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The Exhibition and Other Learning Environments in The Millbank Atlas

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Abstract

The Millbank Atlas is an open-ended project that maps and remaps the neighbourhood of Millbank, an area of London, UK. This is home to Chelsea College of Arts (University of the Arts London) and our course, BA (Hons) Interior and Spatial Design, which has anchored the Atlas since 2016. We offer the following reflections as tutors on this course and co-researchers on the Atlas, along with our students and members of the local community. Central to this discussion is the kind of learning journey enabled by this type of project, and how it benefits from being distributed across cultural, social, geographical, discursive, and other environments. This raises fundamental questions for teaching and learning, especially the potential to complicate normative assumptions in higher education about where knowledge is produced and who learns from whom.

Keywords atlas, exhibition, learning environment, locally-engaged practice, live project

Introduction

This article considers some of the main learning environments that compose an open-ended project on a BA course in Interior and Spatial Design. We offer these reflections as tutors on the course, the project's facilitators and two of its many co-researchers. Others include our students and members of the local community. Central to these reflections is how, based on a specific project and hence example, teaching and learning benefits from being distributed across cultural, social, geographical, discursive, and other environments and some of the ways they may interact to host the production of new knowledge. This raises fundamental questions regarding the distributing of teaching and learning to complicate normative assumptions in higher education about where learning and teaching takes place and who learns from whom.

We observe aspects of our students' learning journey as they negotiate these environments. We could, however, have instead discussed the profound consequences that negotiating these has had for our own ways of doing social practice. Alternatively, we could have collaborated with the local communities involved to write up some of the ways that co-researching through this project has enhanced their own awareness of learning environments and what implications this has had for their campaigns and other activity. Instead we have chosen to focus on our students' learning journey with the aim of enriching our teaching practice. This may be of interest to other educators and practitioners of art and design as they organise and analyse educational projects that enfold community engagement, and as they seek to understand and enhance the heterogeneous value for the learners involved. A pivot of the

discussion that follows is an exhibition in 2017, as this was a place where our students' learning journey turned a corner. While exhibition histories are gaining traction in the discourse of art through, for instance, the scholarship of Lucy Steeds (2014), Katrine Hjelde has observed there is surprisingly little written about the role that exhibitions of course work play in student experience.¹ Drawing attention to this gap is the upcoming conference, *Making Public: The Fine Art Degree Show*, which is being facilitated by the National Association for Fine Art Education (NAFAE) in March 2019 at Leeds Beckett University. Our cursory review of the literature and practice indicates the role played by exhibition making in pedagogies of interior and spatial design also remains under-researched. With this in mind, we reflect on a specific example to discuss this exhibition as a learning environment where students receive diverse benefit from encountering their own work through its public display.

Pedagogical Relations: College, Course and Studio

The course on which we teach is part of the Interior and Spatial Design programme at Chelsea College of Arts, one of six constitutive colleges of the University of the Arts London. Second and third-year students on this BA are organised into collaborative design studios. These research-driven environments for teaching and learning consist of clusters of staff and students working closely on a focused agenda that is framed through individual design briefs. The studio on which we collaborate is nicknamed 'Chelsea Local' as our projects engage with the communities around Chelsea College of Arts (henceforth 'Chelsea' or 'the College'). Below we discuss the College's location as a key site in the teaching and learning of our course, but for the time being it is useful to know this is not presently located in the London neighbourhood of Chelsea. Its name instead recalls the College's original site on Manresa Road, Chelsea. This opened in 1895 but was redeveloped as luxury flats after 2005 when the College moved to its present location.

The Millbank Atlas as a Project for Civic Engagement

Still based in London, today the College calls the area of Millbank home, with the campus positioned on the banks of the River Thames beside Tate Britain and between the Houses of Parliament and MI6. The desire to embed the College in the complex context of the borough of Westminster of which Millbank is part has motored Chelsea Local, with the studio self-organising to take the lead in the College's programme of community engagement. Back in 2001, when the Royal Army vacated the site, local residents petitioned Westminster Council not to sell it to a luxury property developer. They campaigned for the option of a college of art and design in the hope it would provide a platform to reinvigorate Millbank as one of London's earliest explicit cultural quarters. This dates back to at least 1897 when the Tate Gallery was established and all the buildings comprising the soon-to-be constructed Millbank Estate took their names from well-regarded artists of the day. The Hogarth Building, Ruskin Building and Millet Building nod toward artists who used their practice to address pressing social concerns. This also hints at the significance of the Millbank Estate as visionary council housing. It was designed to address London's chronic housing shortage in the early twentieth-century by 'providing good, affordable dwellings for those seeking to [escape] exploitation and profiteering by private landlords' (Boffy 2014).

¹ We are grateful to our colleague Katrine Hjelde for sharing with us her current research, which is emerging at intersection of 'the exhibition', 'the student' and 'the art institution'. *Journal of Visual Arts Practice* in 2019.

The Millbank Atlas is one of a series of projects we have developed with our studio, Chelsea Local, to work in ways that are both part of the curriculum and cohere as community-based initiatives. Chelsea Local subscribes to atelier d'architecture autogérée's view on the importance of 'taking direct responsibility for the place that one lives' (Murrow, 2007) or in this case studies, to meaningfully address social issues and concerns about sustainability. Building on this idea, our teaching philosophy holds the belief that students of the College should understand themselves as Millbank locals, with this identification feeding into their civic capacity as designers. As coursework for Chelsea Local, The Millbank Atlas aims to cultivate the students' skills and sensibilities in response to locally-engaged proposals, examples of which are explored below. The Atlas also aspires to be an interface amongst Millbank's various communities, with its cartographic experiments providing practical and task-based ways of negotiating this environment. This literally takes classroom-based learning out into the real world where it is tested, iterated and analysed.

This civic engagement means the interior and spatial design at stake in Chelsea Local exceeds the curriculum as something that can be anticipated in advance. How learning takes place as our studio interacts with the local neighbourhoods and communities of Chelsea College was for us a key question that emerged from The Millbank Atlas. As a pivot for this article we seek to better understand how teaching and learning is enriched when we value and attend to the many types of learning environment involved, most immediately in our studio of interior and spatial design. We understand 'learning environment' as sites, spaces, areas, vicinities, locales, and others that are conducive to knowledge production, which we embrace in an expanded sense. The classroom, studio or lecture theatre are only three of many possibilities. Each environment offers conditions for specific but overlapping kinds of experience and understanding: practical, theoretical, sensuous, etc. Engaging Chelsea Local reflexively in its organisation, delivery and especially the public exhibition of its coursework has led us to more deeply appreciate the range of learning environments and hence knowledge, skill and other types of acquisition that comprise our studio as spatial design.

In the academic year of 2016 - 2017, the Atlas developed over several phases. This began with a period of practice-based research. Each student was assigned a particular cartographic approach or concern. These ranged from sensuous encounters (touch, smell, sound) to exploring Millbank's crime or economic activity. Each assignment served as a specific starting point for a specific student to engage with their specific context from a specific point of view, with this providing a basis for collaborating with local residents to produce the cartographic experiments. This was followed by a week-long exhibition at the Cookhouse Gallery at the College (January 2017). As we explain below, the exhibition comprised of the students' 2D maps as well as 3D interfaces for social engagement. The latter were produced by small groups of students and in response to local community needs. Following the exhibition, documentation of the cartographic experiments was disseminated as an atlas, in keeping with familiar notions of this as a collection of maps.²

As a collaborative project the Millbank Atlas assembles staff and student researchers and local residents. Together we map, chart, and otherwise trace Millbank. The aim of this is not to create a comprehensive picture of this London locale but to employ mapping as a socially engaged process that raises questions about the socialisation of the built and natural environments and their representation. Hence the first aim of the Atlas is to better understand

² *The Millbank Atlas: 2017* includes a curatorial essay (by Bradfield and Shechter, authors of this article); reflections on the project from a resident's point of view (by Rimensberger of MCW) and documentation of cartographic experiments. These are accompanied by annotations based on the reflections of their student-cartographers. *The Millbank Atlas: 2017* comes together as a boxed catalogue.

the lived experience of Millbank by drawing on the empirical knowledge of people who reside, work and study there. The second aim is to collaboratively develop and habituate methods of practice-based research that are grounded in real challenges posed by real stakeholders. As a platform for exploring and documenting these challenges, the Atlas supports students to develop their individual and collaborative practice through community-based engagement.

Context, Stakeholders and Their Encounters

From a sociocultural perspective, the way the Atlas supports learning through spatial design across multiple learning environments resonates with the so-called ‘collaborative turn’ that is sweeping higher education. We recognise the collaboration propelling our project as what John Saltmarsh describes as ‘collaborating with community partners to address and solve global [...] problems as they are manifested locally’ (2016: 6). Appreciating what this entails begins with understanding the stakeholders involved, which in the case of the Atlas include:

- Students of Chelsea Local;
- Members of the College’s research community, especially those working in practice-based art, design, curatorial and pedagogical research;
- Stakeholders who live and work in Millbank, including associates of Millbank Creative Works (MCW), a local not-for-profit network that brings together critical fine-art practice, enthusiast and hobbyist cultures and culturepreneurs working in the creative industries;
- Colleagues, planners, policy makers and others who encounter the Atlas as practice-based research, disseminated through traces such as exhibition and its legacy publication.

To encourage our students to recognise their interactions with these and other stakeholders as integral to their learning, we actively draw their attention to diverse encounters and their respective intensities. Our aim here is to model ways of valuing these interactions on their own terms, though this is easier said than done. What at the time may seem like chance meetings in unlikely locales can in retrospect emerge as important turning points in a project, programme or some other trajectory. A case in point was an encounter between Shibboleth Shechter (co-author of this article) and Wilfried Rimensberger, the force behind MCW. Having discovered their shared commitment to establishing a local, creative, and resilient ecosystem in Millbank, the two worked together to establish Chelsea Local as a host for this enterprise. Here, staff and students from the College and neighbourhood stakeholders would explore what the community has to offer the College and vice versa.

Below we illuminate key learning environments that comprise the Atlas. Complementing this spatialisation of knowledge production is the context in which the project resonates. We have chosen to locate the Atlas at the intersection of three axes as a way of nodding towards the complexity of this context, including but also going beyond the sociohistoric significance of Westminster and a site of empire, government, religion and other authority that often finds from as disciplinary regimes. In addition to these there is the first axis: the College’s historical function as an art school that was tasked with meeting the needs of London locals. This differs from its future mandate to cultivate the internationalism as part of a world-leading university (Crow 2017). The second axis spans the cultural, generational and class differences amongst Chelsea Local’s stakeholders. Whereas our studio’s cohort is primarily comprised of overseas students (young, mobile, and capable of paying substantial fees), our community collaborators tend to be people who have lived and worked in Millbank for many years. The majority are retirees; most are on low or fixed incomes. They are embedded but also

vulnerable to the consequences of gentrification, in which the College and its activities are complicit. The third axis is less contentious. It brings together the distinct but also overlapping commitments of transformative pedagogies in art and design through a programme of practice-based research.

Operative at the intersection of these and other axes, the Atlas must negotiate diverse and, at times, competing interests. At the heart of this project is a commitment to recognising the lived experience of Millbank in all its heterogeneity en-route to supporting community-led empowerment and change. We foster this in our students as a point of departure and return in their learning journey. Prime here is the view that interior and spatial designers have a particular role to play, one that tracks with their training and experience of deeply engaging with the spatialisation of multiple and often overlapping spaces, places and the people who traverse them.

Methods for Democratic Professionalism, Live Projects and Case Study Research

Earlier we flagged that our studio, Chelsea Local, is one of seven composing BA (Hons) Interior and Spatial Design. This programme is one of the largest and most established of its type in the UK. Drawing on its art-school context, it is distinguished by an experimental and interdisciplinary approach that pivots on a pedagogy of live projects.

Conceptualising Chelsea Local in terms of its live projects, including the Atlas, presents interesting methodological considerations for our analysis of the learning environments that comprise it. A ‘live project’ can be defined as emphasising the invaluable role that learning plays as it connects academia and the students involved to the worlds beyond (Sheffield School of Architecture 2013). Jane Anderson and our colleague Colin Priest, founders of Live Project Network, define this way of working as comprised of negotiating ‘a brief, timescale, budget and product between an educational organisation and an external collaborator for their mutual benefit. The project must be structured to ensure that students gain learning that is relevant to their educational development’ (Anderson & Priest 2014). Less clear, however, is how the stakeholders are conceived as actors who bring the project into being and the kind of contribution they make and the value they each extract or receive. With Chelsea Local’s commitment to collaboration with stakeholders to support community engagement and change, these considerations become essential.

When thinking about the Atlas as a live project it is worth remembering that contracts for work in spatial design are often structured as service provision: an expert/professional practitioner works for a client to deliver a project on their behalf. Taking its cue from the collaborative turn as a disruptive shift in higher education, Chelsea Local favours an alternative ethos, one committed to valuing local knowledge and resourcing the input of all stakeholders. Crucially, we regard these people not so much as ‘clients’, despite our commitment to addressing challenges they have identified. Instead we encourage all those involved to assume the role of ‘co-researchers’. This framing valorises the specific and situated knowledge of Millbank as privileged insight that can supplement our students’ training in interior and spatial design. This knowledge exchange and co-creation are also the bedrock of an approach to professional practice that chimes with what Albert Dzur has termed ‘democratic professionalism’ (2008). At a time when the general public is often marginalised in the face of technocratic and bureaucratic decision-making, Chelsea Local shares with democratic professionalism a commitment to bringing diverse types of knowledge to bear on social issues. In doing so it aims to encourage and support stakeholders to work together and, in the process, strengthen a public culture of democracy. For this reason, we promote Chelsea Local as an opportunity for live learning where instead of students working *for* the

communities of Millbank, they work *with* them. This commitment hinges on a sense of our studio as one community amongst the many that comprise Millbank in general and The Millbank Atlas in particular.

Bridging the learning and teaching methods of Chelsea Local and those that we used to produce this article is a commitment to pragmatism. We use the format of a case study here as it is good enough for the task at hand: to facilitate a reflective analysis of the learning environments that compose the Atlas. Our rationale for adopting case study research syncs with our general interest in qualitative research. Thick description has great potential to capture detail that is all too often rinsed from quantitative studies composed of large sample groups. Whilst there is no question the latter type of knowledge has its place, we agree with the Arts and Humanities Research Council's views, expressed in its comprehensive report for the Cultural Value Project (2012 -2015): 'Rigorous case studies are valid and important evidence notwithstanding the difficulties of scaling them up. Using in-depth, case study evidence is one of the characteristic strengths of the arts and humanities, and of what they bring to society's knowledge and understanding' (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016: 9).

Learning Environments: From Fieldwork in Millbank to the Project's Exhibition

One of the main learning environments considered here, the site mapped by the Atlas is located in the south of the City of Westminster, on the north bank of the Thames. The boundary of the Millbank conservation area is octagonal, reflecting the shape and hence footprint of the Millbank penitentiary that once occupied it. However, the borderlines of the site mapped by the Atlas exceed any official demarcation. It does not correspond to a recognised ward or neighbourhood boundary but was instead marked in black pen on a printed map by local resident, Wilfried Rimensberger (the powerhouse behind MCW, the community group referenced briefly above as a key stakeholder in the project). Drawing on his extensive experience of living in Millbank for some 20 years, Rimensberger's map encapsulates the area that a local resident might traverse in their day-to-day activity. With these unapologetically eccentric parameters established, the process of producing the Atlas began with students conducting fieldwork. Armed with a copy of the map with Rimensberger's hand-drawn line, they were tasked with continuing this annotative process by 'drawing out' facts and figures alongside hidden stories and histories of the neighbourhood.

Rich and accurate detail is essential to making student projects meaningful for both those who produce them and the stakeholders and others who encounter them. But we never imagined the cohort's maps would together comprise a robust or comprehensive representation of Millbank. More important for our students' learning journey was that each of their mappings served as specific starting points for specific students to engage with their specific context from a specific point of view, with this providing a basis for collaborating with local residents to produce the cartographic experiments. When these are taken together as a body of coursework, Millbank as a learning environment for the Atlas is less a circumscribed territory and more a trafficked intersection, a port of call and exchange to use ethnographer Dwight Conquergood's (2013) sense of the term. Site as the local context comprises both the built environment and the people who use it, the movements that cut across it, the history, the economic development and social dynamics. In getting to know the locals of Millbank, by talking to those experiencing the area first hand - by making personal connections and actively collaborating with residents - the students developed a more intimate relationship with Millbank as their primary learning environment: the flows of people, things, resources, energy and more. The College may serve as a base for Chelsea Local but Millbank and its environs are the studio's classrooms.

The cartographic experiments that emerged from the students' walks, meetings, appointments, phone calls, emails and numerous other exchanges evolved as two strands of practice. The first, touched on above, were 2D maps that explored a specific cartographic concern. For instance, Whitney Akwe's project began by speaking with homeless locals to better understand their lived experience. As Akwe (2017) explains on her website:

Concentrating on creating a map, based in Millbank, my research is on displaced people. I want to consider their experience and create something that they are in need of. Something that would be practical. My map is on a microfibre towel, sharing the knowledge of local resources.

After extensive field research, experiments with materials and feedback from her peers, tutors, and users of her design, Akwe's towels feature a screen-printed map of shelters, public toilets, clinics and other local resources for displaced and other people. Easy to use and light to carry, the towels serve the double function of helping their users to locate themselves in their local environment and to make them more comfortable. The drive to both connect with and meet the needs of this marginalised group is expressed by the project's title: *Humane*.

Our discussions with students of Chelsea Local throughout the 2016 - 2017 iteration of the Atlas often returned to interpersonal exchange like the kind so central to Akwe's learning journey. For instance, Akwe described in a public presentation of her research that she recognised the value of the chance encounters that led to her striking up conversations and becoming acquainted with locals whom she passed on her way to and from college. This interaction was vital to both the content and form of her towel maps. Moreover, this kind of sustained and sensitive contact exemplifies the empathy that is so essential for community-based and other types of people-centred design.

The interpersonal encounters composing the learning environment that gave rise to Akwe's maps are not something that can be readily grasped in theory. They are often immersive, deeply experiential, and uncertain in ways that resonate with what Stephen Dobson terms 'urban pedagogy'. He understands this as practice-based learning that is displaced from institutionalised and hence formal spaces, such as classrooms. This process disrupts teacher-pupil roles which are often fixed and stable. As Martin Severin Frandsen and Lene Pfeiffer Petersen observe, when these roles are shifted 'to the street and the community, many others can assume the role of educators: local residents who convey their experiences from their life in the community, practitioners in local community development organisations, people in local businesses and local institutions and so forth' (2014: 186). Frandsen and Pfeiffer Petersen also argue that Dobson's approach is especially well suited for '[preparing] individuals to participate in democratic society' and the development of critical thinking, self-motivated, problem solving individuals who participate actively in their communities' (2014: 187). For us this participation entails recognising that too often interior and spatial design is framed as designing for a client and hence another. Meeting their needs does not, however, preclude us taking our own practices as legitimate subjects of critical enquiry. For students of Chelsea Local this involves understanding their socially-engaged work in the service of developing resources for making change in Millbank as the environment in which they study and many of them also live.

This approach also underpinned the second strand of cartographic experiments that composed the Atlas, with these taking the form of 3D artefacts. As group work, this strand aimed to complement the students' solo production of their 2D maps. The groups also worked with residents and others who call Millbank home but this time in a more task-oriented way. MCW

invited the students to evolve ongoing projects in response to loose briefs. This resulted in spatial interventions that were propositional, but also, and significantly, this design process generated cartographic *tools* to further understand the who, how and where of Millbank. Witness the food trolley which was designed to deliver provisions to locals atomised by unemployment, mental health issues or both. This prototype operates at the intersection of food provision, physical and mental wellbeing and negotiating the threshold between public and private space. Realising the trolley as a community resource began with the students shadowing members of MCW to understand what this delivery service entails. They collected food from local markets, packaged it into manageable units and then delivered these to people in need.

In another studio this encounter would have primed the trolley's product design, the process of its manufacturing or its look and feel as a functional object. In Chelsea Local, we instead emphasised the trolley as a kind of 'discursive site' in keeping with Miwon Kwon's (1997) sense of the term. Referencing site-specific art in particular, Kwon observes that a work may relate 'to the actuality of a location (as site) and the social conditions of the institutional frame [e.g. Chelsea College] (as site) [but these] are *subordinate* to a *discursively* determined site that is delineated as a field of knowledge, intellectual exchange or cultural debate' (Kwon 1997: 92). Whilst creating a functional food trolley was essential to fulfilling the brief, more vital than its viability as a design with mass appeal or the potential to be mass produced was the trolley's significance as what Rimensberger terms a 'door opener', i.e. a mechanism for connecting with people who would otherwise be atomised. For our students, the process of producing the trolley was something akin to a 'conversation piece'. Discussing its design with the trolley's users helped to clarify their needs. This brings to mind Frandsen and Pfeiffer Petersen's sense that, 'In such cases, the learning that takes places in urban pedagogy becomes situated in a double sense. It is not only situated in the urban environment but also situated in what Jean Lave and Étienne Wenger would term local communities of practice' (2014: 185).

Aware of Lave and Wenger's (1991) well-known theory, we conceptualised the 2017 exhibition of the Atlas as an opportunity to convene and make visible a community of communities. This aspiration shares with communities of practice their three core characteristics. For the Atlas, *the domain* is Millbank; *the community* is composed of the students, staff, locals and others and *the practice* entails using socially-engaged practice-based research and other forms of cartographic experimentation to better understand the lived experience of this domain. But the Atlas also departs from a community of practice. The theory of social engagement that underpins our live project goes beyond learning as an end in itself when design pedagogy is instead perceived as a basis for community-led change.

To highlight the Atlas as a collaboration between students of the College and the locals of Millbank, we curated the exhibition into zones/areas/nodes. Each functioned as a kind of micro environment for learning within the exhibition overall.



Figure 1: The Millbank Atlas exhibition, MCW live project office @ Fernanda Liberti Duarte

Situated next to the main window of the gallery, facing the daily route of staff and students to and from the college and those crossing on their way to and from Tate Britain, there was a live project office where Rimensberger set up a temporary home for MCW. This featured a desk/work space and an exhibition of recent projects produced as part of MCW's coffee bean bag upcycling project in collaboration with Tate Britain. At the centre of the exhibition, there was a large table that featured as the hearth and host, around which we could work and socialise. At the entrance, there was a tea and coffee station that provided visitors, invigilators, and others free hospitality, in the hope that they would linger and chat. We also had a screening area, where we showed video documentation of artefacts in action. The rest of the exhibition featured the maps that students had produced in collaboration with Millbank locals by using strategies like those discussed above with reference to Awake's towel map.

The exhibition's zones aimed to encourage different types of encounters, prompting a range of learning to take place. This approach to knowledge production as a material practice chimes with A.Telier's expanded notion of things. Implicit in their reflections is the influence that actor network theory has had on design thinking writ large:

We suggest that we revisit and partly reverse the etymological history of things. A major challenge for design today has to do with what is being designed - not just the thing (an object, an 'entity of matter') but also a thing (a sociomaterial assembly that deals with matters of concern). How can designers work, live and act in the public that permits a heterogeneity of perspectives and actors to engage in alignments of their conflicting objects of design? How can we gather and collaborate around design things? These things themselves modify the space of interactions and performance, and will be explored as sociomaterial frames for controversies, ready for unexpected use, opening up new ways of thinking and behaving. (2011:1)

This thinking helps us to appreciate the exhibition as itself an emergent ‘thing’ in the parlance of actor network theory and A.Telier, that by assembling maps and other cartographic experiments not only gave visibility to but also actively addressed particular communities and their concerns. For instance, student Sara Abbas mapped the local voluntary sector. Through conversations with Rimensberger she recognised the potential of this learning to compose a local resource. The result was a community newspaper, with the newly minted *MPV Times* being piloted as Abbas’s final BA project with it featuring in the 2017 degree exhibition.



Figure 2: The Millbank Atlas exhibition, Curated Conversation @ Marsha Bradfield

Together with other collaborators in Chelsea Local we activated the exhibition through a series of public events.³ The first of these was the Curated Conversation that launched the one-week programme. What unfolded was an exceptional interface twice over. On the one hand, it was a rare opportunity for communities comprising the college (students and staff) to interact with the communities beyond (members of MCW and other locals). On the other hand, this conversation was exceptional because touring the exhibition and inviting the student designers to introduce their projects to the milling crowd gave rise to a rich discussion in response to the specific set of conditions of possibility afforded by this live learning. It was intriguing to observe the knowledge transfer that occurred when residents and business owners in Millbank, many of them retirees, generously shared their local and hard-won experience with students, many of them young and from overseas. This brought to the fore the type of tension that Chelsea Local aims to explore. It could well be argued that Chelsea College is complicit in the gentrification of Millbank and the displacement of people. This includes the retirees that came and contributed to the exhibition. However, this complicity is

³ Parts of this section draw on Bradfield and Shechter, ‘The Millbank Atlas: A Photographic Essay’ *Living Maps Review* (September 2017).

not something the retirees themselves care to focus on, opting instead to embrace the College as an institution of higher learning that thanks in part to Chelsea Local, values their knowledge and experience. Holding both views in tension affords a more nuanced understanding of various forces that shape the lived experience of Millbank. Yet, this kind of deep and situated knowledge is also often illusive. It involves extensive contact with stakeholders which can be challenging when their contributions are unpaid and their interactions with students are beholden to other demands. In the case of international students, they must acquire cross-cultural knowledge pertaining to their recent move to London whilst at the same time, acquire specialist knowledge of interior and spatial design through their coursework. To this end, the cross-cultural and intergenerational interactions between students and retirees can be both demanding but also rewarding.

Consider Jiyai Mu's maps, which demonstrate how climate change is impacting the health of people who live near the College. The maps 'came alive' when Sylvia Frye, a senior citizen, and a long term local resident, stood beside them in the Curated Conversation, our first public event, and described, in a hoarse voice, how the growing pollution has impacted her breathing and speech and that of many of her fellow residents. The authority of this discursive exchange was powerful and, importantly, potentially cross-cultural. We would like to think that having now returned to China, Jiyai Mu will design other platforms that are purpose built to host and disseminate voices and views that would otherwise be marginalised.

Another key moment that highlighted the adaptability of the Atlas exhibition of 2017 as a learning environment was our Chinese New Year feast. With 16 of our 21 students coming from China and spending the holidays away from their families, it seemed important to celebrate together. Food here was the gateway for cross-cultural and intergenerational exchange. Staff, students and local residents enjoyed a dinner of takeaway from our local Chinese restaurant.



Figure 3: The Millbank Atlas exhibition, Chinese New Year Feast @ Fernanda Liberti Duarte

The final event was a community mapping session facilitated with Nicolas Fonti, a key member of the community-mapping initiative, JustMap. We collaborated with students, locals, and others from across London who are committed to mapping community value in order to safeguard this and other resources for the people who generate them. Using JustMap methods, we identified assets, dynamics, proposals and more. The physical act of pinning flags on a large map of the neighborhood of Millbank was a transformative educational moment for many involved. Whilst for some students the Atlas as coursework had been an academic exercise, our community mapping session shifted it into something more practical and relevant as they translated their insights into ways of identifying and measuring local value that could be used by the communities most directly impacted: people who live and work in the area. The mapping exercise highlighted possible sites for intervention and ways to design for change. Only later would we come to appreciate how influential this session was on the final projects developed by the students of Chelsea Local and displayed in the BA degree show in June of 2017.

Surveying the zone of activity in the exhibition alights on the range of ways that stakeholders relate to live and other types of projects. For instance, students involved in the Atlas may well regard the fieldwork and studio production of the designs in the exhibition as core to Chelsea Local. Community collaborators may instead value their conversations with students and their contribution to the exhibition's public programme of events. Whilst these activities and environments are important to us as tutors of Chelsea Local and curators of the Atlas exhibition, the experience of analysing and representing this live project through a variety of forms (including displays and talks) has also been essential to our own learning and development as practice-based researchers. In fact, this was a driver for realising the Atlas as an artefact. This boxed catalogue features facsimiles of the maps on display in the exhibition annotated with reflections by their student-cartographers, our curatorial essay and a text by Rimensberger that considers the project's impact on Millbank from the perspective of a local resident. These texts aim to activate the bulk of the catalogue as yet another learning environment. (Bradfield, Shechter et al. 2017).

We do not presume to know what immediate benefit the boxed catalogue as a learning environment has had for the students involved because collecting this feedback outstripped what we could accomplish in our 2016 - 2017 academic year. Suffice to say that if we understand their learning journeys as lifelong and lifewide, their three-year undergraduate course is as short as it could be formative. Despite our best efforts many students graduate without a strong sense of identity as cultural producers, as spatial designers or otherwise. Similarly, too few enjoy the conviction their practice is either unique or important or has the potential to be so. This is unsurprising considering this conviction often accreting with life experience, which can take years to reach critical mass. It is for this reason that we try, whenever possible, to model practical ways that students can take their work seriously en route to compelling others to do so. This includes actively valorising their efforts through the public dissemination of their coursework. Exhibitions and publications like those of the Atlas give students a unique advantage. By the time they graduate or shortly thereafter their work has been displayed and written about, and a record of this is held in libraries around the world. Added to which, the 2016 - 2017 iteration of the Atlas has been shared with academic, art world, community audiences and other publics through some seven presentations we have delivered to date.⁴

⁴ These presentations include The Millbank Atlas Exhibition at the Cookhouse Gallery, Chelsea College of Arts, London, January 2017; 'Community: the Best Show in Town? The Millbank Atlas as Locally-Engaged Practice' at Cultivating Curiosity: exploring the design of teaching and learning at UAL, Learning and Teaching Day, London, 21 March 2017; 'Community: the Best Show in Town? The Millbank Atlas as Locally-Engaged Practice II' at Dialogues: Design Education Now, London,

The Exhibition and Other Learning Environments Going Forward

This case study has aimed to map a loosely knit spatial-conceptual-pedagogic framework as a first step to more meaningfully coordinating the knowledge production of Chelsea Local. We have highlighted The Millbank Atlas as a live project that is composed of various learning environments. Principally these include the fieldwork undertaken by students in collaboration with Millbank locals in the College's environs, the 2017 exhibition and the boxed catalogue. Inhabiting the exhibition as a discursive site and interim show, the artefacts it featured were framed as works in progress so that feedback from the local community could inform their future iterations.

As our friend and colleague Katrine Hjelde has observed, there is surprisingly little written about the role that exhibitions of coursework play in the learning journeys of students.⁵ Hjelde's examination of this gap nods towards Irit Rogoff's work on the 'educational turn' in curatorial practice. As Hjelde observes, Rogoff engages with displays of learning by criticising a kind of didacticism as the perceived norm of 'pedagogical aesthetics'. This is marked by the familiar scene of 'a table in the middle of the room, a set of empty bookshelves, a growing archive of assembled bits and pieces, a classroom or lecture scenario' (Rogoff 2008). If the large table at the centre of the 2017 exhibition of the Atlas exemplified pedagogical aesthetics, it did so unapologetically, precisely because the display aimed to encourage sensuous experience with pedagogical purpose: learning about Millbank by encountering and discussing representations of the lived experience of this context. This echoes Rogoff's capitulation that its didacticism notwithstanding, this sensuous regime remains relevant because, 'the drive that [this aesthetics makes] manifest—to force these spaces to be more active, more questioning, less insular, and more challenging—is one to which [we should] stay faithful'. Rogoff goes on to say that we should not give up the socially-engaged practice of conversation because to her mind, '[it] has been the most significant shift within the art world over the past decade' (Rogoff 2008). This tracks with the proliferation of projects in art and design courses that prioritise intersubjective exchange through community engagement. In this regard The Millbank Atlas is in good company. However, there are few accounts that probe how these projects are disseminated and what consequences this might have as social practice for the learning journey of the students involved. In this respect the particulars of the case study of The Millbank Atlas offered above aim to contribute to the field of art and design pedagogy.

Another profound shift that has occurred in both art and education in recent decades is the rise of postinternet practice. With the internet fast becoming a hegemonic environment for learning and display, initiatives like The Millbank Atlas can enjoy other lives online. The postinternet potential of the Atlas and its kindred is something we aim to explore in future research. This entails conceptualising the communities of this live project - past, present, and future - as a network that connects ones based in Millbank with others beyond. This could have important relevance for many practitioners, including alumni of Chelsea Local who have left London and made their homes in neighbourhoods around the world, many of which are surely facing situated and specific challenges akin to those of Millbank.

23 March 2017; The 'Civic University: The Millbank Atlas as Locally-Engaged Practice' at Cities at Communities and Homes: Is the Future Livable, AMPS conference, Derby, June 2017; *The Millbank Atlas: 2017* publication launch at the Cookhouse Gallery, Chelsea College of Arts, London June 2017; 'The Millbank Atlas', *Living Maps Review*, September 2017 and 'The Millbank Atlas: Catalysing Community-based Research in a Spirit of Civic Responsibility' Art of Research Conference, Helsinki 29-30 November 2017.

⁵ Outcomes of Katrine Hjelde's research are expected to be published in 2019.

To this end we posit the glocal ethos of Chelsea Local as a productive place to build solidarities as a practice-based response to the question: *What should our courses prioritise to prepare our students and prime our communities for the uncertain futures that lay ahead?* This is vital concern as tremendous socio-political tumult rocks the UK: Brexit, the general election of 2017, multiple terrorist attacks - the fire in the Grenfell tower block. Never has our work as practitioner-educators felt so urgent but also so insignificant, dwarfed by the waves of crisis that are buffeting our communities, institutions - ourselves. Chelsea Local is committed to staving off fear and malaise by connecting with others who share with us a core conviction: Our futures depend on negotiating immense ambiguity and uncertainty whilst holding fast to the values that underpinned the post-war consensus (freedom, equality, tolerance, knowledge - social responsibility, etc.). Preserving these values becomes an urgent task as the welfare state withers and new learning environments emerge to teach us about our rapidly changing built, natural and other contexts. What seems certain is that the capacity to resource site-specific knowledge in all its nuance and complexity and apply it to other contexts could play a key role in connecting, strengthening, and diversifying communities, like those comprising Millbank.

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