

Propositions for a counter-economy of assessment: Adventures in the assessment of creative arts in higher education**Francois Jonker**

ORCID: 0000-0002-2471-7714

Cape Town Creative Academy / University of the
Western Cape, South Africa

f.jonker@ctca.co.za

ABSTRACT

This article considers assessment practices within the neoliberal conditions of higher education by posing questions to conceptions of value. As a motivating thrust, this article asks: might there be generative potential that remains unexplored, due to assessment's direct linkage to the production of human capital? With its central emphasis on value, this article turns towards Brian Massumi's *Postcapitalist Manifesto: 99 Theses on the Revaluation of Value* (2018). Guided by Massumi, I compose speculative propositions with which to explore the potential for a postcapitalist reworking of value within the context of assessment. The propositions offered in this paper by no means exhaust the emergent potential of re-thinking assessment, yet my aim is to sow but a few generative seeds that might expand on the potential of what (else) assessment might do. In engaging assessment otherwise, this article foregrounds assessment practices that are pertinent to the creative arts (with particular interest in the pedagogical convention of the studio crit), not as a means to suggest that arts-based disciplines have a superior and well-resolved approach to assessment, but rather to leverage the already tenuous relationship between arts education and assessment. As its objectives, this article aims to (1) contribute to the underrepresented discourse on the assessment of creative arts in higher education and to (2) explore the potential for re-imaginings of arts-based assessment practices to leak into the wider discourse of assessment as a whole. The intention is not to deliver fully formed methodological formulae but to think through assessment with propositions that might be expanded upon through speculative experimentation and future inquiries.

Submitted: March 5, 2023

Accepted: October 9, 2023

1. Introduction: Questioning assessment's role in the shaping of value

Assessment frames what students do. It provides an indication of what the institution gives priority to in making judgements, it provides an agenda more persuasive than a syllabus or course outline and it therefore has a powerful backwash effect on all teaching and learning activities.

(Boud, 2007:21)

Assessment serves as a pivotal point of valuation—where the activities of learning and teaching are measured in ways that assert what is deemed as valuable within the educational experience. During assessment, student efforts are exchanged for ‘objective’ indicators of approval/disapproval according to generalised standards that bolster the purpose of the educational project. Assessment delimits what matters and what counts as acceptable learning through the translation of qualitative encounters with learning into quantitative evaluations of their resulting artefacts¹. Assessment, above all else, is a practice concerned with value. In keeping with the thrust of neoliberal capitalism in academia, the South African Council on Higher Education (CHE) positions “value for money in relation to effectiveness and efficiency” as one of the four pillars for quality in higher education (CHE, 2021:30). Value, in this instance (as in most other valuations of exchange), relies on the promise of surplus value—an agreeable profit in the form of future employability. Private higher education institutions, through an ever-increasing client service orientation, trade (on a cost-per-credit basis) in the market of employable knowledge and skills. Assessment, in this configuration, serves as a central nexus for this value exchange—measuring whether a body is, in fact, fit for work. With higher education becoming an increasingly competitive market, statistical information on employability, throughput and pass-rates are often strategically foregrounded as a means of establishing an institutional ‘edge’ (Gilroy & Du Toit, 2013:257). The process of assessment thereby becomes entangled into a complex tension not only with the philosophical aims of higher education but also with the business development goals of institutions, and the various demands of the job market. As such, Allais (2018:45.) argues that “education exists relationally” and she therefore calls for analyses that interrogate how educational institutions interact with other societal institutions and the ‘system’ at large (Allais, 2018:44) For Allais (2018:44) such analyses should avoid “attempts to quantify the individual [...] and the social [...] benefits of higher education, but rather [try] to

¹ This article makes use of ‘learning-artefacts’ as a means to signal the various objects-of-learning that are taken as the objects of assessment. As the primary focus pertains to creative arts, artefacts include any form that art might take, ranging from more traditional media to contemporary forms that include time-based, performance-based, and expanded-field works.

understand better the relationships between universities, society and the economy in different contexts today.”

The complexity of education’s relational existence manifests in its dual functions of “screening” and “development” (Halliday 2015:151). For Halliday (2015:151) the screening function of education operates as a process of meritocratic sorting of individuals into coveted spots in prestigious institutions, reputable degrees, and sought-after job opportunities². The development function, in turn, speaks to the role of education in preparing individuals for autonomous citizenship and a sustained sense of civil well-being (Halliday, 2015:151). This article does not suggest that employability (and the sorting function that prioritises job placement as an objective) should be disregarded as a primary aim for higher education, especially in South Africa, considering its staggering unemployment rates³. It does, however, seek to challenge the manner in which a fixation on pleasing the job market (screening) results in a dilution of critical thinking and exploratory practice (development). By means of a concrete example, this article responds to sentiments such as the one uttered by a colleague of mine (a lecturer in a highly technical field of digital specialisation), complaining that courses on decolonial and queer theory “waste” his students’ time, as these “philosophical” discussions have no bearing on the profession for which students are being prepared. For this lecturer (and others who share such sentiments), emphasis must be squarely placed on appropriate applied skills that are directly translatable into suitable employment⁴. This article responds by asking whether the implicit pitting of employment-centred-skills against critical thinking (and practice) does not merely reproduce the very conditions that characterise the current job markets as exclusionary and ridden with inequalities. Might there be generative potential that remains unexplored, due to assessment’s direct linkage to the production of human capital⁵?

² One would be remiss to engage with this screening function as a neutral and non-political process as it is characterised by a history of purposeful exclusion of women, persons of colour, and persons with various so-called disabilities. The screening function of education remains a highly politicised mechanism that has far reaching impacts on society at large (Allais, 2018).

³ The latest statistics (compiled in the third quarter of 2022) report that 40,5% of South African individuals between the ages of 25 and 35 are unemployed (Statista, 2023).

⁴ Along with the high demand for specialised technical skills, there is an increased pressure from both industry and educational regulators for higher education to develop graduates’ non-technical employable skills (or so called ‘soft skills’, often termed as graduate attributes) (Sitto, 2020:52). This produces a challenge of prioritisation, as the fluctuating range of in-demand applied skills pulls curricula towards deeper specialisation and the dynamic range of desired graduate attributes pulls towards the need for generalisation.

⁵ The production of human capital, under neoliberal capitalism, occurs predominantly as a process of self-fashioning—“surfing the movements of capital”— through self-motivated participation in the production of surplus value (through acts such as education, up-skilling, participating in property and investment markets and so forth).” (Massumi, 2018:31). Massumi (2018:32) argues that “[h]uman capital was invented by neoliberal capitalism to replace the figure of the worker in an attempt to render obsolete the antagonism between worker and capitalist that structured the preceding industrial phase of capitalism.”

While higher education is undisputedly captured by neoliberal capitalism (and to which degree remains open for argumentation), it purports, in the South African context, to serve the purpose of not only “address[ing] the development needs of society and provid[ing] the labour market [...] with [...] high-level competencies and expertise necessary for the growth and prosperity”, but also of “contribut[ing] to the socialisation of enlightened, responsible and constructively critical citizens [...] encourag[ing] a reflective capacity and willingness to review and renew prevailing ideas, policies and practices based on a commitment to the common good [as] an important vehicle for achieving equity” (CHE, 2013:7 - emphasis added). As such, higher education remains caught by the simultaneous mandates of social justice and transformation as well as the demands of the global economy (Belluigi, 2014:351). At institutional level, this tension often emerges as a contrast between curricular content and educational protocol, where the prevalence of neoliberal audit culture urges towards a technocratic foregrounding of the latter (Belluigi, 2014:352).

In support of the aim for social equality, the introduction of outcomes-based frameworks (such as the NQF and HEQF⁶) led to a shift from norm-referenced assessment to criterion-referenced assessment (CRA) that evaluates individual learning as opposed to benchmarking students in relation to the overall performance of their peers (Belluigi, 2014:356). Yet, while CRA acknowledges that different students arrive at the educational experience with differentiated socio-cultural ‘capital’, the assumption persists that the process of learning will lead them to attaining the same shared standardised outcomes (Beets, 2007:184). The student-centeredness espoused by CRA thereby continues to perpetuate the normative function of assessment. The breadth of student-centeredness might further be questioned by the fact that very few institutions critically involve students in the design, structuring, or evaluation of assessment practices (Gilroy & Du Toit, 2013:259), nor do they encourage feedback regarding the ways in which assessments are conducted. It is therefore not surprising that a vast number of students experience assessment as something “done to them and not [...] with and for them.” (Beets, 2007:185). Bryan and Clegg (2006: xvii) argue that “[a]ssessment probably provokes more anxiety among students and irritation among staff than any other feature of higher education.”

What is lacking in assessment practices is a deep consideration for how assessment might be purposefully refigured in order to become more response-able. Response-ability in higher education, for Bozalek, Zembylas and Tronto, is more than “simply examples of the type of learning that can

⁶ The South African National Qualifications Framework and Higher Education Qualifications Framework.

take place when power relations [...] are acknowledged; they also constitute ethico-political practices that incorporate a relational ontology into teaching and learning activities⁷.” (Bozalek, Zembylas & Tronto, 2021:5). Response-ability thereby actualises responsibility by configuring the conditions for learning in ways that account for co-constitutive relations so as to “render each other capable” (Murriss & Bozalek, 2019:882). Response-able assessment practices would therefore refrain from hierarchical arrangements such as teacher/student, student (as agentic subject)/project (as passive object) and assessment (as an active process)/grades (as fully determined measurements). Approaching assessment with response-ability (and the relational ontology it requires) suggests a radical reworking of assessment to the degree that such theorising might seem unattainable in practice. Yet, this article argues for a conceptual exploration of such possibilities as a means to open up unexplored value that might be uncovered should assessment be approached with response-ability.

With its central emphasis on value, this article turns towards Brian Massumi’s *Postcapitalist Manifesto: 99 Theses on the Revaluation of Value* (2018). Guided by Massumi, I aim to compose generative propositions with which to explore the potential for a postcapitalist reworking of value within the context of assessment⁸. Massumi’s critical, imaginative, and fabulatory analysis of conceptions of value within the framework of neoliberal capitalism offers a suitable background from which to probe at the manner in which value—in the context of assessment—is contingent on the insidious co-optive operations of capital. This article echoes Massumi’s assertion of the need for anarcho-alternative conceptions of value in the face of neoliberal hegemony (2018:3-4 - emphasis added):

In the absence of [...] strong alternative conception[s] of value, it is all too easy for normative gestures to slip back in [...] Standards of judgement are simply allowed to operate implicitly [...] To take back value is *not to reimpose standards of judgement* providing a [new] normative yardstick. That would do little other than to make the oppressiveness explicit again [...] More radically, *it is to move beyond the reign of judgement itself*.

⁷ The notion of relational ontologies stems from the field of posthumanism and feminist new materialism. Relational ontologies differ from classical conceptions of ontology, which take being to be centred in the agentic independently existing human individual. Relational ontologies, in contrast, emphasise the processual nature of becoming as always-already in co-constitutive relation to various human and non-human others, thereby rejecting the pre-existence of the individual prior to their entanglement in material-discursive arrangements. A relational understanding of ontology demands a refiguring of agency. As such, Barad (2012:54-55) renders agency “not something that someone or something has to varying degrees [...] rather, agency is an enactment [and] not about choice in any liberal humanist sense [...] Agency is about possibilities for worldly re-configurings.”

⁸ Propositions are used here in the Whiteheadian sense as “lures for feeling” (Whitehead 1978: 25). As conceptual prompts, propositions figure attunements to the unknown potential that drives speculation toward new and differentiated ways of thinking, doing, and being (Manning, 2020:67).

The propositions that follow by no means exhaust the potential for challenging assessment through alternative conceptions of value. Yet, this article aims to sow but a few generative seeds that might expand on what (else) assessment can do. In engaging assessment otherwise, this article foregrounds assessment practices that are pertinent to the creative arts, not as a means to suggest that arts-based disciplines have a superior and well-resolved approach to assessment, but rather to leverage the already tenuous relationship between arts education and assessment. Scholarship on assessment, and prominent models and taxonomies primarily function under the assumption of written or verbal work as the object of assessment (Gilroy & Du Toit, 2013:258). The disciplinary specificity of the creative arts (pertaining to its multimodal and processual approach) offers generative potential for engaging the complexities of assessment, yet there is a remarkable lack of scholarship dealing with the assessment of creative practices in South Africa (Belluigi, 2014:349). As its objectives, this article aims to (1) contribute to the underrepresented discourse on the assessment of creative arts in higher education and to (2) explore the potential for re-imaginings of arts-based assessment to leak into the wider discourse of assessment as a movement towards an alter-economy of value in higher education. The intention is not to deliver fully formed methodological formulae but to challenge conventional approaches to assessment with propositions that might be expanded upon through speculative experimentation and future inquiries.

2. Questioning the object(ive) of assessment

Proposition: Embrace the processual beyond of use-value

The concept of *function* needs to be replaced with the more plastic concept of operation, making clear that [...] *operativity is processual*.

(Massumi, 2018:1–2 - emphasis added)

The undervaluation of the learning process is a symptom of neoliberalism's "valorisation of quantity over quality" that occurs in higher education through the foregrounding of efficiency and performance-measurement (Bozalek, 2021:2, 14). In this neoliberal equation, students are positioned, on the one hand, as the objects of assessment (from which data might be extracted with regard to success rates) and, on the other hand, as consumers demanding certification and its associated success as the product of their tuition fees (Rattray, 2018:1489). These conditions result in an increasingly risk-averse academic environment—characterised by what Kinchen and Winstone (2017) refer to as academic frailty—where 'pushing' students into uncomfortable (albeit generative) terrains is avoided at all costs (Rattray, 2018:1489). Such academic frailty stultifies the development

of renewed academic approaches by fixating on grade results as the primary goal and sole indicator of success (Rattray, 2018:1491).

Assessment reproduces neoliberal capital's process of capture, which "appropriate[s] and subsume[s] [value] under the principle of perpetual quantitative growth" (Massumi, 2018:39), both in the form of growth as institutional credibility (through the production and circulation of success-rates) and growth as the accumulation of academic credit (through the checking-off of programme outcomes through the sequential completion of summative assessments). The process of learning is mapped as a punctuated teleological progression, tracking students' advancement through a checklist of applied skills as evidenced in complete and fully formed outcomes. This linear reading of learning urges toward prioritising the exchange value of outcomes-for-results over the use-value of transformative higher learning, thereby foregrounding the 'screening' over the 'development' purpose of education.

Such an instrumentalist view of assessment sits in stark contrast to the commonly held understanding of the value of learning programmes within the creative arts. Here, value is generally considered to be rooted not only in the innovative crafting of artefacts but also in the generation of new knowledge. Novelty is valued in the creative arts through pedagogic strategies that embrace creative experimentation and iterative problem-solving in ways that lead to the crafting of propositional artefacts as responses to assessment tasks. As such, pedagogic engagement and assessment activities often appear as void of 'right answers' as it is assumed that appropriate and relevant knowledge is to be created anew during the course of the learning (Orr & Shreeve, 2018:30). This aspect of creative art makes assessment resistant to standardisation (Orr & Shreeve, 2018:30), and requires an understanding of value as emergent.

A revaluation of value must contrive to develop [the] *connection between value and vitality* [...] It must make *qualitative excess* a postcapitalist virtue—beyond the myth of equal exchange [...] and the rhetoric of commensuration.

(Massumi, 2018:8 - emphasis added)

Manning argues for "a pragmatics of the useless"⁹ (2020) as a valuation of the emergent nature of processes prior to them being organised according to prefigured evaluative criteria (Manning, 2023:57). For Manning, to be artful¹⁰, is to engage with that which has "not yet found its form" in a

⁹ For Manning (2020:97), the useless is a "refus[al] to take use-value as the measurement of experience [so that] other ways of living [might] become possible.

¹⁰ Art is made artful is its expression of the "irreconcilable tension that results from making something, while intentionally allowing the materials and things that make up that something to change the making in mind [...] until it becomes something radically singular, something neither wholly of the mind that made it, nor fully the

manner that avoids being captured by reproduction and mimesis (Manning, 2020:23). “Art,” for Manning, “must never seek to define in advance its value [...] the taking-form must not fall into the category of prevaluation” (Manning, 2020:23). Artfulness, or the “force of art” as Atkinson (2018:1¹¹) terms it, is disobedient to established valuations of what constitutes Art. For Atkinson, it is this sense of disobedience that serves as the most valuable condition for learning through and with the force of art (Atkinson, 2018:60)¹². When considering the question of value, Manning argues for a movement away from the assumption of inherent value towards questioning the conditions under which a learning event’s coming-into-being expresses itself and spills over into lived experience. (Manning, 2023:19). Value—for a pragmatics of the useless—is not a matter of calculability (Manning, 2020:12) but a matter of accounting for the incalculable that sits at the core of the emergent nature of the artful (Manning, 2020:13). In this equation “[v]alue must [...] be activated each time anew” (Manning, 2020:23).

The force of art takes art not as an object, but as a conduit, bringing into question how it transforms thought and action (Manning, 2020:59). When engaging with the assessment of artistic practices (through an acknowledgement of a pragmatics of the useless) one is urged, therefore, to move beyond a fixation on the ‘use-value’ of learning-artefacts in a shift towards attending to the process from which such artefacts emerge. In this light, the immanence of a student’s creative practices becomes the object of the evaluative inquiry of assessment¹³. How propositional solutions (in the form of artefacts) emerge from a student’s navigation of the conditions of their encounter with learning opens up assessment as an exploratory adventure (Atkinson, 2017:142)¹⁴. It is thus not a case of evaluating art through prefigured criteria but to engage “the force of art [that] challenge[s] us to think” beyond that which is already known (Atkinson, 2017:142). Response-ability, when foregrounded in the adventure of assessment, therefore, seeks to create the conditions in which response is not directed in a unilinear fashion from the examiner to the ‘object’ being examined. Instead, response-ability allows for the artfulness that moves through the student’s processual

matter from which it was made. It is here that art incompletes itself, and appears.” (Chan, 2009, quoted in Manning, 2020:29-30).

¹¹ Disobedience, as Atkinson uses the term, does not mean oppositional, but rather speaks to an expansion of thinking and practice towards new possibilities that resist the normalising forces of established modalities (Atkinson, 2018:60).

¹² Disobedience, as Atkinson uses the term, does not mean oppositional, but rather speaks to an expansion of thinking and practice towards new possibilities that resist the normalising forces of established modalities (Atkinson, 2018:60).

¹³ Immanence, for Atkinson (2017:142), refers to “internal relations and values of modes of existence that facilitate capacities to act. It relates to those local flows of experiencing that facilitate how someone makes sense of, conceives or feels particular experiences” in their immediacy.

¹⁴ While Atkinson (2017:142) makes this argument with a more generalised focus on pedagogy, I suggest that the same can be said about assessment in particular.

efforts to inform how the examiner comes to conceive of Art's value. A movement towards response-able assessment is thus a continuous being-on-the-move that breaks free from standardised criteria and quantifiable metrics by embracing co-constitutive qualitative encounters with art-in-the-making. Assessment criteria might therefore be more effective (and response-able) when negotiated in collaboration with students as a means to embrace the dynamism of artfulness and the diversity of processes (or 'skills') that might be operationalised as responses to process-centred assessment tasks. Poon, McNaught, Lamb and Kwan (2009: 341), identify multiple benefits stemming from the participation of students in the interactive negotiation of assessment criteria, which include: (i) increasing awareness of what constitutes meaningful learning engagement, (ii) providing an appropriate and relatable framework for enhancing learning practice, (iii) critically engaging with and clarifying the objectives of a task, and (iv) developing a scaffolding for how to engage with learning. The process of negotiating criteria, however, requires guidance, which could occur through the use of open-ended constraints to assure that negotiated criteria align with appropriate learning outcomes¹⁵. As part of a processual engagement with learning, the negotiation of assessment criteria has the potential to prevent the sense of disconnection that occurs when translating qualitative experiences into standardised quantitative norms. Additionally, criteria negotiation offers the opportunity for learning to become more attuned to the sociocultural specificity of students' learning experiences.

3. Questioning the standardising urge of assessment

Proposition: Resist the pull towards normalisation

To succeed in revaluing value [...] the post-capitalist future will have to *decouple value from normativity*.

(Massumi, 2018:62-63 - emphasis added)

Discourse on assessment must be widened by an awareness of the implications of the sociocultural context in which learning occurs (Boud & Falchikov, 2007:9). While there has been a noticeable shift towards social constructionist approaches to pedagogy (that foreground the construction rather

¹⁵ In the South African context open-ended constraints may be developed by using criteria a-j as described in the NQF level descriptors (South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), 2012) as a starting point. The suggestion for open-endedness speaks to the need for highlighting qualitative points of interest, while allowing for contextual specificity to be enriched by students' own learning experience and processual discoveries.

than the reproduction of knowledge¹⁶), Lubbe and Mentz (2021:2) note a continued prominence of behaviourist assumptions in the assessment of higher learning. Following a realist critique of social constructionism, one might question the effect of ‘vocationalism’, and the marketisation of institutions. One might argue that these ‘screening’ conditions of higher learning tend to favour standardised graduate attributes to the detriment of the development of complex processual learning that functions as the means to create new knowledge and transform practice. This concern is of particular pertinence in the arts, where students are expected to develop novel creative outcomes that challenge the known limitations of what Art might be (Orr & Shreeve, 2018:22, 23). In the arts, the pedagogical emphasis on process aims to foster students’ ability to “see [and] realise the ‘not-[yet]-known’” (Atkinson, 2015:44). Accordingly, a vocational approach in the arts needs to be approached as an open-ended dynamic and generative dialogical process that moves away from notions of mirroring or reproduction (Orr & Shreeve, 2018:24). ‘Preparing’ students for the world of professional practice, therefore, demands positioning formal knowledge as co-composing and in dynamic relation to the situated specificity of student’s experiential learning¹⁷. As such, learning experiences should not be approached as static ‘texts’ open to a stable reading or interpretation, but should rather be considered as ‘sites’ for the negotiation of significance and meaning (Belluigi, 2014:355).

Traditional assessment practices, however, make use of generalised criteria in order to arrive at prescribed readings of students’ art practices and the objects they produce (Atkinson, 2018:105). As such, assessment functions through representationalist operations that devalue the immanence of the force of art in favour of normative judgement (Atkinson, 2011:105)¹⁸. As normative judgement belongs to the prefigured field of assessment (and in the case of art, aesthetic) discourse, it thereby fails to penetrate the situated specificity of learning-artefacts (Atkinson, 2011:99, 106). Normative

¹⁶ In its emphasis on students’ active involvement in the construction of knowledge, social constructionist approaches promote the notion that assessment cannot be treated as separate to teaching and learning and should be engaged as a pedagogical tool rather than as a *a posteriori* comparative judgement (Lubbe & Mentz, 2021:21). Social constructionism, however, operates under representationalist assumptions by assuming that objects (such as learning-products) are fully knowable as the products of culture (Murriss, 2022:43), and that knowledge is developed in a predictable linear fashion.

¹⁷ The notion of knowledge as situated, for Haraway (1988), suggests that all knowing is embedded in the intersectional specificity of the knower’s social, cultural, and historical milieu.

¹⁸ Representationalism, for Barad (2007:46), is “[...] the belief in the ontological distinction between representations and that which they purport to represent.” In its reliance on the notion of reflection (the assumed correspondence between the material world and descriptions thereof), representationalism thereby limits itself to the domain of epistemology and forecloses engagements with experience (Barad, 2007:803; Mazzei, 2021:562). In a movement away from a foregrounding of representations, Barad suggests turning attention towards the causal relationship between material-discursive practices and material phenomena so as to emphasise the entanglement of ontological and epistemological concerns (Barad, 2007:45).

evaluations consequently fail to engage the entangled emergence of situated knowledge and practice by indexing learning to idealised conceptions of what constitutes an artwork, in accordance with normative discursive matrices (Atkinson, 2011:99, 106). A notable shift in art practice and discourse, towards the end of the 20th century, caused a movement away from the modernist foregrounding of formalism, where “the form or visual surface of the artwork alone is its content, and artworks are believed to belong to [a] realm of transcendence or enlightenment”, towards a postmodern emphasis on the contextual embeddedness of the work as materially and discursively entangled in a social-political context (Belluigi, 2009:702). However, normative assessment practices often continue to perpetuate formalist assumptions regarding assumed transcendental values concerning the mastery of technical qualities in accordance with an established (Euro/Western) canon.

This reproduction of canonical knowledge proceeds not merely in the definition of evaluative frameworks but also takes on a performative dimension within the context of the studio crit¹⁹. The studio crit is an interactive pedagogical strategy common to most creative arts programmes. During the studio crit, students are tasked with sharing their work (either in progress or as complete artefacts) with their lecturer as well as their peers (and often to external examiners). The studio crit takes on a discursive format, where students are provided the opportunity to contextualise their work within their broader practice, their ethico-political orientation, as well as the material and processual encounters that have led to its coming-into-being.

As such, the studio crit serves the purpose of what Carless (2020) identifies as the need to guide students in the development of feedback literacies through coaching and iterative, interactive grappling with feedback. Feedback, for Carless (2020: 144), should not be considered as activities centred on the one-way ‘transmission’ of information from teacher to student, but should rather emphasise the reciprocal nature of learning and the development of internal evaluative judgment capacities. The studio crit performs this role by creating the conditions for multiple readings and diverse interpretations to be shared, as responses are commonly elicited not only from the lecturer but also from peers. However, the master-apprentice model that serves as the inherent foundation for the lecturer-student relationship conditions the studio crit with an underlying performative

¹⁹ Performativity, as developed by Judith Butler (1990), exceeds the understanding of performance as the theatrical act of imitation or dramatised expression to describe how identity emerges through activity (or performance) rather than being a transcendental essence. A performative account consequently understands identity as a continuous state of becoming that occurs in iterative co-constitution with cultural practices and social norms.

dimension where attention is awarded not solely to the work being presented but also towards the performance of idealised responses.

The power dynamic nested in the student-lecturer relationship calls forth a form of behavioural modelling in which peer-respondents might be praised for, or encouraged to respond to artefacts in a manner that mimics the behavioural patterns and vocabulary modelled by their lecturer (as a representatives of an established art community)²⁰. Particular performances and vocabularies are rewarded, and where opportunities for response are limited to the typical mode of talking-with-confidence-in-front-of-the-class, certain students are systematically excluded, and the enactment of their artistic persona undervalued. Webber refers to this process as a form of acculturation that functions through the reproduction of a disciplinary habitus (2005:280)²¹. The studio crit is intended as an inclusive and participatory space in which student-artist identities can be formed through the trial and error of their social participation. Implicit normative criteria, however, persist as a “coercive choreography” of assimilation based on abstract conception of what an Artist is expected to be, commonly personified by the presence of the lecturer (Webber, 2005:280). This notion of implicit behavioural modelling is even more troublesome when considering that the diversity of teaching staff (in South African higher education institutions) does not always reflect the diversity of the student body (Arbuckle, 2020:140), bringing into question the risk of exclusionary normalising behavioural modelling that urges towards the systematic reproduction of particular forms of socially and culturally embedded tacit knowledge. As such, individual practices and ways of knowing are productively shaped through normative modelling in ways not necessarily authentic to the situated experience of each student as they work towards integrating formal learning with their broader sociocultural reality.

In a movement towards response-ability, one might ask how the conditions of the studio crit could be refigured to move away from its foregrounding of normalising responses (or any urges towards unidirectional feedback) towards an opening up of diverse modalities for authentic response. This could include popular practices such as small group discussions, peer-dialogues, and written responses, as well as less typical practices such as walking-dialogues, peer-excursions, gift-giving,

²⁰ This is largely due to the tendency for higher education institutions to employ professional creative practitioners as teaching (or part-time teaching) staff. Such lecturers thereby occupy a dual role, as representatives of the institution and representatives of the professional domain.

²¹ The notion of habitus, as conceptualised by Pierre Bourdieu (1977), relates to a series of “internalised dispositions” that are acquired through socialisation and experience (Swartz, 2002:63). Habitus functions as a “matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions” that are acquired through processes of acculturation that prescribe which social behaviours are favourable through systems of social reward (Bourdieu, 1977:95).

and artistic responses through acts of making. A movement away from normalising assessment practices needs to find ways of responsively adapting to the situated specificity of learning encounters and thus demands resistance to the impulse of generalisation.

4. Questioning the quantifying urge of assessment

Proposition: Resist capturing qualitative value through the generalising force of quantification

The first task of the revaluation of value is to uncouple value from quantification. Value must be recognised for what it is: *irreducibly qualitative*. [...] Appealing to transcendent values, [...] only raises the structures of normativity to the absolute.

(Massumi, 2018:4 - emphasis added)

The conflation of use-value with exchange-value is disseminated in higher education through assessment—as a process of generalising economisation according to the myth of equal exchange²². CRA practices function through the deployment of generic equivalents that equate the outcomes of qualitative learning encounters to quantitative values²³. The process of quantification serves to flatten the processual nature of learning into static valuations that do not account for the wild potentialities that flash up in occurrence with learning²⁴. Contrary to the generative potential of situated process-oriented qualitative encounters, conventional assessment practices tend to capture student efforts as static temporal-material configurations without awarding adequate attention to the process of learning or to subsequent learning experiences that over-spill assessment results and feedback (Boud & Falchikov, 2007:3). In fact, very little attention is awarded to the vital excesses produced by assessment, with feedback and results often only reaching students at the conclusion of a learning unit, when it is ‘too late’ to make an impact (Boud, 2007: 18; Boud & Falchikov, 2007:4)²⁵.

²² Summative assessment practices reproduce the myth of equal exchange in a manner that mirrors the operations of the classical conceptions of the market that take as its foundation the assumption of currency as a general equivalent to which all value can be quantitatively measured (Massumi, 2018:6).

²³ The superimposition of general equivalents in the South African context occurs through the nested approach set forth by the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), 2007:6) where discipline-specific specialised criteria (that operate on the level of learning programmes) must be mapped out in accordance to the generic standards set out as level descriptors.

²⁴ See Snaza (2013) *Bewildering Education*.

²⁵ While one might argue that feedback can never be ‘too late’ to contribute towards life-long-learning, receiving feedback at the end of a learning unit is often experienced by students as being out-of-sync with their learning and therefore not received with the necessary curiosity and attention.

The registering of the qualitative by the quantitative is by nature reductive.

(Massumi, 2018:49)

While the inclusion of formative assessment practices offers a means to activate the process of learning, Boud (2007:14, 17), argues that “taking up formative assessment might not go far enough²⁶” if not adequately partnered with an emphasis on sustainable assessment. Boud (2007:19) proposes a move towards reframing assessment around the purpose of “learning to inform judgements” through the development of students’ capacity to “evaluate evidence, appraise situations and circumstances astutely, to draw sound conclusions and act in accordance with this analysis”. Boud thereby places emphasis on assessment practices that encourage “reflexivity and self-regulation through acknowledgement of the centrality of judgement as a process.” (Boud, 2007:20 - emphasis added). The interweaving of reflective pedagogies and feedback processes (such as the studio crit) provide students with the opportunity to move towards an embodied state of what Carless (2015: 974) refers to as ‘connoisseurship’, in which evaluative judgement functions as a self-propelled component of embodied creative practice. Within the context of the creative arts, it is widely accepted that knowledge is process-rich and embedded in material-practice (Orr & Shreeve, 2018:19). Learning can therefore be described as a continuous and iterative immersion into the practice of art (Orr & Shreeve, 2018:25)—an immersion that speaks to learning as “embodied, embedded, embrained, encultured, and encoded or located in bodies, routines, brains, dialogues [and] symbols”, without the ability to sensibly separate one particular type of knowing from its entanglement with the others (Orr & Shreeve, 2018:28). The notion of embodied knowledge is essential to understanding the materiality of creative practices, where the prompts for learning occur experientially (through sight, sound, smell, touch, memory, imagination, and affective resonance) (Orr & Shreeve, 2018:28). Knowing, in the arts, is (in)formed through these embodied practices as a processual and reflective uncovering of learning-through-making.

Learning as embedded in practice offers a rich potential for the development of students’ capacity for evaluative judgement through an engagement with what Manning describes as immanent critique—a process of building the tools for valuation from the process itself [...] as an engagement-with [rather than] a judgement-over” (Manning, 2023:57). Immanent critique differs from other forms of evaluative feedback in that it resists a reliance on generalised criteria in a movement

²⁶ Boud critiques the manner in which formative assessment practices such as self- and peer-assessment are commonly conducted as mere procedural mechanisms in service of meeting regulatory and quality assurance measures. In such instances, formative assessment fails to make a substantial contribution to learning (Boud, 2007:22).

towards an attunement to how a process ‘leaks’ into thinking-feeling (Manning, 2023:64)²⁷. Immanent critique engages with what is immediate to the creative process from within its taking-place. Through an ethics of response-ability, students might be guided in the development of their feedback literacy by attending to the ways in which a process or its resulting artefacts offer immanent feedback (or responses) by asking questions such as: “Which unexpected questions does the work unearth?”, “What is the material urging me to do?”, “What next step is the process suggesting, in its taking-form?” Such engagements with immanent critique, as a form of feedback, infuse learning with the practice of “creat[ing] the conditions for practising elsewhere” by cultivating a response-ability that ensures that a student is never to be without generative feedback, as they develop the rigour to engage process as a co-constitutive force (Manning, 2023:57 - emphasis added).

A movement towards response-able immanent critique is a movement away from lack-based assessment²⁸, shifting the parameters of valuation from the domain of generic standards towards that which is personally meaningful to the individual student. When emphasis is directed towards the co-constitutive nature of the creative process students are empowered to draw insight from their own situated position (or socio-economic context) rather than through prescriptive and normative frameworks. Immanent critique thereby opens up to the surplus of what can be measured through standardised criteria and thereby repositions feedback from claims of retrospective judgement to prompts for future explorations in thinking and doing.

²⁷ “Thinking-feeling”, for Massumi (2015:94), “is not the thinking or feeling of [...] a particular subject. It pertains more directly to the event, what passes in-between objects and subjects [...] as an event, it is already carrying each (object and subject) beyond itself, making it other than it is just now, and already more than what it was just then.”

²⁸ Lack-based assessment relates to the tendency to evaluate student work in relation to standardised outcomes that they did not manage to achieve.

5. Questioning the finality of assessment (in lieu of a conclusion)²⁹

Proposition: Embrace occurrent value and its improvisational spilling into surplus-value

Emergent collectivity would be valued as the product. By emergent is meant [...] its taking-form [...] This would be an *occurrent* value [...] the product would be the continuing of the creative process.³⁰

(Massumi, 2018:115)

Work produced by a student might require the lecturer to visually apprehend the work, smell the work, touch the work, participate in the work, click through the work, listen to the work, experience the work or watch the work unfold. The work might be huge, tiny, heavy, strange, temporal, digital, analogue or elusive; in other words, the output forms will be hugely diverse. Grading student work is a multi-sensory practice.

(Orr & Shreeve, 2018:125)

The material configurations composing the evaluation of creative practices are immensely variable and contextually contingent. As such, learning-artefacts are never fully knowable, as their legibility is dependent on the conditions through which they are encountered. This poses problems to the manner in which transparency is widely purported as a key value of assessment. Yet, one might argue that the valuation of artistic works and practices will always produce ‘gaps’. For Orr and Shreeve (2018:58), such gaps in legibility “are not simply voids waiting for clarity to be poured in; they are not an absence of clarity; they are the presence of ambiguity.” One might therefore question how such gaps might be operationalised to harness the occurrent value of ambiguity in service of response-able learning.

As an alternative to attempting to reconcile these gaps with an outcome-focused, quantifying and normalising thrust towards transparency in assessment, response-able approaches could condition assessment not as retrospective valuation, but as an event flush with the potential to actualise new and unanticipated forms of knowing and being. One might ask: when composing the conditions of assessment, how might one refigure its orientation to explore what might be distilled from the process of learning and assessment that exceeds the capture of representationalist valuation? How

²⁹ In the purposeful avoidance of capturing this article’s value, I choose not to ‘conclude’ with concrete finality but rather to end with an invitation for future propositions in service of continuing the adventure of conceiving value anew.

³⁰ Occurrent value, for Massumi (2018:115), is processual value in-the-making in its event-form. Occurrent value does not seek to extract a product from the welter of the transversal intra-actions that constitute an event, but rather places value on the self-driving emergent creativity that courses through an event.

might one attune to the gaps of ambiguity—to that which resists linguistic articulation—as seeds for new thoughts, techniques, processes, and practices that would otherwise remain beyond the grasp of knowability? How might immanent critique be activated in a manner that transforms the studio crit from an archiving of the value of students’ efforts to a springboard for future thinkings, makings, and becomings?³¹

This article does not suggest that assessment models and conventions should be completely and abruptly overturned, as assessment has far-reaching consequences and, therefore, must be engaged with through deep thinking and careful consideration. Instead, this article suggests an exploration of how current conventional modes of assessment and feedback might be oriented as purposeful scaffolds in the development of feedback literacies, evaluative judgement, and an attunement to immanent critique. While higher education most certainly needs to be sensitised to the needs and demands of their graduates’ potential employers, response-able efforts must be made in order to defend learning from being subsumed into mere quantitative engagements with the use-value of learning-artefacts in a manner that foregrounds the reproduction of standardised ways of thinking, doing and making. Higher education, for Buikema and Thiele (2018:35), serves as one of the most important arenas in which practices can be liberated from the oppressive forces of neoliberal hegemonies through counteractions rooted in “the power to imagine”. A speculative movement towards a re-evaluation of value must endeavour to engage learning as a form of processual becoming - a becoming that continuously produces qualitative excess. It is here that the epistemological and ontological surplus-value of learning resides. Albeit ridden with gaps filled with ambiguity, this more-than of learning might be harnessed through response-able adventures in assessment as a means to expand the value of higher education in ways still unimaginable.

References

- Allais, S. (2018). South African higher education, society and economy: What do we know about their relationships? In Ashwin, P., & Case, J. (eds.) *Higher Education Pathways: South African Undergraduate Education and the Public Good*. Cape Town: African Minds. 44-60.
- Arbuckle, K. 2020. Between a formalist rock and a contextually hard place: The gaps and tensions challenging visual arts curricula in South African higher education. *Critica Arts*. 34(5): 139-152. DOI: 10.1080/02560046.2020.1840084.

³¹ While the scope of this article does not allow for such an exploration, future inquiries (and academic practitioners seeking to engage the occurrent value of the studio crit) could seek to engage Manning’s notion of the anarchic and its potential for the generation of process seeds as a means to further advance the generative potential of assessment in art education. (See Manning, 2020).

- Atkinson, D. 2011. *Art, Equality and Learning: Pedagogies against the State*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Atkinson, D. 2015. The adventure of pedagogy, learning and the not-known. *Subjectivity*. 8(1): 43-56. DOI: 10.1057/sub.2014.22.
- Atkinson, D. 2017. Without criteria: Art and learning and the adventure of pedagogy. *The International Journal of Art and Design Education*. 26(2): 141-152. DOI: 10.1111/jade.12089.
- Atkinson, D. 2018. *Art, Disobedience and Ethics: The Adventure of Pedagogy*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Barad, K. 2007. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Barad, K. 2012. Interview with Karen Barad. In Dolphijn, R. & van der Tuin, I. (eds.) *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies*. Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press. 48-70.
- Barrow, M. 2006. Assessment and student transformation: Linking character and intellect. *Studies in Higher Education*. 31(3): 357-375. DOI: 10.1080/03075070600680869.
- Beets, P. A. D. 2007. (Re)positioning assessment in higher education: the case of Geography in South Africa. *South African Journal of Higher Education*. 21(4): 577-584. DOI: EJC37362.
- Belluigi, D. Z. 2009. Exploring the discourses around 'creativity' and 'critical thinking' in a South African creative arts curriculum. *Studies in Higher Education*. 34(6): 699-717. DOI: 10.1080/03075070802644911.
- Belluigi, D. Z. 2014. The paradox of 'teaching' transformation in fine art studio practice: Assessment in the South African context. *International Journal of Education Through Art*. 10(3): 349-362. DOI: 10.1386/eta.10.3.349_1.
- Boud, D. 2007. Reframing assessment as if learning were important. In Boud, D. & Falchikov, N. (eds.) *Rethinking Assessment in Higher Education: Learning for the Longer Term*. London: Routledge. 14-25.
- Boud, D. & Falchikov, N. 2007. Introduction: Assessment for the longer term. In Boud, D. & Falchikov, N. (eds.) *Rethinking Assessment in Higher Education: Learning for the Longer Term*. London: Routledge. 3-13.
- Bourdieu, P. 1977. *Outline of a Theory in Practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Bozalek, V. 2021. Slow scholarship: Propositions for the extended curriculum programme. *Education as Change*. 25: 1-21. DOI: 10.25159/1947-9417/9049.
- Bozalek, V., Zembylas, M. & Tronto, J. 2021. Introduction, in Bozalek, V., Zembylas, M. & Tronto, J. (eds.) *Posthuman and Political Care Ethics for Reconfiguring Higher Education Pedagogies*. London: Routledge. 1-12.
- Bryan, C. & Clegg, K. 2006. *Innovative Assessment in Higher Education*. London: Routledge.

- Buikema, R. & Thiele, K. 2018. Feminism and feminist studies in neoliberal times: Furthering social justice in higher education curricula. In Bozalek, V., Braidotti, R., Shefer, T. & Zembylas, M. (eds.) *Socially Just Pedagogies: Posthumanist, Feminist and Materialist Perspectives in Higher Education*. London: Bloomsbury. 31-45.
- Butler, J. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Carless, D. 2015. Exploring learning-oriented assessment processes. *Higher Education*. 69: 963–976. DOI: 10.1007/s10734-014-9816-z
- Carless, D. 2020. From teacher transmission of information to student feedback literacy: Activating the learner role in feedback processes. *Active Learning in Higher Education*. 23(2): 143-153. DOI: 10.1177/1469787420945845.
- CHE. 2013. *The Aims of Higher Education*. [Online]. Accessed 25-02-2023. Available from: <<[>>](https://www.che.ac.za/file/6431/download?token=1HXDcpUT#:~:text=Higher%20education%20equips%20individuals%20to,achievement%20among%20South%20African%20citizens.>>>></p>
<p>CHE. 2021. <i>A Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) for Higher Education in South Africa</i>. [Online]. Accessed 21-02-2023. Available from: <<>
- DHET. 2007. Higher Education Qualifications Framework. [Online]. Accessed 25-02-2023. Available from: <<[>>](https://www.dhet.gov.za/Policy%20and%20Development%20Support/The%20High%20Education%20Qualifications%20Framework%20(HEQF).pdf)>>
- Gilroy, S. & Du Toit, P. 2013. Current approaches to the assessment of graphic design in a higher education context. *International Journal of Art and Design Education*. 32(2): 256-268. DOI: 10.1111/j.1476-8070.2013.01758.x
- Halliday, D. 2016. Private education, positional goods, and the arms race problem. *Politics, Philosophy & Economics*. 15(2): 150-169. DOI: 10.1177/1470594X15603717
- Kinchen, I.M. & Winstone, N. E. (eds.) 2017. *Pedagogic Frailty and Resilience in the University*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Lubbe, A. & Mentz, E. 2021. Self-directed learning-oriented assessment and assessment literacy: Essential for 21st-century learning. In Mentz, E. & Lubbe, A. (eds.) *Learning through Assessment: an approach towards self-directed learning*. Durbanville: AOSIS Publishing. 1-26.
- Manning, E. 2020. *For a Pragmatics of the Useless*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Manning, E. 2023. Post philosophies and the doing of inquiry session 6: A conversation between Erin Manning, Halbe Kuipers, Myra Morales, and Diego Gil. *Qualitative Inquiry*. 29(1): 55-68. DOI: 10.1177/10778004221106762
- Massumi, B. 1992. *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press.

- Massumi, B. 2015. *Politics of Affect*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Massumi, B. 2018. *99 Theses on the Revaluation of Value: A Postcapitalist Manifesto*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Mazzei, L. 2021. Speculative inquiry: Thinking with Whitehead. *Qualitative Inquiry*. 27(5): 554-566. DOI: 10.1177/1077800420934138
- Murris, K. 2022. *Karen Barad as Educator: Agential Realism and Education*. Gateway East: Springer.
- Murris, K. & Bozalek, V. 2019. Diffraction and response-able reading of texts: The relational ontologies of Barad and Deleuze. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*. 32(7): 872-886.
- Murris, K. & Bozalek, V. 2021. Causality. In Murris, K. (ed.) *A Glossary for Doing Postqualitative, New Materialist and Critical Posthumanist Research Across Disciplines*. London: Routledge. 40-41.
- Orr, S. & Shreeve, A. 2018. *Art and Design Pedagogy in Higher Education: Knowledge, Values and Ambiguity in the Creative Curriculum*. Oxford: Routledge.
- Polanyi, M. 2009/1966. *The Tacit Dimension*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Poon, W., McNaught, C., Lamb, P. & Kwan, H.S. 2009. Improving assessment methods in university science education with negotiated self- and peer-assessment. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*. 16(3): 331-346. DOI: 10.1080/09695940903319729
- Rattray, J. 2018. Affect and ipsative approaches as a counter to pedagogic frailty: The guardian of traditional models of student success. *Higher Education Research and Development*. 37(7): 1489-1500.
- SAQA. 2012. *Level Descriptors for the South African National Qualifications Framework*. [Online]. Accessed 25-02-2023. Available from: <<https://www.saqa.org.za/docs/misc/2012/level_descriptors.pdf>>
- Sitto, K. M. 2020. Assessing non-technical employability skills in public relations pedagogy: Reflections of an educator and student. *Scholarship on Teaching and Learning in the South*. 4(1): 51-68. DOI: 10.36615/sotls.v4i1.136
- Snaza, N. 2013. Bewildering education. *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*. 10(1): 38-54. DOI: 10.1080/15505170.2013.783889
- Statista. 2023. Unemployment rate in South Africa from Q1 2019 to Q3 2022, by age group. [Online] Accessed: 12-01-2023. Available from: <<<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1129482/unemployment-rate-by-age-group-in-south-africa>>>
- Swartz, D, L. 2002. The sociology of habit: The perspective of Pierre Bourdieu. *The Occupational Therapy Journal of Research*. 22: 61-71. DOI: 10.1177/15394492020220S108

Webber, H. 2005. The Architectural Review: A study of ritual, acculturation and reproduction in architectural education. *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education*. 4(3): 265–282. DOI: 10.1177/1474022205056169



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>