

Invigilators

An acknowledgement within the installation that breaks with tradition is the recognition given to each member of the exhibition invigilation team. Born out of Scotland's key priorities for widening access and participation in the arts, this team is composed of students and early career practitioners from across Scotland with the purpose of exploring how contemporary art-making can promote restorative justice.¹ The formation of a professional development invigilation team, which required enormous amounts of organisation, time and expense for a cross-institutional partnership, also served to redefine the role of the invigilator within this project. Utilising educational theorist Wenger-Trayner's 'communities of practice' conceptual framework, the structure of the programme can be understood as cultivating a social learning environment wherein through sustained interactions a 'shared repertoire of resources' is created. These resources reflect dynamic modes of knowing such as lived experiences, stories, skills, and tools to create an collectively informed practice.² In *Cultivating Communities of Practice*, Wenger-Trayner elaborates that this shared knowledge production is necessary for addressing complex issues: 'today's complex problem solving requires multiple perspectives...we need others to complement and develop our own expertise.'³ When considering the entangled sociocultural issues brought to the forefront in *deep dive (pause): uncoiling memory*, this collective approach creates space for participants to engage critically with the themes of Whittle's work. This 'communities of practice' approach is best exemplified in the structure of the training sessions.

¹ "2022 Scotland + Venice Professional Development Programme," *Scotland + Venice*, 30 March 2022.

² Etienne & Beverly Wenger-Trayner, "Introduction to Communities of Practice," (Wenger-Trayner 2015).

³ Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, *Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge*, (Harvard Business Press, 2002): 10.



Figure #11: Scotland + Venice professional development training session at Dovecot Studios, the tapestry *Entanglement is more than blood* in mid-production. Image taken on 5 February 2022 by author.

As illustrated in figure 11, training sessions were structured as intimate studio visits to Dovecot Studios, Glasgow Sculpture Studios, and the Centre of Contemporary Arts to speak with Whittle and her collaborators during the production of the pieces that would later be showcased in *deep dive (pause): uncoiling memory*.

While traditionally invigilators are prepared for their positions through instructional lecture-based trainings, the structure of the programme broke from this norm to create a non-hierarchical network of communication between artists, curators, administrators, and invigilators. Through these conversations, it was understood that not only would invigilators be attending to the gallery space, but that their on-site contributions were part of the creative process that influenced the visitor's holistic experience of the installation. This is further realised by the invigilator's active role in offering visitors handmade quilts to sit with and 'teas of magical resistance' to drink

within the installation. Through this performance of care and encouraging rest within the space, invigilators become and are recognised as part of the experience of the installation. This is a radically different conceptualisation of the role of invigilators than is typical within the UK arts sector, but is one that is absolutely vital as a counter-hegemonic strategy. Following an unfortunate series of high-profile reports of mistreatment to front of house staff throughout the arts sector, the Museums Association published a *Charter for Change*, a campaign which outlines the need for reorienting organisational hierarchies: ‘We need to commit to recognising talent and contribution across all functions and teams in museums, especially front-of-house colleagues, as these roles may have previously been ‘side-lined’ or diminished as a result of organisational hierarchy and bias. [...] There is often greater diversity within front-of-house teams than other areas of the museum workforce.’⁴ By including invigilators as accomplices in Whittle’s network they become part of this cycle of ‘constant addition’.

Art Technicians

‘Increasingly, successful artists are working with teams of technicians who contribute precious amounts of skill, time and experience to the final work. What of these assistants? Their names never appear in the list of government grants or biennale participants.’⁵

The quotation above comes from the essay ‘The Art of Outsourcing,’ which examines the long-lasting tradition of only extending credit to a singular artist and disregarding contributions made by others involved in the art-making process, especially in the case of

⁴ “Recognition,” *Museums Association*, 2022.

⁵ Nicola Harvey, “The Art of Outsourcing,” *Artlink* 25, no. 1 (2005): 15.

‘fine art’ institutions such as biennales. This illustrates perhaps the most radical of Whittle’s acknowledgements: that she pays to contributing artists, performers, and technicians. This is exceedingly unusual in the contemporary art field, as crediting others has been seen as undermining the authority of the artist as a lone visionary. To underscore how remarkable Whittle’s departure from the norm is, it is vital to scrutinise how value is placed upon contemporary art.

The lack of objective criteria for the aesthetic judgement of contemporary art creates a heightened reliance on the artist’s own ‘creative vision’ as a metric for evaluation. I borrow Hannah Wohl’s definition of creative vision for this analysis, which she defines as a: ‘bundle of recognizable and enduring consistencies within a body of work, with a body of work being the oeuvre or corpus of an individual.’⁶ Whittle’s creative vision spans a prolific oeuvre, wherein works build upon each other and continue to expand on formal and conceptual elements. However central to this creative vision is how the artists themselves are perceived. The cult of celebrity and the contemporary art market are inextricably linked, with a long history resulting in a favoured characterisation of the ‘true artist’ as eccentric, individualistic, aesthetic obsessed, and economically disinterested.⁷ This image of the lone genius tormented by their own creative energy has become a sign of authenticity, as a necessary expression of the artist’s unbridled aesthetic autonomy. When that romanticised, patriarchal image of absolute autonomy is threatened – such as through crediting art technicians, performers, and artists – this can be seen as delegitimizing the artist and thus consequently devaluing the work. This ‘culture of secrecy’ made in response to commercial pressures is difficult but not impossible to resist, and is described by an anonymous art technician in the Independent’s exposé as

⁶ Hannah Wohl, *Bound by Creativity: How Contemporary Art is Created and Judged*, (University of Chicago Press, 2021), 4.

⁷ Wohl, “Bound by Creativity,” 42.

follows: ‘The more positive the relationship [between artist and art technician] is, the more chance there is of them recognising the fact that they didn’t make it themselves – but that’s a rare occasion.’⁸

Through Whittle’s accreditation of the highly-skilled technicians who worked for and with her, Whittle subverts the pressures of a romanticised industry to stand by her stated mission ‘to practice in solidarity with others.’⁹ This is waywardness incarnate: Whittle’s refusal to meet best practice industry standards that have hidden the contributions of others to the art-making process puts her reputation as an artist in a precarious position. It is only by breaking away from harmful methodologies that can we collectively build a supportive space to ‘shape-shift our gallery into a new incarnation.’¹⁰

⁸ Lindsey Johnstone, “Art Technicians: The Industry’s Dirty Secret,” *The Independent*, July 2018.

⁹ Whittle, 110.

¹⁰ Whittle, 122.