

Artists Shaping Policies Through Higher Art Education. How Visual Artists Develop Policies that Affect their Lives, Practices, and Careers

Künstler gestalten Politik durch akademische Kunstausbildung. Wie bildende Künstler Politiken entwickeln, die sich auf ihr Leben, ihre Praxis und ihre Karriere auswirken

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Abstract

This paper centralises visual artists in policymaking processes. It foregrounds the ways artists influence and determine the policies that affect their lives, practices, and careers through their higher art education in London (UK) art schools between 1986–2016. The uninvited and indirect processes by which artists are shaping policies using their education is captured through artsbased/informed methods developed for listening, analysing, and interpreting alongside grounded theory methodology. The practitioner-led approach is key to noticing and raising the subtle agitations in the actions and inactions that underscore artists' role as policy progenitors. Artists' relationships with professional development and their experiences of structureless pedagogies, which are aligned to artistic myth are foregrounded. Their acceptances, rejections, and reframing of their fine art curricula is where their influence in shaping policy sits.

Dieser Beitrag stellt bildende Künstler in den Mittelpunkt politischer Entscheidungsprozesse. Im Vordergrund steht die Art und Weise, wie Künstler durch ihre Kunsthochschulausbildung an Londoner (UK) Kunsthochschulen zwischen 1986–2016 die Politik beeinflussten und bestimmten, die sich auf ihr Leben, ihre Praxis und ihre Karrieren auswirkten. Die unaufgeforderten und indirekten Prozesse, durch die Künstler mit Hilfe ihrer Ausbildung die Politik gestalten, werden mit Hilfe von kunstbasierten/informierten Methoden erfasst, die für das Zuhören, Analysieren und Interpretieren neben der Methodik der Grounded Theory entwickelt wurden. Der von Praktikern geleitete Ansatz ist ein Schlüssel, um die subtilen Aufregungen in den aktiven und passiven Handlungen, die die Rolle von Künstlern als politische Vordenker unterstreichen, wahrzunehmen und zu erheben. Die Beziehungen von Künstlern zur beruflichen Entwicklung und ihre Erfahrungen mit strukturlosen Pädagogiken, die sich am künstlerischen Mythos orientieren, werden in den Vordergrund gestellt. Ihre Akzeptanz, Ablehnung und Neuformulierung der Lehrpläne im Bereich der bildenden Kunst ist der Ort, an dem Einfluss auf die Gestaltung von Politik vorliegt.

Keywords

Artists / Künstler, higher education / akademische Ausbildung, cultural policy / Kulturpolitik, artistic research, career / Karriere, professional role / Professionalität

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Centralising Artists in the Policy Process

This essay presents a new perspective on visual artists' position in policymaking processes. Focused on the case of higher art education (HAE) in London, UK, this study looks at visual artists' positions, centralising them as policy progenitors. The current study departs from recent research into UK HAE which polarises around skills debates. Commonly, what skills should and should not be taught through fine art curriculum are disputed, and entrepreneurial skilling and professionalisation are argued for (THOM 2017) and against (NEWALL 2019). Notably, the debate has been positioned by curriculum designers, rather than those experiencing the curricula. Mostly, these accounts exhibit anxiety over professionalisation in HAE due to its instrumental alignment with top-down government industrial policies towards employability and enterprise (McROBBIE 2016). Professionalisation is perceived to situate HAE as an incubator for creative industries workers (McROBBIE 2016) and is held accountable for embedding the now dominant *Professional Curriculum* in HAE (HOUGHTON 2016). In fine art education, accommodating government industrial policies is seen as particularly unfeasible (McROBBIE 2016). Meeting employability agendas is largely encountered as impractical, due to creative labour often being precarious and difficult to measure in the visual arts, especially (TAYLOR/LUCKMAN 2020).

Given these arguments stem from those working within HAE design and delivery, unpacking the influence of the past thirty years of UK government employability and enterprise agendas on HAE from a different perspective is important to resituate the debate. In this paper, I move discussion forward by positioning the experiences and views of fine art graduates at the forefront, addressing this gap in knowledge. While other studies exist on people's experiences of creative education (ORR/SHREEVE 2018; NEWALL 2019), the focus on fine art education and visual artists is scant. Considering the effects of professional pedagogies by those affected adds critical practitioner perspectives to the discussion. I detail the impact on artist graduates' practices, careers, and lives of embedding professional pedagogies in fine art education, focusing on individuals who attended London art schools between 1986-2016. By spotlighting what matters to visual artists about their higher arts education, the focus moves away from binary views of skilling as outlined above towards a more nuanced debate. I argue for visual artists' agentic capacities over the policies that affect them and show how the artists I studied are shaping policy through their fine art education. This essay

provides a new outlook, where artists are understood as affecting policy changes despite the dominance of the professional curriculum and government agenda it is tied to. Significantly, this study seeks to shift understanding of visual artists' position in policymaking processes in HAE. Having almost consistently occupied the margins of policy processes since 1985 (JONES 2019), my research reframes that to position visual artists' voices, experiences, actions, and disruptions at the centre.

Findings are developed from my doctoral study; *Artists and The Art School: Experiences and Perspectives of Fine Art Education and Professional Pedagogies in London Art Schools, 1986-2016* (SCARS-BROOK 2021). My central question for the study was—What are visual artists' experiences and views of their undergraduate fine art education and encounters of professional development in London art schools? It was formulated to improve understanding of why people attend these art schools and their views on professional training, and to find out the influence of the professional curriculum on artists' identities, practices, careers, and lives from artists themselves. In this essay, I extend this question to consider—How do visual artists who attended London art schools between 1986–2016 shape policies that affect their lives and careers using their fine art education? I discuss the ways the artists I studied influence change through their education. The findings are vital to debates on policy in creative education, on pathways into the creative industries, and creative work in the UK. The implications may be wider reaching, certainly in settings where professional curricula are prevalent in fine art education further afield.

I used Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM) with specifically developed artsbased/informed methods. This afforded a close examination to surface the complexities in the experiences and views of artists of their fine art education. My practitioner-led approach is also a focus of this essay, through which I highlight developments in practitioner-led research for understanding practitioner perspectives. I signify how developing critical qualitative methodologies underpins ways artists can be listened to, and how what matters to artists about their education can be understood in policymaking processes. Being an art schooled artist and someone with overlapping experiences, the findings in this paper were only made possible through this subjective approach. The artsbased/informed methods were developed to challenge my biases, deepen my sensitivities to the artists' experiences, and address my familiarity with narratives the artists raised. This afforded necessary analytical distance from the data to distinguish the artists' positions from my entangled

emic situation. Through this I have found the artists' active and unin-
vited actions, inactions, subtle agitations, indirect, and direct rejections
of art school pedagogies that impact policy. The approach and findings
contribute to relevant educational, employability, and enterprise poli-
cies for the creative industries being developed that are effective, inclu-
sive, and applicable in visual artists' education and careers.

Practitioner-led Observations & Translations

Grounded theory methodology was chosen for its connections with in-
terpretivism (CHARMAZ 2006; BIRKS/MILLS 2015) which is aligned
with my relative ontological, and subjective epistemological research
paradigm. My insider status, as an art schooled artist, also underscores
this subjective approach. Because of these factors I used GTM as a meth-
odology with a social constructivist approach to understanding, and with
an adaptable set of methods (BIRKS/MILLS 2015), suiting this non-hy-
pothesis and practitioner-led study.

Data was collected using semistructured interviews, a standard
method of GTM (CHARMAZ 2006). I interviewed twelve visual artists
across three graduate exit points in the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s. The
participants were both selfselected and purposively selected (to ensure
a diverse sample) from people who responded to a participant call-out
for graduates from London art schools who had attended between mid/
late-1980s to the mid/late-2010s. The location and timeframe were cho-
sen to explore the influence of the professional curriculum—developed
in London art schools beginning in the mid1980s, and prevalent since
(HOUGHTON 2016)—on visual artists. The sample comprised; six fe-
male, six male (no one expressed being genderqueer or nonbinary); five
identified as having working class origins, one as upper-middle class and
the rest did not identify; nine were white British, two were black British,
and one white Swedish; there were a range of ages with equal numbers of
participants from the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s exit points; two had stud-
ied as mature students (this refers to someone who is 21 or over when
they begin their higher education studies in the UK). The sample size of
twelve is justified in GTM research where data is “often obtained from a
relatively small number of sources” (BIRKS/MILLS 2015: 38). This num-
ber was established when no further new information could be found in
the data via the simultaneous data collection and analysis I carried out.
This point is known as the “saturation point” (FLICK 2009: 428) and

is understood to occur around ten and fourteen participants in studies with homogenous groups (GUEST et al. 2006), like the participants in this study who were all London fine art graduates.

To find out what it was like for the artists during art school and afterwards, and particularly what their experiences and views of professional curricula were, I developed questions which were adapted from a self-interview, as per GTM processes where interview questions are “derived from analysis of the first interview” (CORBIN/STRAUSS 2015: 241). The participants were asked:

1. Why did you go to art school and why did you choose that particular one?
2. What was it like being at art school? What did you do?
3. Currently, we see a lot of discussion about personal and professional development related to art schools. Do you have an opinion about this? What was your experience of this?
4. What did you do following art school, and how did you go about this?
5. What did you take away from your art school experience?
6. What are you doing now?
7. If you had one wish today, what would it be?

Follow up questions were asked based on themes occurring in previous interviews. These evolved through GTM theoretical sampling processes, whereby data collection and analysis are carried out concurrently until the, aforementioned, saturation point. This addressed possible limitations with the chronological questioning and permitted participant-led discussion. My emic researcher position aided my asking relevant follow-up questions, facilitating empathy between myself and the participants, and increasing their abilities to engage more openly. Use of this method was important in destabilising inherent researcher/participant power relations that can occur in studies. Compassion and trust between the participants and myself were deepened by my position as a practitioner researching this topic. This closeness underscored the processes of collecting and analysing, and permitted the open and emotionally unconstrained responses I detail shortly.

GTM recommends the use of three sequential cycles of qualitative data coding (QDC) (Open, Axial, and Selective respectively) (CHARMAZ 2006). I expanded on these methods, establishing artsbased/informed methods through my situated knowledge as a practitioner. To generate insights I included doing, making, drawing, speaking, filming, editing, and performing throughout the QDC processes to facilitate my fracturing

and thematically piecing back together what the artists said. Using specifically developed creative methods moved away from a straightforward analysis, enabling a rigorous critical exploration of the data, and supporting my navigations of the common ground the participants and I shared. The insights gained from this practitioner-led approach centralised a close examination of visual artists' experiences and views in their own words. Before discussing artists as policy progenitors, I contextualise the historical relationship between HAE, visual artists, and policy.

UK HAE: Policy & Pedagogy

Since the mid-1980s, visual artists' position in policymaking processes and the policies that affect them has mostly occupied the peripheries. According to Jones, artists spent many years being subjected to "top-down policy interventions" (1985–2002), gained a brief period of precedence being "placed at the centre of policy" (2003–2006), and, since 2008 they have, less favourably, been "positioned at the margins" (2019: 25). Jones's (2019) study shows that visual artists have recently been under prioritised in policymaking processes which affect them. Here, I focus on the relationship between UK HAE policy and wider UK cultural policy, highlighting the interconnections and subsequent effects on fine art pedagogies. The connections are the backdrop for understanding how visual artists contribute to policymaking through their education.

Creative education has consistently been linked to industry and been instrumental to political agenda, most notably industrial policy. The first UK art schools were established to meet the needs of manufacturing to increase numbers of skilled British designers in competition with designers from Europe (STRAND 1987). These art schools, including London's Royal Academy (founded in 1768), and the Government School of Design (1837) today known as the Royal College of Art (RCA) (STRAND 1987), delivered government agendas by producing generic, ally skilled graduates with standardised styles. They would become the workers competing with European neighbours in design and manufacturing economies. Art school's teleological beginnings chime with more recent studies (TAYLOR/LUCKMAN 2020), which draw key operational connections between HAE and the cultural and creative industries (CCIs), where HAE occupies an instrumental position as gatekeeper, provisioning pathways into the CCIs, satisfying government employability and enterprise agendas, and industrial policies.

In subsequent years, art schools were set up in many UK towns. By 1959 there were “180 dedicated art and design institutions in the UK”, however, in 2012, there were “only a dozen left” (BECK/CORNFORD 2012: 1). This decline, and the policies which prompted it, are notable for having a galvanizing effect on visual artist-students in policymaking processes historically. Many of the newer art schools were funded by local authorities and had developed independence from higher education; they were free from delivering the aims of central government (BECK/CORNFORD 2012). However, this changed with 1960s reforms to art and design education introduced through the *First* (and *Second*) *Coldstream Reports* of 1960 (and 1970 respectively). The reports introduced academic assessments and tougher entrance requirements, separating visual arts from their historic association with trades to raise the profile of art schools (STRAND 1987). Art school education was academicised, used new systems of measurement, and became aligned once again to government agendas.

At the same time, between 1968 and 1973 thirty new colleges were created, called polytechnics, amalgamating local technical colleges, art schools, and other colleges. For art schools, this signalled a retroactive move towards central funding and governance akin to universities (STRAND 1987). Art school numbers depleted, as they were absorbed into fewer, large umbrella institutions. Significantly, the changes inspired rebellion among art students, and in 1968, against a backdrop of socio-political unrest throughout Europe (the Paris riots of '68 were in full swing), the now infamous protests began in London's Hornsey School of Art. These acts of resistance are historic examples of artist-students disrupting and actively determining policies that would affect them and future artist-students as they opposed the new “academic entry requirements and formal assessments” in efforts to “set the terms of their own education” (WALTON 2018: 2). The sitins impacted HAE policy creation towards a more student-centred curriculum (WALTON 2018:). Whether this influence remains, however, is difficult to extrapolate from today's studentcentred curriculum in UK universities, where, since the introduction of tuition fees in 1998, the student as consumer takes precedent in the higher education service industry (BUNCE et al. 2017).

Also in the 1990s, additional changes to UK higher education occurred through the *Further and Higher Education Act* (GREAT BRITAIN DFE 1992) against the backdrop of *New Public Managerialism* (NPM). NPM is a dominant government ideology that imposes the “values, structures

and processes of private sector management [...] upon the public sector” (RADICE 2013: 408), including education. This established a new era which subsumed the polytechnic colleges into universities, and the remaining art schools in UK towns were either culled, absorbed, or became departments of universities. Critically, through this period, art schools became part of higher education and were instantiated into the institution of education.

Art schools’ institutionalised position in universities today, means they are directly accountable for delivering on policy. The need to meet government employability and enterprise agendas has impacted curricula and pedagogy design, leading to the advent of the *Professional Curriculum*, circa 1990 (HOUGHTON 2016). This is “tied tightly to a belief that education should be instrumental, and be aligned to enabling students on leaving to earn a living and contribute to a nation’s economy”, and that “everything becomes subservient to this main goal of professional preparation” (HOUGHTON 2016: 115). Art schools are definitive gatekeepers to the CCIs, tasked with provisioning workers for these occupations. Furthermore, arts courses are responsible for meeting the same regulations and marketised evaluation systems as other university courses, including the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). These two frameworks are evaluative tools used in the UK to assess teaching and research quality. They are critiqued for scrutinising public spending in UK higher education and pitting institutions against each other (O’REGAN/GRAY 2018). Art schools’ position in universities means they are also interconnected to wider sociopolitical factors, for example neoliberalised learning, and instilling individualisation through pedagogies that make everything the responsibility of artist-students, ranging from formulating their own project briefs to understanding and regulating mythologised identities. Art schools are thus responsible for furthering the cultures of marketized measurement and evaluation systems within the institutions they now exist in. The experiences, views, and actions towards policymaking of the artists in this study stem from the realities of this environment.

What Makes Visual Artists Policymakers?

In assessing artists’ roles in policymaking processes, I consider the question; what are visual artists *doing* through their education that we can consider as policymaking? This section outlines findings relating to artists’ self-ledness and self-regulated learning which extends to osmotic

and hidden/incidental ways of learning. I highlight how these ways of learning have been absorbed into creative pedagogies, and discuss artists' reactions, actions, and inactions towards areas of curricula, including professional development. I consider how acceptances, resistances, and rejections of art schooling are negotiated while artists attended art school, reflecting on the influence of these negotiations on policy development. Finally, I discuss what I call Art School Absorptions (ASA), to indicate artists' choices and agency in their learning, rather than a more passive act of *being taught*. I reflect on experiences of what shaping ones' own curricula is like from artist-graduates' perspectives.

Self-ledness & Self-Regulated Learning

The importance of self-ledness and self-regulated learning for UK fine art students is paramount. Independent learning is deeply embedded in HAE curricula. In fine art courses students are expected to demonstrate "independent self-motivated studio practice" (UAL 2017: 16). Critically and uniquely in fine art this is expected from the start of their courses (ORR/SHREEVE 2018: 115). Expectations depend upon and entrench predominant structureless pedagogies throughout art and design education in the UK. Structurelessness is most prevalent and extreme in fine art degrees, where the "no brief" brief" (ORR/SHREEVE 2018: 112) prevails—meaning students must generate their own tasks to work on to produce their artwork. Though interconnected, I distinguish self-ledness and self-regulated learning as distinct from the kind of independent learning that is embedded in structureless pedagogies. Instead, I suggest that artist-students deliberately negate art school practices, shaping curricula, pedagogies, and educational policies as a result. How these subtle and sometimes overt agitations and manipulation are observed and taken on board by curricula and pedagogy designers is key in this process.

I found artists' assertions of their engagement with fine art education to be underpinned by levels of self-regulation. This was especially notable in relation to professional development and the (single-choice) structureless pedagogies in which artist-students, in the art schools studied, are expected to operate. The topic of self-ledness and self-regulation surfaced in my interviews with artists around ways of learning. The term osmotic learning was used by some of the artists I interviewed to convey self-initiated acquiring of knowledge and understanding about the systems of art worlds they would be entering. Osmotic learning was

related to peer-to-peer knowledge exchange, which, to the artists, felt independent of what was being provisioned and expected by their art schools. For example, one artist suggested they osmotically learnt from other students how to “be public”, and how to “tell people that there’s a show on” (P10: 2719-2749). Another discovered otherwise hidden elements about the “business” they were getting into, that their art school did not impart, but which they found out, such as there being “women [at art school], who were sleeping with quite powerful artists, and they would then get opportunities that started with that” (P6: 1057–1061).

The notion of osmosis has historical connotations in education, often implying a topdown transmission of knowledge from teacher/master to students. “[L]earning by osmosis” that positioned the “teacher as exemplar” in the customary “masterclass” (OCEAN n.d. cited in NEWALL 2019: 107) was common in the 1960s and 1970s (NEWALL 2019). However, this perception of osmotically learning, situates students as passive learners who lack active capacities, failing to see “the teacher and student as cocreators” (LUPTON, 2013: 161, cited in ORR/SHREEVE, 2018: 9). My findings suggest an alternative viewpoint. Osmotically learning was deliberately asserted as something that was student-led, and which fell outside of the art school’s jurisdiction. Artists asserted their agency over creating self-governed aspects of learning, diminishing the art school’s influence over what and how they learnt.

The artists I interviewed also asserted hidden, incidental, and unofficial ways of learning and making. They became aware of the “aims or ethos” (P8: 2074) of their course implicitly and understood well that learning took place through the “course structure” [lessness] (P10: 2050-2053). Others found discreet and forbidden areas of art school buildings to work in, where collectively they pushed the edge of the sanctioned studio and learning/making environment. One artist remembered their studio as being like a “free project space” where they were “jig-sawing holes in the walls” (P2: 345). They recalled this pursuit as a collective act, saying,

[...] we did take walls down and rebuild walls and build ceilings and really literally carve up the fabric of the building on a regular basis. [...] If you needed something, you know you could climb in [between the walls] and root through and maybe find something that hadn’t been used for five years and take it out. So we felt like our space was furtive and we could find things. (P2: 345-349/622-626)

The autonomous, unsanctioned, and sometimes hidden, incidental, and covert explorations were positioned by artists as important modes of learning that, crucially, were self-led, self-regulated, as well as peer-to-peer and

collective. Some of these ways of learning have been absorbed into creative pedagogies already. The encouragement of artist-students to create their own curricula is particularly prevalent, and art school pedagogy designers openly state that “for many students the tutor becomes someone who does not teach; they see their learning as self-taught—‘we teach ourselves really’, and the teaching becomes invisible” (ORR/SHREEVE 2018: 143). But, perhaps more than merely enacting this individualistic and neoliberalised tendency to take on or be given the responsibility of creating ones’ own curriculum, it is in understanding these areas of where, how, and why artist-students self-regulate learning that indicates where artists are expressing the shape of their learning, and where art schools can take note.

Accepting & Rejecting

The kinds of skills artists said they developed at art school were couched in terms of what was self-regulated, and what was chosen. I call this Art School Absorptions (ASA), which refers to artist-students choosing to take what held value to them from their art schooling. This underlies self-regulated learning and denotes both acceptances and resistances to certain curricula. I found ASA pertaining to five key areas of skilling; Perspectival Shifts, Communication & Defence, Fabrication & Making, Transferability & Employability, Art World ASA, and Visual, Verbal & Critical Perception. The artists talked of developing (art) world views, political concerns, and empathy (P12: 1025–1026 & P8: 2773–2780). They said they learned specialised language, gained an “ability to talk about artwork proficiently” (P11: 2243–2245), and understood how to “defend ideas” (P6: 572). They felt they would be more “useful as an employee” (P8: 2962–2991) having attended art school and left with “a whole range of skills that are really applicable to...life in general” and “other fields” (P6: 463–469). While the art schools these artists attended have succeeded somewhat in meeting anticipated outcomes, credit was not freely given to the art schools by the artists when discussing their ASA.

Indeed, within all of these learning areas artists predominantly claimed responsibility for self-initiated acquiring of these skills, and some suggested they already had these abilities before attending art school. This was particularly relevant to skills relating to making their artworks, where the artists denied art schooling helped them build on

their technical skills. One suggested they made the “same work” (P7: 1735) at art school as before attending. In denying being skilled in making through their art schooling, assertions of prepossession of artmaking skills are raised and images of the mythic artistic genius, born with innate creative talent surface through the disavowal. This highlights interconnections between skills, myths, and artists’ identities; where being taught interferes with shared ideas of who the artists I interviewed believed they were or wanted to project themselves as being. ASAs are tightly interconnected, with artistic myths and identity. Significantly, artists’ accounts of skilling showed how and where artists manipulated and constructed their personal curricula. What they took, valued, and have come to recognise as important as they looked back from their positions as graduates, as well as how this is related to beliefs, myths, and identities, was indicated in their descriptions of becoming skilled. By foregrounding artists’ voices, these findings offer new perspectives around skilling artists and skills debates relating to art schooling, which have polarised skills into hard versus soft, practical versus conceptual, and the debate about whether art can or cannot be taught.

Alongside accounts of skilling, artists interviewed unreservedly rejected, disparaged, and often disavowed explicit professional development. Recollections of professional development varied from, “there may have been one lecture on the business of art in the third year” (P2: 404–405), to there not being “any real discussion about it” (P12: 1831), and “there was never talk about what happens next” (P4: 2921). Some, who acknowledged there had been a level of professional development recalled a “bunch of workshops” delivered in a “half-ironic way” (P7: 775–791), and another remembered being advised, “as long as you’re always thinking about your art, you’re still an artist” (P1: 1232–1234). This final point is a key factor in terms of the relationship I found between professional development, ASAs, and artists’ identifications. It indicates that what artists absorbed and rejected of art school curricula is based on an ideal of their imagined possible selves, which shuns the image of a formally professionally developed artist, and again raises the mythic image. Indeed, as one artist overtly stated about art; it was “vulgar, to talk about the business end” (P6: 1151).

Artists have consistently been found to reject alignment with commodification and business practices (BANKS 2017), finding association with entrepreneurship “unbecoming” (WESNER 2018: 36). My findings add to this debate, demonstrating the continued distrust of the marketisation of artists’ work and labour, and persistent anxiety over

professional development programs that focus efforts on commodifying art object production, reducing art education into mere incubators of creative industry workers.

Discontent & Disappointment

Within the artists' descriptions of their self-led and self-regulated engagement with skilling and professional pedagogies, the artists offered unconstrained emotional details of their disappointments and discontent about aspects of their fine art education. These findings eschew typical ideas of creative workers who are "continuously positive" (GILL 2014, cited in TAYLOR/LUCKMAN 2020: 272), "cheerful if not exuberant" and consistently presenting "a professional stance" (McROBBIE 2016: 40). Artists I interviewed offered deeply personal and emotional accounts of their art school experiences. Unsettling descriptions centred on their being marginalised, and their resulting feelings of culpability. Specifically, some felt excluded and disregarded by the art schools they attended due to their inability to participate in structureless pedagogies.

Artists stated that the environment of structurelessness was pervasive, and insufficiently supportive. They felt their "learning...suffered" (P10: 924) from not knowing what the structures were that they were supposed to be working in. They recalled "wanting something, but not knowing how to talk about what it was that I wanted" adding that "though the resources were there, [they] didn't know how to ask for them" (P10: 2833–2940). Others stated that at art school "the biggest general challenge for people [was] that you have to provide your own structure" (P8: 1098–1108). It was unexpected to find that in the structureless environment freedoms over making were limited, and artists explained constrictions they encountered as they recalled being expected to only make "big, dry, masculine works" (P2: 1116–1118), or "formal objects" to not "annoy anyone" (P11: 2414–2419). Of deep concern was another artist who, in describing their experience of freedoms, stated art school was emotionally "really hard [and] very alienating" as they "dealt with a lot of racism, not only from other students, but from tutors, combined with sexism, and the obvious classism, as well" (P6: 512–517) and so "didn't feel any freedom" at art school (P6: 3292–3294). This disturbing account was variously reproduced across the artists in my study (P2:1105; P5: 2382; P8: 686; P10: 4073; P11: 2414), corroborating its prevalence

in HAE (HATTON 2019), and highlighting that marginalisation of this kind also deeply impacted the purported freedoms of structurelessness.

These findings suggest that freedoms offered under structureless pedagogies may be circumscribed, exclusive, and unequally available to those experiencing them. Participation is conditional on an artist-students' ability to self-impose structure and provisioned to those who can somehow meet the unwritten rules of involvement through trial and error. That the artists I interviewed struggled in this environment left them feeling let down and culpable. This was a lasting discontent felt by participants from the 1990s group, as well as those from the 2000s and 2010s. It raises questions that art schools can consider, regarding (un)equal participation in the mode of learning on offer, and inequalities around the individualisation of cultural workers that the structureless model seems to support. It is within the artists' emotional reflections, and in the drawing out, noticing, and framing of these, that new considerations of this core pedagogical model can occur and the urgency for policy change may be surfaced.

Structurelessness & Artistic Myth

There is a tangible link between structurelessness and artistic myths. Underlying structureless pedagogies are notions of special affordances granted to artists to *only* make. These are based on particular mythologised freedoms given to artists that are rarely obtainable by most (if any) artists. In artistic myth, it is the born talented/gifted genius that is afforded such privileges and freedoms to focus all of their time and energies into making their masterpiece. The mythic solo artist has been perpetually separated from others in society historically (BAIN 2005). This designated isolation absolved artists from following normative societal rules (BAIN 2005), characterised either as exceptional or dissenting (BAIN 2005). Historically, creativity is romanticised as emancipatory, and artistic labour idealised as less constrained than other work. Structurelessness draws on these idealised myths of freedom.

The allure of these mythologised freedoms are decisive factors in artists attending art school and used to reason some of their difficulties when there. Certainly, it impacts on the lasting emotional fallout from art school after graduation. Artists justify attending art school in relation to prospective freedoms, saying they "wanted the immersion...wanted to be immersed in creative practice" (P2: 33–36) and wanting "the

absolute freedom that, maybe art school could, and...does perpetuate” (P11: 1376–1381) was a decisive factor. As justifications, these highlight that the artists experienced some freedoms in terms of being only an artist, and that, even if brief, structurelessness delivered on its promise.

After art school, the artists interviewed sought to dismantle, disrupt, and reposition myths that had been perpetuated through structureless pedagogies, as well as in art school more generally. One artist asserted that they were more than *only* an artist, rejecting what their art school had repeatedly told them, and had orchestrated through structurelessness. Being persistently told “you’re an artist” (P3: 3864), led this artist to feel they would be seen as *only* that. Instead, the artist identified by other (paid) work they carried out, because they did not want to be perceived as “privileged” (P3: 3786) enough to make art full time. Other artists also sought to dismantle artistic myths that held them as romantic, or starving artists, which they felt restricted what type of artist they could operate as. One artist discredited any “subscription to the romance of the starving artist” (P2: 854), stating it was “something that I don’t think’s helpful”, as it contributed to “limiting beliefs about what financial status was available” to them (P2: 850–853). A different artist rejected mythologised descriptions claiming they hadn’t wanted to “waste three years [at art school] with the romantic idea of being an artist” (P11: 138), claiming to be more “serious” (P11: 138) about being an artist than that. Another artist wanted to highlight artistic processes to dismantle artistic myths around making and ask for better remuneration, breaking away from the idea of “the artist just slaving away and creating this work” which is “this mystique of the artist” (P12: 2531–2533).

The artists’ awareness that artistic myths are perpetuated and maintained through art schooling underscores their intentions to reshape the image of the artist and conversations around art making and artistic careers by dismantling commonly held myths currently maintained through HAE. These indirect rebellions can be folded into policymaking processes as rejections of current pedagogical models in art schooling and in the development of new ones.

Conclusion: Interpreting Policymaking Through Art Schooled Tensions, Conflicts, & Contradictions

Underlying the discussion above there is a legacy of tensions, conflicts, and contradictions in the lives, practices, and careers of art-schooled artists.

These tensions are imprinted through professional pedagogies and structurelessness which perpetuate myths that both afford and constrict certain freedoms. The contradictions cause lasting emotional distress, obstructing processes of artistic identification, artmaking, and career-building. Artists' identities are formed in this conflict, which directs tensions into ongoing identity and professional navigations.

The self-led actions artists take at art school epitomise their grappling with conflicts between overarching structure and personal agency; legitimated by attending art school (structure) and/or their self-definition (agency). Self-ledness was outlined as a subtle agitation, yet, underlying it, is a tension between the intention and effect of art school pedagogies. Artists' interactions with myths perpetuated and maintained through art schooling are complex and bound by contradiction; at once essentially motivating, while also adversely impeding. Some myths are accepted, and others are rejected, and myths create a conflict in core motivational identities around wanting to only make art.

Underlying these conflicted scenarios is a persistent struggle around definition, of who has the authority and power to determine, shape, and configure artists' identities, myths, freedoms, and careers; the art school, wider myths and stories in society, or artists themselves. These findings unsettle and influence important aspects of art school pedagogies, that are not normally challenged this way. By centralising artists in the debate, and amplifying their voices, a series of direct influences on HAE policy developments that are relevant to the organisation of artists' lives and management of their careers can be considered. These include:

- Disputing the function and longevity of art schools' pedagogical tradition of structurelessness that is shown to uphold unequal participation, and asking art schools to recognise their part in perpetuating these inequalities and the repercussions on graduate art practices.
- Challenging and rethinking the applicability of structurelessness so artist-students can engage more equitably, and artist-graduates have more opportunity to construct more secure and relative careers after art school (and sooner).
- Asking art school educators to (re)consider how myths are embedded into their curricula and pedagogies, and to understand the influence this has on artists' identities, expectations, and prospects.
- Recommending professional development is realised by developing pedagogies around artists' needs in nurturing sustainable

artistic careers, and making available additional forms of ongoing support that are understood to help artist-graduates navigate the lasting legacy of art school to support their career paths.

These recommendations highlight a distinct need for HAE to reassess the structureless curricula policy in fine arts courses, to move away from pedagogy based on mythologised, and outdated, notions of what artists can be. Considering a more relevant structure to learning is crucial for artists to develop relative skills for a range of practices. Though limited to a distinct group of art schools in the UK, this research reveals insights which can have wider implications for students and graduates elsewhere where structureless professional pedagogies exist. It can help redress the deep influence of artistic myths on artists' education, practices, careers, and lives nationally and internationally. Crucially, the recommended amendments to HAE policies stem from artists' narratives that disrupt the status quo. The artists in this research were not explicitly invited to participate in shaping policies which affect them but were invited to have their experiences of their fine art education and professional art practices listened to. Through practitioner-led study, the narratives drawn out underscore areas for policy change in HAE in the UK towards positive change in artists' education, careers, and lives.

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