

SPACE AND SCALE:

WHO CAN AFFORD TO BE SUSTAINABLE?
AND AT WHAT COST?

REFLECTION ON LAST WEEK'S WORK

The critical line of enquiry surrounding affordability could form an interesting investigation.

Concept of world-building could be an approach to communicate our ideas and productively challenge the work of the UAL Net Zero Team.

The imagination of speculative worlds would be a more successful way to explore the complexity of the issues discussed, rather than the chess motifs previously used.

There must be an impetus to acknowledge the complexity of the issues at hand, without reducing them for the purpose of easy communication.

CHAIN OF REACTIONS

To understand the scale of the environmental impact of UAL, the chain of reactions caused by each individual decision must be acknowledged.

Reflecting this notion of a ripple effect, our work has been guided by chapters, where each section builds upon the knowledge created in the previous.

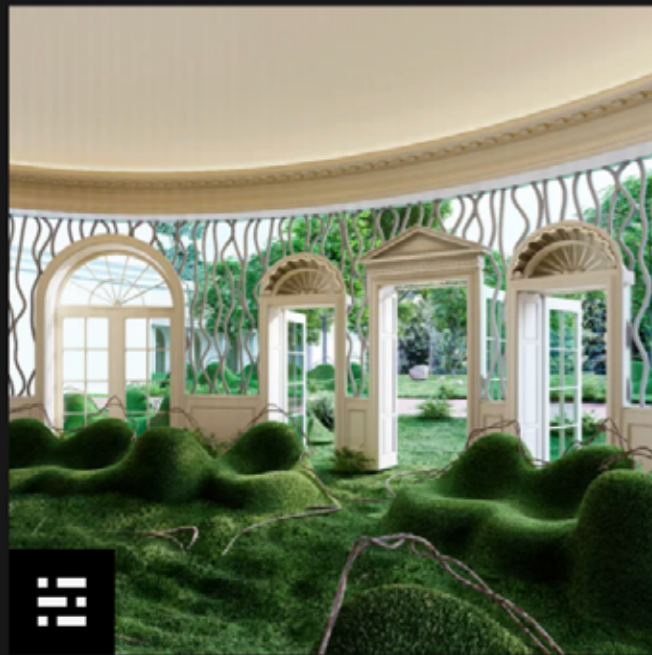
An index is created to categorise the project guided by the terms; context, contextual, contextualising, contextualisation.

Context
Contextual
Contextualising
Contextualisation

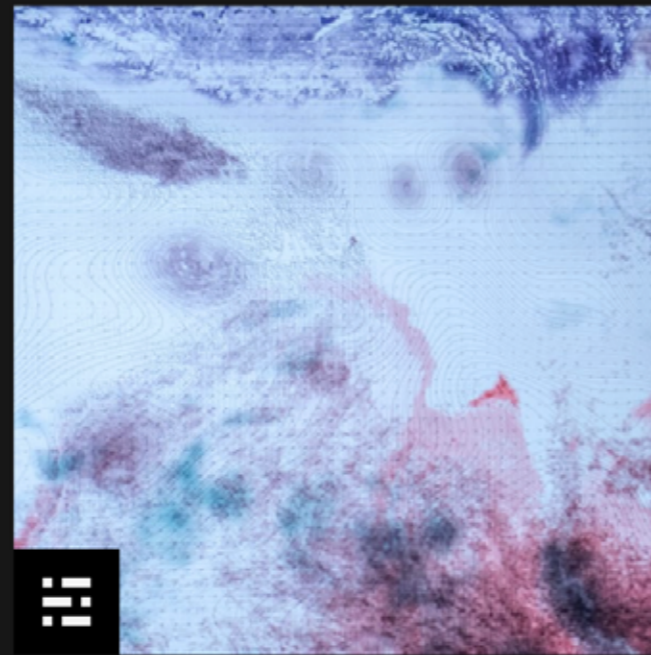
To locate yourself within the document, this has been communicated in the top left corner of each page.

UAL NET ZERO PLAN: OVERVIEW

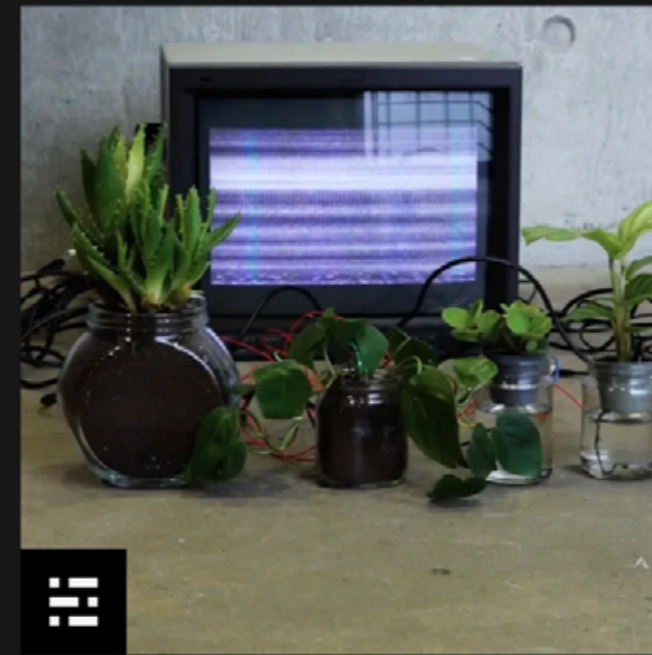
Four action areas



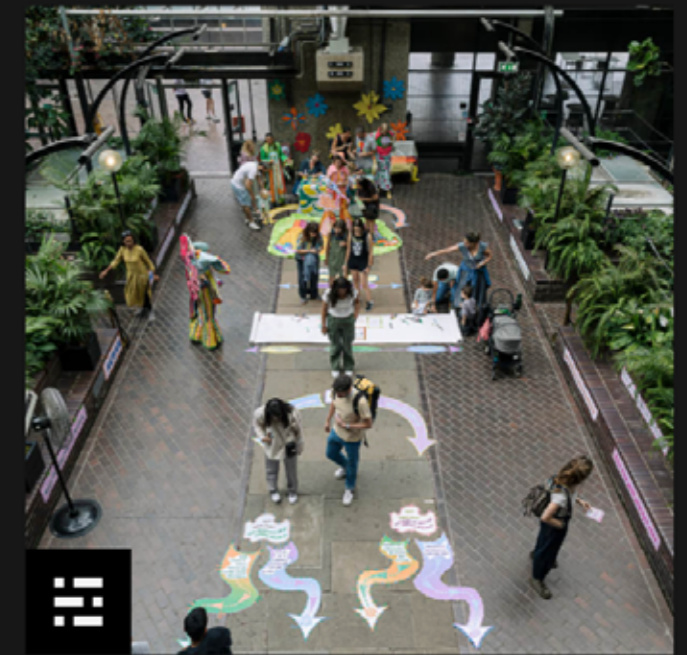
What and how we teach



The knowledge we create
and share



How we behave as an
institution

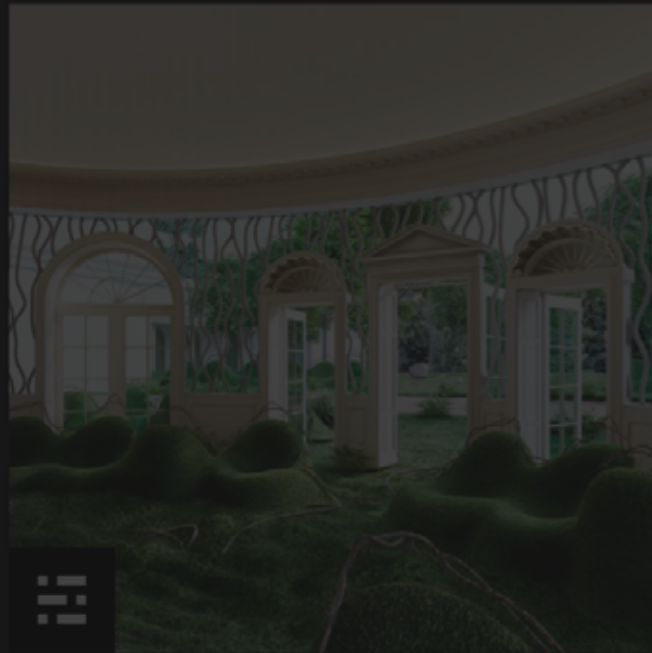


Climate Emergency
Network: Changing the
way we work together

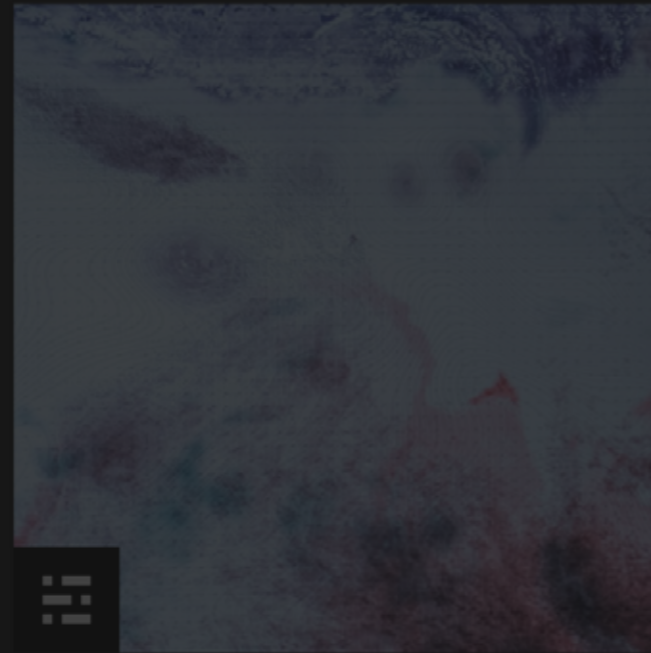


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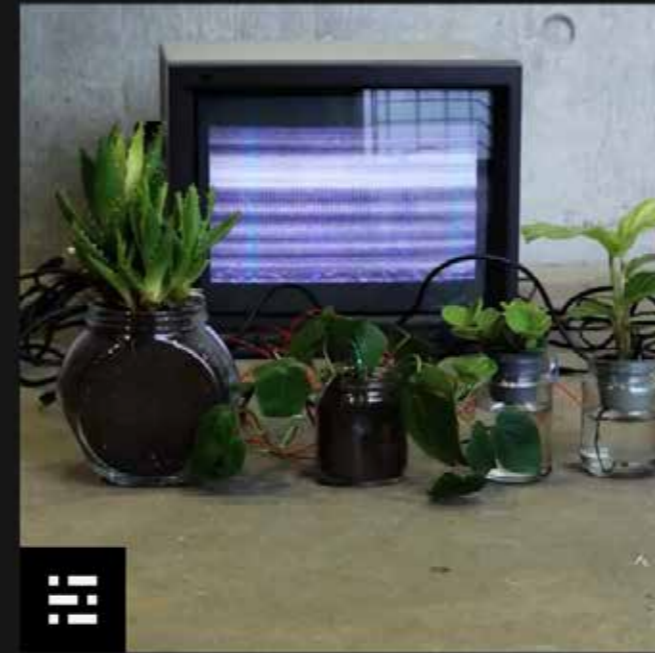
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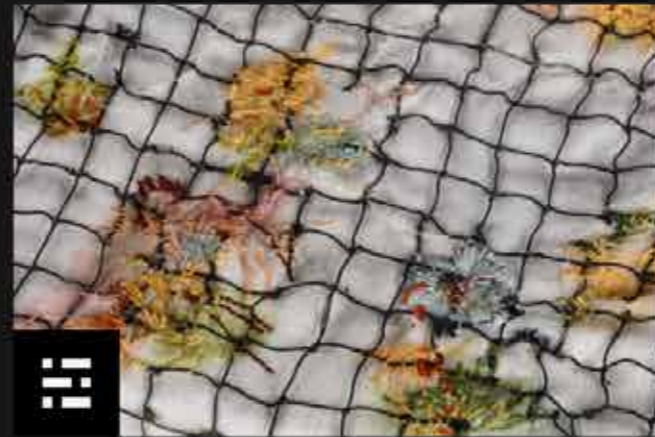


UAL NET ZERO PLAN: INSTITUTIONAL

What we've done so far



Environmental policy and management



Social and environmental ethics



Waste, recycling and circularity



Sustainable construction, travel and food



UAL NET ZERO PLAN: INSTITUTIONAL

What we've done so far



Environmental policy and management



Social and environmental ethics



Waste, recycling and circularity



Sustainable construction, travel and food



UAL NET ZERO PLAN: WASTE, RECYCLING AND CIRCULARITY

Waste and recycling

Our waste management is compliant according to all current statutory legislation and audited through the ISO14001 management system.

Recirculating materials and minimising waste is embedded across our operations and within our teaching and learning. For example:

- we encourage students to use sustainable materials in their projects
- we champion the use of recycled materials and degree shows should design according to the principle of 'building for deconstruction' so the materials can be reused
- we have been piloting an [environmental assessment framework in our technical workshops](#) which includes the recirculation of waste within our workshop spaces
- students have access to [re-use units to encourage waste reduction and material reuse](#)
- materials can be re-used, re-purposed or repaired at the [Central Saint Martins SWAP SHOP](#)
- Camberwell College of Arts have launched a Repair Café to foster a culture of repair
- sustainability has also been at the heart of our [Grayson's Robes competitions](#).

Material circularity

UAL's Social Purpose Lab conducted a research project from December 2023 to October 2024 in which they examined the state of play around the topics of material reuse and circularity in regards to courses across UAL.

The report explores the various barriers that inhibit circular principles and approaches from being embedded systemically across all of UAL's teaching and practice.

[Read the Material circularity summary report \(PDF 6.9MB\)](#)

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UAL NET ZERO PLAN: MATERIAL CIRCULARITY

- 01 Agree university-wide waste and materials aspirations**
- 02 Establish volume and cost baselines for UAL's material use**
- 03 Develop basic waste literacy training**
- 04 Explore behaviour change opportunities across the UAL ecosystem**
- 05 Build material circularity objectives into job descriptions and staff roles**
- 06 Support students to exercise greater choice in material procurement**

WASTE MANAGEMENT

Having studied UAL's Net Zero Plan, we decided to proceed with a more focused view on the data provided, to refine to scope of our work.

We decided to focus on waste management, due to the tension between institution and individual to achieve sustained change within the sector.

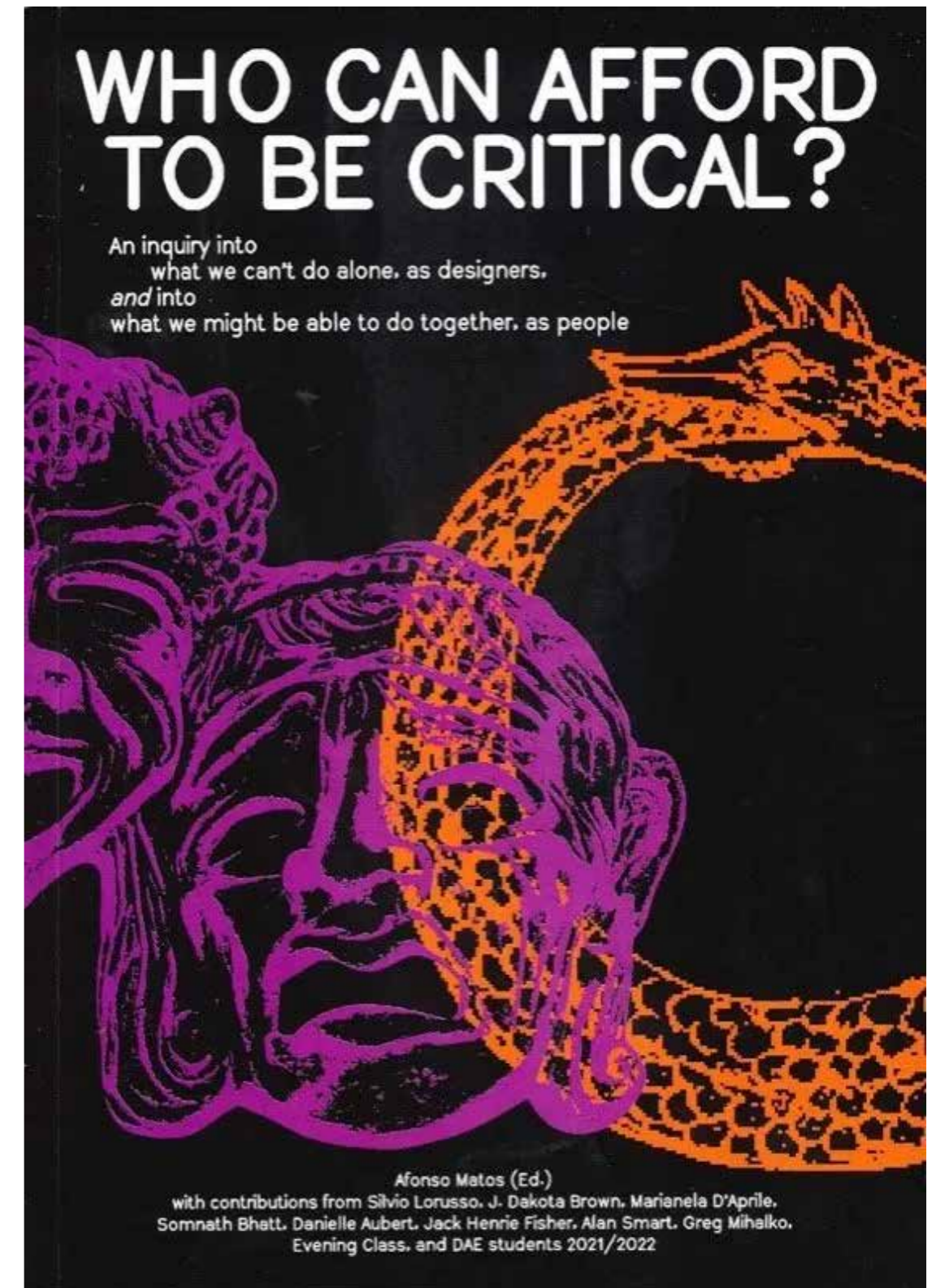
As a group, we felt that we could critically comment on the current work of UAL's Net Zero Team and question to the power structures at play in the decision making around climate change within CSM.

REFERENCE: WHO CAN AFFORD TO BE CRITICAL? - AFONSO MATOS

The phrasing and formation of the critical question 'Who can afford to be critical?' has many dimensions that transcend above financial.

Matos explores what designers can achieve as a collective rather than operating as an individual. He also explores social, political, material, and economic factors that impact one's experience of design education.

What does it mean to be able to afford something? And how could that be translated into the conversation surrounding UAL's Net Zero Targets?



Matos, A. (2022) Who can afford to be critical?: An Inquiry Into What We Can't Do Alone, as Designers, and Into What We Might Be Able to Do Together, as People. Eindhoven: Set Margins'.

AFFORD

Financial:
have enough money to pay for.

Material:
have available or to spare.

Social:
be able to do something without risk of adverse consequences.

Political:
provide or supply (an opportunity or facility).

The image shows a screenshot of a dictionary application. On the left, a sidebar lists related terms: 'afford', 'affordability', 'affordable', and 'affordably'. The main panel displays the definition for 'afford' with its phonetic transcription |ə'fɔ:d|. It lists two verb meanings: 1) 'can/could afford' (have enough money to pay for) and 2) 'provide or supply (an opportunity or facility)'. Below the definitions is an 'ORIGIN' section explaining the word's etymology from Old English.

Dictionary
4 found

Search: afford

All Dictionary Thesaurus Apple Wikipedia

afford | ə'fɔ:d |

verb [with object]

1 (can/could afford) have enough money to pay for: *the best that I could afford was a first-floor room* | [with infinitive] : *we could never have afforded to heat the place.*

- **have (a resource such as money or time) available or to spare:** *it was taking up more time than he could afford.*
- [with infinitive] **be able to do something without risk of adverse consequences:** *only aristocrats could afford to stoop to such practices.*

2 provide or supply (an opportunity or facility): *the rooftop terrace affords beautiful views* | [with two objects] : *they were afforded the luxury of bed and breakfast.*

ORIGIN

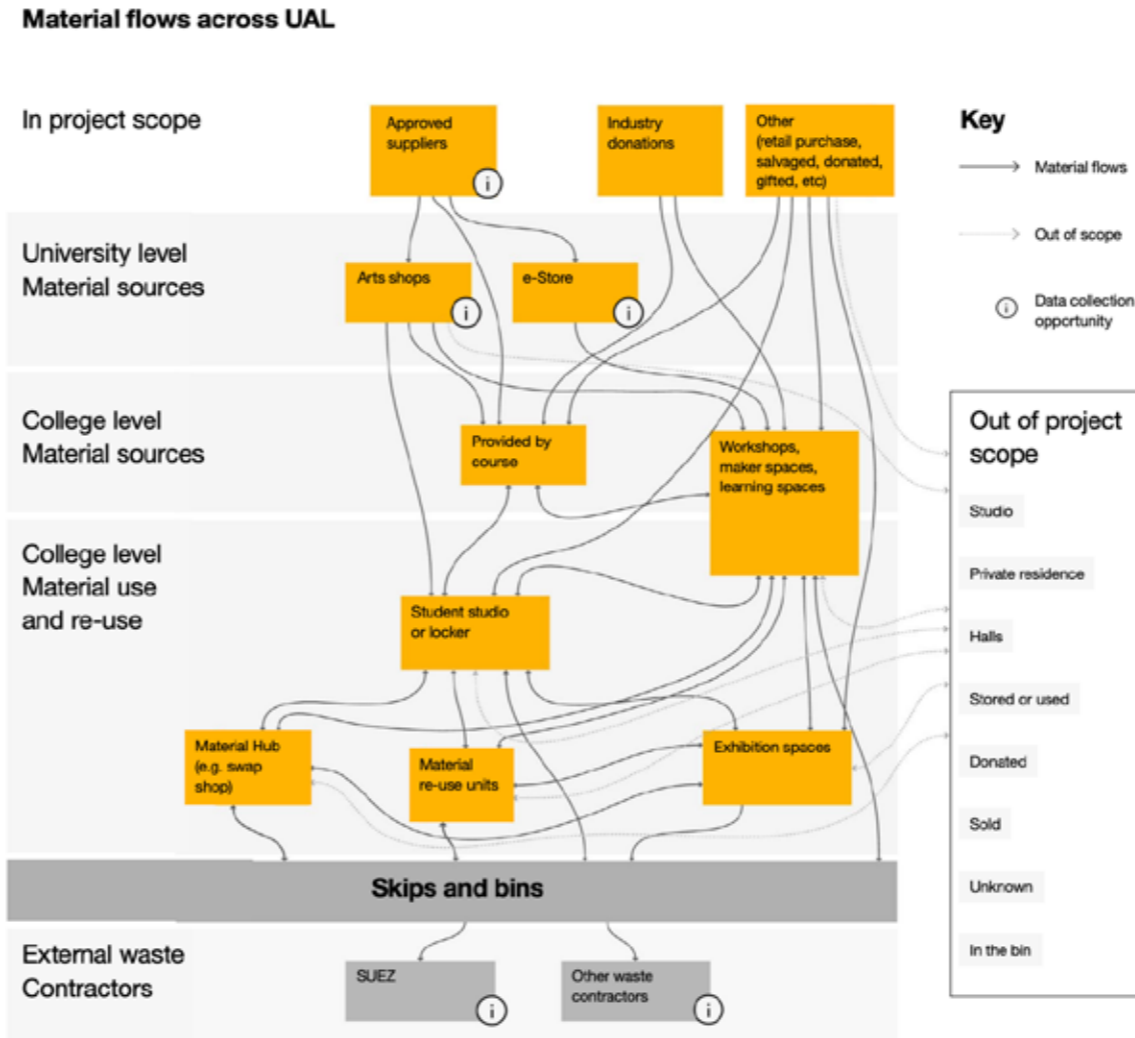
late Old English *geforthian*, from *ge-* (prefix implying completeness) + *forthian* 'to further', from **forth**. The original sense was 'promote, perform, accomplish', later 'manage, be in a position to do'.

**WHO CAN AFFORD TO BE SUSTAINABLE?
AND AT WHAT COST?**

NETWORK OF DEPENDENCIES

Within the Material Circularity at UAL report, this flow diagram is used to visually communicate the network of waste across UAL.

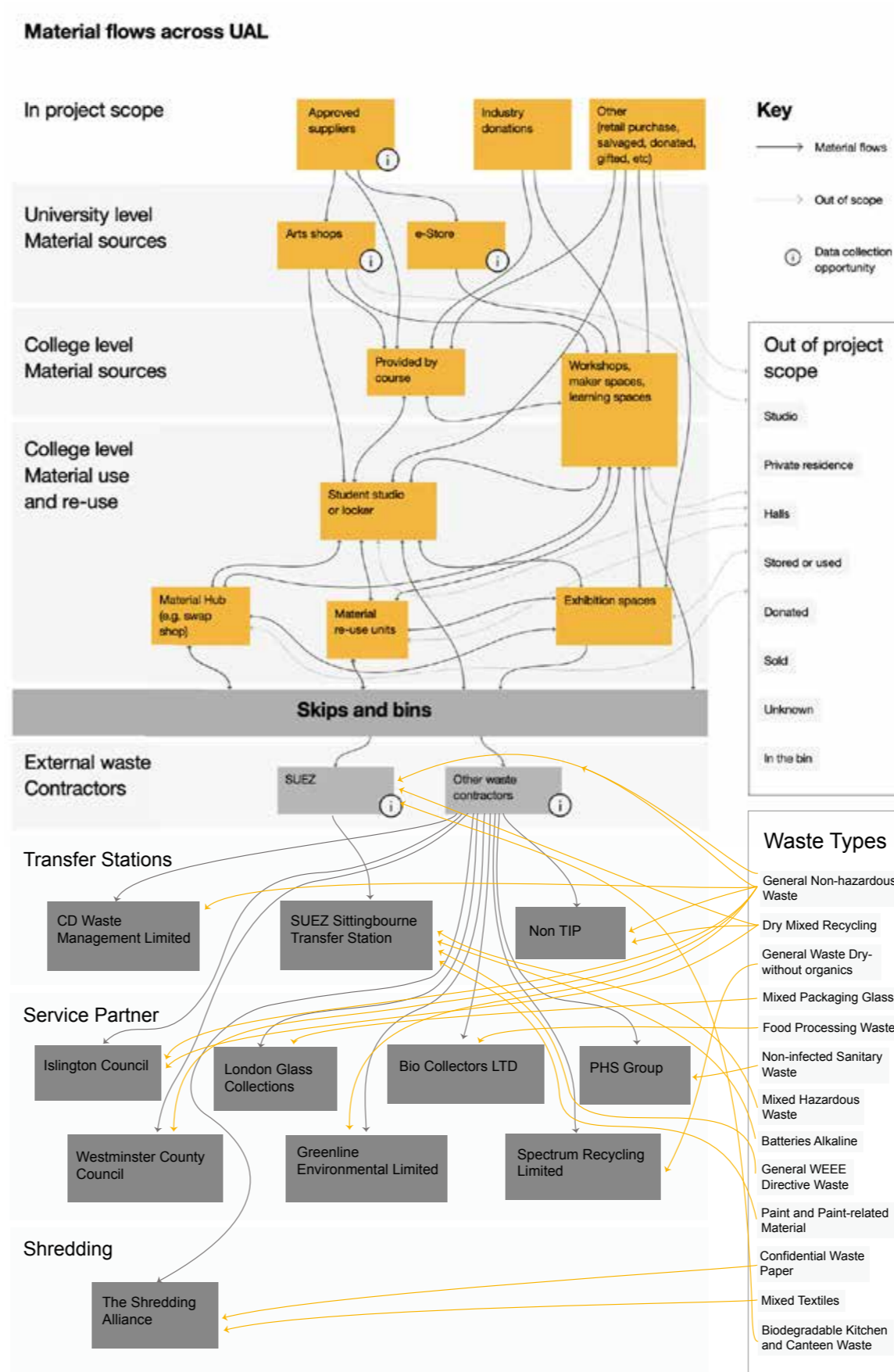
There is a suggestion about what happens after these items leave UAL, but at this point it becomes harder to trace.



Meure, E. (2025) *Material Circularity at UAL*. Available at: https://www.arts.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0033/477618/Material-circularity-summary-report-2025.pdf (Accessed: 22 February 2026).

EXPANDING THE NETWORK

Although the current UAL material flows diagram creates a robust foundation to understand current waste management across the university, the scale does not address the wider impact of the waste produced and where it winds up.

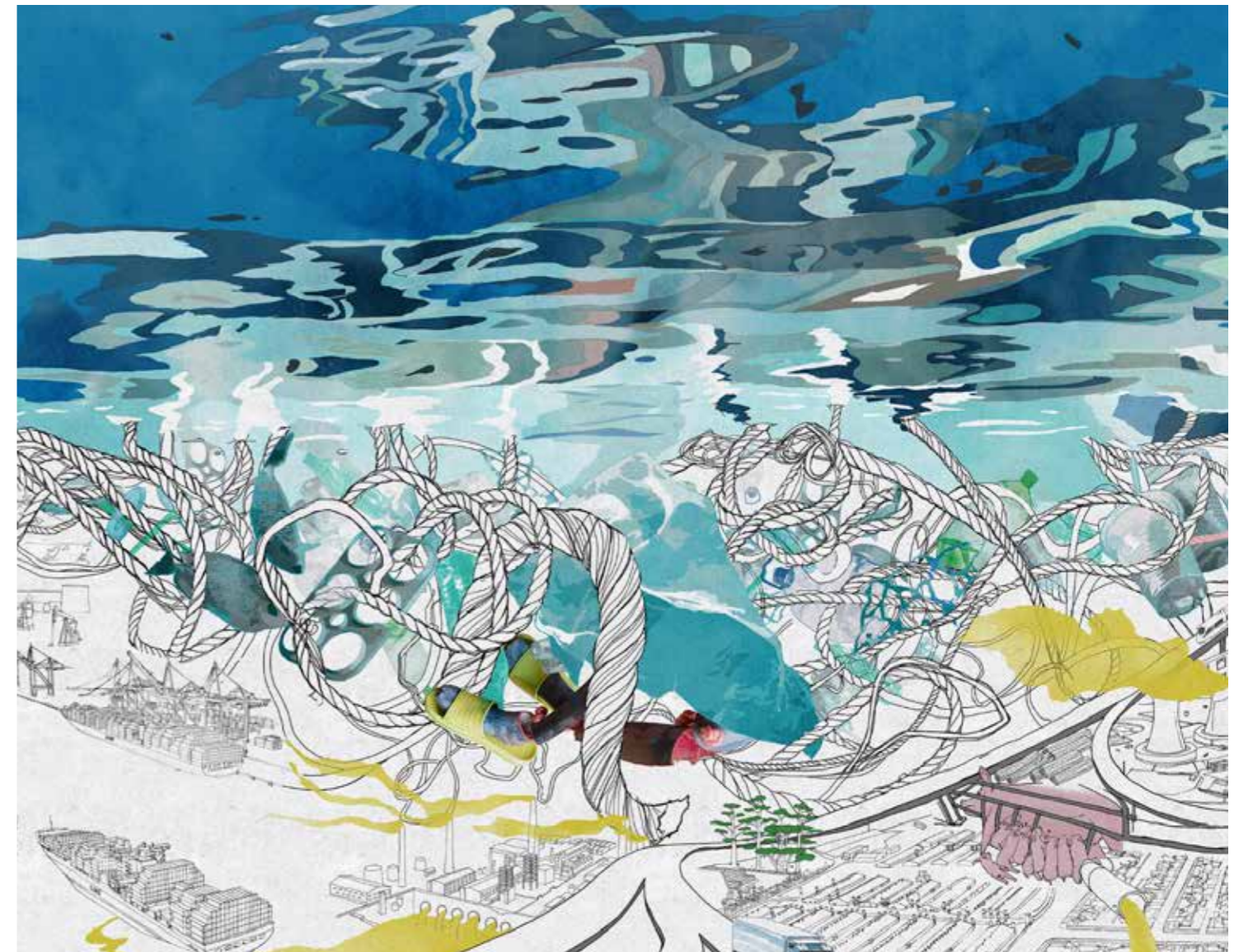


REFERENCE: FERAL ATLAS - ANNA TSING

Illustrates ecological worlds shaped by human infrastructure and feral non-human effects through non-linear critical cartography.

Successfully communicates the complexity of a network of ecologies.

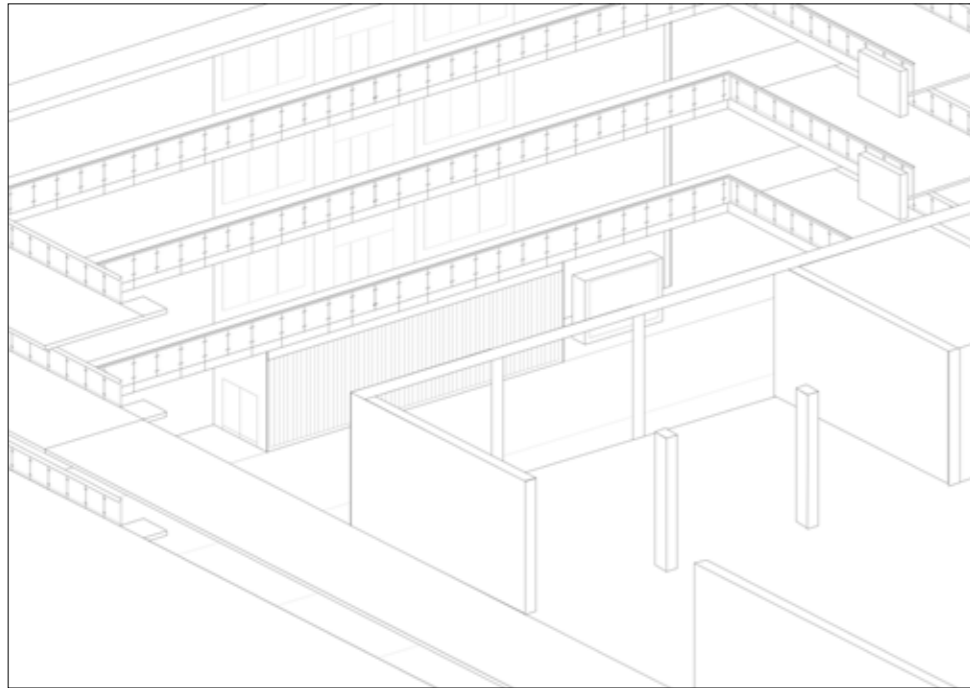
Illustrative example of world-building, where the viewer is actively engaged as they are invited to explore the work as they form their own journey across the platform.



Tsing, A. (2020) Feral Atlas.
Available at: <https://feralatlant.org/>
(Accessed: 18 February 2026).

WORLD-BUILDING

Beginning the world building process by illustrating at three different scales creation (CSM), accumulation (London), distribution (global).

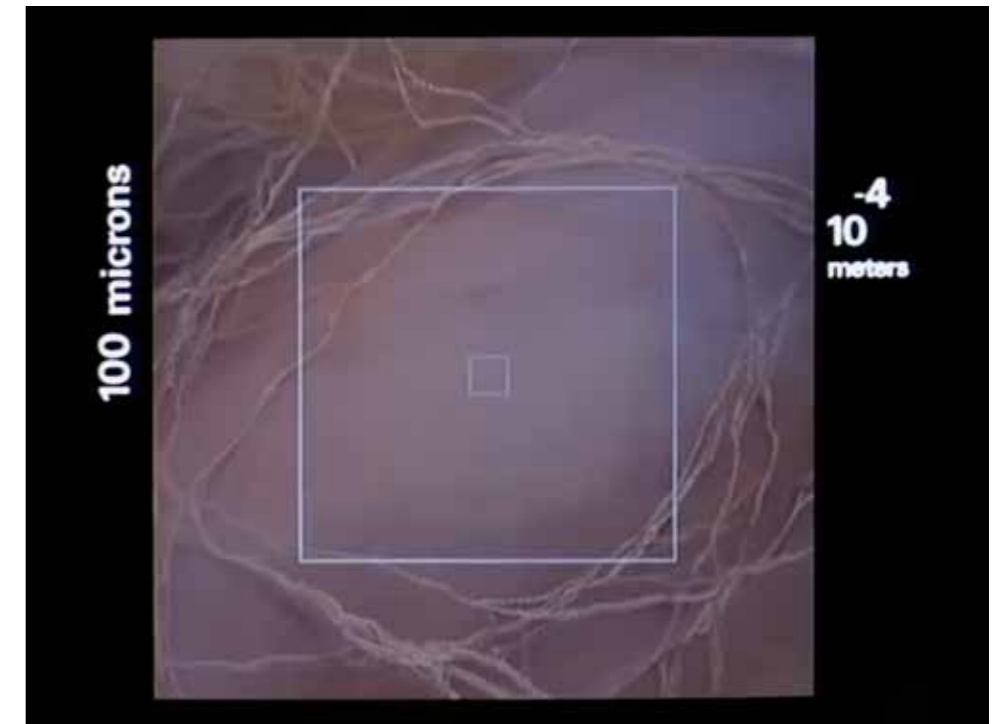
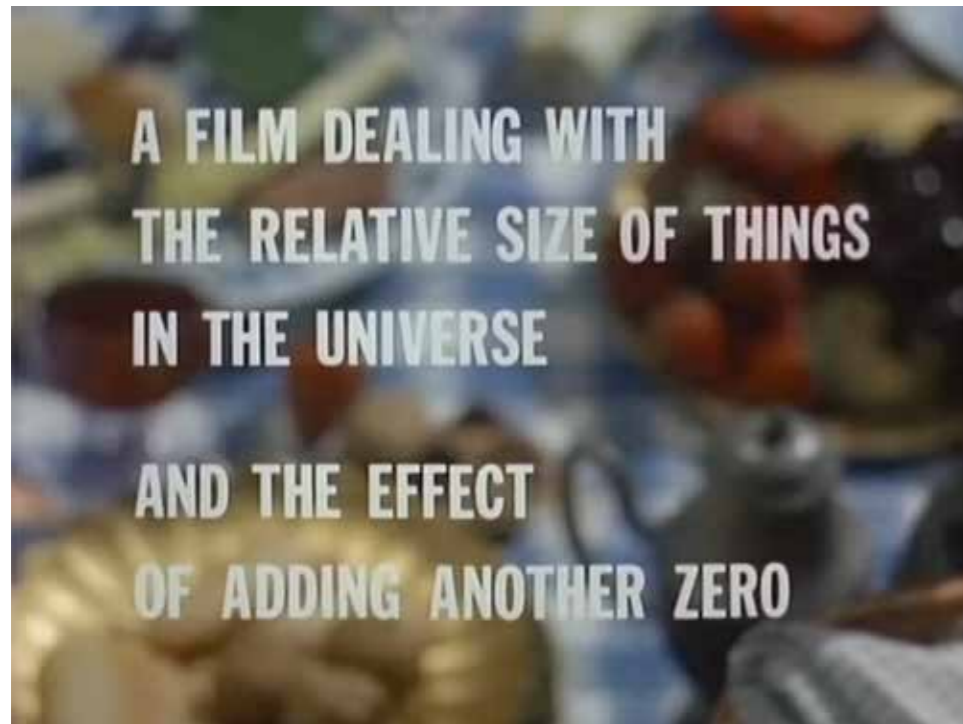


REFERENCE: POWER OF TEN - CHARLES AND RAY EAMES

Uses zooming as a tool to visually communicate the relative size of things in the universe.

The video uses a system of zooming in or out with a scale factor to the power of ten, creating a framework and structure to their investigation.

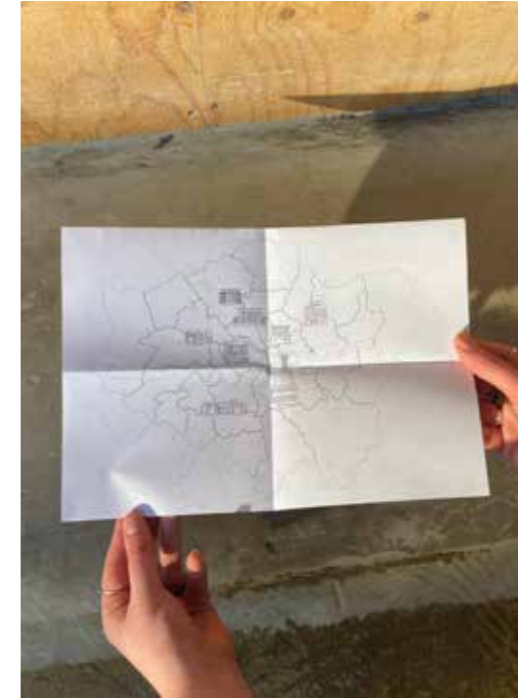
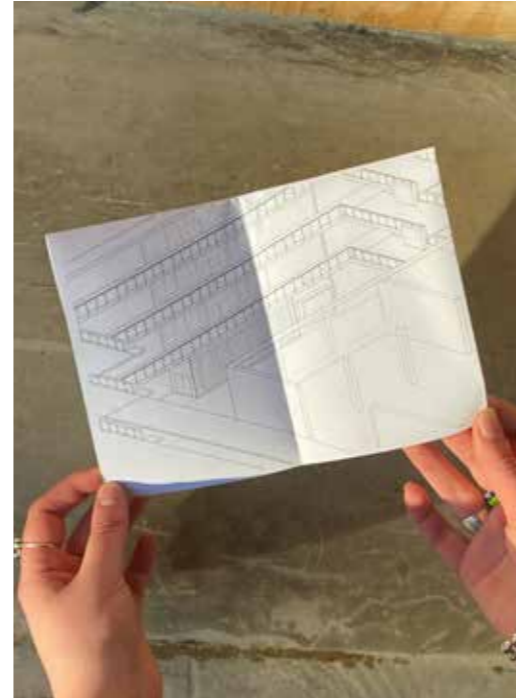
Raises the concept of using *zooming* as critical tool to represent scale and space simultaneously.



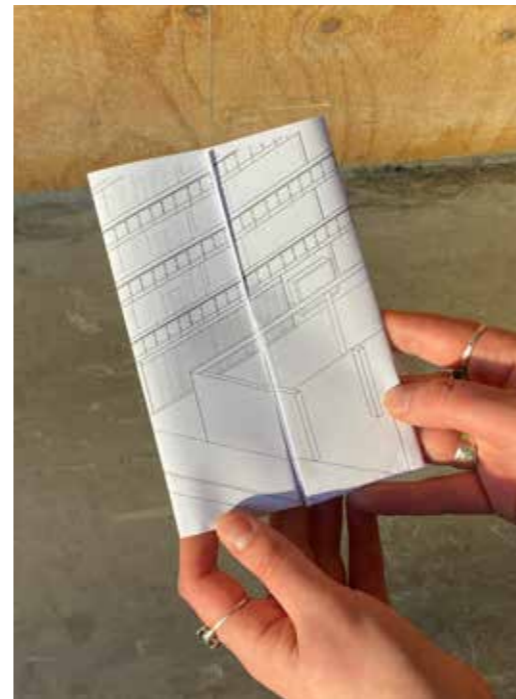
Eames, C. and Eames. R. (1977) Powers of Ten and the Relative Size of Things in the Universe [Film]. Eames Office, Los Angeles.

ZOOMING AS A CRITICAL TOOL

Folding Technique 1



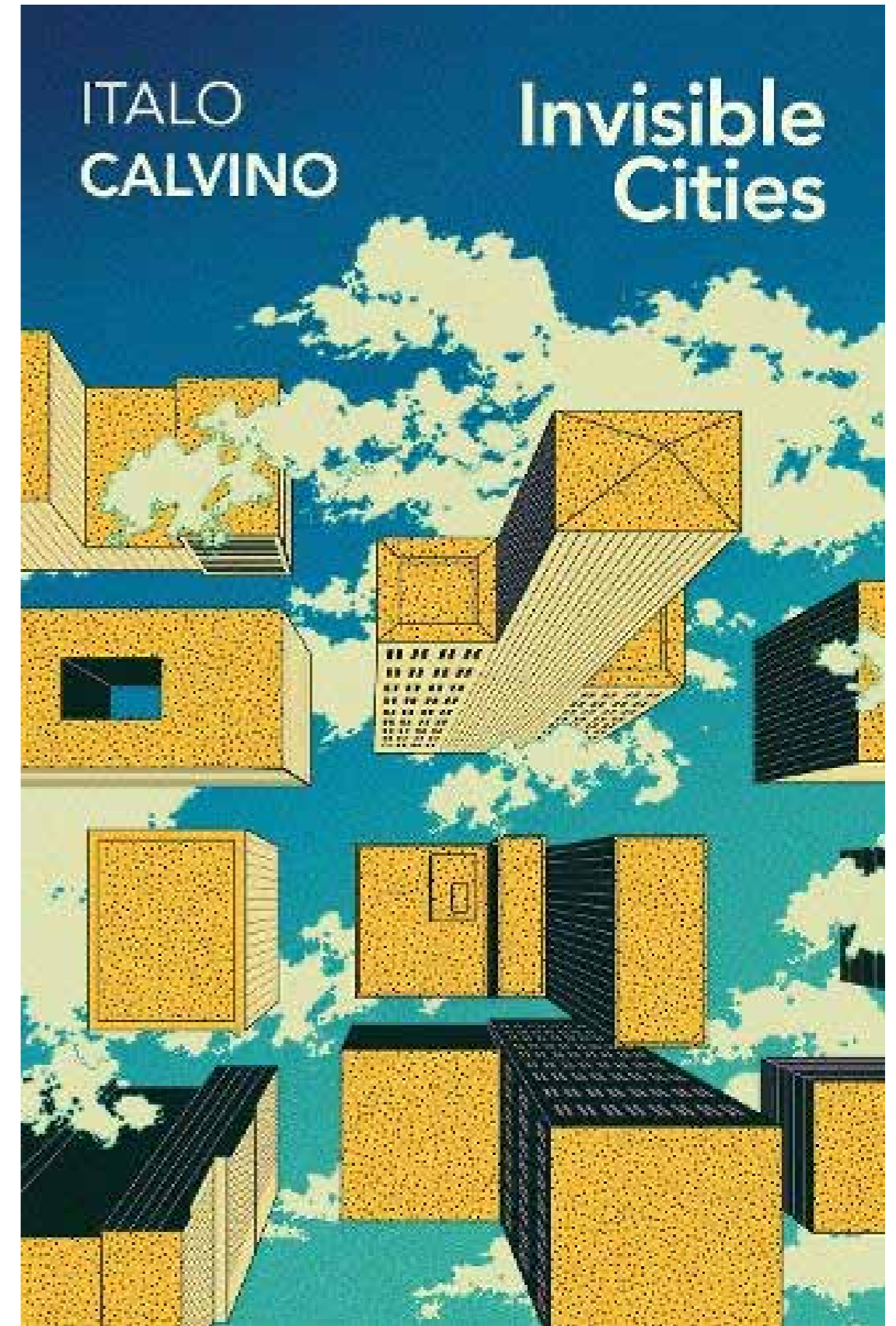
Folding Technique 2



REFERENCE: INVISIBLE CITIES - ITALO CALVINO

Invisible Cities is a literary example of world-building. Calvino uses a complex index system to thematically categorise together sets of speculative cities.

Calvino's fragmented descriptions of imagined cities provided a structural model for our speculative waste futures. Rather than predicting a single outcome, Invisible Cities presents multiple realities that reflect different social logics.



Calvino, I. (1972) Invisible Cities. Translated from the Italian by W. Weaver. London: Vantage Books.

SPECULATIVE WORLDS

If UAL Net Zero Targets are achieved

If we are 20 years from now

If we are 50 years from now

If we are 100 years from now

If we live in a post-war world

If global air temperature has increased by 3 degrees

If landfill no longer exists

If everything has to be reused

If everything is single-use

If we live in a post-internet world

If the road network in the UK no longer exists

If the boundary of London changes

If the UK no longer has a relationship with the EU

If Reform comes to power

If The Green Party comes to power

If UAL expands

If UAL shrinks

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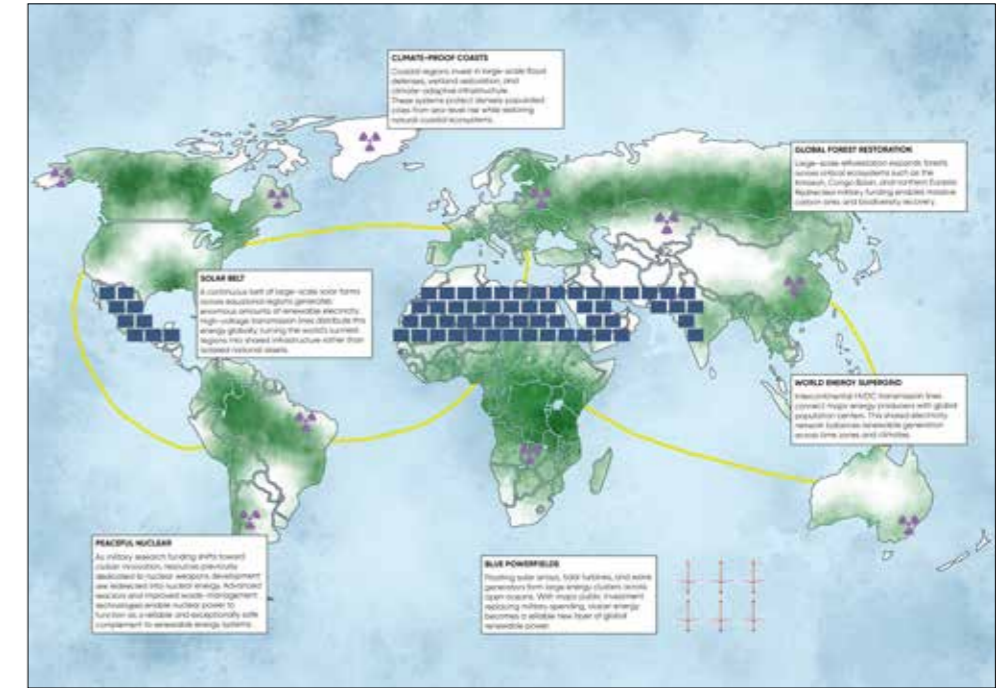
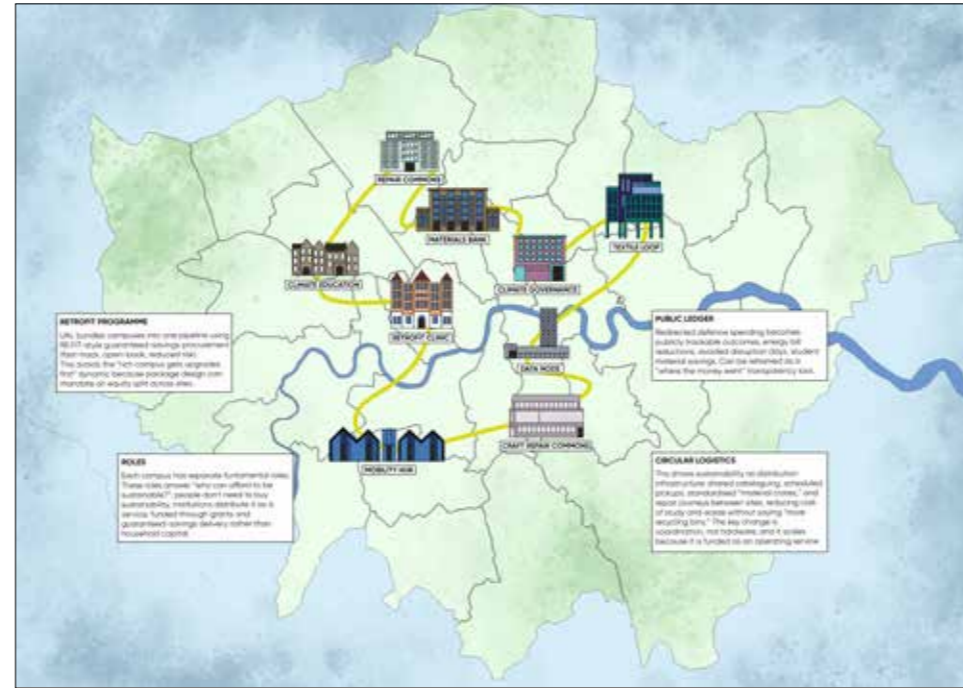
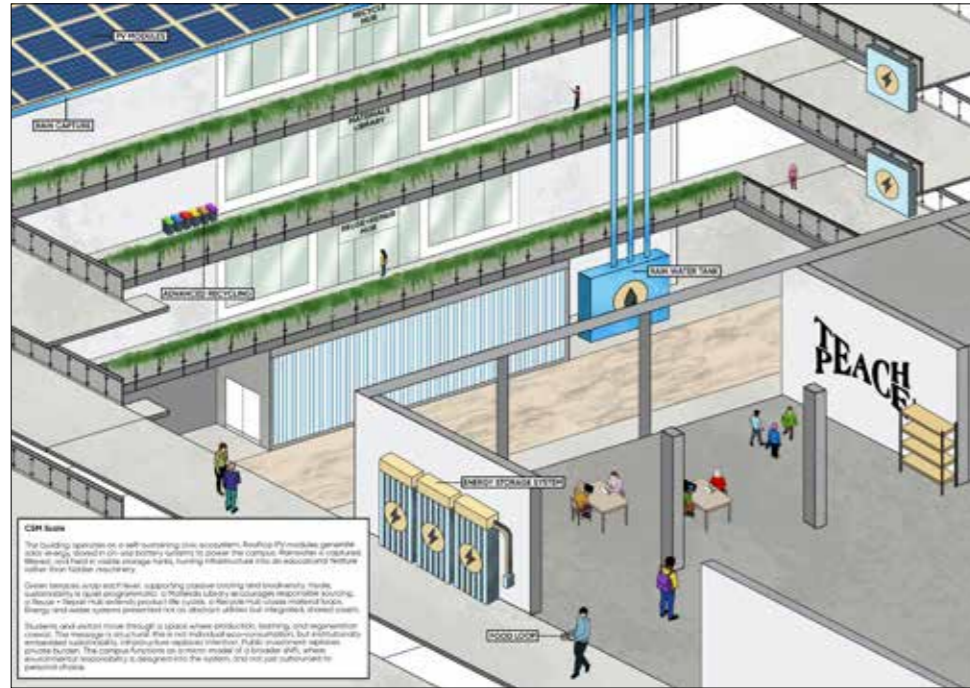
If Reform comes to power

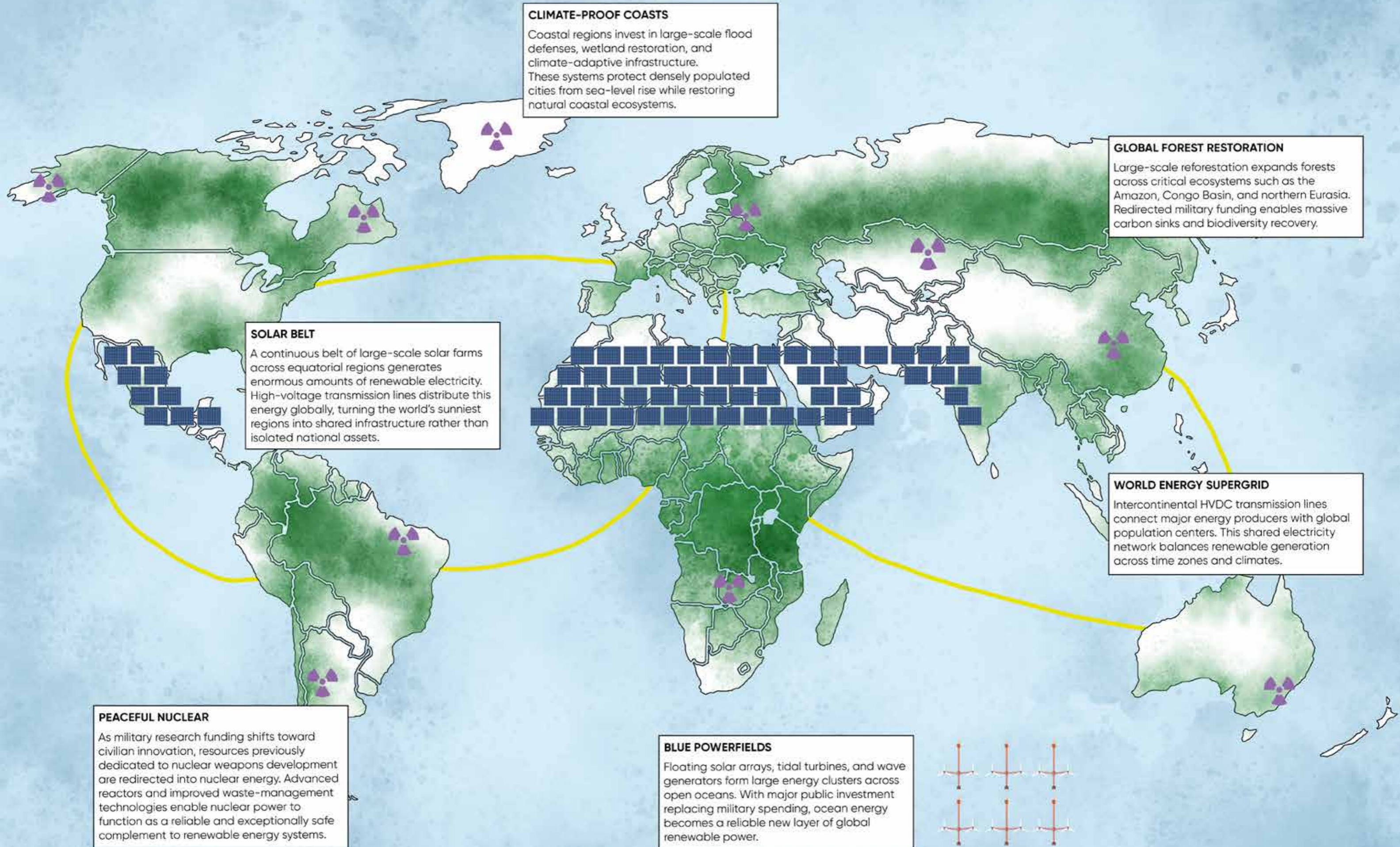
If The Green Party comes to power

If UAL expands

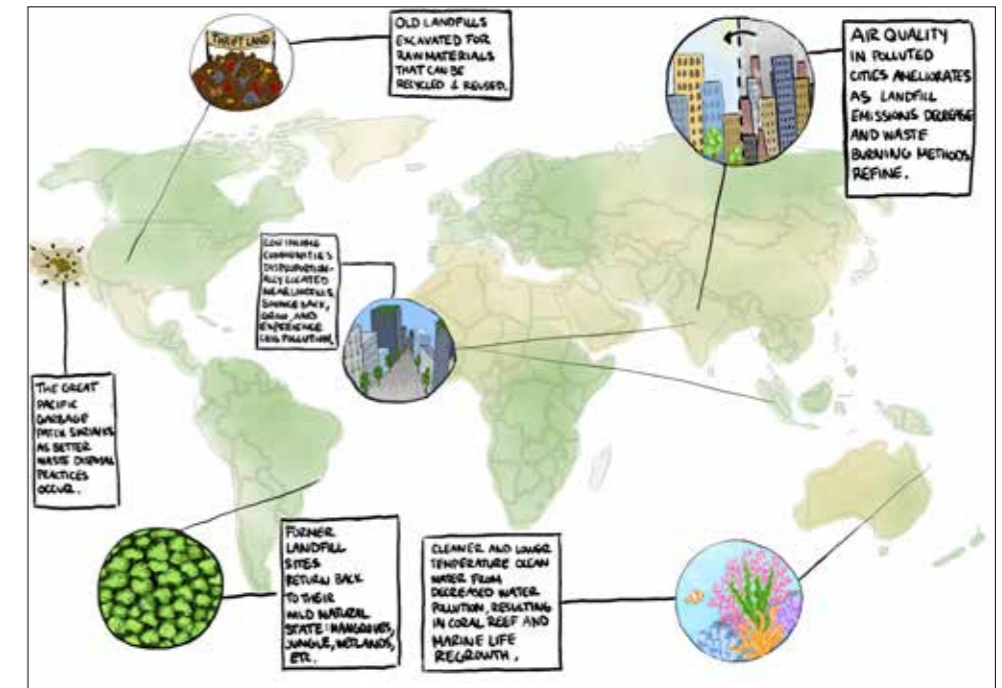
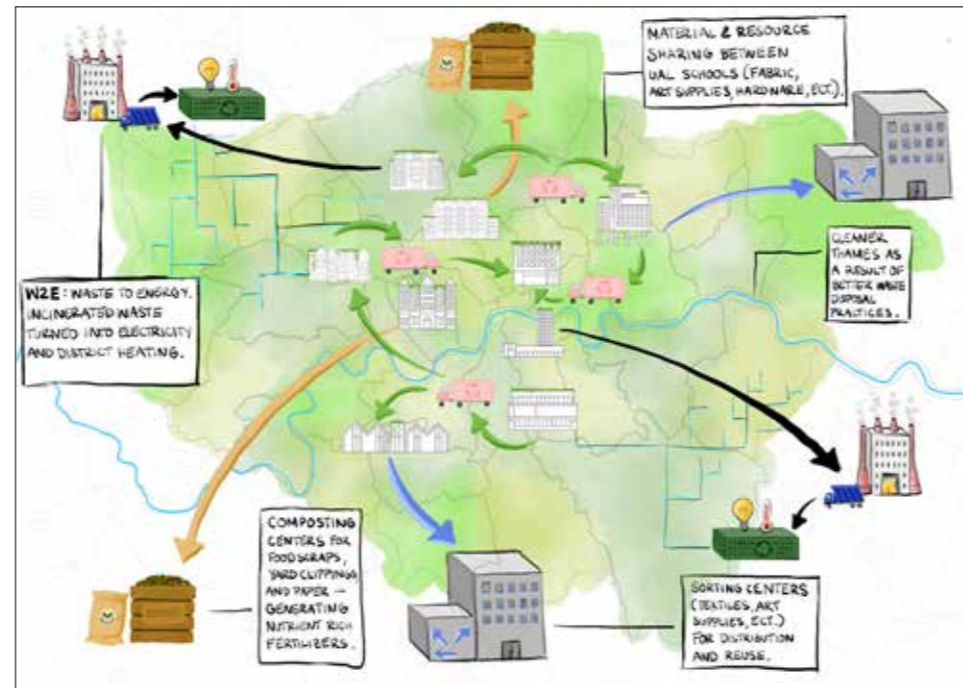
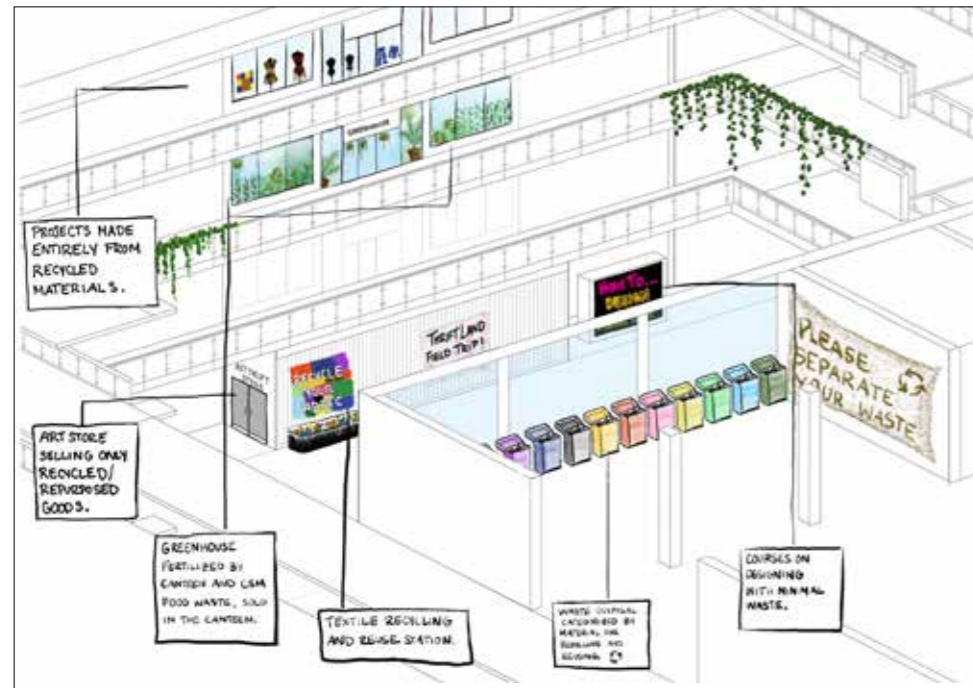
If UAL shrinks

A SPECULATIVE POST-WAR WORLD





A SPECULATIVE WORLD WHERE LANDFILL NO LONGER EXISTS



WITH RADICAL +VE
**COSMOLOGICAL *
ACCELERATION**

- INTERNET HAS EVOLVED AS PLANETARY INTELLIGENCE
- ART SCHOOLS FOCUS ON BUILDING ECOLOGICAL ETHICS INSTEAD OF MATERIAL OUTPUTS.
- CONSTRAINTS SLOW DOWN AESTHETIC ACCELERATION, CREATES DISCOMFORT AS PRODUCTION + CONSUMPTION IS DEVALUED.
- OWNERSHIP DISSOLVES & ART COLLEGES BECOME MATERIAL COMMONS.

REPAIR WORKSHOP
MON - THU
10 AM - 12.30 PM

NEW LEADING CAREER PATHS EMERGE -

- WASTE ETHICIST
- SUSTAINABLE PRODUCT DESIGN
- RE-USE DESIGNERS

START YOUR CAREER AT UAL

IN A 'POST-INTERNET' WORLD
BASED ON THE THEORY OF "COSMOLOGICAL ACCELERATION" *
* BY PATRICIA MACCORMACK

TRUE FUTURITY & ETHICS COME FROM MOVING BEYOND HUMAN-CENTERED THINKING & EMBRACING THE UNFAMILIAR. ACCELERATION IS NOT ONLY CAPITALIST, BUT AN ETHICAL VERSION THAT DECENTERS THE ANTHROPOCENE, WITH NEW, NON-HUMAN FUTURES.

VOTE FOR 1 PROJECT PER YEAR! LIVE SLOW!

SYSTEMS DECENTRE THE ANTHROPOCENE

START YOUR CAREER AT UAL

SCRAP PAPER - SYSTEM FAILURE EXCESS IS 0

PETITION TO MAKE ART FREE AGAIN! CAPATIVE FREEDOM IS THE RIGHT!

PRINTER QUOTA

ASSEMBLAGES
HUMANS + NON-HUMAN FORCES BECOME A DECIDEA!

WE DO NOT BUY BOOKS AT ALL. YOU ARE ONLY ALLOWED TO BORROW OR USE SECOND-HAND.

THE LIBRARY IS THE BIGGEST SELLING-POINT OF ANY UNIVERSITY.

NOW ANY 'PHYSICAL' ART PROJECT REQUIRES US TO SUBMIT A PROPOSAL FOR APPROVAL FROM OUR TUTORS.

'CREATE' IS NOT A WORD WE USE. WE PREFER 'REVISE'.

TECH BECOMES A DECIDER

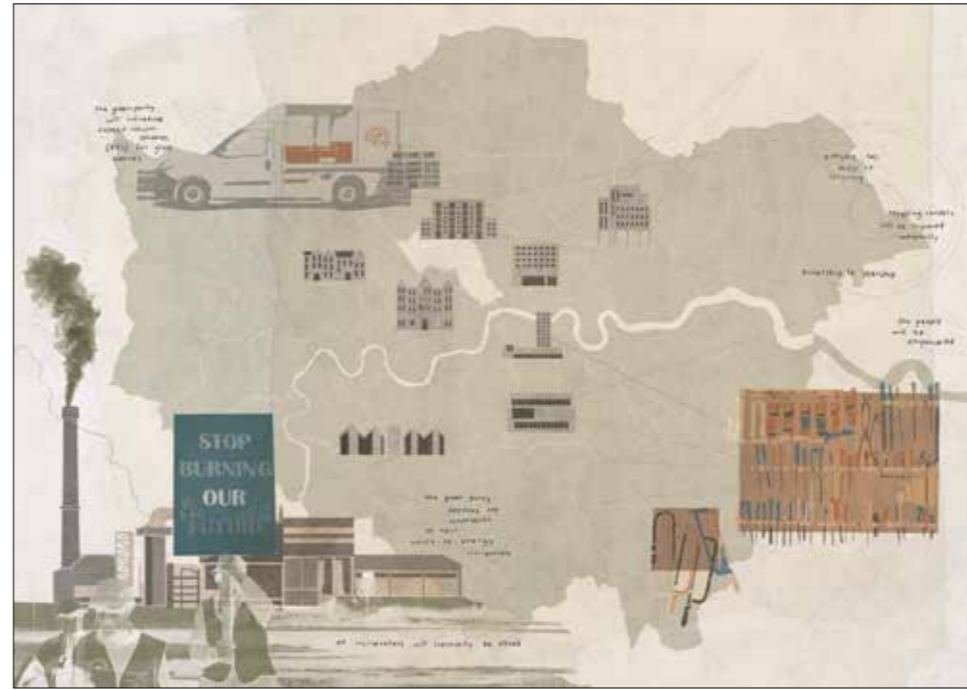
SPACE IS NO LONGER STRUCTURED TO MAXIMISE RE-USE

PERMANENCE IS NOT ENCOURAGED

EPHEMERAL ART IS THE FUTURE
Ephemeral art is the future

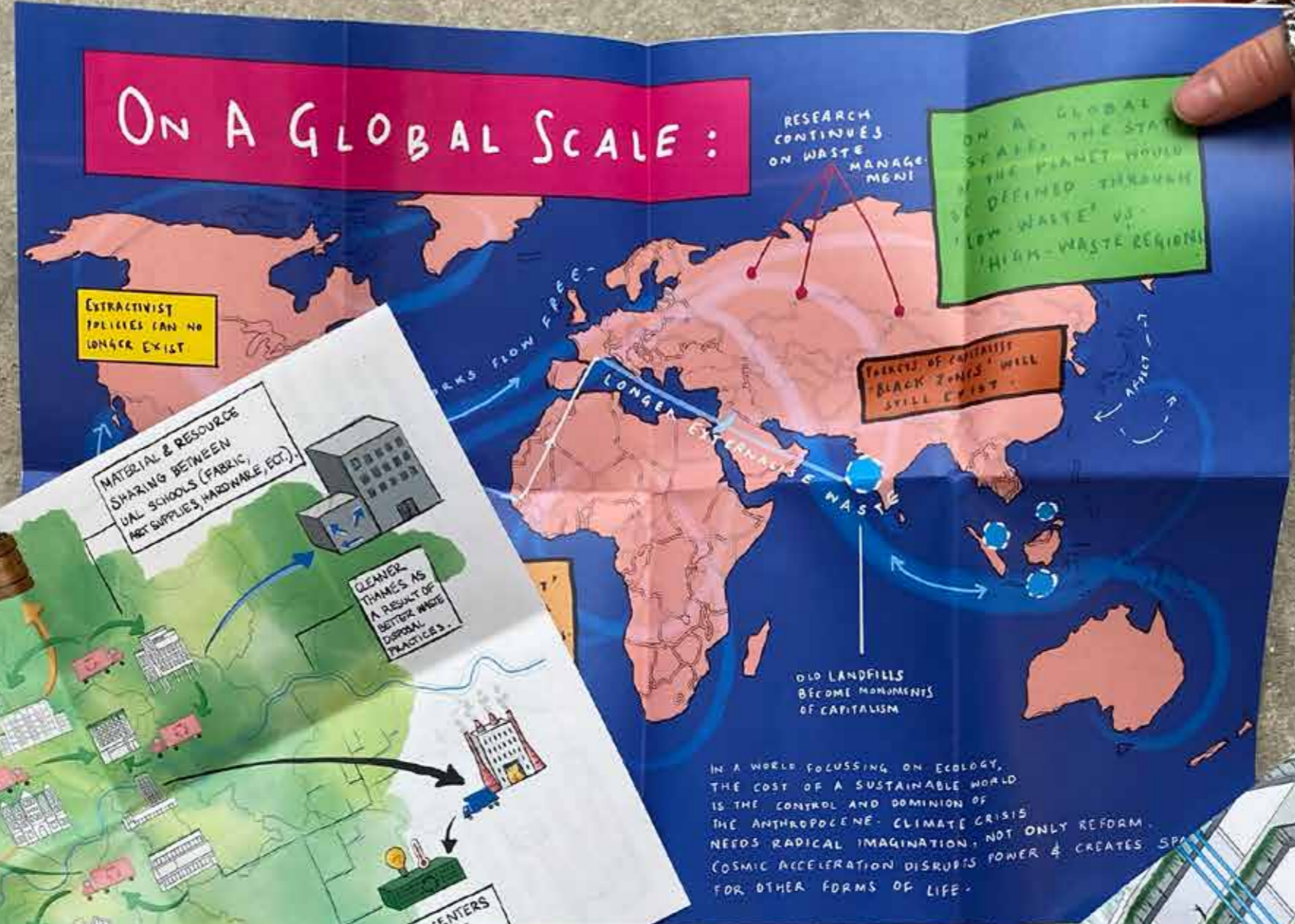
* Uma Bhojraj argues that ethical futures are innovations and transformative human futures mean structured not centred humans

A SPECULATIVE WORLD WHERE THE GREEN PARTY IS IN POWER









WRITTEN SUMMARY

Our space and scale project analytically examines “Who can afford to be sustainable? And at what cost?”. Following a meticulous dissection of UAL’s Net Zero Plan, we decided to focus our investigation on the current waste management strategy. The project explores the tension between the institution’s and the individual’s role in creating realised improvement within the waste sector. We aimed to constructively challenge the current infrastructure as laid out by UAL’s Net Zero Team, questioning the complex interplay between systemic institutional change and cooperation from the individual.

Zooming was utilised as a critical tool to examine our work as we transferred between different spaces and scales. The introduction of zooming enhanced our enquiry as it initiated a further dimension of temporality into our work, whilst prioritising interactivity and self-guided discovery for the audience.

Drawing inspiration from Italo Calvino’s (1972) *Invisible Cities*, speculative world-building became a lens to understand the future of UAL’s waste management. Through the practice of placemaking, we imagine how UAL could operate within the fictitious environments created: a speculative post-internet world, a speculative post-war world, a speculative world where landfill no longer exists, and, a speculative world where The Green Party is in power.

In an attempt to utilise graphic design to visualise scales of influence and impact, there was an ongoing impetus to communicate complexity. The fundamental understanding of the scale of the chain reaction cause by a singular decision within UAL’s waste management system underpins the entire body of work. The notion of a ripple effect guided the formation of the chapters, where each section builds upon the knowledge created in the previous. Following the same system of a network of dependencies, an index is created to categorise the project guided by the terms; context, contextual, contextualising, contextualisation.