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Studio Matters

Derek Jones
The Open University, UK

Colin M. Gray
Purdue University, USA

Lorraine Marshalsey
University of South Australia, Australia

Elizabeth Boling
Indiana University, USA

Nicole Lotz
The Open University, UK

See next page for additional authors

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Authors

Derek Jones, Colin M. Gray, Lorraine Marshalsey, Elizabeth Boling, Nicole Lotz, James Corazzo, and James Benedict Brown

Editorial: Studio matters

Derek Jones^{a*}, Colin M. Gray^b, Lorraine Marshalsey^c, Elizabeth Boling^d, Nicole Lotz^a, James Corazzo^e, James Benedict Brown^f

^a The Open University, UK

^b Purdue University, USA

^c University of South Australia, Australia

^d Indiana University, USA

^e Sheffield Hallam University, UK

^f Umeå University (Sweden)

*Corresponding author e-mail: derek.jones@open.ac.uk

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There is something very special about the studio as a place of practice and of learning. The studio is a place where we have the safety and permission to imagine the world as it might be, to explore alternatives and to do this critically. Without studio, the ability to create alternative futures would be a very limited and fixed thing. However, to understand the studio is, as Lyon (2011) puts it, both ‘important and frustrating’. Frustrating because studio is necessarily complex and difficult to study: it is human (Cennamo, 2016), ‘messy’ (Koskinen et al., 2011), a milieu (Farías and Wilkie, 2016), incomplete (Boling et al., 2016), contradictory but consistent (Orr and Shreeve, 2018). But studio is important precisely because of these same properties and affordances, reflecting the opportunities to safely explore the very complexities of the contexts we are preparing our students for.

Hence we are faced with two challenges. First, studio as a complex subject to study, and, secondly, studio as a rapidly changing object of study. Despite this complexity and variability there seem to be certain properties of studio that do persist across time, practices, and modes of learning. Exploring such properties of studio was a first motivation for the track *Studio Matters*: What is it about studio that really matters? What is essential? What is consistent? What is necessary? Such questions, are explored in the articles accepted for the track *Studio Matters*.

The challenges observed within studio learning and teaching over the past few years will leave lasting changes to education. In design education, the centrality of studio has been challenged during the COVID-19 pandemic as educators have been forced to retreat from physical studio learning and teaching to adopt distance and online methods (Marshalsey and



Sclater, 2020). These critical changes to studio practice during the pandemic, such as the loss of affordances of proximity (being near each other), synchronicity (happening at the same time), and presence (being with each other), have made visible and explicit many aspects of studio learning that were previously implicit and hidden (Jones, 2021). For many educators, transition teaching during the pandemic made the unseen properties of studio visible. Hence, it is very likely that no one is going back to 'normal' in design education and not only because educators, students and contexts have changed, but because studio was never the place we thought it was anyway. This is a further motivation for the track, exploring how aspects of studio, when made visible, enable us to re-describe, re-imagine, re-distribute, and revoke the necessary conditions for what constitutes, defines or bounds 'studio' in contemporary design education.

The initial call for papers sought work exploring the nature, makeup, properties and boundaries of contemporary studio learning and teaching in a diverse range of design education contexts. Six papers were accepted, all of which respond directly to the call by exploring some aspect(s) of design studio education.

In *Critical Pedagogy and the Pluriversal Design Studio*, Colin Gray engages with historical critiques of studio pedagogy, describing common framings of studio learners as in deficit and lacking in agency. They call for a shift from pedagogies dominated by fear to pedagogies that are defined by their emancipatory qualities, leading to a proposal for a pluriversal design studio—where multiple ontologies are valued and celebrated. This pluriversal approach to studio pedagogy includes acknowledgement of a diversity of knowledges, pathways towards competence, and instructional moves.

In *Illuminating themes and narratives in studio through expert elicitation and collaborative autoethnography*, Lorraine Marshalsey and Nicole Lotz explored expert elicitation with an invited collective of design educators who were experienced in the research and operation of design studios in education to explore the critical values, questions, and themes of studio. Later, they determined their own subjective narratives as they reflected on the themes relevant to their individual studio research interests; studio through the lens of sensory affect and the inclusiveness of the design studio. The emergent themes from this study have implications for both studio research and practice: identifying a plurality of the boundaries of studio today.

In *Camera-on/camera-off: visibility in the design studio*, James Brown considers the boundaries of studio, given the shift from physical to digital proximity over the past years. Brown particularly explores the visibility of people, processes and objects, asking how this changed and what it tells us about the studio and design education generally. As with many of the papers in the track, the answers are not simple or singular, asking uncomfortable questions of habitual practices and assumptions that we often prefer to remain invisible.

In *Exploring Studio Proximities: Space, Time, Being*, Derek Jones explores some of the challenges the educators faced during the Covid-19 Pandemic and how this highlighted some

of the assumptions made about traditional studio practice and affordances. Jones argues that focusing on differences between modes (such as online vs physical studios) ignores critical similarities, many of which are actually the 'real' underlying values and conceptualisations of the studio.

In *Where Do We Go From Here? Rethinking the Design Studio after the COVID-19 Pandemic*, Saskia van Kampena, Lesley-Ann Noel, Johnathon Strube, Anne Galperin, and Karin Jager present a rare longitudinal collective reflection on teaching practices during the pandemic, exploring the nature and purpose of studio as part of this. Their framework of inquiry asks important and meaningful questions of what studio is, who gets to take part in it, and when and where studio happens.

In *Studio Through Studio: a diffractive reading of the educational design studio*, James Corazzo examines the relationship between professional and education studios and how these differ in certain key ways. Importantly, these differences highlight critical pedagogical components, many of which are quite subtle or are implicit in the studio. As with many of the other articles, it is through looking for, highlighting, and discussing such properties of the studio that allows us to better understand them and engage in better directed and planned inquiry.

The themes that emerge from this track demonstrate that scholarship in the studio is an active and important area of design education research. There is no attempt here to define the studio and any thoughtful examination of the studio, complex and elusive though it may be, will only continue its exploration. At its essential core, the studio is a place of preparation and readying in, and of, itself: not for *some* thing but for *any* thing. This emergent character of the studio depends on what has mattered in the past as well as what will matter in the future and should be reflected in the learning and teaching it best supports.

As design education moves on from the experience of the pandemic and the consequent transitions to the delivery of studio learning and teaching, some kind of 'new normal' will emerge. This will not simply be a return to what studio was before for many reasons, not least because what has been made visible should not be ignored. We have had a chance to see the studio differently and experience how studio might operate. We have also heard different voices and witnessed new connections and communities, not normally heard in traditional studio settings. Most importantly, we have the chance to question the role, purpose and values we take from, and give to, the studio.

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About the Authors:

Derek Jones is a Senior Lecturer in Design at The Open University (UK), part of the OU Design Group, and the Convenor of the DRS Education SIG. His research interests are the pedagogy of design and creativity, embodied cognition in design, and theories of design knowledge.

Colin M. Gray is an Associate Professor at Purdue University and leads a program in User Experience (UX) Design. Their research focuses on the ways in which the pedagogy and practice of designers informs the development of design ability, particularly in relation to ethics, design knowledge, and learning experience.

Lorraine Marshalsey is a Senior Lecturer in Design and Technologies for Education at the University of South Australia in Australia. Lorraine is also a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (SFHEA) and a member of the Editorial Board of the *International Journal of Art and Design Education* (iJade).

Elizabeth Boling is a professor of instructional design whose background in design practice includes illustration, interface and management of interactive materials design for Apple Computer and Macmillan Publishing. She is editor-in-chief of *International Journal of Designs for Learning*.

Nicole Lotz is a Senior Lecturer at the Open University, UK and Equality Diversity, Inclusivity and Accessibility Lead for the School of Engineering and Innovation. She researches and publishes on social engagement and inclusion in distance design studios and learning.

James Corazzo is Teaching and Learning Lead at Sheffield Hallam and an award-winning graphic design educator and co-founder of the UK Subject Association *Graphic Design Educators' Network*. He researches and publishes on the social, cultural and material assemblages of the studio and design education.

James Benedict Brown is Associate Professor of Architecture at the Umeå School of Architecture and the author of *Mediated Space* (RIBA Publishing, 2018). He has a particular interest in critical pedagogy and the role of design-build and live projects in architectural education.