



STUDIOTOPIA

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RESEARCH QUESTION:

‘What does ‘studio culture’ mean to post graduate illustration students?’

RATIONALE

**Most of us will have had experience working or teaching within a studio context.
'The Studio' means different things to different people...**

The studio will be different depending on what you need it be and on what you do in it.

Culture *noun* (WAY OF LIFE)

– the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time

Culture *noun* (ART)

– music, art, theatre, literature, etc.

RATIONALE

“a sense of ownership of the space... It can provide student groups with a sense of identity, value and offer the opportunity for confident self-expression of individuals and whole peer groups. The studio can become a melting pot for ideas and opinions, encouraging autonomous learning to develop.”

Jon Spruce (2007), at the School of Art and Design, University of Salford



Bauhaus, Dessau



WeWork, Montreal

RATIONALE

There is an external political dimension and also an internal one;

“Is your studio or lecture-room a space or a non-space?... What kind of learning journeys does this space facilitate?” (Lange, Reynolds and White, 2016).

There is a question as to whether we need a physical studio space at all;

“Traditional ‘open studio’ conventions are rendered obsolete as, by its very nature, the laptop studio can always be ‘open’” (Jones 2010).

RATIONALE

**Is this a question of
managing expectations,
being pragmatic or is
something broken?**

AIMS OF THE PROJECT

To ascertain what exactly our students think studio culture is and determine if it is more than just studio space?

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A longer term aim would be to see how we can give students a feeling of agency of the space they inhabit, even if temporarily.

POTENTIAL ISSUES

How to avoid the elephant in the room (that is the room).

How to avoid my personal bias
– culture as an organic process rather than enforced.

RESEARCH METHODS

One thing affects another...

Questionnaire

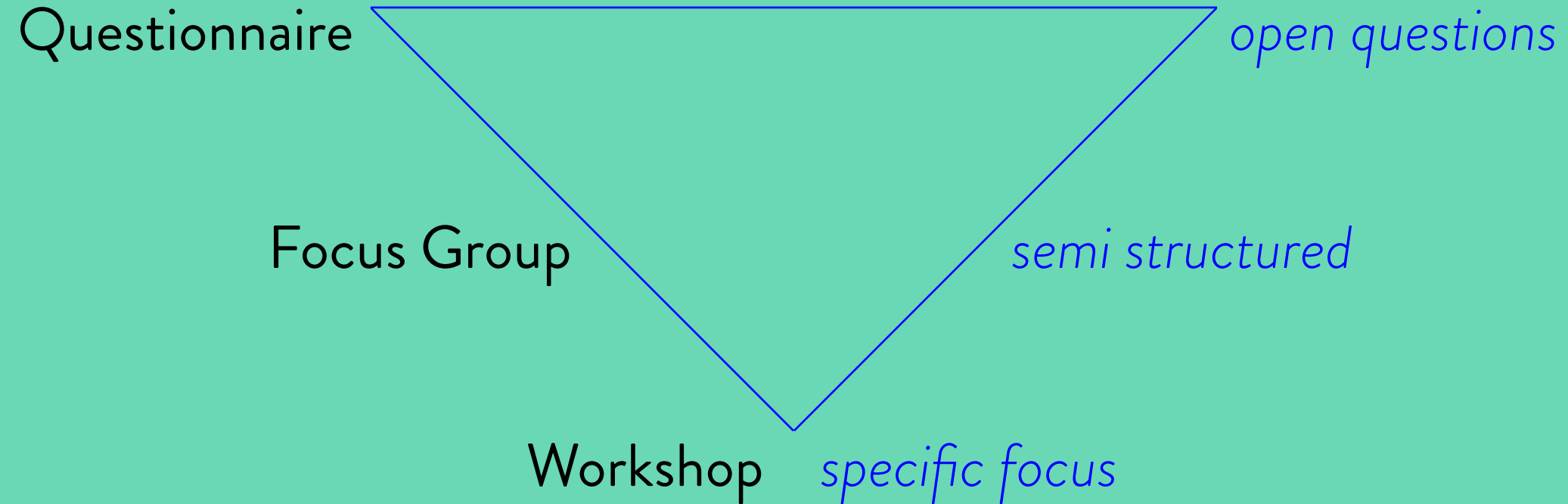
open questions

Focus Group

semi structured

Workshop

specific focus



RESEARCH METHODS

QUESTIONNAIRE with students – 17/33 respondents (via Google Forms)

Why? – to get simple, anonymous responses from full cohort, with little or no influence from myself. Also to get a general feeling of the students' understanding of studio culture.

Analysis – common appreciation of the importance of the physical space and its influence on studio culture (although 'studio culture' itself has different interpretations).

RESEARCH METHODS

Commonality and shared/sharing space

- “sharing the same space.”
- “connecting all the different ways we express ourselves through our studio”
- “A space that nurtures new ideas and artistic expressions”

Studio Culture as some kind of intangible quality or Atmosphere

- “the atmosphere is relatively intimate”
- “a specific atmosphere. Under the atmosphere, the members in the studio are creative and willing to work together.”
- “environment which is help to make creative art work”
- “I think it’s so important to feel good in a space, to feel comfortable and I think it’s a matter than people don’t talk about a lot”

Informality

- “able to collaborate and discuss ideas in an partially informal space”
- “A creative home”
- “A space where you feel free, less

insecure about trying new things, and more comfortable in making mistakes.”

‘Safety’ or risk-free environment

- “Where we can experiment and playing and doing some research without concern too much about other judgements. It’s somewhere ‘safe’ to us”
- “A place where you can try things out without fear”
- “A healthy environment which reflects a union between a group of student”

Collective involvement and interpersonal relations

- There is an acknowledgement of importance of the other members of the studio as a benefit but there needs to be a way of managing how all relate to each other, on a more practical level – noise and space – and also the collective mind-set.
- “it is not only my private working space, but also a place to hold some activities, like conversation, small exhibition”

- “a mode of interaction and development occurring within a group”
- “work with other people and share the ideas together”.
- “A place where privacy and sociability equally work”
- “...with passionate people”
- “mix different contexts of people”
- “Co-working in a same space with people is always important since we are all human being”

Importance of physical space and access to equipment/facilities

- “Studio space provide us an individual space to work and discuss”
- “The right size and utilities are vital. Nothing extravagant: light, wall space, peace and running water.”
- “the space will give people a good feeling to work”
- “The space is the key thing to make studio successful”

RESEARCH METHODS

SEMI STRUCTURED FOCUS GROUP – with 8 students
(selected by volunteering via q'aire or email follow up).

Why? – to produce more quality feedback and data than q'aire.
“The job of the depth interviewer is thus not that of data collection but ideas collection”
(Oppenheim, 2008)”

How? – used a series of cards to prompt conversation. Based on questionnaire results and knowing students I felt that they would respond better when there is more structure and some clear prompts to focus the conversation.

CARDS USED FOR FOCUS GROUP

Side A

Side B

COMMON	PERSONAL
OUTWARD FACING	INWARD FACING
PHYSICAL	INTANGIBLE

PRAGMATIC	IDEALISTIC
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Side A

Side B

PEACEFUL	ACTIVE
RISKY	SAFE
WORK	HOME

IS STUDIO CULTURE AN IMPORTANT FEATURE OF A COURSE?	WHERE IS IT, WHAT WE MAKE, WHAT WE DO or HOW WE ACT?
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RESEARCH METHODS

Analysis – The importance of space was again stressed, but with emphasis on the fact it is a shared space, this should be celebrated but also managed.

Other recurring features of this conversation – Importance of ambiance and environment.
Collective working and the mind set of those within the space. Respect for each other
That this space is NOT home, it is a place for work. Communication.

Student response: “I think the studio culture is really really important, it’s basic but it is like the air, we cannot live without it”.

Using Interview to Inform Workshop – The interview added further evidence that using fantasy as a device to escape the current situation would be beneficial in order to better facilitate a conversation about what studio culture could be, rather than is.

RESEARCH METHODS

WORKSHOP – with 8 student volunteers

On the use of fantasy and speculation:

“In Such Stuff as Dreams Keith Oatley writes that “[i]magination gives us entry to abstraction, including mathematics. We gain the ability to conceive alternatives and hence to evaluate. We gain the ability to think of futures and outcomes, skills of planning. The ability to think ethically also becomes a possibility.”

(Dunne and Raby, 2014)

STUDIOTOPIA - The Academy

You may recognise me, my name is David Hockney, I am a famous artist.
I am starting an Art Academy, specialising in visual communication.
You are my proposed fellow teaching/technical/research staff.

Who are you?

- Pick an artist/writer/illustrator/designer/thinker/academic/scientist/ animator/film-maker past or present who is an influence on you or your work.
- Produce a small costume intervention to signify your identity.
- Take 15 minutes to research and answer the following questions:
- What is your area of expertise?
- What is your background?
- What are your interests outside your work?
- What inspires your work?
- Present yourself and your work to the other members of staff (2 minutes)

I have an infinite source of funding for this new academy (I have lots of wealthy friends), but as of yet do not know where the academy should be, who it is for and what it should offer.

My funding, despite being infinite, does however, run out at 2.30pm today. I have gathered you here to come up with a plan for the academy. I have not had time to gather necessary materials with which to construct this model, so we will have to use whatever is to hand. Let's spend a minute gathering some materials.

These materials will have to dictate to a degree, the form, colour and size of the academy building.

When making the model we should consider:

- The scale
- The materials we use and the method of manufacture and building
- Accessibility?

First we must consider how we make quick decisions, do we appoint one person to oversee, delegate departments to teams or individuals or should we reach all decisions democratically?

Next we should pay attention to the following:

- What is the academy called?
- Where is it located (we can take over an already existing building in a particular location or build a new one, either way, how does it interact with its surroundings, both architecturally and socially)?
- Who is it for (do students pay fees, is it free, is it for long term courses or short? The answer to this questions might be dictated by or inform its location)
- What are we for?
- What are we against?
- What shape/form is the building?
- What facilities should it include?
- What activities and events will it host? (If any)
- How do we interact with the outside world? (Do we?)

Right now it is not so important WHAT we teach, but the building and community we teach in and for.

By the end of today we should have a 3D plan to show my investors.

GO!

Above: The Workshop Brief



My 'David Hockney glasses'

STUDIOTOPIA

The Academy

Staff:

Primary Facilitator –
David Hockney (visual artist)

Fellows –

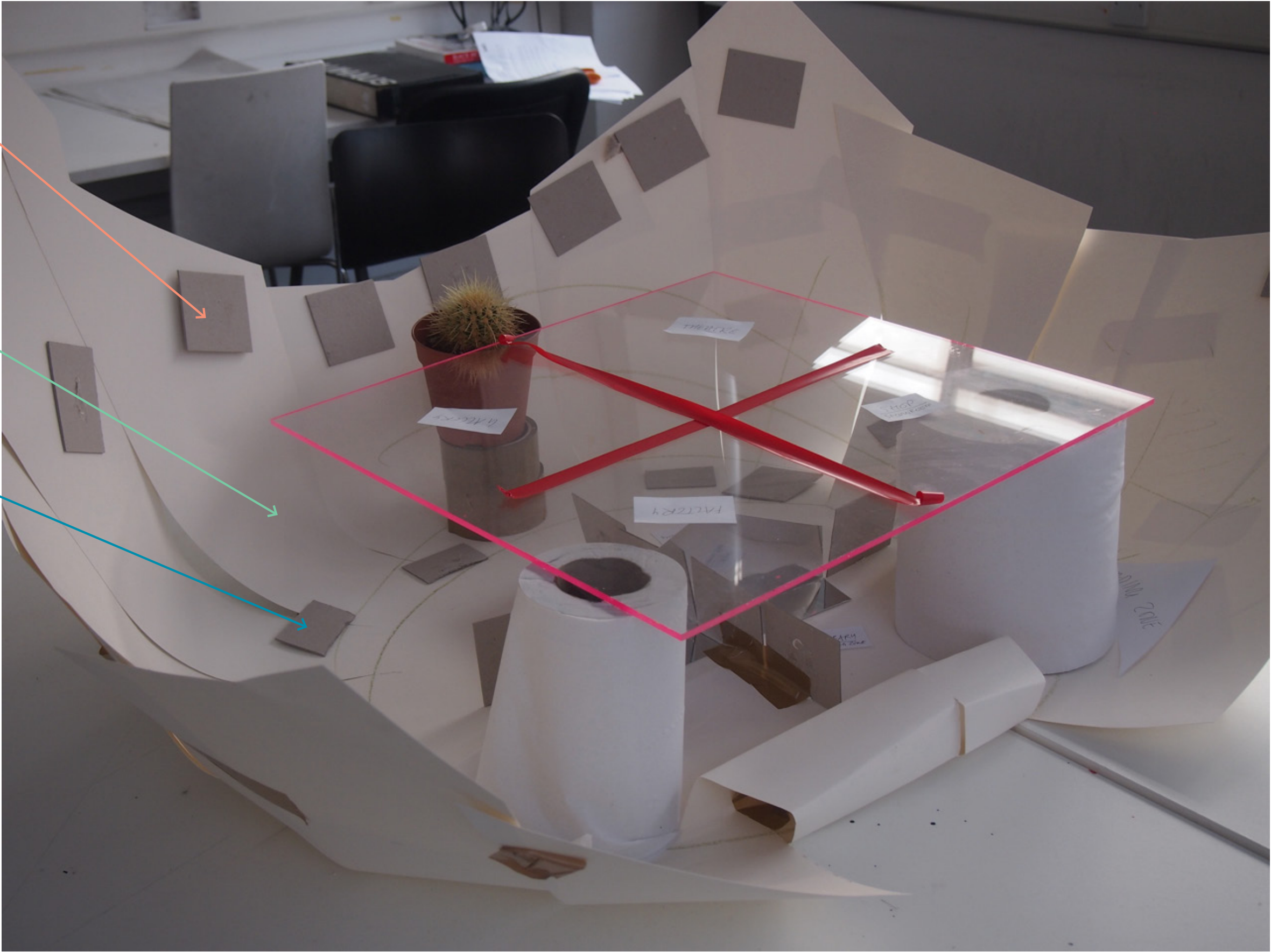
Peter Doig (painter)
Victor Ngai (illustrator)
Virginia Woolf (writer)
Samuel Beckett (writer, director, playwright)
Joey Yu (animator, illustrator)
Juno Calypso (photographer, artist)
Wes Anderson (film maker)

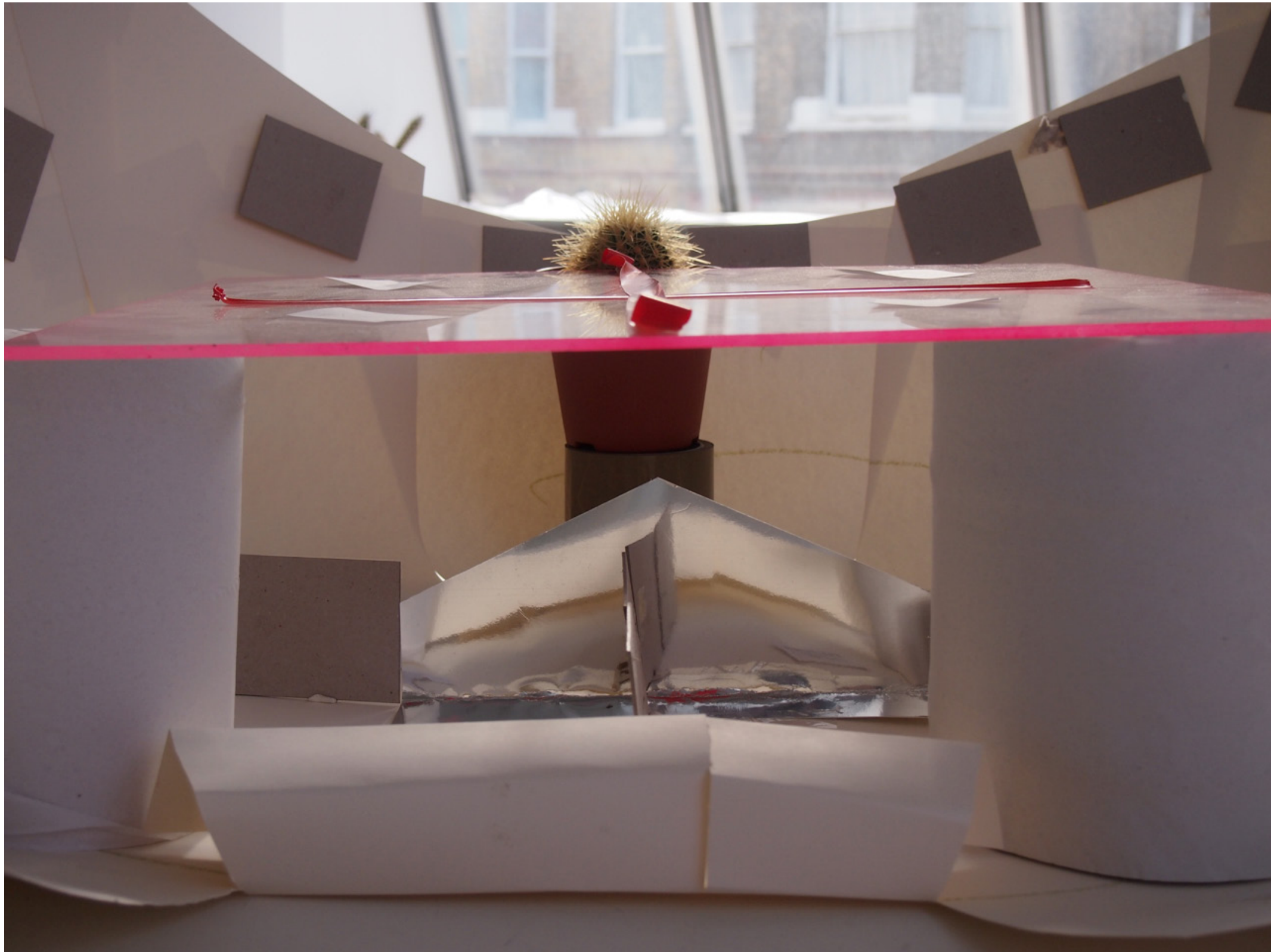


Living spaces

Surrounding 'garden'
area, with trees to block
off living spaces from
main building

Ground Floor – 'Studios'





Ground Floor – ‘Studios’

**First Floor – ‘Theatre/
Concert Hall/Cinema’**
For showing work produced
in the academy

**Ground Floor –
‘Printmaking’**

Ground Floor – ‘3D workshop’
inc. ceramics, woodwork, casting
and other 3D production

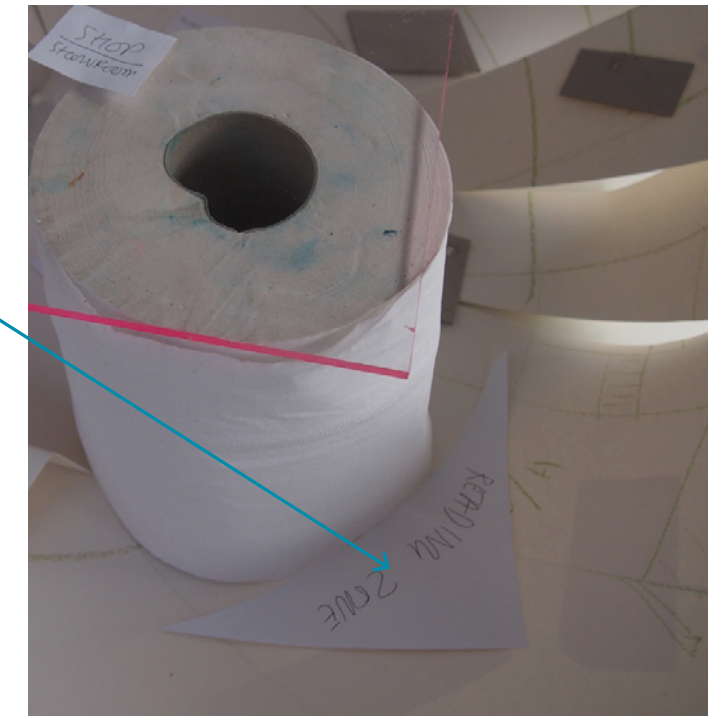
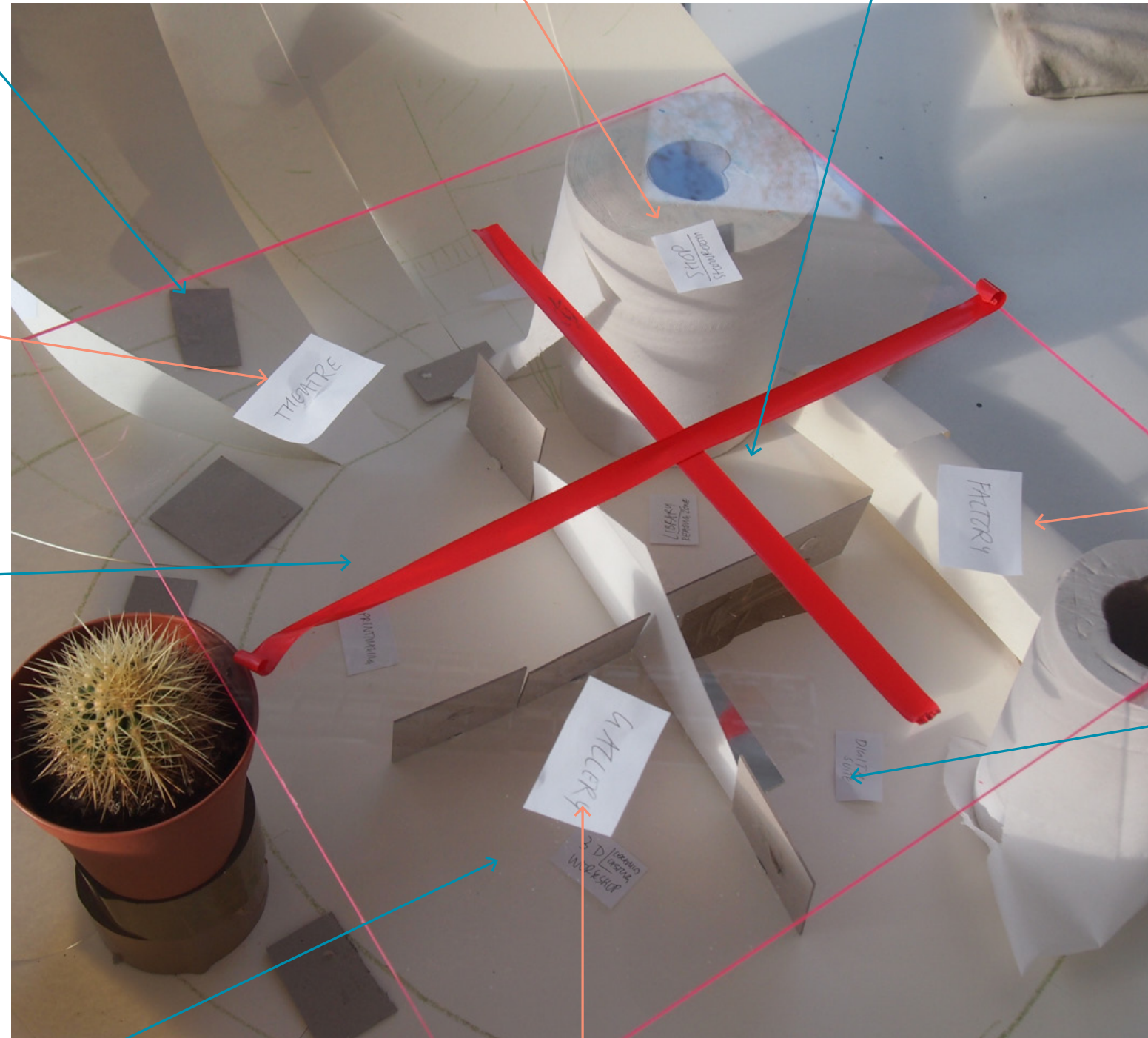
First Floor – ‘Shop/Showroom’
For exhibiting work produced in
the academy

Ground Floor – Library’
with reading room
that extends into the
surrounding gardens

First Floor – ‘Factory’
for commercial and large scale
production of objects and work
created by students & staff

Ground Floor – ‘Digital Suite’

First Floor – ‘Gallery’
For exhibiting work produced
in the academy



**We look forward to
welcoming you**



IN SUMMARY

- Proximity to a city hard to decide on – benefits of being near acknowledged but at odds with desire for retreat like location
 - Collaborative working celebrated – large open plan spaces based on process
- Foundation like experimentation – ability to try many different techniques and processes
 - Personal studio space paramount
 - Space to present produce and present work also vital
 - Making and thinking run in tandem

ANALYSIS

**Lack of ambition or
unable to avoid the elephant
(and castle)?**



ANALYSIS

Pragmatism then Idealism

Student A: “I think it’s always good to start being maybe a bit more pragmatic, because it’s important to just begin rather than just think we’ll only be able to work really well if I have that studio. So I think you should work with what you have now and have these goals.”

Student B: “Yeah it’s just everything starts being pragmatic, we’ve got things in reality, every time we start from zero and we bring the stuff in a build-up, it’s a gradual process. I think maybe all of us prefer the studio to be idealistic at the end, but we build up together from the pragmatic.”

Reading into this, maybe pragmatism comes first, then idealism and dreaming comes next, first the group must establish their collective ideals and then move towards them?

ANALYSIS

Q: What is more important, the things we do in the studio, or the way we do it?

Student A: “I think if what we make is good, then nothing else matters but for you to do something good then [everything else matters]”

...

Student B: “I think there is a strong connection between what we make and how we act”

Student C: “I think how we act leads to what we make”

WORKSHOP REFLECTIONS

Difficult Decisions & People Power

WHAT HAVE I LEARNED?

Studio Culture in a traditional sense might well be something that is lost with the loss of the studio - in a traditional sense.

Perhaps there should be greater efforts made to encourage the collective identity of a student year group rather than worrying about the space itself, as if the community is strong a pragmatic and positive response to the facilities available will follow.

As teacher and rector of Black Mountain College,
Bob Wunsch, described the BMC as
“first a community, then a college” (Stranger, 2018).



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THANKYOU

Any Questions?