Pedagogies of Care: Peer-Led Alternative Art Education During the Coronavirus Pandemic.

Aisling Marks

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Contents

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Abstract

This thesis studies models of alternative art education in the UK and San Francisco during the twofold crisis of art and education during the COVID-19 pandemic. Its central thesis, that art is a privileged site of experimentation for pedagogy and education, where normative categories of value, assessment and metrics can be suspended, underpins an exploration of the desires and needs emerging from the field. From this, it speculates upon the formation and production of postcapitalist subjectivities from alternative art schools during this period of crisis in education. The thesis interviews 15 artists, educators, organisers, activists and participants involved in producing peer-led art education and free-school experiments as alternatives to neoliberal UK and USA university models. The research uses an interpretivist, qualitative paradigm to foreground the experiences and voices of the respondents, using narrative analysis, critical realism, and an emergent design to highlight my own experiences of doing research during the unpredictable time of the pandemic. It also uses Social Reproduction Theory as a methodology, to understand the care work of education and mutual-aid, as well as a lens for pointing towards postcapitalist futures.

The research emphasises the central importance of care in shaping pedagogical practices, in which alternative art schools emerge as vital spaces for shaping self-confidence, vulnerability and community-building against individualist educational paradigms. Findings include that peer-led pedagogical environments for artists offer insights into possible postcapitalist futures by proposing a different model of education through socially reproducing qualitatively other relations. It also attends to increased access for artists from working-class communities, ownership over curriculum, the abolition of grades and assessment, and proposes the concept of transindividuality as a postcapitalist ontology. It expands on the existing studies on alternative art education models by detailing how practices of care were exacerbated and indispensable during the pandemic, and provides insights into the shaping of subjectivity within care-driven communities. Finally, it suggests further research into sustainable models for adult lifelong learning and communities of practice as well as comparative analyses with a university art education.

Introduction.

My PhD is an illustration of artist community learning projects and nonformal education within the scope of contemporary art and artistic endeavours that promote the strengths of collectivity, collaboration and mutual-aid as tools against the hegemonic ideology of individualism. It looks at groups of adult artists and learners who, having felt alienated by the formal system of higher education and attracted by alternatives, have formed their own or joined pre-existing experimental and peer-led learning groups to embark on a learning experience that differs qualitatively from structures of higher education and the mainstream education system in general. These groups reject formal learning that leads to qualifications, owing to reasons of accessibility, financial barriers, their class, age, feelings of inadequacy, shame and mental health.

The project draws from anarchist and Marxist pedagogies, aspects of queer theory and utopian theory, Social Reproduction Theory and the concept of transindividuality to understand how these learning groups, which have been categorised within a scene of 'alternative art education' can gesture towards a postcapitalist – or communist – subjectivity. The thesis therefore unpacks the term postcapitalism in Leftist discourse since 2008. It also addresses the recent history of experimental, self-organised and anti-capitalist learning in the arts. It will then address the current landscape of education and of art education, in particular through the lens of crisis, which will be explored to encompass economic and political austerity, ecological destruction and the Coronavirus pandemic.

The project draws from several different examples of collective learning projects that have struggled and yet survived during the Coronavirus pandemic. It uses insights from these struggles of maintaining a community of artists and learners through conditions of physical separation to understand how individuals have formed bonds and have understood the conditions around them, including how they understand themselves as artists, the effect of being in a community on their wellbeing and place in the world, and of their political and personal landscapes. I have used primary research, of which 15 interviews from late 2020 into 2021, with artists, learners, educators and organisers who participate in communities of practice in the UK and in San Francisco. I also use examples from a group of artist-learners in Manchester in the UK, whose method of working ceased just before the Coronavirus

pandemic to give an example of peer-learning and an alternative method of an art school "crit" that evolved over a decade. I also draw from other projects where experimental learning, experiential learning and critical pedagogy with adults and young people are central. I will set up all of these sites in my methodology chapter.

The questions that drove my research were:

- How does art education function in late capitalism, how has austerity affected it, and how are alternatives being imagined, dreamt, and conjured in an era of 'capitalist realism' (Fisher, 2009), Covid-19 and multiple intersecting political and ecological crises?
- What happens when creativity is given unparalleled economic value, artistic subjectivity is aligned with neoliberal subjectivity, making the work of artists nearly aligned with 'the contemporary worker' (Kunst, 2015, p.143) or 'model worker' (Child, 2019, p.52) and yet, arts subjects are underfunded, stripped from curricula, or contained by the *Professional Curriculum*[1] (Houghton, 2016, p.115) and many working artists must still have several other jobs to survive?

These contradictions inform this research, which explores current discussions in mainstream arts pedagogy and discusses efforts to build self-organised, experimental alternatives to an education system led by market and economic imperatives and quantifiable outcome-based learning. Threading through is the sense, put forward by theorists such as Mark Fisher and Franco "Bifo" Berardi, of weariness to the pervasive current of capitalist realism, in its neoliberal manifestation, as well as an urgency for radical systemic change in the face of multiple intersecting and accumulating crises, which, as David Harvey (2014: p.xi) has elaborated, are essential to the reproduction of capitalism. Following Harvey, the crisis narrative that so pervades the literature upon the state of arts education and higher education today finds itself enmeshed in a broader and more existential crisis, that of capitalism, its reproduction and the fate of human and non-human subjects. It has led critics

[1] The 'Professional Curriculum' is the dominant curriculum model whose primary objectives are to prepare student-artists for professional working life as professional artists.

like Harvey (ibid) to contend that social reproduction, in which the realm of education sits, is 'the field where the creative destruction of capital is at its most insidious, promoting, as it does, an alien consumerism and individualistic ways of life conducive to what amounts to little more than crass and competitive selfish greed…' (p.196). The crisis thus being experienced under COVID-19 invites us to look closer at the existing alternatives.

When I enrolled as a PhD student in Manchester in late September 2019, I had no idea that a global pandemic was around the corner. December came around, and news of a new Coronavirus discovered in Wuhan, China, filtered across into UK media streams and into casual conversation. We were told that deaths were not only inevitable, but already happening. The alarm being raised by leading scientists was largely ignored by Western governments, whose primary interest in the economy kept business running as usual for as long as possible at the expense of human lives. In the UK, by mid-March 2020, the Conservative government mandated a ban on all large gatherings, advising pubs, restaurants and cafes to close, universities and schools to shut, and for everyone apart from workers essential to the preservation of life – those in health, food, agriculture, transport and care – to stay at home. Leaving the house for an hour's exercise per day, buying essential groceries and caring responsibilities were all that would be permitted, and contact with other humans had to be at a distance of 2 metres. To save lives, we were told to isolate from one another, to forego physical contact, and to avoid each other's company. The global "lockdown" was an effort to contain the spread of the virus and ease up pressure on health services already experiencing severe capacity issues, critical shortages of equipment and a toll on the mental health of staff.

I had initially developed a research plan that had involved a period of ethnographic study at the Islington Mill Art Academy in Salford, a former cotton mill repurposed into an experimental artist-led space with studios and an alternative art school. I was interested in researching the dialogue between pedagogy and politics within the spaces of alternative arts education and the informal learning cultures of artists, and how subjectivity is formed through these relational modes of being that fall outside of mainstream art school cultures. The project was predicated upon people sharing physical space and being together, in order to investigate alternative education in the arts as sites of cultural production and spaces of subjectivisation. I was particularly interested in how political subjectivity is formed through

the embodied aspect of inhabiting a space that frames itself as 'alternative to' a typical, established arts education in a university, usually characterised by hierarchical structures and strata of management, high tuition fees and corresponding levels of debt, a teacher-student framework, regular formal assessments with grades attached, learning outcomes, competition between students and a focus on graduate employment. In the discourses of critical university studies and critical pedagogy this has been given the name of 'academic capitalism' (Slaughter and Rhodes, 2009) that characterises the neoliberal restructuring of universities with its inbuilt structures of 'dominance, hierarchy, expropriation, and exploitation' (Szadkowski and Krzeski, 2019, p.468). Contemporary Marxists examining these structures critically have drawn out models to further characterise the specifics of academic labour in the contemporary university, including precarization, development of controlling metrics, experiences of uncertainty and anxiety (ibid, p.469). Some have termed the learning cultures in these institutions a 'pedagogy of the privileged' (Cresswell, Karimova and Brock, 2014) or a 'neoliberal pedagogy' (Kenning, 2019), which perpetuates capitalist models of inequality and ideologies of individualism. While I was prevented from doing site-specific, in-person ethnographic research, which I will detail in my methodology chapter, I continued to be driven by the relational questions and thoughts posed above, which I turned into the following research questions.

0.1. Research Aims, Questions & Theses.

I have two central theses within this project. The first thesis is that art is a privileged site of experimentation where normative categories of value, assessment and metrics associated with neoliberal ideology are incongruent to the discipline. This has been similarly voiced by a report of the 'inapplicability' (Gordon-Nesbitt, 2012, p.12) of metrics and measurement-based value systems to small arts organisations. Art's exceptionalism can provide models for education and pedagogy in other fields and give insight into ways of being otherwise. The following thesis posits that practices of care, mutual-aid and social, emotional and embodied learning over metrical grades and assessment gesture towards and offer an alternative way of understanding subjectivity because it recognises the 'self' as socially constituted: 'the co-individuation of a collective 'we' and a transindividual 'I'.' (Vujanović

and Cvejić, 2022, p.71) The thesis suggests that in following a transindividual pedagogy, with art education as its main forum for experimentation, there are implications that posit a postcapitalist subjectivity and ontology. To this end, my research aims were:

(a) To explore how alternative arts pedagogies located in the UK and San Francisco navigate, survive and emerge from the twofold crisis of education and the arts in the Coronavirus pandemic and under conditions of physical separation.

(b) To investigate and analyse what kind of desires and needs emerge from within the pandemic and to the formation of new kinds of artistic and political subjectivities.

My main research questions, following from my aims, were:

(a) What desires and needs are emerging from the nonformal, self-organised alternative art education 'scene' as a result of the pandemic and the crisis of education?

(b) What can this tell us about the production of postcapitalist subjectivity in these spaces?

The second research question leans towards the utopian. It understands the discourse of postcapitalism to fall within a larger discourse of utopian studies and desires for futures without oppression and exploitation, which will be discussed in the section on postcapitalism. The utopian impulse springs precisely from a background of exacerbated precarity within the terrain of the 'crisis' of the university, with radical ideas being revived. Experiments that straddle the intersection of art and education have been framed as reactions to increasingly untenable circumstances. Sam Thorne, in his compilation of pedagogic experiments since 2000 writes, 'This is a story of debt and corporatization' (2018, p.26), and compactly traces the historical trajectory of the university-modelled art school as 'more numerous, expensive, and professionalized than ever before' (ibid, p.30). He sets this against artist-led initiatives that propose modest alternatives for 'what might happen next' (p.31). He identifies historical precedents, such as the Bauhaus, UNOVIS and VhkUTEMAS as 'a utopian moment' (p.32). But, apart from suggesting that each school considered themselves to be revolutionary, the substance of that utopia is not defined. Similarly, the 2008 financial crisis ushered in a new wave of alternative art schools and a new wave of

interest in the 'Educational Turn' in contemporary art, in which education became the subject and object of much contemporary art exhibitions and corresponding discourse.[2] Alongside contesting the pervasive culture of competition and student debt, the post-2008 landscape preoccupied with education played into a reconceived 'changing relationship between art and the academy.' (Bishop, 2012, p.242).

0.2. The utopian impulse

Part of bringing forward the notion of utopia involves constellating other moments in time where a utopian impulse has been present in the organising of students, artists and workers. The Benjaminian method of constellating deliberately steers away from the notion of historical progress or a historical linearity (Benjamin, 1940). Instead, reading history dialectically allows us to examine the present moment without recourse to a technological or teleological ideology of progress, in understanding that radical politics aims at transformations from injustice to justice, which with a critical reading of struggles does not follow in a linear fashion. While I do not use utopia as a method in this thesis, I follow Levitas in positing the value of utopian thinking because it acknowledges that an economic system such as capitalism, predicated on endless growth and extraction, has made life unbearable for the global majority and destructive to human and non-human life, and can only be resolved through deep systemic change. Her approach breaks from the idea of utopia as a fixed abode of stasis. Instead, it removes utopia from mere speculative thought and brings it into alignment with thinking possible alternative futures (Levitas, 2013, p.xi).

Levitas posits her 'utopia as method' as 'a critical tool for exposing the limitations of current policy discourses and economic growth and ecological sustainability' (2013, p.xi) and denotes the criteria of thinking about 'possible futures', 'democratic engagement' with those futures, 'human needs' and 'flourishing' and 'the desire for being otherwise, individually and collectively.' (ibid) The method is analytic, about process and transformation rather than a goal. The passage below was written in the aftermath of the

[2] See: Irit Rogoff (2008) 'Turning', *e-flux journal*, November 2008; Felicity Allen (Ed.) (2011) *Education: Whitechapel Documents of Contemporary Art*. The MIT Press &
Janna Graham, Valeria Graziano & Susan Kelly (2016) 'The Educational Turn in Art', *Performance Research*, 21:6, 29-35

global economic collapse of 2008, however, reading it in 2022 in the immediate aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic is both relevant and urgent:

> ‘For those who still think that utopia is about the impossible, what really is impossible is to carry on as we are, with social and economic systems that enrich a few but destroy the environment and impoverish most of the world’s population. Our very survival depends on finding another way of living.’
>
> (Levitas, 2013, p.xii)

A utopian impulse has been building in the crossovers of the arts and education since 2008. This is apparent in mainstream universities, in activist spaces, in self-organised projects and independent organisations. It is reflected in the plethora of literature that explores political pedagogy, experiments in learning, experiments in art education, projects that critique existing social relations and those that build towards a collective emancipatory praxis. It is also reflected in the resurgence of Marxist thought in academic and extra-academic spaces, including the critical pedagogic work of Paolo Freire. At the same time, the utopian finds itself attached to its nemesis, the disillusionment, despair and hopelessness of capitalist realism (Fisher 2009), the pervasive, unrelenting and expansive quality of which cuts through into alternative projects and falls prey to perpetuating the same problems from which it tried to escape or transform. This point is critically explored by Haslam (2018, p.37), who warns of alternative educational projects that act towards social change but, due to institutional hinderances, find their efforts restricted. Similarly, Fisher, writing in the shadow of the 2008 economic crash, carried a tired critical lens towards the worn-down value of the ‘alternative’ and ‘independent’ subjected to ‘precorporation’ (2009, p.9) by capitalist culture. Bearing in mind the sense of ‘no alternative’ that characterises the post-Thatcher cultural impasse of late-capitalism, it is still valuable to note how utopian impulses and their dystopian counterparts dynamically move together and come to signify moments of a radical imagination at work in building counter-power along with its repression by the

internalised neoliberal pedagogy and its state apparatus.[3] I interpret Levitas' 'utopia as method' as the process of building towards radically just futures, which includes moments of failure, loss and grief.

0.3. Literature review of the field of art education and alternatives.

This literature review sheds light on historically significant models of experimental art education, some debates within critical university studies and will move towards how practitioners and theorists have responded to the specific crises affecting art schools, in particular. The review will highlight how bureaucratic governance of universities has provoked a fight on two fronts: on the one hand, exodus from the institution towards self-organised alternatives and, on the other hand, waging the struggle from within, to fight for the art school and engage in forms of institutional critique. The review will then explore positions from theorists of critical and radical pedagogies with a particular focus on pedagogies of embodiment and care, taking up the question of what a pedagogy in a recrafted, anti-capitalist, utopian art school might look like.

0.3.1. Reimagining the art school from conditions of crisis.

In Spring 2020, The Antiuniversity Now Festival, 'a collaborative experiment to challenge institutionalised education, access to learning and the mechanism of knowledge creation and distribution' (*AntiUniversity Now,* no date) set up an online discussion on art schools and the challenges presented by the pandemic (ibid, 2020). The conversation, which consisted entirely of representatives from London, featured art students in discussion with fine art teachers and union organisers representing university lecturers, cleaners and art workers, brought into sharp focus the crisis is affecting arts education, the neoliberal model and workers' rights. Speakers talked about the need to collectivise, to organise and to reimagine relationships between teachers and learners, and the ongoing need to use this

[3] In *How to be an anti-capitalist in the 21st century* (2019), Erik Olin Wright conceptualises agency occurring 'within all sorts of constraints, both those generated by the social structures within which people act and the internalized constraints embodied in beliefs and habits.' (p.122)

“pause” to not only anticipate the “massacre” that awaits on the other side, but to actively fight against it with a vision of how arts education can be reimagined.

The following literature review understands the crisis felt in art education as inseparable from crises in education more generally, which it will be argued ought to be understood through a lens of social reproduction. The term social reproduction has undergone various uses since it became a central concept for a feminist critique of orthodox Marxism in the 1970s (Katsarova, 2015), but despite historical differences in understanding and use, it aims to develop a new set of tools for analysing the reproduction of capitalism as well as processes of subject formation under capitalism (Katsarova, 2015). In the field of human geography, Cindi Katz (2001, p.711) notably describes social reproduction as ‘the fleshy, messy and indeterminate stuff of everyday life’ and ‘a set of structured practices that unfold in dialectical relation with production, with which it is mutually constitutive and in tension.’ (ibid). More recently, the concept of social reproduction has resurfaced in Marxist-feminist discourses as Social Reproduction Theory (SRT), tersely described as ‘activities and institutions that are required for making life, maintaining life, and generationally replacing life.’ (Bhattacharya, T. 2020, cited in Jaffe, S., 2020) The notion that social reproduction is in crisis can be attributed, as do Gilligan and Vishmidt (2015), to the ‘mechanisms of austerity’ (p.625), where they identify that reproduction has become a prime concept for politicisation, for pre-figurative politics, where ‘reproduction becomes the core principle of organization, both of capital done with labor and a postcapitalist future.’ (p.625) Through these readings, it’s apparent that, where reproduction becomes terrain for further oppression by capital and as a site of political and cultural resistance, it necessitates subjects to ‘find new collective shapes rivalling the systemic scale of capital’ (p.628). Analogous concerns are raised by Sophie Lewis (2019) in forewarning of the re-popularising of terms such as ‘care’ and ‘social reproduction’ in academic discourse leading to its romanticisation or depoliticization (p.302). While, on the other hand, David Harvey has argued that inspiration is drawn from organisations formed on the basis of reproduction ‘for the idea that another life is possible to that given by pure market and monetary transactions’ (2014, p.191). Education in the arts and how their experimental pedagogies form part of the realm of social reproduction for making ‘another life possible’ is the conceptual underpinning for

this literature review. I now turn to look at some historical models of art education as early inspiration for contemporary alternatives to HAE.

0.3.2. Anticapitalist roots of historical art education models.

In his anthology documenting self-organised art education, Sam Thorne argues, 'In different ways, [the Bauhaus, UNOVIS, and VhkUTEMAS] each viewed themselves as revolutionary proposals for remaking the world,' (2018, p.32) In drawing attention to those examples, Thorne seems to be pointing to the beginnings of a new era of experimentation in the education of artists. Bauhaus ideology was even built into its name, *bau* (to build), and *haus* (house), foregrounding architecture as the most important of the arts, but perhaps also as a metaphor towards the *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total work of art) or, architects of a new way of seeing (Bittner, 2019). Bauhaus pedagogy, as Bittner (2019) describes, based itself upon an "epistemological skepticism", which grew out of the destruction wrought by the first World War and, along with it, a break from conventional pedagogical practices previously associated with the French École des Beaux-Arts model (ibid). The desire to unlearn preordained systems of knowledge driven by pre-war academic systems signalled a paradigmatic shift in the teaching and learning of art. In the early days of the Bauhaus, drawing from fantasy was valued over imitating reality (Elkins, 2001, pp. 200-1), intuition and creativity through exploration of a variety of materials was revered (Bittner, 2019) and the primacy of first-hand experience was said to release creative potential in every individual (ibid). A commitment to a new way of seeing, feeling and making brought Bauhaus pedagogy in the early 1920s deliberately at odds with the accelerated machine-culture having taken root across Europe since the early to mid-nineteenth century. The importance of tactility, craft and deep sensuous perception were pedagogical reactions against the dominance of industrialism, and were envisioned as transformations in perception (Bittner, 2019). Bittner traces its influence through to Anni Albers' theory of design and weaving, of which the process 'does not distinguish between touching, comprehension and cognition' (2019) and therefore collapses the academic separation of subject and object, and the artificial separation of intellectual and manual labour. The latter, in particular, is of political relevance to the changing relations of production and working conditions. As E.P. Thompson argues, the 'factory hands' once belonged to 'craft traditions'

(1968, p.213) and the worker became an '"instrument"', or an entry among other items of cost" (p.222). Anni Albers would later teach at Black Mountain College, discussed a few paragraphs below, taking with her the deliberate pedagogical erasure of hierarchies between "intellectual" work and "manual" work. It was those distinctions that the Bauhaus therefore attempted to dissolve in the pedagogical fusion of art and craft and a return to traditions of craft, a subject that one of my respondents brings insight to in chapter four.

It is interesting to note that the roots of returning to craft as exemplary of dissolving false dichotomies of mind and body were already evident in the 19th century British Arts & Crafts movement associated with William Morris. Dave Beech (2019) briefly traces the utopian thought of that movement through reference to concepts of art as unalienated labour, referencing the idea that in Morris's best-known work, *News from Nowhere* (1890), the supersession between art and labour is indicative of "favourable" communal relations under socialist conditions (Beech, 2019, p.50). The British Arts & Crafts tradition was at the forefront of a new artistic movement of which the Bauhaus became famous, indicating political and pedagogical parallels being taken up as utopian and oppositional to specific historical circumstances. The Bauhaus formed in tune with the utopian fervour of the time, springing out of a context of political turmoil and rebellion in Germany: a crumbling post-war economy, an appetite for social experimentation inspired by the 1917 October Revolution in Russia, and vicious repression of democratic structures and worker-solidarity. A few decades prior in Britain, William Morris and the Arts & Crafts movement was born out of anti-industrialism (Beech, 2019, p.42). Writing about the Bauhaus, Ben Davis points out that only when the German government put pressure on the Bauhaus and when funding was in short supply that Walter Gropius refashioned its ideology to "Art and Technology – A New Unity", a turn which abandoned its original intensions and placed it more in tune ideologically with the fascistic leanings of the Italian Futurist movement. The Bauhaus, originally conceived as an 'island of unalienated labour in a capitalist world' (Davis, no date) with its insistence on the harmony of arts and crafts and the reconciliation of embodiment and thought, fell to the pressures of American market-ideology and became its anathema, a symbol of the corporate world. This has led some commentators, such as Schuldenfrei (cited in Turner, 2018) to read the Bauhaus as a contradiction in its later years of pragmatism and alliance with industry.

Nevertheless, the Bauhaus is considered the most noteworthy of the pedagogical experiments in art education of the early twentieth century, as it offered an alternative to academic models in reaction to moral conservativism and a heightened sense of revolutionary spirit. Sam Thorne (2019) insists that this period was a 'utopian moment' (2018, p.32), which included the UNOVIS group founded by Kazmir Malevich at the Vitebsk People's Art School the same year of the opening of the Bauhaus. The UNOVIS collective made art politically, and the group's pedagogy was explicitly activist, with students and teachers advocating a socially transformative artistic program against the capitalist mode of artistic production (Kachurin, 2013, pp.37-38). The attention given to human needs, embodiment and materials, and the dissolving of false distinctions of intellectual and manual activity are still relevant aspects of art education and pedagogy, as we will come to see.

Another important crucible of utopian experiment in art education in the first half of the twentieth century took place at Black Mountain College in the rural setting of Blue Ridge Mountains in North Carolina, where previously mentioned Josef and Anni Albers taught. The art school's radical programme emphasised community and 'cooperative intelligence', where students could leave whenever they felt ready, the teacher rejected the idea of a school (Thorne, 2018, p.35) and teachers and students 'lived as part of a close-knit social unit.'(Adamic, 1936, p.520) Since the school was unaccredited, it could be better placed as an informal learning experiment rather than a school, making it a leading forerunner of the alternative art school explosion and other artists' informal learning cultures that proliferated after the 2008 financial crisis. As we will see, some of the ideas which came out of Black Mountain College were present in the desires of my respondents currently working in the field.

0.3.3. The neoliberalisation of Higher Education.

Before exploring discussions within the field of art education and some alternative propositions, it is worth briefly foregrounding it with what has been driving the search for alternatives.

The neoliberalisation of higher education, as with the public sector more generally, has been covered extensively in academic literature, and it is well established that

neoliberalism in the university entails 'an extension of the principles of 'free market' capitalism—particularly the logics of profit, individualism and competition' (Breeze, Taylor and Costa, 2019, p.1). Mahony & Weiner (2019), writing about the impact of neoliberalism in higher education, have explained some useful terms inextricable to how neoliberalism tends to be understood: 'managerialism', they assert, emphasises public-sector business practices into the public sector, establishing internal markets and competition, performance management, target setting and customer satisfaction inspection (p.561); in addition, 'performativity' relates to 'coercive accountability' (Shore and Wright, 2000) and self-reporting (Mahony & Weiner, 2019), a culture that heavily implicates academic workers into a seemingly endless tunnel of auditing and measurements (Burrows, 2012; Pereira, 2015). Furthermore, in a paper analysing a 'neoliberal moment' in English Higher Education, Joyce Canaan (2010) presents the criteria imposed upon academics in the neoliberal model and some of their consequences, including how critical thinking, reading and learning are substituted for a culture of impression, spectacle and performance (p.60), a culture of pervasive self-scrutiny (ibid) and performance monitoring utilising technologies of performance (p.58); consequently, it is argued, academics frequently work in a hostile environment laden with anxiety and 'ontological insecurity' (p.61). Perniciously, such cultures individualise what are structural problems, and as Pereira (2015) argues, there must be an urgent collective response to challenge what Amsler (2015) has called the 'hegemony of hopelessness'.

According to Slaughter and Rhoades (2004), the incorporation of neoliberal policies into structures of education, both in compulsory schooling and in Higher Education, began at the turn of the twenty-first century when information societies and the knowledge economy demanded the 'integration of universities and colleges into the new economy'. Slaughter and Rhoades developed a theory of 'academic capitalism' (1997) to explain this transition from a public university to a system that brings in the corporate sector and remodels itself as a 'marketer', arguing that the term 'academic capitalism' captures the 'encroachment of the profit motive into the academy' (1997, p.9), in which 'colleges and universities compete vigorously to market their institutions to high-ability students able to assume high debt-loans.' (2004) Students as consumers, in turn, choose subjects complementary to the new economy, such as business, finance, marketing, communication

and media arts. In this landscape, humanities and arts subjects have been caught in the crossfire of subjects deemed to have 'value' to the new economy, where research has shown that performing and creative arts are included in subjects that will have up to 50% of their teaching subsidies cut. (Bulaitis, 2021) The same article worked out that funding support for arts subjects would be cut from £36 million to £19 million (ibid). In real terms, this has led to departments across the UK to suspend their arts programmes and reduce their humanities courses (Greenfield, 2022), with these cuts to arts and humanities subjects forming part of the 'crisis rhetoric' associated with the neoliberal university (Siddiqui, 2016, p.62).

While Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) contend that corporations 'remain distinct from universities', they also show how universities directly and indirectly supported neoliberal initiatives. In the US context, they cite the Bayh-Dole Act (1980) that allowed universities to begin profiting from federally funded research (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Giroux and Aronowitz (2002), for example, mention that the University of California at Berkeley appoint business representatives to sit on faculty committees and have a large sway over how funds are spent and distributed (p.332), and they worry over the blurring between 'public values and commercial interests' (p.333). There are also volumes of academic research papers that argue and evidence a corporate style university, from managerialism (Deem, Hillyard and Reed, 2007) to labour practices (Hall and Bowles, 2016) and the behaviour of staff and students (Burton, 2021). Nuanced discussions have teased out how critiques of neoliberalism and adjacent bureaucracy in universities have often been used to stifle issues over equality in British universities. Sarah Ahmed traces how equality was 'dismissed as a symptom of neoliberalism, as "just another" mechanism for ensuring academic compliance' (2015), showing how the distaste for the changing demands on academics' labour backfires into hindering other aspects of progressive transformation within the university. Burton (2021) also argues how acts of kindness and solidarity in the university can be ambivalent or controlling, and used against staff through 'the creeping manoeuvres of neoliberal power' (p.21) against an underlying sense of carelessness (Lynch, 2010). Other scholars have noted the gendered aspects to neoliberal power, detailing the 'dominance based masculinised practice' (Mahony & Weiner, 2019, p.561) implicit in managerial language. This is relevant for the kinds of language used in higher education management, which Canaan (2010, p.60)

argues allows for the internalisation of norms and consequently the shaping of subjectivity. These are examples of what is generally deemed to be a crisis of Higher Education brought about by neoliberal reforms.

0.3.4. How art education became neoliberal.

The process of streamlining art schools into universities where they would become accountable to the same standards converged with an emerging professionalisation of artists. Houghton (2016) has called this the Professional Curriculum, which has become the dominant curriculum in art schools in the UK. It has been argued that the professionalisation of artists is directly indebted to the Bologna Declaration (1999), which standardised the EU's university programs into a three-part system of undergraduate, masters and doctoral degrees. Within this, art schools that previously enjoyed institutional autonomy were restructured to fall in line with protocols given to universities awarding non-art related degrees (Kenning, 2014: p.4; Haslam, 2018).

Before that, as Beck and Cornford (2014) outline in their fascinating research on the "lost" art schools of Britain, there was an art school in every small town. These were entry level institutions which set themselves apart from a more traditional education. These schools existed as early as 1913 and were either re-purposed, sold-off, demolished or otherwise abandoned after the 1980s. Beck and Cornford argue how the demolition of these art schools was part of an economic justification to streamline art education and to reduce and remould the public sphere: it has 'eliminated a vital space where exploratory creative practice could be sited inside the everyday, positioned both as an extension of and as a challenge to, the quotidian.' (2014, p.8) The loss of these institutions speaks to a parallel loss of public space, as the author has noted that 'we are standing among the ruins of publicly supported and publicly situated art schooling and all that might mean in terms of critical and cultural enrichment and diversity.' (ibid) While the authors attend to feelings of loss over the quantity and proliferation of these art schools, which if viewed through a utopian lens alludes to a society comprised of inclusive community art schools, they notably institutionalised their own kind of elitism. Beck and Cornford write that these local art schools provided skills and cultural training to students from the working-classes supported financially by local authorities, but they omit how the experience of attending these art

schools differed according to gender and race. It is therefore important not to glorify the pre-neoliberal 'public' art school nor the system of higher education before neoliberal restructuring.

The disappearance of local, public art schools into the opening of polytechnics in the 1960s to the introduction of BAs in Fine Art at a university from 1999 speaks to 'the consolidation of generic institutions' (Beck and Cornford, 2014, p.42) more privatised than public. The influence of the *Coldstream Reports* of 1960 and 1970 significantly marked a distinctive shift in the provision of artists' education in the UK. The reports were directed by Sir William Coldstream, an artist, educator and influential figure in the reshaping of arts education policy in the UK. The reports ushered in profound changes to the provision of artists' formal education and training, in which the main shift encapsulated a drift away from art as a formalist, technique-focused discipline to the more conceptual, abstract and intellectual, replacing craft with design, and was aligned with changes in the contemporary art world generally towards conceptualism, abstraction and performance. One of the most profound differences became the introduction of what was called Complementary Studies into the curriculum for fine art students, which spurred concerned reactions from teachers at the Royal College of Art that this would make disciplines such as painting and sculpture 'a secondary activity' (Willer, 2018, p.13). Fifteen per cent of studio time was axed in favour of 'academic' work (p.11), instantiating the artist as a public intellectual and the fashioning of cultural and socio-cultural studies and concomitant shrinking of Art History as a subject. This coincided with the professionalisation of artistic practice in art schools, which was influenced by Coldstream's reforms, but made more explicit upon implementation of the *Further and Higher Education Act* (Great Britain, DfE, 1992) which absorbed former polytechnical colleges into universities, further entrenching the academicization of practical art subjects. As Scarsbrook has noted, there were 180 independent art schools in 1959 compared with around a dozen in 2012, the rest having been either 'culled, absorbed or institutionalised' (2021, p.34) through the *Further and Higher Education Act*.

0.3.5. Critiques of neoliberal HAE

Artist and educator Dean Kenning suggests that the oppositional, utopian and political spirit for which art schools used to be renowned is still latent within art schools today if they

refuse neoliberal pedagogies and students resist neoliberal subjectivisation.[4] Kenning writes about the detrimental, depoliticising effects of neoliberal subjectivisation in art education elsewhere (2019), where he criticises the alignment of an education in the fine arts with neoliberal subjectivity produced by market-oriented universities. He suggests that art practice in education is incompatible with the governing logic of the market and that educators should try to resist shaping their students into competitive, individualistic entrepreneurial subjects. He suggests that even if, under a Labour government, Higher Education fees were to be waivered, the 'neoliberal logic' is so far entrenched that attitudes of neoliberal mentality would still be present and must be resisted. Kenning deploys the term 'art world capital' (2019, p.120) to suggest forms of symbolic capital specific to the contemporary art world. He thereby delineates how artists are expected to pursue activities which make themselves and their work visible to those who already possess 'symbolic power', a move which he seems to suggest capitulates to the 'acceptance of the art world as it is' (2019, p.121) and has a desultory effect on the critical artist and 'the political agency of art.' (ibid)

In his talk, 'Towards a Critical Art School' (2014) he argues for the critical value of an art education, contending that criticality in art must not be subsumed into 'contextual studies' or driven out of art courses, nor should critical theory and critical thinking be a separate appendage to art education. Instead, Kenning proposes critical theory to be immanent to the making of art, which would dissolve the false dichotomy of manual and intellectual work. Creative work in art-making is an embodied process that must involve criticality, as students are no longer confined to representation or medium-specificity, but instead have 'the entire social world opened up for investigation and creative re-engineering.' (2014)

Critiques of the art school's neoliberalisation is similarly expressed by Das Theatre's newest director, Silvia Bottiroli. Her concern is that the artistic and political values that are now shaping higher education are radically different from how art schools were conceived

[4] It is important here to acknowledge that through a focus on the destructive effects of neoliberalism in higher education, some researchers have ignored that many art schools prior to the Bologna Process were anti-feminist, disablist and racist. The "utopian" that Kenning seems to be nostalgic for was only on offer to a very small slice of the population. Project Womanhouse, the Feminist Art Programme at the California Institute of the Arts is an historical example of a feminist counter-space.

of two centuries ago. Her starting point is the assumption that we can anticipate how institutions perform if we first understand how they think. She argues that 'understanding how institutions think is very important in order to exercise our agency within them effectively and, consequently, to be able to bend them, hybridize, challenge, betray or queer them.' (Bottiroli 2020, p.204)

Relevant to the field of performing arts in particular, Bottiroli runs with Andrea Fraser's influential article, *From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique* (2005), where Fraser argues that the 'art market', and as such the 'institution(s)' of art, Fraser argues, is everywhere where arts discourse claims as its ground and sets its boundaries, and when those boundaries are pushed, the institution rises to absorb it. She describes 'the entire field of art as a social universe' (2005, p.281), the institution as 'the network of social and economic relationships between them' (ibid), and further explains: 'art is art when it exists for discourses and practices that recognise it as art, value and evaluate it as art, and consume it as art…The institution of art is not something external to any work of art but the irreducible condition of its existence as art. [It is] a perception not necessarily aesthetic but fundamentally social in its determination.' (p.281) If the institution is 'embodied in people' (p.281) Fraser's argument is that the 'institution', like social relations in capitalism, is dialectically antagonistic between systems of power and the people who perpetuate it with the agency of art workers, whose acts of complicity or boundary-pushing, aesthetically or politically, reframe the conditions of the institution of art. It is thus where she stakes her claim that, 'It's not a question of being against the institution: we are the institution. It's a question of what kind of institution we are, what kind of values we institutionalize…' (p.283)

Hence, the question of outside and inside the institution, antagonism and exodus, becomes destabilised, where what is 'mainstream' and what is 'alternative' are already cut from the same social cloth. Possibly a false dichotomy is established where, as Fraser claims, the 'institution is 'us' and to speak of the institution as 'other' than us is to disavow our role in the creation and perpetuation of its conditions.' (ibid) Through the argument applied here, alternative art education that does not question art's complicity in the matrix of power and does not take care to transform its pedagogies in alliance with an emancipatory orientation towards the world, falls prey to reaffirming the institution of art. Haslam (2018)

recognises this 'double instrumentalization' (p.81) of education, used to describe how education became a useful and experimental category for contemporary art before being adopted by its institutions. The 'exodus' from the institutions of art peddled by the 'alternative', in this view hardly represents a true break but instead finds itself enmeshed and entangled within the relational systems of power forming an expansive art world.

Following from Fraser, Bottiroli (2020), contends that thinking with and through the institution is necessary because art education as a field 'thinks itself as progressive, research-led, experimental and committed to the production of the future.' (ibid) She speculatively applies Fraser's argument on Institutional Critique to art schools and academies, and correctly identifies that art schools have somehow been exempt from the glare of institutional critique, an oddity considering that 'art schools are now increasingly and primarily a necessary feeder channel for the conservative reputational economy of a professionally organised field' (Malik, 2015, p.50). Of course, following Fraser, art schools are not exempt from the expansive institution of art; they do not assume an enclosed, protected space separated from the art-world proper, but, as Bourriaud (2015) articulates, have 'a discreet but decisive influence on the art scene it feeds.' Art schools therefore occupy a space of ambivalence and struggle, where experimentation and criticality are encouraged, but only in so far as the prevalent powers dominating higher education allow. Abundant research has demonstrated how the education to employment pipeline is ideologically embedded within universities, from their curricula to learning outcomes and marketing strategies (Clark & Jackson, 2017, p.119). Art schools are, as Bottiroli reminds us, 'situated at the meeting point of education and production' (2020, p.205) and, as art schools are transient spaces for the artists and students who move through them, it becomes more challenging to make lasting grassroots transformations.

Parallel concerns are raised by Vicky Gunn (2020) who argues that there exists a friction between students' creative freedom and the 'demands of artistic merit required by higher education learning outcomes' (p.17), pointing to how higher education in the arts under the Bologna Process merged art schools into a university model. Both authors see an 'incompatible' (Botirolli, 2020, p.207) rift between a safe and supportive environment on the one hand, and hierarchies, power structures, timelines and assessments on the other. Implicit in both Gunn (2020) and Botirolli (2020) is a desire for an art school which takes its

cues from the radical openness and experimentation of the historical examples referenced earlier in this literature review, as well as examples of alternative art schools that resist the formalities of education, such as grades and assessments. Bottiroli insists, 'I believe that art schools exist to offer specific support structures for new generations of artists to explore and strengthen their means of engaging imaginatively with the complexity of the world' (2020, p.207). It is, however, the 'environment' (p.207) that, importantly, fosters an imaginative landscape for artists to explore and experiment, which both authors seem to suggest is compromised when education is beholden to market-values and rigid learning outcomes. At the same time, Bottiroli's suggestion of art schools as sites of 'agonistic pluralism' (pp.207-208) helps her out of this impasse, arguing that the progressive/destructive tensions that arise within institutions are what allows institutions to change (Franzen, 2020, p.178). Art schools as sites of agonism, as she envisions, are where students can feel safe to explore their understanding of their work and be "co-authors" of what an art school can generate. As she understands it, art school as a space of agonistic pluralism entails a 'constant deconstruction and reconstruction of the idea of the school itself' (p.208), an exercise in living together for 'the exercise of political negotiation…questioning one's own beliefs and values, exercising radical forms of listening.' (ibid) Bottiroli seems to be advocating for art school as a place to practice prefigurative politics, a way of organising social life that shapes how subjects act and interact outside of its walls. Prefiguration will be taken up by this thesis in chapter 4.

To elaborate, Bottiroli (2020) brings in Barad's notion of 'entangled subjects' bringing to mind how 'individuals emerge through and part of their entangled intra-reality' (Barad, 2007) and that we 'lack an independent, self-contained existence.' (2007, ix) Bottiroli asks of art schools:

> 'what if, instead, we look at art schools as collective entities and unique environments that nourish a sense of multiplicity and a desire to undertake adventures together? What if…students could graduate with collaborative or collective works, instead of with creations valorised as the product of an individual with a discernible set of pre-determined skills?'
>
> (2020, p.211)

Bottiroli wonders how this new focus would ripple into the broader art field, undercutting the value placed on individual 'singularities' (Bourriaud, 2015) produced by art academies. She shares and reiterates the concerns of Dean Kenning (2019) for resisting neoliberal subjectivisation in the art academies at the level of pedagogy and culture, and follows the desire of alternative art school collective BFAMFAPhD for 'new spaces for collective weirdness and joy' (Reyes, 2017, chapter 14). This is an important direction distinct from the nostalgia of art schools that exercised exclusivity with regards to gender, race and class, and also from the business model of art schools that prevail in higher education.

This idea of the school providing a space of creativity and experimentation has roots in the Western tradition, according to Masschelein & Simons (2013), as an established time and space detached from the spheres of work and of the home. They trace the etymology of school to the word *schol*é, which is the Greek word for leisure and rest. Masschelein and Simons (2012) look to the school idealistically, as a space where 'productive' time is suspended. For them, the school 'arises as the concrete materialisation and spatialisation of time that literally separates or lifts schoolchildren out of the (unequal) social and economic order (the order of the family, but also the order of society as a whole) and into the luxury of egalitarian time.' (p.30). School is a 'suspension' (p.31), a temporary relief from the family and time where the rules and rhythms of productive society do not apply. This reading casts school in a heavily romanticised light. The authors seem to see the school in heterotopian terms, as a space that is *other* or different from society, yet somehow, strangely in relation to it. Foucault, who coined the term heterotopia, describes these spaces as 'something like counter-sites' (1986, p.24), which 'suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect.' (p.24) People pass through the school, it is a liminal space of passage, of travel and of artificial vertical ordering that correlates age with academic progress. That it represents a cocoon from society, from the world of work, and a passageway through time for children exemplifies the idea of it being a space exempt from ordinary rules. The authors venture that the 'format' (p.32) of the school is 'the time and space where students can let go of all kinds of sociological, economic, familial and culture-related rules and expectations. In other words, giving form to the school – making school – has to do with a kind of suspension of the weight of these rules.' (p.35) They think it as a

vessel for providing precious time and space away from usual market-driven or chore-driven daily activities, in which students are led into a space of reflection and curiosity.

Yet Masschelein & Simons (2012) acknowledge that in modern societies the school is not quite this, with curricula being continuously moulded to satisfy demands of the job market, subjects tethered to economic worth and students' cultural and social backgrounds forming a point of privilege or disadvantage. School is fundamentally heterogeneous; it contains aspects of control and kernels of liberation. For some young people, school is a place of refuge from an abusive family or miserable home life; for others it reinforces and exacerbates already existing social inequalities. The space of pluralistic freedom that Bottiroli (2020) envisions for art schools bears some resemblance to the qualities of a school described by Masschelein & Simons (2012), but where it falls short is takes us to the protest cultures in Higher Art Education (HAE) and universities, which is the focus of the next section.

0.3.6. Protest, resistance and counter-pedagogies in art school.

This section looks at some of the recent history of protest, resistance and counter-pedagogies in Higher Arts Education (HAE) in the UK and in the USA and understands how this has informed the academic discourse. A number of authors working as art educators have written about how an academic art education within universities ought to resist ideological neoliberalisation from within the academies and universities to enact change. Gawthrop (2016) is one of these authors critical of attempts to flee the university, and argues that the setting up of alternative, independent art schools 'inadvertently give[s] credence to the government's neoliberal agenda' (p.42), and presses instead for political opposition' (ibid) from within the structures of higher education institutions.

In 2011, the results of the Browne report, a government report that brought in cuts to spending in universities and the triple increase of tuition fees, spurred a wave of student protests across the UK. Students at the University of the Arts formed coalitions with artists and anti-cuts activists to rage against proposed cuts to arts subjects, as details of the Browne report showed that arts subjects would be particularly badly hit. In 2015, a wave of protests and occupations took place at various campuses that make up the University of the Arts in London. Over 100 students at Wimbledon College of Arts organised demonstrations,

workshops, performances and screenings around the politics of contemporary art with the title 'Reclaim our Art School', during which they accused the art school of being like a corporation. At Chelsea College of Arts, similar protests took place to raise awareness about proposed redundancies and course restructuring at University of the Arts. The students were protesting the lack of transparency in the top-down managerial and bureaucratic structures of the university that gave students little autonomy in decision-making processes and devalued their courses. In March 2015, students from the UAL staged an occupation of the reception area of Central Saint Martins in King's Cross. They were protesting the plans to cull 580 Art and Design foundation places for new students. The university reacted by placing an injunction on the protesting students, criminalizing student dissent indefinitely.

These examples of protest in the art schools speak to the effects of austerity and neoliberalism on art education as well as the art school being a site of struggle and resistance. Like Gawthrop (2016), who advocates for the university as a site of struggle, HEIs are contradictory and contested spaces. While neoliberalism tends towards monocultures in terms of academic performance, standardisation and curriculum-shaping, it is difficult to completely enforce. Diversity exists within universities and experiments in counter-pedagogies have historically shaped the 'university from below' to inform what Sarah Amsler calls a 'democratic educational practice' (2017, p.6). If protests are the public site of struggle and outrage over education, radical projects exist within universities and art schools in the classrooms to fight back against the damaging effects of neoliberal restructuring, not merely by articulating what they are against, but proposing 'utopian pedagogies against neoliberalism' (Cote, Day & Peuter, p.2006). Learning communities within art schools have sought solidarity-based alliances between staff and students to show support for and to protest the casualisation of academic staff (Loveday, 2018; Read & Leatherwood, 2022), have spoken out against institutional racism (Desai, 2010; Sian, 2019; Carpenter II et al, 2021) and have worked on reshaping curricula and experimenting with emancipatory pedagogies (Clack, 2022).

0.4. Covid-19 and its effect on the art world & creative industries (spaces, venues, artists)

This section will offer a brief overview of the effect of Covid-19 on the arts in the UK, looking at the literature published during and immediately after the lockdowns of 2020 and 2021. It is important to note that, still being in the immediate aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, much of the research is nascent and inconclusive, with many of the prolonged effects of the pandemic still unknown and in process. This section therefore provides some context on the arts and education, with the year 2020 being an important date after ten years of austerity policies, prolonged economic neoliberalism and closure to sectors of the economy during the pandemic. This context informs the PhD research undertaken here which understands alternative arts education within these sets of economic constraints as well as the opportunities for resistance and difference it has opened.

During October 2020, a government advert was widely plastered on billboards and internet sites across the UK depicting a ballet dancer lacing up her pointe shoes. Written across it was the copy, 'Fatima's next job could be in cyber. (She just doesn't know it yet).' It was part of a crude government campaign to encourage artists struggling with the impact of the pandemic and the closure of their physical workplaces to reconsider their choices, retrain out of the arts and into more government-mandated economically lucrative industries, using the slogan 'Rethink. Reskill. Reboot'. Many furiously saw this as another government attack on the arts sector after a decade of austerity had steadily gutted funding allocated to the arts and cultural sectors, with recent research suggesting that the likelihood of increased government withdrawal from spending on arts and culture is high (Rex and Campbell, 2022, p.27), as it seeks to speculatively invest in more commercial ventures with better financial prospects (ibid).

The UK government announced a national lockdown on 23rd March 2020, banning all social gatherings and closing venues, schools, universities, bars, cafes, clubs and banning all non-essential travel. The three-week lockdown was then extended by a further three weeks. By mid-April in the UK the number of infections and deaths from Covid-19 continued to rise, and changes to cultural production and consumption were evident (Banks, 2020). Even though the government brought in a package of financial support ("furlough") which

was handed out to directors of organisations to parcel out to their workforces, many cultural freelancers were unable to access it (Walmsley, 2022, p.9), indicating a lack of insight into the labour practices and needs of cultural workers (ibid). A comprehensive report led by the Centre for Cultural Value about the impact of Covid-19 on the culture industries found that significant damage had occurred to the sector during the initial lockdowns from March 2020. The report found that the artistic and creative workforce in music, visual and performing arts was cut by approximately 25% and had little signs of recovering towards the end of the year (2022, p.14) The report also found heightened concerns about people's mental health and burnout, including worries that those on long-term furlough would struggle returning to work amid reports of people leaving their jobs in the arts in late spring and summer (ibid). Other research detailing the effects of the pandemic on the wellbeing and working patterns of performing arts workers predicted that the creative sector would be hit 'twice as hard' as the wider economy, with some sub-sectors losing half their workforce (Spiro et al, 2021). The report noted that 'within weeks' respondents to their survey experienced loss of income due to work that was cancelled or reduced, which correlated to levels of anxiety, depression, stagnation and 'stifled creativity' (ibid); at the same time, some had reported that they were working harder and longer hours than before the pandemic (ibid). Reports that their industry had 'disappeared overnight' (ibid) were not uncommon. The complexity of the situation, including the nuances at the intersections of age, social class and access to capital and networks meant that some artists experienced the availability of new opportunities through the expanded reach of the internet, and that people took the opportunity to care more for their wellbeing. However, the analysis emphasised that the stressful challenges far outweighed the opportunities. In the arts sector overall, it has been revealed that while financial insecurity is often ubiquitous for freelance artists and cultural workers, the pandemic exacerbated this precarity (May, 2022, p.1) and that the pandemic had led to adverse psychosocial effects on cultural workers.

Despite government campaigns recommending artists to reskill, a recent report has shown that during the pandemic creatives and artists returned to arts education to "upskill", rather than reskill. The report showed that postgraduate arts degrees were being studied far more than undergraduate arts degrees (Feder et al, 2021), but cautioned at the

accessibility of those programmes, and significantly, that 'increased enrolment in education might exacerbate inequalities in the creative occupations' (ibid). Arts activists who were part of The Other MA (TOMA), one of the key groups explored in this research, recognised this gap in accessibility and increasing inequality and formed a protest group called the Solidarity Syndicate. They countered that the Arts Council Emergency Funding, part of the government's Culture Recovery Fund of £1.57 billion to support cultural organisations, forced small arts organisations and individuals to compete for resources against each other and against large National Portfolio Organisations (NPO), such as the National Gallery and other large arts organisations. The artist-activists who formed the Solidarity Syndicate worked out that out of the £160 million emergency response fund, £90 million of that fund went to NPOs, and only £20 million would be available for individual creative practitioners and cultural workers. Solidarity Syndicate responded by encouraging artists to group together rather than compete with each other, while drawing to attention to the 'vital creative activity [that] happens outside of the NPOs (who are mostly art™-safe-white-people).' (#22 SolSyn). This assertion is evidenced by a report on the 'small arts ecology' (Gordon-Nesbitt, 2012), which raised the issue that small arts organisations were being forced to abide by the same standards of measurement and evaluation as large arts organisations, a burden which they attribute to these small organisations struggling to survive through the waves of austerity and financial crisis. One article focusing on the visual arts, noting the heightened precarity of individuals who did not receive financial support and suffered greatly during the most challenging points of the pandemic, suggested Universal Basic Income for cultural workers to protect their wellbeing and livelihood, showing holes in the government's 'traditional entrepreneurial model' (Doustaly & Vishalakshi, 2022) of accessing funding for arts projects. A year into the pandemic and on the one year anniversary of the closure of venues and the end to in-person socialising, a union of creative practitioners, Equity, demanded a basic income for artists and cultural workers, arguing that the pandemic had 'exposed the inability of the national welfare system and government support schemes to allow for the specific needs of creative, freelance and intermittent workers' (Equity, 2021) and that 40% of their members were unable to access the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme (ibid).

A report from the musicians' union stated that over 75% of theatre musicians were likely to be in financial hardship if they were not able to return to work until September 2020, with 53% unable to meet the government's criteria for the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme (Musician's Union, 2020/2021). A survey conducted by a-n, an information and advocacy group for the contemporary arts, reported the severe impact of COVID-19 on over 4,000 artists and curators in the visual arts sector, with income reduction being the most affected, and a large impact on access to studio space, with one in three respondents estimating that their income will drop by more than 76% (a-n The Artists Information Company, 2020). An open letter from the Artists' Union England to the UK Chancellor of the Exchequer details how the crisis is immiserating artists who are disabled, single-parents, on zero-hours' contracts, low-income and freelance (Artists' Union England (AUE), 2020a). The union used evidence to heavily criticise the government's delayed response for protecting artists and cultural workers, for whom the funds from the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme would not be received until June 2020, four months into the crisis. The same union also published a critical response to the Arts' Council England's announcement of an emergency fund, of which the £160 million, they argued, failed to reach poor and working-class artists, and would provide a crutch for large National Portfolio Organisations while smaller organisations and individual artists would be left to compete 'for this tiny pot of money', (Artists' Union England (AUE), 2020b) with further criticism that 'It entrenches the unequal and competitive nature of the arts sector' (ibid). During the period being termed 'The Great Pause', while the first few months of lockdown in the UK brought the economy to a standstill, the arts sector found itself at the precipice of collapse but simultaneously expected artists to work without remuneration. Artists and cultural organisations began rapidly using internet platforms as their new exhibition spaces to reach audiences and raise morale with quarantined audiences and gain visibility. The contradictory positioning of the arts during times of limited proximity threw into sharp relief the precarity of artistic labour and how much of this work is taken for granted.

The impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on the arts sector reverberated through universities and art schools, a sector already deep in the discourse of crisis before governments around the world mandated them to close (Ramírez & Hyslop-Margison, 2015). Universities in the UK were mandated to move their classes online at the end of

March 2020. The University and College Union (UCU) expressed concerns over excessive workloads that had increased due to the transition to online learning since September 2020 and the corresponding increase in anxiety and depression in staff and students (UCU University and College Union, 2021). It continues to be well articulated that austerity policies and neoliberalisation has intensified the crisis conditions of academic workers and students before the Coronavirus outbreak (Slaughter & Roads, 2004; Canaan, 2010; Cresswell, M; Karimova, Z; Brock, T., 2014; Kenning, 2019). This was echoed in the US context, where many art educators and researchers expressed trepidation in having to teach visual arts online (Sabol, 2021) and worried over further cuts to the arts during the economic crisis (Tuttle & Hansen, 2021).

Reflecting on the privatisation of higher education in the United States, an interesting parallel is brought up by Astra Taylor (2020), who writes about how the sector suffered from shockwaves of the Coronavirus pandemic. She argues that further austerity policies will mean that 'more schools are public in name alone' and that after the crisis of 2008, state funding for education never made a recovery (Taylor, 2020). Taylor's position on the relationship between increasing privatisation and inequality is worth mentioning, where she points out that for-profit learning institutions, at a time of great economic uncertainty, 'with their false promises of economic advancement and online course offerings' (ibid), prey on the working classes, often people of colour in the American context. People from poor or working-class backgrounds do not, she states, have the 'luxury' (ibid) of studying for its own sake, and for-profits take advantage of this pragmatism based on survival and purported economic dividends. This was reflected in my interviews with artist-educators in San Francisco, who, as it will be demonstrated later in this thesis, spoke of the university with vampiric imagery.

I will now introduce the key concepts that comprise the theoretical framework for the project and underpin the primary research. These key concepts are neoliberalism, postcapitalism, peer-learning, transindividuality and care. Peer-learning and transindividuality will be conceptually linked in their orientation towards the production of postcapitalist ontologies, which will be explained. I will then outline the structure of my dissertation by setting up each chapter.

0.5. Key concepts

0.5.1. Neoliberalism

This section unpacks the term neoliberalism, how it is understood in Leftist discourse since the economic crash of 2008 and justifies the use of the term for my project. Neoliberalism stands for a set of ideologically right-wing, market-driven economic policies which were first implemented in Chile in the 1970s but came out of US economists associated with the Chicago School in the 1930s (Foucault, 2008; Gilbert, 2013). Its initial architecture as a political project is understood by some as a slow moving 'social movement from above' (Nilsen, 2015), a counter-revolution clutching at power after political gains made by workers and colonised people in the post-war years and until the 1970s. Ideologies of individualism and competition, stemming from the economic policy of free-market capitalism, became widely implemented by the Thatcher-Reagan era marking the beginning of the 1980s.

Neoliberalism has become a defining feature of the early twenty-first century's political landscape and 'a guiding principle of economic thought and management.' (Harvey, 2007, p.2) Scholars tend to agree that neoliberalism is defined by 'market-based governance practices on the one hand (the privatization, commodification, and proliferation of difference) and authoritarian, national security-driven penal state practices on the other' (Mohanty, 2013, p.970); this includes 'deregulation… and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision.' (Harvey, 2007, p.3) As a mode of governance, neoliberalist ideology purports that individual freedom and wellbeing can be achieved through giving autonomous powers to markets and having humans fashion, design and perform themselves as if they were a commodity: 'by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by private property rights, free markets, and free trade.' (ibid, p.2) By the mid-late 2000s, neoliberalism had become a 'hegemonic discourse' (ibid, p.3), the term being used unequivocally to describe the global restructuring of the economy.

This process of neoliberalisation is pervasive in institutions and the way we 'interpret, live in, and understand the world.' (ibid) It is with this in mind that Harvey, as others (Foucault, 2008; Brown, 2015, 2019; Davies, 2014), understand neoliberalism as a disciplinary system of governance that imposes a morality and ethic through pervasive

systemic policies that weaves ‘uncertainty and inequality’ into its fabric (Davies, 2014, p.39). As a system tied to economic and market imperatives that strips away public provision, it produces real and affective anxiety and precarity among subjects. Foucault made this point as part of his theory of rationality, which argues that neoliberalism instates a ‘governing rationality at all levels of society: workplace, healthcare, learning, living, loving…’ (Brown, 2020) Thus, the ‘advancement to human well-being’ (Harvey, 2007, p.3) that advocates of neoliberal policies claimed, it has shown, has been deeply disproven.

The neoliberal model, as Mohanty explains, drives further gulfs between the “privileged” and the “non-privileged”, creating stark divides between those who are accepted by the nation-state, and who can be criminalized under the economic law (2013, p.970). Its framework publicises choice, freedom and individuality, but, as Brown (2015) has argued, neoliberalism ‘configures all aspects of existence in economic terms, quietly undoing basic elements of democracy.’ (ibid, p.17) The process of neoliberalisation has entailed a restructuring of the world economy and has become a hegemonic system of governance that appears as the “withering away of the state”, only - different to how Friedrich Engels (1878) envisioned it - that instead of a dictatorship of the proletariat there is the dictatorship of markets. As Srnicek and Williams (2015) point out, neoliberalism, as opposed to classical liberalism, does not do away with the state completely. What appears as the withdrawal of the state rather cements the state as being in service to markets through its direct, albeit limited, intervention, by creating markets and ensuring their optimal continuation. The ‘central function’ of the state, according to Srnicek and Williams, under neoliberalism, is to ensure that market-logic holds dominance in political and economic affairs. Consequentially, they have called it a ‘universalising logic’ that has pervaded ‘the media, the academy, the policy world, education, labour practices, and the affects, feelings and identities of everyday people.’ (2015) This government intervention deliberately engineers and manages the behaviour of populations to become individualistic, entrepreneurial and competitive (Gilbert, 2013), purporting an ‘egalitarianism’ (ibid) which claims ‘to offer individuals from all backgrounds an equal chance to compete for elite status’ (ibid) in an idealised hierarchical, but false meritocracy.

Neoliberalism is used as this project's point of departure because it provides an overview of criticisms of the neoliberalisation of the university and of the art school before exploring alternatives to them. It looks at the effects of neoliberalism as a particular point in the process of capitalist accumulation on the arts and education, how the venture of privatisation and the commodification of education has led to increased inequality. Examples of these are the transformation of schools to academies in the UK, the dramatic increase in tuition fees in UK universities and the modelling of these institutions on corporate businesses. Following a Foucauldian analysis on the domination and pervasiveness of neoliberalism as a governing rationality, this project uses tenets of neoliberalism's effects, such as the splintering of a collective identity, the insistence on an entrepreneurial self, and depoliticization as ways into imagining and understanding how a postcapitalist - an alternative and beyond - to capitalist subjectivity is being cultivated through the creation of alternative organisations and their infrastructures. Gago (2017), for example, in her analysis of neoliberal subjects, in what she deems a post-neoliberal context in Argentina, emphasises how subjects are forced to find alternative ways of surviving which are both constituted by neoliberal precarity and more subversive and cooperative forms of agency. She calls this 'baroque economics' (2017, p.3) because of the simultaneous, dual character of exploitation in these nonformal economies as well as the novel ways of building solidarity and community (Bailey, 2021). These point to a subjectivity alternative to and beyond capitalism without necessarily consciously desiring a postcapitalist outcome (Bailey, 2021). I will now turn to postcapitalism as the next key term.

0.5.2. Postcapitalism

This section unpacks the concept of postcapitalism, discusses the main literature on the topic and considers its usefulness for my project, including how it intersects and synthesises with other terms used in this introduction and throughout the dissertation. 'Capitalism' writes David Beech, 'has always appeared to be on the verge of collapse.' (2019) He suggests that the idea of postcapitalism starts from capitalism *as* crisis, that capitalism produces crises over and over again, an argument also made by David Harvey. Similarly, Kim Charnley (2021) has written about the recent crisis of neoliberalism and its shaping of a new avant-garde of political artists, or 'socio-political aesthetics' which respond to conditions of political urgency. He argues that collectivity and participatory artworks as a hallmark of this

period of contemporary art provide ‘an insight into the ideological tensions that exist under neoliberalism’ (2021, p.11), alluding to a counter-response capitalism and a prefiguration of alternatives.

Postcapitalism, then, is the dreaming up and carving out of exit routes and has been around since capitalism itself (ibid). My use of the term will mostly focus on the discourse that has appeared since the economic crash of 2008. The main paradigm in the literature on postcapitalism understands the transition away from capitalism through the means of appropriating the surplus produced through capitalism’s mode of production, and removing the inequalities associated with gendered and racialised modes of exclusion (Bailey, 2021). Authors on this topic have drawn various speculations and have drawn uncertain conclusions around the efficacies of prefigurative politics and horizontalism on the one hand, and a ‘vertical’ politics with leadership and hierarchy on the other (ibid). In what follows I will draw out some of the main proponents of these discussions.

Paul Mason (2015) sees emancipatory potential in the ‘networked individual’ of information technologies. His ideas are borrowed in part from Bauwens’ theorising of peer-production and open-source communities, which we will attend to in section 1.5.3. For Gibson-Graham (2006), alternatives to capitalism are already at work within the diversity of the economy in which capitalism is hegemonic but not totalising. For these authors, postcapitalism emerges by way of affects and subjectivity, through a focus on community economies and the different social relations that are brought into being through the creation of alternative infrastructures. Postcapitalism in this reading is not about seizing power as in the old tactics of the traditional Left, but like the Zapatistas in Mexico – whom for Gibson-Graham represent the ‘new imaginary’ of postcapitalist politics (ibid, p.xx), creates ‘autonomous zones of counter-power’ (ibid). Elsewhere in the literature, authors focus on postcapitalism as the imagining of post-work utopias, either through the opportunistic seizing of automated technologies to liberate the working classes from work (Bastani, 2019), or through the implementation of a Universal Basic Income (UBI) (Srnicek & Williams, 2015), which would free people’s time for meaningful work, care and leisure.

Alternatively, for Fishwick (2021), a useful and necessary starting point for speculating upon the possibility of postcapitalist life is through an analysis of exclusion,

which he defines as the 'historical constant in the formation of global capitalism [that] expels swathes of the population from the means of life.' (p.200) Unlike many of the authors cited above, in his analysis of exclusion Fishwick focuses on the global majority, those living in the Global South and most at the mercy of capitalist structural violence, allowing us to rethink the discourse on postcapitalism. Whereas much of the discourse understands postcapitalism as built through abundance, Fishwick chooses instead to focus on how postcapitalism can be summoned from 'the violent redistribution of scarcity' (ibid), alluding to the idea of 'artificial scarcity'.[5] In this analysis, those rendered 'superfluous' (Fishwick, 2021, p.212) can find the means to assemble in a social practice that becomes a 'critical mass of commoning' (De Angelis, 2017, 291), which, according to De Angelis, would pick up speed until common knowledge suggests it is the best mode of social organisation. An example of this might be the Greek social solidarity clinics that emerged during the Greek financial crisis, during which people's assemblies ensured that necessities were distributed where the government had withdrawn support. Fishwick's vision of postcapitalism, therefore, emerges through a proliferation of multiple forms of conflict and antagonism where 'local, utopian forms of prefigurative practice' (Fishwick, 2021, p.212) are 'a rupture with the universalising notion of capitalist expansion.' (ibid) Fishwick, however, acknowledges the drawbacks to this approach, notably the responsibility placed on the resource-less urban precariat to wage an uphill struggle against 'the violent dynamics that underpin capital accumulation' (ibid), struggles which are often subsumed or co-opted.

What is interesting in this is the principle of uncertainty and indeterminacy underlying the discourse on postcapitalism, exemplified by Bailey (2021), who quotes a research paper on the advantages to the limits to our knowledge: 'When uncertainty is acknowledged and embraced, the likely response is an attitude marked by experimentation, non-linearity, improvisation, deliberation, and disruption (Scoones, 2019, cited in Bailey, 2021). Postcapitalism, then, marks a break from the revolutionary politics of the traditional Left, or as Dave Beech contends 'deliberately distances itself…from the Marxist and socialist tradition.' (2019, p.2) It conceptualises the transition away from capitalism as gradual rather than abrupt, open-ended and unknowable instead of prescriptive. Capitalism is the starting

[5] An article from 1975 called 'Effects of Supply and Demand on Ratings of Object Value' demonstrated the principle of artificial scarcity. (See: Worchel and Adewole, 1975)

point, and alternatives are faced with building from what it has produced. This is signified by the "post" in postcapitalism. It aims to recapture a politics of the future at a moment when 'it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism.' (Fisher, 2009) This is one of the key messages that is voiced in Mark Fisher's posthumously transcribed lectures, written into *Postcapitalist Desire* (2020). Discussing Lyotard's *The Libidinal Economy* (1974) and Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* (1983), Fisher ventures that 'the implicit message…is that we have to imagine a transformation *out of* where we are now. We can't fall for any temptation to look for an untainted region…We have to start from full immersion in capital.' (2020)

A key problem that Fisher poses in his lectures is to do with the prefix "post" in postcapitalism, how it necessarily leads on from capitalism but does not break away from it completely. A consequence of this, he asks, is whether postcapitalism posits a desirable future. Alluding to Peter Frase's speculative book *Four Futures* (2016), he conjures visions of extinction and a high-rent hyper-capitalism as versions of life after capitalism – a bleak vision that exaggerates conditions already present in late capitalist societies – that drives home a point about how the "post" in postcapitalism makes itself available as an empty prefix to be filled with various potentialities about what could be born out of it. This leaves theorists with visions both apocalyptic and utopian, with a political project that is neither positive nor negative (Fisher, 2020) This open-endedness as opposed to prescriptivism is one of the main defining features of postcapitalism, leaving it vulnerable to both progressive and regressive ideas. By the same token, postcapitalism has also fallen prey to criticisms of capitalocentrism, in which capitalism is seen as the one and only model of economic activity. Gibson-Graham "queer" the discourse by dislocating the hegemony of capital and instead 'construct a new language of economic diversity.' (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p.56) Gibson-Graham's central idea of postcapitalism is a form of 'community economy' (ibid, p.xix). According to Fisher's reading, it does away with what Walter Benjamin called *left melancholy* (see: Brown, 1999), moving away from anger, resentment and despair and instead pushes an affect-driven agenda where people 'encounter [others] in ways that support their wellbeing...; consuming sustainably; caring for – maintaining, replenishing, and growing – our natural and cultural commons; investing our wealth in future generations so they can live as well…' (Fisher, 2020) For the purposes of exploring the possibilities of post-

capitalism in peer-led art education, I use a hybrid perspective that embraces open-endedness and indeterminacy without completely removing structure, or what I call a non-violent hierarchy, which will be explored in later chapters. Understanding desire as a post-capitalist concept will also be important for the chapter that discusses respondents' actions towards each other and desires for different ways of learning. The next section focuses on peer-learning and peer-production.

0.5.3. Peer production, peer-learning, & critical pedagogy

0.5.3.1. Peer-production

> *'Just as socialism was the social ideal of the nineteenth and early twentieth factory worker, so peer-to-peer production is emerging as the social ideal of contemporary knowledge workers. Indeed, peer-to-peer production is the socialism of the twentieth century.'* (Bauwens, 2006, p.131)

To explain peer-learning, peer-led learning, or peer-to-peer networks and its relevance for my project, I will draw upon Ivan Illich's framework, whose seminal text *Deschooling Society* (1970) powerfully critiques the formal, compulsory schooling system. I will touch upon the origins of peer-learning using Michel Bauwens and his theory of peer-production, weave in Paolo Freire's notion of critical pedagogy, and then look towards some examples of peer learning and peer networks in alternative art education contexts and other art projects.

'Commons-based peer production' is a term attributed to Yochai Benkler, whose book *The Wealth of Networks* (2006) describes a model of non-profit sociality that produces knowledge through decentralised and distributed internet-based collaboration, cooperation and participation, often participant-led and without a strict hierarchical structure. The same year that Benkler published *Wealth of Networks* (2006), Michel Bauwens argued that these peer-networks were not simply adjuncts to the market, as he saw many commentators describing, but that there was a 'utopian' element to the project (2006, p.121) of peer-production, because peer-producers 'ignore the constraints of the current political economy.' (ibid) Bauwens' argument is that the 'peer to peer relational dynamic' (p.122) is

both ‘immanent’ and ‘transcendent’ to the capitalist mode of production; where it transcends capitalism, ‘it has sufficient post-capitalist aspects that can strengthen autonomous production communities in building an alternative logic of life and production that may, under certain conditions, overtake the current system.’ (ibid)

According to Bauwens, peer-to-peer production has three basic characteristics: 1) materials are open and freely available; 2) participatory ‘processing’; 3) ‘commons-oriented output.’ (ibid) In other words, what is produced becomes freely available for the next cycle and ensures its continuation. Other characteristics of the transcendent aspect of peer-production are that it does not produce commodities, but rather immaterial information goods (ibid, p.124), there is no wage dependency, but admittedly production is sustained through indirect income (ibid, p.123) and tasks are ‘self-assigned’ and ‘distributed’ rather than there being fixed roles (ibid). Importantly, Bauwens understands this as ‘a process of social reproduction’, citing Nick Dyer-Witheford’s term ‘circulation of the common’ (ibid), seeing the potential of this form of production to undercut and supersede the capitalist mode of production. He describes it as such:

> ‘true peer-to-peer dynamics take place in distributed systems that are permission-less, not dependent on powerful obligatory hubs (in peer-to-peer logics, hubs are chosen/created through cumulative individual action, not a priori imposed by power centres). Participants have the intentionality and awareness that they are either participating in a sharing mechanism or in a commons mechanism, and therefore human intentionality is integrated in peer-to-peer dynamics, having social objects that transcend the individual. Those objects of sociality are in fact the glue that holds peer-to-peer producing communities together, providing the meritocratic logic that will define community norms around shared notions of quality.’ (ibid, p.127)

Bauwens understands peer production as a form of ‘cybernetic communism’ (ibid, p.124), not only because its ‘mode of participatory innovation…is antithetical to both the industrial and cognitive modes of capitalism’ (p.132), but also because of its emergence within capitalism, just as capitalism emerged within feudalism (pp.122-23), and that peer production ‘is dependent on the existing surplus of the current political economy.’ (p.130) This resonates with David Graeber’s view of ‘everyday communism’ that is discussed in

chapter four, which also aligns with an argument made by Gibson-Graham (2006) on the diverse economic forms that exist within capitalism. While Bauwens is writing about a digital manifestation of peer-to-peer networks, the relevance to my project, is with the qualities and intentionality that peer-led education attracts; participants who have not found a happy home within mainstream universities and prefer a learning environment which is more intimate, peer-led, self-directed and without externally enforced outcomes such as grades and certificates. Participants in these projects could be seen as the 'surplus' to the schooling system, the human subjects produced by the education system who want to continue learning as a cooperative project but either don't want to, won't or can't do so through the means offered to them by the system of higher education. Bauwens concludes that the emergence of peer-to-peer paradigms will 'influence new subjectivities and relationalities' (p. 137) and 'may create the conditions for new political identities' (ibid), marking a specific relevance for my project and my research question around artistic and political subjectivities arising from peer-led alternative art education arising from both physical in-person communities and their transference online.

0.5.3.2. Ivan Illich, Paolo Freire and peer-learning

Preceding Bauwens' theorising of peer-production was Paolo Freire and Ivan Illich's models of peer-learning, placed in the context of schooling and education. Illich was one of the most renowned critics of the schooling system, who argued that schooling is authoritarian and crushes the desire to learn because it is 'obligatory' (p.70), becomes 'schooling for schooling's sake' (ibid), and 'a place of confinement' (p.12). According to Illich, 'most learning happens casually and tacitly, and even the most intentional learning is not the result of programmed instruction.' (ibid) Instruction, he suggests, does not produce learning; instead, most learning 'is the result of unhampered participation in a meaningful setting.' (Illich, 1970, p.39)

Politically, Illich's understanding of the schooling system as authoritarian and a tool of social control was influenced by the Marxist educator Paolo Freire, whose *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) visits similar themes for the abolition of the 'banking model' of education. Freire describes this 'banking model' as a hierarchical process of transmitting and depositing knowledge in the form of drills and repetition from teacher to student in a way

which keeps students disempowered and removed from their agency and desire. As a radical alternative designed to empower students to be active subjects, Freire proposed critical pedagogy, which he foresaw as a powerful tool to politically and socially empower the illiterate peasants in rural Brazil with whom he was working to critically understand and transform the world around them. Critical pedagogy, according to Freire, teaches to empower by the co-production of knowledge through dialogue – 'of reflection and action at the structures to be transformed' (Freire, 1970, p.68) – and action by bringing materials for learning into deep relevance for the lives of the students. It does this by removing the hierarchy between teacher, student and the object of knowledge, whereas the "banking" model of education enforces their separation and alienates the student from the knowledge they seek. Whereas Freire argued that schools could be reformed into joyful, democratic and relevant institutions (Bartlett and Schugurensky, 2020, p.76) and were spaces of contradiction, Illich set out to reimagine education, proposing for new 'relational structures' (Illich, 1970, p.71) to be set up in the form of cooperative 'learning webs' (ibid). He envisioned these as peer-networks where anyone wanting to learn a skill can find others wanting the same, and speculated that the success of these would help to shape a qualitatively different social reality (Bartlett and Schugurensky, 2020, p.74) These learning webs are 'convivial' institutions, which he sees as 'models for a more desirable future.' (Illich, 1970, p.53), as opposed to the 'manipulative institutions' (ibid) wrought by the system of compulsory schooling. He remarked that 'a desirable education system would let each person specify the activity for which he sought a peer,' (Illich, 1970, p.92) shaping the fabric of reality to become about interdependence and collaboration, where people could freely follow their passions and curiosity (Bartlett and Schugurensky, 2020, p.74). In this model, anyone can be a learner or a teacher, and each person has the autonomy to pursue their own learning needs.

Peer-learning also goes by the name cooperative learning, which has been researched for its use in schools and in higher education. According to Gillies, who has conducted extensive research in schools in the USA with small children and young adolescents, collaborative learning skills enhance students' self-confidence, and found that children were better 'able to participate, share ideas and make group decisions' (2007, pp.50-51) Gillies also discovered that a sense of personal agency was increased as well as

their ability to facilitate others' learning (p.51). It was also noted that cooperative learning in small groups brought enjoyment, seen as more 'motivating and conducive to learning.' (p.51) It is further argued that the use of learning how to cooperate through cooperative learning skills or peer-learning facilitates meta-cognition (ibid), in other words the ability to empathise, to support, to listen and be interdependent. This will be discussed in more depth later in this thesis in the chapters that showcase my findings.

Peer-led learning has become an increasingly popular mode of lifelong adult education and an alternative arrangement of education which Bartlett and Schugurensky (2020, p.68) suggest has been catalysed since the COVID-19 pandemic, with the closure of many schools around the world and the resort to online learning and learning in communities. Organisations such as Huddlecraft (previously Enrol Yourself), AntiUniversity Now and The Hologram are all examples of peer-networked learning infrastructures which promote a non-hierarchical "webbed" or "networked", decentralised approach to knowledge, where anyone can lead and participate if they have something to offer. Haslam (2018), in her thesis on alternatives to the alternative art school, convincingly suggests that these programmes or offerings could be offered as speculative models for art education because they fall outside of the values and symbolic order of contemporary art, and so are not beholden to them (ibid, p.124). Taking Huddlecraft as an example, it treads closely to the speculative model offered by Illich in the 1970s, when he suggested that 'a good educational system should have three purposes: it should provide all who want to learn with access to available resources at any time in their lives; empower all who want to share what they know to find those who want to learn it from them; and, finally, furnish all who want to present an issue to the public with the opportunity to make their challenge known.' (Illich, 1970, p.75) Huddlecraft, for example, functions within a model that grows an 'ecosystem of support for peer learning and action' (Huddlecraft, 2023), and 'an ongoing enquiry into how groups of people can turn to one another to produce powerful learning experiences outside of institutions and traditional formats.' (ibid) Its format takes from the principles of decentralisation and self-organisation, using resources efficiently and foregrounds sharing over exchange. A 'learning marathon' takes place over 3 to 6 months, facilitated by a person interested in seeking answers to a central 'learning question'. A small number of participants are then recruited to embark on that 'learning journey', where each person brings their own

learning question to the group. As a group, they investigate individually and collectively. It becomes an exercise in group learning, interdependence and mutual support.

Other models of peer-learning, as mentioned above, such as Antiuniversity Now and The Hologram also use a decentralised and self-organised structure. Antiuniversity was set up in 2015 as a revival of the 1968 Antiuniversity of London, which itself was an experiment in challenging educational paradigms that took place on Rivington Street in East London, with R.D. Laing and Stuart Hall among the participants. The newly formed Antiuniversity Now, born from the contexts of austerity and the increased marketisation of art education, takes the form of a festival, which is shaped collectively, 'by everyone who takes part, as organiser, host or guest' (Antiuniversity website). Similar to Illich's idea of learning webs, the crux of Antiuniversity Now is that 'knowledge is created and shared by people.' (Ashman, 2016) It therefore denounces the idea of ownership of knowledge, providing a free, accessible, and diverse programme of events, workshops and performances. The Hologram, as another example, uses an infrastructure of peer-to-peer support as 'social medicine for a cooperative species' (The Hologram, 2023). It claims to be 'a viral four-person health monitoring and diagnostic system practiced from couches all over the world. Three non-expert participants create a three-dimensional "hologram" of a fourth participant's physical, psychological and social health, and each becomes the focus of three other people's care in an expanding network.' (ibid) The Hologram was initiated by artist Cassie Thornton as an 'interventionist art project, a collectively improvised science-fiction story and a form of social activism directed at the way we reproduce ourselves and our social life together.' (Thornton 2020, p. viii) Thornton was inspired by the Greek social solidarity clinics in 2017 that had been formed in response to the European Union's sanctions of austerity on to the country during the 2008 financial crash. Its rhizomatic structure aims to 'disentangle' and 'dehabituate' humans from capitalism (ibid, p.13), making it postcapitalist in aim and concept. It is a social practice that has grown since its inception and began with a weekly workshop online with a group of 28 participants from around the world in April 2020 during the Covid-19 lockdown (ibid, p.12) At the time of writing, in September 2022, it coordinates monthly 'communities of practice', exhibits in Berlin and the USA and has a Discord channel participation of 136 people.

Critiques of models of alternative education such as Huddlecraft ring similarly to those levelled at Illich by Freire. Namely, Freire worried that the peer-networked learning webs 'failed to recognise the different levels of cultural, social and economic capital existing in society.' (Bartlett and Schugurensky, 2020, p.77) and that these models are predisposed to advantage those with already existing cultural and social capital. The same critique was ventured by one of my respondents who, reflecting on her time as a student at Byam Shaw, offered the view that the structurelessness of the curriculum favoured economically-secure students and disadvantaged her working-class peers (respondent K). However, to use my research as a parallel example, the alternative art schools I have investigated are operating through peer-learning, they are not decentralised in the same way as models such as Huddlecraft and require one or more core organisers to facilitate the activities of the group. Contrary to the critiques levelled at peer-to-peer networks, I have found that the models I have researched serve working-class adults with caring responsibilities and full-time jobs more than a formal, mainstream educational experience, a claim which is supported by Scarsbrook (2020), who highlighted the increase in the cost of higher arts education correlating to the 'injustices linked to decreased attendance of working class or disadvantaged students' (p.35). It would also seem that the learning webs modelled by Huddlecraft, The Hologram and Antiuniversity Now, although unable to work for everyone because of (in the case of Huddlecraft) cost, time and capacity, speculates at a grander gesture of autonomy and mutual support that could be used in learning centres where the goals are exploratory as well as skills-based. These models have, as Illich speculated, conceived of 'new relational structures which are deliberately to facilitate access to these resources for the use of anybody who is motivated to seek them for his education.' (Illich, 1970, p.78) The process of peer-learning will now be conceptually linked with the concept of transindividuality, which I set out below.

0.5.4. Transindividuality as a lens for exploring being-in-common and postcapitalist subjectivity.

> *'The common is given and at the same time produced in being-together.'* (Vujanović and Cvejić, 2022, p.18)

> *'Individuals are composite, i.e., composed on the basis of exchanges of parts among one another.' (*Vujanović and Cvejić, 2022, p.204)

In this section, I explore the concept of transindividuality, which I will use in chapter four as a lens through which to view my respondents' perceptions and evaluations of themselves in community, and as a way of understanding subjectivity beyond the impasse of late capitalist neoliberal individualism. I will unpack the term, its usage in critical theoretical discourse and explain how it will be useful to my project.

Transindividuality is a concept that pushes against rationalist ontologies of individualism. In his book *The Politics of Transindividuality* (2016) Jason Read understands it as a means by which the binary between self and society, or individual and collective can be overcome, instead reaching towards a 'transindividual "I"' (Vujanović and Cvejić, 2022, p.71). It helps to potentiate beyond the limited horizon of the 'self' to encounter expansive and alternative social imaginaries to neoliberal late capitalism, where society is not the sum of disparate isolated individuals, but an ecosystem where we all rely and depend upon one another. Transindividuality therefore has ontological potential in reframing the hegemonic notion of 'self', steering the discussion towards transindividuation, which Gilbert Simondon posits as a process in which the individual and the collective constitute each other (Read, 2021, p.6). Instead of self and society, or individual and collective being a static binary, the two concepts dynamically inform, shape and transform each other dialectically. The process of becoming in this paradigm is called transindividuation, whereas transindividuality is a markedly different idea of the 'self' and so has ontological implications that disrupts the hegemonic hyper-individualism characteristic of neoliberal ideology.

Vujanović and Cvejić (2022) write about 'the transindividual individuation of the self' (p.249) as the antithesis to alienation in a society where there is a 'crisis of social imagination' (ibid), alluding to Jameson's often-quoted phrase that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism. By seeing oneself as composite of other 'selves' and everything else that has shaped one's experience, the self is no longer fractured or isolated but instead knitted into a relation of relations. They argue that the alienated individual of neoliberal capitalist society is 'desubjectified' (ibid), in other words, is prevented from individuating and becoming a subject, and 'leads to individuals incapable of imagining and building their common future of new possibilities' (ibid). This was the success

of the Thatcherite project, to artificially produce a social landscape composed of competitive individuals and to thwart the idea of solidarity and community, or the realisation of a common project. This was tied to her implementation of the free-market economy, in which competition between individual companies is encouraged, and, in turn, manifests in neoliberalism as ideology. The concept of transindividuality, by contrast, recognises a future collective horizon composed of individuals who have 'emerged through a collective individuation' (ibid). It supports the idea that the 'self' is more capable, powerful and responsible to act in the world when supported by others, making cooperation and collaboration in service to the 'common' a complement to theories of mutual-aid and peer-learning.

The philosophical underpinning of the concept of transindividuality has been read by Jason Read (2016) through Hegel, Marx and Spinoza, whom he characterises as transindividual thinkers. For Read, Marx's concept of 'species-being' underscores a transindividual ontology, as the term encapsulates humanity as collectively in process together with all other forms of life on Earth, all transforming one another without a specific point 'A' or point 'B'. This also bears some resemblance with Rosi Braidotti's neo-Spinozist posthumanist thinking that embraces assemblage, heterogeneity, multiplicity, a rejection of the individual and the centrality of the human subject. It is a conceptual ontology that embraces alliances between humans and non-humans, seeking an expansive notion of the human beyond the 'self' to include other selves who are always in process. The key difference with transindividual thought, as Vujanović and Cvejić describe, is that 'New and longer-lasting transindividual subjectivity ought to respect the singular experience of the self within the intertwined processes of the individual and collective individuation' (2022, p.255-56); in other words, transindividuality does not deny the individual in the same way that Braidotti's posthumanism does. Instead, it understands the individual as composite of other individuals who are all in a process of individual and collective transformation. In writing about 'species-being' Marx explains that 'production by an isolated individual outside of society…is as much of an absurdity as is the development of language without individuals living together and talking to each other.' (cited in Vujanović and Cvejić, 2022, p.86) According to this view, there is no linear teleology or simple cause- and-effect to this process; it is instead rhizomatic, non-linear and multi-directional. Braidotti would refer to

this as a 'multi-layered interdependence' (2019, p.102), while Vujanović and Cvejić understand it as 'interdependence, sharing, commonality, as well as indispensability of the individual.' (2022, p.261)

Similarly, Read (2016) understands transindividuality as a more useful term than intersubjectivity for analysing political and social relations (p.8), as it posits a *through* and *with* rather than an in-between. The usefulness of the term as applied to the topic of peer-led alternative art education is in its potential for pedagogy entwined with the methodology of care discussed later. It becomes a lens through which to study social ecology, the relationships that constitute people and their lived environments. As with Spinoza, the relationship to the body is paramount, conflicting with the body having been historically ignored or under-emphasised in pedagogical thought and praxis due to the dominance of Cartesian dualism that separates mind and body. It is now becoming more commonly acknowledged that there is a body-mind (Hartley, 1995), positing the relationship between brain and body (Van Der Kolk, 2014, pp.86-88). Its relevance to education and to pedagogy serves to reshape how practitioners, organisers and students re-create infrastructures for their learning based upon having a body and being with other bodies, being mindful of comfort and discomfort, feelings of hunger, sadness, stress, fatigue, or elation, as well as gendered and racialised tensions – all of which emit affects towards other learners. As Jason Read writes, following Spinoza:

> 'The body itself is nothing other than a particular relation of motion and rest, particular capacity to affect and be affected. The body is constantly undergoing transformations, increasing and decreasing its capacity to act, and gaining and losing its component dimensions. These transformations are matched on the side of thought, which is constantly reflecting and acting of those transformations, as ideas are shaped by (and shape) these encounters and increases and decreases of power.' (2016, p.12)

Somatics does not take the body as an object or mechanism, but as 'the embodied process of awareness and communication' (Green, 2002, p.114) Taking the body as a starting point, and how the neoliberal subject has their body rendered anxious, performative and hyper-individualised, the draw of transindividuality makes a case for a collective, relational, corporeal pedagogy without negating the individual. Taking inspiration from self-organised,

intentional communities that many of the experiments and alternatives to art education draw upon, the concept of transindividuality is helpful for looking at how collective and individual transformations occur through the process of being and learning together, especially when moving through times of uncertainty and complexity such as during the Covid-19 pandemic. Felix Guattari touches upon this process of subjectivisation in his study of psychiatric patients at an innovative participatory clinic called La Borde in France. Patients were assigned responsibilities for running the clinic and were offered numerous creative therapies. Guattari's noted that new interactions between people, their environment and materials offered people 'diverse possibilities for recomposing their existential corporeality, to get out of their repetitive impasses and, in a certain way, to resingularise themselves.' (Guattari, 1992, p.7) From here, 'one creates new modalities of subjectivity' (ibid). Similar to La Borde, which ran an alternative, experimental operation according to democratic principles and a rotating division of labour, this dissertation looks at similar practices in alternative art schools so as to understand emerging postcapitalist subjectivity. The next section explores care as a key pedagogical and organising principle, which is central to my thesis.

0.5.5. Care in feminist and queer pedagogies.

The final and most crucial component to my dissertation is the concept of care and caring pedagogies, which I will now turn to. The academic literature around care will be discussed in depth in chapter two. Feminist pedagogy has become an important sub-genre of critical pedagogy springing from a renewed interest in a feminist ethics of care (Beasley & Bacchi, 2005; Fraser, 2016; McLeod, 2017) able to wrestle with a higher education sector that is overwhelmingly masculinised: Hook (2019) points out how the sector is male dominated and increasingly driven by competition, meanwhile women are overrepresented at the lower end of the career-ladder and shoulder a disproportionate amount of teaching (ibid, p.44). Mahony and Weiner (2019) have compellingly pointed to the use of militaristic discourse deployed in the sector during a time when the sector was embracing neoliberal models. Militaristic expressions included 'biting the bullet, developing the strategy and the game plan, hitting the targets, upsetting the troops and punching through new initiatives' (p.99), the ideology of which shapes the materialities of gender in higher education and

presents fresh struggles for critical feminists working there. Meanwhile, is it acknowledged that the care work of teaching is gendered: romanticised and devalued, materially and symbolically (McLeod, 2017, p.44). Hook (2019) explores feminist-activist pedagogy as a way of staying with discomfort (p.49), enabling a challenge to normative patterns of thinking, of 'on resisting hierarchies, draws on personal experiences and seeks to contest normative thinking and ways of being.' (p.59).

Thinking with and through care as a critical category in academic practice has been a central topic of feminist theory. The speculative thought of María Puig de la Bellacasa (2012), who thinks with Donna Harraway's conception of care 'as an ontological requirement of relational worlds' (Puig de la Bellacasa 2012, p.199) is useful here. With Haraway, Puig de la Bellacasa reminds us that 'nothing comes without its world', and in the context of academia and the university institution as her subject of critique, Puig de la Bellacasa anticipates the thought of Botirolli (2020) and Reyes (2017) in urging the building of relation and community that happens when we seek out 'relationships of knowledge based on care' (2012, p.203) rather than 'reinforcing the figure of a lone thinker' (ibid) that fuels the competitive basis of the neoliberal university. She asserts: 'Objectified, separated from each other in order to become 'comparable' and enter into competition, they use complex processes of attribution and reordering to detach the work of their employees from complex intellectual webs. Only then can thinking and knowledge become individualized property of an institution.' (Munro 2005, cited in Puig de la Bellacasa 2012, p.202).

In their article 'Femagogical strategies in the art school', Walsh and Knezevic (2020) accept that there is structural patriarchy in the academic systems of the art school (p.86) and reflect on methods used to disrupt these dominant hierarchical structures by taking from Feminist Theory, Black Feminist Thought and New Materialism, calling it a femagogical teaching practice. The authors reflect on how they teach in the academy to be inclusive, intersectional and experimental, challenging knowledge hegemonies implicated within art curricula, and opening up space for multiple positionalities and 'hierarchically disruptive modes of material thinking.' (p.99) What is currently unclear is how femagaogy as the authors describe it has qualities specific to the learning of art other than what is regarded, as with feminist pedagogy more generally, that, as they articulate, 'learning and making is a

feminist ethic of 'response-ability' (Haraway, 2016, p.68) that fosters a way of coming together and being with each other that is based on inclusion and equality.' (Walsh & Knezevic, 2020, p.99) However, what might be more compelling is that contexts for the learning, teaching and making of art are prime for a feminist, embodied and queer pedagogy that is disruptive to hierarchical norms and engages a full scope of experimental knowledge-building, away from dogmas of outcomes, audits and performativity. Walsh & Knezevic's feminist intersectional pedagogy that they practice in the Fine Art studio programme at TU Dublin, disrupts binaries of power and makes space for co-created and myriad epistemologies by using collaborative teaching and learning, with space for students to contribute to curriculum development and 'challenge knowledge hegemonies' (ibid). This serves as an example of feminist pedagogy that queers the traditional student-teacher binary and understands the collaborative practice as one of engendering more caring relations between humans and materials.

It is not surprising that issues of care in education are not only feminist issues, but a matter of decoloniality as well. Decoloniality calls for perspectives other than the hegemonic White Eurocentric epistemologies to be included into students' curriculums. The call for decoloniality in universities began the South African protest movement Rhodes Must Fall. It began on 9 March 2015 in which a collective of staff and students at the University of Cape Town, which mobilised for direct action against institutional racism at their university, noting that Cecil Rhodes was a symbol for white supremacy and oppression. The movement erupted in waves of protest around South Africa and sparked a movement to decolonise education. In 2018, the School for Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) published a toolkit to decolonise teaching and learning, and many UK universities have since been persuaded to decolonise their curriculums (Decolonising SOAS Working Group, 2018).

The case for decoloniality as an example of a feminist, queer and embodied practice is made by Antonia Darder (2009), a Freireian scholar who emphasises the body and embodiment over subjectivity in pedagogical debates. She argues convincingly for an embodied pedagogy, for a return to materiality, emphasising that 'without considering the materiality of the body, all notions of teaching and learning are reduced to mere abstractions. (p.218). Writing about the situation of public schooling and universities in the United States, her arguments translate to a similar situation in the UK where, as it has

already been stated, league-tables, learning outcomes and quantifiable measures are imposed on to learning, which, as Darder states, is visceral, corporeal and sensual (p.221). She speaks to the denial of sensuality in schooling, the immobilisation of bodies and their containment behind rigid desks, manifesting the myth of learning as purely cognitive. In Audre Lorde's seminal speech *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power* (1978), she emphasises that [Black women's] 'most profoundly creative source' is repressed by 'a racist, patriarchal, and anti-erotic society.' (2007, p.59). She writes that the suppression of the erotic has been 'fashioned within the context of male models of power' (ibid: p.53), which privilege the mind as superior and separate from the body, and debunk the validity of emotions, aligning them with weakness, itself aligned with femininity. 'The erotic is not only a question of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing,' (p.54) writes Lorde. Similarly, in denying that intensity of feeling that can surface through learning in relation to others is what Darder describes as 'pedagogical practices that ultimately do emotional and psychological violence through their erasure of the body' (2009, p.221). She argues that this reproduces racialized and gendered oppression and severs the students' capacity for self-knowledge. (p.223) For Darder, materiality is paramount and arrived at through an embodied pedagogy of care.

The possibility of an embodied knowledge and embodied learning is linked to decoloniality conceptually and materially due to the erasure of the body and otherness in Eurocentric knowledge systems that privilege whiteness, masculinity and able-bodiedness. It has therefore been argued most prominently by Sarah Amsler, writing extensively upon education in uncertain times, that the perceived crisis of education did not start with neoliberalism. Instead, she argues that we must look to the development of modernity and its implication of colonialism, of which neoliberalism is a specific manifestation in advanced capitalism (Amsler, 2020). A collective called *Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures* (GTDF) is an example of an informal learning experiment that utilises affective, artistic and collective knowledge production for social and ecological justice. Their engagement with pedagogy is to allow for 'different kinds of relationships, and different possibilities for (co)existence, without guarantees… [they] emphasize complexity, complicity, and uncertainty, and draw on multiple interpretations and dimensions of decolonial theory and practice in particular, its ecological, cognitive, affective, relational, and economic dimensions.' (Stein et al, 2020,

p.45) Amsler (2019) writes about the idea of making 'gestures' in the realm of experimental educational practices as a way of 'opening spaces for emerging possibilities that would otherwise be incorporated into existing frameworks of knowledge and systems of social organization, or closed down as 'unrealistic'.' (ibid, p.929) She suggests that 'shifting the geography of learning' (p.927) outside hegemonic institutions can open space for inhabiting new possibilities of being and knowing, while acknowledging that those of us socialised within hegemonic institutions often reproduce colonial 'habits' (ibid) that block different ontologies.

bell hooks relates a pedagogy of care to practices of freedom rooted in intersectional feminism and critical pedagogy. In her seminal work *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994), she brings to light the notion that the classroom is a 'communal space' (ibid, p.8) where everyone is responsible for generating excitement and an open learning environment. Inspired by Paolo Freire, she seeks to undo domination in the classroom and insists that everyone's presence is valued. Her commitment to a 'liberatory' (p.19) education depends upon a classroom environment which she contends ought to be 'a dynamic place where transformations in social relations are concretely actualized and the false dichotomy of the world outside and the inside world of the academy disappears.' (p.195) This holds some resonance with the thinking of Masschelein & Simons (2013), who understand the school conceptually as a liminal space representing a 'suspension' (Masschelein & Simons 2013: p.39) from real life. hooks, however, is also aware that a classroom in which space is held critically, erotically (hooks 1994, p.195) and with passionate commitment, holds the promise for teachers and students to self-actualise through the exercise of critical imagination (p.196). In her brilliant tone of optimism, she ends her collection of essays:

> 'The academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand and of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom.' (p.207)

hooks sees learning as a place of possibility and of transgression. It is because spaces of learning - which are held in ways that are supple and attuned to the delicate and potent relational ambiguities of power - can unfold in unexpected ways. hooks is attuned to this in her text, aware of moments in learning, often subtle and delayed, where preconceptions are blown apart and new ways of moving through the world can be accessed and embodied.

0.5.5.1. Ethics, relationality and value

Recent literature on the topic of critical pedagogies within art education also focuses on ethical considerations. When Bottiroli writes, 'we operate within a circulation of responsibilities and agencies, and it is our task to embrace them' (2020, p.210), it is an affirmation that chimes too neatly with a neoliberal ideological tendency that posits a positive human subject, an autonomous self that bears the weight of their own individual choices regardless of structures acting upon and through them. In her seminal work *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005), Judith Butler, in careful dialogue with Adorno's ideas, poses a problem to the 'circuit of responsibilities and agencies' (Bottiroli 2020, p.210) that Bottiroli imagines. Because we can never fully know ourselves, she regards a model of 'ethical capaciousness' (Butler, 2005, p.103) to provide 'a certain ambivalent gesture as the action of ethics itself' (ibid). It is this ambivalence that is compelling for a consideration of relationality in pedagogy, which might at its core be a consideration of ethics: the theory of subject formation that Butler proposes is one that 'acknowledges the limits of self-knowledge' (2005, p.19). She writes, 'If the subject is opaque to itself, not fully translucent and knowable to itself, it is not thereby licensed to do what it wants or to ignore its obligation to others.' (pp.19-20) In delineating how responsibility and agency emerge through an ontology of fallibility, it is possible to ask questions on the subject of pedagogy, relations and responsibility within the stance posited by Bottiroli, where it seems that in her discussion on responsibility, support structures and agonism, what she is in fact demanding is a critical attitude of care and caring, and therefore a return to ethics at the heart of her question - on the future of the institution of the art school. Here, the proposals outlined by Bottiroli can be seen in line with the emancipatory pedagogy of Paolo Freire, who emphasised the importance of ethics in education (Darder, 2009, p.230), which appears in later discussions of feminist ethics of care in Chapter 2 and relational ethics in Chapter 4.

Pleading for art schools to try to veer away from the dictates of competition driven by neoliberal market imperatives, Bottiroli insists instead that fostering a collaborative environment at the level of curriculum and assessment would influence artistic research and practice beyond the art school. A substantially more radical proposition is alluded to with the notion of art schools as 'collective entities' (2020, p.211), where the art school 'can realize existing entanglements with other subjects.' (p.212) Here, she references the different disciplines in arts education, such as painting, sculpture, animation, photography and acting, which she posits can be productive collaborations via 'permeable and porous entities', i.e. the students, artists and workers who live and work in the space. I also believe the reference here has much to do with destroying the artificiality of competition and competitiveness that has prevalence in and among higher education institutions, and instead building alliances of solidarity that undercut market prerogatives and models of personhood based on possessive individualism. In effect, it alludes to an ontology of self and other as theorised by Butler (2005): 'the "I", its suffering and acting, telling and showing, take place within a crucible of social relations, variously established and iterable, some of which are irrecoverable, some of which impinge upon, condition, and limit our intelligibility within the present.' (p.132) Butler understands by this that 'in recrafting ourselves with and for another, we participate in the remaking of social conditions.' (pp.134-135) It is this "recrafting" of what an art school could become that I believe Bottiroli is conveying, which magnifies its social responsibility in the wake of alarming political and planetary crises. Breaking down the hegemony of competition and individualism is laudable and necessary, the quality of which has been picked up elsewhere by Dave Beech (2020) in an article on the importance of solidarity in the arts. It could be asked, what would pedagogy in a "recrafted" art school look like if it could be based on solidarity and an ethics of responsibility? This is something which, in the main body of my thesis, my research explores in relation to my interview material and the sites of alternative art education.

A similar return to ethics and subjectivity at the core of art education is given attention by Gert Biesta, who decries the obsession with learning outcomes, league tables, comparison and competition and the creation of hierarchies and inequalities that characterise global modern-day education (2018, p.11). He argues, 'rather than asking what education *produces*, we should be asking what education *means*. And rather than asking

what education *makes*, we should be asking what education *makes possible*.' (p.13, italics the author's). For Biesta, this fundamentally has to do with 'existing as subject' (p.15), where what matters about learning and about how learning is instituted through education is 'how we are trying to be' in the world (ibid) and that 'we try to exist *in dialogue* with what and who is other – in the world without occupying the centre of the world.' (ibid, italics the author's). Following the philosophy of Levinas, Biesta insists that art education takes seriously the notion of being in relation with the world beyond the reduction of art to an instrument (i.e. with learning outcomes) and beyond its use for expression and identity, although I would counter that art as a medium of self-expression has legitimate and important value for expressing difference across dispossessed and marginalised identities through exploring aspects of experience affected by race, gender, sexuality and class – even when 'expression' and 'creativity' are co-opted by neoliberal markets. This leads academics such as Dipti Desai (2020) to advocate for social justice art education based on her work as an educator in the social justice-based art and education programs at New York University (NYU). She sees her work as focusing on the ability for art to 'challenge hierarchical power relations' (p.12) and work towards 'a decolonial option in how we see, know, and live in our society.' (ibid)

So far, the overriding theme implicitly weaved through discussions bring to light issues of care, support and responsibility. Reyes (2017), alongside others, contemplates an art school for the 21st century, and on the topic of care, she focuses on teaching with compassion. 'How I teach is social,' Reyes writes. 'It is from a de-centered position of power. It is about respecting and valuing all of the contributions of the group equally. It is about finding ways to make the work we are doing as learners and makers socially relevant. And it is about having the contributions of students seen as valuable to multiple contexts.' (p.198) Her concept of 'critical care' foregrounds this attitude to her pedagogy, and that the 'violence of critique… [perpetuates] unhealthy and destructive environments of power and dominance, instead of creating space for growth and deep understanding.' (p.196) Following bell hooks, Reyes contends that 'The unfortunate reality of art schools, and academia as a whole is that it is not a place that is teaming with actualized, loving human beings,' (p.199) targeting the toxicity of academic culture. She shares the desire for cultivating an art school where 'we take control, work together, and shape knowledge

collectively' (p.200). 'What we really need is to change our structures of value so that we can respect and acknowledge other approaches to education,' (p.179) she writes, echoing other art educators who would prefer to see the end of target-based approaches to education. These writings overwhelmingly suggest that education work in general is care work, resonant in part with a classical reading of Marx's understanding of unproductive labour, in which teachers are named amongst those who engage in it (Marx, 1967; Harvie, 2007). A residual question is what is specifically caring about art education and pedagogies in art? One possible answer could be around the fact that art requires paying attention to materials, another could pivot around the importance of purposeless activity in a world where metrics and objectives take priority.

The aim of this thesis looks to how transformative practices outside of formal education, i.e. in nonformal learning environments that still nonetheless classify themselves as 'schools', show a commitment to liberatory pedagogies, seeking exodus from formal institutional models as a way to exercise these practices with less constraints, for individual, social and collective transformation. I will now set out how the thesis will unfold.

0.6. Structure of the thesis.

In this introduction, I have reviewed the literature regarding the neoliberalisation of Higher Education and discussed the context of art education during the Covid-19 pandemic and how this affected the arts sector in general. I also explained my key terminology: neoliberalism, peer-learning, postcapitalism, transindividuality and care. I looked at existing alternative pedagogies in art education that brings into play queer and feminist theory, decolonial theory and embodiment and have understood these as examples of pedagogies of care. I also looked at critiques of neoliberal Higher Art Education and some responses to them in the form of protest, dissent and alternative schools. The introduction provides the context, both empirical and theoretical to set up the discussions in later chapters.

In chapter one, I outline my methodology, which weaves together assemblages of critical realism, ethnography and Social Reproduction Theory (SRT), as well as how I approached my interviews. I also look at my research journey and what the project was

intended to be before the pandemic made those conditions untenable. Subsequently, I introduce the sites of alternative art education that I used for this research. The following three chapters present and discuss my findings, bringing together themes from my interpretation of the interview data I collected during lockdown over the winter 2020/2021.

Chapter two explores connections between pedagogy and care through analysis of my interview transcripts. It understands care connected with infrastructures built into organisational and relational practices, arguing that the alternative art schools I encountered for this project centralise care in their operations and functioned in part as support groups for participants during Covid-19. I discuss the literature on care in contemporary political and cultural theory, and also the discourse on care coming out of curating, with examples of notable exhibitions, publications and symposiums given. The theory and practice of mutual-aid is also introduced as an example of a pedagogy of care and folded into its discussion. The analysis will show how alternative art schools during this historical moment are attempting to provide infrastructures of care that coordinate around a qualitatively different set of values to those in HEIs, reaching towards generative spaces that seek to be more aware of structures, systems, the need for connection and belonging and recognition of the individual and collective experiences that participants bring to a space.

Chapter three focuses on time and space as crucial components of a pedagogy of care and facets of the alternative educational models explored in this thesis. The chapter is framed theoretically with discussions on art as a 'free space' and, via the insights of Marion Milner (1987) and Jackie Wang (2016), the space needed to access creativity. Using interview material, I discuss vulnerability, difference and disagreement, and the idea of the "encounter" in both physical and online spaces. The discussion of time and temporality is linked to care, using notions of non-linearity and idiorrhythmy (Barthes, 1977), which I relate to postcapitalist subjectivity. The chapter outlines these differences and speaks to a plurality of desires, which were exacerbated by the pandemic.

Chapter four - the final chapter that addresses my findings - looks towards a transindividual pedagogy and futures of art education, with an emphasis on desire, play, joy and asset-based methodologies of pedagogy and judgement in art education for exploring social, emotional and experiential learning as ways of re-constituting peer-learning and

student-centred learning. It uses the concept of transindividuality, introduced earlier in this chapter, leaning towards the utopian, prefigurative practices within the settings of alternative arts pedagogical contexts explored in this thesis. The chapter begins with a discussion of transindividuality as a postcapitalist ontology, looking at the desires and motivations of participants for choosing an alternative arts school. Using my interview material, it sheds light on barriers to access - in particular, for working-class students - and the political and personal transformation of participants. It discusses the alternative art schools explored in this thesis as examples of micro-utopias and pre-figurative politics, illustrated by the economic models used for sustainable practice, and leads on to a discussion of what to do with the place of judgement in art education if grades and assessment were to be abolished. For this, examples of asset-based methodologies developed and adapted by Islington Mill and REBEL (Recognising Experience Based Education and Learning) are used. The chapter highlights the relational ontologies central to the pedagogy and organisation of the alternative at schools I've chosen to look at and the possibility of postcapitalist subjectivity.

Finally, in the conclusion to the dissertation, I look back at my research aims and questions, summarise my key findings and main arguments, emphasise the study's original contribution to knowledge, discuss the limitations to the research and make some suggestions for further study.

Chapter One

Methodology, Methods and Introduction to Cases: doing research during a pandemic.

1.1. Introduction

In this chapter I review my methodological framework and my methods for conducting research on alternative art pedagogies during the COVID-19 pandemic. The chapter addresses, firstly, the methodologies that have informed my thinking and, subsequently, the methods I have used to answer my research questions. For this research I interviewed fifteen people who are artists, educators, organisers and participants in alternative art education in the UK and USA and are entangled within art-educational structures either in universities, free school experiments or community art organisations that work with pedagogy. I used narrative analysis to foreground their experiences and perceptions, deliberately choosing not to use Grounded Theory, a research method that assists with the systemisation of qualitative data, or NVivo, a data analysis software package. I did this in order to tease out nuances and literary subtext that those aforementioned theories might have otherwise overlooked.

I chose to use an interpretivist, qualitative paradigm, a research philosophy that emphasises human meaning and nuance, as I wanted to find out more about my respondents' experiences of alternative art education, their motivations and their experiences during the Coronavirus pandemic. At the same time, I acknowledge that my perspective and my ability to know is partial; some of this is because of my own privileges afforded by class background, gender, whiteness and having been schooled in western thought. This research eschews a positivist approach to phenomena that maintains the social world can be measured and tested while the researcher is an invisible outsider. Instead, this research sets out a position in which, as the researcher, I am already enmeshed within dynamic and complex processes and whose subjectivity and intervention impacts the field being studied. This was particularly heightened because the interviews I conducted took place within a time of unprecedented uncertainty and instability due to the Coronavirus pandemic and lockdowns, which meant that my own ideas and expressions

were by shaped personal circumstances and the affecting social, political and economic context and how I navigated those experiences. Gonda, et al (2021) have suggested that paying attention to emotion and affect in qualitative research 'helps us to embrace the relational character of vulnerability as a pathway to democratising power relations' (p.1) and contributes to a 'new ethics of producing knowledge' (ibid). This is at the heart of critical reflexivity that I embrace as a researcher in this project, especially accounting for my own emotions and position of vulnerability while taking care to be attuned to those of my respondents. The importance of the researcher recognising their own vulnerability was also flagged up as a crucial aspect of reflexivity while doing research during the Covid-19 pandemic elsewhere in scholarly output at that time (Greene and Park, 2021; Gordon, 2022). Throughout my fieldwork, I recognised the impossibility of being "outside" of the research, and I do not assume my position as the carrier of knowledge against that of my respondents. This is a position which is now commonly understood as standard practice in qualitative research (Palaganas et al, 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In this chapter I will discuss my methodological approach of critical realism, as well as social reproduction theory as a methodology of care and its relevance to the project and the research questions. I will also elaborate on critical approaches to the interview, which was my primary source of generating data. I will then look at 'mess' as an approach to method, bringing into play 'bricolage' (Berry, 2006) and 'assemblage' (Law, 2004). I will then detail how I recruited my respondents, how I interviewed them, the questions I set out to ask and my reflections on the interview process.

1.2. Objectives and Research Questions

Before the pandemic, my research objectives were designed on the basis that I would be undertaking participant observation at the Islington Mill Art Academy in Salford, as well as with other communities in the UK and further afield. My objectives were:

1. To construct a conceptual framework to situate the embodied, material practices of alternative arts education and its pedagogies in the context of neoliberal capitalism.

2. To review and critique a range of documents produced from pedagogical experiments in alternative art schools regionally, nationally and internationally.
3. To develop a participatory programme with a cohort of students at IMAA to understand the materiality of their pedagogies.
4. To theorise and analyse how alternative arts pedagogies currently being practiced across organisations envision postcapitalist futures.

In January of 2020, Islington Mill Art Academy decided to cease its programme, and, in March of 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic hit the UK and the UK government shut the country down in a series of lockdowns. In light of these unpredictable changes, I modified my research objectives to the following:

a) To explore how alternative arts pedagogies located in the UK navigate, survive and emerge from the twofold crisis of education and the arts in the Coronavirus pandemic and under conditions of physical separation.

b) To investigate and analyse what kinds of utopian desire emerge from within the pandemic and to the formation of new kinds of artistic and political subjectivities.

My modified research questions then led from the objectives:

1. What desires are emerging and being formed during this time within the field of art education?
2. How might alternative arts pedagogies envision and work towards postcapitalist futures?
3. What artistic and political subjectivities are emerging as a result?

The research questions emerged from the field, through critical analysis of the literature and through my primary investigations from having taken part in peer-led alternative learning approaches, for example with Chto Delat's School of Engaged Art and with Critical Practice Made in YU. Furthermore, the research questions were formed with a view to centre the knowledge, perspectives and experiences of my respondents and have these intertwine generatively with theoretical insights. In doing so, the thesis forms a propositional roadmap for art education within the context of neoliberal capitalism and the crises of education and care.

1.3. Ethnographic research: Emergent Design and Critical Realism

I began my methodological approach with an emergent design to account for the uncertainties and ambiguities caused by the pandemic. Emergent design is when 'inquiry, research, and imagined outcomes develop over time in open-ended, unexpected directions.' (Campbell & Lassiter, 2015, p.32). This was not merely a conscious choice, but a necessity because the economic, political and social states of play were deeply unstable. When I began my research process, six months before the pandemic had arrived in the UK, I had designed a project that had involved participatory observation in artist communities and alternative art schools and had intended to use visual ethnographic methods to capture slow processes and unfolding narratives. With regards to an erratic social field, it is acknowledged that:

> 'All ethnographic projects must be prepared…to change plans, expectations and goals for any number of reasons as any given project develops or unfolds: as new information presents itself, as new questions arise, as old questions become less pertinent, as research contexts shift, as people change their minds, as individuals move on or drop out.' (ibid)

This was certainly the case for my project. New contextual information was being presented all the time and the research context was shifting as more knowledge became circulated about the pandemic, including the search for vaccines and the ever-changing state of lockdowns which generated a range of emotions: uncertainty, weariness and anticipation among them. As already noted, one of my sites of research, Islington Mill Art Academy in Salford, with whom I had intended to do participatory research, decided to cease their activities in January 2020. I had to redesign my study to fit the new context of social isolation and its effects on human relationships. In a context where I could not, for an unknown quantity of time, meet anyone physically because of government mandated lockdowns, I decided that a clear way forward was to do Zoom interviews as it would allow me insight into the narrated experiences and thoughts of my respondents – it was in fact the only way I could access them while being able to see their faces. It would bring to light respondents' representations of their experiences, thoughts and observations, and bring them into dialogue with my research questions and predispositions based on my own life

experiences. As previously mentioned, as I was unable to do ethnography in a way that made space for close encounters and slow observations, I transposed this over to the activity of close listening through Zoom interviews.

I subscribed to the paradigm of critical realism, and its reconciliation with ethnography as argued by Rees and Gatenby, as a 'mutually beneficial relationship' (2014, p.2). Critical realism is an approach in social science that '*supports a generative, rather than successionist, model of causality*' (Reed, 2009, p.431, emphasis the author's) and understands social ontology as comprising differing layers of reality that cannot be collapsed into one another, but 'come into highly complex interaction with each other' (ibid, p.431) in a way which supports 'emergence' (ibid), the idea that new indeterminacies arise through these complex interplays. As an ontological theory it supports my discussions elsewhere in this project on *indeterminacy* as outlined by anthropologist Anna Tsing (2015), *encounter* by JN Hoad (2020) and *transindividuality* (Read, 2015; Vujanović & Cvejić, 2022). It also resonates with dialectical thinking as encountered in Marx, in particular with Open Marxism which resists synthetic closure from supposed static opposites; instead of enclosing the complexities of the world into binary antagonisms and rendering them as absolutes (Holloway, 2009), Open Marxism's use of dialectics opens up the binary and finds indeterminacy, uncertainty, fluidity and possibility. Critical realism, then, argues for other pathways between a reality that is known outside of language and perception and one that is indeterminate and known only through mediation and our constructions through language, discourse and experience. The social world, according to critical realists, is an unfolding 'open context' (Roberts, 2014), and knowledge is fallible because contexts interact in ways which are unpredictable; complexity and dynamism mean that researchers can also be misled to erroneous conclusions (ibid). The dialectical interactions of structure and agency, as well as structure and history (ibid) are what make critical realism appropriate for a qualitative study, as it acknowledges that the subjects of research (in my case, humans) are responsive to their social contexts and conditions; their agency interacts with social structures in processes which are complex and rigid, and at the same time dynamic and flexible. The conditions of the pandemic threw this fully into view, where suddenly quotidian human interactions could no longer be taken for granted and social and public institutions were forced to reorganise, disassemble, embrace different working patterns and

values, respond to mass worker layoffs, and respond to calls to decolonise in the wake of Black Lives Matter. In other words, the entire fabric of social life was forced to adopt a new rhythm and a new choreography as a result of a disease born from inter-species contamination, and how its rapid spreading was facilitated by decades of funding cuts to public health services and international competition rather than cooperation.

As my project is one that explores the meanings, worldviews, ontologies and agency of individuals within imposed structures which shape and are shaped by agential action, it was appropriate to take a qualitative, ethnographic approach that 'reveal[s] the links between these subjective understandings and their structural social origins.' (ibid). It became even more evident that this underlying methodological approach was appropriate in the midst of the pandemic when messiness and uncertainty became normal.[6] It follows that a deeper understanding is generated from the field, as the subjective accounts of research-subjects are honoured while being seen in wider, determining and indeterminate contexts. My reasoning here extends from the argument set out by D. Soyini Madison that 'theory does not block our access to the interview narrative but, instead, shows us the way into its deeper (not always seen or evident) questions and veracity.' (2012, p.36). I see the approaches of an emergent design and critical realism as similar in aim, as they both emphasise an unpredictable and unfolding reality, making them integral to my project.

1.4. Social Reproduction Theory as Methodology.

I am using Social Reproduction Theory as a method and as a lens, which is a response not only to my research questions but to a social and political context in which SRT has seen a revival in interest in conversations on care and crisis. At the time of writing, there is a widely acknowledged cost-of-living crisis, in which prices for every day essentials are disproportionately higher than average household incomes, at a rate that is steadily growing. It has been ventured that the increase in energy prices, for example, 'has been the largest since the 1973 oil crisis' (Webster and Neal, 2022, p.475). With many bearing the cost of fuel poverty, housing insecurity and food insecurity, the cost-of-living crisis is part of

[6] 'Mess' will be taken up later in this chapter in section 2.5.

the crisis of care, the aftermath of the precarity and lack of funding given to care during the Covid-19 crisis, for example for those unable to secure furlough pay, who were made redundant or who were self-employed without income. This is where Social Reproduction Theory comes into play. While SRT continues to be deployed methodologically for analyses of schooling, care work, sexuality and domestic labour, the methodology encompasses 'the corpus of social relations involving regeneration – birth, death, social communication and so on…commonly referred to in scholarly as well as policy literature as *care* or *social care*.' (Bhattacharya, 2017, p.9, emphasis in the original). It offers a 'lens' (Bhattacharya et al, 2017) through which to research the field of inquiry; as a theory it constructs a way of seeing phenomena. Social Reproduction Theory is a methodology of care. According to Battacharya (2017), it 'is a methodology to explore labor and labor power under capitalism and is best suited to offer a rich and variegated map of capital as a social relation.' It 'interrogates the complex network of social processes and human relations that produces the conditions of existence for that entity' (ibid) and is about the 'life-making activity of people outside of the workplace' (Fergusen and Battacharya, no date), which the authors insist provides insight into experimenting with 'new ways of being in the world.' (ibid) Its theoretical and contextual home is in both Marxist-feminist and qualitative research methodologies without it being confined or limited to analyses of gender, race or class. It is informed by them without according one a specific focus or assigning them as an afterthought. Because social reproduction is largely composed of work that is feminised and falls on subjects who are marginalised either via their immigration status, race, gender or sexual identity, social reproduction theory argues that this comprises a class relation where, as the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed, those who are socially excluded are performing labour which is the most essential to society (e.g. nursing, teaching, agricultural labourers, food workers, etc.) (Ferguson, 2020). Ferguson makes a distinction between what she terms 'coercive social reproduction from above' (ibid), such as policing in its disciplinary function and its perpetuation of racialised oppression, and social reproduction from 'below', systems of support for community self-determination. At the online Historical Materialism conference in 2020, she used an example from the Black Lives Matter protests of June 2020 to illustrate her point, suggesting that the abolitionist demand to "defund the police" is about communities of colour taking back control of their social reproduction, to give due importance to those activities which are crucial for the regeneration of life on a psycho-

social basis (Ferguson, 2020). The argument proceeds that with life-making activities that are undervalued and under-resourced in contemporary capitalist society, there is a chance to undermine systems of capital through forging bonds of solidarity, community and support. This could plug the gaps where, through neoliberal restructuring, the state has withdrawn funding and resources; it is way of taking back control of social reproduction through self-organisation.

According to feminist political economists Kate Bezanson and Meg Luxton, social reproduction refers to 'the provision of food, clothing, shelter, basic safety, and health care, along with the development and transmission of knowledge, social values and cultural practices and the construction of individual and collective identities.' (2006, p.3) The current research project is focused on the latter of those categories – those concerned with culture, meaning, knowledge and social values - in which education and art sit. It has been widely researched that the education of artists in neoliberal times, along with education more generally, has capitulated almost entirely to market-values under a regime where receiving an education is for the enhancement of one's 'human capital'. The concept of 'human capital' has been critiqued by Wendy Brown (2015), who in writing about higher education, argues that transference of knowledge, thought and training 'are valued and desired almost exclusively for their contribution to capital enhancement.' (p.177) She argues that it crushes the developmental capacities of subjects for 'envisioning and crafting different ways of life in common.' (pp.177-78) As such, the work of social reproduction in the present time, and its importance to this project, is about understanding how social actors at the intersection of art and education are reimagining, both conceptually and practically, relations of learning, care and community against the dominant ideology of human capital and market-centred imperatives to try and generate a 'life in common'. (2016, p.178)

Social reproduction as an analytical tool has been used by feminist political economists to acknowledge the importance of community, voluntary and third sector social ties between the state, market and households (Benzanson and Luxton, 2006, pp.263-264), and feminist theorists of work have contributed to a new understanding of the politicisation of unwaged work in both teaching and the creative industries (Beech 2019, p.54); but the realm of art education where education meets production at its intersection, and the extension of its methods into nonformal learning cultures, has not been comprehensively

empirically studied or theorised using the methodology of social reproduction theory. The ontological assumptions used to understand this are, firstly, that education is a form of care work[7]; second, the work involved in art-making is an act of production and reproduction that is exempt from capitalist value (Beech, 2019) which, as Beech asserts, contains the key to its political potential in the transformation away from capitalism; thirdly, that the democratic impulse of art-making as simply defined by Herbert Read in *Education Through* Art (1958) is when people 'give shape to something' (p.16). Following the authors of *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentring Oppression* (2017), I have found it compelling to ask how social reproduction theory, in addition to the concepts and ideas by the authors above, can illuminate and make sense of the complex social reality gleaned from perspectives collected through empirical and ethnographic research at a moment of tremendous insecurity for many working-class artists and cultural workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. I used the approach to shed light on reimagined learning cultures and pedagogies from artist-led groups and community learning projects under the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic and in wider conditions of neoliberal capitalism and continued political austerity.

A methodology that foregrounds care, on the one hand, and imagination, on the other, led me to look to artist-led groups as the primary subjects of this research. The focus on the present moment called research design that is able, first of all, to describe present circumstances as they are unfolding and to collect a plurality of perspectives from a range of actors in the field who have varying degrees of social power and participation. The focus on the field of art education is limited to social actors who had decided to break away either partially or entirely from a formal university education and participate in and organise their own learning cultures. As Amsler (2017) has noted, 'the rich traditions of critical pedagogy and popular education tell us that there is something about learning which promises a radical shift in consciousness that generates possibilities for undertaking practices of freedom against domination and determination.' (pp.106-107)

Education as a life-making activity coincides here with the realm of art and art-making; while the commodification of both spheres is no longer contested in terms of

[7] Karl Marx cited teachers in his list of those who do not produce surplus-value, which is where theories of social reproduction emerge in Marxist-Feminist discourse. (See: Marx, 1967).

access to these services, it is difficult to maintain that the relationships made through education and art are subject to the same. As one of my respondents said, 'It's just, like, being a human being. I don't think you can commodify care and I don't think that art should be a substitute for being a human being.' (respondent D) What's implied is that the relationships built through these institutions can't be reduced to a commodity, even while access can. It occurs to me that social reproduction theory can deepen our understanding of the field of art education by focusing on radical learning and subjects who are organising their own learning cultures and support systems in this area through peer-learning, and to further understand how these actors experience the undervaluing of their work at the present historical moment. Social reproduction theory is therefore 'a theory rooted in human experience' (Martineau 2020) which is where it methodologically finds its allies in phenomenology and ethnography, with the interview form as a productive concrete method arising from abstract theory, which I will address in later sections of this chapter.

1.5. In defence of mess.

It has been unavoidable that this research project has had to confront messiness. As detailed in the introduction to this section, my original plan for the PhD was derailed by a global pandemic that led to all social interactions – messy in and of themselves – to find an exclusive home in the online sphere. Digital correspondences replaced face-to-face interactions and, as I attempted to find my way through murky waters both in my personal life and in my work, (which included figuring out how to approach the research project under new, challenging and unforeseen circumstances), my methods in the end have reflected the messiness of the social and political environment. The messiness of method reflects a social reality that is itself messy, unfixed, always unfolding and in process. The researcher does not enter into a social environment impartially or without affecting or being affected by the dynamics that are constantly unfolding. Social research, therefore, is creative; 'it recrafts realities and creates new versions of the world.' (Law, 2004, p.143) The methods used in this project thus adhere to a process of 'assemblage' (Law, 2004, p.144) and 'bricolage' (Berry, 2006). Law describes 'assemblage' as the 'crafting, bundling, or gathering of relations in three parts: (a) whatever is in-here or *present*… (b) whatever is absent but also *manifest* (it can be seen, is described, is manifestly relevant to presence);

and (c) whatever is absent but is *Other* because, while necessary to presence, it is also hidden, repressed or uninteresting.' (2004, p.144) Significantly, Law understands this as a process of 'imagining' and of 'resonance' (ibid), which departs from the metaphysics, ontologies and epistemologies of social research that understand the world as knowable and predictable (ibid). It makes sense, ontologically and epistemologically, that for a project focused on imagining and crafting postcapitalist subjectivities through alternative arts education models, that the underlying methodological approach itself understands the world as open and malleable. It rejects universality for multiplicity, simplicity for complexity and finiteness to an infinite unknowability and ambiguity.

I have also used 'bricolage' as a research method, described through an analogy by Berry as so: 'It's like when the carpenter who builds a house and uses anything he (she) has handy to get the job done".' (2006, p.87) In other words, I have 'used the tools at hand' (ibid, p.88) and not followed a blueprint (ibid). The research objects I have had at my disposal, therefore, have been: 15 interviews carried out on Zoom with individuals working or participating in the intersection of art, education and peer-learning, a box of archive materials from the Islington Mill Art Academy containing ephemera from between 2009 and 2019, a post-lockdown visit to Southend to visit the TOMA exhibition space and meet some of their participants and organiser, a post-lockdown visit to San Francisco where I held a focus-group meeting on Zoom with participants of the free school and a card-game asset-based methodology for peer-learning called REBEL (Recognition of Experience-Based Education and Learning), which I have used as a case-study in chapter four. I will now turn to the organisations and individuals with whom I undertook research.

1.6. Critical approaches to the interview.

The purpose of my research is primarily to gain knowledge on how subjects in the expanded field of arts pedagogy, specifically focused on artist-led projects, have been experiencing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, how this experience has shaped and is shaping their politico-aesthetic beliefs, their desires for how education in the arts could be responding, and the subjectivities that could be emerging from this moment. The limitations and drawbacks in focusing on present circumstances is that, having interviewed my respondents

in the middle of the pandemic, it is likely that they lacked the clarity of critical distance to be able to reflect on recent events and experiences. Interview questions that I designed and posed attempted to combat this by jumping across time through a combination of a trio of interview types according to D. Soyini Madison (2012): 'oral history', 'personal narrative' and 'topical interview' (p.28). The purpose of the oral history interview was to recount particular moments from April 2020 as well as moments from the aftermath of the economic crisis of 2008. It therefore invited participants to formulate comparisons. The personal interview was used to gain an individual expression and perspective on how the participant had/has been affected, and how they imaged different realities. In particular, the advantage of staging interviews at the present time and about the present time is to capture immanent thoughts, ideas and avenues for further exploration. A topical interview focused on instances of a political or social nature, specifically regarding the speculative, utopian aspect of the project that explores desires for superseding the capitalist present. In this way, interviews asked about the past, the immediate past, the present and the future, which contributed towards answering my research questions, taking cue from Soyini Madison that "the interview is a window to individual subjectivity and collective belonging" (ibid).

The window that Soyini Madison refers to is, however, a partial one, and one that has historically not been favoured by researchers in the field of education who tend to favour a quantitative, "scientific" approach (Seidman, 2000, p.13). There is the further limitation of interview subjects having incomplete knowledge or distorted memories (Walford, 2001), as well as the truism that their account will always be subjective, and the possibility that their opinions and perspectives might change over time. Is the interview, then, too flawed as a way of accessing knowledge? Joan W. Scott's (1992) important essay on experience advises caution when interpreting the experiences of others:

> 'When experience is taken as the origin of knowledge, the vision of the individual subject (the person who had the experience or the historian who recounts it) becomes the bedrock of evidence upon which explanation is built. Questions about the constructed nature of experience, about how one's vision is structured – about language (or discourse) and history – are left aside. The evidence of experience then becomes evidence for the fact that difference, rather than a way of exploring how

> difference is established, how it operates, how and in what ways it constitutes the subjects who see and act in the world.' (Scott, 1992, p.25)

Here a critique of a purely phenomenological approach is offered, whereby taking what a subject says in an interview as a given is not sufficient grounds for complexity. It is suggested that experience is 'only one factor' (Cerwonka, 2011, p.66) and should not be the starting point for analysis of social phenomena (ibid). Nevertheless, for researchers with an interest in subjectivity, the interview is an in-depth way of discovering how people make meaning through language and other forms of embodied expression. There are also advantages to interviewing as part of a bricolage (Kincheloe, et al, 2018) of interdisciplinary methodologies such as are brought together in ethnography, arts and education, where a purely quantitative approach would be inappropriate for the answers being sought.

It is usually advised that the researcher should spend as much time as possible in close proximity to the research subjects, to be well acquainted with the field through close observation, listening and immersion (Madison, 2012, p.13). Recent additions to ethnographic methodologies concur that for research to count as ethnography, multiple methods must be used for a rich collection of data, of which the interview is only one (Walford, 2021). Walford is critical of research that relies solely on spoken word data, usually acquired in highly artificial situations, and calls itself ethnographic (ibid); this, he claims is a recent phenomenon in the social sciences (ibid). The reality of doing fieldwork during a pandemic posed an added challenge, in that participant observation based on close encounters was not possible. As such, the breadth of knowledge and familiarity with the research area and the field of research was undertaken from private interiors and under conditions of separation. Participants and researchers alike were scattered away from their usual hubs of activity and replaced with online video-conferencing meet-ups, which mediated the interactions in the field between researcher and participant. The reality of scoping out the field via a digital interface limits the possibilities for knowing the field intimately and sensuously and with all of the affects of embodied togetherness.

1.6.1. Narrative approaches to interviews

Another aspect of the interview that I used is narrative interviewing. According to Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000), narration plays a part in reconstruction of time, place and

action, making it a mode of active remembering, and ties into the advice of Irving Siedman (2006) to reconstruct rather than remember, assuming that the former emphasises the most important information brought to the forefront of memory (p.88). Jovchelovitch & Bauer (2000) call this 'relevance fixation', in other words, the respondent will necessarily select the features that are most relevant for their perspective, and therein underlies their subjectivity. For my research, I have used narrative interviewing to ask the respondent to reconstruct a particular moment of importance for them. I also asked them to imagine scenarios that are fantastical or fictional when speculating on the future. The narrative interview therefore seeks to be less structured and more in-depth, using a form of everyday communication that, it is assumed, allows an informant's perspectives to be revealed without much inhibition (ibid). Jovchelovitch & Bauer (2000) also suggest that different ways in which informants tell a story, as well as the content of the narrative, give insights into their worldview and their ontology, which bears relevance for answering my research questions about subjectivity and envisioning postcapitalist ontologies.

1.6.2. Dialogical performance in interviews

All interviews are performative (Madison, 2012). Madison refers to the 'performative dynamic of dialogue' (p.40) when using the interview in critical ethnographic research. It involves deconstructing the binary which places the interviewer as the expert who asks questions in a rigid back-and-forth with the interviewee, and instead aims for a more conversational approach where the interviewer probes for a deeper understanding and directs the conversation fluidly with an open mind and a lack of judgement. In Madison's view, approaching an interview this way not only helps to build a rapport, which is important for the interviewee's sense of comfort and trust, but facilitates a presence of mind, body and active listening. It ontologically departs from traditional methods which render the research subjects as objects of research, so that the interviewee is less a vessel of data to be extracted, but a real living person whose thoughts, experiences, beliefs and desires are being shared voluntarily. It is therefore important for the interviewer to proceed with humility, deferring expertise over to the respondent (p.39). A similar approach which I adhered to is the 'toolkit' (Brown & Danaher, 2019) of the CHE principles of Connectivity,

Humanness and Empathy (ibid). Purported to facilitate authenticity in the interactions of semi-structured interviews, authenticity is defined by the authors as 'a response underpinned by a set of beliefs that consistently and genuinely reflect and align with practice and actions.' (ibid) To this end, it was intended that my semi-structured dialogical interviews would pertain to the co-construction of meaning and exchange rather than a one-way extraction of data (ibid). It will be discussed in the following section how I encountered tensions with the principles of CHE which necessitated eye-contact and open body-language, for example, in order to facilitate rapport, when using the online medium of Zoom.

1.6.3. Internet interviews during Covid-19

Conducting interviews over Zoom was far from ideal. It has, however, become commonplace in social research even before the pandemic made it a necessity (Weller, 2017), and its benefits include being able to have in-depth conversations even while geographically dispersed. It has been argued that online interviewing through mediated technologies has become a new 'methodological frontier' (ibid; Deakin & Wakefield, 2014, p. 605). However, as internet video calls are disembodied, the complexities and subtleties of communication, such as in non-verbal cues, are lost, and both interviewer and interviewee are able to 'hide' behind the screen. It has also been noted that, due to limited internet access and technological faults, some participants are excluded from research (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). I experienced this with one of my interviewees from San Francisco (respondent F), whose internet connection was so poor that we both abandoned the interview after ten minutes and I instead sent them a series of questions over email, which they then answered. The results were that their answers were far less in-depth than they would have been in comparison to the in-real-time video calls I had with other respondents. In further comparison, respondent F had time to carefully plot their answers, another contrast to the sometimes messy, clunky, stuttering and in-depth responses that real-time conversations tend to have. In several of my other interviews, there were moments of technological non-responsiveness, delays, screen-freeze and other problems which distorted meaning and understanding; in some of my transcripts there are irregular words

and sentences which are obscured. While the 'e-interview' (Bampton & Cowton, 2002) saved time and gave me access to specific answers from the respondent that would have taken longer to get to in a real time conversation, obvious subtleties in tone, register and emotion were missing which provided important information in my other interviews, especially under heightened emotional circumstances of lockdown and the pandemic.

However, there were many aspects of conducting online interviews that put respondents at ease. All of them spoke to me from their own homes or studios, which although sometimes included interruptions from children, housemates, pets and the noise of traffic, allowed respondents to feel safe and relaxed. By this point, many people had become familiar with online conversations using Zoom, and the familiarity accentuated the sense of ease and relaxation, allowing respondents to open up and reveal their emotions as if they were talking to a friend. Even though I disclosed that I had a Dictaphone and would be recording the interviews, the invisibility of these props – being outside of the frame of the screen – likely helped respondents to feel less pressure to perform, a note that corresponds to Weller's research on establishing rapport using online interviews with young people (2017).

1.7. Introduction to cases: the sites of alternative arts education.

1.7.1. My criteria & sampling strategy.

I chose alternative art education programmes that were artist-led, peer-led and were motivated by opening up pathways to lifelong learning and community education not hampered by financial restrictions and other barriers that are faced by those entering into formal higher education. Within this remit I also chose to look at artist development programmes, one in London and one in Birmingham, and a youth-centred arts and education centre in Birmingham. I was also interested in reaching out to organisations whose activities were continuing in spite of the pandemic, to find out how they were responding and how care featured in their organisations. I didn't want to limit my field to the UK. I had originally reached out to Chto Delat in St. Petersburg, Russia, but they were unresponsive. A year later, Putin declared war on Ukraine and it was sadly no longer

appropriate to include them in the study. Through one of my respondents from TOMA, I found IAFS based in San Francisco, which I followed up.

1.7.2. TOMA (The Other MA)

TOMA stands for The Other MA and is based in Southend-on-Sea. It was set up in 2016 and is an artist-run and peer-and-student-led artist education programme that runs for 12-18 months. It works at postgraduate level, is unaccredited, and was set up in response to 'the hierarchies surrounding access to higher education' (TOMA, website). The programme is particularly open to people who have not had a formal art education, who find an artistic practice later in life or have not had the chance to develop a critical or creative practice due to work, family or caring commitments.

The TOMA website emphasises their interest in artists who are looking to participate and form a supportive creative community. Students on the programme choose what they learn and from whom they learn, with the emphasis on 'learning together, failing together and succeeding as a group' (TOMA website) while 'disrupting the pupil teacher hierarchy' (ibid). In addition to their artist education programme, they also set up the TOMAssociates, which allows artists who have been on their education programme to stay connected and keep contributing to the wider group of creatives.

1.7.3. IAFS

IAFS is based in San Francisco and operates online through Zoom meetings. They are a group of artists, activists and educators who formed from the crisis of the pandemic out of a need for mutual-aid after the San Francisco Art Institute, where some of them were employed, laid off their staff and students during the onset of COVID-19 institutional closures. The group met weekly on Zoom to self-organise their own programme and curriculum of learning, modelled on anarchist free skools and experiments in pedagogy. On their website they have the following statement:

> *"IAFS is an emerging free school community, self-organizing along the principles of democracy, mutual-aid, and mutual benefit to foster art and learning through the aftermath of SFAI's rupture, the ongoing Coronavirus Pandemic, crises in higher education and climate change, and in solidarity with worldwide movements for racial and economic justice." (i-a-f-s.org/)*

The statement takes a defiant stance in opposition to multiple intersecting and compounding crises that brought about conditions for IAFS's existence, namely the financial instability of the San Francisco Art Institute during March 2020, the Coronavirus pandemic, and global crises affecting higher education and struggles for climate, economic, racial and social justice. The course structure that they created indicates a critical and utopian pedagogical approach to art-making, teaching and learning and ways of being together, which reveals a commitment to care as a cornerstone of their pedagogy. It reveals a deep commitment to the idea of reimagining, in a way that is both prefigurative and reaching towards Bloch's notion of utopia as something just out of reach but nevertheless worth reaching for.

Below is their course structure, taken from their website, which provides an example of their utopian pedagogy:

Fall 2021 – EMBRACING THE MESS	Spring 2021 – CARE AS RADICAL EXPRESSION	Fall 2020 – How to Become a 21st Century Art School
M is for Merriment: IAFS Open House Jamboree	**Many Ways To Say I Love You Too: Caring in a Childlike Manner**	Seminar Topic: What We Love: Reflecting on Art School Experiences
Josef Albers in my Boyfriend: Color Theory Intensive	*The Art of Grief: Grieving as an Act of Defiance*	Studio Practice: *(Dis)embodied Space and Place: "Together"*

What's the Deal with Humor and Trauma?	Long Con: A Series of Classes With A Community End Goal in Sight	Seminar Topic: Mutual-aid: Fostering Learning, Accessibility and Inclusion
How to disappear completely – #privacyisfun	Artists of Color Gathering	Studio Practice: Moving Images in Time
Sketchbooking with the Moon Group (Waxing Moon)	Artist as Facilitator: Visual Assembly Lab	Seminar Topic: Decolonizing Time
crafting the dharma: embroidery as spiritual practice with olive loew		Studio Practice: Color/Sound Studies in Community
We contain multitudes		Seminar Topic: Art + School = X
Making Money: Intro to personal finance		Studio Practice – Fiber Fun from Home!
Stitch Witch		Seminar Topic: Art as Community Engagement
Doing It Ourselves: De-Institutionalizing Art Worlds		Studio Practice: Art and Politics at the Precipice
CRAFT		Seminar Topic: Art + Politics = The Third Rail of Art Schools
Field Notes on Utopia		Virtual Party: What have we done?
The Art of Grief: Grieving as an Act of Defiance		

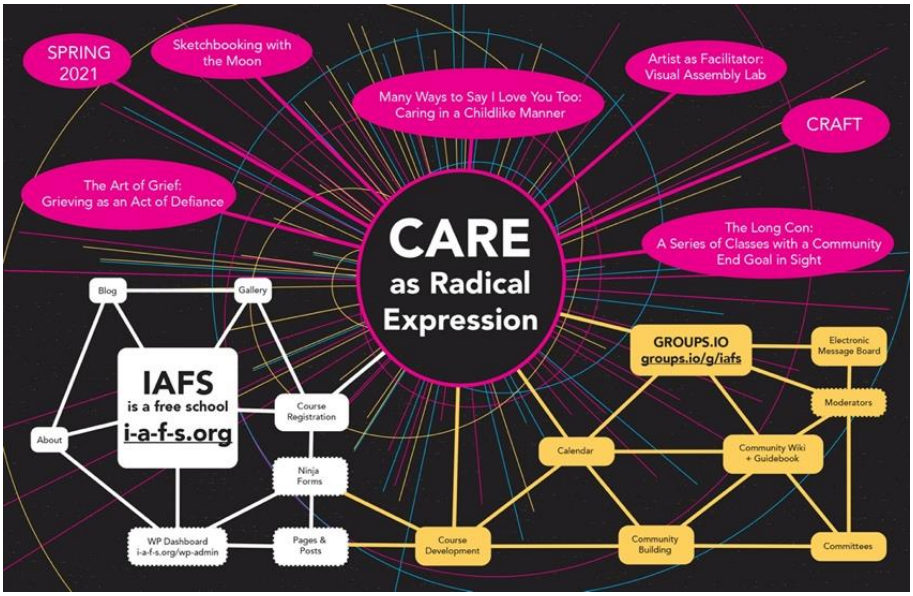

Figure 1: Pasted from i-a-f-s.org

1.7.4. Into the Wild

Into the Wild is an alternative art school based at Chisenhale Studios in London with a focus on 'mentoring, opportunity and practical advice for emerging artists' (http://www.intothewildchisenhale.co.uk/). It is free to participate in and is more directed than some of the other programmes such as School of the Damned, which is completely peer-led and unstructured. Into The Wild has a structure, some taught elements and moves slowly throughout the year towards self-directed practice for the participants. The aim of the programme is the help artists to gain confidence in their practice, build community and relationships of support, which they achieve through 1-1 mentoring, group crits, talks from artists, activities and workshops. They select 10 artists each year via an online application and an interview to join them for two weekends followed by one Monday every two weeks. I only spoke to the organiser of this group, as during the pandemic the other participants did not reply to my emails.

1.7.5. Islington Mill Art Academy

Islington Mill Art Academy, based at Islington Mill in Salford, was one of the longest running alternative art schools in the new wave of alternative art education. It was set up in 2007 and had its final cohort in 2019; it closed just before the UK went into full lockdown, during which time I began building my relationship with Islington Mill as my partner organisation, spending a two-week period examining their archive of materials from previous installations of their alternative art school. This was a scoping exercise in order to guide me towards entry-points and themes relevant to my literature review and potential interview questions. Dialogue with the staff at Islington Mill helped me to locate the Mill in its context and its plans going forward. I also attended several crit sessions with the 2019 art academy cohort, which was to gain a sense of the atmosphere within the group and how sessions were conducted. Insights gained from these crits are used as a case-study in chapter four on the Thinking Hats technique, used as an example of a way of valuing art with a different criteria of value.

1.7.6. REBEL (Recognising Experience-Based Education and Learning)

Choosing to present REBEL as a case-study came out of an in-depth interview with respondent M, whose work on the project garnered some useful insights and tools into experiential pedagogy and life-long learning. Respondent M is herself an artist and someone who has also worked in Higher Education in a more pastoral role. The REBEL card-game is an asset-based framework of peer and self-assessment for use on students in art schools, which I will discuss in detail in chapter four. It helped to gain a critical look at the role of assessment in art schools that usually uses a deficit model, and to forge a path towards recognising what else students bring to their learning that isn't usually valued.

1.8. The interviews: doing 'fieldwork' at home during a global pandemic.

I recruited my participants by sending out emails with a letter that gave them details of my project alongside an ethics form, which, if they agreed to take part, they were asked to

complete. The recruitment process took place during the Autumn of 2020, between September and December. Out of the thirty people I contacted, some did not reply and fifteen people agreed to participate. This took place during the Autumn of 2020, after nearly six months of being in the pandemic and with three more lockdowns to come. It was a time of heightened insecurity for many people, which I suspect contributed to people either having the time or not to participate in my project. I was conscious of making more work for people at a time when many were working even harder than usual and under strenuous conditions; others valued the opportunity to speak to me at length about their work, as other avenues to do so during the pandemic were in short supply. I spoke to five participants from TOMA, who were mostly in their 30s, working full-time and identified as women, and one older man. One of these interviews led me to the organisation in San Francisco, IAFS, with whom I conducted in-depth interviews with three of them and one shorter interview with one of them after technological faults with Zoom interrupted the flow of that conversation. Once able to visit San Francisco in June 2022, I joined one of their meetings and was able to listen to and speak with nine members of the group as they were collectively deciding on the future of their activities.

The interviews took place during December 2020, January and February 2021, and the Coronavirus pandemic determined and shaped our interactions. What ought to have been a social experience became a solitary one; often the technologically-mediated interactions heightened the feeling of isolation even while technologically "connected", and at other times a rapport was quickly built which helped to melt the distance between us. The first interview took place on January 5th, 2021, at the beginning of a 6-week national UK lockdown that was prolonged for more than three months. We met on Zoom. All of my respondents had either been key organisers or at least participants in an ongoing experiment of reimagining how learning in the arts takes place, sharing their experiences of trying to build community responses to the crises of our times. We spoke into each other's private interiors where the physical restrictions of the pandemic kept us enclosed. To this end, "fieldwork" for me became 'placeless' (Norman, 2000, p.120); as anthropologist Karin Norman relates in her experience of using telephone calls in her fieldwork with Kosovan Albanian refugees: "the field" is does not have its usual demarcated boundaries, but rather spills into everyday life (p.122), which comes with emotional demands. I certainly found that

doing Zoom interviews during the months of national lockdown generated an emotional intensity because of the dearth of connection and sociality with other people experienced by myself and my respondents. The flatness of the screen made the separation more visceral. Within this, I found myself in some of the interviews performing emotional labour and counsel when my respondents were in states of heightened emotion and distress; in my interview with respondent B, she told me afterwards that she was worried that it had come across as a therapy session. I also put myself into the interviews by presenting my views and experiences as well as listening and being exposed to their vulnerabilities.

In order to build rapport, the interviews were open-ended, semi-structured and conversational. Here I followed a 'performative dynamic of dialogue' (Madison, 2012, p.40) elaborated upon in section 2.4.1, which allowed the conversation to move in the direction led at times by my interviewees so as to allow for unexpected results, and at other moments, sometimes responding to a surprising answer, I would ask a different question, or provoke my interviewee to elaborate, or I pulled the conversation back to the direction of my topic. For each interview I allowed my respondent time to tell me about themselves and their background in art and their current artistic practice, and their motivations for being in an alternative art school programme. I paid close attention to not only what they were saying but the how of what they were saying. I understood that a conversation mediated by a laptop meant that there is no direct eye-contact, and voices can become inhibited due to poor connection issues.

I structured the interviews into themes, defined before the interviews took place. Thematically I was interested in the topics of care, mutual-aid, barriers to higher-education and their perspectives on utopia/desires for the future of art education, and I split these into two specific camps: one section focused on their experiences of the pandemic, and the other section focused on what is emerging ('what do you want to see') – in other words, the latter section focused on desires. Within these two camps I specifically addressed respondents' i) experiences of alternative art education; ii) their experiences of the pandemic; iii) the 'utopian moment', iv) care and learning, v) opinion of the art world, vi) the significance of peer-learning; and vii) the underpinning philosophies of their organisation. Each interview, apart from with respondent F, lasted at least an hour. While I allowed the conversation to unfold free-form, there were specific questions that I directed to everyone:

a) What is your understanding of art school today in the age of COVID-19?

b) How did you become interested in alternative art education?

c) How does care feature in your organisation?

d) How do you understand care in relation to learning/pedagogy?

e) How do you create a non-hierarchical space?

f) There was a "utopian moment" during April and May of the first lockdown in 2020. How did you experience that?

g) How did learning and peer-support change (in your organisation) when the lockdowns began?

h) How do you think you've been affected by the pandemic, and what role has (your organisation) played in that?

I altered the questions to suit the specific individual or organisation I was talking with. For example, with IAFS is San Francisco, I used material from their website to probe deeper about their politics and underpinning pedagogical philosophy. I asked them about mutual-aid and non-hierarchy, how joy and pleasure feature in their work and about the practicalities of setting up a mutual-aid group centred on teaching and learning under circumstances of the pandemic.

After each interview, I wrote reflective notes about the interview, including reflections on the emotionality, the pace, the questions and leads to follow up on based on information the respondent had given me. I also reflected on the response I had generated in the respondent and the response they had generated in me; in other words, how we were shaping each other through the course of our interaction. There were some interviews where I felt exhausted because of the high energy of my respondents. Often there were frustrations due to a poor internet connection, or interruptions from children and pets. For each interview, I was allowed privileged insight into my respondents' homes or workplaces, where I gained a perspective on what was going on for people at that specific moment of the pandemic.

1.8.1. Data Preparation & Analysis

Once all the interviews were recorded on a Dictaphone, I had them professionally transcribed. I then analysed the transcripts using a narrative analysis in conjunction with my recordings and my notes, so as to pick up on tone, emotion and affect as well as subtext. I read through my transcripts one by one, and using a spreadsheet I pulled out common themes in each interview and collated quotations according to themes of: class, affect, care, desire, pleasure, access, mental health, value, conflict, community, re-imagining, intimacy, collaboration, austerity and disaster. Within this scope I deployed close-reading techniques to draw out other lines of enquiry, such as the relevance of assessments and grades to art education. Upon writing the chapters of my thesis, I pulled out quotations from my respondents to analyse in depth to use generatively with theoretical findings and other academic literature to create a wider discussion around pedagogies of care, alternative economies and prefigurative desire-making practices in alternative art education that could be a lens through which to view formal higher education.

1.9. Conclusion

In this chapter I have detailed and discussed how I approached my research, beginning with the research objectives and questions and how I changed these to fit circumstances beyond my control. The combination of emergent design with critical realism reflects my ontological standpoint and I have argued is an appropriate approach for navigating and accounting for an unstable social environment brought by the pandemic. I further argued alongside Rees and Catenby for the 'mutually beneficial relationship' (2014, p.2) between ethnography and critical realism, and embrace concepts of indeterminacy and mess, bricolage and assemblage, as they are again appropriately suited to the context in which the research took place.

I further mobilised and argued for social reproduction theory as a methodology of care and justified its relevance for my project in the following ways: as a tool for reimagining relations of learning and, understanding art and education as life-making activities that can produce subjectivity beyond capitalism. I discussed narrative and dialogical approaches to

the interview, foregrounding the importance of conversation, affect and reflexivity. I put forward the advantages and challenges of conducting interviews over Zoom rather than in-person, giving an account of the fluidity and spontaneity in semi-structured, gently guided interviews. Themes which I brought to the interviews were: care, mutual-aid, barriers to education and the arts, utopia and desires, experiences of the pandemic, opinions of the art world and peer-learning. Themes which I drew out of the interviews through close reading included: class, affect, care, desire, pleasure, access, mental health, value, conflict, community, re-imagining, intimacy, collaboration, austerity and disaster.

These approaches have enabled me to gain insights into my respondent's experiences and have generated rich data through the interplay of my pre-conceived enquiry and their responses. It enabled me to set up the following chapters which further elaborate the themes generated above. I will now turn to the chapter on care, which begins the series of three chapters that present, analyse and discuss findings from my fieldwork.

Chapter Two

Pedagogies of Care: The alternative art school as peer-support group.

This chapter explores the connections between pedagogy and care through analysis of my interview transcripts, in which my respondents narrate their experiences of and perceptions of care before and during the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to their corresponding organisations. Respondents talked about care as it related to them personally, conceptually and structurally, which emerged through specific questions on the relationship between care and learning, and organically in reference to community building and mutual-aid. In many cases, my respondents drew their own links between care and other topics of discussion, bringing up the topic of care either implicitly or explicitly of their own accord. In bringing to light how and why care mattered to my respondents, I therefore asked about the desires, needs and visions carried by alternative art education programmes. In showing how the theme of care was narrated by respondents, I will analyse its relevance to the wider, determining structures that made care a scarce and in-demand resource during the COVID-19 pandemic. I will also look to the relevance of care in art education and argue that alternative art education programmes during that time crucially functioned as support groups for artists experiencing ruptures to in-person connection and lack of access to studio space. In doing so, my research explores the historical moment in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic, with respondents reflecting upon nine-months of various lockdowns. As my interview material will show, care was practiced and at the forefront of alternative art schools before the pandemic; it had always motivated them. The pandemic, however, made care even more important and became central to their collective ethos and operations.

The chapter begins with a review of the discourses of care coming out of contemporary cultural and political theory. It then explores how care has been picked up in the field of curating and the subject of art exhibitions, publications and artworks. My interview material is then explored and discussed in relation to the contextual and academic literature. The analysis will show how the sites of non-formal peer-led alternative art schools are attempting to provide infrastructures of care that coordinate around a qualitatively different set of values to those in HEIs, reaching towards generative spaces that

seek to be more aware of and provide alternatives to the damaging and limiting structures and systems of neoliberal capitalism, including the need for connection, belonging and recognition of experiences of exclusion that individual participants bring to a space. The chapter then looks at mutual-aid as a practice of care specifically related to pedagogy, using material from my interviews with IAFS.

2.1. Discourses of care in contemporary cultural and political theory

This section discusses discourses of care in cultural and political theory. It deploys concepts from feminist and queer theory to understand the complexity of care helpful for thinking through the models of alternative art education discussed in this chapter and through the interview material of my respondents. The notion of care has been a central concern for feminist academic scholarship (Fisher and Tronto, 1990) and saw a resurgence around 2016 with Nancy Fraser's article 'Contradictions of Capital and Care' (2016) published in the *New Left Review*. Care continues to be a centrally important theme in discussions and speculations on radical alternatives to capitalism, including in the literature about commons and family abolition, in which care in cast as an abundant resource rather than a scarce one.

Fraser's article (2016), which blends insights from Social Reproduction Theory and Marxist-feminist political economy, focuses on the scarcity of care in late capitalism. It explores the discourse around the 'crisis of care' in which she explains that people have less capacity to sufficiently reproduce what they need to live, e.g., work-life balance, time-scarcity and the pressure to sustain relationships generally is being depleted (p.99). The current 'cost of living crisis' in the UK is a symptom of this crisis of care. Fraser argues that the crisis is not simply one of care but of social reproduction in the broadest sense, which she adds is imperative for a functioning society: 'without it there could be no culture, no economy, no political organization.' (ibid) She therefore claims that the crisis of care is 'best interpreted as an acute expression of the social-reproductive contradictions of financialized capitalism.' (ibid) In other words, during the current phase of capitalist development, what she terms 'neoliberal financialised capitalism', what is experienced is a deficit of care in an economy characterised by scarcity in general. She understands 'care' as activities which maintain and sustain social bonds, for example childcare, healthcare and schooling, all of

which are privatised and commodified within a hybrid state-corporate model. As more women were recruited into the labour force during the twentieth century, Fraser explains, care work in the nuclear family unit had to be externalised. The 'two-earner' household works more but for stagnant or falling wages. They are burdened with increasing care work but with less time to perform it (p.112). Care work is therefore 'commodified for those who can pay for it, privatised for those who cannot' (p.104). In this economy, Fraser personifies capitalism as a 'free-rider' (p.101), as a parasite to care-giving activities usually performed without the socially-validating mark of money but which are essential for the maintenance of social bonds, as these activities 'form human capitalism's human subjects, sustains them as embodied natural beings, while also constituting them as social beings, forming their habitus and the cultural ethos in which they move.' (ibid) Fraser's analysis helps to underscore the connections made later in this thesis in the chapter on time and space, in particular between care and time; the more hours given to capitalist value-producing work, the less time there is for non-capitalist activity, including that of care and mutual-aid – the work of social reproduction which generates a social reality comprised of postcapitalist values.

In the year following the publication of Fraser's article, feminist scholar Maria Puig de la Bellacasa published *Matters of care: speculative ethics in more than human worlds* (2017). In this she knits together an intersectional feminist analysis of care with the entangled worlds of 'techno-sciences and nature-cultures [and] the livelihoods and fates of so many kinds and entities on this planet.' (2017, p.1) Her book brings to light an urgent direction for discourses of care, refusing to disentangle the threads entwining systems of oppression in human worlds with those in our wider ecosystems. It argues for an account of care that understands the fragility of humanity entwined with climate breakdown and states of emergency. 'Care is a human trouble', she writes, 'but this does not make care a human-only matter.' (p.2) Drawing upon the definition of care put forward by Tronto (1993), Puig de la Bellacasa emphasises a core theme in feminist ethics: interconnection and interdependence (2017, p.4), while being attentive to the ambivalences of these terms, and in particular where they might clash with notions of dependency, which have been exposed by scholars working in the field of disability (ibid).

For the purposes of exploring care in alternative art school contexts and the implications for art education, Puig de la Bellacasa's focus upon more than human worlds bring to light the dialectics of apocalypse and utopia that underlie the necessity for care and its complexities in university struggles and their alternatives. The relevance of Fraser's understanding of the 'crisis of care' provides the bedrock for a political theory of care, contextually rooting the discussions with my respondents. Puig de la Bellacasa understands care to be ambivalent – because sometimes we don't *want* to care, or we *can't* care. Despite this, she ultimately insists upon care as 'one way of looking at relations' (2017: 5), in order for 'living to be possible' (ibid). She looks at three dimensions of care that will be relevant for this chapter: 'labor/work, affect/affections, ethics/politics' (ibid). At the same time, this chapter will pay attention to ideas of care speculatively, 'as an analytic of provocation, more than a predetermined set of affective practices.' (Atkinson-Graham et al. 2015, cited in Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p.7). It does so because the question of care as understood by respondents in how they view their work is an open question for pedagogy: if education is cast as care work, how ought that care be given and received and what are its limitations? It is therefore suitable to the task of reimagining and constructing care in education, casting it in terms of infrastructure, in particular, in terms of infrastructures of care? It furthermore attempts to, as Puig de la Bellacasa does, be aware of the complexities of care, bound up as the term is in essentialising notions of women's work and motherhood as well as uncomfortable dominant discourses that surmount pressure on devalued waged or unwaged care work, on the one hand, and the commodified, neoliberal imperative of self-care and the wellness industry on the other. Care is therefore unpicked in its complexity and explored iteratively from theoretical writings to the specific individuals and organisations explored in this chapter.

During the pandemic, the crisis of care was further explored by Emma Dowling. In her book *The Care Crisis: What Caused it and How Can We End It?* (2021) she echoes Puig de la Bellacasa, asserting that care is centrally important for 'hold[ing] society together' and in this way focuses on our necessary interdependence. The feminist ethics of care that Dowling posits is based on care 'understood as the opposite of aggression, exploitation and oppression' and is instead 'generative and life-affirming' (ibid). While both scholars derive their ontology of care through feminist ethics, Dowling's account is more binary, placing

care in terms of what it is not (exploitation and oppression) and what it *is* (generative and life-affirming). By contrast, Puig de la Bellacasa teases out the nuances of where the giving or receiving of care can be oppressive, unwanted and uncomfortable. These nuances act as a reminder that care is not one essential quality, and that the conditions of care in a capitalist society are not only unevenly distributed, but also privatised and rendered scarce in the creation of the working-class colonial nuclear family: two exhausted parents struggle to find time to care and be with their children; the local community centre and youth groups are too expensive or permanently closed for lack of funding; the depleted family unit is a pressure-cooker where care is spread thin and poorly given. This crisis of social reproduction, as discussed earlier with Nancy Fraser, also forms a core critique from feminist family abolitionists such as Gumbs, Martens & Williams (2016), Lola Olufemi (2020; 2021), Sophie Lewis (2019; 2022) and Michelle E. O'Brien (2023). What Dowling and Puig de la Bellacasa can agree on, however, is that without care life could not be sustained, and that the politics of care is 'best understood as a particular configuration of social relationships that are politically and economically – and hence historically – conditioned, with all of the gendered, racialised and classed implications of power relations, as well as considerations of vulnerability, need, ability and disability.' (Dowling, 2021) This leads Dowling to investigate the crisis of care and propose broadly socialist solutions for ending it, such as calling for 'a transformation of the structural conditions for care.' (ibid) Allocating much more time, resources and social capacities towards care and raising its status; shifting it away from markets and financialisation (ibid) or allowing a Universal Basic Income are some of her proposals. Her question of whether, 'Instead of producing ever more for the market, can we envisage radically different ways of distributing time and resources?' (ibid) chimes with this project of reimagining arts pedagogy outside of universities and formal art schools, demanding a reimagined models that these nonformal learning places attempt to enact individually and collectively by centring caring pedagogies.

2.2. Care in the context of art and curatorial discourse.

Care as a subject of academic discussion and within institutions began to appear prolifically in curatorial discourse in 2018, before the onset of the pandemic in early Spring of 2020, but

gained traction as the pandemic made care a concern for everyone (Krasny, et al, 2021). It can be traced to the symposium "Who(se) Care(s)", which connected queer and feminist activism with curating as 'a practice of critical caretaking' (ibid, p.11). Since the global pandemic, part of the new wave of care in discourse was because of the Black Lives Matter movement, which although began in 2013, found a rapt international audience when George Floyd was murdered by a white police officer in May 2020. Care became entwined with systemic change along the lines of race, class, dis/ability and non-human life, and became a high-profile topic of many exhibitions and publications. Most recently, care in curating and art is explored in an online symposium called 'care ecologies', exploring the question 'how is art building other ecologies?' (Care Ecologies, 2023) This section looks at a few examples which are used as context for zooming in on how these matters of care were relevant in the lives of my respondents in section 3.3. It pays particular attention to understanding alternative art schools as 'communities of practice' (Lavé, 1991; Wenger, 1999), and thus a site for embodying the kind of care explored in the curatorial discourse.

A volume of essays entitled *Radicalizing Care: Feminist and Queer Activism in Curating* (2021) explicitly connects care with curating. In this anthology, Amelia Wallin (2021) discusses how care 'may move beyond the exhibition to inform daily work habits, and to reimagine systems of operations and the structural hierarchies of power.' (p.122) To this end, Wallin cites art institutions which have begun to look at how they reproduce themselves, using care as a benchmark for how to operate, all the while being mindful of how artworkers over-identify with their work, leading to a situation in which 'the purported love of their work justifies and intensifies the un(der)paid labor.' (ibid) An example she gives is Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons, a self-proclaimed anti-capitalist arts organisation in Utrecht that 'maintains a political commitment to acknowledging social reproduction in its institutional structural and labor relations' (p.126). It is an example of a small arts organisation who have built infrastructures of care into a sustainable model. Watkins argues, as does this dissertation, that the pandemic exacerbated conditions of precarity, galvanising art institutions and artist collectives to 'pay close attention to their methods of social reproduction' (p.129), shining a light on how to institute practices of care. Other essays in the same volume also pay attention to the climate crisis and to issues of decolonization, aiming to move the discourse and practice of curating closer to activism. It

names ‘the political crisis of ethno-nationalist and white supremacist populism, the economic crisis of neoliberal flexibilization, the social crisis of hyper-individualism and competition defining all human relations, and the environmental crisis of climate change’ (p.14) as reasons for the abovementioned crisis of care.

Another example of discussions of care, this time intersecting contemporary art and disability justice, illustrates how care became a central concern during the global pandemic. In 2016, genderqueer artist and writer Johanna Hedva wrote a searing manifesto called *Sick Woman Theory* (2016). In this text, Hedva begins from their own condition of living with chronic illness, lingering on the thought that the social construction of illness and health delineates a ‘norm’, while those who are anxious, depressed or generally unhappy fall into the category of ‘deviant’ (Hedva, 2016, pp.3-4). They wrote the text ‘to think how illness, disability, and vulnerability feminize—e.g., render “weaker” and “more fragile”—any person who requires care.’ (ibid, p.8) As a queer, disabled artist, the body is something that ‘is always vulnerable’ (p. 9). They take cue from Judith Butler, who asserts that since the body is a site of vulnerability, it requires ‘infrastructures of support in order to endure’ (ibid) and accedes that society ought to be shaped according to the requirements of those bodies. Hedva’s text was republished early in 2022 as Western societies began reopening after the lockdowns, and Hedva recalls how, during the pandemic, they received ‘what felt like the hundredth invitation to talk about why care is important’ (Hedva 2022) As I will explore in section 1.3 with specific reference to my interview material, a collective sense of fragility and vulnerability was felt amongst my respondents, of which Hedva is speaking to in *Sick Woman Theory* (2016).

Similarly, exhibitions such as *Don’t Worry, I’m Sick and Poor* (ICA, London, 2020), *The Bureau of Care* (State of Concept, Athens, 2020-present), transnational initiatives such as *The Museum of Care* (2020- present) and *The Hologram: feminist, peer-to-peer health for a post-pandemic future* (Thornton, 2020) aim to bring broad social and economic conditions of production into the presentation of artworks as well as shining a light on institutional practices and the restructuring of institutions. These platforms and organisations focus on the scarcity of available care and, in the case of Thornton’s work, imagined radical peer-led models for democratising and valuing care inspired by the Greek social solidarity clinics during and beyond the 2008 financial crisis. These initiatives underscore how curators have

become more concerned with the affective aspect of their work between people, institutions and networks, and hope to reflect back to art institutions the politics that curators are often presenting through their exhibitions. For example, *Don't Worry, I'm Sick and Poor* was a lecture series organised by a collective called Babeworld, whose aim is to create safe spaces and opportunities for those who are marginalised in the art world, such as artists who are sex workers, queer, neurodivergent, black and/or disabled. The lectures focused on the 'lack of diversity in art education and disappointment in art curriculums' through giving an 'accessible critical framework' (ICA, 2021). Discourses on care in curating would, according to feminist scholars, work with initiatives such as Babeworld, force art institutions to scrutinise their own practices, especially with regards to the exploitation of workers and the distribution of resources, in other words, 'translating the radical politics that inform exhibitions into more lasting institutional change.' (Reckitt, 2016, p.24)

So far, this section has surveyed a number of examples from contemporary art and curating where care is a priority concern, intersecting with discourses on race, sexuality, class and disability, noting a sense of collective vulnerability and efforts at instituting care within organisations. We will now turn to how an ethics and politics of care came to be understood up to and during the COVID-19 pandemic within a small ecology of community arts organisations, alternative art schools, grassroots pedagogical experiments and artist development programmes within the UK and in San Francisco, where I focused my research. My respondents talked about their work during the Coronavirus pandemic, and the excerpts I've selected from my interviews focus on care, mutual-aid, survival, thriving and community flourishing in response to a widely held view of an uncaring political system. I've selected these in order to better understand the conditions in which actors in art education and the alternative scenes have created community during the Covid-19 pandemic and to answer my research question about how alternative and self-organised peer-led art schools are navigating and surviving the pandemic and what desires are emerging from these conditions. While the topic of care became a central concern in our conversations, there was a meta-layer of care which encircled some of the conversations relating, in particular, to the relationship between myself as the researcher and my respondents, whose emotions I became sensitive to. The pandemic conditions of conducting interviews from home, and talking into others' homes, allowed for intimacy and vulnerability, creating a quick sense of

rapport and ease between myself and my respondents. It could have affected the temperament of conversation, with some respondents becoming emotionally heightened easily when talking about issues passionately.

2.3. Building communities of care in peer-led alternative art education programmes.

In the following sections I analyse my respondents' interviews, where a collective sense of fragility and vulnerability during the pandemic reverberated loudly. This section asks: how did my respondents experience care from their organisations or institutions during the pandemic, and how was care integrated into these organisations? It therefore begins with my respondents' criticisms of the university's capacity to care entwined with its relationship with capitalism, before looking at the alternatives that are being built in the vacuum of care. The latter question gestures towards infrastructuring as a process of structuring care relationally, i.e. between participants, and institutionally.

In the middle of a second major lockdown in the UK, I organised a Zoom conversation with an academic working as a lecturer in the art department at a former polytechnic university in the North of the UK. It took us several attempts to get through to each other because of the poor connection and technological interruptions. After talking about the specifics of individual feelings and affects, they widened their perspective to social structures, to the unfolding crisis and collective feelings of powerlessness. At the time of writing in 2022, the pandemic in the UK had mostly faded into the background, treated by the government as if it no longer exists. My respondent said:

> '… I think the importance right now about what bell hooks sort of says about care is really important and it's not... it's not necessarily just about care of the students but care of yourself, I think society needs to take a moment of self-care [laughs] and reflection in some way and it feels like a weird fight to be fighting about like the removal of tuition fees when unemployment, homelessness, domestic violence, everything else is just so apparently... disastrously increasing in our pandemic and the loss of life, you know?' (Respondent L)

This draws attention to the need for care in our collective lives, where a sense of doom and disaster requires urgent infrastructures of care to be created. It can be inferred from my respondent's answer that in the context of a university, care for the students falls on the tutor, as is frequently the case with the sense of obligation to care that comes with teaching work. Students are not expected to care for the tutor because of hierarchical structures that position the tutor as an authority over the class and over themselves. My respondent seems to be suggesting that caring for yourself, casually known as self-care, became a necessity during a time of heightened stress; there was no indication that my respondent was receiving support from their workplace. The dialectical relationship of care that could be envisioned in an art school with flattened hierarchies, or 'non-violent' hierarchies, as I will later explain, is stifled in the experience of my respondent, where, as discussed in the feminist theories previously, care is one-directional or difficult to enact, especially during the pandemic where university teaching moved online, requiring teachers to deliver seminars without the physical affects reverberating around a room full of students. While some university teachers found this liberating (Jandric, et al 2021, p.1080), others found it more stressful and that it increased their workloads (p.118). Zoom teaching brought about its own kind of fatigue and a new sense of emotional distance from the students, making the giving and receiving of care an added challenge – one academic wrote about the challenges of having to take care of her baby son while meeting with students online (p.1137), an experience that closely resembled two of my respondents in the USA. My respondent further brings to light the idea of a whole society needing to self-care, posing a sense of thwarted collectivity in which people turn inward for self-examination, while looking at each other but not with each other. The fractured nature of this collective identity that was experienced during the months of lockdown prompted a conclusion in the literature of what was needed, namely, 'a lot more work, support, patience, empathy, and resources.' (Jandric, et al 2021, p.1182).

The relationship between care, time, resources and capacity, which will be further explored in the following chapter, was also brought up by respondent D, who alludes to how the university she worked at in San Francisco as the Covid crisis hit had responded with a distinct lack of care. She said,

> ‘[The university] was so underfunded that by the time the pandemic hit, many of the important staff positions that support students were empty. This is where my rage at the danger that they created, like, I feel it.’ (Respondent D)

She told me that the university’s strategy was deliberately to exhaust staff and students, who were ‘left to support each other’ (ibid) without any resources.

In conversation with an organiser of TOMA, she told me of her experiences of formal institutions. She bluntly and unambiguously recalled her ‘lack of respect for the way that institutions don’t treat their participants of their community like people’ and that they are ‘walking cash balances’ (Respondent K).

Another respondent, whose work as an artist, arts educator and in the supporting pastoral team at a London arts university, spoke critically about care and its entanglements with capitalism:

> ‘But it was like all the words that have just been absorbed into like capitalism, essentially, and care is now obviously one of them along with self-care and radical and any language that [laughs] anyway, so yeah, it has been co-opted wholly and truly in a really... non-committed way, it like, no systems have changed, they've just added care into the description, you know, so like yeah, no structural change, essentially. But for me I think it's like totally fundamental and foregrounded and that kind of fun and conviviality and like... like... kind of connection or interdependence and stuff that should happen within like a cohort scenario or like a group dynamic. That's like the most important thing for the rest to happen, it's like creating the environment where permission's given and that has to come a certain way through like, and it will sound like a cliche with kind of like trust and these things, but I don't mean that in the sense of like... [missed] a trust-building exercise, that comes with time, you know, but like an icebreaker and then we tick trust and it's done! [laughs]’ (respondent M)

This respondent points out how care is 'fundamental' for 'fun' and 'conviviality', emphasising, like bell hooks does, that 'the classroom should be an exciting place, never boring.' (hooks, 1994, p.7) Crucially, she understands care as a vital component for the exciting stuff to happen, but feels dismay at the lack of structural change alongside the expectation to care and for institutions to act as if they care. On this note, some cultural workers have argued for 'the redistribution of resources as a long-term strategy of care' (Wallin, 2021, p.121) that goes beyond the caring rhetoric as my respondent mentions above. This call for 'institutional (re)structuring' (p.122) is microcosmic in its focus on art institutions and the university, but bears relevance for wider society, for the kind of collective self-care that respondent L noted in the excerpt above. The anger and criticality from my respondents were evident in our conversations, pointing towards what is needed in this vacuum of care.

Respondent K's experiences of the university as a machine that allows students to struggle through it, objectified by how much debt money they can bring, inspired her to approach things differently with her programme at TOMA. When I asked her how she brings care into the organisation, this was her response:

> 'It's really important that people's labour is kind of valued in that way, so I guess transparency and this idea of building a genuine community. I coordinate the education programme still and I build really close relationships, actually, with the participants, so if I haven't heard from them in a week or a few weeks at the moment, I will WhatsApp them or I will call them and make sure they are okay. Things like that, I think, just having some fucking care about humans.'

In this nonformal educational context, according to my respondent, boundaries between organiser and participant are less defined and inhibited than in formal education. Roles are rigid in task only and the relationships between those who are paid to organise versus those who pay to participate are not alienated by conformity to structures or by the fact of one person being paid while others pay. It is a willing form of community membership in which responsibility is distributed and adults are given autonomy over their programme, with the paid organiser acting with the oversight of a facilitator and administrator. Crucially, care can be direct and relatively unmediated, as tends to be the case with a closeness of

relationships that are held and built over time when a small group of people dedicate themselves to a shared experimental and experiential programme.

These ideas around building a community of care were echoed by an organiser of another group, a programme called Into The Wild, in which it was made apparent that much consideration and attention was going into how care is given and received as an integrated part of the programme, making a stake for a pedagogy of care. Respondent I recalled that 'there seems to be a lot of support and care going on which isn't necessarily thought about at normal art school.' She then elaborated:

> 'A big part of it that has allowed that space of caring and looking after each other which is different from university structures is that as much as I'm leading it I also treat it like we're a part of this group together…obviously there's a particular dynamic where I'm organising the thing, so I'm reminding them of things or setting up the Zoom…but I really try to engender this thing of like we're all responsible for the experience and I think from that there has been a greater degree of care because even from the beginning we took it in turns to make the food and sort out the space or take notes and things like that so it sort of feels more like an ecosystem where everyone's keeping it up rather than coming from one type of direction.' (Respondent I)

Respondent I brought up the fact of having appropriate boundaries, knowing her natural inclination to 'go further for people' and her deep desire to 'create a space where it feels like I know them and they can talk to me about things and they can talk to each other about things which aren't just art, but are…affecting them in their lives and that they don't have to be this art machine.' (Respondent I) This corresponds to the aspects of care that are ambivalent and can lead to burnout, as elaborated upon in the academic literature, in which the care that one puts into their work, especially when their work involves people and human relationships, takes on extra dimensions of responsibility which comes at the cost of time and resources.

At Into The Wild, care was extended towards participants and integrated into its programme at the very start, taking time to go through exercises of relating. The organiser

told me how they asked each other 'how do we want to relate to each other? How do we want to communicate with each other?'

She continued:

> 'Building in the how that you make is just as important as what you make, who did you speak to, who are you referencing, where are you showing it, who got paid and all that sort of stuff is folded into the work and just as much a part of the thing at the end.' (Respondent I)

The respondent is talking about her artistic practice which she co-creates with Respondent M, separate from her work with the alternative art school, Into The Wild, where they share 'a dislike of how egotistical and competitive and messed up art school made art sound…we're more invested in something that's more collaborative, into non-authorship and dissolving ego, something like that…' (respondent I). This is an example of care-conscious artists who build an explicitly feminist practice into their work leading alternative art schools and artist-development programmes, which helps to create alter-systems with different values.

These intimate spaces for alternative art education became support groups and spaces of care and community, in which participants and organisers were 'checking in on each other'. Interestingly, the organiser (Respondent I) made it clear to me that the practice of care as illustrated above 'is a huge part of our practice…you're not just making work to "be the best", you're looking after the people that you're relating with.' It is apparent how this finds resonance with recent discourses in curating, in which practices of care traditionally reserved for the artwork are transferred on to practices of being with co-workers, co-artists in solidarity and with empathy for them as a whole person as opposed to as a role they are filling within an institution (Wallin, 2021), a sentiment which relates to Respondent I's dismissal of her participants being 'an art machine'.

Being able to see the whole person and create a space safe enough for that person to reveal themselves comfortably and in the company of others responds to a sense of artistic subjectivity that is inseparable from and intertwined with anti-capitalist and post-capitalist political discourses on care coming out of the pandemic. Alternative, nonformal

art examined in this thesis are some of the sites through which this is being consciously explored.

With both organisers of Into the Wild and TOMA, in which participants used the words 'unlearning', 'undoing' and 'transformative' to describe their experiences of being part of the programme. 'It felt like undoing of certain kinds of knots…undoing ways of being' (Respondent B), said one participant who had never been to art school before. These deeply transformative experiences on the level of consciousness and subjectivity require care for the participant to feel supported in their unlearning and the rewiring of their brains.

> 'We'd have shared lunches, which was a bonding experience, that kind of bringing something and talking and connecting on a human level. We were having Thursday night theory sessions, so we'd look at things like Marxism and modernism…It was my first experience with it and I was really keen for it.' (Respondent B)

While unlearning and undoing ways of being is not unusual for students encountering the contemporary route of HAE at a university, what this makes evident is that alternative art schools are providing a similar unpicking of predisposed knowledge but without the barriers to access. Respondent B had not studied art before and, by being on an alternative art education programme, was able to experience a deep rewiring that tells us that we are learning something new and integrating it.

bell hooks writes lucidly about the importance of radical inclusion in *Teaching to Transgress* (1994). She writes that 'any radical pedagogy must insist that everyone's presence is acknowledged' (p.8) and that 'students want [teachers] to see them as whole human beings with complex lives and experiences rather than simply seekers after compartmentalized bits of knowledge.' (p.15) She mentions how women's studies and gender studies programmes became the first sites where teachers strove to create shared spaces for 'learned in life practices' (ibid) alongside academic knowledge. hooks integrates Buddhist teachings into her pedagogy to illustrate the emphasis on wellbeing that comes with being committed to one's own and others' 'self-actualization' (ibid). She acknowledges the difficulty of this endeavour in formal education – in universities in particular – where 'there was little emphasis on spiritual wellbeing' (p.16). In talking about her experiences as a university teacher, she recalls a general 'fear that the conditions of that self would interfere

with the teaching process.' (p.17) This contains echoes of a recent piece of research which attends to a 'lack of connection' (Wehlburg, 2022, p.10) felt among students with their fellow students and faculty before the pandemic, in what Wehlburg calls 'an unwritten agreement to not connect' where there are large class sizes (ibid).

To my mind, this corresponds to the conditions of crisis ventured by Nancy Fraser (2016), whereby teachers who are committed to what hooks calls a 'liberatory' (1994, p.17), 'holistic' (p.15) or 'engaged' (ibid) pedagogy must first care for themselves. But, in a capitalist system where there is a crisis of social reproduction, this becomes increasingly untenable, as evidenced by the number of teachers in schools and universities who are under pressure of increased workloads and job stress – affecting their capacities to care in classrooms. My respondents in the US spoke to this on the one hand as a compartmentalising of knowledge and care, for example telling me about how 'the whole structure' generated an ideological expression of 'I'm a teacher, let me show you how to do this' (respondent C), and on the other to do with the exploitation of staff and students from the university bosses. To this one respondent told me that the strategy of the university management was 'to exhaust everyone' (respondent D), speaking in particular of the crisis in management at the San Fransisco Art Institute that occurred during the early months of 2020. This speaks to how many people teaching in conventional art schools also believe in trying to coax a transformational experience for their students, but that the overarching structures are obstacles to that process.

At TOMA, a sense of direct care reverberated through the responses of its participants, who echoed how care was given and received at a time where the programme had only enjoyed three months of in-person time before lockdowns and social distancing measures were put in place to stop the spread of the virus. One respondent said of the programme,

> 'it's always been really open to, if somebody is really struggling, so at the moment we're trying to get our catalogue together and someone's partner has COVID, so we've just put a pin in it because it feels very much that we're not gonna go ahead with anything unless we're all on board. TOMA's so special in that sense that, at first it was like I don't trust it [laughs] it really is that lovely.' (Respondent E)

The respondent here is recalling the affective side to care in which a sense of solidarity was felt among participants. The fact that she brings up the notion of trust, which was said with some humour from her laughter, also sheds light on her experiences of formal art education, in which she expressed to me how her BA studies in fine art had exacerbated her lack of confidence and struggles with mental health:

> 'TOMA's taught me to be kinder to myself about why I'm making art and what you're making and what you're putting out into the world.' (Respondent E)

The experience of feeling marginalised, stressed and under-confident is not uncommon with people who attend conventional art schools. The previously mentioned Babeworld created their alternative art school platform specifically to cater for people from marginalised social groups (working-class, mixed-race, trans, sex worker, queer, disabled, etc), and artist Raju Rage speaks to the need for 'access intimacy' (2020) in institutions where marginalised people are made to feel as though they don't belong. He describes this intimacy as 'essentially caring about access issues enough to make a change to the current exclusionary structures we live within.' (ibid) Writing specifically about disability, he asks if compassion, care and empathy can be 'written into policy… What would it mean to actually support disabled artists?' (ibid) While my thesis is not an examination of disability in the field of art education, Rage's concerns speak to wider structures of access that have appeared consistently across my interviews, with the lack of access for working-class artist-students being a particular feature for the participants interviewed in my research. It is interesting that my respondent from the programme Into The Wild spoke to me about their concerns about access for people of colour, worried that the programme reproduces systemic barriers to those communities. While Into The Wild provides 'additional mentoring for artists of colour and artists that identify as disabled' (Into The Wild, website), there was an explicit recognition of this issue in our interview. I asked, 'how do you prevent a situation in which everyone is white, middle-class and has lots of structural privileges?' The response was,

> 'last year we ended up having 4 people of colour and 10 white people which to me is a complete failure in terms of like balance and yeah I think like... the conversations we kind of had were a lot about access and privilege and things like that. Some of the white people were from working class backgrounds and were the first to go to

university so it's not just about that but it's trying to think about these things properly.' (Respondent I)

There's an acknowledgement that structural racism and ableism won't disappear or suddenly become resolved in the creation of an 'alternative'. Instead, active attention to different needs and capacities is needed. This was the motive behind the creation of Babeworld, as well as in other more community-specific organisations such as The Free Black University, who only recruit participants from people racialised as Black or mixed-Black (website), or the Silent University, which is specifically for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

Returning to the experience of respondent E, this participant was able to confidently say that the programme had brought her 'confidence', the ability to 'work with people' by 'being in discussion with ten people and feeling like I can be there and say what I think', that the programme had been 'a vessel for learning about yourself'. She trailed off by saying to me that she thought that 'sounds really stupid'. If this respondent had experienced a lack of confidence at formal art school, she perhaps still carried some of this with her. What she responded to, however, was that being in a small group of adults on their own learning journeys, held by an organisation committed to deepening the practice of people who want to make art outside of the formal context of higher education, helped her to feel comfortable to express herself. It is implied that expressing herself in front of people in other contexts such as during her formal undergraduate artist training, was difficult.

Another participant of the TOMA programme expressed to me how care was given and received by visiting the idea of remote or virtual collaboration:

> 'one of the members of my cohort, she was making videos actually about Zoom as part of her art project. Learning the choreographer dance routine on Zoom on a lunch break when I should have been working [laughs]…that was really nice just to be able to do these collaborative things and feel like you're supporting someone's practice in a different kind of way. Taking the time to do those things for a group as well.' (Respondent B)

This might reflect what it means to be part of a 'community of practice' (Lavé, 1991; Wenger, 1999), in which the authors demonstrate how learning is a social act, and that

communities of practice must be dynamic and have permission to shift in focus concomitantly with the needs and desires of the group. Artists at alternative art schools become embedded in their 'communities of practice' through regular group participation. People who join an alternative art school because they want to regularly make art with others absorb the social and cultural position of an artist through being with other artists. Bourdieu calls this 'habitus' (1977), a concept he uses to describe the shaping of the body, mind and actions of individuals when absorbed into a social group. It often encompasses tacit knowledge that is embodied over time through absorption and immersion in an activity surrounded by others who are doing the same.

The social need to "be together" and reinforce a community of practice became almost impossible during the pandemic, so how did respondents care for each other during that time? While remaining in separation from each other, the group at TOMA continued to connect to each other through being asked to make art for a project called Big Screen Project for Focal Point Gallery, giving many of them an anchor to "real life" outside of an isolating and insular experience. One respondent commented:

> 'I think it was one of the best pieces of work I made all year [laughs], because almost, like, surreal response almost…the whole pandemic freed me up in a way because I felt like I'd had this break…a breakdown…and it was kind of OK just to embrace all of that messy soupiness and make it into something, and finding a dark humour in it. I think that was a way I could try and distance myself from certain situations and certain things I was being asked to do at work at the time… making work with a purpose. Some of the proceeds went back into TOMA, and some proceeds came back to me, and Solidarity Syndicate…kind of in that vein. Um…again…like I think I was lucky to be given that opportunity…I don't think I would have been given that opportunity if I was in a normal art school to make work to sell for profit or to support me as an artist…and to know we're all working as a group towards the longevity of the programme by selling our work then that can help the funding of the programme that we all really care about, so that's a motivator too.' (respondent B)

The respondent is reflecting upon the process of making art as a group even through long periods of physical separation, and the narration evokes a therapeutic side to the work without it being therapy. In the example above, the respondent is reflecting on how the

organisation had acquired funds from the Arts Council to feed back into their organisation. It did this by giving their student-participants the opportunity to make art while cultivating a relationship of mutual-aid towards each other and the organisation. This shows how small arts organisations that run alternative learning programmes have a more direct capacity to care and respond to the needs of their student-participants using an economic model that mutually sustains the participants and the organisation, a model that will be further discussed in chapter four. In contrast, one would not expect to see equivalent levels of direct support at a large university because of the centralised system through which communications and procedures must be mediated, which contributes both materially and in effect to the deficit of intimacy, community and social bonding. It therefore comes across as a huge achievement for a small arts organisation to feel like a real alternative to a university where, as my respondent said, she felt she would not have had that opportunity in a formal art school context.

Significantly, many respondents revealed that their experiences of being in an alternative, nonformal arts education space had transformative effects on their wellbeing and sense of self that could be described as 'therapeutic', experienced through sensations of discomfort as well as moments of joy and catharsis. Participant A said, '[art] is very important for me as a sort of therapy.' He continued, 'I feel buoyed up by it, I feel very positive, I feel that…my sense of self-worth is fuelled, however pathetic that may be, it's true… you feel part of something'. Similarly, respondent E's interview revealed self-limiting beliefs about her abilities, which translated into how she questioned the validity of her own responses to me as the interviewer, positioning me as the authority in our conversation. Despite this, earlier in this section I quoted her talking about how TOMA had taught her a new capacity for self-kindness compared to her former lack of confidence while at art school. For her, being at TOMA was about:

> '…confidence and working with people…It's really helped me, like, being in a discussion with ten people and feeling like I can be there and say what I think. That's been mega learning, so, rather than having learnt printmaking techniques…I mean, we've done that as well, which has been great, but that feels like more of a vessel for learning about yourself.'

Art making, for respondent E has a relational affect that seems therapeutic but actually is doing much more than that. It creates a strong sense of belonging, confidence and a sense of collectivity. These perennial effects of the programme mentioned in respondent E's response is echoed with respondent I, who said:

> 'I really do wanna create a space where it feels like I know them and they can talk to me about things and they can talk to each other about things which aren't just art but are, y'know, affecting them in their lives and that they don't have to be this art machine. We had some exercises in the beginning of being like how do we wanna relate to each other, how do we wanna communicate with each other, terms of engagement type thing, but very loose and the rest of it comes from like how you are in a space… I think especially because of Covid, when I was starting to get better at boundaries…I just know how hard it is for all of them, so there's been a lot of stuff outside the structured thing which is about checking in on people… groups of friends have formed that are checking in on each other, and I think learning that as well is a huge part of our practice, or of the practice that I want to be involved with anyway in terms of like,…that you're not just making work to "be the best", you're looking after the people that you're relating with.'

Care therefore became a vital infrastructure during the pandemic for participants of alternative arts pedagogical programmes. The difference between someone being treated as a 'machine' and looking after the whole person is apparent, whereby the group infrastructure and the structures created around sustaining that support became akin to a therapeutic space, allowing for direct communication between participants to check in on each other. This offers the potential and hope for a sustainable exercising of group practice where sociality, communication and self-reflection are crucial for how to build a caring and supportive community.

Confidence-raising and an increased sense of belonging among participants and students in education programmes is a hallmark of 'therapy culture' which scholars such as Sarah Amsler have critiqued, addressing how the rise of 'therapeutic' education in American and British education is shaping neoliberal subjectivities (2011, p.50-51). According to these critiques, the purpose of education is to 'produce individuals that are subjectively inclined to accept, flexibly adapt to and ultimately desire vicissitudes of precarious life in neoliberal

societies.' (p.51) What I suggest that alternative arts schools are doing, however, is providing a space where more attention can be given to open-ended play and non-linear development of intellectuality, creativity and fulfilment, ideas of which will be more fully explored in the following chapter. A 'therapeutic' education which Amsler critiques in university education emphasises individual responsibility, competition between individuals and the 'self' as models for social relations, perpetuating a culture of individualism. The models of alternative art education explored in this thesis, however, with their emphasis on care as an infrastructure with its by-products of therapeutic affects, has the effect of modelling postcapitalist social relations and ontologies, which I will discuss in further detail in the chapter on transindividuality. When care is deemed as a need and is resourced through infrastructural ways of being and working, social dynamics become elevated above the individual, and relational ontologies provide a pedagogical blueprint for living and thriving in a community and organising collectively.

2.4. The practice of mutual-aid as a pedagogy of care.

> *'Statement of Pedagogy: At IAFS, we undertake teaching and learning as a free exchange of mutual-aid and benefit in order to develop the expressive skills, critical engagement, and artistic practices of our community members and our community itself.' (i-a-f-s.org/)*

This section focuses on mutual-aid as a component of how care is practiced in the sites I explored through my interview research. It will draw largely from the interviews with IAFS, a free school in the USA founded upon anarchist principles in response to crisis. It begins with anarchist theories of mutual-aid, then turns to practices of mutual-aid during the Covid-19 pandemic through the eyes of my respondents.

2.4.1. Theory of mutual-aid from Kropotkin to Covid-19.

Mutual-aid, also known as mutual cooperation, is a central tenet of anarchist praxis, developed and shaped by Peter Kropotkin's ideas on human nature (Suissa, 2006, p.102). Kropotkin contended that the free society formed through self-governance and decentralisation would be born through ongoing efforts at human beings' capacity for social cooperation, which he argued could be evidenced in both human and non-human species predating industrial capitalism (Suissa, 2006, p.27). He contested this as the firm antithesis to evolutionary Darwinism and Hobbesian theory which at the time of writing in the nineteenth century was being summoned as a common-sense political ontology, under the belief that dominant social groups would oppress, control and destroy "weaker" groups in a "natural" struggle for survival, with competition and rivalry seen as a de facto part of being human. As Graeber and Grubačić (2021) have noted, the term "survival of the fittest" was coined in 1952 by the liberal biologist Herbert Spencer, which Graeber and Grubačić add might have been used to justify the European genocides of the early 20th century and colonialism (2021, p.19). Kropotkin did not deny the competitive streaks of human nature, but pointed out that it did not paint a full picture of humanity: mutual cooperation was missing from the equation. At the beginning of his book, *Mutual-aid: A Factor of Evolution* (2021), which was published at the turn of the 20th century, he writes that solidarity is 'the unconscious recognition of the force that is borrowed by each man from the practice of mutual-aid; of the close dependence of every one's happiness upon the happiness of all; and of the sense of justice, or equity which brings the individual to consider the rights of every other individual as equal to his own.' (2021, p.21) In his study of bees, he writes that 'in the long run, the practice of solidarity proves much more advantageous to the species than the development of individuals endowed with predatory inclinations… [who are] eliminated in favour of those who understand the advantages of sociable life and mutual support.' (2021, p.39).

Contemporary understandings of mutual-aid owe their lineage to Kropotkin's work at a time when social Darwinism, which read humanity as an evolution through competition, was taking the lead in social theory and in the social order. These contemporary theorists share some understandings. Rhiannon Firth (2020) asserts that: 'Mutual-aid is a practice of

community helping with roots in anarchist thought and working-class communities which aims to transgress the hierarchies of established charities and erase distinctions between helpers and helped in order to prefigure a more equal—and stateless—society.' (p.57) Dean Spade (2020) similarly asserts that mutual-aid 'is collective coordination to meet each other's needs, usually from an awareness that the systems we have in place are not going to meet them.' Rebecca Solnit, in her preface to *Pandemic Solidarity* (Sitrin & Colectiva Sembrar, 2020) considers mutual-aid as 'generosity without strict rules of reciprocity' (p.xi) and, similar to Firth (2020), argues that 'capitalism is constantly failing – producing desperation, destruction, alienation – and anti-capitalism comes to undo what it has done and does' (Solnit, in Sitrin & Colectiva Sembrar, 2020 p.xii). As mutual-aid stems from anarchist praxis, there is a direct a correlation between mutual-aid and anti-capitalism. This proposition is in reference to how mutual-aid pre-exists crises and disasters. Firth makes the point that the mainstream resurgence of mutual-aid during the Coronavirus pandemic came from a 'well-meaning middle class embodying the logic of the state: a depoliticised form of relief and reconstruction that is almost entirely compatible with neoliberal capitalism and its institutions, functioning to restore 'normality' (or an even more terrifying 'new normal') in a context of the withdrawal of state welfare functions.' (2020, pp.57-58) Firth is here warning against the co-optation of mutual-aid as it acts as a buffer for a government that withdraws social support and privatises social welfare programmes. One of my respondents, an organiser of a small arts organisation in Birmingham in the UK, reflected this during January 2021, saying,

> 'when we started closing…I started thinking quite a lot about how tiny organisations, like arts organisations, community initiatives, are really the backbone of how aid is being organised, right… For the longest time, and I've been saying this in lots of interviews and conversations, community arts organisations have, not by choice but by default ended up picking up a lot of the work that the state has neglected, let that be the closure of youth centres so you provide social work, or it could be advocacy for young asylum seekers which is something that we do quite a lot now...youth homelessness...all these things are now the work of community organisations.' (respondent H)

The Coronavirus pandemic in 2020 saw a resurgence of interest in mutual-aid as both an idea and a practice. This is reflected in a number of books published during 2020 that addressed how solidarity was organised and distributed during the pandemic (Preston and Firth, 2020; Sitrin & Colectiva Sembrar, 2020; Spade, 2020) as well as a new print of Peter Kropotkin's seminal text *Mutual-aid: A Factor of Evolution* (1902/2021) discussed above. Unsurprisingly, during the pandemic, mutual-aid projects gained popularity as many people found themselves in unforeseen desperate circumstances.

In practice, mutual-aid refers to the exchange of necessary goods such as food, clothing and medicine, but also incorporates other, often overlooked necessities pertaining to belonging and community cohesion. A notable example of self-organised solidarity operating along the rubric of mutual-aid is in Greece where mutual-aid networks were set up years prior to the pandemic due to the severe economic crisis from the EU's imposition of austerity since 2010. The existence of bottom-up solidarity networks that used horizontal decision-making processes were most evident in social health clinics, meeting people's needs for food, medicines and mental health support (EP and TP, 2020, p.156). These solidarity networks were formed for reasons other than providing basic material needs. Interviews undertaken with participants in these communities told researchers EP and TP (2020) that they recognised the importance of 'strengthening social ties weakened due to social distancing; in strengthening communication; in strengthening our decision to stand up for everybody; uniting our power…' (ibid, p.157). They pay attention to matters of belonging and community, building pedagogies of care similar to what I will show with the research on IAFS, to which the next section now turns.

2.4.2. IAFS: mutual-aid emerging out of crisis and necessity for community.

This section explores the theme of mutual-aid in IAFS, the reasons why the school began and how mutual-aid emerged as a pedagogical theme and was central to their organising. The main lines of enquiry come from respondent C and respondent D, two colleagues at the San Francisco Art Institute who, along with students, started the free school. Two further interviews from respondents F and G, artists and participants in IAFS provide extra

information but are not the main respondents for this section. The section begins with some background to the emergence of the free school in the words of my respondents.

Calling themselves IAFS, which inverts the abbreviations for the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI), respondents C and D were working as adjunct teaching staff at SFAI. In the USA, an adjunct is a member of teaching staff who is employed on a contractual basis rather than having the security of a tenured position. Both are activists and were agitators in the SFAI union when respondent C lost his job there during the mass staff layoffs that occurred when the school was unable to financially sustain itself due to amassing an enormous institutional debt. 'The background of disaster is part of why we started the free school,' respondent C told me, adding: 'It's just really poorly run, the whole thing.'

As the pandemic began to take hold across the West in March 2020, the San Francisco Art Institute, a prestigious private art school on the United States' west coast, was forced to close its doors due to financial corruption and an institutional debt of $18 million. It subsequently laid off of its adjunct staff (casualised teachers) who make up 75% of the teaching staff, and told 300 students to transfer to a new university for the following semester. Problems within the art school – including with money – were apparent before the pandemic. My interview with respondent D spoke to the urgency of that particular moment, full of affect and with a heightened sense of drama. 'Covid was going to reveal deep, deep truths…' she said '… and create alternative possibilities, fields of opportunity and possibility that were not on the table before.' Respondent C's account added to this, saying, 'I think Covid actually saved the school because of the government support for schools [the CARES Act]. They were broke and they knew they'd be broke, so Covid was a convenient cover for them.'

The idea of a free school was born out of the 'disaster' of SFAI and the pandemic, the language of catastrophe being wielded frequently to refer to the dual crises of the institution they were part of and the pandemic, the latter catalysing reflections on the former, creating 'alternative possibilities' that respondent D mentions above. They were frustrated with an institution seen to be exploitative of teachers and run by 'philanthro-capitalists', described by respondent D as such because 'they give a little money, raise a little money and then just borrow a lot of money against the institution, then they just drive it into the ground, like again and again and again…'. She paints a vivid image of the

university administration: '[they are] literally treating these young artists as fodder for their weird capitalist art fantasy machine with little regard for the risks that students take on…' (respondent D) She continued, 'The adjunct faculty are already pretty underpaid, there's already significant underrepresentation of teachers of colour, like, basically you have to have other forms of support to teach at the school.' (respondent D)

Born out of the chaos left behind by SFAI, IAFS became a self-organised experiment in education, conceiving of itself as an alternative to the institutionalised and debt-ridden education that its participants had become used to and declaring its project as an exercise in autonomy from state control. It began as a mutual-aid network in order to salvage a community of artists, students and teachers, as respondent C explains:

> 'Really early on when the San Francisco Art Institute was collapsing, I started reading about mutual-aid groups among students at schools around the country…with students on campus we were talking about mutual-aid and that was really the seed of thinking in going in a new direction… We started talking about this idea of walking away from this sinking school and starting something new.'

And respondent D:

> 'I was trying to figure out how to preserve the things that I was angry at losing, which was my community. And fundamentally my community was students and more fundamentally my community was students of colour, like we really need each other and so I thought, like okay, we'll just, make a free school, I mean that's easy, a mailing list and Zoom and we'll just hang out and figure it out and we'll at the very least have preserved our community with one another.'

Responent D continued…

> '[we] organised a mutual-aid network, a spreadsheet for, I mean and this was like mutual-aid, this was like basic life skills, food, shelter, transportation, cash, because you know, they are entangled with the institution in all these different ways. Scholarship money, work, study, housing, food, meal plans! And given extremely short timelines to figure this out-'

The shared experience of an unforeseen end or suspension of an institution provoked and catalysed the need to start something different, as respondent G explained:

> 'this might be the last time that the community get the chance to gather and voice their concern as a group…[at the meeting] everyone was kind of muted and no one could really talk at the same time without permission of the board and the administrator, and I realised there needs to be a platform where students and the community members of SFAI, so I started freaking out and messaged my friend on Facebook and was like, what do we do, this might be the last time we can talk together as a community.'

And from respondent F, who was heavily involved in organising IAFS:

> '[it] just sort of emerged out of the necessity to stay connected… everyone was panicking, and we were like, what was happening?'

The sense of imminent dispersal, loss, confusion and panic was palpable in these responses. My respondents saw each other as a lifeline and the university threatening to their livelihoods. Upon interviewing respondent D, she launched into a zealous speech about a conflict with the governing board of SFAI, who positioned itself to sell an historically significant site-specific Diego Rivera mural, *The Making for a Fresco Showing the Building of a City*, (1931) to film producer George Lucas, hoping it would salvage the 'dangerous situation they created for students' (respondent D) at the onset of the pandemic. My respondent began to cry as she spoke about the mural as an 'ally' against a 'deeply classist and racist institution' (ibid), describing its threatened removal as 'disgraceful', narrating the racial and economic context important for understanding the current pedagogic struggle in the US. It became apparent that the mural came to stand for the lack of care from the university more generally, as our interview occurred on the cusp of the last 48 hours of the campaign to save it. Her overflowing emotionality and relief in being able to talk to someone about it – 'it feels so good to tell you this!' – was affecting in the clashing of the depth of historical time (the historical significance of the mural) and the dramatic immanence of the breaking news. The lack of care exhibited by the school showed up in the

juxtapositions she made between those at the top of the hierarchy and the students who attend classes, only rendering more palpable the socio-economic differences between them. As she explains, not only the students but the staff were also thrown into a precarious situation, and she paints the institution with a vivid image of monstrosity:

> ‘we're in the United States, right, so staff are thrown out without health insurance benefits in the middle of a pandemic, that's life-threatening in the United States. And so, they... and then they... this is like, it's absurd, because, and then there are distinctions between the adjunct faculty and the ten-year track faculty, which is, is everywhere. And the ten-year track faculty had some contract protections that required the school to keep them on the payroll for another year and so to mitigate those costs, the school decided to bring students back, because they have no resources to pay these faculty otherwise... now they are out of money again, nine months later. No one is surprised, and so they are... without opening their own wallets, which are enormous.’

From having conversations with each person, I was piecing together a narrative and interpretation of what was happening to them. There was an imminent sense of reacting to events and trying to figure out how to organise their community along different lines. Returning to the theme of disaster that all four respondents independently resonated with, respondent G referred to the need for IAFS being about ‘our concerns with the world itself’ (respondent G):

> ‘It’s not just about pedagogy, but it’s about our concerns with the world itself, y’know, what’s wrong with the world? It comes down to also where resources are going, it’s about equity and about an environmental justice...what’s going to happen to the world and how we want to live in general, right?’

The concerns of this respondent speak to a moment of calamity not only within SFAI but towards precarious, collapsing social systems and climate breakdown, broadly emphasising matters of pressing global relevance while looking towards utopian horizons. Referring to

'the world itself' and the burning question 'what's wrong with the world?' as pillars for pedagogy as mutual-aid, furthered by emphasis on resources, equity and justice brings to mind a climate fiction novel by Kim Stanley Robinson called *The Ministry for the Future* (2020). In the novel, which is set only a few years into the future, global temperatures have soared beyond the point of human habitation, and in India, an extreme heatwave leads to deaths in droves. A council is established to represent the interests of future generations of species as they attempt to mitigate the worst effects of global warming and biosphere collapse. Comparably, my respondent's narrative and that of the novel both have imminent catastrophe looming above their words like an ever-present threat. The urgency to look towards qualitatively *other* ways of being in the world is consequently immanent to their words, and responds directly to a general concurrence of neoliberal temporality, where 'the future has become a site of crisis' (Kingsmith and Nasr El Hag Ali, 2018, p.2), felt acutely in the time of the present.

This notion of disaster was echoed in my interview with Respondent C before I'd even started asking him questions. We began our interview with some rapport-building exchange on the weather, during which he mentioned how he welcomed the rain 'since we've got nothing but fires lately'. He was alluding to the California wildfires of 2020, which broke the record for the largest ever wildfires in the region, the causes of which scientists have put down to global warming. 'The background of disaster is part of why we started the free school,' he told me. It's important to note that all of my respondents who I spoke to about IAFS used the word 'collapse' to describe the loss of the San Francisco Art Institute, in which, as respondent C, explained, 'they closed the school, killed the school, then said no, we were just kidding, come back. But of course, people had already moved on and now they're just pretending everything's fine, so it's a very odd situation…'

So far in this section, the story of IAFS has been narrated in the words of my respondents those who had been directly involved in the organisation of the free school. Having come together out of necessity, out of the need to preserve a community and through a sense of threat from SFAI, catalysed by the pandemic and ecological and financial crisis, there's a sense that the formation of alternative and fringe organisations depends upon intense shared experiences. The concept of transindividuality, explained in the

introduction and explored further in chapter four, bears relevance here, as the group were thrown together and built new intimacies with each other through a shared traumatic experience. The success of a self-organised grassroots project such as IAFS, organised along lines of mutual-aid, is heavily reliant upon the voluntary work and intrinsic motivations of the people involved, who are committed to creating a utopian programme that separates them from structurally embedded exploitations in the university that catalysed its existence. While my respondents were already active in agitating for better conditions and transparency within SFAI – anti-capitalist praxis is not new to them – the creation of a free school feeds into the narrative of exodus from the institution in order to build alternatives (Amsler, 2017). This is opposed to the argument that insists that change only occurs from "within" – which in the UK context is demonstrated through the activities of the anti-casualisation movement and strike actions of the University and Colleges Union (UCU) around cuts to pensions and an intensified workload. There is the implication that fighting for change from 'within' – referred to by respondent C candidly, perhaps facetiously, when he said 'we continue to fight them. As a form of entertainment', implies that their energy was better spent on imagining and actioning prefigurative cultural politics. The bonding which unites the group could also be understood through the following truism: 'When a student feels like they belong to the community, they become more engaged. When they are more engaged, they are more likely to learn more and retain that knowledge over a longer period of time.' (Wehlburg, 2022, p.11) Hence, the correlations between learning, care and cohesion of community are seen here as inseparable, which the next section examines through pedagogies of care, in particular teaching and learning as mutual-aid as a core part of the praxis of IAFS.

2.4.3. Teaching and learning as mutual-aid.

While interviewing, I specifically asked my respondents about teaching and learning as mutual-aid, connecting it to values of care. Historically, the importance of mutual-aid in the San Francisco Bay Area, specifically its connection with teaching and learning, calls to mind the Oakland Community School set up in 1974 by the Black Panther Party to provide a liberatory education programme for Black youth where they were being failed by the USA's public school system. IAFS has historical precedents here, a lineage and tradition of

autonomous groups and marginalised people setting up free schools to counteract and cope with the crisis created by the state.

Before going into my respondents' answers regarding mutual-aid as pedagogy, it is useful to describe the overlaps and distinctions between mutual-aid and care. These categories are conceptually distinct from each other but flow into one another in practice and have significant overlaps. For example, being part of a mutual-aid network is a practice of care; it demands a willingness to be active in community, to meet the material, social and affective needs of others and be involved in processes and chains of interdependency. Its central tenets of direct action and cooperation make it an intimate practice, compared with, for example, the more conventional, albeit distanced and aloof approach offered by charity. For some, such as with the example of charity, there are ways of caring which are less involved and are linked with mutual-aid only tangentially. An example of this can be seen during the Black Lives Matter events of 2020, during which there were numerous demands from communities of colour across the USA to 'defund the police'. Activists involved in mutual-aid networks called upon allies to donate money to help support families and communities directly affected by police shootings and law court fees. Hence, while mutual-aid is a practice of care, care itself is a contested and ambiguous category containing numerous subjectively experienced practices.

When I asked my respondents about how they understand teaching and learning as mutual-aid, I received detailed answers that spoke to a lenient model of generosity echoed by the Marxist slogan, 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs' (Marx, 1875). IAFS were guided by the question, 'what are people's needs and how do we support each other?' (respondent C). As respondent F told me, 'Mutual-aid is the act of giving what you can when you can. That doesn't necessarily mean money either, and can be time and energy…' While I asked them to specify the teaching and learning aspect particular to their practice of mutual-aid, their answer referenced the beginnings of the project, when SFAI collapsed during the early stages of the pandemic and the adjunct faculty 'offered to set up a mutual-aid site for students who needed to move out of the city.' (respondent C) According to them, money and resources were pooled initially to help international students who had fallen through the cracks of the Trump administration's CARES Act and therefore

couldn't access that financial support. Without an explicit mention of mutual-aid, however, the practice of mutual-aid in the group's pedagogy was implicitly narrated by respondent F as such:

> 'IAFS is very asynchronous in its learning. There are topics that some people find more interesting than others, which means that it's more of an open-door classroom. Anyone can come in and join whenever they feel, but participation and consistency isn't necessary. It certainly shows who is passionate about teaching and art education. This past weekend there was even a cooking tutorial (that I had slept in for) something that I don't think formal education would smile on.'

The same respondent continued:

> 'There is also the sense of horizontal leadership rather than vertical leadership. As in anyone can host a course or talk on whatever they feel is necessary. Anyone can participate or teach, and there aren't questions or the sense of entitlement that comes from secondary education.' (Respondent F)

Mutual-aid as a generous practice of giving that isn't charitable or philanthropic is evoked here in the giving and receiving of time and energy without looking to one person for expertise. It dissolves the traditional teacher-student binary that Rancière critiques in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (1987), and allows for a democratisation of expertise, which is passed around without judgement. This allows not only for a diversity of topics seen in IAFS's course content, but also for a different way of relating to one another:

> 'I think what we considered to be mutual-aid at this point is more about support, so that support could be emotional support, that support could be learning support in the sense that when we are teaching something with mutual-aid, the structure of the conversation is very different and we, in general, we are not like having a lecture where one person is telling all the information to everybody else, so how it works in a practical sense is just

building up a sense of a community within a bunch of boxes on Zoom and then… allowing the conversation to go however people direct it…' (Respondent C)

Respondent C is describing reciprocity as a basis of pedagogical process rather than knowledge being transferred from one "more" knowledgeable than another. He continued that, 'the idea of mutual-aid is connected to access and making the group as accessible as possible to people.' He describes one of the participants who grew up on an indigenous reservation with 'extremely difficult access to education', remarking upon the bespoke nature of access coming from different lived experiences, creating different needs.

Respondent D recalls the early days of setting up the group realising that, during the initial phases of the pandemic, it would have been dangerous to use the 'tried and true techniques of reclaiming power' (respondent D) such as occupations and demonstrations:

> 'We just kind of decamped to our little virtual world, which is that groups.io site, which has been super useful, and Zoom, and we just started meeting and you know… [respondent C] and I, because we are the experienced teachers, we did sort of take the lead in guiding the group towards certain ideas about how we might go about it and we kind of landed on this idea of... of a course that would meet every week, through the semester and again, that's just copying what I did [laughs] at the school before and we would just, you know, use the tools of pedagogy, what is our guiding question? How do we become the kind of school we want to become? That seems like a good guiding question. [laughs] And then we took the schedule and just passed it out to people who were just willing to try and answer that question in a variety of techniques. We tried to integrate studio practice in kind of seminar stuff, but that was tough with the virtual... medium. And but really, I thought, you know, the most important for us is to just... the weekly routine of holding that space and students, you know, like they do in regular times…'

She continued:

> '…especially because of the pandemic, we had to emphasise self-care and we were going to do away with like all of the things that come with tuition and accreditation, which is some transactional exchange of grades and shame and a degree and just

like, is it possible to create a space of learning? A non-hierarchical space of learning, sort of modelled on this thing called mutual-aid? I didn't know.'

The same respondent also talked to me about how mutual-aid co-exists and cuts through capitalist time, understanding the free school as a matter of 'time and attention', connecting mutual-aid, care and time:

'…the mutual-aid can run alongside our capitalist gerbil wheel-lives and that's what I saw with the free school… because we insisted that it be free and we insisted that it not be about money. It fundamentally became about time and attention, which is still largely captured by capitalism, but if you can practice recovering your time and attention, right, and then you find these places where we can just pool that as a shared resource. We are going to pool our whatever, your own hour a week, your ten hours a week, your 15 minutes a week, we are just going to pool time and attention in this thing that we are going to call our free school and we are just going to try and organise our time and attention with our little internet tools and our documents and our links and our clicks and our Instagram whatevers and we are just going to try and gather more time and attention and what I've learned, right, is that that can be its own little economy-' (respondent D)

She continued:

'And I think it's also part of an imaginary that's really wrapped up in capitalism and disaster capitalism and this idea that there is a catastrophic event in the future that will liberate us, destroy us, whatever, and right, like from a... you know, I'm trying to really cultivate like a decolonised perspective and a decolonised sense of time, that moment happened liked 500 years ago, we are already on the downside of like all of this, right, and this thing in the future, yeah, of course a disaster's coming! [laughs] I have read the IPCC [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change] reports. That's a given. But like what's not a given is how we organise to survive, right? And what I realised is like mutual-aid was, it's so simple, right, anyone can do it, people already

do it and David's essay on everyday communism was just like, I was like okay, yeah, I'm here, got that.' (Respondent D)

The notion of a 'decolonised sense of time' that respondent D draws attention to is worth exploring, especially connected to the theme of disaster, global warming and climate change. Scholarship has drawn attention to temporal infrastructures which are used to police, control and homogenise people (Motta and Bermudez, 2019), squeezing and manipulating a multiplicity of rhythms into a coordinated, regimented and controllable temporality. This is a theme which has increasingly surfaced in the literature of critical university studies (Felt, 2016; Doharty, Madriaga & Joseph-Salisbury, 2021). What can be ascertained from respondent D, herself a woman of colour with Filipino heritage working within university structures, is the urgency to bring radical imaginaries to the free school and cultivate that as part of the project of mutual-aid and pedagogy. It reflects a desire to craft a space of learning that challenges modes of time that have historically been used to exert power over marginalised people, with my respondent specifically alluding to the colonisation of the Americas 500 years ago. Cultivating a decolonial temporality in education can refer to speed and pace (of learning), course lengths and reflections on the present and desires for the future. In a co-created course oriented towards radical political imaginaries, mutual-aid, support and care, the decolonial enters into the discourse of pedagogy through the act of 'deschooling' (Illich, 1970). In other words, returning to education rather than school as a process of learning about self and other in a held space where time is given for reflection and action. The process of becoming a subject is a large part of this, as bringing a decolonial perspective to bear on pedagogy and mutual-aid, which can be thought to be about collective enquiries and developing capacities for collective organisation.

Respondent C builds upon the interactions that take place in a pedagogical learning environment premised upon mutual-aid, in many ways recalling the importance of holding space, as will be discussed in chapter three, and the recognition of what each person is bringing into that space in that moment as a reflection of the concerns and trials of their daily lives. The "classroom" is therefore never a neutral space but brimming with politics,

emotions and affect, which requires careful navigation. Respondent M, a UK-based artist and educator spoke to this issue:

> 'There's a lot more that's exchanged, isn't there, than the teaching alone. There's all kinds of wisdom and bits of knowledge or insight or like…kind of modelling, isn't there? Like some people that you're taught by who you may not have grown up around ever come into contact with someone that thinks a certain way or has a view or something that whether you agree with it or disagree, whatever, it just blows your mind and that's a kind of mutual-aid, I think.' (Respondent M)

bell hooks touches upon this as a fundamental principle of her critical pedagogy, underscored by the idea of mutual recognition. In *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994), bell hooks applauds educators who 'approach students with the will and desire to respond to our unique beings, even if the situation does not allow the full emergence of a relationship based on mutual recognition. Yet the possibility of such recognition is always present.' (1994, p.13) hooks has drawn deeply from Brazilian radical educator Paulo Freire's philosophy of education, in which he claims knowledge as a field in which to exercise democracy, 'a field in which we all labor' (ibid, p.14), and from Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Buddhist monk whose pedagogy sought to unite body, mind and spirit in the service of learning as a "whole" human being, striving for 'knowledge about how to live in the world.' (ibid, p.15) Teaching and learning as mutual-aid can be viewed from this light, as a practice of sharing knowledge about the world and drawing upon each individual's uniqueness.

The idea of teaching and learning as mutual-aid as promoted by IAFS owes itself to the radical tradition in San Francisco's Bay Area, but also one that resonates with indigenous knowledge and the erasing of indigenous knowledge by dominant epistemologies. As one respondent with indigenous heritage told me:

> 'I'm not really clear if teaching as mutual-aid is something we have just been doing to each other in general, you know, even when we are like talking to friends…but at the same time it goes back to the issue of like sustainability, like do we even need, like what kinds of resources and funds do we need to be able to like sustain the

> practice of institutional teaching? And with that in mind… education comes down to this idea of like nurturing ideas and passing them on, right? But also, like, it, it…there's education there before institution, in my belief, at least… and education does not necessarily have to refer to… to the particular discipline of institutional education because indigenous people and Native Americans, as a species we education our young, so like we taught them what the world is like, you know? And this is also coming for me, like, as a father, like my son is not in school yet, but there is an immense amount of teaching that I have to do, right, so that he can like grow up good [laughs].' (respondent G).

Respondent G echoed this sentiment elsewhere in our interviews, with the notion of art beyond the institution, that 'art just used to be part of our everyday lives, you know? And that's the feeling I get from looking at cave paintings… It was already there before all of this, so of course art education goes beyond the institution.' This calls to mind the question of what to call that which sits outside of contemporary art institutions and the possibilities of existing outside established social systems and meanings. Mutual-aid exists outside of the state's social systems of care and becomes essential when capitalist infrastructures break down, for example through economic crises, or when, for political and ideological reasons, they refuse to serve communities in need, such as the case with the Black Panther Party and their extensive Community Survival Programs (seven of which were educational and arts-based). My respondent's perspective as a person with an indigenous ancestry speaks to the importance placed on informal networks of learning from each other outside of the institution akin to the practice nonformal peer-to-peer learning.

2.5. Conclusion.

This chapter has explored a pedagogy of care, underscoring its central importance for building caring and sustainable communities in art education. Through my interview material, it has shown the inter-personal instances in which care has been demonstrated and worked into organisational infrastructure, arguing that this heightened attention to care pushes against a neoliberal individualistic model of social relations and towards a model of

collectivity, interdependence and 'genuine community' (respondent K). Beginning with a feminist-materialist analysis of the scarcity of care during the Covid-19 pandemic that exacerbated conditions of precarity, I argued that the need for care, while already an integral part of how alternative art schools operated, became even more urgent during conditions of lockdown. This was explored in my interview material, firstly through understanding the anger and frustration from the vacuum of care in art education and in universities broadly as a microcosm of the scarcity of care in neoliberal capitalist society, and understanding that the issues resulting from this deficit of care as a motivation for building a qualitatively different caring infrastructures into an alternative model of provision. These conditions of care included valuing people's labour and transparency, modelling co-creation, nurturing relationships, unlearning, and an awareness of radical inclusion, what Raju Rage calls 'access intimacy' (2020) for participants from marginalised groups. The theory and practice of mutual-aid was also discussed, drawing almost exclusively on my research with a San Francisco-based anarchist free-school, whose drive for community and togetherness was born out of struggle with and the unreliability of their formal university institution during the Covid-19 pandemic. Through this, some key differences between capacities to care in a university setting compared with those in a small arts organisation have also been explored. I have outlined the legacy of radical models of care and mutual-aid in the Black Panther party's programme as well as the infrastructure born from the Greek solidarity clinics during the imposition of austerity on Greece. What is revealed is an attempt to build alternative infrastructures of care and support that are direct, unmediated and informal. All interviews recognised the importance of care for building mutually affirming and qualitatively different relations to what is usually found in larger, more corporate organisations. The material drew attention to survival and an intense awareness of ecological disaster, which aided the group to bond and grow. Attention was also brought to a 'decolonised sense of time' (respondent D) and 'our capitalist gerbil wheel lives' (ibid) that framed the school's need to find other ways to exist in the world. The next chapter takes this further, concentrating on the relationship between time, space and care, with a discussion on conceptual, physical and virtual space and temporalities to shed light on other needs and desires emerging from within alternative art school spaces.

Chapter Three

Taking Time, Holding Space.

This chapter looks at time, temporality and space as facets of the "alternative" that are explored in this thesis as crucial components of a pedagogy of care. The rationale unfolds conceptually from chapter two, taking forwards the idea of caretaking to that of giving time and making space for artistic creation, community building and group process. It is argued that these are necessary components of what it means to be a caring art school and participate in an arts education that places infrastructures of care at the centre. I begin with a discussion of art as a "free" space, connecting art and art-making to ideas around freedom. I look at Kant's concept of freedom, Greenberg's idea of 'art for art's sake' and bring in Marx, Dave Beech and the art collective 'bare minimum' to illustrate a new model of art for art's sake tied to postcapitalist ideas of freedom from the capitalist value-form. This allows me to explore space more abstractly, tying it to a postcapitalist idea of freedom from capitalist work, generated from the material in my interviews. From there, I bring in the work of psychoanalyst Marion Milner and theorist Jackie Wang to elaborate on the psycho-social spaces of safety and risk that are necessary prerequisites for accessing artistic creativity, which feeds into a discussion of non-linear time and idiorrhythmy (Barthes, 2013). These parallel concepts - 'oceanic' (Wang, 2016), to do with space, and 'idiorrhythmy' (Barthes 2013) to do with time and non-linear temporality - tell us about ways of being otherwise. They operate through modes of suspension, disruption, discontinuity, and difference; respond to an inner-axis rather than an extrinsic clock, and exist in a deviant relationship to the industrial and orderly time and space of late capitalism which, in the different contexts of the "alternative", my respondents brought to my attention. These concepts are discussed in relation to care being central to the organisation of learning programmes, and it is suggested that this mode of being otherwise as expressed through concepts of space and time have radical political implications for re-organising and re-imagining art education in times of planetary crisis.

3.1. Art as a 'free' space.

This section explores the nuances of art as a 'free' space using cultural and political theory and examples from contemporary art collectives and community art projects. We broaden out to these concepts to zoom in on the particulars as it adheres to my empirical data in the interview material. Doing so provides a frame for space to be explored conceptually, to think about the space of peer-learning in the arts as a container and vessel for self and group inquiry and attention to materials. To begin, we must decide what we mean by a 'free' space, and how art has a contested entanglement with the notion of freedom.

Several of my respondents at TOMA understood there to be a stark division between the work they must do for money and the work they do which is meaningful and fun. One respondent felt she was lucky for the employment she has, and still made a distinction between it and her artmaking and the work she does at TOMA. Others felt more keenly that their paid work was out of necessity for survival while their artwork was out of necessity for meaning and 'making life worth living', as Respondent E told me.

Respondent B, for example, pointed out that the art practice that she was able to develop with TOMA allowed her 'distance' from her work that, at the time, she found demanding and unrewarding. Another respondent found that being on the TOMA programme allowed her to reconnect with her practice in a way that contrasted sharply with the demands of work. In her words that TOMA was accessible for 'working around a full-time job' (respondent E), implies that full-time work is a hindrance to creative practice and separate from the space held for making art. This was echoed by respondent B, who told me that the participants in her group 'felt compromised…at how they wish they could spend their time but they can't because they're constrained in some way…", acknowledging the fact that people are working. Interestingly, respondent B echoed this separation between the world of art as she experienced it by accessing an alternative art school and the 'real' world of her work, saying, 'I was learning all of this new other world and then having to act in a very different way in the real world.' (Respondent B)

For this particular group of people, we could therefore talk about art as being "free": a space free from waged labour, a space for the free sharing of ideas and a free space for artistic creation away from interference of external imperatives.

Immanuel Kant is a useful way into this discussion. In Kant's politics of work, he conceptualised an antithesis between art and labour, by which he meant the forced labour of slaves, waged work and domestic work. As Beech explains, according to Kant, 'Fine Art…is differentiated from any mechanical, manual and mindless chore or job' (2019, p.34) that is 'burdensome' (ibid). Artistic production is considered a lofty pursuit, distinguished, according to Kant, from commerce and mechanical, manual work – drudgery that is the opposite of an experience that is pleasurable and done for its own sake. However, as Beech argues, Kant's thinking was congruent with its time, in which his dichotomising of art and labour was a hallmark of the Enlightenment which presupposed a false binary between intellectual and manual labour.

Like Kant's false binary, much contemporary artistic work in late capitalism employs the use of artists' assistants, who make or build the art-piece that has been sketched or conceptualised by the artists. This division of labour is also evident in the work that goes into building exhibitions, of which recent research has documented the vital and skilled but devalued labour of technicians in the installation of exhibitions (Harris, 2020). This reinforces and retrenches a hierarchy of skill between artists and makers, on the one hand, and the intellect and the body, on the other. Research in the creative therapies, such as art therapy and dance/movement therapy, has shown that making artwork relies on a symbiotic unity of the body and the mind, such as in the work of Linda Hartley (1995); that artmaking is embodied can be wielded as a critique of the mind-body separation, even when this work is, as per the division of labour, physically separated out to different bodies, i.e. an artist creates an idea, while art-workers build it and technicians install it in a gallery. Beech's critique of the separation between art and work suggests that if art is leisure, belongs to a higher purpose, and therefore gives access to "freedom", it 'corresponds all too well with the aristocratic and bourgeois condemnation of work in favour of a life devoted to higher things' (2019, p.81) and is 'the great delusion of privilege' (ibid). Beech also points out that Kant's idea of artistic production belonged to an idealised abstract realm in which art serves self-actualisation (p.35), a view that in Kant's world is only accessible to those with inherited wealth. In this, art is a space of freedom only for a privileged few. It is interesting how, according to Kant's idealism, his equalling of art with freedom and venturing that art is the antithesis of work, brings him oddly into alignment with an anti-capitalist politics of anti-

work, despite how his ideas ring with the omissions of social inequalities. It would be misplaced to understand Kant as a spokesperson for a contemporary politics of anti-work, but his ideas, however abstracted from social reality, can be useful for exploring why contemporary artists' collectives and my respondents in peer-learning artists' networks are returning to the separation of art and work but understand it differently to Kant; work that is draining, unfulfilling, boring, isolating and undervalued is seen as antithetical to the otherwise life-affirming work of art-making, especially when in community with others. This is exacerbated when work that is considered boring comes with an oppressive, hostile workplace, such as with the prevalence of discrimination and bullying along the lines of gender, race, sexuality and ableism, to name some. It is important to note here that the institution of contemporary art – and its adjacent art schools – are not innocent from these discriminatory practices, itself part of the reason for the emergence of alternative practices in the form of self-organised collectives and alternative art schools, which run autonomously and with their own distinct set of values, but also in parallel to and often as an extension of the elite contemporary art world, informing and shaping practices from the margins.

The conflation of art with freedom – art as a free space – also takes us to Clement Greenberg's theory of Modernist painting (Greenberg, 1960), in which he describes the flattened, two-dimensional images of Modernist paintings as indicative of an emphasis on art as self-referential and autonomous, an art for art's sake that was free from the interference of social, political or moral meanings. The development of postmodern art in the latter half of the 20th century formed a backlash to this. Artists working in performance, installation, video-art and collective practice in particular reacted to the art for art's sake championed by Greenberg. They instead insisted that art should respond meaningfully and often directly to social and political issues. Much of the feminist visual and performance art of the 1970s and 80s can be taken as examples of this practice and fierce counterpoint to Modernism's art for art's sake in the discourse of Greenberg. In the late capitalism of the 21st century, the political in art, and therefore where art intersects with a notion of freedom, is the process of making it as opposed to the content, which includes the organisational and relational politics and ethics, which I will now explain by looking at a collective called bare minimum.

The collective bare minimum is a self-described 6-person interdisciplinary anti-work arts collective who launched their project during the first summer of the pandemic, July 2020. As a collective, they consider art as a free space for expression, learning and community where they are excluded from the historically elite spaces of contemporary art. Here is their statement:

> 'We hate working, hustling, neoliberal self-improvement, wage labour and surplus value, private property, how work eats into our time, our love, our ability to make things in earnest. we are a group of friends who needed a formal structure to give ourselves the permission to make things. We are lazy, queer & many of us are disabled. We get how common this line of thinking is, how edgy it is to reject the given and we've decided to come together anyway. Like we said, we're lazy.'
>
> (bare minimum collective, 2020a)

They are tuned into art making through engaging with discourses of laziness and anti-capitalist critique that is at the same time committed to anti-racism, disability activism and a prefigurative politics of entwined relationality. Their manifesto states, 'We strive for that which has not yet been realised, an Art for Art's Sake in a world where none of us are subjected to premature death. We want space for pleasure. We want the abolition of everything but care, mutual-aid and community.' (bare minimum, 2020b) Their notion of freedom contrasts to the myth of the artist genius posited by Kant's aesthetics and concept of freedom and as a counterpoint to the Enlightenment model of freedom, which locates freedom in the hermeneutically bound, undifferentiated (male) subject, the individualised 'self' of (neo)liberalism. The collective makes explicit reference to art for art's sake, but this is a different art for art's sake to what Kant and Greenberg offered. In the social and political landscape of a post-2008 and post-pandemic world, art for art's sake is an anti-capitalist critique and a post-capitalist position, which is about having time and space away from capitalist, industrial time, which will be discussed in section 4.4. The "free space" of art according to this reading lies in its freedom from the wage-relation and from value-production. Art is 'species-being', and has more to do with Marx than with Kant. bare minimum shares with Kant a repulsion towards work, but more similarities lie with Marx, for whom any form of labour that is put to work for capital is unfree. For Marx, the free space of art is distinct from its embroilment in capitalism, its commodification. Marx spoke to this

when he wrote that while '[wage] labour does not belong to [a person's] essential being' (Marx, 1978 [1862-75], p.285, cited in Beech 2019, p.36), art, by contrast, is 'intimately attached to the personality or subjectivity of the producer.' (p.34) Art, according to Marx, provides a space to disconnect from the alienating toil of wage labour and to tune into experiences of curiosity, aliveness and intimate connection to sensory awareness and heightened perception. As Beech points out, in the *Grundrisse*, Marx contrasted 'labour' with 'really free working', and in Volume 3 of *Capital*, excludes works of art from his analysis of capitalism (Beech, 2019, p.35). Beech also brings up the early communist and philosopher Moses Hess, an early communist whose work influenced Engels and Marx, who understood art as free, or 'unalienated' human activity, an argument which has seen a recent revival (Molyneux, 2020). In contrast with Kant, Hess's utopian thinking understood the 'free society' to be full of pleasurable activities. In this conception, labour does not exist, and 'every worker can participate in this workless work when capitalism is replaced by communism.' (ibid) These early communist ideas are implicit in the political statement of bare minimum when they make reference to 'an Art for Art's Sake in a world where none of us are subjected to premature death.' (bare minimum, 2020b) I argue that the alternative art schools explored in this thesis are expressions of this new art for art's sake, where there is commensurability between art and freedom or the "free space of art": the desire to practice politics and therefore freedom through how art is made relationally, is how to do art politically. This will also be further discussed in the final chapter in the section on prefiguration, in which art becomes a free space according to conditions of collectivity and shared relationality, where experiments with forms of assemblage of intricate, mutually constituted social enmeshments are arguably more important that the artwork.

3.2. Art as a psycho-social space.

One theme within this chapter is that of a post-enlightenment concept of freedom, which connects to a postcapitalist politics of anti-work, disability and mental health activism and finds a point of resonance during the recent years of the pandemic. In this understanding, work that is produced for capital is contrasted with the work of making art in community, which will be further explored through the material of my respondents. This section maps

another theme to surface from the broader realm of space and space-holding; it provides a brief exposition of how art creates and is created by a psycho-social space, the stuff surrounding pedagogy that facilitates learning.

British psychoanalyst Marion Milner's formulating of psychic states of 'depth mind' and 'surface mind' (1987, p.159) is useful for understanding how artistic creation can happen. In a chapter called 'Psychoanalysis and Art' she proposes that for a person to be in a state or space of freedom to make art, there must occur an oscillation between states of submergence and re-emergence. Drawing on Freud and Ehrenzweig, she writes that Freud:

> 'also found that ideas coming from the lower layers of the mind, like our dream visions, tend to be inarticulate; they appear to our observing mind as altogether chaotic and difficult to grasp; and not only our night dreams but also our day-dreams have this elusive quality. Of course we do not really need an expert to tell us this. We have only to try to take a look at our own day-dreams, reveries, moments of absentmindedness, to know that we do, ordinarily, think on two different levels, in an oscillating rhythm, and that when we return from the absent-minded phase it is not always easy to say what we have been thinking.' (Milner, 1987, p.158)

For an individual artist, a collective or group to make work together and to learn from each other, they require 'a temporary, cyclical paralysis of the surface attention.' (ibid) Optimally, conditions of safety and belonging need to be in place for this temporary submergence to manifest. Art as a free space is therefore not a given but actively produced by the creation of authentic, intentional community and the sharing of practices. Milner's practice of psychoanalysis tackles the psychic state of art making in reference to what Freud called the 'oceanic' (p.159). For Freud, the 'oceanic' is the feeling of oneness that the infant experiences with its mother, in which there exists no clear boundaries between the self and other. This oceanic feeling is for him a regressive state. Milner's interpretation, however, is more optimistic. She explains this through exploring a drawing by a patient in analysis, where she suggests that the state of oceanic feeling is essential for the creative process because it seems to almost dissolve the boundaries between self and other. She calls it 'a feeling oneness with the universe, the undivided self' (p.160) and that 'this process…essentially involves an undoing of that split into subject and object which is the very basis of logical thinking.' (ibid) Artistic creation happens in the intermediary points

between a state of oceanic submergence and re-emergence into the realm of signification, the point at which one has to put into language what 'happened' when submerged in the ocean. This can happen not only with the act of making art, but in group composition and pedagogical journeys, when groups undergo a process together, learn from each other and emerge changed.

Theorist Jackie Wang takes Milner's ideas further. She understands oceanic feeling as a metaphor for assembling new modes of sociality, which has implications for art pedagogy that I argue the 'alternative' explored in this thesis is attempting to work towards. In Wang's essay 'Oceanic Feeling and Communist Affect' (2016), she dismisses Freud's interpretation of the oceanic as infantile and regressive. Instead, she speculates that oceanic feeling brings about a state of immanent relationality that produces feelings of affinity and 'oneness' in social relations: 'the capacity to conceptualize the subject as connected: as part of an assemblage or node inscribed within a larger world or network.' (ibid) She asks, 'Could the oceanic act as a feeling-in-common that serves as the experiential basis for the co-construction of new worlds?' (ibid) She excitedly ruminates upon affective states that 'take us beyond the boundaries of self' (ibid) that have potential for radical social ecology, or our 'embeddedness in the world' (ibid). The process of peer-led artmaking as anathema to individualism will be explored further in the chapter on transindividuality, in which I argue for the interdependence and mutuality in the prefiguration of postcapitalist subjectivities. Discussing oceanic space leads me to the next section in which, linked with care, I discuss the idea of space-holding as part of art-pedagogy.

3.3. Space-holding.

Holding space is a basic component of pedagogy that is about being explicit with positionality, power and listening (Pascoe, et al, 2020), often in order to navigate relational and sociocultural complexity. Holding space is also embodied, meaning that affect and somatics (Shapiro 1999; Motta, 2012) play important roles in shaping and transforming the quality of interactions in a pedagogical space, and the subsequent dialectical production of subjectivity and of knowledge. This section focuses on the importance of holding space as it featured in my interviews. It makes sense of the difficulties of holding space for

vulnerability, difference and disagreement and for unexpected encounters. It also explores the production of various affects of affinity, non-violent hierarchy, and therapeutic affects.

Indisputable in the descriptions and discussions of the factors involved in holding space is power. It has become commonplace in neoliberal discourse and inscribed into policy to attempt to smooth over and dilute instances of dissent, for example through the emergence of therapeutic pedagogies in HEIs. Amsler (2011) has warned against the rise of these therapeutic pedagogies and the affective turn in education that she understands as part of neoliberal subjectivisation (p.58), and yet argues for 'critical affective pedagogies' (p.59) to resist the discourse and policies of 'well-being' that dominates schools and universities. The danger of the well-being paradigm, she argues, is that it individualises structural problems. It makes education about feeling and being 'well' (p.51) in order to adapt flexibly to a precarious life. Firth (2016) is also critical of therapeutic interventions in schools and universities that have programmes designed to 'develop resilience' (p.125), identify 'vulnerable' or 'at risk' learners (p.124) and develop 'positive attitudes' (ibid). This was a key intervention and strategy from the UK government in which Michael Gove was Education Secretary during 2010-2014. It influenced research and policy, as evidenced by The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Delivery Plan 2011-2015, which emphasised 'Influencing behaviour and informing interventions' as a key strategy (Firth, 2016, p.125). Within the discourse on wellbeing, individuals are to blame for experiencing difficult emotions, the causes of which are social. 'Therapy culture' has been targeted as a neoliberal strategy to depoliticize and defang feelings of distress, creating a culture of vulnerability, with people who are locked into precarity with little agency.

One way of problematising the way that states engineer affect into disciplining subjects is, through pedagogy, to create spaces where complexity and ambiguity can be explored, which means allowing knowledge and learning to be uncomfortable (p.127). Firth calls this a 'pedagogical role for unpleasant affects' (p.128), and what I call sitting with comfortable discomfort. I will first look at how vulnerability was understood and experienced from the voices of my respondents, before turning to the other aspects integral to the concept and practices of holding space.

3.3.1. For vulnerability.

The groups and individuals that I interviewed spoke of holding space for vulnerability, which thematically emerged multiple times. It was generally seen to be an important, valued, realistic and honoured state of being that was difficult and courageous to access. One of my respondents even acknowledged that making art and being able to show it to a group of people is a vulnerable act, that it is 'something that has come from your heart':

> Here's paint. Here's what I have learnt can be done with these things. What are you going to do with these things? Show me. Right? But it's like the economy of it that just fucks it all up because now you are going to show me something, something vulnerable, something that has like come from your heart and I am going to like take out a ruler and be like hmm? You know? Which is not to say that there is not a place for that, but... it's not the only part of the process.' (respondent D)

I've also used this quotation in chapter four, in which respondent D is suggesting that there is something absurd and incongruous, even unethical, about placing numerical measurements onto something abstract, ephemeral and subjective that has manifested from a person's experience. However, the quotation is a helpful starting point for understanding the role that vulnerability plays in education and why it arose in the interviews, especially in the context of the pandemic in which many of the global population were cast as vulnerable and ordered or expected to 'shield' from contracting the Covid-19 virus. The idea of vulnerability thus rings with paternalism mandated by authorities and states for purposes of control, and created a class of people who identified as vulnerable (Butler, 2020). Vulnerability, continues Butler, is 'part of embodied social relations and actions.' (2020) Further, in the same article she points out that vulnerability is a social quality and one that is not experienced in isolation, as 'individualism fails to capture the condition of vulnerability' (2020). This is compounded by the insight from artist and disability activist Johanna Hedva's 'Sick Woman Theory' (2016) that vulnerability is an overriding condition of being human: 'existence in a body [is] something that is primarily and always vulnerable,' she explains.

Thinking with Butler, who argues that vulnerability is 'a feature of social relations rather than an attribute of the subject' (2020), we can follow lines of thought that traversed

my interviews that framed vulnerability as a quality to be built into infrastructure and held on to. It is implicit that the people I spoke to who were involved as participants or organisers were seeking out that space of vulnerability in being at an alternative art school. One of my respondents who attended art school in the 1980s recalled how, after having graduated, 'things didn't work out in London. I became very depressed…' (respondent A). His narrative reveals some of the hidden subtext of the impact of art school, and what the artistic process opens up for people psychologically and how that is held and supported or not. Being at an alternative art school, such as TOMA, reveals how these feelings are accounted for and supported. Respondent B, also a participant at TOMA, echoed the idea offered by respondent D about art being exposing and intimate. Using vivid imagery she said, 'it's almost like standing naked on your doorstep and being like, here I am, here it is.' In this she was referring to the process of sharing her work with the group, suggesting that by doing this she was sharing her most intimate self. She quickly resumed in saying how she felt 'lucky' that the organiser had created a 'safe feeling space', where everyone is 'mindful' and 'asks lots of questions' (respondent B). A container had been created for group intimacy.

Compare this to the formal and traditional format of sharing work in university art schools, known as the 'crit', which is often portrayed as a negative confrontational experience. Focus group research from Charlie Smith found that students had experienced tutors as 'unnecessarily adversarial' (2011, p.51) and that feedback was highly dependable on a tutor's mood (ibid). More recent research suggests that these negative experiences have not much changed: Scarsbrook's research includes comments from former students who described 'barriers to participation, centring on alienation and marginalisation' (p.151), citing one student who recalled that crits were 'notorious for…middle-class male, students…going to all the sessions and really ripping people apart.' (ibid) Scarsbrook further found that these crits were sites of bullying and undue exercises of power, with students describing them as 'competitive', 'gruelling', 'way too harsh' and not supportive of creative instinct at all.' (Scarsbrook, 2021, p.150). By contrast, my respondents who attended TOMA, for example, were noticing how the programme was helping them resist perfectionism: 'you don't have to be great at everything... just taking all that pressure off trying to prove yourself as an artist.' (Respondent E) The crits described above by Scarsbrook represent an

environment that facilitated peacocking, performances of domination and competition, where strength is valued over vulnerability and vulnerability is not seen in itself as a strength. A qualitatively different set of values are socially choreographed at TOMA in order to allow participants to experience their shared vulnerability without being discouraged.

The model of sharing work described by Scarsbrook attests to an instrumentalised logic of art school which has not considered a conceptual model that creates infrastructures for collective conditions of vulnerability. Educational models that reinforce 'the fostering of macho middle-class white cultures' (Scarsbrook, 2021, p151) perpetuate systemic relations of dominance. As Scarsbrook maintains, 'The perpetuation of that brutality prepares artists for the supposed brutality of the art world, perpetuates its continuation in an autopoietic loop, becoming part of the story of art school C/crits and of what artists need to survive the art world.' (p.153)

The issue with this is that it individualises problems that are collectively experienced and structurally produced. As was narrated in the case of respondent A, this kind of individualising creates a harmful narrative around those who 'succeed' in the art world, those who are the "heroes" and those who "survive" art school; everyone else is seen as a failure or not "fit" for that world. "I don't think I would have made it," they said. "I don't have the sort of… I don't think it would have worked." The idea of "making it" is an engrained in institutionalised discourse that separates the protagonists of the art world from those who can't embody the same conformity to a monolithic ideology of success, which Scarsbrook's research has explored in depth (2021, p.174) The subtext is that, in order to "make it" as an artist, one must embody and present as assertive and invulnerable, to maintain 'a professional stance' (McRobbie, 2016, p.40). It has been argued that these traits are rewarded by neoliberal capitalist society and the neoliberal work ethic (Lorey, 2011; Kunst, 2015).

The alternative art school Into The Wild tries to carry their participating artists through the narrative of survival but in a way which is supportive. Respondent I told me, 'they do need to learn how to do their taxes and how to write a funding bid because unfortunately that will be part of their work forever.' She alluded to the 'game' of surviving the art world, but with a critical edge, hoping that their programme will support students to 'learn how to game it but continually question what it is and trying to fit yourself into it.' She

continued, ‘it’s something that you create as well…the ecosystem you find yourself in…you can make it…you don’t have to bend to it.’ (respondent I) This reflects how ideologically and practically Into The Wild as a representative sample of alternative art schools has one foot in the “reality” of the art world, i.e. how to practically survive it, and also one foot in the exercise of world-building, to imagine and create other possibilities that both question and are several steps removed from the educational models that perpetuate systemic injustice. When I asked my respondent from Into The Wild about how their programme matches up to a normal art school Masters’ programme, she said, ‘I think it’s completely other. Even though we do make space for people to talk about their work, we’re never pushing their work. In a way we’re encouraging all the things that go around their work, so that they can make their work.’ (Respondent I)

A way that Into The Wild practically created this infrastructure – in response to conditions of the pandemic that moved their activities online – was to share their resources and give autonomy to their participants as a response to collective precarity and vulnerability. Respondent I said,

> ‘They were gonna be doing their collaborative projects, but COVID disrupted that and everything went online. So we basically gave them the rest of the budget and they decided what to do with it and they used it to pay each other to run things and pay some other artists to come in and lead some stuff over Zoom. And in that they did a load of crits and things like that where they talked about their work. But it’s not like in a university where you’re trying to strive for something or achieve something. I think, and especially this year because of COVID, everyone’s slowed down so it’s much more like celebrations of small wins, just trying out new materials and new skills. I don’t know if we would have talked about the details of that so much otherwise – I think there would have been much more emphasis on where are you going, and I kept trying to slow that down…’

This tells us that the conditions brought about by the pandemic helped organisations such as Into The Wild to focus less on an instrumentalised approach to artist development and focus more on nurturing the artistic process. The pandemic allowed Into The Wild to step back from the hegemonic idea of success as explored in Scarsbrook’s research (2021).

Instead, they'd created a capacious and generous attitude towards success, people's capacities and the challenges of life during the times of uncertainty.

Within the narratives of my respondents, it became clear that the process of being with a group of artists over time, such as in the TOMA programme, debunked ideas associated with the mythology (Scarsbrook, 2021, p.51) of being an artist. Participants began to think differently. For example, respondent B told me: 'I think I was fairly naïve in thinking that being an artist meant being this fully-formed thing that, I don't think I'll even get there…I think it's been…the value of those times in the making. And I think that's all I ever wanted to get from the programme was to be with people and to make and to show those things and it was never about having this thing that I could sell at the end of it…'. The subtext underlines a feeling of being alert to what unfolds in a creative process rather than executing an idea, and feeling vulnerable enough to show what isn't complete or finished.

Respondent E, also a participant on the TOMA programme recurringly about honesty and vulnerability as if they were interchangeable. She mentioned how when sessions moved online over lockdown, 'Zoom almost feels like a barrier', but strangely brought about a feeling of being 'less vulnerable because you're on a screen so you can be more honest'. This echoes some of the literature from my methodology chapter, where I noticed a feeling of being more relaxed on screen (Weller, 2017). This was contradicted by respondent A, who acknowledged that with the Zoom meetings 'it wasn't as easy to be open'. Respondent E's recollections of an in-person group meeting contradicts her initial response on vulnerability. She describes a particular session of a visit from a theatre maker who seemed to unintentionally generate a 'confession circle…of why you're on TOMA… a circle of ten of us…and people were crying by the end of it, people really, you know, completely, like, talking about their families, what they didn't do, what they want to make up for in TOMA, and he just did a really good job of making sure that…because a couple of people had spoken, everybody had to.' Rather than it being implied that everyone was forced to speak, it seems instead that space was held which encouraged intimacy and vulnerability: 'it quickly became that we all overshared.' (Respondent E) Pedagogical experiments such as these generate visceral and intense feelings of trust, of interconnectedness and, with what was being described by respondent E, a sense of catharsis, which was similarly affirmed by respondent B, also a participant of TOMA: 'I'm just very lucky that [the organiser] managed

to create a very safe feeling space and that everyone is mindful and asking lots of questions.' Implicit in the activity described above is the physicality of the space being important for provoking such outpourings of affect. It could be implied that had the same activity been transferred online to Zoom, there might not have been such a visceral response.

An organiser of an artist development programme based in Birmingham, respondent N, explained to me the importance they place in their programme of holding intimate, emotional space without retraumatising participants. They recruit their participants 'informally' without 'any constraints' and tend to have a diversity of people who attend, with many having not been through 'the traditional art school route.' Respondent N describes:

> 'So, we have this group of people, we bring them together and we spend a couple of days on this process we've got around mapping and that's, what that is, is, we get them, we sit them down, with massive pieces of paper and loads of coloured pens and we just go, right, draw your life. Draw your life, up till today, put in all the, what we call eureka moments. All the special people that influence you. The places you've been, the art you've seen, the stuff that you experience that's really made an impression on your life, that's what we want to see. And it's fucking intense, right? I mean, it is really quite intense, and we give people hours. We don't just sit them down for half an hour, we give them hours to do this and we sort of facilitate it, we wander around while they're doing it and we chat to them and stuff and chivvy them along, because at first sometimes it can be really daunting. People sit there staring at this piece of paper and it's like well, where do I start? So, we get them started and once they're into it, they're just in there.'

Respondent N then went on to explain the importance of 'being really careful' when setting up and facilitating the activity, in case of re-traumatisation: 'sometimes trauma will get you where you are and what we don't want to do is take people down those rabbit holes.' Similar to the session with the theatre-maker at TOMA, the session in Birmingham is generated from the life-experiences and starting points of the participants themselves, requiring openness and vulnerability from participants and highlighting how each person has different needs. A point of contrast between the two sessions is that at TOMA,

described from the perspective of a participant, re-lived in her narrative the intense memory of being intimately emotional with others in the group, whereas the other, narrated from an organiser who retained a critical distance from the participants undergoing their personal reflections, described a more detached view, and from his description, the session seemed poignant and tender but without the collective outpouring as a result of the session at TOMA.

Vulnerability also had to do with survival, in particular of surviving the art world – often surviving art school, and finding a place of what I call comfortable discomfort in an alternative setting with different processes. Surviving the art world, or just surviving in general, for the groups and individuals I interviewed, was viewed through lived and embodied experiences of being working-class (respondent B, respondent K), and so moving through the world precariously meant that survival therefore took on a different significance. Survival and vulnerability had also been a factor in groups and individuals' political struggles to do with social class (respondent B; respondent K) and race (respondent D, respondent F). These amplified individual struggles and helped to produce conditions for shared connection in the setting up of and participation in the groups. Shared precarity conditioned an awareness of vulnerability which had become sharpened and more visceral since the onset of the pandemic. For example, one respondent, reflecting on her work at a university told me that 'pastoral care work had gone over and above…[because] I was getting calls at like two in the morning from people really panicked' (respondent M); from IAFS I was told that 'people are still suffering because they are losing their jobs' (Respondent G); Into The Wild was set up for 'the people who just really needed some extra support or who were really into this idea of collaboration and community building' (respondent I), with the application to the programme asking 'what are you most in need of at the moment?' (ibid). Other respondents mentioned that during the pandemic, attending TOMA had helped to build their 'confidence' (respondent E) during a time of 'constant insecurity' (ibid). Respondent B described to me a collaborative project that the cohort did online during April 2020, the first full month of national lockdown, in which participants had to make an artwork each day and upload it to a shared website for other participants to see. To this, she said, 'We were just living day to day and it felt like taking each day as it comes but knowing that even within those days we could do small creative acts.' She continued, 'it felt like you

were supporting someone's practice in a different way…taking time to do things for the group.' Pandemic conditions exacerbated feelings of vulnerability, and alternative art education kindled a sense of community using virtual online platforms during that time.

3.3.2. For difference, disagreement and dissent.

My findings did not only express affirmations of belonging and group cohesion but also underscored the necessity for productive disagreements and conflict. Holding a space delicately means being attuned to and allowing disturbance and disagreement – allowing difference rather than collapsing it, and therefore resisting hegemony or homogenised thought. The most telling incident of conflict that was narrated to me was anecdotally. Respondent A recollected a group session in which a participant brought their work to the group, and it was met by one other person with a criticism of appropriation, the effect of which 'was like lighting a spark in a gunpowder room', as it was handled 'not very well'. Subsequently, that person had completely disengaged with the programme, 'hardly attended any of the sessions online' and 'made them feel they shouldn't, they've stopped painting.' This experience reminded respondent A of 'how incredibly fragile we are and how very careful you have to be.' The point was made that the conditions of lockdown severely affected the ability for the relationship between that individual and the group to be repaired. The respondent's recollection acts as a reminder of false intimacies that can arise from intense shared experiences, as well as hidden power dynamics that play out in groups. When I asked how the situation could have been handled differently, respondent A suggested that it might have been worthwhile taking time as a group to 'openly discuss what appropriation was.' He continued: 'but there was only 15 or 20 minutes left and then it was over and it moved on to somebody else and probably nobody realised what had happened, what it was like, I mean I had some indication, I pretty much knew straight away that this was not going to go down very well and it probably wasn't, maybe I should have talked about it, I should have encouraged the group to talk about it as an issue, to be a positive way forward.' (Respondent A) It was acknowledged that the online platform forced upon everyone due to the pandemic made meeting as a group challenging and seldom, which didn't allow time or space for addressing problems that had arisen (Respondent A). It

seems that this was an example of a missed opportunity for exploring the discomfort and deepening relational bonds.

This issue of how to be in comfortable discomfort and feel safe enough to give and take criticism was directly drawn upon by respondent C from IAFS, whose questions below speak to the anecdote recalled from respondent A. He said, 'how do we create a democratic space where everybody can contribute and everyone can feel comfortable enough to create but everybody can also feel comfortable enough to criticise themselves and others and create a movement towards something better in their work?' He added that he was curious about 'creating a democratic space that would allow people to also be judgemental.' His emphasis on judgement differs from respondent D's 'doing away with' methods of judgement associated with forms of value associated with the possessive individualism of universities. It begs the question of what art is for and who it is for. There might be tension between the need to connect and care for one another, as seems implicit in the response of respondent D, and the need to judge yours and other's work that's brought to the space. Respondent C seems to want to democratise art pedagogy without completely abandoning the forms of value that have been created within an historical space of elitism, which elsewhere in the interview he criticised.

3.4. Encounters in physical and online spaces.

As the above section discusses the constraints on my respondents with online learning, this section looks at the politics and affect of the encounter as an aspect of holding space online. It takes into account not only the encountering of people, but of ideas, knowledge and of ways of being. As will be detailed below, being on Zoom during their programme created various and contradictory responses from my respondents, with some considering Zoom to be a refuge, and others lamenting the forced separation and stymied opportunities of not being able to physically meet.

A way into this material is through Althusser's aleatory materialism. JN Hoad (2021) sketches a queer and trans theory of the encounter that draws from Althusser's aleatory materialism (p.167), a materialist epistemology that accounts for chance encounters which

provokes a stream of indeterminate and potentially transformative consequences. Althusser calls this '*a materialism of the encounter*, and therefore of the aleatory and of contingency.' (Althusser, 2006, p.167, emphasis the author's). Guided by Althusser, Hoad's text searches for an historical materialist account of encounters (Hoad, 2021, p.168), which alludes to Samuel R. Delany's description of people from divergent backgrounds meeting each other in the queer spaces of New York City before Times Square became sanitised of all the porn theatres and peep shows. In Delany's ethnographic text *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (1999), he describes the chance mingling of people from a variety of class and ethnic backgrounds using the word 'contact' (p.125), which he uses as a point of contrast to the more hierarchical and instrumental process of 'networking'. These contact encounters, according to Delany, lead to unusual associations, bonds forged between people who may have never otherwise crossed paths. JN Hoad describes these encounters as that which can disturb, or even liberate (2021, p.166), where a roving tapestry is woven with affect, desire and motives, which on the surface appears chaotic, but is in fact forged of 'years of craft, coordination, and oversight' (p.174), made possible by social bonds and the ephemerality of the moment. The entanglement of matter appears without history but is in fact laden with it, and Hoad reads in Althusser that these are encounters which can lead to bodies in movement and matrixes of relations forged in the most unlikely of places. Althusser outlines that, in order for an encounter to give birth to a world, 'that encounter must last; it must be, not a 'brief encounter', but a lasting encounter.' (2006, p.169)

'Contact' to use the term deployed by Delany (1999, p.125), was limited to digital participation during the pandemic lockdowns. The frustration with enforced separation was alluded to by one of my respondents, who reflected that, 'then the pandemic hit and we had to do everything on Zoom…instead of doing a collaborative project we decided instead to keep meeting every Monday to give ourselves some structure and stay in touch…it was mostly check-ins and just how people were for a whole month, at least.' (Respondent I) 'It was really heart breaking,' she continued.

At IAFS, respondent D echoed the importance of the regularity of routine, to keep a space 'held' for people to be able to drop in and stay connected. This was echoed elsewhere in my interviews with people from TOMA in the UK, in which a respondent highly valued just being together, even in an online space. 'That's something the pandemic has taken away,'

said respondent B, talking to me about the sense of community she felt being part of TOMA. She continued: 'If anything, it's made me realise that ultimately that's what it's all about: it's being with a group of people and having an opinion on something and responding to things in your life and showing it… so despite the theory and everything else it's about being with and showing and being generous in that way.' Respondent A talked fondly of TOMA as a community, and spoke highly of its exhibition space in a shopping centre as a site for encounters: 'You see other people and you sit down and…you see people passing, so I feel much more involved, it's been great for me feeling involved with a community and part of a community.' Respondent B from TOMA said of the programme that 'you get exposed to the people that you really want to meet and the people you're really interested in.'

Several of my respondents understood the limitations of using online platforms such as Zoom for their meetings during the months of lockdown, finding it frustrating in comparison to the in-person meetings they were used to. They recognised that these online meeting spaces tended to cauterise fluid, spontaneous emergences; the platforms are designed for interactions predetermined and sculpted by the virtual environment designed by the motives and desires of developers.

Respondents from TOMA specifically mentioned how having the project space of a shop inside a commercial shopping centre, 'opposite Poundland' (respondent K) engendered an exciting sense of possibility not otherwise feasible in more formal or conventional art contexts. 'I remember having the project space, the shopping centre, had both floors to myself at TOMA and just being like… that is so important that I can do whatever I want' (Respondent J).

Encountering different people regularly in a space was able to conjure personal transformations in participants. 'It's certainly opened my eyes to other possibilities, which I knew were always there, but would never have crossed my mind, to go and do a bit of animation…stimulus from other people with their ideas, stimulus of taking something along to show other people and a sort of responsibility to yourself to make an effort to try and do something, make something…' (Respondent A). Respondent A said how these experiences have 'opened [his] eyes to being part of a group', which was sharply contrasted with his experiences of loneliness and isolation while in art school during the 1980s. This feeling of exploring different ideas with a group of people was echoed with respondent E, who said,

‘It’s always felt that because we’re always exploring different art forms people rise and pivot depending on the subject and how they fit into it.’

At the same time, and in contrast to much of the sentiment around Zoom being a refuge for finding and building purposeful community in times of separation and chaos, the same respondent explained the challenges of meeting online: ‘Back in Jan, Feb time [2020] we’d be meeting to share our work but we’d be chatting around the dinner table having these informal conversations. But when you get on Zoom you’re there to work or to have a theory session. So those kind of natural conversations I wasn’t really having that much with people.’ This was echoed by the organiser at Into The Wild, who similarly mentioned the ‘devastation’ of not being able to be physically together at the onset of the pandemic: ‘I found it really hard because it was that bit of the programme that I was almost most excited about because I was like this is where the unexpected stuff can happen and this is where you can have an idea and I can support them to make that or offer a different way… and …yeah I really felt for them that they didn’t get that big boost of energy of being together and making something together, I think that’s where you learn so much about how to make things happen and how to negotiate with each other and share things.’ (Respondent I). She continued, ‘So much of getting to know them was little side chats or walking to the thing and they mention oh this is going on for me, you know?...how do you make space for that when it’s like, people aren’t just “on”. The problem with Zoom, is that you really have to think about what you’re saying…’ From this perspective, then, Zoom creates an effect of being ‘switched on’, or on high alert. It’s not a relaxing space and doesn’t allow for intimacy to flow. This differs to how respondent I imagined how she wanted to create her peer-led programme Into The Wild: ‘I’d really love it to be this place of real process. Like things being born out of each other, yeah, and setting things up in particular, like not leaving things so chaotic and unbound nobody knows what they’re doing…but setting it up enough so things can happen.’ (Respondent I)

The notion of experiential learning was also brought up, of bringing people’s individual experiences to the fore as a basis for creating. ‘How do we actually make something together in this environment?’ asked respondent C as a provocation, as a question that they are answering as they attempt to make the space. Behind his question is the background of the pandemic, whereby ‘this environment’ gestures to the fact that they

do not have a physical space to assemble, and 'this environment' is the flattened plain of Zoom meetings and the walls of people's private residential spaces reflected onto screens in other people's homes. He attempted to answer his own question with the response, 'at the moment I am feeling like now we are going to explore what is important to people and how that resonates and see if that builds a community or if that is just a dead end. Then maybe we'll try something different.' The notion of not-knowing is part of their methodology, of experimenting with forms, which ties into their statement, "We undertake the organization of our school as a form of art." (iafs.org) Holding space therefore refers to the facilitation of an online space of experimental and utopian pedagogy for making art and building community, as well as a metaphorical space for experimenting with form, structure and organisation.

With my own experience of trying to understand the "space" of IAFS, it occurred to me that as a researcher speaking to the members of IAFS about their experiences of setting up and running the school, that I had begun to imagine IAFS operating as an in-real-life physical space, with a cohesive, tangible group, due to the vividness of their narratives. I had begun to imagine that this was the case after some time had elapsed since the initial intense phases of lockdown, especially since respondent C, in January 2021 had hoped for a real space: 'with Covid destroying a lot of small businesses, there's going to be a bunch of spaces, we can get a space, open up a space, we can have one day, maybe we can have a the in-person classes, so I think there are dreams…'. When I emailed them almost a year later, I found they were still operating fully online, with some people accessing their virtual space from Canada and as far as India. Firth (2020) has noted that most anarchist practices of mutual-aid rely upon physical proximity, tactility and face-to-face meetings, which were of course made impossible during the phases of lockdown (2020, p.71). The fact that IAFS continues to operate in an online space despite lockdown no longer being in effect, and with their community distributed globally, could speak to a variety of factors such as a lack of affordable space in San Francisco and speaks to the challenges of making a utopian free school in an online realm. To what extent has the building of that online space and the labour that's been put into it, which is occluded by the appearance of the website and their content become something that merely gestures towards a hopeful idea? To what extent is

the online realm a space for messiness, risk-taking and adventure, or does it come with its own set of constraints?

Deleuze and Guattari's (1988) concepts of molar and molecular lines can be useful here. A molar line is rigid and binary and refers to containment and capture, whereas molecular lines introduce instabilities and the potential for movement and transformation. In an art pedagogic context with a group of people, it is important that both the molar and molecular are present. Respondent D explained that, 'we just need to parent each other in a way and like take turns being the kid, holding space for one another, so other people can relax and let go... and then giving them an opportunity to hold space for you, so you can relax and let go.' This led to her saying, 'this is a safe space to disagree'. Respondent D continued:

> 'we did sort of take the lead in guiding the group towards certain ideas about how we might go about it and we kind of landed on this idea of... of a course that would meet every week, through the semester and again, that's just copying what I did [laughs] at the school before and we would just, you know, use the tools of pedagogy, what is our guiding question? How do we become the kind of school we want to become? That seems like a good guiding question. [laughs] And then we took the schedule and just passed it out to people who were just willing to try and answer that question in a variety of techniques. We tried to integrate studio practice in kind of seminar stuff, but that was tough with the virtual... medium. And but really, I thought, you know, the most important for us is to just... the weekly routine of holding that space and students, you know, like they do in regular times, like they kind of, especially art students, like, they come and go as they please.' (respondent D)

The online space had an intentional purpose as a haven, and the two experienced teachers were 'guided' by a prefigurative practice while at the same time taking some of the tools from the institution that they are already familiar with.

My respondents therefore all found challenges of being in an online space that worked antithetically to the proximity and sharing of physical space that promises the hope of desirous change, of embracing mess and within the borders of a 'molar' structure,

allowing for more 'molecular', fluid and unexpected emergences. In the artistic practice of the organiser of Into the Wild, she has been preoccupied with 'prefigurative practices, creating spaces where people can test out alternative ways of being together, in micro-ways…yeah that can come and teach us about how to be different in the world…I think we get a lot of excitement from that space of like nobody knows what the fuck is happening and we're all gonna work it out together…' (Respondent I). She used the word 'wild' to describe some of these practices of not-knowing and 'being in a place of unknowing', which resonates with the not-knowing and indeterminacy that are features of artistic practices in alternative education. This corresponds to Jack Halberstam's idea of 'queer vitality' (2020, p.46) to celebrate the space of unknowing that is described across my interviews with IAFS and Into The Wild. Overall, it seems that online learning spaces for community togetherness during COVID was experienced more as a refuge rather than as a space of queer vitality, where chance encounters such that Delany would describe as 'contact' (Delany, 1999, p.125) were almost impossible to access. The next section will now turn to time and temporality as features of alternative pedagogical spaces explored in this thesis.

3.5. Time and temporality in postcapitalist theory.

> 'I think now in the context of a pedagogical or learning environment, I think care is just to take time.' (Respondent L, artist and academic)
>
> 'Time was so syrupy and stretched out wasn't it…' (Respondent I, Into the Wild)
>
> 'The naturalization of the mechanical clock as 'universal' time has created a temporal foundation that is indispensable for capitalist production, accumulation and consumption and for the global expansion of capitalism, because a homogenous temporal framework has made it easier and more efficient to maximise profits.' (Zhou, 2015, p.165)

This section brings time and temporality into the discussion and makes a connection between time and care, as several of my interviews considered the temporal differences

between university structures with imagined, alternative possibilities. Prominent voices on the Left have written about time being crucial for imagining postcapitalist futures. In 2017, Mark Fisher wrote that 'a time of absorption and care' (Thorne and Fisher, 2017) is necessary for fermenting ideas beyond the cul-de-sac of the present. Andreas Malm writes that we are 'imprisoned in a moment that has no links backwards or forwards' (2018, p.1). Seeking to reimagine the present through building and living different temporalities and embarking on a project which disputes capitalist time is therefore deeply linked to the prefiguring of postcapitalist utopias, which is discussed in more detail in chapter four.

Time and temporality also feature in theories of postcapitalism, with much of the discourse focusing on the politics of anti-work, discussed earlier in this chapter, or the refusal of work (Weeks, 2011) and laziness (Lazzarato, 2014). One of the main ideas teased out by Dave Beech (2019) is to wrest time from capitalist value-production towards more rewarding forms of work, which he claims is only possible by revalorising work which in capitalism is devalued (p.92). In contrast, some proponents of contemporary postcapitalist theory assert that mundane, mechanical work ought to be abolished and replaced by machines so as to liberate humans in the service of leisure and pleasurable pursuits only (Bastani, 2019; Hester and Srnicek, 2023). Beech is critical of these perspectives, arguing that the distinction between work conceived as drudgery and work conceived as aesthetic or pleasurable 'is an expression of the social division of labour from the perspective of the privileged' (Beech, 2019, p.91). Both perspectives on time and temporality are central concerns for theories of postcapitalism and important considerations for creating alternative organisations with infrastructures of care. This has manifested in para-institutional, autonomous learning projects such as The Slow/Free University of Warsaw, and critiques of the university as a factory – of which the first comparison was made in 1909 (Majewska, 2015) – but is more renowned as the "edu-factory" (The Edu-Factory Collective, 2009).

The point in comparing the university to a factory was to situate it as a site of struggle and conflict, that the liberal romantic idea of a university flowing with freely made ideas had become replaced with measurable and standardised capitalist-value producing cognitive labourers; a workplace that imposes a monoculture of time, or 'homogenous, empty time' a phrase introduced by Walter Benjamin in Thesis 13 of his 'On the Concept of

History' (1940/2007) to describe the linear and inevitable forwards march of time imposed on to workers by the ruling class. Similarly, a group of academic workers and students from Italy called the Edu-Factory Collective, refer to the 'artificial units of cognitive measure' (2009, p.11) that is at odds with 'the temporality of living knowledge' (ibid). Concretely, this can be seen with the lengths of time given to degree courses, which place a specific unit of time onto learning, or to measurements of value in academic knowledge such as the Research Excellence Framework (REF) which gauges universities 'symbolic power, prestige and recognition' (Breeze, Taylor & Costa, 2019, p.5), but 'further entrenches hierarchies among staff, students and institutions' (ibid) in ways that provoke stress and anxiety. What is more, these world rankings evidence the 'homogenization of academic work' (Rikap & Harari-Kermadec, 2020, p.392) and 'the transformation of academic labour…toward capitalist production processes' (ibid), the measuring of productivity and quality where the research becomes the product. The connections between temporality and care are therefore explored below, thinking through ideas of non-linear temporality in discussion with my interview respondents.

3.5.1. 'Care is to take time': idiorrhythmy and non-linear time.

The idea of a different temporality appeared in my transcripts with respondents talking about manifestations of time and associated forms such as structure, length and measurement. One respondent pointed out that students ought to be given the autonomy to determine the length of their course - to be able to leave their studies when they feel they are ready, in contrast to the conveyor-belt model characteristic of the neoliberal university: time-limited to three or four years, large loans to pay off at the end, penalties if you are unable to complete 'on time'. The future dreamt up in the words of Respondent L, an artist and academic, who remarked that 'care is to take time' points to a desire for a stretched, malleable and rhythmically improvised time, possibly similar to how many might have experienced the temporal dilation of (usually) accelerated capitalist time momentarily suspended over the months of lockdown. He continued:

> 'care comes through time, and I think time and empathy are incredibly important tools within learning and I think that my fear of universities at the minute is the

speed of which change happens, or forced change for forced learning.' (Respondent L)

I am struck by the use of this respondent's notion of time and learning being something that is "forced". It strongly evokes a sense that the university's machinery of production is disciplinarian, authoritarian, subject to strict regimes of measurement, corresponding to the views of the Edu-Factory Collective mentioned above.

Another respondent working in San Francisco at IAFS expressed similar desires for how time plays its part in developing systems of support in an educational context:

'… if we are going to be a community grounded in mutual-aid and our care for one another... people got to come and go as they please and when people show up, don't be an asshole. Right? Like don't hold it against them that they haven't been around, like they probably haven't been around for important and good reasons. Who cares? They're here now.' (Respondent D)

The same respondent then contradicted herself at another point in my interview, venting some frustrations over the care put into creating a course when students can't commit their time:

'Really committing your time and your attention to like a structured course of study has brought me profound rewards, which is why I like to do it for students, right? But it's a lot of work and if you're going to put a lot of time into it and people don't show up, like, it sucks! [laughs]'

At the same time, my respondent acknowledged the need for both structure and structurelessness:

'And so we've talked for the coming semester, of really organising classes so that participants understand, have a clearer sense of expectation, like if you can't commit to showing up regularly, don't take this class, because the people organising this class are designing something for people who will commit to showing up regularly, but if you just want to hang out, like this person is just going to open up the Zoom and select some readings to read aloud whilst you work on your painting or your

> sculpture or your knitting or whatever your studio practice is and you can just listen or you can take a turn reading something, like we are trying to figure out kind of like the more casual spaces of learning and the more structured formal spaces of learning, because they're both, I think they're both important.'

These contradictions unpack the terrain of instruction versus more tacit forms of learning that comes with being in community. It seemed that the IAFS community were figuring out how to structure themselves based around mutual-aid, how to organise their time effectively and how that both generated and depleted capacities to care for one another.

Ideas of non-linear time and idiorrhythmy (Barthes, 2013), which I will later discuss, are helpful in further elaborating the words of my respondents. Non-linear time and the 'diversity of human time', is claimed by Hassan (2005) to be central and immanent to humans and in the natural world, with co-existing multiplicities of time, or 'timescapes'. (Adam, 1998) Hassan remarks that the emergent and fluid timescapes immanent to human life and the natural environment have been colonised by industrial clock time, reflected in many ways that human processes and experiences of time have been subordinated and controlled by the domination capitalist time, of which it seeks to synchronise and homogenise: 'The differing timescapes in biology, in chemistry, in all organic life and in the environment, conflict with a rigidly clock-entimed capitalism.' (Hassan, 2005) Hassan gives the example of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) disease in Britain in the 1990s, in which 'the unchanging temporal imperatives of industrial agribusiness (acceleration, commodification, optimization) clashed with those of human and animal biology, rendering, so to speak, BSE an "invisible" risk that came to light only when the damage forced its way onto the scientific gaze and (later) a horrified public consciousness.' (ibid) More quotidian examples could point to the lack of time given to human processes of grief, where workplaces often give little or no time for individuals to mourn loss or death. Another example is how pregnancy and post-natal care need enough time for bonding to form between a new-born and parents. Zhou (2015) nods to this lack of adequate time and the domination of paid time over unpaid time. She argues that:

> 'specifically, mothers' increasing participation in the labor force has revealed some problematic aspects of the dominant time discourses or contemporary temporal

> order, including the legitimacy of an exclusively economic and quantitative interpretation of time, the subordination of (unpaid) 'life' time to (paid) work time as the fundamental principle regulating society and personal identity, the neglect of the nature of care time as an open-ended, circular and repetitive time that is about human well-being (e.g. raising a child), and has little capacity to be 'rushed' or accelerated.'
>
> (Zhou, 2015, pp.167-168)

Taking time for what feels necessary therefore becomes an act of resistance against capitalist clock time. For example, at IAFS in San Francisco, my respondent tells me about recent graduates who had been evicted from their university since it closed from Covid-19 leading a class on grief, imparting 'a willingness to say this is what's important in my world.' (respondent C). The structure afforded by IAFS that centres care and mutual-aid allows time for individual expressions, for democratic leadership and matters of care to take a leading role. The direction of their pedagogy flows non-linearly. It contains interruptions for different participation, it grows from the desires of participants. At the same time, the 'semester' model of proposing and participating in courses is still held onto; courses come and go with the seasons, suggesting that these formal structures which are inherited from university models have not been completely abandoned. It shows that IAFS are not abolishing wholesale the structures handed down and entrenched by the neoliberal model, but are adapting it to suit a critical, more emancipatory and democratic alternative.

There are numerous other examples to how the human body, emotions and processes that are asynchronous with capitalist time have been subjected to its control. Similarly, with education and learning, Respondent L said:

> 'One of the things that I would love to see happen is the removal of the length of the course. And that people would leave when they felt satisfied that they'd had enough time to think about something. I think timing how someone learns is a completely odd form of measurement.' (Respondent L)

In reference to respondent L's desire for university course lengths to be removed, for time to be taken appropriate to the needs of the student, and for respondent D's understanding

of people's different capacity to show up for a course, Barthes' concept of idiorrhythmy can help. Idiorrhythmy is, simply, 'where each subject lives according to his own rhythm.' (Barthes, 2013, p.6) It is characteristic of 'a median, utopic, Edenic, idyllic form' falling between the interactions of social and individual rhythms (Barthes, 2013; Tygstrup, 2018, p.224). It is:

> …a flexible, free, mobile rhythm; a transitory, fleeting form, but a form nonetheless… a rhythm that allows for approximation, for imperfection, for a supplement, a lack. (Barthes, 2013, p.35)

Idiorrhythmy stands in counterpoint to authoritarian, homogenous rhythms that organise life according to dogmatic forms of capitalist production. It doesn't pit self against other, but rather is about 'finding oneself in the syncopated mesh of rhythms' (Tygstrup, 2018, p.229), in which a person's unique rhythm emerges dialectically, informed and shaped by and shaping in turn a rich social tapestry of rhythms. Barthes, through the concept of idiorrhythmy gestures towards a convivial and forgiving form of social life that allows for both individual and collective flourishing. In Barthes' project, a fantasy about how to live together, we are encouraged to imagine self-organised art education that makes room for difference and exists fully as process rather than outcome-orientated. As Tygstrup (2018) explains, 'Living together is defined…by way of temporal processes, and then eventually by way of the place that comes through the encounter between these processes, the "zone" articulated through the interplay of differently organized temporalities.' (p.225) Rhythm, for Barthes, is about difference, variation, fluidity, intensity and ephemerality (p.226). It is reflective of complex lives and irregular patterns of working life, which brings a heightened sense of agency to participants that they can integrate the commitments of the programme into their lives rather than have to subordinate their time to the demands of a rigid programme. Respondent B mentioned that her age, part-time working pattern and low-income were all 'pragmatic' reasons why she chose to participate in an alternative art school: 'for financial reasons, caring responsibilities and working…for someone with different life experiences.' Similarly, respondent E mentioned the flexibility of the programme, 'around your life, your money, your work, your responsibilities.'

Flexible working, however, has become a hallmark of neoliberal restructuring, allowing the worker to be productive at any time and blurs the work/life boundary, 'achieving flexible cover for the increasingly dominant 24/7 economy' (Rubery, 2015) and extends worker responsibilities to all hours of the day and the 'intrusion of work into all aspects of life.' (ibid) Rubery explains that this flexibilization 'reduces labour costs, serves the 24/7 economy and enables global markets to operate across different time zones.' (ibid) 'Flexibilization', (ibid), therefore, refers to changes to labour market relationships since the 1960s, with in the UK a decline in trade union power since the 1980s, and with the UK government launching a consultation into 'Making flexible working the default' (Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, 2021) in September 2021. In Fordism, employers incentivised and emphasised longevity and loyalty through the promise of predictable promotions and a "job for life". Under neoliberalism, employers 'cross-utilize employees' (Stone 2004, p.80), re-casualising work and 'de-emphasize attachment' (p.82). Workers wanted more flexible working practices, but the demand was appropriated with the diminution of labour rights and security. This is Bifo Berardi's argument when he claims that 'Workers demanded freedom from the life-time prison of the industrial factory. Deregulation responded with the flexibilisation and the fractalisation of labour.' (Berardi, 2003) While the flexibilization of the labour force has led some critics to assert that artists have become model workers under contemporary capitalism (Kunst, 2015) my respondents, expressed relief at being able to have the flexibility of the programme around their other life commitments and activities – the programme enjoys actual flexibility, as opposed to the perceived flexibility of capitalist work. The models of alternative art school explored here run on idiorrhythmic time, with flexibility built into their structures as an answer to divergent human temporalities.

Time corresponding to measurement and notions of success also plays a part, in which one respondent, an organiser of an artist development programme talked about slowing down and decoupling time with success:

> 'But I guess like, not in the university way that you're trying to strive for something or achieve something. I think, and especially this year it's felt like I don't know whether it's because of COVID and everyone's slowed down so much but like, much more kind of celebrations of small wins and stuff, like, just trying out new materials

> and new skill where, like, I don't know if we would have talked so much about the details of that otherwise – I think there would have been much more emphasis on where are you going, where are you gonna get to. And I kept trying to slow that down, but obviously it's hard when you wanna…we all wanna progress, we all wanna get better at what we do or like have more money to do it...' (Respondent I, Into the Wild)

The above quotation from Respondent I speaks to ideas about time, and completion in a set amount of time, as a marker of success. Rising numbers of HE students attend university having been conditioned by their compulsory schooling to experience an educational system which is focussed on passing exams rather than taking time, experimenting, questioning, and caring. I've learned from academic colleagues who teach on Fine Art, Anthropology and Law courses that students arrive at university anxious to know how to "get a First" before engaging with the course materials or being open to a learning process. It seems that Benjamin's 'homogenous, empty time' (2007, p.261) is embedded in their rhythms, and from my understanding of some of my respondents, alternative art schools intentionally attempt to unpick. In those models, there is emphasis on process, incompletion and elusiveness, which are characteristic of idiorrhythmy. It corresponds with a form of postcapitalist subjectivity that could be borne from alternative modes of art education as seen in the sites explored in this thesis, and brings to mind Harney and Moten's argument in *The Undercommons* (2013, p.28):

> 'What the beyond of teaching is really about is not finishing oneself, not passing, not completing; it's about allowing subjectivity to be unlawfully overcome by others, a radical passion and passivity such that one becomes unfit for subjection…'

Allowing space for divergent temporalities therefore appears as a form of care. It holds power in theory to disrupt capitalist time and substantiate efforts to acknowledge and make room for variety, difference and complexity in the lives of adult learners.

3.6. Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed and argued for time and space as core facets of pedagogical provision for artmaking and explored these as core traits of the alternative education

models as part of their infrastructures of care. Led by my data, the chapter began by examining art as a "free" space and the relationship between art and freedom, which I explored through a discussion of art as the antithesis of work under capitalism. I argued that the alternative art schools explored in this thesis express a new art for art's sake in which artmaking in community is process-based and centred around creating spaces of sanctuary away from the wage-relation. I then used this as grounds for exploring space more abstractly through the concept of the 'oceanic', which Jackie Wang (2016) argues can form new modes of sociality and boundlessness between self and other. I argued that this constitutes for interpersonal, group process in art education that can underscore postcapitalist ontologies and undercut the individualising and consumer-oriented approach of Higher Education. From the abstract to the more concrete, I then explored space-holding in pedagogical art spaces for vulnerability and conflict, looking to the idea of the 'encounter' (Hoad, 2021) to articulate the disappointments and missed opportunities in the online space during the pandemic, and how vulnerability and conflicts were experienced during that time within the groups being discussed.

The chapter then turned from space to a discussion of time. I connect care to ideas of time and temporality, bringing in notions of non-linearity as well as idiorrhythmy (Barthes, 2013) to substantiate my respondents' claims about the disconnect between the time allocated by universities and how learning actually corresponds to an individual's real experience. Idiorrhythmy, in particular, is useful for connecting ideas of temporality with post-capitalist subjectivity, which I have correlated to conviviality and difference. I argue, in line with my respondents, that there is an incongruity between learning and the 'homogenous, empty time' (Benjamin, 2007, p.261) imposed by the quantified, measurement and outcomes-based courses in university models, and argue in favour of a more temporally divergent model that holds space for plurality and difference. At the same time, recognition is given to the struggle between structure and structurelessness, between flexibility and commitment and the different needs facing learners and teachers in finding a mode of organisation that foregrounds care – by taking time and making space – while holding fast to known methods of rigour in creating lasting bonds, process-oriented art making and community building.

Chapter Four

Towards Transindividual Pedagogies

This chapter looks at desires for the future of art education, leaning towards the utopian, prefigurative practices within the settings of alternative arts pedagogical contexts explored in this thesis. The chapter uses narratives from my interviews gathered during lockdown in January and February 2021 to understand how prefiguration is implicit in the contexts of the respondents and how they narrate those experiences. Ideas of play and pleasure will be discussed as well as asset-based methodologies and tools for peer-led learning. The chapter will theoretically look towards the notion of a postcapitalist subjectivity stemming from conversations with my respondents. In particular, I turn away from the individualist neoliberal subject and towards a more collective formulation. The discussion will therefore be framed by the concept of transindividuality as discussed and explained in the introduction to the thesis. Transindividuality (Read, 2016; Vujanović and Cvejić, 2022) is used in this chapter as a way of breaking the oppositional binary between the individual and the collective. As Read explains, 'Simondon's concept of transindividuation… breaks with a longstanding binary that sees the relationship between individual and collective as a zero-sum game – seeking instead their mutual points of intersection and transformation.' (2015, p.6) I posit the usefulness of this concept for understanding how respondents see themselves, their communities, and their work in the context of a society poisoned by a 'crisis of social imagination' and 'the loss of any long-term perspective [for] a vision of a common world.' (Vujanović and Cvejić, 2022, p.13). Looking at the production of subjectivity within alternative art schools from an ontology of transindividuality helps to envision new modes of collectivity against the dominant mode of individualism that is endorsed and perpetuated by higher education institutions. From this premise it can be said to be an attempt at prefigurative politics by building relationships based on care, mutual-aid and cooperation.

The chapter begins with a discussion of transindividuality as postcapitalist ontology. It explores respondents' political motivations for participating in alternative art school scenes and analyses how it corresponds to a utopian horizon against and beyond neoliberal individualism. The chapter then posits David Graeber's idea of 'everyday communism' as a

way of understanding prefiguration and utopia, and analyses narratives from the interviews as well as other examples to bring this to the forefront. From there, the chapter links desire and joy approached via Spinoza and Deleuze; desire and joy are conceptually linked because they build on the prefigurative and the utopian and are attached to what Lauren Berlant addresses as an 'enduring collectivity' (2011, p.225), when 'amidst all the chaos, crisis, and injustice in front of us, the desire for alternative filters that produce the sense – if not the scene – of a more liveable and intimate sociality is another name for a desire for the political.' (p.227) I then move to analyse asset-based methodologies in pedagogical examples of assessment, value and measurement, looking at an example of an alternative "crit" from Islington Mill Art Academy, and of an experience-based learning card game called REBEL (Recognising Experience Based Education and Learning), both of which posit alternative ways of student-centred relations and value judgements in arts pedagogy.

4.1. Transindividuality as postcapitalist ontology.

This section underscores where transindividuality as a postcapitalist ontology is located, specifically looking at examples from TOMA through my interview material. It looks at the political context and motivations for TOMA's existence, originating from working-class identity, and looks at empathy and intimacy as ripple-effects, through which dance and movement is used metaphorically and analogously to illustrate the power of being together in physical space in contrast to the flattened experience of Zoom during the pandemic. It argues that TOMA, as an alternative to Higher Education, sets up its values, motivations and practices to allow for flows of political consciousness against and beyond the logic of neoliberal capitalism, even if individual participants come to the programme without a predisposition to radical politics or simply with the desire to attend a structured art-making programme outside of the university system.

4.1.1. Desiring the political

Following Lauren Berlant, we can understand postcapitalism as a political desire for 'a more liveable and intimate sociality' (Berlant, 2011, p.227). I therefore ask whether my

respondents saw themselves and their practices through this lens, in other words, if they saw their practices as political. For some of my respondents, there was an explicit underlying political motivation for creating an alternative to HAE (Higher Art Education). A key organiser of TOMA, for example, told me that 'the recession [had] really shaped [her] practice,' (respondent K), relating it to 'fee hikes' and 'the invisible and visible hierarchies that come with trying to access specifically art education'. More viscerally, she expressed outrage at the way institutions treat their students as 'walking cash balances' (ibid), alluding to the monetisation of higher education and the policies that place outcomes and league tables as more important than student and staff wellbeing and creative expression. Her motivations were fuelled by her anger at injustice; she was 'pissed off' at the 'bullshit' and 'lack of transparency' to do with the increase in tuition fees. A triple increase in tuition fees was the result of the Browne Report (2010), a government research document on 'securing a sustainable future for higher education'. She said, 'I was a student representative, so I was going to these big meetings and asking questions like where is this extra £6,000 going? What is happening with this money? And they just could not answer me.' When asked of her motivations for organising TOMA, she responded, 'It was in direct response to personal situations that happened to me…'; 'my passion for accessible education' and 'I did it to fucking survive.' She elaborated: 'I always bring it back to the recession and I always bring it back to austerity. I felt powerless with those institutional and structural systems.' The respondent's anger and frustration moved her to build her own programme more aligned with her values, creating a political action away from neoliberal capitalism and towards an imagined other foregrounded by intimacy, co-creation and transparency.

This was similarly reflected in another participant on the TOMA programme, who, coming from a working-class background and knowing from the age of 18 that she wanted to study art, 'was interested in the alt. art school ideas' because 'they had a kind of community school to them and they were political and kind of against everything that was perhaps happening in the universities' (respondent J). Respondent J is referring to the wave of alternative art schools that began to grow in popularity since the rising of tuition fees in the UK in 2011, in which organisations including Islington Mill Art Academy (Salford), Open School East (formerly East London, now Margate), Alternative Art College (Lincoln), AltMFA (London), AntiUniversity Now (London) were set up directly to challenge university courses

and present an alternative to them (Thorne, 2017). That she was seeking community and intimacy led her away from her first choice of Central Saint Martin's, where at an open day she saw that someone had graffitied 'I'm so lonely here' on the walls, prompting her to gravitate instead towards Byam Shaw School of Art, a smaller independent art school which later, in 2003, was – ironically – absorbed into Central Saint Martin's as part of the Bologna Process (The European Higher Education Area, 1999).

What drew her and 'many others in the alternative art school scene' (respondent J) to Byam Shaw was the importance of it being 'a small arts school' and a 'community' where 'a lot of ideas developed for a lot of people'. According to respondent J, Byam Shaw held space for creative people to experiment with their ideas, but in a loosely structured way. However, she noticed that 'the lack of structured teaching' (ibid) began to make itself apparent in how 'the gaps in access were starting to play out' between middle-class and working-class students.' (ibid) Giving structure to an art programme was an element brought forward to TOMA from respondents K and J, both of whom came from a working-class background, are politically attuned and active and integrate their politics and values into the programme. The narrative of respondent J conveys someone with a predisposition towards a different pedagogical approach and already politically engaged; her ontology was from the beginning already directed away from the measurement-based instrumentalism of higher education in the UK. Her involvement in TOMA helped to solidify her values which are distinctly alternative to higher education objectives.

The values implemented at TOMA have created ripple-effects into other areas of their participants' working lives. Respondent J, who works as an art teacher in post-16 education, has felt the effects of being at TOMA ripple into her work with students. Aside from the challenges of having 80 students to teach, she brings to her pedagogy the following philosophy: 'I'm not the fountain of knowledge as a teacher. We get through it by learning from each other and supporting each other…it's about this network of support.' Teaching fine art and textiles, she also gives the students the opportunity to exhibit, 'because it's self-affirming to see your work up and to have space for the freedom for what goes where.' I understand this as praxis, as the respondent bringing a transindividual ontology to her work with students, inviting a participatory, inclusive way of being in the classroom that has derived - in part - from her participation at TOMA. While TOMA itself

does not advertise itself as a political project, its ripple-effects are small yet evident in wider society through the small actions of people committed to fostering relational ethics and relational ontologies. It follows that this particular type of political desire can be considered as a transindividual affect and ontology, as it understands collectivity and commons beyond neoliberal individualism and individualist hegemonic structures.

4.1.2. Personal transformations.

While respondents K and J had more explicitly political motivations for the project, other participants on the programme who I spoke to saw their involvement in a different light and did not see the programme as a political vehicle; yet they underwent transformations in their personal lives and ways of relating to others as a result of being with the programme. Respondent B, for example, a working-class woman without any formal background in art, told me about the transformative personal power of the TOMA programme: she felt 'validated as a maker' because being in the programme challenged 'beliefs I held about myself'. Using vivid language she said, 'it's almost like standing on your doorstep naked and being like, here, I am, here it is.' Learning about critical theory as part of the programme engendered further challenges to her life that allowed for deep self-reflection:

> 'It felt like undoing certain kinds of knots…Undoing ways of being. Because I hadn't had experiences of being with certain types of people who were on the programme who were challenging things that I took for granted. Learning art theory and humanities…looking at people like Foucault who are sort of challenging ways of like, historical ways of helping sick people…and that felt like what I was doing all the time. It felt like I was living two very separate lives because I was learning all of this new other world and then having to act in a very different way in the paid world. So it wasn't only exposure to a group who were thinking about things like gender equality and their identity and class and all of those things that go along with making art but in a way I hadn't necessarily been thinking about before or working with.'
> (respondent B)

This was echoed by respondent E, who, having studied for a Bachelor of Fine Arts at a university art school, benefitted from 'just connecting with people that I never would have done otherwise' and 'unlearning all the stuff that art school had taught me'. Respondent B similarly emphasised this aspect of 'unlearning', stating that a strong learning point for her was 'Learning that there is no end point', which points to the non-linearity of learning discussed in more detail in chapter three. Another participant whose understanding of the programme was not political remarked that 'it's certainly been transforming in terms of encouragement and thinking of new things…' but also that 'I don't think there's been a transformation in my thinking in politics and in relation to wider society.' (respondent A). Altogether, it is emphasised that some individual moments of political realisations had a tacit effect on many others in the group, which was experienced both individually and collectively. It is clear from respondent K, quoted below, that programmes such as TOMA are intentional about who their programme is for and who will gain the most out of them:

> 'These alternative models need to be just that, they need to be alternative systems for people who cannot access the traditional models, and that is what is at the forefront at TOMA. It's not a finishing school and it's not a space for people that already have MAs in that way, it's for people who can't access other models, so demographically we have age ranges from 21 up to late sixties. We have people from all disciplines, people that have been trained, commercial ceramicists their whole life but want to start expanding into contemporary art practice. We have people who have had caring responsibilities their whole life and the come into art a lot later on. We have people who have not got undergraduate degrees of any shape or form…so when we do the interviews (and I wish we didn't have to do applications or interviews, but that is trapped in those systems again) it's really important that the first thing we look for is a person's need for this thing.' (respondent K)

The experience of being in a programme such as TOMA, while heavily influenced by political context and barriers to access – austerity, recession, unaffordable art education, with social class and the experience of being working-class as a huge and significant factor – is not an explicitly political project, nonetheless can be considered a cultural force with political ripple effects, which I argue contain the seeds of an affective transindividuality.

4.1.3. Social Class.

Considering the visibility of social class, the working-class origins of the participants of TOMA and its location in Southend-on-Sea, a seaside town on the outskirts of London, I argue that as a project it attracts and produces a type of artist whose interests are displaced from the neoliberal notion of self-hood. Social class is made visible through the practice of TOMA as an organisation; it foregrounds economic disparity by creating infrastructures of transparency and care, and does not shy away from discussions of money. The neoliberal project, as it sought to erase social class from political discourse and weaken the power of trade unions, has been antagonised by artists who are re-asserting the necessity of social class as a means for mobilisation, as society becomes increasingly stratified. Calls for transparency from organisations such as TOMA, Babeworld, The White Pube and Art + Museum Transparency have helped to put class back on the agenda, seeing increasingly high levels of inequity in the art world and from artists emerging from Higher Education. The Coronavirus pandemic fuelled open discussions over salaries in the art world and who is financially able to complete unpaid internships. While TOMA is tied para-institutionally to the art world and does not function as a fully autonomous space, its practices and values are potentially producing a different kind of artist and political subject. They include those who historically have been typically excluded from the art world and, having entered into Higher Education through the Blair government's agenda to expand university participation, still felt 'out of place', which is a feeling attributed to experiences of inequality in the creative and cultural industries (Brook, O'Brien & Taylor, 2020). As neoliberalisation attempted to erase class identity and replace it with individualistic notions of 'selfhood' (Child, 2021, p.13), programmes such as TOMA seem to be placing lived experiences of social and economic disadvantage on its agenda, both pedagogically and within its organisational structures, thus making visible social class and contributing to the development of political consciousness and collectivity. The need for alternative art school programmes such as TOMA are therefore born from conditions of precarity and of the lack of access to other traditional methods of accessing art education, in an industry where it has been documented that only 12% of the workforce in music, performing and visual arts in the UK are from working-class backgrounds (Brook, O'Brien & Taylor 2020, p.12).

These ripple effects of political consciousness as previously mentioned in practice attend to a mode of feeling and touch – of being *touched* or *moved* by what social movement theorists have called social contagion, or from proponents of New Social Movement Theories (NSMT) who focus on categories of ethnicity, sexuality and class as factors that influence collective action (Buechler, 1995). To illustrate further, I find it useful to find analogies in the field of dance and movement, as theorists and practitioners in this field understand that feeling is a route to empathy and from there a route to being moved and transformed. This has implications for physical bodies in space, where during the Coronavirus pandemic the absence of physical bodies to constitute a physical community had to be replaced with the online realm of Zoom and virtual bodies over a felt sense of corporeality. In the dance form Contact Improvisation, for example, in which partners or groups explore movement through the sharing of weight, touch and awareness, there is a 'somatic state of responsiveness' (Albright, 2013, p.269) that is alive in the sharing of space and of physical touch. Dance ethnographer Deidre Sklar has called this a 'connected knowing' that 'produces a very intimate kind of knowledge.' (cited in ibid, p.271). In a space which is upheld by values of intimacy and togetherness and deliberately eschews an 'us and them' (respondent K) attitude of being in the art world, individualism begins to break down. Participants mentioned the sharing of food, the sharing of empathy and knowledge, and a sharing of grief, the affects of which resonate between and through bodies in a felt corporeal way. The metaphor of touching and moving substantially emphasises how a political vibration is felt through the organisation even while some individuals had not understood it as such. Desiring the political, in Berlant's sense, is evident through the cognitive and somatic learning that can only be practically embodied in relationship with others as they experience a process together. This is at the heart of transindividuality as postcapitalist ontology which underscores a way of understanding collectivism without ignoring individuality. To emphasise this further, I will look how alternative economies in the art school models presented here represent aspects of prefiguration and micro-utopias, with reference to David Graeber's 'everyday communism' (2011, p.100).

4.2. Prefiguration & micro-utopias.

Prefiguration is a term from social movement theory to describe 'the attempted construction of alternative or utopian social relations in the present.' (Yates, 2015, p.1) The term was coined by Carl Boggs who defined it as 'the embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a social movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal' (1977, p.100). This definition grew out of his observations of New Left politics embedded within social movements during the 1970s in the USA. According to Kreutz (2020), organisations, social and political movements which practice prefigurative politics 'plant the seeds of the society of the future in the soil of today's' by 'having your means match the ends you can expect.'

The concept of prefiguration is useful to describe the practices within the arts pedagogical spaces investigated in this thesis. I understand prefigurative politics allied with Luke Yates (2015) as 'collective attempts to create social change' (p.2) through prefiguring utopian aspects that they wish to see in the future society predicated upon the abolition of capitalist exploitation and its intersecting oppressions, such as racism, homophobia, transphobia and ableism. Implicit in my interviews with respondents, however, was a sense that this understanding of their participation in the groups varied in motivation and was broadly connected to a sense of personal transformation over and above a broader concern with social change and collective action. However, as explained in the previous section, the ripple effects of such personal transformations effectuate social contagion and bring fresh understandings of group identity, belonging and political challenges. Broadly, as it has been explored in previous chapters, it was evidenced that participants had been consciously practicing non-violent communication, non-hierarchical approaches to pedagogy and, as will be discussed later in this chapter, methods of peer-assessment that are asset-based rather than punitive or based on a model of deficit. Taken together, these function to propel long-term engagement with artistic practice rather than short-term focused drives to pass an exam or gain employment in the creative industries. Within this exploration the following questions can be posed: how might pedagogical experiments and organisations studied in this thesis connect to form a broad alliance within an ecosystem that, taken as an assemblage, can be leveraged as alternatives to the study and practice of art in a higher

education context? How can they become a movement against higher education through prefigurative practice?

The horizon of possibility reflected in the work of TOMA, for example, demonstrates a utopianism and prefiguration put into practice at the level of organisation and organisational responsibility towards participants. It can be seen as an example of what the late anthropologist David Graeber has called 'everyday communism' (2011, p.100) or 'baseline communism' (p.101), which in his book *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (2011) he argues is 'the ground of all human social life' (ibid) and at the point of sharing food, stories, music and other pleasures is 'at the root of most things we consider fun' (p.99) as well as a general sense of helping each other out beyond reciprocity. Rather than communism being 'some magical utopia' (p.95), it is 'something that exists right now…to some degree in any human society.' (ibid) It is part of an economic diversity that exists within capitalism, and as Graeber argues, capitalism, as well as many other social systems, has 'always been built on top of a bedrock of actually-existing communism.' (ibid) Graeber therefore places communism as a mode of relations where value and praxis exist as qualitatively *other* than the often regarded as totalising system of exchange and transaction-based social relations specific to capitalism. The kind of politics that are built upon such relationships has been called 'postcapitalist' by theorists such as Gibson-Graham, whereas anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing understands it differently. She uses the term 'pericapitalist' to acknowledge the movement between capitalist and noncapitalist forms, venturing that pericapitalist economic forms 'can be sites for rethinking the unquestioned authority of capitalism in our lives' (2015, p.65) and that, while we are entangled within capitalism, economic diversity offers multiple possibilities forwards. Instead of using Tsing's term 'pericapitalist', however, I will use 'postcapitalist' as an insight into Graeber's understanding of communism, as both a *here and now* and as an example of prefigurative politics.

4.2.1. Micro-utopias

The settings that I visited saw themselves as 'micro-utopias', which is itself a model of prefiguration, of creating the collaborative space of mutual-aid and mutual flourishing that participants hope to bring about in their efforts with each other in their art practice and in

their community at the alternative art school. Many of the aspects of micro-utopia spoke to a desire to find belonging, safety and challenge, where peer support and peer learning take place. Respondent K, reflecting on the most recent cohort of participants that had been supporting each other through the Coronavirus pandemic said:

> 'People don't want to leave [TOMA]… so we talk a lot about creating mini utopian art worlds in direct response to… they're small fleeting moments of awesomeness in direct response to the art market.'

The culture and pedagogy of TOMA as 'a direct response to the art market' alludes to art institutions whose present inaccessibility foregrounds histories of exclusion and exclusivity. Organisations such as TOMA exist because of a need to generate different criteria of value set apart from the traditional elitism of art. Respondent K qualified this with:

> 'Not everyone wants to have that kind of non-boundaried, really close, weird, messy relationship that kind of happens with a lot of artists on the programme, but I think if you're up for being human to human and actually getting to know each other, then that's something TOMA can offer.' (Respondent K)

The utopian in this statement is a gesture towards making these different worlds according to the actions and beliefs of the participants: 'we are trying in our own little way to make these mini-utopias for groups of people, and there isn't this idea of us and them or competition… it's about trying as much as possible to eradicate that elite system that can come within education or specifically within the art world.' (Respondent K)

These quotations from respondent K, a key organiser in the alternative art school scene in the UK, speak to the need to abolish pretences for making art. By removing requirements, art making becomes an activity for anyone and brings it back to its fundamental humanity. Respondent K said, 'I teach in other places, at adult colleges, and I teach people that have come to learning art a lot later in their lives and they're always like, I'm not an artist, like, I don't know what this means and I kind of want to get rid of that.' Art making becomes untethered to obligations of fulfilling market imperatives or from getting into an art school or university. It instead becomes about community, forming relationships with self and others and producing a co-learning environment where each participant has their own reason for being there. This was echoed by participant B who told me, 'it's made

me realise that ultimately that's what it's all about: it's being with a group of people and having an opinion on something and responding to things in your life and showing it. And that's what it is, that's all it is.'

4.2.2. Alternative economies.

The organiser of TOMA, respondent K, explained to me her interest in alternative economics and circular economies, using a circular economic model for TOMA's sustainability. As she explained to me:

> 'People pay £75 a month to access it. We have two free spaces a year as well, which are supported, one by a private benefactor and one by [the artist] Sarah Lucas. People pay in, monthly or however they can, but I am transparent about where their money goes, and I also get funding in to commission them, so I pay them £150 back, or I get them some teaching work, so they never really actually pay the full year. I'm very interested in money and how people survive because it's something I've always had to think about… we are trapped in this capitalist system, so it's how we can do that more ethically and in a more caring way.' (respondent K)

Circular economies have gained traction as an ethical mode of transitioning out of economies of waste and towards more sustainable avenues of economic activity. Circular economies circulate resources, products and materials, and in doing so help to eliminate waste and promote sustainability (Ellen Macarthur Foundation). So far there is evidence of circular economic models being taken up in education, which is being called the ability to apply 'circular thinking' (ibid). For example, scholars at the Manchester Fashion Institute who have researched circular economies as a pedagogical innovation at the Amsterdam Fashion Institute's (AMFI) Reality School (Hall & Velez-Colby, 2018), have shown the connections between industry and curriculum design and pedagogy, including how the former influences the latter. As the capitalist fashion industry produces some of the most severe waste globally, there is an urgent need for sustainable and ethical practices. AMFI's Reality School concept uses a circular economy at the level of pedagogy and curricula, which

scholars have found generates 'deep learning' (2018, p.15) as opposed to surface-level knowledge retention for short-term outcomes and objectives, e.g. for passing assessments. Most significantly, with a circular economy model embedded into the curricular, they found that 'circularity offers a unifying framework for systems thinking: a holistic approach to identifying challenges, defining problems and exploring potential solutions that transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries.' (ibid) The way that organisational systems are designed influence the way people behave and what they produce. While this thesis does not study the effects of the circular economy adopted by TOMA on the participants, what is clear is that the intentional circular economic design invests back into the organisation and facilitates ontological foundations for community sustainability and replenishment rather than the take-and-leave model of modern universities. People who have passed through TOMA are invited to stay on with them through the **TOMA**ssociates, which ensures the continuation of the community, the circulation of knowledge and depth encounters.

Another example of an alternative economy that facilitates postcapitalist ontologies is through a cooperative model. In 2019, artist Sophia Kosmaoglou undertook a research project and initiated a series of workshops centred around the question of how to make a cooperative art school. She was inspired by the Social Science Centre in Lincoln, which was a model of cooperative education set up by Mike Neary and Joss Winn in 2011 and which ran until 2019. The cooperative model is part of what is called a solidarity economy, which describes a 'sustainable and equitable community-control of work, food, housing, and culture using a variety of organizational forms' (Woolard, et al, 2021, p.154) and is a method of design to meet the needs of people and communities (ibid, p.7) During Kosmaoglou's research, she asked questions such as 'how would a cooperative art school be organised and structured?' (Kosmaoglou, 2019), 'would a cooperative art school incorporate assessments?', and how to resist common tendencies such as volunteer burn out and informal hierarchies (ibid). Among these questions, she proposed that a cooperative art school would be 'democratically run', 'provide independence and self-determination in a supportive community of peers. It would foster collaboration and solidarity, alleviating anxiety and isolation. It would provide access to shared resources, expertise, training, skill-sharing and collaborative curriculum design.' (ibid) She proposes the cooperative economic model as a potential solution to the lack of sustainability of

most alternative art education programmes that often rely heavily on volunteers and which lack sustainable funding. She argues that cooperative education could complement the other economic models offered by programmes such as TOMA.

Turning back to TOMA's circular model, I asked my respondents how it works practically between participants. Respondent E said that the organiser 'put in our first commission all together where we were all commissioned to make a bit of merchandise for a shop', which participants then received half the sales from. 'We got a couple of hundred quid out of the pot,' she told me with pride, which made the cohort feel valued alongside the small amount of money they were putting in each month for TOMA. Unlike other models of alternative art schools such as the former Islington Mill Art Academy, which bore no cost for participants, TOMA charges a small monthly amount. The organiser, respondent K, explained that:

> 'the budget has always been completely transparent to participants, so they know exactly how much is being spent on what, and we give participants input into what they learn, so we pass it over to the groups to decide what workshops they want to do, who they want to come visit, all those kinds of things, so it's really nice that they feed that into me and I administer and make everything happen.'

She also told me about their collaborative practice and transparent ways of working: 'we now have a shared rate card…it's really important that people's labour is valued…' and she was forthright that this transparency is imperative to 'building a genuine community' and to 'build really close relationships'.

4.2.3. Co-creating exhibitions in unusual spaces.

Prefigurative practices that lean towards micro-utopian politics are also evident in the group's exhibition practices. The organiser of TOMA ensured that participants had significant input into the co-creation of space to exhibit work and co-curate. The exhibition that I visited of the cohort's work was displayed in a shop-front opposite Card Factory in a shopping centre. 'It's not where you expect to find an arts space!' respondent E exclaimed.

When I went to visit the exhibition in May 2021, I saw it as resembling a micro-utopian space co-mingling with capitalist social relations, a non-commercial space injected into a space of commerce and exchange. This is distinct, however, from the micro-utopias of Nicolas Bourriaud's relational aesthetics, which he argues posit the deliberate artistic intervention of 'relational space-times…spaces where we can elaborate alternative forms of sociability, critical models and moments of constructed conviviality.' (Bourriaud, 2002) I argue here that TOMA's exhibition space is not itself the work of art but functions incidentally as a space of imagining otherwise. As opposed to it being a micro-utopia based on a model of relational art, it seems more akin to what, in anthropological literature on ecology, Tsing might call a 'contaminating relationality' (2015, p.40); Joseph Beuys might have addressed it as social sculpture; it could also resonate with Mark Fisher's understanding of the weird, 'the presence of that which does not belong' (2016, p.61). They all serve to highlight that the presence of contrasting encounters in the social world engender indeterminacy and transformation, which I have elaborated upon elsewhere in chapter four (4.3). They are interruptions of what is considered normal: a DIY, self-organised, explicitly anti-capitalist art exhibition in a store-front opposite Card Factory in a shopping centre. Contrary to some prefigurative, semi-autonomous micro-utopias that figure in Leftist activism, this exhibition by TOMA participants is not separate from the "outside world"; it chose instead to present itself as a counterpoint to commerce, inviting complexity and a different relationship to subjectivity into a place otherwise prescribed for monetary transactions. See *Figure 1* and *Figure 2* at the end of this chapter, which shows the exterior and interior of the exhibition space.

4.2.4. 'Being with'.

Thematically, the idea of 'being with' (respondent B, sections 3.4. and 4.1.2.) showed up for another participant. Respondent A, who joined as a participant of TOMA having been an artist his whole life in an isolated and secluded way, told me that joining the group had helped enormously in myriad ways with his mental health. Art is 'giving me some worth' and 'helping me through life', he commented. Having lived with depression his whole life, being part of an artistic community, receiving stimulus and insight from others has helped him to

feel ‘buoyant’. He continued: ‘I’ve got to do something for today…I think stimulus is so important. Stimulus from other people with their ideas, a stimulus of taking something along to show other people and a sort of responsibility to yourself to make an effort to try and do something, make something, if for nothing else than to not want to look stupid or to try and justify your existence as an artist, you make…all things that help you get out of bed. I’ve opened my eyes to being part of a group…it hasn’t yet convinced me to become a collaborative artist…but I’m a hell of a lot nearer collaboration than I was in my shed!’ (respondent A) His was a sad story – a person who had made many compromises in his life and still blames himself – he had individualised the trauma he experienced of having been at art school in the 1970s. He still feels the sense of resignation of never having “made it” as an artist, indicative of an entrenched art school myth around success and being serendipitously lucky (Scarsbrook, 2021, pp.219-220). Joining TOMA, however, was an enabling force in his life that engendered personal transformation.

In terms of ontology and subjectivity, I argue that this example is illustrative of the makings of a transindividual self. Through the narratives of my respondents discussed above, a story is told of becoming part of a group that nourishes individuality while at the same time forming a group identity. As Vujanović and Cvejić point out, this process of relationality summons an ‘I’ and ‘we’ which are ‘co-formed in the midst of their pre-individual conditions and potentials.’ (2022, p.288) According to Vujanović and Cvejic, this process brings about ‘a relation of relations, whereby individuals are individuated through the reciprocal individuation of the collective.’ (ibid) It is my contention that these intentional and consciously-formed structures as evidenced in alternative pedagogical environments can pose significant alterations in subjectivity, which, leaning towards transindividuality, have potentially disruptive consequences for capitalist neoliberal subjectivity and are generative, forward-looking and prefigurative of postcapitalism in our social relations. Under current conditions of late capitalism and the alienation it produces, it would seem that peer-led groups of artists come together as ‘the sum of alienated particularities’ (Vujanović and Cvejic, 2002, p.249), or ‘nothing other than the sum total of self-interested competitive relations.’ (Read, 2012, p.54). A transindividual pedagogy, however, strives towards a collective process of transformation in which people emerge and unfold together,

experientially. As Jason Read writes with regards to Spinoza, 'individuation is constituted through relations, not in spite of them.' (2012, p.46)

An example of this was more readily evident with IAFS, the group of artists and activists in San Francisco whom I researched. Having formed through a traumatic shared experience in 2020 at the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic and the temporary closure of the San Francisco Art Institute, the group asked themselves, 'where do we go from here?' At a meeting that I attended on Zoom, the poignant question was raised: 'How do we use art, care and radical vulnerability to bring something kind to the world?' and 'How to exist when the weight of the world is crushing you?' These questions posit a critical and radical pedagogy that is reflexive and already presupposes the skills and knowledge of the involved participants to bring their insights to produce new knowledge and a co-created peer-led learning environment, and which asks direct questions about how to create space for being together in ways which are qualitatively concerned with remaking the world as an exercise of active imagination away from the confines and preconditions of capitalist and neoliberal hegemony.

One participant in IAFS, an artist and primary school teacher, raised to the group the issue of how, as individuals and as a collective, they can 'be part of what we perceive as the times.' In other words, how can the group make connections with world events and local and global politics? Attempting to find congruence with her work as a primary school teacher and her work as an artist in the group, she brought to the group her involvement with practicing anti-racism in classrooms, while another participant shared that she wanted to work on a regular grief support group, making space for holding each other. That she isn't a grief specialist makes it all the more democratic and radical, because the work relies on experience, necessity and willingness. It taps into Illich's idea that anyone can be a teacher, a facilitator or leader if they have something to share with others, and so further breaks down the need for expert knowledge. Learning becomes a shared experience that pertains to lived experience, has value in itself and is not extrinsically motivated.

4.3. Desire.

The groups studied in this thesis have formed through similar needs, and also similar desires. They want to make art freely, in community with others and outside the regimented constraints of a modern university system; they want to co-create their learning experiences. Underlying these desires is the more ontologically-oriented desire to produce, through their constitutive relations, a world where individuals do not see themselves as isolated and related only through competition (Read, 2012, p.58). Instead, what becomes apparent through the narratives of the interview material is a need to be together, a need which gained heightened urgency during the Coronavirus pandemic. The artists at IAFS 'emerged out the necessity to stay connected' (Respondent F), and the TOMA participants continued their meetings online and found activities that helped them to foster a sense of togetherness. This section focuses on desire and its connection to joy through Spinozan thought. It looks at some of the desires coming out of IAFS and the role of emotionality in group processes. It then looks at examples of desiring otherwise, from desire into action with concrete examples of asset-based methodologies for modelling a different kind of "assessment" used at Islington Mill Art Academy and a higher education setting.

The concept of desire emerges in Spinozist terms as a capacity to affect and be affected by the world, in which the individual is a vehicle for 'open communication' – process and relation, acquiring ontological depth…forming a sort of 'ontology of relations'. (Read, 2012, p.71) This process of chasing one's desire through transindividual activity is what Spinoza calls 'joy' (Deleuze 1993, p.140). One of my respondents, an artist working with young people and arts pedagogy, told me that he 'takes joy and pleasure very seriously' (respondent H) at his work, terms which will be further unpacked in the discussion of an experiential learning game (REBEL) later in this chapter.

In an online meeting with some member of IAFS, they expressed their desires to me as the following:

'Structure doesn't work for us.'

'A lot of us struggle with mental health.'

'We are stuck in the ways we learned from school.'

‘We want to bring what we do in the real world to mirror what we bring to the group.’

‘We want casual time together to create community.’

‘We want space for contradiction.’

‘I know I can come here and be in a safe space.’

‘There’s a low bar of entry.’

These expressions of needs and desires are also expressions of collectivity and a yearning for *other than what is* and are formed through being together and sharing experience.

For Spinoza, desire is about striving, and what we desire is constituted by and determined by ‘our history, by a particular determination of our affects and knowledge.’ (ibid, p.45) ‘Desire is an essence that is singular and relational, rather than universal and foundational.’ (ibid, p.46) According to Spinoza, our desires are framed relationally through affects – resonances of love, hate, desire and fear radiate through individuals that are being individuated transindividually. Desires are formed through the well of these intertwined, dialectical resonances. ‘Objects and individuals that we desire, that we love, become the conditions of other loves and hatreds, as we love the things that resemble them or are the causes of their joys and sorrows, in an increasing spiral of conjunctions and connections.’ (ibid) The billowing mushroom effect that plays out between individuals plays into previously discussed ideas on social contagion. In *Joyful Militancy*, the authors emphasise that joy is ‘the growth of people’s capacity to do and feel new things.’ (2017) In contrast to happiness, which they understand as static, joy ‘is a *desubjectifying* process, an unfixing, an intensification of life itself.’ (emphasis the author’s). It is a ‘thinking-feeling’, an ‘active passion’, in which ‘you feel you have the power to change and feel yourself changing with what you’re doing, together with other people. It’s not a form of acquiescence to what exists.’ (Federici, 2017, cited in quoted in Bergman and Montgomery, 2017). Importantly, for the authors of *Joyful Militancy*, joy often comes with a range of emotions and ‘not by avoiding pain, but struggling amidst and through it.’ Marina Sitrin, an organiser and researcher writing in *Joyful Militancy*, expressed it simply: ‘How do we feel when we participate in a movement or group? What are our relationships to others in the group? Does it feel open? Caring? Social? Is there trust?’ (2017)

The role of relationships, emotions and desires has historically been ignored in social research (Snow, et al, p.2018). It has more recently, however, been understood as a 'new ethical turn' (Shankar, 2020) due to the uncertainty and precarity wrought by the Coronavirus pandemic, implying that the role of emotions is finally being taken seriously. This was acknowledged by respondent C from IAFS, who said: 'this kind of emotional opening up in the free school, I think provides an environment for people to…hopefully both do the political work as they develop a desire to do that and also to connect emotionally and build a community.' (respondent C, IAFS) This underscores the role of desire as political fuel in a self-organised group, keeping the group together, interested and motivated. Expressions of desire fed into the following section about grades, assessments & measurements which point towards a different future for art education practices.

4.3.1. Desiring otherwise: abolishing grades, assessments and measurements.

A distinguishing factor in alternative arts pedagogy that sets itself apart from the formalities and values of formal higher education is the lack of emphasis placed on grades, assessment and measurement. Alternative art schools and experiments in learning are free to create their own criteria for success; they do not adhere to standardisation, nor are they tethered to the labour market in the same way as universities are. Often this means that assessment is qualitative, processual and peer-led, and there isn't a grading system. Respondent D brought into focus that, for art students in the university, the process of grading is connected to a sense of vulnerability, for which a rigid system of measurement may not be appropriate:

> 'Here's what I have learnt can be done with these things. What are you going to do with these things? Show me. Right? But it's like the economy of it that just fucks it all up because now you are going to show me something, something vulnerable, something that has like come from your heart and I am going to like take out a ruler and be like hmm? You know? Which is not to say that there is not a place for that, but... it's not the only part of the process.' (respondent D)

The process of making and then showing artwork as 'something that comes from your heart' taps into a specifically 21st century model of contemporary artmaking, in which technique is no longer the most important criteria. Rather it is the subjectivity of the artist and the content of the work, often deeply related to an artist's sense of self, identity, culture or issues concerning social justice, that are communicated through a variety of media. Respondent D points to a level of incongruity correlated to the action of 'taking out a ruler' to measure a subjective experience of having made the artwork and the subjective experience of receiving it. As a group, organisers and participants of alternative art schools and pedagogical experiments in teaching and learning in art are not interested in subjecting their artworks or their processes to formal measurements of this kind. This is partially because the pressure of an employment pipeline for the cultural industries, or an investment in 'self' as human capital for the creative and cultural industries, does not exist as a priority. This stands in contrast to many universities, whose marketing is often explicitly tied to graduate employment prospects and employability figures over and above creativity and learning. Another reason why measurements in the form of grades are not given importance in alternative learning environments is because peer-led 'assessment' is seen as enough. This is often in the form of group crits, informal conversations and collaborative artwork, which pulls apart the need for competitiveness and instead forms semblances of togetherness, mutual self-empowerment and co-created knowledge. Research arguing that group crits in HE settings are unpleasant, confrontational experiences due to competitiveness and macho-culture has been discussed in chapter three. Art education is, in this argument, an exceptional environment to experiment with different forms of assessment because having a degree in art is not a necessity for making art. Research from the USA shows that, despite the large uptake of fine arts degrees, '40 percent of working artists do not have a bachelor's degree, and 16 percent of working artists have an arts related bachelor's degree.' (Jahoda, et al, 2014, p.3)

However, when schools do away with assessment and grades, what becomes of judgement and criticism? Is there a place for critique and judgement in a free school or radical learning environment where trauma-informed pedagogy and the cultivation of mutual-aid takes precedence over the content of the artwork? This was a question raised by respondent C, an active organiser at IAFS. Respondent C discussed the difference between art and craft in the elitism of the former and the democratic nature of the latter, that craft,

being democratic, 'is accessible to everybody, that it's part of everybody's life and should be part of everybody's life':

> 'When you have an idea of art, you also have an idea of judgement, of good and bad, so in the art world, craft is sometimes perfectly acceptable, as long as it's judged as being super special and super elitist, like somebody could make a quilt and that's just craft and somebody else could make a quilt and that be put in a museum. When you start to think about how to judge things you end up with this back and forth with no easy answer. Arts and crafts as trying to bring them together is a very difficult thing, because we want to judge. In some cases we need to judge. How do we provide the tools to people to judge how they improve in their own art making? They have to learn to judge what they like and what they don't like. The problem is when you have an elitist sphere that is judging and deciding what is acceptable and what is not, as opposed to a group of people that are working together and assisting each other in judging how they should improve. So…*how do we create a democratic sphere where everybody can contribute and can feel comfortable enough to create but everybody can feel comfortable enough to criticise themselves and others and create a movement towards something better in their work*?'

Respondent C asked the question, 'how can we create a democratic sphere that would allow people to also be judgemental?' This question can be reframed in terms of needs: there's a need to connect, to be seen and validated; there's also a need to judge and to critique. Can there be a propositional critique? A form of critical judgement that is based on further imagination and intrigue, rather than on negation and lack? What's implicit in the speech of respondent C is a need to democratise art pedagogy but with a reluctance to wholly let go of forms of value that have been created within a historical space based on exclusion and political formations rooted in possessive individualism.

An example of the fragility that comes with a crit in an alternative art school, where tension and conflict arise was narrated and recalled by another of my respondents, and speaks to the question raised by respondent C above. Respondent A of another alternative art school told me about a time when a participant was 'really, really discouraged' by what

was said in the group about their artwork. A participant who was already tentative about showing their portraits, courageously showed them to the group, and was met with a comment about the inappropriateness of 'appropriating other people's suffering', raising the question about what is or is not an "acceptable" thing to portray if making representational work. This, according to respondent A, made that participant depressed: 'it's made them feel they shouldn't, I think they've stopped painting…I think they're still doing some other art but they've become disengaged.' A further example is when respondent A reflected on a comment he made about someone's drawing:

> 'I really liked the drawing and thought it was weakened because the hand wasn't well-drawn, and I said the hand's a bit flabby, and I thought shit, that's a stupid thing to say.' (respondent A)

Respondent A remarked on 'how incredibly fragile we are and how very careful you have to be.'

Similarly, respondent J would like to see an art school which is not just skills-based but also has 'a rigorous critical side to it, where we would learn how to be critical in terms of analysing our own work but also that of others.':

> *'How do you run a crit that is supportive but also has structure to it*, so it's not just the ballsiest loudest person sort of takes over and is saying, you know, saying what they think, when we go round, or do I just speak objectively about what I see and then come to conclusions about how I think that they could be developed based on what this person is saying that they want, or can I just say I really hate that colour? There's no clear guidelines…' (Respondent J)

I will now turn to discuss an alternative approach to the crit: an example of an asset-based crit by Islington Mill Art Academy.

4.3.2. Asset-based assessment methodologies: challenging deficit-based systems of assessment and measurement.

4.3.2.1. Example 1: Islington Mill Art Academy '6 Thinking Hats' Critique session.

One such way to approach a crit that promotes a democratic sharing space, the welfare of participating artists and the need to judge or criticise is a format modelled on Edward de Bono's 'Six Thinking Hats', a technique that the 2019 cohort at Islington Mill Art Academy used in their crits. The method, as originally devised by de Bono, was intended to aide decision making to incorporate a range of perspectives and avoid jumping to instinctive conclusions based on 'right' or 'wrong'. The group of artists at Islington Mill Art Academy used this technique as a way of responding to one of their peers who was showing their artwork for peer review, welcoming feedback. The session avoided making any kind of 'judgement' of good or bad, and welcomed only opinions based on how the receiver of the artwork was feeling upon encountering the artwork. For example, one of the hats represented 'what do I see?'; another represented 'how do I feel?'; another represented 'what does it make me think about?' This way the showcasing artist opens themselves up to a pool of receptivity from the artwork itself and the feedback becomes generative of new ideas which the artist can choose to be influenced by or not. Deliberately missing from this method is any kind of in-depth critical discussion fuelled by the artwork around the politics of representation, cultural theory or themes generated by the artwork in dialogue with its social context. Proceeded in this way, the crit is about personal feelings, sensations, colour, arrangement and emotion, all of which hide spiritual layers of symbolic meaning, but is kept superficial for the purpose of the crit being to facilitate the artist to think through how their work is being received by their peers and how that might allow their work to take a different direction. It could be understood here that judgement and critique have their separate functions and ought to be placed at different moments of a learning journey, if judgement can be seen not as saying what is 'good' or 'bad', but instead responding in a personal way to how an artwork makes you feel. This method avoids the possibility of damaging or offending artists who bring their work, which has 'come from their heart' (respondent D), to be shown to a group of their peers for feedback and creates a space of safety for vulnerability and exploration. It respects that responding to an artwork emotionally necessitates for the space to be held delicately for a range of human emotions to make themselves known, and that, correspondingly, a space for in-depth critique incorporating more intellectual and theoretical discussion has its own separate area. This need to find a model of judging artworks for the purpose of developing an artist's work while remaining

supportive and democratic was expressed across my interviews. The next section looks at another asset-based pedagogical tool.

4.3.2.2. Example 2: REBEL: Recognising Experience Based Education and Learning.

Respondent M is an artist who co-developed an asset-based framework of peer and self-assessment for use on students in art schools called REBEL, which stands for Recognising Experience Based Education and Learning. REBEL is a set of cards, 108 in total, developed by academics and community-based activities in London and Salford and further developed by a European Erasmus Strategic Partnership. It acts as a toolbox for reflecting on capabilities, and is designed as a 'dialogic interface' (Bradfield and Meller 2022, p.142) for having meaningful, reflective conversations with peers, mentors and yourself about specific learning experiences as they relate to one's 'approach to being in the world' (ibid). The cards are divided thematically into 'heart', 'head' and 'hand', to represent intentions and motivations, cognitive intellect and curiosity. 'It was designed to be a holistic spread of looking at knowledge acquisition, with an aim to design experience-based units that at some point people can credit their learning through…otherwise it's just a support system that alternative learning sites can adopt if they want to.' (Respondent M) The purpose of REBEL is:

> 'to work out ways that we could develop some modules that supported students that did projects outside the university and to work out what ways that these could be acknowledged in the same way as curriculum learning, to credit them for it, so that everyday life stuff can be acknowledged and for people to feel empowered to self-actualise through that.'

Respondent M continued:

> 'it never looks at deficit, whereas in formal education you're given a curriculum and learning outcome and it's your chance to jump and reach so it's already assuming that you're alone, whereas the REBEL format asks what you'd like to put your attention towards and changes the language so there's no value judgement…what it generates is mind blowing because it fucks with what students are used to. Every

> time I do a session with students and we usually do a peer-to-peer and people just talk about what they've selected and why they think those things are appropriate or whatever and just like being listened to when you've made your own decisions about what is important to you.'

It is recognised that REBEL stands up antithetically to corporate models of evaluation, 'challenging prevailing paradigms based on econometrics and professionalised consultancy' (Bradfield and Meller 2022, p.139) It also stands up culturally against the 'banking model' of education that Paolo Freire (1970) criticised, and against a hegemony of the deficit model of formal education (Bradfield and Meller 2022, p.152) that plays out ontologically with individuals and is carried through social hierarchies and their institutions. REBEL, through its playful methodology presents an opportunity for players to recognize the knowledge they already have, and 'to understand what makes it significant to them as people, to their relationships—to their being and working in the world.' (ibid)

As an asset-based methodology, REBEL is an example of how peer-learning that forefronts 'one's approach to being in the world' (Bradfield and Meller 2022, p.142) carries implications for ontology and a reimagining of social relations. The fact that REBEL is a game points towards emerging research based on the importance of games and play for pedagogy, geared to increasing learner enjoyment, deep learning and motivation (Nørgård, Toft-Nielsen and Whitton, 2017, p.273) It has been pointed out that little exists on the impacts of play, playing and playfulness in adulthood and adult education, as opposed to the widely understood benefits of play for children and childhood learning (Brown and Vaughan, 2010; Nørgård, Toft-Nielsen and Whitton, 2017, p.274). Playfulness is recognised as a value within the communities of alternative education and is seen as important; its importance can be situated as oppositional to the standards of rote learning and exam-focused structures characteristic of formal education institutions. The formal education system in the West with its focus on grades and diplomas structurally forges a pathway for individuals to follow with 'hoops' to jump through in the form of targets and outcomes; it mimics a game, albeit a game accompanied by shame, stress and individualising, alienating and competitive tendencies that fosters atomisation and division among individuals. Asset-based methodologies such as REBEL, the 6 Thinking Hats game and the values of playfulness as seen among alternative peer-led art schools form a radical break with the 'game' of top-

down hierarchical learning structures and encourage participants to direct their own learning. The 'school', instead of 'confusing learning, education and competence with teaching, grade advancement and diploma (Vujanović & Cjević, 2022, p.90) instead plays a different game. One of my respondents noted that her experience of TOMA was like 'being taken out of that box all the time, in ways that at first might feel quite uncomfortable' (respondent E). This corresponds with respondent M's insight that 'it fucks with what students are used to' (quoted above), alluding to breaking with the 'game' that has been learned and internalised through years of formal schooling and 'teaching to the test'. Respondent E alluded to this when, having joined TOMA's programme, her friends in more corporate lines of work asked her incredulously, 'why are you doing this again? Why are you doing an art course where you don't get a degree?' She understood that TOMA was helping her to 'unlearn what school has taught you all the time' and that 'it's really refreshing to not have this final goal.' She continued, 'there's no test to prove that I've learnt stuff – it's ok if I haven't!' The learning, therefore, is tacit, emotional, social and political:

> 'for me, personally, its all been about confidence and working with people. It's really helped me, like, being in discussion with ten people and feeling like I can be there and say what I think. That's been mega learning, so, rather than, having learnt any printmaking techniques… I mean, we've done that as well, which has been great, but that feels more like a vessel for learning about yourself…'

The commonalities between REBEL as a method of self-assessment and TOMA's approach to learning is that the self-reflection that is both peer-led and self-governed is generated by active participation in an art school invested in the social, emotional and political; they regard their participating artists on their assets rather than their deficits – in other words, what they already bring to the community, as opposed to 'what can we teach you' – and community building over individualised grades and assessment. What becomes clear is that wellbeing is prioritised over normative quantified value-driven outputs that are characteristic of the formal education system, and that participants see themselves as part of a larger, coherent and cohesive 'we'. As explored earlier in chapter two with the discussion of mutual-aid and Kropotkin, it is possible that alternative structures beget alternative social relations; the structures built and generated by the actors and organisers in the alternative art school ecosystem, deliberately set against oppressive, hierarchical and

grade-oriented formal universities and schooling, hope to bring about an ontology centred around liberation – liberation that is initially personal and with political ripple-effects. The use of critical and radical pedagogy is in some cases implicit and accidental – for example at TOMA where a visiting artist chosen by the cohort came to talk about her practice (sculpture) and the discussion moved into frustrations with rent and childcare, 'it became a really honest discussion about living as an artist and navigating that' (respondent E). Informal learning structures open these possibilities of moving conversations into directions that are more personal, generating insights into the reality of people's lives which can have a lasting emotional and affective impact on participants because it allows for critical self-reflection and furthers the process of individuation. Open structures seen in TOMA, therefore, that are strongly linked to values of play, openness and experimentation have transformative, long lasting personal and political effects because the outcomes are not predetermined, externally motivated or imposed by a centralised bureaucratic monolith attached to the job-market. Respondent E pointed to her desire to 'just keep learning', facilitated by her experience of TOMA, and, significantly, mentioned that being part of the group was 'really good practice in being part of the world'. I found it interesting that this respondent seemed to have found integration with her experience of being in a nonformal art school, where 'being part of the world' seems to suggest that she found belonging and congruence with her place in the world. It serves as a striking antithetical note to reports of graduate art students at universities who report their experiences as separate to the 'world' and who reported feeling 'unprepared' (respondent E) for the 'real world' and 'feeling let down' (respondent J). Statements such as these correspond to other research in which Scarsbrook (2021) analyses the 'subemployment' (p.188) of graduate artists who navigate precarious work both in the art world and outside of it.

Models like REBEL as discussed above act as a reminder that there are other factors at play in learning than what is directly transmitted or taught. At IAFS, for example, the discussion point was raised, 'Why can't the outcome just be being in community?' Feeling like 'accomplishments' is too akin to academic output, the role of community is often evaded or ignored. The group wanted to focus on social and emotional learning, with a link between effort and imagination, where supporting each other's work feels generative and is 'a space away from feeling burnt out from the world and from politics'. A focus on social and

emotional learning chimes with Garoian's (2015) metaphor of *prosthetics* as a pedagogy for art, in which 'a multiplicity of unexpected, unending alliances' occurs when learning is engaged in through 'playful exploration, experimentation and improvisation' (ibid). Rather than subjecting students to predictable outcomes, learning that is open-ended and embodied 'resists intellectual closure' (ibid) and makes space for unusual and unexpected alliances as well as the production of tacit knowledge. Respondent C agreed with this, with a nod to improvisation and experiential learning:

> 'How do we actually make something together in this environment?... I think allowing the space where people can feel like this is important to me, this is important as I perceive it for our community, so I want to push in that direction, so at the moment I am feeling like now we are going to explore what is important to people and how that resonates and see if that builds a community or if that is just a dead end. Then maybe we'll try something different.' (respondent C)

Peer-led, artist-run alternative models of art education desire a differential, heterogenous, multiplicity of outcomes based on the different life experiences and needs of participants in the group. It differs strikingly from the wholesale learning outcomes have become prioritised with young people and with adults in most formal learning institutions since the inauguration of a Professional Curriculum for art in the 1990s (Houghton, 2016), which corresponds to 'a coordinated strategy to place higher education in the service of economic growth and global competitiveness.' (Whelan and Ryan, 2018, p.31)

4.4. Conclusion.

This chapter underscored the role of desire in the prefiguring micro-utopias of alternative art education. It looks at the narrative accounts of my respondents in their desires for differential futures. The 'here and now' of communism has been deployed to explore how TOMA has used a circular economy to keep their programme sustainable and affordable, and looks at asset-based methodologies in peer-learning such as with the card-game REBEL and the Thinking Hats game with the Islington Mill Art Academy crit session. Ideas of play, pleasure and joy feature as ways of thinking through the games and the relational ontologies they bring about. Also underscored is the desire for the political, following

Berlant (2011), in which it was noted that while the alternative art education programmes are not explicitly political vehicles, their values and practices engender a personal and political transformation in participants in discussions of power, rent, and surviving as an artist; these transformations happen cognitively through reading groups and discussions of critical theory, but also tacitly, socially and relationally through an embodied social knowledge of "being with" and cutting through traditionally established hierarchies of artist and student. The chapter has used the concept of transindividuality to consider the relational ontologies implicit in "being with" and the accounts of desire from the narratives of the groups explored. In doing so, it considers the possibility of postcapitalist subjectivity as ontology as uncovered through the narrative accounts of my respondents and their desires through action and peer-learning for a qualitatively *other* experience to the teaching and learning of art in HEIs.

Figure 2 (above): inside the exhibition space. On the wall to the left is a large piece of paper with the words: 'It is safe to have an opinion on the framed artwork. Please do also have an opinion on the unframed. You voice is welcome, bring your own frame to the conversation. Be an un-stretched canvas and liberate yourself from the bars. Unlearn to frame things, jump from window to window with no fixed edge. You've been framed and so have we all.'

Figure 3 (above): displayed outside the shop front are these words: 'This is the TOMA project space. We are an artist-run art education programme developed for the busy lives of 21st century artists. We meet and make work here. We host exhibitions, workshops + events which are free + open to everyone…come in and say hi.'

Conclusion.

5.1. Summary.

This research project has sought to develop an understanding and exploration of alternative arts pedagogies during the COVID-19 pandemic. It takes as its point of departure the context of contemporary university struggles and critiques of the neoliberal university without falling into nostalgia for a public university system that is steeped in both elitism and colonialism. Within this it looks at Higher Arts Education (HAE) in particular, and understands it as tethered to the creative and cultural industries, making employability and measurement-based outcomes a driving part of its teaching and learning practice. The research was undertaken at the moment of the pandemic, with its effects of anxiety and uncertainty, to look for modes of difference in the field coming from some specific iterations of alternative peer-led art schools in the UK and in San Francisco, and speculates upon desires for the future of art education in alternative and nonformal education spaces that can provide ontological blueprints for counter-narratives to neoliberal capitalism, which I have called postcapitalism, following the literature on the topic. Within this, it tries to capture aspects of postcapitalist subjectivity as a way of desiring ways of being otherwise. In this concluding chapter I will summarise my key findings and arguments, state my original contribution to knowledge and make some recommendations for further research. I will also acknowledge the limitations to my research and make some suggestions for the field of practice.

5.2. Summary of key findings.

5.2.1. Pedagogies of care as an infrastructure in peer-led alternative art education.

> 'Given the lack of care facilities and mutual support affecting the current social sphere, the values of reciprocity, affinity, and collective learning have once again become central.' (Franceschini, 2017, p.31)

The discussion around care in chapter 2, its urgency and the question of its availability -i.e., its scarcity-, makes evident the need for infrastructures of care in the education of artists

and in education more generally. By infrastructures of care, I allude to the often spatial, visual and invisible channels of communication and organisation that goes into necessitating and foregrounding care that runs through and between organisations, institutions and the people who are entangled within them. I have argued that the alternative art schools explored in this thesis functioned as crucial peer-support groups during the Covid-19 pandemic, a time of acute social crisis. It demonstrated the need for these as spaces as access points for openness, vulnerability, bonding and friendship, the intimacy of which was made possible by small groups, non-violent hierarchies and a sense of affinity, leading to solidarity, camaraderie and feelings of belonging and collectivity. However, small groups with little in the way of infrastructure apart from their capacities to care, for example in the IAFS group in San Francisco, were also more prone to direct burn-out by individuals lacking adequate resources and already dealing with the deleterious effects of Covid-19. These tensions within the settings explored in this thesis sit side by side and are part of the struggle of organising counter-institutions run on good-will and a political ideology of mutual-aid without recourse to substantial and sustainable funding. Other organisations, such as TOMA, have found a semblance of institutionalisation and sustainability in their model, making them a living example of an alternative to expensive, elitist models of university-standard education for student-artists with different needs and expectations.

Using Social Reproduction Theory (SRT) as a methodology of care and a lens through which to understand life-activity outside of the workplace and labour under capitalism framed the understanding of pedagogies of care, and helped me to answer my research question: What desires and needs are emerging from the nonformal, self-organised alternative art education 'scene' as a result of the pandemic and the crisis of education? This lens, tying SRT alongside the ecologies of care theorised by Nancy Fraser (2016) and Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2017), emphasised an intersectional ecological approach entwining care for one another with the wider ecosystem of matter, helped to tease out the infrastructures of care enacted through interpersonal relationships in the alternative art schools explored in this thesis. It tells us that care was a much-needed resource during the Covid-19 pandemic and that care was placed at the centre of the pedagogy and organisation, making it infrastructurally integral to the operations and underlying ethos. Needs for closeness, intimacy, and vulnerability emerged as essential for furthering a

pedagogy of care in which collective and individual desires can be met and explored in the context of a non-hierarchical and process-driven art school. The differences between this and an educational organisation in which care is deprioritised, or dealt with aesthetically, as is explained by respondent M (section 2.3.), are stark, such as when care is co-opted and instrumentalised, aestheticized and becomes merely discursive. When care is given priority and is foundational to pedagogy, students find whole aspects of their humanity opened up. In these models, in which teaching and learning is framed as mutual-aid, students relate to their learning cooperatively and excitedly, rather than as a customer or service-user. It emerged from my interviews that more care, intricately interwoven into pedagogy and connected to current ecological crises, is desired for art education facing the brunt of these crises and economic austerity.

For paid employers and for paying participants of alternative art schools, or where everybody works voluntarily, such as with IAFS, SRT provided a suitable framework in which, for some, it is leisure while for others it is paid work. It sought to bring to light the necessities of mutual-aid and generosity of care in a landscape of produced scarcity, underscoring a way of doing social reproduction differently to how social reproduction is shaped by capitalism to reproduce capitalist social relations. I noted that care existed in alternative art schools before the pandemic - though the extent of this is unknown - but that the pandemic made care more urgent and fuelled the development of infrastructures to make care integral to their pedagogy.

5.2.2. Access for students from working-class backgrounds.

Another key finding from my interviews, building on the infrastructures of care mentioned above, was that respondents from working-class backgrounds had found increased self-confidence, belonging and artistic validation in the alternative art schools I explored. This was made possible by the levels of accessibility afforded to them financially, emotionally and in terms of temporality, which I discussed through Barthes' concept of idiorrhythmy (2013), to illustrate a plurality of temporalities against the hegemony and homogenisation of capitalist time. Respondents from working-class backgrounds who attended mainstream art school for their undergraduate degree either struggled with their self-confidence during

that time or found that the structurelessness of courses, specifically at Byam Shaw School of Art, catered more for their middle-class peers.

I have learned from university arts lecturers that many of their students arrive at university for their undergraduate education, conditioned by their compulsory schooling, with pre-conceived ideas of success measured by how well they score in exams. They are more concerned with how to get the best grades over and above engaging with the educational process. Similarly, at university art schools, time and completion are markers of success, which some of my respondents from working-class backgrounds struggled with. Contrastingly, seeing the value of experimenting, taking time, questioning what is learned and, in some instances, being given ownership over a curriculum, mattered to working-class students. Some of them, who had not studied art at university, had chosen to pursue an art education at a peer-led alternative art school because it was more financially viable and fit around their working lives. The correlation between increased self-worth as an artist and the emphasis on collaborative practice, peer-support and flexibility of time was evident. The non-existence of grades or assessment, which were judged by some respondents to be incongruous to the practice of artmaking, is also included in this list of temporal differences in an alternative art school.

I also found that providing access is part of showing care, as working-class student-artists reflected their feelings that institutions don't care. This became embodied knowledge through consistent exclusion, struggle and limiting self-beliefs. I illustrated this through a brief discussion of disability activism in the arts following Raju Rage's idea of 'access intimacy' (2020). I focused on how organisers and participants were conscious to create spaces where an affect of a flattened hierarchy was produced, creating feelings of belonging, affinity and equality. An expansive, expressive and more confident sense of self was produced through participating in a community of artists, which also included a transformation beyond self-limiting beliefs stemming from being working-class or having been conditioned to think rigidly about the 'self' while going through formal art education. Working-class artists, in particular, had internalised historically-dominant paradigms of success from which they felt excluded, and were able to access other models of success at their participating peer-led art school. At the alternative art schools explored in this thesis, this was clear through giving students ownership over the contents of their learning

material, the scope to take the lead in areas of their expertise and be led by their peers, and direct peer-support.

5.2.3. Postcapitalist subjectivity.

Through my interviews, I discovered that relational intimacy and vulnerability characterised the pedagogy and values enacted in the spaces I explored, and that these were sometimes 'messy' (see: 2.3 and 4.2.1). The complexity of relationships in the groups was enabled by the flattening of otherwise obvious hierarchies and the bonds forged out of disaster and uncertainty, especially in the case of IAFS in San Francisco. I found that, in order for groups to deepen their relational bonds, a degree of willingness to confront conflict through mediation or facilitation was necessary, as in the case of respondent A's story about a conflict at TOMA that was left unaddressed in section 3.3.1.

I drew upon Lauren Berlant's (2011) notion of political desire, which asks that we imagine and build other spaces for intimacy and relationality that are not privatised and point beyond the fantasies held up by normativity. I used this as a pivot to question how proximate my respondents saw their work and their participation to the political. The voice of the organiser from TOMA demonstrated a movement from what Berlant would call 'political depression' – a feeling of powerlessness and of giving up – towards a desire for other worlds, a motivation both political and social to create an alternative art education that can provide for others who had felt let down or excluded by the mainstream education system and who desire a different route. I brought together voices from the TOMA programme and argued that organisations such as TOMA are indirect political vehicles for reshaping ideological values and ethics away from neoliberal capitalism in its commitment to intimacies, care and relationality. This was seen, as mentioned above, in particular through personal transformations of participants who had come from working-class backgrounds, who felt validated as artists and makers. The implications of this are its potential to disrupt hegemonic narratives about who can be an artist and how; it repudiates the normative routes to becoming an artist which are allowed to thrive in universities through the Professional Curriculum, and provides a queer pedagogy for those whose lives have not neatly fitted into the fold.

I used the concept of transindividuality, as fleshed out by Read (2016) and Vujanović & Cjević (2022), to emphasise vitality and strength of peer-led and group processes, which served to reiterate care as an integral quality and organising principle. Transindividuality repositions collectivity without ignoring individuality. In my understanding, and drawing on the material from my respondents, it underscores the need for process-based, co-created art schools which are networks of support and seats of community-building. It is here that I looked at desires for the future of art education based upon prefigurative practices in peer-led alternative art schools, where alongside my respondents we speculated upon what art education could do or be if it were to move away from a neoliberal university-based model.

I introduced the concepts of desire and joy to the chapter via Spinoza, understanding desire as the capacity to affect and be affected by the world. Combined with transindividuality, I sought to understand the work of organisers and participants in the alternative pedagogical programmes in this thesis as growing together by experiencing change as a group, building on relationships where trust and care fluctuate but are held together and put centre-stage of the work they do. I demonstrated that the desires of participants of IAFS are expressions of collectivity and a longing for other ways of being in the world. This demonstrates that desire abounds, and utopian longings are far from inoperative. This led to an exposition of doing art pedagogy differently through the abolishing of grades and systems of measurement and assessment. I found that participants had absorbed and wanted to retain some of the systems that have been passed down and engrained through the university system, but were also looking at building different systems of value and judgement that have little to do with metrics and grading, seen as incongruent to artmaking. From this, I argued that the realm of art education is an exceptional environment for experimenting with different modes of assessment or doing away with assessment altogether because artmaking is a process of giving form and expression, which requires play and experimentation as part of its process and should be available and accessible to everyone. A respondent from IAFS asked, ‘how can we create a democratic sphere that would allow people to also be judgemental?’ Not wanting to let go of judgement, but wanting to unchain it from spheres of elitism usually connected with art institutions and art criticism, it is implied that outcomes and wanting to improve one’s work is an important part of art making and does not have to disappear. I found that the

centrality of relationships that students and teachers built with one another allowed for forms of judgement and criticism to develop that are generative and supportive rather than competitive. I used the example of the Six Thinking Hats crit session at Islington Mill Art Academy to illustrate the above use of supportive criticism for art education and improvement in art making. Following from that, I analysed an asset-based methodology for assessing learning, a card-based game called REBEL (Recognising Experience Based Education and Learning). I read the game as a tool for challenging socially entrenched ontologies of hierarchy and competition and contributing to a reimagining of social relations. I bring out the commonalities between REBEL and the peer-led programme at TOMA, reading both as examples of learning for emotional, social and political growth which are not pre-determined but play with experimentation, improvisation, discomfort and complexity. Peer-led, artist-run alternative models of art education desire a differential, heterogenous, multiplicity of unknown outcomes based on the different life experiences and needs of participants in the group.

5.3. Original contribution.

The original contribution of this study is its presentation and articulation of the desires of artists, art-students, community arts organisers and other cultural workers responding to an arts and education sector in crisis, which is entangled within multiple intersecting crises on a global scale. I have brought their voices and perspectives into dialogue with pedagogical theories and cultural theory to reveal their longings for art and learning for a postcapitalist world. I have also contributed to an understanding of how COVID-19 has shaped the perspectives of these actors and how the pandemic has affected the creative industries more broadly.

To summarise the key contributions, this study:

- Provides details of how alternative art schools and free school experiments responded to the Covid-19 pandemic, the challenges they faced and the personal and collective transformations that occurred during that time of uncertainty.

- Contributes to an understanding of how subjectivity is shaped by intimacies, communities of practice, communities of care and peer-led learning.

- Contributes to an understanding of barriers to art school education, emphasising in particular the barriers faced by people with working-class origins, which cuts across multiple intersections of race, dis/ability and ideologies of who can or can't be an artist.

- Analyses how mainstream art education and alternative models are contributing to thinking of utopian horizons for the future of art education.

- Demonstrates that different people have different needs, which are taken into account in alternative art education programmes due to a more co-created and self-organised environment, and contrasts sharply to the wholesale education model provided at universities and contemporary neoliberal HAE institutions.

- Brings the concept of transindividuality into discussion with artists' peer-learning practices, reaching towards a transindividual pedagogy that understands individuality and collectivity as shaped by each other and as pedagogical needs to address group cultures and embodied learning processes. Importantly, the concept of transindividuality as purposed in this project foregrounds the inherent sociality of learning and the interactions between humans, materials (artistic and intellectual) and wider ecological processes to ontologically challenge neoliberal capitalism and its ideologically individualistic and competitive society.

5.4. Limitations to the research.

The inevitable limitations to this study will here be summarised. Aside from the time limitations of 3 years in which to complete a PhD project, as is particular to the UK system of Higher Education, cut through by one and half years of a global pandemic and erratic

societal lockdowns, the other limitations particular to the content and methods of this research are hereby acknowledged.

I recognise that my research claims to look broadly at alternative art schools and pedagogical experiments, but only covers in detail two examples out of a broad and expanding array of projects under the rubric of the 'alternative'. The focus on TOMA and IAFS allows for a microcosmic understanding of these alternative art education programmes, through the lens of an established alternative art school on the outskirts of London (TOMA) and a crisis-born anarchist free school in San Francisco (IAFS). I do not cover other well-known programmes such as School of the Damned or Islington Mill Art Academy, and had there not been a pandemic, I would have wanted to cover a range of different programmes and use methods of immersive participation with and beyond the interview.

The Covid-19 pandemic brought unforeseen challenges to the study, which limited by ability to access potential interviewees and limited my findings to those drawn from internet-based video-calls rather than in-person interviews. I believe that this has contributed to a less ethnographically rich study than what could have been had conditions been different. Also, out of my sample size of fifteen respondents, I only make prominent use the voices of twelve, which some might believe too small a sample from which to gain significant insights of the field. However, the data that I gathered from participants was drawn from focused, semi-structured interviews which allowed respondents to speak in depth about their experiences and allowed me to develop analyses appropriate to my research aims. Another limitation relevant to the small sample size is that I would have preferred to have captured a larger range of responses from participants in the programmes, as the voices of organisers and educators were given more focus in some areas of the study over that of participants and student-artists.

The study could have benefitted from a more sustained focus on decolonial, ecological and somatic pedagogies, wherein the focus on postcapitalist subjectivity and desires for the future would have underscored more pressing priorities for postcapitalist ontologies and futures. This will be expanded upon more in the next section which outlines suggestions and recommendations for further research.

5.5. Suggestions for further research.

I have several recommendations for further study in this area. I suggest that further study could be taken using a site-specific ethnographic approach in which the researcher spends at least six months doing participatory observation as well as in-depth interviews with participants of alternative art education, allowing for data that affords the space, breadth and depth for its unfolding over time, and allows for insights that shed light on real-time change that takes place in the personal lives of the participants as well as collective group processes and transformations. Another suggestion is for a longer study to take place in which a great many more respondents are recruited from at least five alternative art schools across the UK (not purely focused on London) and abroad, and a quantitative study initially takes place to gather factual data, before more in-depth qualitative data is produced over time with participants of alternative art schools dating back to early years of the projects up to and including more recent iterations. This would allow for a more comprehensive and nuanced view of processes, attitudes, ideologies and ontologies that have shaped these alternative education organisations over the years and lay the groundwork for a comparative analysis to the university system.

The above recommendations would add to debates within critical university studies as well as the field of art education and pedagogy. As mentioned above, further work could also be done with regards to specific pedagogies – ecological, decolonial, queer, somatic – for a study that is laser-focused on desires for the future in the midst of planetary, existential and social crises. The implications of such studies could be used to inform alternative art schools as to how to build broad, lasting alliances between their organisation in order to create an ecosystem or a movement that is able to significantly challenge the higher education sector for adult lifelong learning and communities of practice and how to become more sustainable in their practices, organisational structures and curriculum development.

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