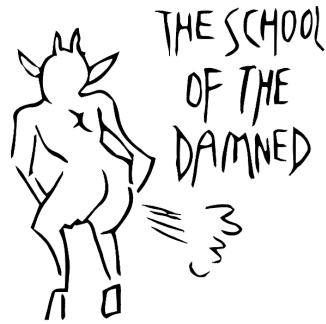


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School of the Damned

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Alternative Art MA

- 1. How does School of the damned transmit from year to year, how do people know to find it to be able to 'sign up', and what that entails?***

Previously there has been an open call on the sotd (school of the damned) instagram, people apply from there on google forms and the previous cohort read these and select the next cohort. Our application process involved us writing what we thought sotd is/should be. When you apply you don't know what it entails to join as this is chosen by each cohort.

Existing cohort sets up and decides some of the structure (ie how many people) for the following cohort, there is a 'hand over' from one to the other. Previously this 'handover' was in person with both year groups but ours was online.

I heard about it from knowing people from previous years. Whether that is historic alumni, or people in the current year. School of the Damned has quite a large following / is fairly well known, this in itself is a big boost to each year's open call getting out there.

School of the Damned is one of the free alternative MA programmes in the UK, some people just find it on google looking for free art education!!

I imagine the schools nature: springing up in different cities for a short period of time, making connections, developing networks and being visible through our output also contributes to knowledge of the school / open call

You don't know what it entails as it each year decide this as they go, we still don't know what our year entails...

It's a complete mystery of unknown system forces. Something like that, there is like a magic about the unknownness of everything, like who knows what SoTD is but it works somehow!!!!
Utopian community vibes

2. Are there limits on how many people per year?

It is up to the previous cohort. This year, we have 102 members which is the largest amount of people we have had in School of the Damned at any point. Previous years have been around 30 people. The last cohort wanted to bring in more people to increase access to the school.

The first cohort consisted of only 14 (double check) members!

Something about the experimental nature of the school. Perhaps touching on the decision to invite a cohort of such high numbers and the relationship between this and other historic education / alt education theory (words???), particularly towards the idea of educational inclusivity. Let me find the quote/ theorist.....

Normally cohorts stay for 1 year but last year they stayed for 2 due to covid limiting their activities. Cohorts could stay for as long or short as they want. Although there are 100 people who were accepted into soto everyone's engagement levels varies. For example, this call we are on to write these answers was sent to the whole cohort and there are 9 of us here. There is no pressure to attend every meeting to be a part of the collective and people are free to step in and out as they please.

3. How is structure is decided each year by the group, and are all ideas used?

There is a loose structure that has been passed down over the years, some very basic ideas / ethos / practical admin. Consensus decision making. development of each year is primarily directed by those in the cohort.

Hard to know if all ideas have been used previously! But with the current year being much larger it could be a possibility that we aren't all following the same structure at any given point, which is in equal parts exciting and complex!

Accessibility is definitely a factor in deciding the structure, for example some people need to plan things up to a month in advance and some people are not able to plan more than 1 week ahead, so we balance all these factors to be as accessible as everyone as possible.

Accessibility also is also a huge factor in deciding what spaces we work with which also determines the structure a fair bit.

From what I know previous cohorts have met online weekly (roughly) and in person monthly (ish) in various places around the UK. These inperson and online meetings may include from reading groups, crits, exhibitions, sharing research/skills and planning future activities. Anyone can start any subgroup at any time, for example if I wanted to start a film group I can and could

call weekly/monthly/random meetings for this as and when I want. It's very empowering to be able to do what you want and be supported by the group in this.

- may be worth just specifying how the school functions outside of a formal qualification etc. - expanding on what we interpret "alternative arts programme" to mean and what it lets us do etc.

4. Also just practically - what's the spread of people who take part, where are they based?

People are all over the UK and we have some people in other countries too. We keep in contact via Slack, WhatsApp and Zoom meetings.

This year we are 102 (?) split into four groups. These groups were designed by the previous cohort to be as equal as possible geographically, to encourage collaboration/visits across areas.

Typically in the past it has been fairly London-centric - however now, and in past years, as people seem to be more and more actively aware of a poorly distributed art world focusing on London, there's been conscious movement to be more geographically representative. For example our sub groups, within which our year functions, were intentionally not based upon physical proximity. As it stands there is still a bit of a London/Southern bias in the year group - but nowhere near as centralised as most arts groups/schools etc.

5. Are there any patterns of background or type of work interesting in/making?

Not really. Everybody has different conceptual and material interests. It's a mixture of fine art, self-publishing, fashion, film, writing, performance...anything you can think of. This is great for discussions and learning from each other!

Earlier iterations of the school were very firmly tethered within the sphere of contemporary art, although over time this has relaxed, with people from a successively wider range of contexts and practices entering.

An interest in art of some kind seems to be what links us all; whether this be making art, working in the arts, used to make art etc. People tend to be interested in collaborating, learning from each other, working in new ways, learning about self-organising,

Background wise there are both those with formal art education and those coming from alternative art education background. Some/most are interested in alternative forms of education.

We currently have members across the full spectrum of institutional and non institutional education: from people fresh out of their BA or having never engaged in arts education, to people post-MA/PHD. The same is true for peoples practices: recent grads, established artists, creatives looking to explore a different context and novices all exist within the same space.

6. *Do sessions mostly happen as a hybrid video/in person meet up at this point?*

Hybrid as much as possible? 100(?) people is a lot to have one big in-person meet up but we are trying lol. Smaller group in-person meet-ups happen pretty often. Exhibitions, school trips, gallery visits, the pubbb etc etc

My group tends to have weekly (ish) zoom calls, mostly to organise in person weekend trips around the country which happen roughly monthly.

Generally speaking is a mix of in person and on zoom. Meeting on Zoom can make mean the meetings are a lot more accessible which is something we're keen to focus on at every possibility. Before we work with any space we ask about accessibility and we try our best to accommodate as many specific access needs as we can. As we decide our own structure and ways of working we can work these into our schedules and plans in quite a unique and flexible way in person and on zoom.

It depends somewhat on the nature of the session! For example, in writing these responses we've convened purely over zoom / google docs: it wouldn't make sense to find a mutually accessible physical location for this task! On the other end of the spectrum, as mentioned, individual groups are all organising meet ups that are primarily in the physical realm. Maybe people will join us at the pub via zoom? Who knows? (Bring back the zoom pub quiz)

7. *Is there any sort of list of who has taken part, what they've gone on to?*

There is no official list but there are websites from previous cohorts and the instagram:

<https://schoolofthedamned.tumblr.com/>

<https://schoolofthedamned.wixsite.com/sotd2019/about>

<https://schoolofthedamnedarchive.tumblr.com/> - this has an archive of the first 5 years of the school. I think the login was lost and previous years have made their own websites.

We are currently working on our cohorts website - (hoping to amalgamate the history of the school into one place, and not lose the password so it exists for future cohorts!(So many websites now my god))

Just trying to get an idea of how it functions and the balance between idea and practice!

We have four groups within School of the Damned and those groups self-organise to decide how they will function and balance idea/practice. There is overlap between these groups with exhibitions etc often being open to all.

Group 4 - we have regular weekly/biweekly meetings (depending on busyness of the month) to discuss ideas about events and what activities we want to do.

It is personal to each person on balance. Some people spend a lot of time on admin, while others do not want any involvement. Some people want crits, while others want to collaborate or discuss ideas. We are hoping to implement more casual zooms where we create and chat casually.

We are running a chainmail slack channel, where people create pages (physical & digital) to pass on to others to contribute to. At the end, we hope to make a zine or a multitude of zines from the collaborative works. We also ran a zine workshop in Birmingham and made more pages for this there.

With a cohort of this size it feels like it's taken us a long time to find our bearing and a sense of direction: There's definitely been several months that were mainly focused on the idea, feeling things out and putting our own structures in place (in both the wider cohort and our smaller groupings). This is now turning towards practice, and I think soon we'll have a strong balance of idea/action.

Our year is very keen on access and on our sotsd register we have a section dedicated to access, an access channel on the slack with frequent meetings, and an access guide put together by the cohort which we follow for in person and online meetings.

As well as the four groups (which naturally function more like form groups) we also have themed channels on the slack. For example, a Magic channel (group), which all sotsd members can come and go from, in which we have magic and art based meetings and hope to have trips to magical sites around the UK. There are also more traditional arts education channels: 'Reading Group', 'Writing Group', 'Crit Group' etc which again all sotsd members can come and go to meetings as they please.