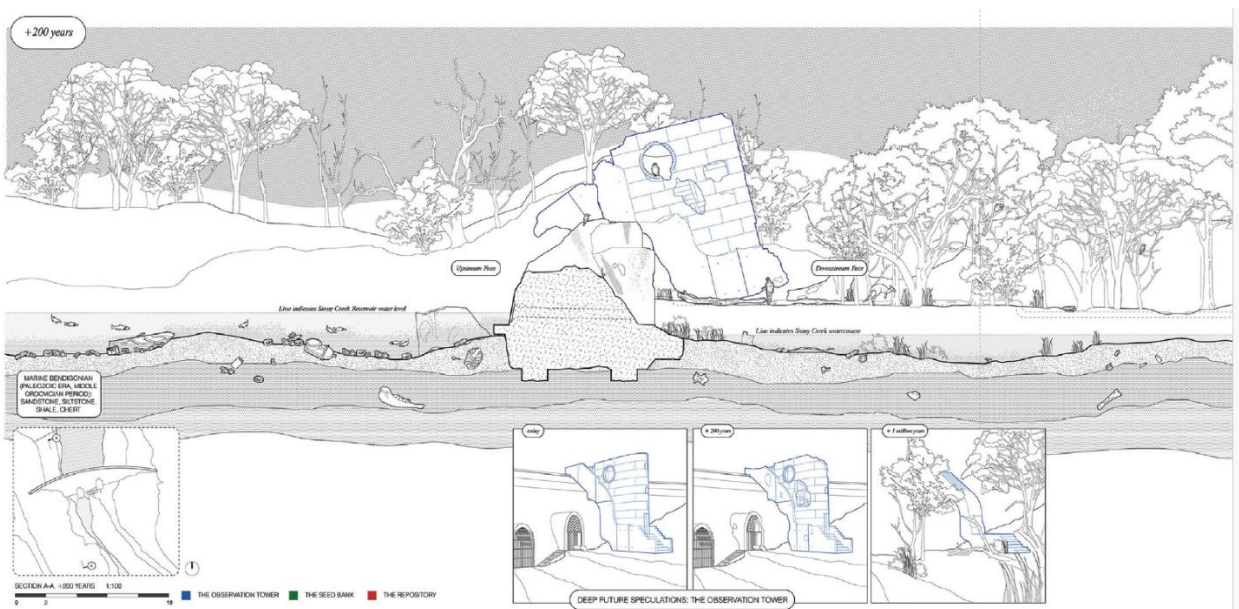# Exhibit A

arts and culture, austerity and anarchism

> *"The ultimate, hidden truth of the world is that it is something that we make, and could just as easily make differently." - David Graeber*
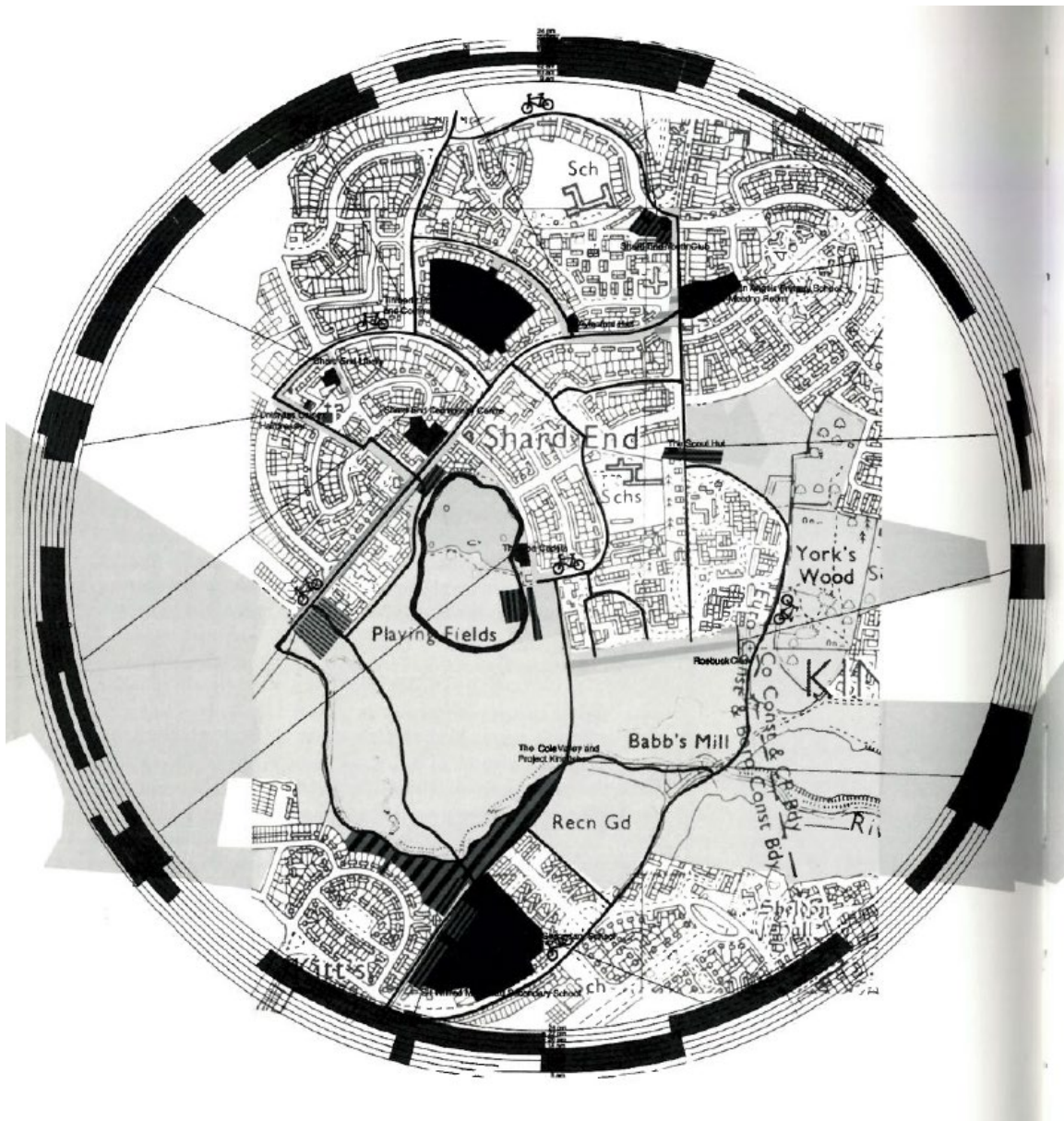

Emilie Evans, Infrastructural Remains: Caring for Anthropogenic Ruins, 2021 – irrational section cut

The impacts of an acute economic crisis in the city quickly bring to mind obvious ramifications for frontline civic services and our shared reliance on the state. Health, social care, policing, refuse collection and environmental cleanliness represent the foundation of our understanding of basic physiological needs; but without equal consideration for the opportunities for self actualization and transcendence offered by arts and culture, our hierarchy of needs[1] is incomplete.
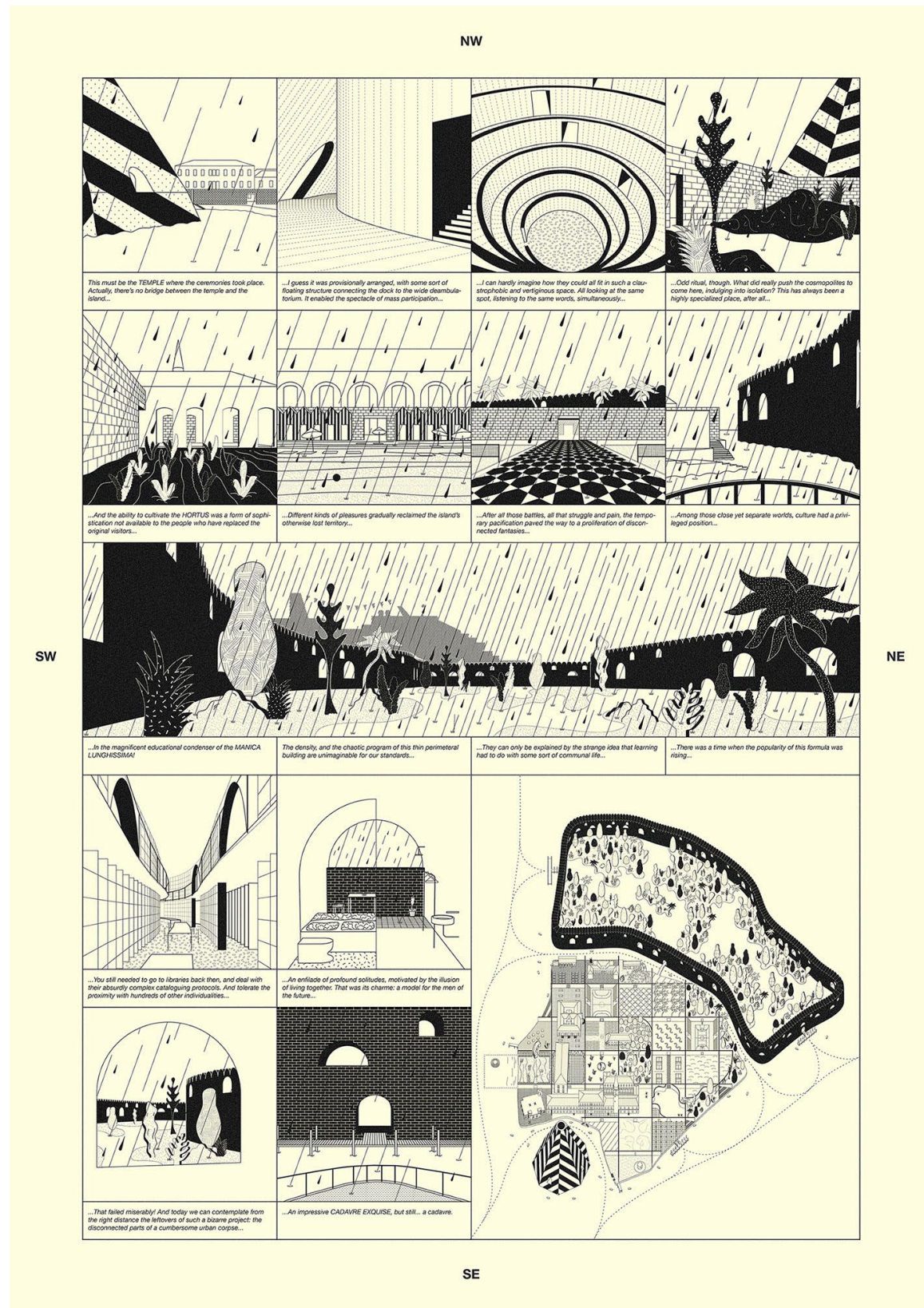
Birmingham's arts funding is under threat of complete extinction, with investment in the cultural sector expected to be cut by 60% in 2024 and 100% in 2025, prompting the publishing of a joint statement by major arts organisations in the region under the banner #CultureMatters [2]. Although some opportunities for support remain, such as the recently announced fund offered by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), [3] its remit covers a large geographic area and benefits will undoubtedly be spread thin.

In addition to this future crisis, questions are being asked of the city's recent past. Whilst Birmingham has successfully demonstrated its commitment to major cultural events such as the hosting of the 2022 Commonwealth Games, the hope of a long term legacy for communities is undermined by the announcements of major losses of both money and opportunity on infrastructure that has struggled to offer a life beyond the games[4]. As architects we should question whether a different architectural and urban design strategy could have avoided this.

Shard End, Restless Youth Centre - MUF

NW

SW

NE

SE

This must be the TEMPLE where the ceremonies took place. Actually, there's no bridge between the temple and the island...

...I guess it was provisionally arranged, with some sort of floating structure connecting the dock to the wide deambulatorium. It enabled the spectacle of mass participation...

...I can hardly imagine how they could all fit in such a claustrophobic and vertiginous space. All looking at the same spot, listening to the same words, simultaneously...

...Odd ritual, though. What did really push the cosmopolites to come here, indulging into isolation? This has always been a highly specialized place, after all...

...And the ability to cultivate the HORTUS was a form of sophistication not available to the people who have replaced the original visitors...

...Different kinds of pleasures gradually reclaimed the island's otherwise lost territory...

...After all those battles, all that struggle and pain, the temporary pacification paved the way to a proliferation of disconnected fantasies...

...Among those close yet separate worlds, culture had a privileged position...

...In the magnificent educational condenser of the MANICA LUNGHISSIMA!

The density, and the chaotic program of this thin perimeteral building are unimaginable for our standards...

...They can only be explained by the strange idea that learning had to do with some sort of communal life...

...There was a time when the popularity of this formula was rising...

...You still needed to go to libraries back then, and deal with their absurdly complex cataloguing protocols. And tolerate the proximity with hundreds of other individualities...

...An enfilade of profound solitudes, motivated by the illusion of living together. That was its charme: a model for the men of the future...

...That failed miserably! And today we can contemplate from the right distance the leftovers of such a bizarre project: the disconnected parts of a cumbersome urban corpse...

...An impressive CADAVRE EXQUISE, but still... a cadavre.

https://www.jeanbenoitvetillard.com/projet/poveglia/

Against this backdrop of diminishing state support and its failures of imagination, other questions include: *How can a city's residents continue to ensure a thriving arts and cultural environment? What is the scale or nature of a neighbourhood sufficient to offer an identity for artistic self-determination, organisation and mutual aid? What cultural infrastructure must it adopt, create, steward and maintain to facilitate creativity and recreation in the community for multiple generations without risk of systemic failure?*

Exhibit A will examine how architects and urban designers can address these questions on behalf of communities to foster archetypal spaces and forms ready for **occupation and appropriation** through the creation of neighbourhood **Exhibition Halls**.

By taking inspiration from precedents supporting exhibitions, festivals, fairs and pageants we will explore how to create '...*positively shaped HULLS of public space.* '[5] to be filled with the arts and culture of its assembled residents.

It will do this with the help of a biologist, an anarchist, a structuralist, an astrophysicist and a Space Crone.
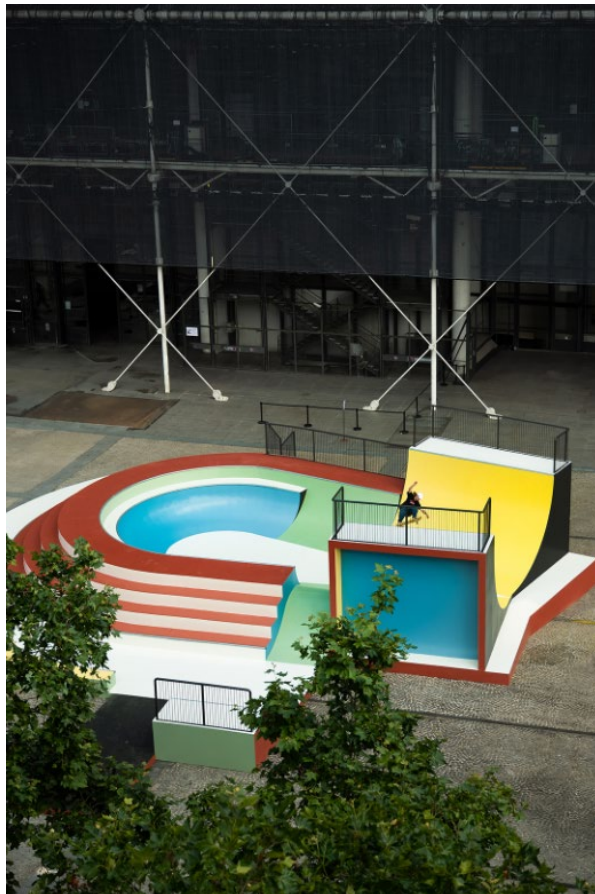
Left: Cycloid Piazza - Raphael Zarka + Jean-Benoît Vétillard

Right: Expo 2000 Netherlands Pavilion / MVRDV

the cast

<u>Patrick Geddes (biologist)</u>

Geddes (1854-1932) was a biologist, geographer and pioneering town planner. Through concepts such as his **'valley section'** he sought to demonstrate the interconnectedness of city regions. His understanding of how a region's local character was formed by a combination of **'folk, work and place'** will help us develop a framework for describing our site. He was also an advocate of engaging citizens in understanding and shaping their urban environment through the creation of a **'civic pageant'**.

<u>Colin Ward (anarchist)</u>

Ward (1924-2010) was a prominent British anarchist thinker, writer, and social historian who made significant contributions to urban planning, education, and anarchist theory in the 20th century. Often described as a "gentle anarchist," Ward's approach focused on practical, everyday examples of anarchism in action rather than revolutionary rhetoric. His work emphasized the importance of self-organization, mutual aid, and the **creative use of space by ordinary people**.

<u>Christopher Alexander (structuralist)</u>

Alexander (1936-2022) was an architect, design theorist, and author best known for his seminal works "A Pattern Language" (1977) and "The Nature of Order" (2002-2004), which proposed innovative approaches to design and the understanding of living structures. We will be discussing how his concept of 'pattern languages' might support the creation of **archetypal, universal spaces** and a structuralist emphasis on **meaning arising from relationships** rather than inherent properties.

### <u>Fritz Zwicky (astrophysicist)</u>

Zwicky (1898-1974) was an astrophysicist and polymath. He provided early evidence for dark matter, predicted neutron stars, and coined the term 'supernova'. Beyond his astronomical discoveries, he developed the problem-solving technique called '**morphological analysis**'. We will be exploring how this can assist with decision-making around complex problems.

<u>Ursula K. Le Guin ([Space Crone](#))</u>

Le Guin (1929-2018) was an American author best known for her groundbreaking works of speculative fiction. Le Guin was also a prolific and influential essayist and cultural critic, addressing topics ranging from fantasy fiction and feminist issues to the craft of writing itself. We will be considering her essay on **'Utopiyin' futures.**

the precedents

1. Fun Palace (unbuilt, conceived 1961)
    Architect: Cedric Price
    Location: London, UK (proposed)

2. Mummers Theater (1970)
    Architect: John M. Johansen
    Location: Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

3. Centre Pompidou (1977)
    Architects: Renzo Piano, Richard Rogers, Gianfranco Franchini
    Location: Paris, France

4. Dutch Pavilion, Expo 2000 (2000)
    Architect: MVRDV (Winy Maas, Jacob van Rijs, Nathalie de Vries)
    Location: Hanover, Germany

5. Casal Balaguer Cultural Centre (2016)
    Architects: Flores & Prats + Duch-Pizá
    Location: Palma de Mallorca, Spain

6. Cultural Center Cobquecura (2022)
    Architect: Alberto Campo Baeza
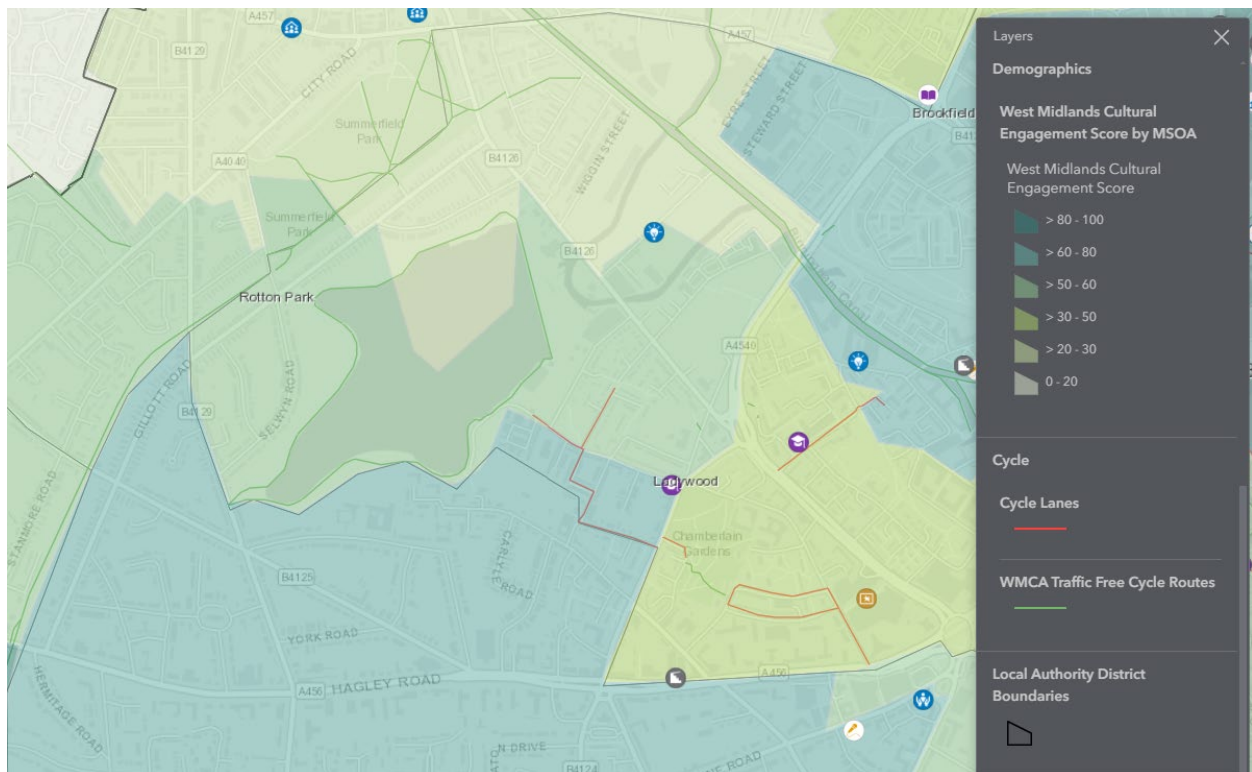   Location: Cobquecura, Chile
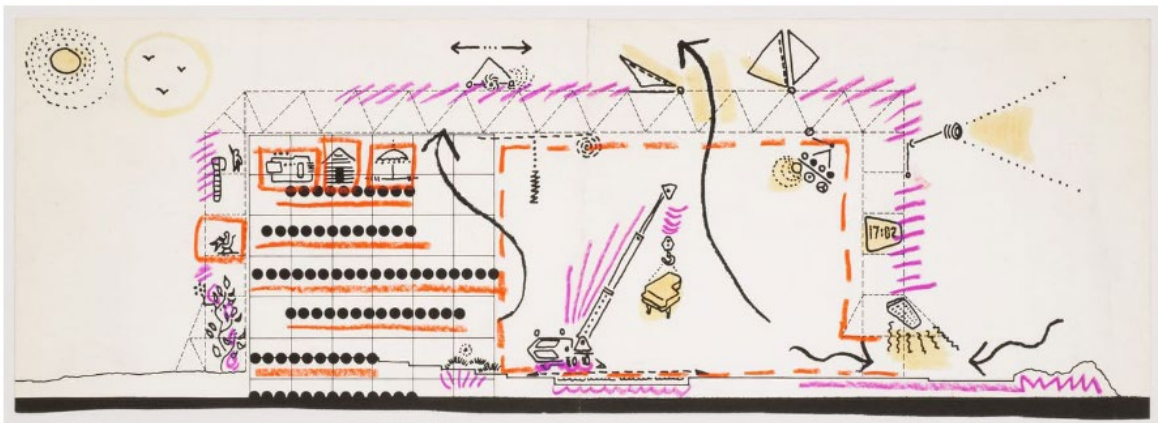
Cedric Price, Fun Palace: Section showing potential use of interior spaces, 1963. Ink, coloured pencil and felt-tip pen on paper, 157 × 419 mm. Cedric Price fonds, Canadian Centre for Architecture.

https://drawingmatter.org/light-adaptation/

the site

The proposed area of Birmingham for this project is to the west of the city centre, around the ward known as North Edgbaston. Defining the local character and spatial extent of the site will be part of your project.

We will begin at the following location:

///care.newest.bunny

https://www.wmca.org.uk/what-we-do/culture-and-digital/culture-creative-industries/west-midlands-cultural-sector-research-project/west-midlands-cultural-infrastructure-map/

the work

We will begin by visiting and documenting the site, choosing individual routes and areas for investigation to share with the group via experiments with written descriptions to form a taxonomy of place using Geddes' Folk/Work/Place headings.

Your reading of the region will be described through an 'irrational section cut' chosen to help you describe the local character of your region and begin to imagine the creation of a future civic pageant.

We will define and map the region's character and create objects as tactical co-ethnographers to become your 'conditional intervention' to witness, record, describe or highlight existing lifeworlds.

Your final site strategy will use your new definition of place, supporting a civic pageant celebrating local folk and work, together describing a new region for arts and cultural events, allowing you to propose a locally relevant project program for your Exhibition Hall.

Recommended readers will be provided by the studio tutor for discussion in class and are intended to support your critical analysis of and response to the brief – see bibliography.

The studio tasks described above are intended to **support and supplement** the required deliverables described in the <u>ARC6116 Design Exploration General Brief Synopsis</u> – see summary below:

Phase 1 – Research and Critical Analysis (3 x A1 or equivalent)

Site analysis + Site mappings + Broaden your mind

Phase 2: Exploration and design response (1:50 Physical model + 1 x A1 or equivalent)

Conditional Intervention + Social intervention

See full brief document for all submission details.

This studio challenges you to synthesize diverse theoretical perspectives, from anarchist thought to pattern languages, in crafting innovative solutions for cultural sustainability in times of austerity. Your work will not only address Birmingham's immediate challenges but also contribute to a broader dialogue on the future of urban cultural spaces.

By reimagining the relationship between communities, infrastructure, and creative expression, you have the opportunity to develop radical yet pragmatic approaches that could reshape how cities nurture arts and culture in the face of economic constraints.

"One thing I'm very passionate about is that I want people to make things, because I know how good it's been for me," he says. "I get sad when people say: 'Oh, I can't draw,' because you can.

People are creative and they don't realise it. They think art is this abstract thing for people that can go to galleries and buy sculptures for the foyer of an HSBC headquarters.

But it's not. It's for everyone. Art serves a vital role in our lives." – Joe Lycett

▲ A Cat Having a Little Think While Resting on a Skylight on a Hot Summer's Day, 2022. Dreamies Creamy on canvas, 30 x 40 cm. Photograph: Joe Lycett

---

footnotes:

1. see Maslow and the recent discussion of his First Nations influences: https://gatherfor.medium.com/maslow-got-it-wrong-ae45d6217a8c
2. see example by Culture Central: https://www.culturecentral.co.uk/news/birmingham-festival-23-full-evaluation-demonstrates-positive-impact-on-the-city-hwfyt
3. £20m budget announced in March 2024: https://www.wmca.org.uk/news/20m-funding-boost-for-region-s-arts-culture-and-heritage/
4. After standing empty since the games, despite a housing need crisis, the final sale of the athlete's village development resulted in a financial loss: https://www.localgov.co.uk/Birmingham-to-lose-320m-on-athletes-village-sale/60947
5. see Alexander's The Nature of Order, Book 3: https://www.patternlanguage.com/archive/hulls.html

bibliography

Alexander, C. (1977) A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction. New York: Oxford University Press.

Alexander, C. (2004) 'The Hulls of Public Space', in The Nature of Order: An Essay on the Art of Building and the Nature of the Universe, Book 3: A Vision of a Living World. Berkeley: Center for Environmental Structure, pp. 334-343.

Doucet, I. (2022) 'Architectural Storytelling: A Space between Critical Practice and Fragile Environments', in Frichot, H., Carbonell, A., Frykholm, H. and Karami, S. (eds.) Infrastructural Love: Caring for Our Architectural Support Systems. Basel: Birkhäuser, pp. 32-45.

Giaccardi, E., Speed, C., Cila, N. and Caldwell, M. (2016) 'Things as Co-Ethnographers: Implications of a Thing Perspective for Design and Anthropology', in Smith, R.C., Vangkilde, K.T., Kjaersgaard, M.G., Otto, T., Halse, J. and Binder, T. (eds.) Design Anthropological Futures. London: Bloomsbury, pp. 235-248.

Greenfield, A. (2024) Lifehouse: Taking Care of Ourselves in a World on Fire. London: Verso Books.

Kusch, C. F. (2013) Exhibition Halls: Construction and Design Manual: Construction and design manual. Berlin, Germany: DOM.

Le Guin, U.K. (2015) 'Utopiyin, Utopiyang', in Le Guin, U.K. Words Are My Matter: Writings About Life and Books, 2000-2016. Easthampton: Small Beer Press, pp. 83-94.

Lopez Cesar, I. (2017) World expos: A history of structures. Sabadell, Spain: By Architect Publications S.L.

Lucas, R. (2023) Anthropology for Architects: Social Relations and the Built Environment. London: Bloomsbury.

muf architecture/art (2001) This Is What We Do: A Muf Manual. London: Ellipsis.

Ward, C. (2022) 'Unexpected Pioneers of Town and Country Planning in Britain', in Ward, C. Talking to Architects. London: Freedom Press, pp. 87-102.

Ward, C. (1989) Welcome, Thinner City: Urban Survival in the 1990s. London: NCVO Publications

UNESCO, 2016. Culture: urban future; global report on culture for sustainable urban development; summary. Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.