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Research article

Navigating old and new terrains of academic practice in higher education: indelible and invisible marks left from the Covid-19 lockdown

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Abstract

Higher education has been (re)shaped by the Covid-19 pandemic in ways which have left both indelible and invisible marks of that period. Drawing on relevant literature, and informed by an exchange catalysed through a visual narrative method, authors from four European universities engage with two reflective questions in this article: As academics, what were our experiences of our practice during the lockdown periods of the Covid-19 pandemic? What might we carry forward, resist or reimagine in landscapes of academic practice emerging in the post-Covid future? The article explores how academics experienced and demonstrated resilience and ingenuity in their academic practice during that turbulent time. Particular insights include entanglements of the

personal and professional, and the importance, affordances and limitations of technology. In addition, the authors reflect on some of the ongoing challenges exacerbated by the pandemic, such as education inequalities. The article concludes by reprising the key points about what marks are left behind in the post-Covid present, and how these relate to the future in which relational pedagogy and reflexivity are entangled in the ways in which we cohabit virtual and physical academic spaces.

Keywords higher education; Covid-19 pandemic; learning and teaching; academic practice; academic identity; visual narrative

Introduction

The precipitousness of change to the known, familiar routines of academic practice in higher education necessitated by the stay-at-home imperative with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic was a disorientating and isolating experience for many staff and students. As socially constituted beings, people are sustained through social relations (Nixon, 2012). For periods of time at the height of the pandemic, social relations in academia were mediated primarily through contact in the virtual world, raising ontological questions. The challenges that this posed, and the creative responses that were needed to develop different ways to expedite learning and research relationships, are slowly being documented through publication in academic literature.

As a period of disruption and change, the pandemic caused many of us to reflect on ontological questions. These included questions about how we inhabit the virtual and analogue worlds, how we relate to one another and how we mediate personal support and learning relationships as educators. The disruption of the Covid-19 pandemic opened up possibilities for alternatives and, in some cases, imagining new ways of thinking and acting (Peters et al., 2020). It also provided the conditions for questioning the desire for a 'rear view mirror', and the wistful waiting for things to return to the 'normal', as they were before (Motala and Menon, 2020). Nixon's (2012) thoughts, with reference to the global economic downturn, appear prescient when thinking about the lessons to be learnt following the experience and uncertainties of higher education during the pandemic. They reminded us of the importance of rethinking future possibilities: 'uncertainty may provide us with a stark sense of reality regarding where we find ourselves and how we finished up here; and, that sense of reality may, in turn, prompt new imaginings and a renewed sense of possibility' (Nixon, 2012: 134). This article also represents the desire, once relieved of the urgency, to learn from upheaval, a phenomenon common in times of social upheaval, including post-war. And it demonstrates that we recognise that desire, but that we are determined to create the conditions to push against that affective exhaustion, to seek to witness from what we recollect, and to learn collectively.

In this article, through a visual narrative method, authors from various national higher education contexts reflect on their experiences of working while living in Europe during the lockdown periods of the Covid-19 pandemic. It was an exploratory engagement, because we recognised the value of 'indirections' (Frankham and Smears, 2012: 361) in our reflections. They enabled us to hear and see the complexities of the lived experience we endured. The pandemic offered a rupture and set of responses to a point in time which provided a glimpse into what may indeed be a shift from the university as 'the mass factory' to 'the universal network' with ruptures in space, practices, relations and identities (Matthews, 2022).

The context of the study: universities' response to the Covid-19 pandemic

In early 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic forced universities to close campus spaces and to continue education provision remotely using various technologies. As a result, university academics and professional service staff had to adapt to remote working. The abrupt move to online teaching and remote working represented a major change in working conditions and created huge challenges for many academics and students in different ways.

Watermeyer et al. (2021) show that the impact of the pandemic appears transformational, and for the most part negative. Karakose (2021: 53) notes how 'the sudden and largely unprepared transition to emergency remote teaching placed serious pressures on not only students, but also academics, the families of both, and also other stakeholders as well'. For academics, adjustments to academic labour under Covid-19 were dramatic, and resulted in the overwhelming majority making a transition to prolonged remote working. Many endured significant work intensification, as the previously demarcated spatial arrangements between the domestic and the professional were suddenly eroded.

Women academics, particularly those with caring responsibilities, appear to have been professionally disadvantaged by working from home during the pandemic (Myers et al., 2020; Oleschuk, 2020; Squazzoni et al., 2020) and to have experienced what has been described as 'academic guilt' (Walters et al., 2021) from the role conflict that the period engendered. Because of the complexity occurring in how these worlds collided, early on the pandemic created 'breach points', not only for pedagogy, but also for academic labour and the values espoused by higher education (Morrish, 2020).

The move towards the digital university and utilising digital technologies for teaching and learning began well before the Covid-19 pandemic. Reitan et al. (2022: 1) have suggested that 'Over the last few decades, universities around the world have undergone processes of digitisation, which have not only involved incorporating digital technologies in existing practices, but also reorganising and redesigning the way courses and programmes are taught, assessed and administered'. However, the rapidity of the pivot to online teaching and learning brought about by the pandemic presented pedagogical challenges for many educators and institutions, many of which were ill-prepared. This is in part because 'e-learning requires altogether different pedagogy, especially in online assessment and individual and group interactions' (Treve, 2021: 214). Concerned that the academic practices being adopted to 'pivot online' during the pandemic were imperfect, long-standing advocates for e-learning and educational technology put out discourses which distinguished such pragmatic online practices from the ideal, through terms such as 'emergency remote learning' (Belluigi et al., 2022). An unanticipated ill-effect of such drastic and underprepared change was at the affective level. In their study Jelińska and Paradowski (2021: 1) emphasise how 'sociodemographic variables such as gender, age, relationship status, living conditions, and length of professional experience non-trivially affect situational anxiety, work-life synergy, coping, and productivity'. Those findings were informed by a large-scale study on emergency remote teaching conducted between April and September 2020 with 804 higher education teachers from 92 countries. An aspect of this was the emotional labour that academics expended to sustain the academic engagement of their students, and their own academic practice (Newcomb, 2021).

Located in two European national contexts, the authors share similar research interests and concerns about academics' different experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic, and their implications for the future learning and teaching landscape. This article is our joint effort to explore the nature and significance of the entanglement of personal and professional lives, privilege and participation, rupture and possibility, relational pedagogy and reflexivity in the ways we cohabit virtual and physical academic spaces.

Methods and materials of the study: thinking together through and with imagery

As authors, we were interested in, and open to, the different lived experiences we would bring to the study, and we sought ways to explore these without separating insights into the conditions *for* the 'educational' from the conditions *of* the 'educator'.

We embarked on a collaborative autoethnography structured for the purposes of generating and co-interpreting our personal reflections as authors. The process was one which enabled us to take individual experiences, and then to engage, pool, analyse and interpret collaboratively to discern similarities and differences (Chang et al., 2013). This was of value, because while we were all at the time employed as academics within upper-income, well-resourced academic institutions in the Western minority world, we were operating during lockdown in countries, institutional types, social locations and personal circumstances which differed.

Thus, we begin this section by briefly outlining, between the four authors, relevant aspects of our identities, positioning and circumstances during the Covid-19 pandemic. In terms of our professional practice during the lockdown period, all authors facilitated teaching and learning on various degree

programmes in humanities and social sciences, including supervision of master's and doctoral research. Three authors would have self-assessed themselves as technologically competent prior to the lockdown, with one being more anxious about moving all academic activities online, particularly those related to learning and teaching. Between us, we served five higher education institutions to which we were affiliated, within the contexts of the UK and Austria. Two authors were mid-career academics who were permanently employed and working full-time during that period; one was on a precarious job contract which needed to be renewed every semester (twice a year); one was a late-career academic working part-time. One author self-identifies as a man; three as women. Two authors are native to the country they work on, and two are migrant academics, meaning their country of birth and 'academic nationality' are different (Rostan and Höhle, 2014). Two authors were parenting young children, with one enduring enforced single parenting due to the lockdown. Two of the authors were infected by the Covid-19 virus during the pandemic, with one enduring it during the lockdown period.

For this article, the authors used an exploratory visual process to aid recollections, reflections and discussions on our experiences of the conditions of our academic practices, from which we composed a visual narrative as a composite story to represent in this article. This was a loose adaptation of the four-phase process recommended by Kolb (2008). In the first phase, we selected the guiding question 'As academics, what have we learnt from our experiences of working through the Covid-19 pandemic?', from which to consider how we might individually take photographs or select existing photographs that reflect our viewpoint or experience. This started the cognitive process, as we each reflected on the meaning of the question. Each author was required to choose between one and three images which they felt captured their experience of the conditions for their practice. In the second, or active, phase, each author individually composed new photographs of specific subjects within their social or material context, or reconsidered their personal photographic archive of images captured during that specific time period, limited to that of the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions imposed in Western Europe during 2020. These archives varied from tens to hundreds of images, and they were taken using various devices, such as mobile phones, cameras and webcams, reflecting the digitally dexterous nature of life during lockdown. There were no limitations imposed on which images the individual chose or composed anew, although ethical conduct was adhered to in terms of the picturing of any third parties. Of interest is that most of the images were devoid of even the author as a pictured human subject, despite the predominance of selfies in current visual cultures on social media, and the many visualisations of the authors' portraits in their online meeting technology. The third, or decoding, phase required us to consider our photographs and to verbalise our thinking in virtual research meetings and in textual form. For this, each author selected one image as emblematic of their experience, and composed written reflections on that choice and what they felt it captured. These two components (visual and textual) were shared in virtual meetings, and then added to an online document shared between fellow authors as imagined readers. The final phase, or analytical scientific interpretation phase, involved researchers analysing the data made up of photographs and textual narratives generated in the first three phases. This was an iterative process, undertaken over four weeks, wherein each of the authors simultaneously added textual commentary and questions to each other to probe deeper into interpretations of visual, experiential and professional similarities and differences in the texts and images. During that last step, we considered afresh the relation between the four images, and we made the decision to rearrange them as a visual narrative. This enabled more evocative readings of the four images as a composite story of conditions betwixt and between our practices as academics during that period. Composite portraits, stories and vignettes have been found to be evocative representative devices for inviting readers to reimagine the nuances of experience and identity-making when heterogeneous individuals undergo conditions of difficulty (see, for instance, Hunn et al., 2006; Yosso, 2006). Similarly, a number of other qualitative research projects have also played with visual, narrative and composite elements when representing Covid-related academic experiences (Carruthers Thomas, 2021; Metcalfe, 2021).

We use this reflective visual process because of our shared desire to interact with openness to 'the use(fulness) of (inter)action-, positionality-, and affect-driven methods in studying the academic identity construction' (Djerasimovic, 2021: 506). Generally, photo-elicitation approaches require photographs to be used in the research process for the purposes of enabling participants' expression, and to generate discussion about complex affective responses that may be difficult to articulate, or which are impoverished or reduced when tamed into words. However, this research design could arguably be seen to straddle boundary lines between disciplines and methods, so as to eschew naive assumptions around the authenticity of capturing, voicing, witnessing or documenting experiences and conditions.

As a method for generating data with and from participants within academia, photo-elicitation has its roots in fields of anthropology and sociology. Harper (2002) argues that including photographs in the research process provides richer data than some of the traditional qualitative research methods, such as interviews that only use words.

In this article, we were the participants, interpreters and authors of the study, rather than being in the position where the method was used to provide the conditions for others to come to voice. As collective autoethnography, we were consciously activating our recollections of our individual experiences to explore possible interpretations of the conditions from intentionally chosen images and text (individually and then sequentially) to voice and to elicit responses on a topic. Informed by critical approaches to visual pedagogy, we were thus interested in the possibilities of the visual narrative process for transgression, creativity and play within this project, because of our awareness that dispassionate, narrative realism has often failed in its attempt to measure the human experiences of academics (Belluigi et al., 2019). The acts of composing a photograph and then composing a sequential narrative involve conscious processes of selection, presentation and aesthetics-making that are of value precisely because they complicate assumptions about the immediate, authentic 'capturing' of evidence or 'voicing' of testimony: 'A fact of primary social importance is that the photograph is a place of work, a structured and structuring space within which the reader deploys, and is deployed by, what codes he or she is familiar with in order to make sense' (Burgin, 1982: 153).

Recognised is our agency within the tactics of making and acts of narration (Sclater, 2003) and re-presentation. This necessitated an element of confession by each maker to their co-authors, further encouraging critical reception by readers of this article. What was of interest as we began was the possibility that such an approach would not only enable us to story each of our situated, idiosyncratic experiences of the lockdown period through the images, but also provide the conditions to more richly recollect and reflect, and then to step out of that insider reflection to analyse across the visual representations what was of social significance at that time, and possibly for the future. The image and narrative making and sharing enabled us to create vignettes of our lives in that period, thereby complicating and expanding 'facts' through our qualitative academic practices. In so doing, we came to include inferences of sociocultural relationships and their affective import at that time on the conditions for our academic practice, and on collaborative reflection, and what that revealed about our 'normal' and 'crisis' conditions as an academic community.

All the authors were actively involved in the selection of data (both visual and textual), the analytical and interpretative process, and the writing and edits of the article. Because ethical conduct was practised with our full, active and informed participation throughout the research process and publication stages, ethical clearance was not required from our institutional review boards. Regardless, institutional ethical approval from one of the UK institutions was secured. The ethical principle held as being of most importance was the validity of such uncertain methodological approaches to open all authors to non-deterministic endings (Stronach and MacLure, 1997), and to manage situating our experiences within our contexts while attempting to transgress the taken-for-granted positioning of our assigned professional and researcher roles (Lather, 1993).

Findings: visualising our negotiations

In this section, we present images in a specific order to tell a composite story across our experiences: Figure 1 is of a view constrained, and was taken at the border of a room with a message barring entry; Figure 2 allows the viewer access to the room, which is revealed as a workspace, with the viewer standing as if from the vantage point of an academic; in Figure 3, the viewer is seated at the academic's desk, peering closer to what is revealed to be a work-filled screen; until, in Figure 4, the viewer becomes disembodied from the academic insider with the view reversed to that of a virtual audience of an online meeting, getting a glimpse of the larger context of an academic's life during lockdown.

Figure 1. Access denied! Wood's boundary demarcation of her working space

What does Figure 1 depict of the experience of working through the Covid-19 pandemic? A hastily scribbled Post-it message displayed on the academic's door signifies the separation of boundaries where home life was dis-abled from intruding into what became the 'home office' behind it. Through the crack, rows of books are enticingly displayed on shelves, which for a period of time cannot be reached. Wood explained that an understanding was established that, when the Post-it message was displayed, an online meeting or teaching seminar (often, in her case, via Microsoft Teams) was in progress, and that family should not enter. Once those synchronous online encounters were finished for the day, the Post-it would be taken down.

Requests to observe quiet when the Post-it was in place meant that new ways of virtual working from home inevitably encroached on access to, and use of, the home space for others, too. When the scribbled note was placed on the door, it signified not only isolation and separation from life in the rest of the household; it also circumscribed the usual domestic routines, lest noise and disturbance intruded on the academic discussion occurring on the other side of the door. The washing machine or vacuum cleaner could no longer be used during such times, and other family members took on the larger share of the duties to receive the increased deliveries when shopping habits changed during lockdown. In these sorts of ways, the space and quiet needed to carry out professional commitments collided with the freedoms of others in the ways they inhabited, through the invasion of work into what had previously been the separate space of home.

While not a conscious component of Wood's initial reflections, what emerged in our discussion was that this demarcation of boundaries was not only enacted on others in the house. It marked a transition in identity and behaviour within the domestic sphere – when stepping into that room and sticking up the sign, the person (as partner and mother) became sublimated by the academic worker.

The composition in Figure 2 shows a very tidy, clean desk, presented to the viewer from the perspective of the academic who has stepped away for a moment (the laptop screen is turned on, displaying more than one window open). The viewer can almost reach out to move the mouse on the right. There is no pen or paper, no crumbs from food eaten or wires connected to the technology. The sense of calm in the interior is complemented by the garden outside, made orderly by the rectangular framing of windows mid-ground. While toys, some pot plants and a card appear in the frame, the overall sense is of a controlled environment.

Figure 2. Enabling fictions: Su's composed working space

Figure 2 shows Su's working space during lockdown. There is no sense within it that this is a bedroom within a home. Su shared how, when the closure of the physical spaces of universities and schools shifted all learning and teaching activities online, the bedroom became his temporary office and virtual classroom for university teaching activities. In the new working space, countless hours were spent on virtual meetings, online teaching sessions and hosting/presenting and attending academic conferences. During the lockdown, Su too had to negotiate with family members to create a professional working space at home, while still catering for the necessary space to enable his two children's sudden move to home schooling. The kitchen table, a space usually for interactions as a family while preparing and sharing meals, became dedicated to their learning activities.

Su reflected that the flexibility of educational technologies and the virtual space, while enabling the continuation of functions, detract attention from the prioritisation of in-person conversations at home and at work. Su expressed that he missed working from the office, because it provides him with opportunities for authentically encountering others, and because of the natural physical demarcations between work and home that he, as a partner and father, does not have to artificially impose.

Figure 3 offers a detail of a more disorderly workspace, taken close-up at an angle, as if looking to the left of a person seated at a desk. Sitting there, Seidl designed and delivered online lessons, offered student consultation hours, engaged in collegial exchange and collaboration and attended online research conferences. The various objects reveal the porous relation between the private and professional spheres of many academics' lives. The spiral notepad, propped up against the wall with calligraphic marks depicting a face, flowing hair and 'peace', was kept close by because of its value as a gift from a former student who became a dear friend. A mug, gifted by a 'very nice colleague', was filled with pens to become a practical fixture of her editing routines within the temporary workspace. They were kept close by as a part of her daily life when isolated within the home, as supplements to what she most missed during the pandemic: lively in-person contact with friends, students and colleagues.

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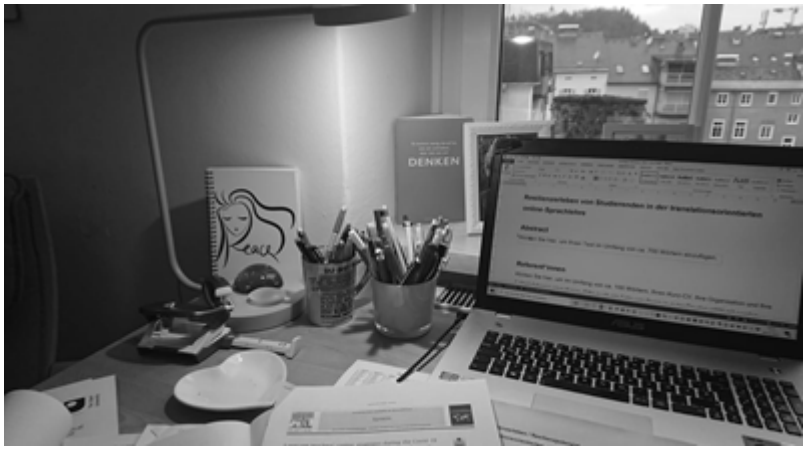
Figure 3. Close-up: a corner of Seidl's working space



Up to a third of the frame is taken by a laptop, the screen of which shows a text being edited, with formatting symbols visible, printed hard copies of related manuscripts and various other documents in the foreground. Aware of the dynamics at play, Seidl recorded the moment when the content of the subject she was writing on, 'Resilienzerleben von Studierenden in der translationsorientierten online-Sprachiehre' (Students' experiences of resilience in the online language classroom), as it shows on screen, was being lived in the form of her life. For Seidl, this photograph encapsulates the essence of her experience of continuing teaching and research activities during the lockdown. With the screen overlaying the view to the city, on too small a desk, within what often felt like a claustrophobic study room in her home, she was composing an abstract for an online conference on higher education and resilience in times of volatility. This laptop screen became her window to the outside academic world.

This sense of a window and means of communication with the outside of the domestic space is common to Figure 4. In this selfie, Belluigi presents a scene to the viewer 'out there' as a witness to what was often blurred by technology tricks or 'masks'. Her pen adds edits to a student's dissertation in the foreground; exercise equipment and a drying rack cut in at the corners of the frame – and in the background behind her, the subject of the image draws the eye's attention, not to the academic, but to the two young children playing with toys in very close proximity to her desk.

Figure 4. Inverted: viewing Belluigi's workspace from a webcam

The image in Figure 4 was taken using the small camera installed for online meetings, perched at the top of her desktop computer brought home hastily from campus for the lockdown. It does not present a composed image of the desk itself from her vantage point, but rather the context around her sitting at her desk. It captures a moment when, in exacerbated circumstances, she realised the impossibility of imposing idealised boundaries between her professional and personal life.

As with Figure 3, the image was taken in recognition that the period would one day pass, and thus needed to be recorded. A person prone to over-stimulation, Belluigi had asserted spatial demarcations within her home during the pandemic in similar ways to the other authors. And despite a self-conception of being organised and on top of things as an academic and as a mother, 'circumstances' required letting go of previously held distinctions, and tolerating the moments of rupture to physical space and 'work' time that would make a frightening period of uncertainty bearable for all involved. Forged through such experiences was the realisation of the importance of being a whole human being with others, rather than presenting a partial professional self as an academic. As Belluigi shared, she found that she was able to form different connections when allowing such vulnerability, and she learnt to be more humble with her children, her students and her collaborators, many of whom were similarly finding ways to work and to 'be' during that porous time of fear, sickness and loss.

However, what is also evident in the image (through the scarf, hair and so on) was that she was still having to play the game of aesthetic labour demanded of all academics during that time, noted particularly for women in the academy (Lipton, 2021). The head-and-shoulder online appearances required fictions of 'appropriate' professional personas. Thus, many academics chose to self-survey their presentations, applying background screens offered by technology to blur or invisibilise their contextual lives at that time. The costs of this balance were that academic mothers were found, in a number of contexts, to have been the most adversely affected in their research productivity during the Covid-19 period (Pebdani et al., 2022), with anticipated knock-on impacts on their future career prospects.

Discussion: lessons learnt

The visual narrative process facilitated the authors' reflections on their lived experiences of working through the Covid-19 pandemic as academics. The authors' photographs and descriptions of their photographs became both the catalyst for recollection and the data for this study, which were analysed inductively using a reflective thematic approach (Braun and Clarke, 2019). During the data analysis process, the authors interacted virtually to reflect and share their experiences and views, with the photographs as focal points, and as catalysts for individual narratives and for collective discussion. The following three main themes emerged from the analysis: (1) the entanglements of the personal and the professional, affectively and spatially; (2) the importance and limitations of analogue and digital technologies; and (3) the worsening of educational and digital inequality during the pandemic. These three themes, and embedded sub-themes, are explored in relation to literature, with key learning points or 'lessons' extracted.

The entanglements of the personal and the professional, affectively and spatially

Each of the images selected for this project was a photograph taken of a place within the domestic space wherein academic practice had continued during the lockdown period. In varied ways, the images reflected our attempts to manage the sudden intrusion of our professional practice as academics into our private lives and homes. The extent and success of such demarcations between personal and professional depended in part on the individual academic. It was also impacted by their personal circumstances, and by the capacity, desires and needs of, and the nature of negotiations with, those who shared their personal lives and domestic spaces.

As a feature in each of the images, space can be seen almost as a character or major component of that period, as it was the only 'stage' on which the negotiations between professional and personal occurred. We vacated our usual working spaces in our university offices, and instead became 'present' for our students and colleagues in our home-working spaces as sites for our professional engagements in ways which were entirely new and untested. This had not happened in our lives before. During this time, we saw and interacted professionally with others through our computer cameras and audio. For these interactions, we chose from the computer-generated backgrounds those we thought most appropriate

to resemble our usual campus office space; sometimes beaches and forest scenes were chosen instead, as longed-for but forbidden spaces of escape in lockdown. Practically, too, these backgrounds screened out the sometimes cluttered, coexisting family space at home. This perhaps also embodied a desire for control which may be seen in the choice of our images, and the desire in some of these to show ordered spaces, as well as in our use of blurred or fake backgrounds in our online interactions with others. This may also amount to an admission of vulnerability, humility, humanity and resistance to an identity as a commodified product of professionalism.

We created workspace and workstations in available domestic spaces, including on kitchen tables and desks set up in bedrooms. Such infrastructure was required for us to maintain the expected interactions with our students, colleagues and management. It also enabled us to present publicly in talks, and to take part in our 'third mission' engagements. The appropriation of home space in these ways required sacrifice from family, for example, when dining table space became requisitioned as the temporary home office or classroom for virtual teaching. Arranging quiet space to plan, read, think and write for uninterrupted periods of time proved more challenging to organise. This demarcating and 'ring fencing' of space and time for interactive professional work, for individual focused work and for one's private self was particularly problematic and complex when balanced against the demands of others in our domestic spheres, with whom we shared not only this space, but also our time and attention.

Combined domestic and work spaces collided in ways that also at times constricted our participation in 'learning spaces'. For some of us, the particular and unique circumstances of prevailing arrangements during the lockdown, enforced isolation from students, colleagues and campus that was not experienced as a fertile learning space. It was isolating, prison-like and claustrophobic without the physical presence of others. We missed the 'social learning spaces for dialogue and debate' (Savin-Baden, 2008: 8) – particularly in the early days of the pandemic, before strategies such as webinars, online conferences (with participation in 'breakout' discussion rooms and so on) became more common. Even then, some of us still craved real-world human contact and dialogic exchange in physical proximity with others.

The conflict and tensions engendered by trying to keep the personal and professional domains of our lives separate and distinct were at times palpable. Academic work became a form of 'emotional labour', a term used by Hochschild (2012), within the home and beyond. During what was an uncertain and anxious time, it was necessary to be 'strong' for students, colleagues and ourselves, while at the same time rendering us 'unavailable' for those in our domestic space. This added to the stress and sense of guilt in feeling compelled to prioritise the 'academic project' over personal and familial well-being, and it evoked feelings of inadequacy at times. Physically distanced and feeling isolated at home, away from the collegial networks in which we participated on campus, we were struck by an awareness of the value that these vibrant campus cultures have for our own and others' flourishing.

Affordances, importance and limitations of technologies

The increase in online activity, and the resulting performativity demands on online academic identity formation, which had been noted in prior research (see, for instance, Jordan, 2020), grew in scale and urgency during the pandemic. In addition to the affective aspects discussed above, during periods when academics have more time and agency for the prioritisation of their image making across social media platforms, those who are active users have been found to reveal aspects of their private and professional identities in ways which align with their, and their communities', acceptable identify fragments (Jordan, 2020). However, the abrupt nature of the pivot online, the lack of choice of platforms and the disruption of physical-to-virtual spaces during the lockdown reduced this sense of agency for academic staff, which also limited capacity for the curation of what was revealed online. In terms of the use of technology, analogue, physical tools were still valued. For example, Seidl (Figure 3) and Belluigi (Figure 4) both showed active usage of pens and hard-copy printouts (often at their own cost); Wood (Figure 1) used a Post-it note, and was surrounded by shelves full of books; Su (Figure 2) had miniature figures on the desk. While the digital technologies afforded virtual connectivity to the world beyond the home, the workspace at home was curated with physical objects, such as practical tools (pens, notebooks, Post-its and so on) and mementos which represented connectivity and reminders of our relationships with others.

As suggested in the authors' reflections elicited by the preceding photographs, there was a blurring of demarcations between private and professional spheres during the period of lockdown-induced emergency online teaching and isolated research practice. This was illustrated in Su's reflection on the

need to create temporary working space in a bedroom, and in Wood's need to limit family members' access to certain spaces in the home, in order to prevent intrusion during virtual meetings and teaching. Seidl's chosen photograph encapsulates the importance of relationships, and a sense of sorrow at the loss of face-to-face contact is represented by the objects on her desk, which have direct personal connections with others. The affordances of technology were important for the continuation of course delivery, but the implementation during lockdown, had significant extended ramifications for academics, which intruded into the personal sphere.

While the use of technologies was vital for the continuation of teaching and learning during the lockdown, there were limitations and downsides. It was not always straightforward, seamless and painless. It should not be forgotten that 'The success of delivery was dependent upon how familiar we became with the technology to be able to apply through the creative engagement of online devices, an environment that was educationally transformative' (Kumar, 2021: 267). This required a considerable investment from staff and students in terms of the commitment needed.

Finally, the blurring of lines between private and professional spheres during lockdown-induced online teaching underscored the impact of our 'digitally extended self' (Parkinson et al., 2018). Students who we never met in person could not solely rely on the carefully curated self-expression of our professional identity on the institution's staff website, but relationships strengthened through the casual conversation, the informal networking and 'checking in' that goes on in the face-to-face classroom setting, which were hard to replicate online. However, these important relational aspects contribute to well-being, and there are ways to enact this online, for example, as described by Kumar (2021: 267): 'I implemented a proposition of networking where we spent a few minutes before a class session, or a breakout room activity to network and bond with the students through conversation about situational circumstance, the general situation, how things were going, health and well-being'.

Worsening of educational and digital inequality during the pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated existing inequalities in higher education institutions. It entrenched the digital divide (Kelley and Sisneros, 2020), and it posed numerous challenges, notably for female academics with regard to precarious conditions of employment or missed career advancement opportunities, not least because of pandemic-era, often single-parent household childcare and home schooling (Adams-Prassl et al., 2020; Gabster et al., 2020). With special focus on culturally and linguistically diverse migrant and/or refugee students, Mupenzi et al. (2020) highlight that the pandemic disproportionately impacted vulnerable students who already face financial hardships, struggling to balance work and study. Mupenzi et al. (2020: 1340) note that 'In the longer-term, there are clear opportunities for reform to equity policy, funding and practice to ensure it is better understood and better embedded throughout the structures, systems and practices of universities'.

As academics in higher education in the Global North, it is important to recognise our privileged positions regarding, for example, the ease of access we each have to technology, and the training opportunities we have had so as to become fluent in the skills needed to be confident in its use. This is not the case for all our students or colleagues, particularly those sessional academics with precarious contracts, and those in less resourced contexts. Crimmins (2017: 97) has explored her own academic casualisation, and she describes casual academics as 'adjuncts, sessional staff or casual teachers', who often feel anonymous, lonely, undervalued and without voice. One lesson we have learnt from our experience of emergency online teaching and learning during the pandemic is the importance of understanding the barriers to online learning engagement which exist, and the ways in which to mitigate their adverse effects. Not to do so may compound the difficulties and disadvantages which some students experience. A personal narrative account by an academic in an Australian higher education context of her experience of teaching international students online during the pandemic includes an honest and reflective explanation of how she came to understand the issues impacting a female international student's online learning experience (Saxton, 2021). These constrained the student's experience of, and participation in, online learning. In the personal narrative, the writer explains how this caused her to 'confront her own privilege', and to realise some of the explanations for the student's lack of participation in online learning.

One of the ways in which such varied affordances were negotiated was the admission of vulnerabilities and the notion that different capitals could be brought to bear. In the final section, our

attention turns to the construction of possible new landscapes of academic practices in the post-Covid future.

Final thoughts: navigating old and new terrains of academic practice in the post-Covid future

State and institutional lockdown responses to the pandemic presented a number of challenges for higher education institutions and their academic citizens, including academics and students. The Covid-19 pandemic, with its severe lockdown restrictions, both highlighted and intensified existing educational inequities. We recognise that it is pivotal for the higher education sector to recognise and to address these for the purposes of increasing the preparedness of academics and universities for future emergencies. Insider insights can help to complicate what is recollected of phenomena in the past, so as to unsettle 'what we see as possible' (Selwyn and Jandrić , 2020: 989). In the same way, this article has adopted a reflexive approach, where the authors' voices contribute to the debate and development of understandings which situate academics' roles and academic labour within the conditions in which they are located.

New technologies and the growth of online learning have clearly opened up options for engagement in academic practice. However, the ways in which these options were deployed for emergency remote teaching suffered from severe limitations, even in contexts with high affordances. This study provides poignant vignettes of the qualitative conditions that the restriction period created for academic practice and labour for those within Western European contexts. Concerns are raised about what may be carried forward uncritically. These include the risk created when the online environment diverts attention from the importance of in-person spaces of face-to-face dialogue and in-person learning. What was re-recognised from the 'old' was the value of analogue spaces of campus, conference, office, classroom and tea and coffee rooms. Their value is in the possibilities they offer for engaging with the whole person, in formal and informal ways; digital modes did not sufficiently satisfy this human need – despite their 'bells and whistles' and breakout 'rooms'.

Along with the challenges discussed in this article, our experiences during the pandemic were catalytic for reimagining pedagogical possibilities and priorities for the post-Covid future. Through reflection on our experiences of practice during the lockdown, a heightened awareness has been gained of the role and significance of social interactions and pedagogic relationships in learning and teaching. Without the in-person connections to and with others through casual chat and informal spontaneous social interactions in physical settings, teaching often felt barren and disembodied when inhabiting only virtual spaces during the lockdown periods of the Covid-19 pandemic. Through experiences during the pandemic as academics, we have become more reflexive, for example, regarding the rationale for the choice of teaching and learning approaches and methods.

These experiences have also prompted questioning and challenging of the epistemological foundations of who we are, what and how we teach, and how we construct ourselves as educators, and ourselves and students as academic citizens. In the post-Covid future, academia may become more appreciative of the hustle and bustle of the campus, with its spatial affordances and digital technologies, which provide reprieve from intrusions of private world demands. In addition to appreciation of such campus-based conditions, in the post-Covid future, we hope that there may be greater awareness and appreciation of our vulnerabilities and holistic lives as academic citizens, with, for example, caring responsibilities and heterogeneous personal identities. Informed by pedagogies of care, more importance may be given to ways of coping with high expectations and their resultant ill-effects, as student and staff well-being and mental health are impacted by the conditions in which we are situated.

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Declarations and conflicts of interest

Research ethics statement

The authors declare that research ethics approval for this article was provided by York St John University ethics committee (Ref: RECELP00014). The authors conducted the research reported in this article in accordance with British Educational Research Association ethical guidelines.

Consent for publication statement

The authors declare that, as the research participants, they provided active informed consent to the publication of findings herein – including photographs, and any personal or identifiable information.

Conflicts of interest statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest with this work. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the authors during peer review of this article have been made. The authors declare no further conflicts with this article.

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