



Repositioning Artistic Practices: A Sociomaterial View

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Repositioning Artistic Practices: A Sociomaterial View

Abstract

Practices, positioned through a sociomaterial lens make visible everyday work, often challenging our understanding of practices in consequence. Artists, and the world of contemporary art offer interesting contexts to explore practices through a sociomaterial lens and render visible everyday work important in the accomplishment of art. As such, this paper presents a distinctive sociomaterial exploration of practices that reconfigures our understanding of professional practices and their pedagogies in art.

Drawing on theoretical resources of practice and materiality, I present findings from an art-based ethnographic study of conceptual artists that combined art and practice-oriented perspectives to look beyond discipline-based processes of artmaking to practices as they happen. I present these findings first, and innovatively, as a series of photo-collages and then, using words, as mundane practices of looking, studio-making and pause, around which other practices coalesce including peer-support, self-promotion, pedagogy and movement-driven. The photo-collages, visually and literally, reposition artistic practices as those necessary in the accomplishment of everyday work, preserving a relationality sometimes lost in written accounts of sociomaterial practices. The paper thus presents novel and necessary insights into the professional development of artists; methodological insights for relational studies of practices; and questions for professional education broadly.

Keywords: sociomaterial; practice; artists; relational; art-based

Repositioning artistic practices: A sociomaterial view

It's important to point out to your reader that this is only a moment, or moments, in what an individual artist does; that they all work very differently. They work in all sorts of ways. In any given six months they might be working towards exhibitions involving lots of different materials and processes, but in the following six months they might not have any opportunities. Your work becomes about finding ways of working that are not reliant on the exhibition. The fact that we are having to find our own way is what is so interesting.

(Conceptual artist, Claire Barclay, Telephone conversation, 07 July 2014)

Introduction

In the world of art, an artist's practice is often described as a single entity defined by processes, products and places of art. For example, the artistic practice of Vincent Van Gogh (1853 – 1890) is readily understood as a painting practice: it involved paint and painting in a studio and the completed paintings were exhibited, eventually, in galleries and museums. Contemporary conceptual art however is not confined to historical fine art traditions of painting, sculpture or printmaking, and can include processes related to film, video and sound, mixed with photography, sculpture and live performance. These are processes that have varied technical demands and may necessitate using a variety of workshops and studios. The artistic practice of conceptual artist Martha Rosler (1943 -), for example, encompasses photomontage, poetry, performance and photography - indeed it refuses a 'signature' practice and is created in photography darkrooms, at the kitchen table and on city sidewalks. Rosler's works of art might as easily be found in abandoned buildings and multiplex cinemas as in galleries and museums. Contemporary artistic practice, particularly in the field of conceptual art, challenges definitions made through a single medium or workplace.

Traditionally however, the workplace of an artist is the studio. This is both a place of production (Blazwick 2012) and intense contemplation (Thornton 2008) and is often depicted in terms of retreat and sanctuary (Amirsadeghi 2012). The most popular representation of the studio is perhaps that of the attic room with an easel and north-facing windows (Fig 2009). This is indeed the case for many artists and this idea of having one's own space with natural light is replicated as learning and teaching environments in art institutions across the world. However, many contemporary conceptual artists engage in what has been called 'post-studio' practices (Renfro 2009, 165) where their art, like Rosler's, is not produced in a studio at all but is performed with an audience or constructed on site and in situ. Increasingly, such post-studio practices characterise the everyday work of conceptual artists and challenge the basis of western art education that holds the studio as a distinctive pedagogical space (Elkins 2009).

Art education has a broad remit across compulsory and post-compulsory education. In the context of this paper, art education refers to formal higher education programmes of studio-based study in the disciplines of fine art, design and architecture. Contemporary studio-based programmes in higher education are designed to prepare graduates for work as professional artists (Glasgow School of Art 2012; Bridgstock 2013) and draw variously from three broad periods of studio art education: the 19th Century Academy; the Bauhaus; and the 'current condition' (Elkins 2012). Briefly, the model of the 19th Century Academy was premised on the mastery of talent. Teaching took place in ateliers (workshops or studios) and the focus was the development of skills and techniques with media. Learning occurred through practise and imitation of 'master' works (Efland 1990). The 20th Century Bauhaus model was premised on creativity as a democratic principle. Teaching again took place in studios and workshops but the focus shifted from imitation to questioning of materials and media. Learning was understood to occur through experimentation and

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3 invention. The current condition of studio art education is premised on an attitude of
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5 criticality. Teaching takes place in studios (and on-site, with audiences etc of the ‘post-
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7 studio’) but is directed neither towards mastery, nor media, but to ‘practice’. Learning in
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9 terms of the current condition is understood as an amalgam of mastery, experimentation
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11 and criticality with a focus on how something is *done* (process) rather than the finished end
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13 product. In the history of western art education, the studio has persisted as an important
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15 site of pedagogy.
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18 A significant reference point in understanding the wider sociological contexts of art
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20 practices and art education is found in *Art Worlds* (Becker [1982] 2008). Becker’s analysis
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22 of art directs attention away from individual works of art and artists towards ‘the patterns of
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24 cooperation among the people who make art’ (Becker [1982] 2008, p.xxiii). Although later
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26 criticized for its underdeveloped conception of social connections (Bottero and Crossley
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28 2011) *Art Worlds* demonstrated the production of art as a collective endeavour of material
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30 resources extending beyond an individual artist. Through his ethnographic case-studies
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32 Becker portrayed the art world as collaborating networks rather than separate people doing
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34 their own thing. Becker’s analyses offer insights across different art forms (e.g. visual art,
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36 jazz) but Sarah Thornton’s (2008) *Seven Days in the Art World* offers a specifically
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38 different point of reference. This ethnographic study is concerned only with the visual art
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40 world and its sub-contexts: the critical review; the art prize; the international exhibition
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42 and the artist’s studio. Thornton also demonstrated the art world as constructed from the
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44 circulation of artworks, people and ideas- showing the importance of building social capital
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46 not just through networks of people but in the networks of the artworks, the galleries,
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48 exhibitions and venues also. The studio in particular, Thornton reveals as a place of
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50 privileged access. What goes on there is a matter of private production into which others
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52 are invited in (if at all).
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Each of these ethnographic studies holds art as the focus of study with little account of the travelling, transport, storage and administration that necessarily falls to individual artists. In order to better prepare art graduates for work as artists it is necessary to look askance, or to hold in parenthesis, traditional art practices and instead look simply at what it is an artist does and draw on this to understand what currently constitutes practice in the everyday work of contemporary art. It is useful to note that any disconnect between how work is understood and how it is actually practiced is not just an issue for education. Work that cannot be understood cannot be explained effectively. Work that is hard to understand is hard to support (through policy and funding for example), as well as being hard to teach (Tims and Wright 2007).

This paper argues that it is necessary to look at practice in conceptual art beyond the art itself and beyond the traditional notion of the studio. The argument draws from an empirical study exploring a central research question, ‘what are the sociomaterial practices of contemporary conceptual artists everyday work?’. Following this introduction to some current understandings of artistic practice and their relationship with the professional education of artists, the paper is set out in four broad sections: an outline of the study design, its theoretical and methodological resources; a visual presentation of emergent practices through four photo-collages; a discussion of these practices; and a conclusion that considers implications for professional education in art and beyond.

Design, Theory and Methodology

Study design

Over a period of 18 months I observed five established visual artists (three women and two men) working variously as filmmakers, photographers, sculptors and installation artists in

the city of Glasgow, Scotland. Each artist is an alumnus of the Glasgow School of Art and have been recognized internationally in the field of contemporary conceptual art. The ethnographic approach was informed by my own visual art practice and I documented observations of their workplaces, daily routines and objects with digital photography and written fieldnotes. I then explored my observations through discussions with the artists using a selection of the observational photographs (i.e. through photo-elicitation interviews). I undertook the analysis through interpretive, visual and art-based approaches (including drawings and photo-collages) and reported my findings through a series of photo-collages with narrative vignettes, aspects of which are used in this paper. The participating artists verified these findings. As this was a visual study and all five participants have easily accessible art world profiles, they each consented to relinquish anonymity: I have used their own names throughout this paper.

Whilst this broadly ethnographic design focused on just five artists their shared alma mater means that the findings speak back to a particular studio-based pedagogy. Visual ethnographic methods of data collection and art-based analyses privilege ocular-centric (Rose 2008) and aesthetic interpretations but these are appropriate to the aims of the study and its theoretical framework (outlined below).

Theoretical resources

The relational concepts of practice, materiality, and knowing are key theoretical resources for this study - each is understood in terms of the other. Although there is no single theory of practice (Schatzki 2001), Hager, Lee and Reich (2012) draw attention to five principles common across practice theories. First, practices are knowledgeable action: performance of the activity is, in some way, a performance of knowledge. Second, practices are embodied materially in mediated doings and sayings that mean that the practical activities

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of practices are inextricable from the materials (human and not-human materials) involved. Third, practices are relational in so far as the relations between and amidst practices change and are changed by changes in constituency of those practices. Fourth, practices evolve in historical and social contexts, and in power relations, so whilst the doing of practices are inherently in the present, their materials and activities are not without a past. Fifth and finally, practices are emergent: they are not predefined. These principles underpin my understanding of practices but specifically, for the analytic intentions of this study, I understand practices not as single entities but as multiple entanglements of activity and materiality within which knowing is enacted (thus my deliberate use of ‘practices’ rather than the singular ‘practice’). In defining ‘activity’ I draw from Schatzki’s (2001) ‘doings and sayings’; for materiality I draw from Fenwick, Edwards and Sawchuck (2011) to mean bodies, objects, tools, technologies and settings involved in the activities; and for knowing I draw from Gherardi’s (2000, 2001) knowing-in-practice where embedded forms of expertise are performed through materials.

In developing this theoretical perspective, I also draw upon two resources from actor network theory (ANT): assemblage and symmetry. Assemblage is a gathering metaphor that acknowledges the contingent relationality of my three core analytics (practices, materialities and knowings). Law (2004, 42) describes assemblage as a process of

Recursive self-assembling in which the elements put together are not fixed in shape, do not belong to a larger pre-given list but are constructed at least in part as they are entangled together.

The ‘elements put together’ are those of materiality, practice and knowing, or in the terms of this study, the studios, desks, lunches and books are gathered together in ways that perform expert knowledge. Symmetry in this context is not the geometric principle of

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3 mirrored sameness and balance, rather it is a way of thinking about ‘the elements put
4 together’ without determining in advance that they are necessarily connected (Latour
5 2005). Further, symmetry means that no form of materiality is privileged over another,
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7 including the materialities of persons.
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11 Combined, these theoretical resources offer a means of seeing what artists do in a
12 way that includes seeing practical activities but also in a way that includes the very material
13 and physical aspects of those activities. Furthermore, and particularly for the education
14 context of the study, they offer a way of seeing artists’ practices differently and trying to
15 understand how they might be learned. These resources are distinctively *sociomaterial* in
16 that they afford equivalence to the material world in their explanations of practices, as they
17 attempt to give the same kind of analytic account irrespective of person, place, process, and
18 product. The relationality of these resources raises particular methodological issues not
19 least of which relates to methods of data generation that might preserve the relationality of
20 practice, materiality and knowing.
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34 *Methodological notes for an arts-based approach*

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37 The relationality of the theoretical resources has implications for the methodology of the
38 study. As the aim of the study is to discern practices as they happen, the methodology
39 draws from ethnographic approaches. However, in addressing relationality in the analytic
40 framework, the ethnographic methodology also incorporates art-related principles and
41 methods and is, in effect, an arts-based ethnography. I take this opportunity to set out a
42 brief rationale for this approach. First, I am drawing on the education work of Elliot Eisner
43 (2002) who describes aesthetic use of visual elements (line, colour, pattern, shape, form
44 etc.) as art’s method of making sense of something without separating it into component
45 parts – all-in-oneness. An example of such an art method is photography – a compositional
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tool with the capacity to ‘capture’ and make still observations of activities and materialities together. Second, drawing on the practice-as-research work of Graeme Sullivan (2005, 2008), visual elements, media and processes of art can perform a critical function he describes as ‘create to critique’, or in social science language, can act as a method of analysis. Collage, specifically photo-collage, is one such method of analysis and shows how one thing makes sense in relation to another (Butler-Kisber 2008; Butler-Kisber and Poldoma 2010; Holbrook and Pouchier 2014). An important aspect of this methodology is the visual presentation of findings. The ‘art’ of the methodology is essential to how I make sense of the theoretical resources. Relationality is a case in point where digital photo-collage makes sense of its methodological issue. Working with tactile materials such as cameras, keyboards, photographs and computers etc, and more ethereal materials such as software, pixels, and scale etc sensitizes me (and my own work as an artist) to the fact that none of these things make sense in and of themselves but only when positioned in relation with each other. The camera, keyboard and photographs collaborate together with the software, pixels, composition and scale to create each digital collage. In turn, the visual content of the photo-collages – people, tables, laptops, piles of paper etc are positioned amongst, amidst, besides, above and below each other, often dislocated from their original contexts but now affording meaning to the things around them. The visual-ness of photo-collage is part of how I make sense of the theoretical resources of practice and materiality and therefore it makes complete sense to me that I would present my ‘findings’ visually and continue to employ their art related principles in interpreting the emerging practices. It is an important point of method to note that the visual presentation of findings informs the subsequent naming of individual practices – pictures and words work together.

So, the analytic framework is as described earlier, i.e. an interpretive, visual and art-based approach in the form of drawings and photo-collages. It is so purposefully because the visual/art analysis maintains relationality.

Emergent practices... in pictures

Four photo-collages are here positioned as findings and act later as visual arguments (Marín and Roldán 2010) for the relationality of practices. They represent neither individual practices nor themes but are depictions of relations amongst materials and actions. Whilst conventional social science categorization is counter-intuitive to the relational framework, the 'all-in-one-ness' of art (Eisner 2002) makes it possible for the photo-collages to describe such relations without immediate default to themes, coding and categories. For example, in Figure 1 the colour blue, parallel lines and the play of light and shadow are visual elements of colour, lines and tone that alert the viewer to relations between movement, stillness, collaboration and lone working. Similarly, in Figure 2 lines of perspective lead the viewer from the frame of the photo-collage, through the screen of the technology, through the carefully ordered piles of paper to the out-of-scale background of boxes and argues for looking as set of practices situated *in* materials, past experiences and concurrent with other practices.

In the printed version of this publication, white space surrounds each photo-collage, setting it apart from the printed text and deliberately privileging each image. The photo-collages' respective captions make reference to wider material narratives. I invite the reader to view each photo-collage without further persuasion and read the subsequent paragraphs into conversation with the images.

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Sound, Soup and Paper Edits

Insert Figure 1 here (whole page image with caption – no other text)

For Peer Review Only

Paper Piles and Antlers

Insert Figure 2 here (whole page image with caption – no other text)

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Keys, Bags and Negatives

Insert Figure 3 here (whole page image with caption – no other text)

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Tables and Toby

Insert Figure 4 here (whole page image with caption – no other text)

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Emergent practices...in words

The everyday work of artists is full of what they called “stuff” – everyday objects – and it is everywhere. Unsold artwork rests against books, boxes and broken bits of bones; great piles of paper are stacked amongst paints, pencils and polystyrene cups; and laptops and light-boxes jostle for space with files, folders and food. From my interviews with the artists I realised it is important how this stuff is stored, stays put and moves. It moves around from table to shelf; from studio to home; from bag to bus - and the logistics of moving, storing and retrieving stuff are a significant source of everyday problem solving. These materialities are closely related, highly mobile and constitute some of the sociomaterial practices of everyday work in contemporary art. In the following sections seven practices, visually evident in Figures 1-4, are named and explained in words. These seven are not the entirety of what might constitute everyday work in contemporary art rather they are simply those that have emerged within the limitations of the empirical study.

Looking, pedagogy and peer support

In the photo-collage *Paper Piles and Antlers* (Fig. 2), separate piles of paper are being created from Claire’s visual decision-making. Claire keeps her gaze fixed to the printed paper as she lifts and places it on one of the piles. She lifts another print, looks at it and then inserts it into the middle of a pile to her left. She lifts another and holds it, hovering above two piles before placing, undecided, across both. This process of lifting, looking and placing, continues until all in her nearest pile have been reassigned amongst other piles. The whole process was completed in near-silence and took half an hour. Something happened in the looking that decided which pile each print was assigned to. That something is not entirely visible in the photographs, or my fieldnotes, because it was part of Claire’s internal decision-making process but the paper, colours, inks and printing

equipment are taking part in this decision-making.

Looking is central to what an artist does in everyday work. Being able to 'look' is a core skill (Elkins 2001); it is shaped by interactions of technology and materials (Goodwin 1994; Rose and Tolia-Kelly 2012); and it is cultural with no single way of looking (Berger 1972). But the looking evident in Figure 2 is a very particular form that is about editorial decision-making and it is informed by the materiality of the paper, the inks and colours, the table space available. Looking is also performed in Figure 3 but its different materiality construes teaching not editorial decision-making. Practices of looking are evidently performed in situ - not learned first and applied later.

In *Keys, Bags and Negatives* (Fig. 3) Christina is looking at student artwork and trying to read the decisions that a student has made. This is a repetition of the looking 'trope' already identified in Figure 2 but different material circumstances are performing this looking in a very different way. The art student and formal criteria for assessment construe not an editorial moment of looking but a pedagogic one. Christina brings knowledge and practices of looking to bear upon an entirely different purpose – not making art but facilitating learning.

A pedagogical remit seems to pervade Christina's everyday activities. Examples are found in formal episodes of art-school teaching as described in Christina's 'looking' in Figure 2 but there are also examples beyond the realms of schools and universities where artists are performed into educators and learners by the materialities of auditoria, lecture theatres, seated audiences and galleries. Art world events such as artist talks are key sites where discourses of art, education and marketing flow through practices of self-promotion and peer-support.

During the period of research only one participant, Duncan, was explicitly making work for exhibition. This meant he was in many ways the most visible in terms of self-

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promotion, but also the most elusive. The period of research coincided with his nomination and subsequent winning of the 2014 Turner Prize, a high profile contemporary art award in the United Kingdom. Press articles at the time promoted ‘Duncan the brand’ as ‘film-maker’ (Brown 2014a), ‘Dublin-born’ (Brown 2014a), ‘Glasgow-based’ (Brown 2014b; Jeffery 2014), and ‘fallible’ (Thorpe 2014). This brand was made evident in a public event held as a ‘primer’ for the upcoming premier of *It for Others* (2013) at the Venice Biennale and took place in an auditorium where Duncan sat directly beneath projections of his artworks and influences –his art world ‘body of work’ projected upon his corporeal self.

Three other participants in this study attended Duncan’s primer event described above. They did not see their attendance as billable work, indeed they did not see it as ‘work’ but as a form of mutual support carried over from formative student experiences and early careers in artist-led gallery collectives (see Lowndes 2010). Practices of peer support are the material activities of co-operation and collaboration between artists but involve, arguably, high levels of unpaid labour or a particular work ethic and self-effacing generosity characteristic of a particular contemporary art scene.

Combined, pedagogic practices and those of looking, self-promotion and peer support illustrate the nature of much professional development of artists – an apprenticeship model of self-directed, opportunistic learning of expertise.

Studio-making and movement-driven practices

Tables and Toby (Fig. 4) depicts the extraordinary table-desk-table scenario where, at the end of a sewing project assisting another artist, Karen dismantles the trestle-top and legs of the sewing table and then re-assembles it to a different height and in a different part of the studio. She adds to the table a detachable shelf, sets down a lamp, connects her computer to the power supply and moves a chair to the table. The sewing table has become again her

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3 computer desk and with that move her attentions have moved from her assisting work to
4 her own artmaking work. Karen's work involves multiple jobs and she is repeatedly
5 adapting the studio to accommodate both her artmaking (labour-intensive embroidery,
6 photography and printmaking) and the artist-assistant work she undertakes for other artists
7 (film-editing, prop making and project management).
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13 In *Tables and Toby* (Fig. 4) there is a deliberate juxtaposition of different tables and
14 different rooms; scuffed and varnished wooden floors; in the middle of which Karen is
15 hidden adapting the height of a table to suit a shift from a project management task to an
16 art-making task. The photo-collage shows that almost similar constructions of table and
17 activity are evident at home where oftentimes the workplace of the studio is created. The
18 composition of the photo-collage shows the studio changed from project
19 management/assistant office to artist studio by virtue of reconfiguring the components of
20 the table. The photo-collage argues for practices that make and remake workplaces that
21 involve not just the activities of the artist but also the activities of the workplace materials.
22 The construction of this photo-collage *Tables and Toby* (Fig. 4) in particular, draws
23 attention to multiple entanglements of material activity that constitute practices in Karen's
24 everyday work. Evident in the table-desk-table is the importance of the capacity of stuff to
25 move, adapt and change in order for workplaces (i.e. studios) to function differently
26 inferring their entanglement whilst insisting on their different functionalities.
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44 The movement of bodies and things relates to the creation of workspaces and
45 creates the passages amongst them. In *Sound, Soup and Paper Edits* (Fig.1) a standing
46 figure, dressed with outdoor clothes and bag is imposed upon static piles of paper, pressed
47 open books and people facing computer screens. Everything is still. But at the same time
48 everything is moving: the outdoor jacket and the bag on a body that is moving out of the
49 scene; tufts of grass move the outside into the interior of the office scene; the book prised
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open suggests someone has been and will return. All of this movement activity is part of what makes the workplace studio. The physical movement of bodies and things, whether during a daily commute or lunchtime visit to a local deli is intrinsic rather than consequential to the accomplishment of practices. The content and composition of *Sound, Soup and Paper Edits* (Fig.1) argues for practices that are movement-driven and also *not* moving, such as sitting a computer, reading a book or eating lunch.

For artists who pursue multidisciplinary (sometimes collaborative) ways of working the ‘studio’ is not a single fixed place of work as in traditional thinking of the ‘studio’ but a constant process of facilitating different workplaces that exist simultaneously. Is it the case that not only are there are different activities going on different workplaces but actually the stuff in the workplaces constructs the work differently? Practices of studio-making are those that enact that this multiplicity and simultaneity and are inherently movement-driven.

Practices of pause

In the everyday work of artists there are routines such as coffee-making, dog-walking and lunch-breaks that appear mundane but serve important purpose in work that is precarious. In the top right-hand corner of *Sound, Soup and Paper Edits* (Fig.1) a book is held open by two candlesticks. They rest on a small kitchen table and are the focus of a daily lunchtime ritual when Roddy leaves his studio to buy the same lunch from the same delicatessen. Returning to the studio, Roddy places the polystyrene cup of soup, bread roll and shortbread onto the small kitchen table and makes a cup of tea. Already placed on the table is a book, held open with candlesticks. With everything in place, Roddy sits down and reads the book whilst eating his lunch. In all, this takes about one hour at the end of which he clears the table and returns to his studio work.

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3 This is Roddy's lunchtime hiatus, a ritual of leaving and returning to the studio, of
4 setting out the same lunch components and of reading more of a challenging text. It is a
5 deliberate and routine interruption to the work of the studio that creates a distance from the
6 issues of work whilst staying connected to them. For Roddy, the issue that is taking all of
7 his time and energy is that of his underemployment; this lunchtime hiatus is not the absence
8 of work but it is hard emotional labour when work is precarious and uncertain. This set of
9 practices performs what Knorr Cetina (2001) calls a 'dissociative dynamic' – the emotional
10 labour of work.
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20 Practices of pause are amongst the most significant and overlooked of artistic
21 practices. They are not about rest and recuperation, although that might be part of their
22 effect. They are about carrying the weight of becoming detached from a world that values
23 new and novelty in particular.
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29 In pictures and words this section has presented several sociomaterial practices that
30 assemble in the everyday work of conceptual artists. The artist-participants agreed that
31 these indeed were significant to their overall work and verified each one. Although in total
32 seven practices have been described there are three in particular around which the others
33 coalesce. Practices of looking, studio-making and pausing are the three practices around
34 which pedagogy, peer-support, self-promotion and movement-driven practices coalesce.
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42 It is useful at this point to acknowledge how the naming of these practices was
43 decided. The names are cumbersome translations of the visual motifs materially patterned
44 in the photo-collages. The names describe what I understood patterns of materialities to be
45 *doing*. As my definition of practice is centred on 'doing' then it made sense that respective
46 titles should reflect this and so the gerund for visual motifs seemed appropriate, as in
47 *looking*; *studio-making*; *pausing*, if not always elegant. Indeed, the potential for
48 misdirection had I used the titles teaching, peer-supporting, self-promoting, and moving led
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me to ‘*practices of...* pedagogy; peer-support; self-promotion and movement-driven practices. The names are necessary compromises of language.

Necessary practices

Whilst each practice has been described individually it is not the case that they are separate entities. Consider for example how the lecture theatres and audiences are part of pedagogic practices *and* those of peer support *and* self-promotion. Similarly, consider how movement-driven practices infuse those of studio-making and peer support. How can we make sense of this overlapping and recurring characteristic? Here it is useful to recall Law’s (2004) recurring and self-assembling ‘assemblage’ that cannot be fixed into shape but nonetheless draws practices together.

Although clearly contextualized by the art world, these practices are not distinctively artmaking and they do not conform to preconceived categories of artistic practices. That is, in part, the point of the relational analysis – there was neither an *a priori* expectation, nor later judgement about the perceived artistic-ness of the practices. The visual case made by the photo-collages (Fig 1-4) argues for practices as relations of materials and activities, held together by virtue of their purpose as work. In effect, the findings suggest an understanding of artists’ practices not as those exclusive to making art but as those *necessary* in the accomplishment of everyday work in contemporary art. It cannot be assumed therefore that the full extent of the professional knowledge of artists is located in art, the art world or artist’s studio. Instead, this professional, necessary knowledge is emergent in everyday material practices of mundane and routine occurrences such as breaks, commuting, and looking.

Such assemblages are not classified as art and thus they challenge the distinctiveness of ‘artistic’ practice. This challenge might (temporarily) be responded to

with Schatzki's (2012) teleology – that the *desired purpose* of these practices is 'art' and that is sufficient to make distinct the artistic from those of a different occupational purpose. However, to mitigate the challenge in this way does a disservice to the radical purpose of relational and sociomaterial perspectives in education research. Their very purpose is to position things differently but it is perhaps the extent of the differences that is the surprise. Imagine the professional education of artists where the studio is not a fixed place of individual artmaking but an assemblage of fluid studio-making practices that cannot be taught but must be materially experienced; where the purpose of the curriculum is learning how to collaborate with materials in order to not know in advance; and where the structure of the curriculum is predicated on the concept of pause and its mundane material practices of dissociation. Such an assemblage-based curriculum extends the premise of Renfro's (2009) post-studio practices beyond signifiers of artist, art, audience and context to something that is both post-art and post-education. The distinctive pedagogical space described by Elkins (2012) might still be found amidst an assemblage of studio-making practices but its outward claim to be a pedagogy for art would be found wanting.

When set against the great presence of contemporary conceptual art these sociomaterial practices of looking, studio-making and pausing are conceivably insignificant and of little consequence but this would be to misconstrue the importance of materiality. Remember, the stuff is everywhere and the methodological commitment to symmetry means that these apparently mundane practices of looking, studio-making and pausing exist in multiple materialities in ways that a work of art does not. Tiny arrangements of polystyrene cups and open books carry practices of such emotional weight that they might be considered heroic in their relative stature. What appears to be mundane is not.

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Implications for professional practice and education

I now consider what implications these findings have for the study of professional practices and education more broadly. The findings point to understanding professional practices not as those exclusive to a professional discipline but as those *necessary* in the everyday accomplishment of professional work. What is interesting here is not that necessary practices become exotic but that their very ordinariness expands the concept of discipline-based practices. This is a somewhat heroic achievement. To illustrate this point, consider nursing – a usefully incongruous example - where professional practices are constituted from physiology, anatomy and health; the technologies involved in drug administration, infection control, the transfer of patient information; professional codes of conduct and policy guidelines for everything from hand washing to care of the dying. Without doubt these are important aspects involved in the professional practices and learning of nursing but my study suggests essential practices are missed if our gaze rests only on the discipline rather than the doing. Where in the everyday work of nursing might we see those rituals of respite, rest and retreat that essentially sustain the unpredictable, emotional and precarious aspects of nursing? What are the materials of nursing that might perform such rituals? How might such practices challenge the basis of nursing education? In the contemporary world of work similar questions can be asked of other professions especially as disciplinary boundaries become increasingly blurred in contemporary workplaces.

What more might these findings contribute to the study of professional practices and education? Professional education might consider further the importance of materially-mediated movement as a literal driver in practices – that the physical movement of bodies and things, whether during a daily commute or lunchtime visit to a local deli, is intrinsic rather than consequential to the accomplishment of practices. The significance of the interruptions to work – that practices of pause are not work stopping but that they afford

continuation – may offer an important entry point for the study of practices in the precarious circumstances of community palliative care, emergency response work, or indeed in government policy development, judiciary work – circumstances where the capacity to sustain uncertainty is important? In turn, this attention to the role of material properties in professional judgements leads to understanding more of what constitutes pedagogic practices: that ‘teaching’ and learning’ come about through/with/in consequence of materials and are not ‘done’ by humans. This different way of understanding professional practices creates new contexts unrestricted by disciplinary or professional domains. However, the bold questions that remain are not what can we learn if practices are repositioned in this way but what new questions can be asked about practice and learning? Instead of asking how is this practice learned, we might now ask what is the *materiality* teaching and how might that reimagine curricula in professional education?

Conclusion

The aim of the empirical study was to look beyond artmaking to *practices* as they emerge in the course of artists’ everyday activities. As my analysis involved a combination of art and practice-oriented resources I presented the findings as visual statements depicting artistic practices as sociomaterial assemblages of mundane material activities. Recall for example the polystyrene cup and book mediating the practices of pause depicted in *Sound, Soup and Paper Edits* (Fig.1), or the desk and tables of *Tables and Toby* (Fig. 4) mediating practices of studio-making – mundane materials mediating essential practices. Visual elements of line, colour and composition have been used to create photo-collages that make sense of the lunchtime ritual of pause in relation to the daily commute, in relation to the studio environment and so on. Further, the careful and aesthetic visuality of the photo-collages demonstrates an important methodological congruence with relationality. One of

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the distinctive things I have done with this study is to use my artistic expertise with photo-collages to analyse practices beyond the art and the traditional notion of the. The analysis was essentially immersed in visual and art-based expressions for which text is a poor substitute. However, the text-based *naming* of these practices led to seven practices identified in and emerging from the findings.

In all, seven practices emerged from these findings including those of pedagogy; self-promotion; peer support; and those that are movement-driven – each of which coalesce variously around practices of looking, studio-making and pause. Such practices are not isolated from each other but are collaborations that assemble and reassemble in response to their changing material contexts, irrespective of the art-ness of those contexts.

These seven are not presented as the entirety of artistic practices but, taken together, they reposition artistic practices from those pre-defined by artworld disciplines to those necessary in the accomplishment of art’s everyday work. Reconsidering now the opening example of Van Gogh, his practice would no longer be defined by painting but by an assemblage of essential material practices –some of which would involve the palettes, brushes and canvases of painting, but more would involve such things as the bags and transports of travelling; the sights and sensations of decision-making; the bodies and audiences of exhibiting.

This sociomaterial turn away from artmaking towards practices means that the pedagogical dimension of professional artist education is challenged in two ways. First, whilst there is no doubt that the studio remains an important aspect of practice its multiple incarnations renders it meaningless when fixed to a single place. A post-studio pedagogy positioned through sociomaterial practices is no longer learning and teaching across different sites of production, but an effect of material practices constituting and reconstituting. Second, given the practices presented here, the pedagogical dimension of

artist education is as bound to mundane material entanglements as it is to artworld abstractions – so much so that the material nature of art is challenged. The significance of the study is not that I have identified practices unfamiliar to the world of art but that they reposition what is understood as practices in art and art education.

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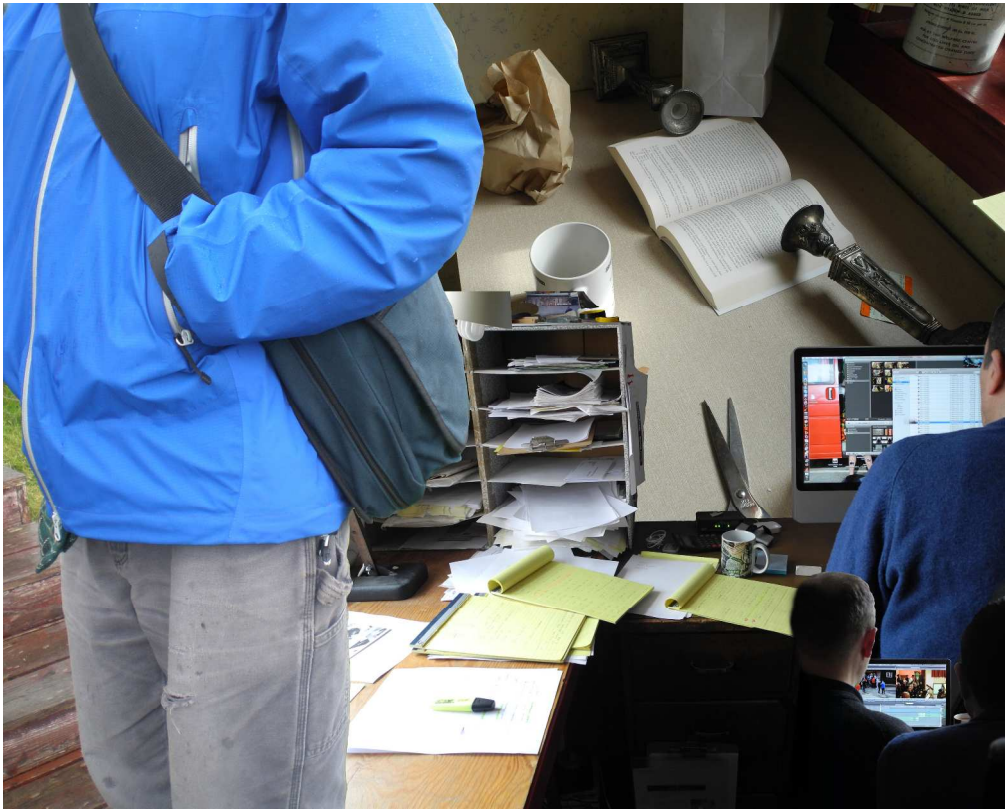


Figure 1: Sound, Soup and Paper Edits [digital photo-collage] created by the author
441x355mm (300 x 300 DPI)



Figure 2: Paper Piles and Antlers [digital photo-collage] created by the author

1083x812mm (72 x 72 DPI)



Figure 3: Keys, Bags and Negatives [digital photo-collage] created by the author
199x243mm (300 x 300 DPI)



Figure 4: Tables and Toby [digital photo-collage] created by the author

308x231mm (300 x 300 DPI)