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Undercurrent: swimming away from the design studio

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Abstract

Should architectural education pull away from the design studio as the dominant form for architectural education? Can live projects offer a more relevant, inclusive, and engaging model?

In order to establish points of divergence from studio-based learning and using a definition of live projects¹ established in collaboration with Colin Priest, a comparative analysis is made between contemporary architectural live projects and the Public Art Projects led by David Harding at the Environmental Art Department, Glasgow School of Art from 1985. This comparison reveals the potential of live projects to extend collaborative ways of working beyond graduation and between the university and its community. With reference to Lave and Wenger's theory of situated learning as legitimate peripheral participation,² the paper demonstrates how live project learning can be understood and valued. A case is made for a shift towards a transformative, democratic and holistic form of learning made possible by live projects.

Keywords

Live Projects, Design Studio, Architectural pedagogy, Public Art, Situated learning

¹ Jane Anderson and Colin Priest, 'Developing an inclusive definition. Typological analysis and online resource for live projects', in *Architecture Live Projects*, eds. Harriet Harriss and Lynnette Widder (Oxford: Routledge, forthcoming 2014).

² Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated learning: legitimate peripheral participation*. (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1995)

Abandon ship! Swimming away from the Design Studio

Should the design studio surrender its pre-eminence within architectural education? Taking contemporary architectural education as the context and exploring the design studio as the dominant force within it, the author asks whether we should swim against the tide that it creates. It is expensive, resource hungry and so much effort is expended defending it within the institution where it is perceived as comparing unfavourably in terms of cost and efficiency with other lecture-based disciplines. The teaching, learning and production within the design studio are rarely conceived, perceived or expressed as research by institutions and therefore become de-valued. Its institutional setting places it at least one step away from architectural practice making the task of maintaining its currency in a rapidly changing world a considerable challenge. The engrossing nature of design studio activity and its importance (conveyed to students in ways that are both explicit and implicit) within the curriculum can marginalise other core academic subjects such as history and theory, technology and practice. These subjects are occasionally brave enough to assert their role within design by integrating with it and are often drowned in the attempt. This can be seen in the Royal Institute of British Architects' architectural degree course validation reports, where frequent mention is made of the need to improve the integration of technology into the design studio.³ The author challenges the monopolisation of the design studio by the formal aspects of design, suppressing its holistic nature and encouraging design as a discrete activity, insulated from other core subjects.

The design studio dominates as a physical space where students are expected to experience the majority of their education and also as a symbolic space where students become socialised as architects. It is in this use of the design studio, as a socialising tool, that it is most difficult to define, challenge or change the status quo. Yet it is here that the greatest opportunity for generosity can be sited: inviting students to belong to the group that they want to join and supporting them in becoming an architect. However, this system also provides ample opportunity to exclude students who struggle to conform. From personal experience of teaching the author has observed that this is most often manifested in the student's physical disengagement from the design studio. As long as imbalances in gender, race and class remain within the profession and wider society, the vagaries of this socialising system will continue to create barriers to the widening of participation.⁴

As described above, contemporary architectural education is striving to maintain its institutional, academic and professional relevance. It has created unintended pedagogical consequences associated with the dominance of both design as a discrete subject and the design studio as an entity, that create unwitting barriers to a wider participation. The design studio-only model struggles to deliver an environment that fosters a holistic approach to design and to support authenticity, relevance and inclusion. Could any of these issues be addressed if the teaching and learning of architecture occurred outside the architectural design studio?

³ *Royal Institute of British Architects*, 2013. 'Validated courses', [online] Available at <<http://www.architecture.com/EducationAndCareers/Validation/Validatedcourses.aspx#.Ud8tYkGsh8E>> [Accessed 12 July 2013]

⁴ *Centre for Education in the Built Environment*, 2006. 'CEBE Guide to Supporting Student Diversity in UK Schools of Architecture', [online] Available at <http://cebe.cf.ac.uk/learning/sig/equality_arch/pdf/StudentDiversity.pdf> [Accessed 10 March 2014]

Cast Adrift. Neither here nor there

What are the dangers and rewards for tutors and students who cast adrift from the shelter of the design studio? A radical early example is Walter Gropius' experiment to connect the Bauhaus with industrialisation and mass production during a time of hyper-inflation, exemplified by the *Haus am Horn* prototype dwelling built for their 1923 Exhibition. The work on show gained widespread acclaim and remains significant today. At the time it was a mixed financial and artistic success.⁵ There was conflict among teachers and students about what was lost in this shift in direction. Local craftspeople felt threatened by the potential competition and the public resented the use of their taxes to fund the institution. Staff and student work was now in the public domain, making it accessible for praise and criticism alike. The perception that profit motivated the actions of the Bauhaus may have contributed to some of the negative reactions to their bold experiment from all sides.

From experience of running live projects, the author suggests that the physical product of a live project should not be viewed as the primary output. The real product is the learning gained by the students. It is important for the live project educator to be clear to students, fellow educators and external collaborators from the outset that live projects are educational projects taking place outside the design studio and not proxy professional projects. This allows us to broaden our understanding of what a live project is. It frees us from the expectations associated with professional practice and helps us to structure live projects with a greater focus on questions of why, what and how we should teach and learn outside the design studio.

A tension still exists today between the established role of the university to function as an important place of free thinking (theory) and its more recent identity as a resource that engages at first hand with the world outside (practice).⁶ In the opinion of the author, both activities are complementary to the design process and should inform one another. Activities associated with theory and practice are mixed up in any design project. A tutor may be pursuing a piece of research while students are engaged in scholarship by learning about it from their tutor. Original discoveries or innovations may be made in the course of the project by either tutor or student. The practical aspects of design can range from the simple practising of skills to an early application of innovative research. The process of learning by doing can lead to discovery, innovation and original thought. The central activity of architecture is the manipulation of space and as this is essentially within the experiential realm, architects need opportunities to learn to connect their imagined spaces to experienced spaces.

The author will focus on two possible points of divergence from the mainstream of the design studio-only model for contemporary architectural education. The first comes from art education, a related discipline that is traditionally studio-based. Environmental Art shares outward-looking preoccupations with architecture such as context and society. The author will look at the innovation, influence and success of the Glasgow School of Art Environmental Art Department and its graduates such as Christine Borland, Rachel Mimiec and Douglas Gordon. The connections between their student Public Art Projects and contemporary architectural live projects will be explored, revealing inter-disciplinary lessons that are relevant for live project educators. In finding connections with other disciplines and projects that pre-date well documented architectural examples such as Rural Studio, the author seeks to expand the boundaries and dialogue surrounding live project education. The passage of time allows us to assess the influence that this live education had on the professional work of its graduates.

⁵ Frank Whitford, *Bauhaus*. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), p. 150.

⁶ Flora Samuel, 'The way we were: the changing relationship of research and design', *RIBA Journal*, March (2014) [online] Available at: <http://www.ribajournal.com/pages/march_2014__intelligence_research_230015.cfm> [Accessed 6 March 2014].

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The second point of divergence from the studio-only model to be explored here is the architectural live project. Through analysis of a programme of year one live projects at Oxford Brookes School of Architecture (*OBI LIVE*)⁷ established in 2008, commissioned by local community clients and designed by students of architecture and interior architecture, the author in collaboration with Colin Priest, has arrived at a definition of what makes a project live. We have identified the constituent parts of a live project and here the author develops a methodology to understand learning outside the design studio. This information is being shared via an online *Live Projects Network*.⁸ With reference to Lave and Wenger's theory of 'situated learning' as 'legitimate peripheral participation',⁹ the author will propose ways that learning derived from live projects can be understood and valued. The status quo of the design studio-only model will be reviewed in the light of discoveries made by live project education.



Figure 1. Elephants' playground at Pitcoudie, Glenrothes. Late 1970's (with author in red wellies!)

The Storm. Are the studio and university still relevant?

The work of David Harding and teaching partner Sam Ainsley in the field of fine art provides architectural educators with a pioneering and successful example of what can happen when students are encouraged to journey between imagination and experience. In 1968 David Harding became the town artist in the New Town of Glenrothes (see figure 1). He initiated the involvement of local people in the making of public art works. In 1978 he was a significant part of the development of the Art in Social Context course at Dartington College and between 1986 and 2001 he was Head of the Environmental Art Department at Glasgow School of Art. Environmental Art was a new specialisation taken by students after year one for the remainder of their four-year undergraduate course. Their studios were located outside the School of Art building in the former Girls' High School building in Scott Street, where they had lots of space and sources of inspiration to experiment with site-specific work.

In an unpublished article on the Public Art Projects carried out every year by all undergraduate students in the Environmental Art Department, David Harding describes how they were structured:

Students had to find their own site; negotiate permission to use it; propose a work and set it up. Thorough research of the site and its setting was of crucial importance. Using a variety of research tools such as, drawing, photography, interview, library, questionnaires students were encouraged to get to a point of immersion seeking out the critical elements of the context whether it be social, historical, architectural, political, psychological.¹⁰

⁷ Jane Anderson and Colin Priest *OBI LIVE Blog*. (2013) [online] Available at <http://www.brookes.ac.uk/schools/be/about/architecture/ob1/index.html> [Accessed 24 February 2013].

⁸ Jane Anderson and Colin Priest, *Live Projects Network*. (2013) [online] Available at <http://liveprojectsnetwork.org> [Accessed 21 June 2013].

⁹ Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated learning: legitimate peripheral participation*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 34.

¹⁰ David Harding (unpublished), *The Public Art Project*. [article] (Personal communication, 5 June 2013), p. 1.

The motivation was to develop ‘a willing engagement with, and sensitivity to non-art/secular/everyday contexts; to negotiation and / or collaboration with non-artists; to a delicate balance between the personal and the public; to the issues around the local and the universal; to sites, places, audiences.’¹¹ The Public Art Projects had evolved from David Harding’s interest in the work of the Artist Placement Group (APG)¹² who pioneered the concept of art in the social context. In particular, Harding cites APG member John Latham’s axiom that ‘the context is half the work’.¹³

Christine Borland described the influence of this radical approach to learning on her practice: ‘Environmental Art gave me the practical means of getting in touch with people and also the desire to do it.’¹⁴ Reading about the parameters of the Public Art Projects and seeing the collaborative and external nature of the work in Harding’s book *DECADent*¹⁵ celebrating ten years of the course, struck a familiar chord with the author. There seemed to be parallels with the method and motivations behind contemporary architectural live projects.

The Environmental Art Department has attracted attention because of the number of its graduates who have risen to prominence as artists. In addition to individual successes in high profile awards such as the Turner Prize and Becks Futures, they are particularly visible because of the group identity that they have maintained throughout their careers through various collaborative projects and initiatives. They emerged from a place that was considered peripheral to the artistic establishment.¹⁶ Their group identity maintained both during and after their time as students in the Environmental Art Department and the attention that their work attracted for its relevance and originality, provokes questions about the extent of the influence of their education on their professional work. Douglas Gordon in his Turner Prize acceptance speech referred to the group as the ‘Scotia Nostra’.¹⁷ They are connected by Harding and Ainsley’s radical teaching approach, their collective and collaborative experience of the Public Art Projects as students of the Environmental Art Department and also by the influence of the contemporary art scene that was struggling to emerge in Glasgow.¹⁸

Joseph Beuys made a series of influential visits to Scotland from 1970 to 1981. Circa 1974 he had established a Free International University. Perhaps inspired by this, in January 1987 a group of Glasgow writers and artists including Malcolm Dickson, James Kelman and Alasdair Gray started a Free University that lasted for five years. The flyer for the inaugural event read ‘part free university, part late/cheap cafe, unemployed centre, artspace etc. DEMAND THE IMPOSSIBLE’.¹⁹ The nature of the educational institution, its accessibility and its structures were open to question in this predominantly socialist climate where there was a widely-held belief among artists that they had a responsibility to work for their community.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 2-3.

¹² APG, *Artist Placement Group*, (Tate Online Resources) Available at: <<http://www2.tate.org.uk/artistplacementgroup/>> [Accessed 2 Mar 2014].

¹³ David Harding, (Personal email communication, 25 November 2013)

¹⁴ Sarah Lowndes, *Social Sculpture. The Rise of the Glasgow Art Scene*. 2nd edn. (Edinburgh: Luath Press Ltd, 2012), p.88.

¹⁵ David Harding, (ed.) with Pavel Buchler, *Decadent. Public Art: Contentious Term and Contested Practice* (Glasgow: Foulis Press, 1997).

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 11

¹⁷ Ian Irving, *BBC Imagine. Glasgow – The Grit and the Glamour*, (2012) [video online] Available at: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W2XwOXTSAic>> [Accessed 21 Feb 2013].

¹⁸ Chris Sharratt, ‘Fact, legend and the Glasgow Miracle. A new exhibition traces the ‘Glasgow Miracle’ back to the 1970s and the foundation of the city’s Third Eye Centre’, *a-n The Artists Information Company*, (2012), <<http://new.a-n.co.uk/news/single/fact-legend-and-the-glasgow-miracle>> [Accessed 9 Feb 2013]

¹⁹ Lowndes, p. 94.

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In her book *Social Sculpture. The Rise of the Glasgow Art Scene*, Sarah Lowndes describes the determination of Harding and Ainsley's alumni as they chose to stay in Glasgow, the city that had inspired their earliest works. They continued to work collaboratively and took over the running of the artist-run gallery, Transmission. It is interesting to note that they chose to go from one institution, the Glasgow School of Art, to another, finding the collective way of working and identity that they had already established as students, undertaking Public Art Projects, continued to be important and useful for their developing practice as professional artists. They invited established artists from outside Glasgow such as Lawrence Weiner to collaborate with them. This effectively extended the institutional support that they had found in the art school with which they retained close connections. The decision to stay in Glasgow was not an obvious one in a post-industrial city with almost no art market and very little public funding forthcoming for conceptual art.

The testimony of several Environmental Art graduates allows us to attribute part of their success to their innovative education and their uncommon experience of undergraduate (live) Public Art Projects in the public domain.²⁰ In Harding's article *THE SCOTIA NOSTRA. Socialisation among Glasgow artists*, he also acknowledged the significant role that the students played in their own education by noting that when Douglas Gordon was asked what he learned in the Environmental Art Department he replied 'To sing. Not how to sing but simply, to sing.'²¹ Their collective working methods can be attributed in large part to their education because they were developed and established while they were studying and were so significant that the artists chose to sustain them throughout their later professional art practice. Harding observed that 'the course produced students who don't wait around to be asked or commissioned to do things but are equipped to go out, initiate projects, create their own opportunities and set things up for themselves.'²² As they began to find international recognition it did alter the way that the group could function in the public realm. This was described by Christine Borland in 1993:

It is perceived that they can no longer engage in the area of debate where previously they functioned so well. To make valid comment is only acceptable from a position of non-privilege. The ensuing local politics, guilt hang-ups and possible rejection on the home front are possible side-effects.²³

This description of the potency of a position of "non-privilege" is very similar to the peripheral position of the situated learner described by Lave and Wenger who acknowledge its unique creative potential for developing 'constructively naïve'²⁴ questions. The group's dilemma seems to have been resolved in part by their involvement in teaching at the School of Art and through their cultivation of informal internal and international networks that include the younger generations of artists emerging in the city. Thus the group continues to contribute to the perpetuation and development of the model of collaborative working and public art processes that they first encountered in the Environmental Art Department.

²⁰ Lowndes, p.88.

²¹ David Harding, 'THE SCOTIA NOSTRA. Socialisation among Glasgow artists', *CIRCLES*. Karlsruhe: ZKM', (2001) [online] Available at: http://www.davidharding.net/?page_id=11 [Accessed 26 June 2013]

²² Harding, *The Public Art Project*, p. 3.

²³ Lowndes, p. 179.

²⁴ Lave and Wenger, p.117.

This self-sustaining and supporting model is a useful one for the situation faced by many architecture graduates in the current economic climate. Lowndes notes that ‘The combination of social co-operation and interest in process-based practices that characterise the Glasgow art scene helped to shield the city’s artists from the collapse of the art market in autumn 2008.’²⁵ These artists formed an early identity through collaborative working and undergraduate public art projects and remained loyal to the group, their art and their city, a place that inspired many of their earliest projects. Schools offering live projects have the potential to foster similar collaborations among students that survive and develop after graduation. A contemporary response can be seen in the University of Northumbria’s Graduate Retention And Development (GRAD) programme established in 2010 to respond to the lack of opportunities for architecture graduates as well as address some of the development needs of the region.²⁶ In hostile social, political and economic climates, it can be seen that institutions can provide an important shelter for collective activity that is creative, educational and external. The sum becomes greater than its parts and is particularly conducive to collaborative and inter-disciplinary working. These institutions can be established, such as Glasgow School of Art; be self-forming, such as the Free University; or be appropriated, such as the artist-run Transmission Gallery.

All Hands On Deck. Collaborative ways of working

One criticism of the studio-only model is of the issues arising from the imposed reality of theoretical design studio-based projects. This is particularly relevant to disciplines such as architecture that are outward-facing and concerned with context and society. The author has observed that design studio-only briefs that totally or partially detach from realities such as context and society require students to negotiate with their tutors the terms of the reality that they must imagine and work within. The tutor and any other assessors are the arbiters of the legitimacy of the reality that the student imagines. This can lead to imbalances of power between tutor and student. Any such power imbalance has the potential to become exploitative or lead to a loss of autonomy, authenticity, confidence or motivation for students. Such consequences are counter-productive to learning and engagement with learning.

This can be seen most clearly when teaching year one students, the vast majority of whom are simultaneously negotiating the shift from classroom-based learning to studio-based learning. As novices to this system, they are not afraid to point out its idiosyncrasies to their tutors who are already immersed in it. At first questions betray a partial belief that the project is real. Examples of such questions encountered by the author while teaching in year one are:²⁷ ‘Why did the neighbours not know that we were proposing a cinema next door, and why did they seem so alarmed when I told them about my project?’ ‘Will this design get planning permission?’ Once it becomes clear that the project is fictional, the questions shift, revealing negative consequences arising from the realisation that this is not real: ‘If it is not going to be built, why do I need to demonstrate that the structure will stand up?’ ‘Can’t I just assume that disabled people won’t want to visit my building?’ The reasoning seems to be that if the project is not real, then we must be operating within a wholly or largely imaginative realm. Unwanted facets of reality that don’t sit comfortably within the individual’s imaginative world or things we know exist but don’t understand must therefore be dismissed.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 12.

²⁶ Sebastian Messer, ‘The G.R.A.D. Programme: an alternative form of practice’, in: Oxford Brookes University, *Live Projects Pedagogy International Symposium*, (2012). Oxford, U.K. 24-26 May 2012. Abstract only. Available through: Northumbria Research Link, Northumbria University. Available at: <<http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/8001/>> [Accessed 24 February 2013].

²⁷ In addition to reflections made by the author on her own day to day teaching practice, she also undertook a twelve-week period of observation of the year one design studio at Oxford Brookes University from October to December, 2001 as part of the University of East London architectural tutor training course.

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The danger for educators here is that by using fictional projects to encourage students to use their imaginations, we can neglect the importance of imagination to help designers engage with reality in a creative way.²⁸ *Healthy Design, Creative Safety*, a research project undertaken by the University of Sheffield for the Royal Institute for British Architects and the Health and Safety Executive found that even subjects such as health and safety that rarely succeed in engaging students can be addressed naturally and creatively as part of a live project.²⁹

At Oxford Brookes School of Architecture in 2008, my colleague Colin Priest and I established *OBI LIVE*, a programme of live projects for community clients designed by year one students of architecture and interior architecture. We introduced a live project on the first day of year one as an experiment to see if it helped to remove the tutor / student power imbalance and fiction / reality confusion normally created by the negotiated reality of a conventional design studio-only project brief. An early project in 2009-10 was to design proposals to improve Mount Place, an underused public square in Oxford (see figure 2). Its location in the public domain required us to structure contact with local residents and the City Council carefully. Students made prototypes to test their own understanding of their proposals at full scale. They presented a collage of each proposal in context for discussion to local residents, planners and local councillors at a local area planning meeting. Everyone involved was explicit about the students' peripheral status as novices rather than experts and this was critical in engaging the interest and involvement of local people.



Figure 2. OBI LIVE 2009-10: *Strategies for place improvement*, Mount Place, Oxford.

Improvements to Mount Place had been at a standstill for the preceding decade. The local councillors and planners attributed this to political issues that made local residents reluctant to collaborate with the council. The involvement of the students changed this dynamic, opening a channel of communication between local people, planners and councillors during the design process. The momentum of the student project and their proposals presented at the planning meeting led to changes being agreed that evening. These changes were implemented within the next few months. The wall to the canal was demolished to allow views of the canal from the square, opening it up to visitors on the opposite bank. An information board designed by the students was installed to welcome visitors arriving from the canal bridge. It depicted the history and character of the area and the text was written by local people.

²⁸ Ruth Morrow, Rosie Parnell and Judy Torrington, 'Reality versus creativity?', *CEBE Transactions*, Vol. 1, Issue 2 (2004). [online] Available at:

<<http://www.cebe.heacademy.ac.uk/transactions/pdf/RuthMorrow.pdf>> [Accessed 2011, March 16].

²⁹ Leo Care, Daniel Jary, and Rosie Parnell, 'Healthy Design, Creative Safety. Approaches to health and safety teaching and learning in undergraduate schools of architecture', *RIBA and Health and Safety Executive*. (2012) [online] Available at:

<http://www.architecture.com/Files/RIBAProfessionalServices/Education/2012/HealthyDesignCreativeSafety-FinalreportMarch2012.pdf> [Accessed 26 February 2013]

We followed this live project with a design studio project brief located in the same area. Students had a first-hand understanding not only of the place but the people who lived there and their attitude to the place. We effectively used the initial live project as a very informative, immersive method for analysis of site, brief and client. My empirical observation of this sequence of events was that the confusion between imagination and reality that I had observed in year one students (described above), was less than it was in a conventional design studio-only project. Tutors and students had a shared understanding of the physical and human context that they were dealing with and what extents of reality and imagination that they were working within. We were explicit that this brief to design a club house was fictional and in contrast to the previous live project. The brief stated they should use the opportunity to find a means of architectural expression that was personal to them as a designer. Having found such a positive relationship where a live project informs a conventional design project, it is a pattern that the author has employed on many occasions since.

Student feedback showed a consistently high number of students who expressed a sense of achievement gained from participating in the live projects.³⁰ Live projects appeared to be engaging a broader range of students at all levels of attainment and from different backgrounds. In addition to the live project strategy, mixing live projects with conventional studio projects extended the range of abilities and learning styles being engaged. Local people and their representatives were included and explicitly valued. Their voices are not normally present in the dialogue of design studio projects and their presence further widens the range of inclusion. Harding has described the transformative potential for young people, often perceived as disengaged with education, who participate in public art projects led by artists.³¹ In conversation we agreed that a similar transformative experience can also extend to students who are given the opportunity to be the authors of public or live projects.³² The shared endeavour of the *OBI LIVE* projects established a level of trust and mutual understanding between students and tutors that was beneficial to all participants in the design studio. Students see their tutors practicing alongside them, learning and teaching in situ, adapting and responding to the live project as it developed. The author has observed that while students are engaged in a live project outside the studio, the design studio remains significant as a place of production, preparation and learning. Our students are in the studio physically but their imaginations are rooted in an external reality.

Lave and Wenger describe their concept of Situated Learning through Legitimate Peripheral Participation as a theory of learning rather than a pedagogical technique.³³ By looking at a live project in the context of the conditions needed for this kind of learning to occur, we can see that in a well structured live project, students acquire legitimacy for their activities outside the institution by their membership of it. In *OBI LIVE* and the Environmental Art course, students' identity as learners is kept explicit, keeping them on the periphery of fully legitimate practice and protected by the presence and accountability of the institution which ensures that relevant learning takes place. It is in this key connection between the institution and the real world that the role of the tutor is critical and becomes transformed from the traditional arbiter of reality to one as 'tutor-agent'³⁴ negotiating the needs of the students and the client. The projects give the students the opportunity to participate in activities and engage with the community that they wish to engage with professionally in future.

³⁰ Student feedback has been gathered via a general module questionnaire at the end of each semester from 2008 to 2014.

³¹ David Harding, 'Work as if you live in the early days of a better society. Collaborations between artists and young people', in: Anna Harding (ed.). *Magic Moments: Collaborations Between Artists and Young People*. (London: Black Dog Publishing Ltd, 2006) [online] Available at: http://www.davidharding.net/?page_id=181 [Accessed 26 June 2013]

³² Jane Anderson, (unpublished). Interview with David Harding at the Centre for Contemporary Art, Glasgow, 2 July 2013.

³³ Lave and Wenger, p.29.

³⁴ Jane Anderson and Colin Priest, 'The Live Education of an Architect: John Hejduk and *OBI LIVE*, imagination and action', *Journal for Education in the Built Environment*, 7(2) (2012).

Lave and Wenger made a series of studies of different apprenticeship models.³⁵ Their study of apprentice butchers who were being taught outdated skills that excluded them from legitimate participation revealed that learning *in situ* is in itself not enough to ensure that positive situated learning will occur. However, if the learner's participation was legitimate and explicitly peripheral, they would benefit by having a 'longer and broader conception of what it means to learn'.³⁶ The author proposes that *OBI LIVE* and the Environmental Art course both employ a live project approach, learning by participating with the support of their tutors in authentic practices and contexts outside the institution, and that these projects are valuable because they are structured in a way that encourages engagement and situated learning through legitimate peripheral participation.

Set Sail! A liberated pedagogy of live projects

Working with year one students placed us on the periphery of recognised live project activity and allowed the author a certain detachment from which to observe developments in the field. With our low-to-no budgets and inexperienced cohorts, projects and products emerged that were very different in nature from the typical live design build, proto-professional projects seen in the architectural press. We were forced to question whether our projects were legitimately live projects. In the absence of an agreed definition of the term live project, in a paper written by the author with Colin Priest we describe the process by which we analysed case studies in order to find a definition of a live project.³⁷ We began by analysing twelve of our own projects and comparing them with live projects publicised by schools of architecture in the UK and USA. We had experimented with different live project formats, using them to test different questions: 'Are self-initiated projects live?' (On-campus pop-up cinema, 2011) 'Are student-led projects live?' (Tactile model for the blind, 2009). We were using live projects to teach conceptual design and had moved beyond the compartmentalised technical, participatory or professional training labels, often applied to live projects. This enabled us to position ourselves within what we recognised to be a broad spectrum of live project education that extended beyond the construction of permanent buildings and also allowed us to acknowledge lessons that could be learned from live project activity occurring outside the discipline of architecture.

We identified six factors common to all live projects and formed an inclusive definition explaining their relationship:

*A live project comprises the negotiation of 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.*³⁸

Some of the six factors (brief, timescale, budget, product, educational organisation and external collaborator) were more contentious or difficult to identify than others:

Brief: we accepted that a real project and its brief were essential for any live project. We observed that some would call a project live if this factor alone was present but decided that without the other factors it is impossible to distinguish this from a professional project or ensure that it is a structured piece of learning.

Timescale is an inevitable factor and it can be difficult to make live projects fit within the academic calendar. We found that a broader view of the possibilities inherent in the other factors, particularly brief, product and client enables more imaginative ways to achieve this.

³⁵ Lave and Wenger, pp. 76-79.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

³⁷ Jane Anderson and Colin Priest, 'Developing an inclusive definition. Typological analysis and online resource for live projects', in *Architecture Live Projects*, eds. Harriet Harriss and Lynnette Widder (Oxford: Routledge, forthcoming 2014).

³⁸ *Ibid.*

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Client: we questioned whether it was acceptable for projects to be self-initiated. If the students are effectively the clients, this is a marginal case, closer to a design studio project but if all the other factors are there and it occurs in the real world, we decided that it can still function as a live project because the group of participating students are effectively the client. Often their institution is actually the client, imposing restrictions on a project that is happening on their property.

A budget is inevitable but often overlooked, even if operating on a make do and mend basis.

The necessity for a product is not contentious but some forms of output tend not to be acknowledged as live such as prototypes or ideas generation.

The educational organisation and external collaborator: we were slower to think of this but the educational organisation is the most obvious factor that distinguishes a live project from a professional project in practice.

In 2012 we established the *Live Projects Network*,³⁹ an international online network of live projects to connect students, academics, practitioners and clients involved in live projects. The purpose was to promote the use of live projects in education, share best practice, encourage dialogue and contribute to the establishment of a theoretical basis for the study of live projects. The site includes a series of case studies of different live projects.

From an initial analysis of the first fifteen different live project case studies on the network from three different institutions (Oxford Brookes University, McGill School of Architecture, Montreal and the University of Portsmouth), we saw that even very diverse project types shared the six factors identified in our definition of a live project. These factors could be perceived as either characteristics or constraints. What in fact differentiated each project was where it sat on the spectrum of each characteristic or constraint. For example, the nature of the client relationship could range from a commission, to a collaboration, to a self-initiated project. The identification of these six spectra enabled us to develop a flexible methodology to analyse the structure of a live project:

*A live project comprises the negotiation of a brief, timescale, budget and product between an educational organisation and an external collaborator for their mutual benefit. The availability of resources offered by each of these factors creates a spectrum and reveals positions along it that the live project can occupy.*⁴⁰

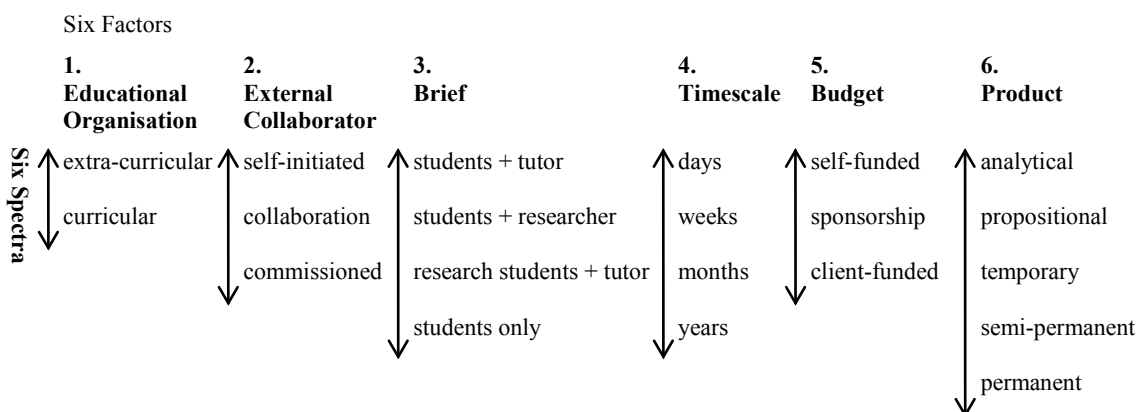


Figure 3. Six factors of a live project revealing six spectra for each characteristic or constraint.

³⁹ Anderson and Priest, 2013.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

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We identified points along these six spectra (see figure 3) and used them to create a pro forma for contributors to the site to complete. We have adapted the terminology of two of the six factors in response to the variation in live project types that we have found. ‘Institution’ has become ‘educational organisation’ to enable us to include extra-curricular live projects organised by groups connected with educational institutions but with some degree of independence from them such as volunteer programmes, educational trusts or charities. Similarly, ‘client’ has become ‘external collaborator’ to reflect the collaborative ways of working, modes of mutual exchange and self-initiated projects that are the basis of so many live projects rather than a more conventional client relationship and model for the commissioning of projects.

The screenshot shows the Live Projects Network website interface. At the top left is a red circular logo with the text 'LIVE PROJECTS NETWORK'. To the right are social media icons for RSS, Facebook, and Twitter, along with a 'Follow' button and a 'Like' button showing 221 likes. A search bar is also present. Below the navigation bar is a horizontal menu with links: About, Live Projects, Methodology, Links, Members, Bibliography, Contact, and Submit Project. The main content area features a grid of filter tabs for various project characteristics: Location, Institution, Client, Discipline, Group size, Budget, Organisation, Timescale, and Product. Below the filters is a grid of 18 project thumbnails, each with a title underneath. The projects shown are: Dor Marunt, Learning From Kilburn, Casa Mellifera, Structures for Children, Stadspree Kiezspree, Ghosts of San Jose, To Shelter, Biggar 2013, Found! for Archeox, Alice Day Caucus Race, Play Pavilion, Fareshare Project, and St Blaise. There are also three more thumbnails at the bottom of the grid that are partially cut off.

Figure 4. Screenshot of *Live Projects Network* website on 18 January 2014.

By 1 December 2013 twenty-six different educational organisations had sent seventy case studies located in sixteen different countries to the *Live Projects Network* site (see figure 4). The intention is to represent as wide a cross section of different live project types and models as possible rather than to provide an exhaustive database of all live projects. Case studies are organised on the *Live Projects Network* online resource so that they can be filtered and found according to their characteristics and constraints. These relate to the six factors in our definition of a live project allowing us to categorise case studies as they arrive to see how they fit within that definition.

It is interesting to note that a case study submitted by a postgraduate research student engaged in applied research sat quite comfortably within our live project definition. We observed the similarities between live projects and applied research projects and hypothesise that if this was more acknowledged than it is at present, it could be made more explicit by educators.

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The *Live Projects Network* site is structured so that visitors can find case studies with contexts and resources similar to their own situation. For example, if a tutor wishes to run a live project but has little or no budget, they can search for projects that have similar resources and find out what can be achieved. The inclusiveness of the definition and the flexibility of the methodology enable a broad range of projects to be connected as live projects, including those beyond the discipline of architecture. It is the role of the tutor as agent⁴¹ to negotiate a structure and focus for the project that ensures students will be able to learn what they need to learn. This could be a broad range of skills and knowledge as is normally found in a design studio project or a very specific academic core subject such as technology or practice.



Figure 5. Rachel Mimiec, *Applause*, Kelvingrove Park, Glasgow, 1991. Installation at the outdoor auditorium prior to its demolition.

We can also use the live project definition and flexible methodology to analyse live projects from other disciplines to see how their methodology varies and whether they fit within the six spectra established originally to describe architectural live projects. For this analysis we will return to the Public Art Projects set by the Environmental Art Department and look at one project from 1991 by Rachel Mimiec to see if it fits within our definition of a live project. The project took place in a neglected outdoor auditorium in Kelvingrove Park (see figure 5).⁴² Mimiec's response to the space was to paste photographs of clapping hands on the tiered seating and to install a sound piece of applause in the bandstand. The project maps as follows:

Educational organisation: Department of Environmental Art, Glasgow School of Art. In addition to other projects which students could elect to carry out in the public realm or in the studio, each student was required to undertake one Public Art project every year in years two, three and four of the undergraduate Environmental Art course.

External Collaborator: owner, custodians and users of Kelvingrove Park outdoor auditorium. Public Art Projects were more likely to be a collaboration rather than a commission because the projects were initiated by the students according to their interests. David Harding commented that:

Over the years the institutions in Glasgow became more and more sympathetic. The students would contact the same organisations - the Police, the city council's Planning and Parks departments, etc: 'Oh we've had one of you here before. What do you want this time?'.⁴³

Brief: 'locate a space or site and develop a personal response to it'.⁴⁴ David Harding explained:

⁴¹ Anderson and Priest, 'The Live Education of an Architect: John Hejduk and *OBI LIVE*', 2012

⁴² David Harding. *Decadent*, p. 68

⁴³ Anderson, 2013.

⁴⁴ Harding, *Decadent*, p.68.

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We said to the students ‘You’ve got to find your own way of working in the public domain. We are not going to dictate what you should be doing and should not be doing’. There was a broad range of things that could happen. The students should find a context whether historical, cultural, social, architectural, etc. - whatever they felt fitted their intentions for their work - whatever they were comfortable with.⁴⁵

Timescale: Students were given the brief in October to give them time to negotiate and research. The project deadline for year 4 was February, year 3 was in March and year 2 was in April.⁴⁶ Design and execution of the project took place approximately five weeks before the deadline.⁴⁷

Budget: most likely to be self-funded but some public art projects had an element of sponsorship or client funding such as Alan Dunn’s billboard projects where a mutually beneficial arrangement was agreed with a company to fill their empty billboards with his artworks.⁴⁸

Product: the art work itself plus documentation of the process in a project book. Most of the projects remained in-situ for one or two weeks and were documented before removal. Some projects remained at the level of a fully worked out proposal due to bad weather or withdrawal of the site owner’s permission.⁴⁹ David Harding noted that:

None of the works were to be seen as permanent or stay on site because I felt that cities deserve the very best art that they can get and student work can be unresolved or immature....You can take risks then and that’s the good thing about it. It’s just going to be out there for a couple of weeks. It’s not going to be out there forever so you can flex.⁵⁰

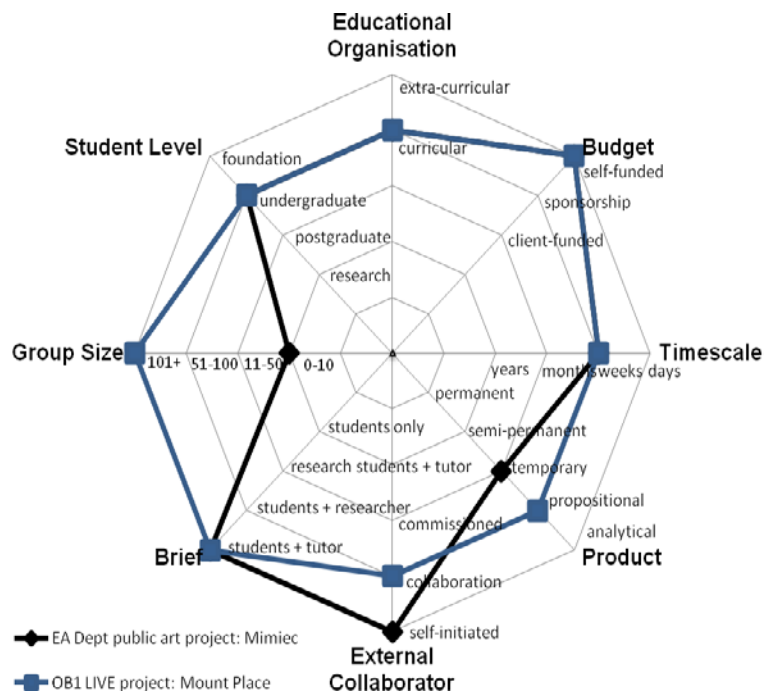


Figure 6. Comparison between an Environmental Art Department’s public art project (Rachel Mimiec, 1991) and OB1 LIVE’s Mount Place project (2009) showing the relationship between the factors of a live project.

⁴⁵ Anderson, 2013.

⁴⁶ David Harding, *The Public Art Project*, p. 1.

⁴⁷ Anderson, 2013.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ David Harding, *The Public Art Project*, pp. 1-2.

⁵⁰ Anderson, 2013.

We can see that the Public Art Project model fits very comfortably with the live project definition and methodology, originally devised to analyse architectural live projects (see figure 6). What can we learn by connecting diverse live project types? We can connect live project educators and participants, opening up new methodologies, exchanging best practice and expanding dialogue about the role of live projects in contemporary education. It is hoped that the *Live Projects Network* is one step towards achieving this. The impact and significance of live projects on the education and subsequent professional activity of architects is not yet clear. In the case of the Environmental Art Department, much can be learned because it is a very particular example and the lapse of time and visibility of its graduates has enabled us to follow their careers.

The Harbour Mouth. Between university and world.

The author began by acknowledging the sheer strength of the current created by university design studios as the location for the majority of architectural education. It described some of the negative effects of the design studio-only model such as the exclusion of parts of the curriculum from the central activity of design and therefore the exclusion of some students from the socio-cultural environment this creates. We can of course choose to reject this and seek to establish radically alternative structures. Contemporary architectural education and statutory bodies are structured towards design studio-only models and need to adapt to admit the increasing use of distinct live project models. The author has described a diversification of architectural and art educational practices made possible and desirable by live project approaches, exposing new opportunities for collaborative, external and inter-disciplinary working. There is certainly an argument for increasing connections between universities and nurturing working relationships with other institutions along the model of artist-run or not-for-profit organisations such as Transmission which enabled the graduates of the Environmental Art Department to effectively extend the public art projects and collaborative working practices that began when they were students. There is much potential to transform the relationship between universities and society through live project activity that stimulates mutual support and joint endeavour.

There is still great value in the strength of the existing university institution as a harbour for creativity. Design studio projects from the 1960s onwards sought to use this to challenge the status quo with radical agendas for an imagined future. The author argues that the radical premise of this form has lost its way, becoming fictional rather than imaginative. Live projects with their situated and democratic ways of working, learning and teaching have made significant progress in re-introducing radical agendas into architectural education and to the profession. They have broadened the curriculum by integrating all parts of it into design projects, widened the range of learning styles and therefore engaged a greater diversity of students.

One role of the university is as a place for speculative work that is yet to find a context in which it can be applied. This would suggest that theoretical design studio projects are still significant but need to be re-thought in the light of the discoveries made by live project pedagogies. They must maintain their speculative function but should be re-invented to at least include the relevance, innovation and accessibility of delivery that has been discovered in live project pedagogies. The author's initial analysis of live projects posted on the *Live Projects Network* and reviews of live projects in other disciplines⁵¹ both reveal a strong connection (to be explored through further work) between live projects and applied research, for example by providing a platform for experimentation with novel technologies. This divests us of the traditional antithetical relationship between theory and practice.

⁵¹ Anderson, J., 2013. Relating Live Projects in Architecture and Health / Life Sciences disciplines, in: *Faculty of Health and Life Sciences Away Day*. The Oxford Hotel, U.K., 21 November 2013 and

⁵¹ Anderson, J., 2013. Live Projects. You Live and Learn, in: *Technology, Design and Environment Faculty Development Day*. Oxford Brookes University, U.K., 4 July 2013.

Contemporary universities offer intellectual freedom, access to the latest research, potential for inter-disciplinary collaboration, accountability, control of quality and professionalised teaching. They should be in a very strong position to allow large numbers of students to participate in and access an excellent, intensive and relevant education. This might seem counter-intuitive in the UK at a time when funding for university education is being challenged and when opportunities for access to that education are made uncertain by changes to fees. The same inclement economic, social and political forces are also acting on the profession and graduates, leading to calls for a radical shift in working practices. These should be viewed as one system, just as the tide in the harbour ebbs and flows with the sea outside. If we choose to work for change within an existing educational institution, we can harness its strength and stability to transform the existing design studio model into one which harbours outward-looking creative, collaborative and inter-disciplinary opportunities for students, staff and the wider community.

Live projects are one way to address this imperative and are particularly well suited to outward-facing disciplines concerned with context and society such as architectural education and environmental art. By defining live projects and understanding how to structure them to ensure that significant situated learning can occur within them, we can establish a theory of live project learning, improve dialogue and share best practice across disciplines and institutions. The author's online *Live Projects Network* is one publically accessible contribution to this effort. The transferability of our definition of live projects to other disciplinary contexts has also enabled the author's current project to review live project activity in other disciplines.

David Harding described the radical and productive consequences of the Environmental Art Department's Public Art Projects: 'One of the wonderful things for us as staff was that the students were constantly uncovering new possibilities for art practice. Literally putting art and creating art in places where it had never been seen before.'⁵² The projects provided transformative experiences for many of the students participating in them. Students engaged local people as they negotiated with them to conceive, install and respond to their work. The city's institutions such as the Police, Planning and Parks departments and private businesses such as billboard companies also began to adapt and embrace the activities of successive generations of students over the years. In Auburn, Alabama and Dalhousie, Canada, also places with long-established live project programmes it is already possible to see communities and universities adapting to each other in ways that are mutually beneficial and locally distinctive.

Although the work of an architect is concerned with, and is manifested in the world outside, significant parts of the design process are located within the design studio or office. Therefore the educational design studio as a proxy for the professional design studio remains important for the learning of studio-based disciplines. However we should be careful not to treat it as a proxy for the context of the real world beyond the design studio. Live projects are located both in the world outside and in the design studio. The presence of live projects alongside design studio projects enables us to be explicit in our methods for exploring an expanded range of imaginative possibilities from the speculative to the evolved. Perhaps we should view educational design studios as public space in a way that is similar to the art gallery as a public space, engaging the wider community in its cultural endeavour. This view shifts the perceived location of the design studio as a physical space located within the university to a metaphysical position straddling the institution and the world.

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⁵² Ibid.