The Dematerialising Studio and the Discovery of the Dérive: Precarity and Resilience in Teaching Art Practice during a Pandemic

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Abstract

Art Education has a tradition of pedagogical flexibility and innovation in response to theoretical, institutional and societal pressures. The Covid-19 pandemic presented the art education community with unprecedented challenges. During lock-down, teaching was sharply reimagined under emergency conditions, before gradually shifting back to a 'new normal'. The return to pre-pandemic teaching has been hugely positive in many ways: relief that we can teach face-to-face, joy that students get a final degree show, liberation from endless online meetings, gratitude for studio space and workshops. However, although many things slot comfortably back in place, it is my experience as a lecturer working in an art school within a University, that some things have been lost, and other things have surfaced that demand further inspection: a space has opened up to do things differently. The present study uses an autoethnographic approach to develop a critical perspective on the transformation of the learning experience in one institution. In particular, I reflect on the dematerialisation of the studio during lockdown and its impact on teaching art practice, and what emergency measures revealed about the pedagogy of the studio. A shift to alternative sites to produce and exhibit student work had the effect of stimulating innovation in teaching and learning, including acknowledging the importance of nearness, the rediscovery of the derive and other radical pedagogies past and present, and collective learning from historical perspectives on how artists have worked together to handle precarity and built resilience.

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Prologue

Fieldnotes, Botanical Gardens, Dundee, 25th June 2022

It's 2 hours into the Cooper Gallery's Ignorant Art School 12 Hour Sit-in Revel, I'm sitting in a marquee on the grounds of the botanical gardens in Dundee. As the wind whips at the tarpaulin, I lean forward in my chair listening intently to the reels of questions being warmly exchanged between artist, curator and educator Barby Asante and writer, filmmaker and researcher Jemma Desai. They resist suggesting a resolution but instead open things out and out and out. They ask each other, and us, to hold these questions for them. I scribble down some of Asante's questions on the margins of the yellow paper programme: 'Rushing back to normality- is this a good idea?' and 'Did we not cry for this?'. Yes! I want to cry. Did we not? The questions galvanise. I'm at the Ignorant Art School to ask questions too. How should teaching in art school be reimagined in the wake of the global pandemic?

Introduction

For me the art school studio is sensorial, a rich banquet: glistening pots of oil paint, dustings of plaster, piles of skip-diving detritus, coffee cups, smell of turpentine, laughter, music, scrawled notes, jokes, art gallery postcards, clipping from magazines, mascots from nightclubs. By comparison teaching a studio module online is akin to a food replacement drink, nutritious and filling, maybe, but wholly unsatisfactory, lacking the sensuality of feasting and the community of a meal.

The sensorial studio, the physical studio, functions as a material space that is essential to teaching and learning art practice. Not necessarily so for the artist in the world, for them the studio can be many things, it might not be a physical space. In a video for the Tate the artist Cornelia Parker advised young artists: "you don't need a studio" (Tate, 2022). In the same year the Whitechapel Gallery exhibition A Century of the Artist's Studio: 1920-2020 (2022) explored artist's workspace from the artists garret to the "city as an atelier" as demonstrated by the 1970s collective Laboratoire Agit'Art who performed on the streets of Dakar (Lloyd, 2022). A seminal text "The Dematerialization of Art" (Lippard and Chandlers, 1968) argued that the emergence of 'ultra-conceptual' art meant that studios would no longer be required:

> "The studio is again becoming a study. Such a trend appears to be provoking a profound dematerialization of art, especially of art as object, and if it continues to prevail, it may result in the object's becoming wholly obsolete" (1968, p.31)

Although Lippard later went on to acknowledge the ambiguity associated with the concept of dematerialization:

> "[...] a piece of paper or a photograph is as much an object, or as 'material,' as a ton of lead. Granted. But for lack of a better term, I have continued to refer to a process of dematerialization, or a deemphasis on material aspects (uniqueness, permanence, decorative attractiveness)." (1997, p. 5)

However, despite Lippard's own caution, the notion of dematerialisation of the art object continues to have resonance within the art community. On 30th November 2021 Art Review

claimed that art object had 'finally dematerialised' when Christies sold Mike Winkelmann's artwork 'made of' nonfungible tokens (NFT's), for $69million which rendered "all the physical paraphernalia of art galleries, museums and objects …not wholly necessary for the economy of collecting to thrive" (Art Review, 2021). Like all aspects of life, the digital world has a great deal of influence on the production of art and the spaces it occupies, potentially making the question of dematerialisation ever more relevant.

This paper offers an autoethnographic account of my own experience of teaching art practice during the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown of 2020/21. Almost overnight, my work shifted from intense engagement with students in the context of a physical, material and sensorial studio, to a more distanced, and very different, on-screen mode of interaction through an immaterial Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). I came to realise that what was happening was that the art school studio in the pandemic was both dematerialising, and rematerializing in new ways. While the studio space dematerialised, the art objects made by students often did not. While the laptop screen was an essential portal to viewing the student's work it was also, somewhat antithetically, a major barrier. While the studio was closed, it became possible to find other places to meet.

Autoethnographic critical reflection

> "Autoethnographies are human dialogues, narratives, and stories through which researchers as scriptors explore and interpret their life experiences to connect with appropriate political and social contexts." (Badley, 2022, p. 733)

This paper draws on my own experiences 'on the ground' (Pujol, 2009) teaching at the Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design (DJCAD), in Dundee, Scotland, to explore the potential impacts of the pandemic on studio teaching. The analysis is based on my personal reflection as co-leader of Level 2 Contemporary Art Practice, around the importance of the physical studio to learning and teaching art practice. What follows comprises an "accidental ethnography" (Levitan, Carr-Chellman and Carr-Chellman, 2017) based on my personal notes, emails, recollections and experiences of this time. My approach to this material has been informed by the principles of autoethnographic methodology, which has been described as a "powerful and useful tool for educators and practitioners who deal with human relations in a multicultural setting, such as educators […]" (Chang, 2008, p. 51). For Pillay et al. (2016, p. 14) autoethnography is a "mode of authentic professional learning in higher education [that] can facilitate critical insights into the beliefs and assumptions we hold about our academic selves and about the selves of the others with whom we interact.'. The autoethnographic text comprises a 'blurred genre' in which different approaches to representing personal experience (poetry, performance texts, photographs, first-person narratives) are juxtaposed with theoretical and conceptual analysis. Ellis and Bochner (2003) describe autoethnography as involving back and forth movement from a wide-angle lens on cultural and social aspects of experience, to an inward look to a vulnerable self that can "move through, refract and resist cultural interpretations" (p. 138). Autoethnography is an appropriate methodology for documenting and analysing events, such as responses to the Covid-19 pandemic, that are impossible to predict and to analyse using pre-prepared tools such as interviews and questionnaires. An autoethnographic approach has allowed me to use critical reflections on my own experience, not only to gain a better understanding of my own teaching, but also to

contribute to a wider community of practice – a shared struggle, amongst art educators, to teach studio-based subjects online, and how the process has revealed significant losses as well as surprising innovations (Florio-Ruane, 1990; Nieto 2003).

What happened

My own back story is that, as well as being a lecturer in art, I am also a practicing sculptor as well as being someone who had to deal with a range of Covid-related family pressures as a mother of two young children. As an artist and teacher, I have always placed a high value on the studio experience, particularly in terms of the quality and intensity of relationship that it makes possible.

Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design (DJCAD) comprises an academic school of the University of Dundee. DJCAD was established in 1888 and was incorporated into the University of Dundee in 1994. It offers a four-year undergraduate degree programme with an annual recruitment of around 550 students into four specialist strands of Contemporary Art Practice, Communication Design, Design and Making, Architecture and Urban Planning. DJCAD has an active commitment to pedagogical principle of learning through making, articulated through well-resourced workshop spaces and access to highly skilled technical staff and Academic Advisors who are practicing artists, researchers and makers. The following analysis focuses explicitly on the experience of staff and students (95) involved in the Contemporary Art Practice course in year 2 of the programme in the academic year 2020/21.

Universities in Scotland offer 4-year Honours degree programmes, with year 1 comprising foundation studies, year 2 concentrating on core practical skills and years 3 and 4 where students develop their own approaches and practice. At DJCAD, the year 2 cohort includes a combination of students who had completed the in-house foundation year, and direct-entry students entering the university for the first time. This means that the 2nd year is a crucial phase in the development of a learning community that sustains more advanced work in years 3 and 4. It is a period in which students are developing their personal voice, establishing a practice, experimenting with techniques, developing relationships, and settling into the university. The 2nd year is usually heavily timetabled with inductions and introductions to the making workshops. The pandemic stripped away regular teaching activities, opening up spaces (or yawning chasms) that required urgent filling with new content, methods and approaches.

The Covid-19 global pandemic led to the first national lockdown to be announced by the British government on 23rd March 2020. Just 5 days prior to this on 18th March 2020 the Dean of School confirmed that the building would be closing, and we were to work from home. Within less than 24 hours the studios, workshops and buildings were abandoned. My co-lead Ellie Harrison and I, with other colleagues moved quickly to communicate with our students online using Microsoft Teams, a software that I had never used before. Students and staff were distraught. What seemed most important at the time was remaining in communication, ensuring students were safe and well and then, later, supporting them to move to an online assessment. It's quite raw reading the emails from that time: the trauma and bewilderment punctuates outgoing and incoming communications. The staff team created a 'virtual studio' to allow space for ongoing chats and sharing work. Students were

angry and disappointed but reported feelings of relief following on-line sessions. Most students asked to work in small groups to remain contact with peers. They talked about feeling afraid and isolated. Some of them had little or no actual physical contact with another person on a day-to-day basis, often living alone in small rooms in student accommodation, many miles from home. That time was firefighting, or emergency remote teaching (ERT), an experience quite different to delivering a course designed to be online or blended (Winters, 2021).

By the start of academic year 2020/21 we were more prepared with hours of CITL (Centre for Technology and Innovation in Learning) training, meetings and planning sessions under our belts. We were planning, like most Universities, to deliver blended learning, locally defined as 'a combination of face-to-face teaching and online and computer-based activities' (University of Dundee, 2020). We became more confident and resourceful users of Blackboard Ultra and Collaborate, institutionally named MyDundee. This Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) was already being used across the University. I had used it too, but with a light touch, prior to the pandemic we had largely still relied on A4 printouts on studio noticeboards and email. Over the summer I pre-recorded my first lecture: it took me hours of stumbling over parts and re-recording to produce 20 minutes. It was a steep learning curve, across the University staff were required to adopt new habits and approaches to teaching (Walters, 2010; Oswal & Meloncon, 2014; Kent, 2015).

In order to maintain social distancing after the first lockdown had been eased, the numbers of students that could occupy the 2nd year studios was dramatically reduced, from 99 to 38. To accommodate this, we ended up with a rota-based system allowing students 1.5 days of studio access each week. This caused a great deal of frustration, disappointment and anger amongst the student body (Pause or Pay Campaign, 2020; Lee, 2021; Ali, 2020; McLaughlin, 2020). Some students remained online as they could not access the studio due to shielding or travel restrictions. After partial studio access during the first semester, Scotland went into a second national lockdown and – following some initial uncertainty - we were required to move all teaching fully online for the remainder of the academic year. By contrast the following academic year 2021/22 was edging towards normality - face to face studio teaching and full-time access to studios resumed, large lectures remained online, and a small number of students worked remotely due to health concerns. For most of the academic year we taught wearing masks, maintained social distancing and limited our face-to-face teaching to groups of 6 students.

Strategies for responding to the dematerialising studio

A key purpose of autoethnographic inquiry is to show a particular example – a case – in a way that allows readers both to know something of the lived experience of the researcher, and to make connections between the specificity and uniqueness of that event and its broader social meaning (Lahua, 2015). In the case of what happened in respect of the teaching of art practice at DJCAD during the Covid-19 pandemic, the wider learning that emerged for those of us who were involved, took the form of a series of interconnected perspectives, each of which incorporated a set of concrete activities: overcoming technology barriers in ways that retained the importance of nearness; re-creating materiality: the monument, derive and making do;

and collective learning from historical perspectives on how artists have worked together to handle precarity and built resilience.

Overcoming technology barriers in ways that retained the importance of nearness

When considering different studio options during the first lockdown, we decided to maintain the pre-existing principle in Fine Art that each student should have their own desk and wall space. We took the view that students being able to claim the space as their own has always been an important part of creating a vibrant studio community, so we did our best to also re-create studio spaces on-line. This task forced us to re-examine our implicit assumptions about what a studio space means, and how it functions.

The studio has traditionally been regarded as constituting a central element of the pedagogy of art practice. Creating a space for students to play and experiment represents a crucial aspect of this type of learning (Becker, 2009). The ideal conditions for artistic development are access to materials; interaction with artists and teachers; introduction to a range of visual forms and encounters with "role models of varying genders, races and ethnic identities" (Burton, 2005, p. 9). The studio is vital not only as space where activities take place but a significant aspect of art pedagogy (Shulman, 2005). The studio experience is constructivist and student led: the academic advisor is a facilitator that guides and encourages the students (Vanada, 2016; Billings and Akkach, 1992). It is an approach that allows students to engage in experiential learning that incorporates conceptual understanding, practice and reflection alongside making (Kolb, 1984).

Studio practice in degree-level programmes has always evolved in response to social and educational change. Contemporary use of the studio as a place for learning marks a significant departure from the traditions of the Academy model (master and apprentice) and Bauhaus model (focused on exploration of materials) and 'allow(s) for distributed knowledge paradigm that emphasizes construction and discovery, learner centred education" (Salazar, 2013, p. 65). However, the significance of the studio as a physical place has remained a constant and essential factor (Pawlicka-Deger, 2021), even in the face of radical innovation (Schmidt, 2020). In an art school the students have a dialogic relationship with the studio space, even the architecture of which influences making and moulds conversations (Shreeve, Sims and Trowler, 2010). Before 2020, some colleges had undertaken initiatives to expand or supplement the studio into a digital space. The projects had proceeded on a gradual basis, with care and attention to maintaining the integrity of the collective learning experience (Svensson, 2018). By contrast, after the Covid-19 pandemic ceased face-to-face teaching the move to online learning at DJCAD was abrupt and difficult.

The online virtual studio we set up was a 'discussion board' on Blackboard, we intended for this to be an informal space for peer-to-peer feedback and discussion. The interface was limited to a scrolling list of images and text. For us, the virtual online studio environment really began to thrive in Semester 2 - with no studio access at all, students began to regularly post and leave comments. The students also created more specific discipline-led groups for themselves, on various social media platforms. We were aware that in some instances, due to generational and cultural differences, there might be wide differences in attitude and aptitude across the community of lecturers and students to technology-enabled interactions.

It became clear to us that further consideration needed to be given to address such inequalities (Pujol, 2009).

In the process of translating the studio experience into an online mode, we came to realise the significance of embodied *nearness*:

> "A studio art class may be thought of as a complex sociocultural system in which multiple factors such as personalities, values, the physical environment, instructional methods, and social interactions play a role in what is being communicated and how it is interpreted." (James, 1996, p. 145)

In *Nearness: Art and Education after Covid 19,* De Munck & Gielen write, "Isolation and quarantine may help us survive in the short term but are in fact assaults on our true life- our lively, vibrating resonating existence" (2020, p. 40). Part of what they are discussing is physical nearness and how important this is in even to seemingly non interactive teaching environments such as the lecture theatre "pre-eminently in education, human nearness is priceless" (2020, p. 12). This perspective is supported by Brian McDonough's sociological research on "communication technology (ICT) at work" which states that "it is not the same to communicate with others using mediating technology as it is to be communicated with others in bodily-presence" (2012, p. 169). Adapting Heidegger's concept of "the perceivedness of the entity" in his *History of the Concept of Time* (1992), McDonough states that this difference is ontological. In an interview for TALON (Teaching and Learning Online Network) in December 2020 he re-examines this research in relation to teaching and learning online during the pandemic "ontologically speaking it is superlative being face-to-face and the online stuff is deficient [...]because it lacks bodily-presence." Ontically some students prefer online to face-to-face, but this doesn't remove its deficiency. While technology has been enabled to make teaching online *as good as possible* there is the indomitable something missing. As David Gauntlett states "I like classroom teaching and I like people being in the same place. Turns out that's not actually necessary. But I still think it is better, to have people in a classroom" (Gauntlett, 2021).

For me the laptop/PC screen is a major barrier that is difficult to overcome. The edges of the screen crop the view, change the context and conceal important facets of the making process. Significantly the work that was not a digital medium was somewhat lost in translation. To a significant degree it also removes 'the unknown' and unexpected encounters which I rely on when navigating materials and objects in student studios. The online studio we created became an effective catalyst for peer-to-peer feedback and creating a sense of community, but it failed to be discursive and *open-ended* in the way that we require as teachers and learners (Boucharenc, 2006; Hall & Thomson, 2016). This was not only about overcoming the technology, but for the students creating makeshift studios from home was a huge hurdle (@nostudiostories).

There is also a problem with digital renderings and how we perceive and relate to images presented online: it is harder to gain a good understanding of colour, form and scale. When spending time in a studio your eyes travel around the space taking in details and stepping back to reveal the bigger picture. You can discover, for example, the way a line is drawn in a particular way and how relates to an image cut out of magazine, or the configuration of a jumble of objects balanced on a desk. The potential connections and meanings held in these gestures, marks and objects, comprise a crucial part of what we are reading when we enter a

studio environment. Rachel Jones characterises this kind of process as a distinctive form 'not knowing' that plays out in the studio:

> "If we are willing to listen, the materials we work with (our own bodies, but also metal, clay, paint, fabric...etc.) will tell us which forms they can hold and sustain, and which they cannot. Or rather, this knowledge will emerge between the vital materiality that we are and that which we encounter and with which we interact." (Jones, 2009, p. 28)

This aspect of the 'unknown' can be very challenging for both students and tutors, by bringing the academic advisor (tutor) in as a 'co-researcher' (Shreeve, Sims and Trowler, 2010). The fact that both are required to navigate the unknown requires a great level of trust between student and teacher (Austerlitz et al., 2008). Teija Löytönen speculates on what might be possible if pedagogy remains 'open and porous':

> "What if pedagogy becomes a Möbius strip?[...] What if teachers twisted and turned into students and students into teachers? (Löytönen, 2017, p. 240)

This metaphor of a Möbius-like loss of clarity over where one thing ends and another one begins, helped me to make sense of my own experience of facilitating teaching through the on-line studio. The move online certainly changed the dynamics between myself and the students. I'm sure my vulnerability was more tangible, tears prickling my eyes as I bid farewell to students waving awkwardly toward the camera. The collapsing of professional and personal spaces has been well documented, for me also, as my children interrupted tutorials, my toddler crying uncontrollably while banging at my office door. I also felt a responsibility to speak with confidence and positivity about digital portfolios and working from home. I felt the need to hold a safe and reassuring space for them. The students were disappointed and angry, their lives were on hold and many feared for the health of family and friends. During these early days of the pandemic the pastoral often overtook the academic, the collaborative took a back seat.

This is not to say that a blended approach cannot work. We found that online tutorials could be valuable, meaningful and helpful even in a situation where vital materiality was missing. Blended learning tended to work well if it was possible to alternate between face-to-face tutorials with research-focussed discussions held online. It is also important to acknowledge here that I am a studio-based artist/sculptor. Some would argue that this veneration of the studio is outdated as we increasingly rely on virtual platforms to work and communicate, a shift to online or blended learning, of course, pre-dates the pandemic (Heywood 2009). Some artists and academics have welcomed a digital revolution that radically reimagines art education and technology for a 'conceptual- post-studio practice', highlighting significant advantages to widening participation and equality and diversity (Dancewitz, 2020).

Essential Materiality: The monument, derive and making do

Question. *How do we make work with little or no access to a studio?*

Answer. *Go outside and make it there.*

A crucial aspect of what we rediscovered during the pandemic was the idea that, whole collaborative, embodied materiality was a central element of learning to make art, and the studio was not only the only place where this could happen. Even during the strictest phase of the lockdown, it was possible to go outside and walk. So, this is what we did - we made a meaningful shift towards the examination of site and context, encouraging students to make public interventions and explore the city (or local environment). Supporting or requiring students to situate or generate work outside of the institution is not new. DJCAD in particular has a rich tradition of site-related practices and researchers (Gair Dunlop, Ellie Harrison, Edward Summerton, Mel Woods and others). But during the pandemic the shift was essential, resulting in exciting and refreshing work. The lack of studio, however difficult, created opportunities to experiment with different approaches, and to gain an appreciation of some of the limitations of the studio as a "material space that can encourage (or discourage) particular kinds of activities, experiences and interactions" (Corazzoa, 2019, p. 1259).

I have learnt a lot from the student's resourcefulness and creativity in the face of lockdown. Their resilience led to the use of sites that might otherwise have been overlooked, everything from corners of bedrooms to the city monuments. The impact of the restrictions and limitations on space, materials and dialogue on the way the students worked during the pandemic draws comparison to the conditions within which radical pedagogical experiments from art schools were carried out in the past (further discussed later in the paper). However, while the conditions of this extraordinary time rendered interesting creative outputs, it was also a pressure cooker environment that was not sustainable or healthy to maintain.

We set the tone with the summer project brief *Alter Replace Improve*, which asked students to find a local monument and consider its adaptation. This project was developed in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement and the toppling of the Edward Colston statue in Bristol in June 2020. We presented some of the debates around colonial statues and artists (such as Hew Locke) who were tackling the problem of monuments in their work. Some of the monuments found by the students had direct links with a colonial past but others did not. The brief simply asked the students to consider the history and context, and critique what they found. Some students found ways to celebrate monuments and others chose to adapt them in protest. The work was diverse and exciting, offering interesting insights into their local areas. This project initially emerged from a requirement to redesign the summer brief in the face of the restrictions and the closure of galleries and museums.

From here we built upon that notion of exploring the local area by setting a short project brief looking at The Situationists International and asked the students to take a *dérive* around the city:

> "In a dérive one or more persons during a certain period drop their usual motives for movement and action, their relations, their work, and leisure activities, and let themselves be drawn to the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there." (Bridger, 2015, p. 230)

The *dérive* is a kind of elaborate game, but one that leads to a radical re-reading of the city. We asked the students to consider ways they might document and record the experience as well as considering if they would make it algorithmic or non-algorithmic (i.e., setting rules or not) (Basset, 2004). The students were inspired by this, many reported that they had not considered walking without a destination or without assistance of sat nav. It was evident in

the assessments that the students had begun to engage with the city and their environment in new ways. Many students used a similar methodology for the whole semester. Examples of the kinds of work that started to appear around Dundee: chalked up graffiti messages of hope, climbing monuments, paintings left in public spaces, empty carparks as collaborative performance spaces, performances in supermarkets, ceramic offerings left in abandoned fridges, exhibitions in underpasses, sculptures made from found materials, billboard messages.

We were acutely aware of the lack of exhibitions for students to visit during the time of lockdown. Moreover, the lack of opportunity for the students to address the challenges of exhibition and display in their own work. This was addressed by many in the ways described above, using the city as a space to make and display work, but students also began to utilise their domestic spaces. Examples included: paintings suspended across bedrooms, fabrics draped and thrown around living rooms, videos of students carry out domestic tasks, films of students in dialogue with themselves, students embodying housemates' behaviours, family narratives, vessels constructed out of cardboard, exhibitions in gardens. This work eloquently, poetically and movingly speaks to the time and contexts within which the students were working. Rather than simply 'making-do' with a diluted version of what was desired (the before time) a space opened up to really innovate. Reflecting on our approaches as teachers I can see that we supported this by designing activities that asked the students to really observe the time they were in and approach things from a different perspective. I like to think that collectively we began to navigate not just around things but forge a new path through.

Student performance and experience comprise the ultimate criteria for evaluating how well we adapted to the circumstances presented by the pandemic. Very few students dropped out (a lower proportion than in pre-Covid years) and the work of our students, as assessed at the end of the year, was of very high standard, being dynamic and highly experimental (Hildebrandt, 2021). But despite the incredible capacity of the students, I believe such levels of student achievement would not be sustainable (Pawlicka-Deger, 2021).

The educational significance of collaborative embodied materiality means that now, following the pandemic there is inevitably a great pull back to the studio, as it was before. Art students need the space, facilities, materials and studio community of peers and teachers. It is what I thrived on and what I want for my own students (Carroll, 2011). But we have learned a lot about how to make the most of the kinds of learning opportunities that are available outside of the studio. The glue that holds these activities together is a community of practice that depends on personal contact, meeting, sharing experience, telling stories, and informal situated sharing of knowledge and skills (Wenger 1998).

Learning from historical perspectives on how artists have worked together to handle precarity and build resilience

While the events of 2020-22 are unique, they need to be viewed in context. Art education already faced a precarious situation due to financial cutbacks and marketisation of Higher Education: studios have been vanishing and shrinking across arts schools in the UK (Shreeve, Sims and Trowler, 2010). This has been a problem since the UK government's Independent Review of Higher Education Funding & Student Finance, or Browne Review (Department for

Business, Innovation, and Skills 2010) replaced grants with tuition fees at triple the cost in English Universities. A direct consequence being the removal of state funding for undergraduate arts and humanities subjects, 'essentially privatising the art school provision' (McQuillan 2010, Goodman, Hudson Miles & Jones 2021). More recently the announcement by education secretary Gavin Williamson in March 2021 of 50% funding cuts to 'non-strategic' University subjects including art education, added urgency to the desire to protect studio teaching.

Comunian and England (2020) argue that precarity (inadequate funding, employment opportunities, social recognition, etc) has always been a central aspect of being an artist. This precarity has been heightened in the pandemic. However, our capacity to handle it both builds on the tradition of innovation and mutual support that already exists within the art community, allowing us to identify new forms of resourcefulness that may serve us well in the future. The pre-existing rich and well-documented tradition of experimentation and innovation around studio practice comprises a further contextual factor of great significance. The digital and community-oriented strategies adopted in our programme at DJCAD did not appear from nowhere, but were part of that tradition (Svensson, 2018; Schmidt, 2020). The positive outcomes that emerged from the emergency, such as a shift towards sites outside the institutional studio, innovative approaches to exhibition, radical rethinking of material relationships – can be regarded as rediscoveries and adaptations of learning methods that were already available.

At a wider institutional level, an ongoing process of re-imaging art education was facilitated through the Cooper Gallery – DJCAD's exhibition space for contemporary art. In the midst of the upheaval of 2020-22, the Cooper Gallery (serendipitously) had been examining this rich tradition of experimentation and innovation within art schools. *Sit-in # 2: To be Potential* (December 2021- February 2022) is part of an ongoing ambitious 3-year programme curated by Sophia Hao titled *The Ignorant Art School: Five Sit-ins towards Creative Emancipation* that has transformed the gallery into "a laboratory for radical, ethical and accessible pedagogies" (Cooper Gallery, 2021). The exhibition took case studies from the 20th Century to the present showcasing significant and often under-explored pedagogies. For example, Sit-In #2 offered a depiction of the famous Hornsey College of Art 1968 six-week student occupation of the college building. Other events explored radical initiatives developed at the Glasgow School of Art (Harding, 2004), and anti-colonialist critiques of the contemporary art education (Manathunga & Brew, 2012; Rit Premnath, 2016; Suchin, 2020).

Manathunga & Brew (2012) argued that the synchronisation or standardisation of practices, that occurs in Universities could be understood as a kind of colonialist approach, where general pedagogical knowledge is privileged over disciplinary or local pedagogies. Here I am reminded again of Asante's questioning about rushing back to normality that I ruminated on in the prologue. For Asante the pandemic has opened space to address these issues of epistemological justice, that the feminist critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak evoked so well with the concept of *unlearning* – "a stream of learning of how to unlearn and what to unlearn":

> "Within the art school, the absence of specialization is replaced with referential knowledge. We point students to art practices that have been validated by the capitalist institutions of power (galleries, collectors and art fairs) and produce an aspirational logic for their motivations. Rather than orientating a student's desires towards an already available structure of power, how do we prolong the "suspension

of learning' that Spivak speaks about, in the anticipation of something else, something other?" (Rit Premnath, 2016)

This statement also highlights ongoing debates around the value of the individual tutorial as a predominant teaching method, based on assumption of the expertise of the tutor being transmitted to the learner (Swann, 1986). As Pamela Wye says in *Rethinking Studio Art Education*, that we as artists and teachers "need to move from our cherished fixed positions, change tables, mingle with the unknown, and see what happens". (1999, p. 3).

The broad reconceptualization of the learning process in art education, reflected in the *The Ignorant Art School* programme of events, provided evocative and inspiring practical examples of the significance of collaborative open-ness and not-knowing. This functioned as a support to my colleagues and myself to respond to the requirements of teaching in a time of Covid-19. I was personally deeply influenced by an account of the teaching facilitated by the art lecturer Rita Donagh in the 3-week project 'White Room' at Reading University in 1970. This project has been acknowledged as an "unforgettably transformative 'event-structure' that continues to reverberate decades later in the lives of its participants" (Cook, 2016, p.4). Donagh and a group of students overthrew the drawing traditions embedded in the academy by repurposing the life-room to create The White Room which became a space for radical experiments that included inviting the life model to adopt an active participatory role in the room. Looking to Joseph Beuys, Donagh embraced the statement 'we can no longer work alone' and refused to impose 'any kind of ideological aesthetic or single viewpoint'. (Cook, 2016, p. 6)

Other radical alternatives to traditional studio-based art college provision, highlighted in the *The Ignorant Art School* series, Sit in #2 presented alternative models of art schools, for example: Copenhagen Free University, Free University New York, GUDSKUL in Jakarta, Womanifesto in Thailand, and The Rooftop Institute in Hong Kong. Since 2010, forty alternative art schools have emerged in the UK as University fees increasingly become prohibitive, including Art School East, The School of the Damned, and Islington Mill Art Academy (Kosmaoglou, 2021). Jo Grady the president of University College Union said in the Guardian last year "The universities most vulnerable are those with a higher number of less well-off students and it is unconscionable to deny them the chance to study subjects like art, drama and music." (Weale, 2021) The Feral Art School in Hull, established in 2018 due to the closure of the Hull School of Art and Design, operates as a cooperative with an ethos of "experimentation, creativity and collaboration" (Goodman, Hudson-Miles & Jones, 2022, p. 90). Beyond this the Feral Art school "must go further than establishing relationships between artists, educators and the local economy, and reassert its civic function at the creative centre of the country's provincial towns" (Goodman, Hudson-Miles & Jones, 2022, p. 91). These art schools are able to operate outside of the bureaucracy of the University, offering different methods and models of funding and supporting art education, holding a more comfortable inclusive space within the communities they are situated. Not least of all because they operate collectively uniting creatively around an ethos and shared goals.

These examples of radical innovation in art education, outlined above, operated as a crucial resource for me, and my colleagues, in our efforts to work out how to provide a meaningful educational experience for our students when we were unable to meet face-to-face. Several significant perspectives emerged from the collective knowledge, experience and memory of the DJCAD community. A valuable reminder of the meaning of precarity and resilience, in our

local context, was offered in March 2020 when the DJCAD lecturer and artist Louise Scullion posted a video for 4th year students. Delivered in a soft and reassuring voice, in amongst detailed practical advice on documenting art works, she shared her own experience of graduating in 1988 from the, now famous, Environmental Art course at Glasgow School of Art, into a country devastated by the unemployment and deprivation of the Thatcher years.

Conclusion

This paper has offered an autoethnographic account of the experience of responding to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown on the teaching of art practice in a specific university context. The value of an autoethnographic approach is that it enables general themes, perspectives and practices to be critically interrogated through representations of concrete experience. It is also essential, however, to acknowledge the limitations of autoethnographic inquiry. A more complete understanding of the events and issues explored in this study requires analysis of evidence from the perspective of students and other stakeholders.

The broad conclusion of this paper is that, while art teaching was significantly disrupted during the pandemic, particularly in relation to an abrupt transition in the direction of dematerialisation, it proved possible to develop a range of innovative strategies for addressing these difficulties. This episode has left us with an enhanced appreciation of future possibilities. These conclusions are consistent with the views of others within the art education sector. In a panel discussion 'Drivers for Change' at the Council for Higher Education in Art and Design (CHEAD) 2021 annual conference, Amatey Doku pointed out that Covid-19 has caused slow-moving institutions to spring into action, implementing changes more quickly than ever before. This this shift has opened up significant opportunities to make real changes across HE in the direction of greater diversification. Other academics, teachers and educators have likewise characterised the pandemic as an opportunity to review, reflect and change the way teaching and learning is delivered and to introduce curriculum reform in schools, FE and HE (Payne, 2020; Mineo, 2020). My own experience leads me to agree that it is crucial to reflect upon the impacts of the pandemic on education, the fault lines that it has revealed and the questions it has raised. For me, a crucial source of solidarity, support and inspiration has been the long tradition of critical reflexivity that has been a defining characteristic of the art education community.

In the article *Educational development within higher arts education: an experimental move beyond fixed pedagogies* (2017) Teija Löytönen, following Deleuze, states that for her "the *what-if* question is tentative, open, and impartial, drawing attention to connections, movement (flux), and the constant becoming of things". She uses the *what if* question to imagine different and new possibilities:

> "What if universities twisted and turned toward the world, the diverse fields of living? Or what if the world, life, twisted and turned into universities, sites for inquiry and (knowledge) creation?" (Löytönen, 2017, p. 240)

The dematerialisation of the studio during the pandemic and the necessary shift to site-orientated practices has twisted cohorts of contemporary art students towards the world,

towards the city of Dundee. *What if*, following the Feral Art School and others, my colleagues and I now look locally for radical new pedagogies and reimagine the civic function of the art school? Now the world is 'opening up' following the Covid-19 hiatus an expanded understanding of studio can begin to encapsulate more than simply 'relocating outdoors' but move towards a more thoughtful approach to how the art school might contribute to healing the ruptures and expedite change. Using these opportunities to encourage collective actions and production of new work.

The Cooper Gallery's *Ignorant Art School* has reminded my colleagues and myself of the rich tradition of radical pedagogy and resilience of both institutions of the past and introduced me to wider range of alternative art education practices. Clearly innovative teaching continues to occur within art schools year in and year out, evidenced annually by the exciting work exhibited in degree shows. Covid-19 proved the resilience and dedication of the staff, creatively bending and stretching to accommodate online and hybrid working. While the physical studio reaffirmed its importance as a crucial space for making and reminded us of how fundamental it is to the pedagogy of art practice, the use of the *derive* underscored the value of also spending time out of doors and in the community. Critically, wherever we work with our students - in the studio or in streets and parks - we as educators, must cultivate a unique space for *both* student and teacher to explore the unknown together.

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