). Sam and Julia can be seen as entering into these practices, as they avoid conventions that coerce the subject into conformity. To extricate oneself from institutional constructions of the self requires an insistence that practitioners are able to create a viable alternative situation, and a belief in their professional mobility which is not 'owned' by the institution. Practitioners can then freely engage the aspects of their personality which they consider important in their working role, rather than being subsumed in the neoliberal form of 'self-care' which is effectively a reduction to an economic niche (Burman, 2016, p. 14).

A focus on self-awareness, as identified through Foucault in the *technologies of self* and via *presence to* self in Sartre, was observed to help sustain the reflexive subjectivity which informs a careful balance of research, teaching and creative practice (Thornton, 2013). Foucault's studies of transformative freedom of speech as *parrhesia* could add to an existential toolkit for conceptualising freedom in practice (Matthews, 2008). For comparison, Sartre presented the frank speaking concept of 'good faith', as not denying own beliefs by going with the institutional flow, as opposed to 'bad faith', which can be represented in practice as acting in self-denial. The upholder of good faith, has refused to act on 'the inauthentic impulse' (Thornton, 2013, p.39) so that their integrity is not compromised.

Sam stated his belief in unconditional freedom of speech, and Julia's concern for the free voice of Youth Art participants presents an element of risk (Ball 2016; Peters, 2003) which relates to Foucauldian *parrhesia*, since 'The parrhesiaste is always less powerful than the one with whom he speaks' (Foucault, 2001, p.18). In The Gallery the discourses which function as a regime of 'the truth' (Foucault 1980, p.131; Smith 2010) are not concerned with the reflections cast by Ofsted inspectors or the exam boards as with formal education, but they do seek to maintain the cultural balance of power, the 'status-quo'. The Gallery's rituals of regulation impress on the self - practitioner and young person, the image of the marketable face of the institution. The paradox of radical creativity, such as Julia's, existing through its interface with a powerful organisation (Dean 2010, cited Ball & Olmedo, 2013, p. 87) is mediated by her work in building communication between The Gallery and the young people. Power tensions remain, however the young people can negotiate autonomy and be 'part of the solutions' in building shared objectives.

Conclusion

Research data presented here documents the challenges that practitioners in the arts face in attempting to move away from the institutionally regulated self, towards positions of agency. I have focused on two of the practitioners interviewed, who had a self-located centrality for critical thinking in practice. Their responses are indicative of counter hegemony in response to conditioning factors in post-compulsory and gallery education, and are not intended to be representative of all in these fields. Further critical practices could be researched in the voices of school teachers, university lecturers and students.

Julia and Sam are notable in that they seek to stir students out of passive learning patterns, engaging the mode of self that Sartre terms *being-for-itself.* Such purposeful activity is located by Foucault, in the challenge to reach one's potential through care of the self. I have observed that the focus participants raise their own and students' awareness of the hierarchical networks operating in their workplaces, and in the wider society. In doing so they care for the learning subjects as they 'care for themselves' (Ball & Olmedo, 2013, p. 86).

This research has considered how practitioners in both formal and non-formal art education form strategies for self-recognition in their work environments, and define themselves as different from a normative Other. Here I have theorised how arts educators question their 'points of insertion' in the institution, and seek to create alternative roles to hegemonic social constructions - outlining these roles through preferred terms.

The findings have implications for boundary work between galleries and formal education, in that comparable approaches have been located between the research participants that could assist in building philosophical bridges and more extensive practical connections. One of the key points, in which I relate to Herne, is that in the

current policy climate these groups could now identify further shared interests in strengthening diversity of representation in, and provision for, the arts and learning.

I have here presented the argument for a comparative theoretical lens, referring to Sartre and Foucault, as an emancipatory combination to support even the solitary practitioner as 'band of one' in an embattled art department. Drawing together the possibilities for applying theory to illuminate pathways of resistance, theory/practice – or praxis is located here as a support for processes of self-definition. These processes are also relational to the empowerment of colleagues and learners within institutional contexts. To counteract regulation of the self as a unit of productivity, perhaps we could nurture expansive spaces around the subject, as in dialogue with Sartre and Foucault. In making available a choice of critical tools and ongoing opportunities for reflexive self-development, we could equip those who seek to encourage a *presence to* learning in the arts, and a multitude of creative innovations.

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