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EVERYDAY PUBLICS

INTRODUCTION: THE PUBLIC CITY

Though our ascent into an urban age now seems nearly incontrovertible, less clear is what the dawn of this epoch means for the relationship between city and citizen. While cities swell in both population and importance as nodes in a network of global connectivity, there is reason for concern that this “triumph of the city” (Glaeser, 2011) may be a Pyrrhic victory; deepening inequalities and the erosion and privatisation of public space suggest that global relevance comes at a great cost (Brenner and Theodore, 2002). Accompanying the shift from city-as-service-provider to city-as-entrepreneur has been a dangerous recalibration in expectation and practice surrounding the city’s obligation to its residents. Indeed, as the highest value of urban fabric becomes conflated with its best use, our notion of ‘public’ has become constrained to delimited spaces within the city, often created as developers’ box-ticking exercises or planners’ token acquiescence to New Urbanist principles.

As Manuel de Solà-Morales (2010) has argued, our notion of what is public has for too long been conceptualised through specific physical spaces, rather than as a basic urban structure. This limited interpretation, de Solà-Morales says, restricts our understanding of ‘public’ to a highly circumscribed spatial realm, rather than a broader view that treats the entire city as a canvas for being public. The ‘public city’, then, is no mere aggregation of the physical, but an amorphous ideal that relies on more ethereal notions of belonging, ownership, and comfort to encourage interaction between diverse citizens, but also between these citizens and the space they inhabit.

Though physical design plays an important facilitative role in the public city, our conceptualisation of this realm demands practicable translations of three highly abstract concepts: everyday, exchange, and experimentation. The everyday spaces and experiences of the city must be appropriated and absorbed into a more inclusive definition of ‘public’. Henri Lefebvre’s ‘cry and demand’ echoes here; indeed, the right to the city is a right to be public, to not just live in space, but to imbue it with our own meanings (Lefebvre, 1996). Lefebvre wanted everyday life to be “reclaimed for itself,” and it was this reclamation, behavioral as much as spatial, that underpinned his call for “a transformed and renewed right to urban life” (Lefebvre, 1996: 158). The value of the everyday was also asserted by Guy Debord and his Situationist colleagues who drifted through the streets of Paris, capturing the moods and nuances of the alleys and dark corners that were hidden behind Haussmann’s grand boulevards (Merrifield, 2002). The *dérives* through these everyday spaces were exercises in urban awareness, and the Situationists, through this heightened consciousness, claimed their own right to the city as they turned the mundane and neglected into their medium for exploration. Emphasising the everyday as a central component in the public city means encouraging ownership of,

and participation with, the entirety of the urban landscape, not just the areas expressly designated as public space.

Richard Sennett (2008) identifies exchange between strangers as the essential quality of the public realm. Building on Sennett’s observation, we would expand this definition to include exchange between citizens and their city. The public city is the broad and diffuse landscape of exchange loci, a landscape that expands and contracts in space according to differing levels of political, social, and physical characteristics that allow for interaction. It is essential that we foster the conditions that help create and maintain the vitality of these loci, and by extension, the vitality of the public realm.

Our conception of the public city as a forum for multi-scalar exchange relies on practicable applications of a third abstraction: experimentation. The gradual erosion of a meaningful and exciting public sphere can be traced back to Augustan Rome or Victorian England, but for our purposes, the advent of Modernism serves as a useful landmark in the decline of the public city (Sennett, 1996). The modernist city was one of reason and rationality translated into rigid form; everything in its right place, every form and function preordained. Public space, of course, was incorporated into the modernist planner’s calculus, but this explicit demarcation had a limiting effect; space not expressly designated as public receded into the private realm as order trumped spontaneity. Stymied by what they felt to be an oncoming tide of oppressive rigidity, the Situationists employed experimentation as their means to “get beyond the rational city...to reassert daring, imagination and play in social life and culture” (Merrifield, 2002: 96).

Though some scars of modernist planning still mar the urban landscape, the public city is now threatened by forces that make the Brutalist mistakes of the 1960s seem trivial; the Western city is largely subject to “the impersonal machineries of the neoliberal state and the deregulated market” and these forces, unrestrained and perhaps encouraged by municipal governance, reinforce spatial and social injustice and thus damage the likelihood of a thriving public city (Wacquant, 2008: 225). Experimentation, that handy and often mischievous instrument of the Situationists, is not only relevant but essential in confronting an increasingly fragmented metropolis. Experimentation can upset established rhythms and roles that perpetuate difference and segregation. As a result, the possibility exists to inject risk and uncertainty into a city controlled largely by the minimisation of these ostensibly negative traits. Governing the public city means acknowledging the full fabric of urban experience and requires that we create a forum for interaction and exploration that might yield fuller realisations of ourselves, our neighbours, and our spaces.



KEY

■ Amenities	■ Residential
■ Culture	■ Sport
■ Podium	

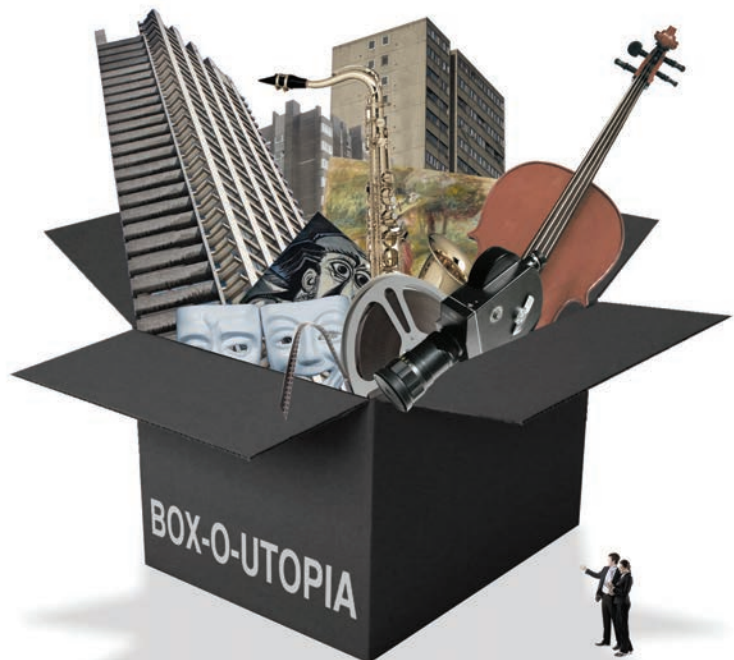
Above: The Barbican Podium

The 1959 plans for the Barbican complex suggested an entity that would be embedded within, and contribute to the vitality of the surrounding urban fabric. The plans envisioned an expansive podium extending across the entire complex, housing various commercial services and cultural and sporting amenities. By encouraging pedestrian traffic, the podium and its facilities would bring vibrancy within the complex walls.

Source: Chamberlin, Powell and Bon, 1959

Right: The Barbican in a Box

The Barbican complex we see today is radically different from what was envisioned in the 1959 plans. When construction of the Barbican complex began in 1963, most of the facilities and amenities originally designated for the podium were instead concentrated within the cultural centre and YMCA on the northwestern corner of the complex. This development only served to emphasise the perception of the Barbican as a walled-off citadel and its perceived isolation from the city.



Since its inception, the Barbican has occupied tricky terrain within the public city. Working within the relatively inflexible constraints of modernist design and planning, the Barbican's planners nevertheless envisioned the need for some sort of controlled vibrancy within the walls of the complex. Early plans called for an elevated 'podium' that would house a wide array of goods and services spread throughout the vast complex. This podium would encourage pedestrian use of the Barbican's public spaces and foster interaction between residents and visitors as they walked between amenities. The podium was an early attempt at engineering the public city through design. This vision was ultimately not realised; much of the Barbican's podium today is empty space denuded of amenities and activity.

The modernist myopia responsible for the failed podium is further reflected in the Barbican's current form; order was envisioned through the separation of pedestrians and vehicles and the creation of these dual worlds has made the Barbican a largely inaccessible fortress protected by poorly integrated streets, obscured views and slabs of concrete. The rigidity and insularity of the Barbican makes it an ordered island amid a sea of living city and its citadel-like form weakens its involvement in the landscape of exchange that constitutes the public city. The Barbican's uneasy status as part art-complex, part residence further complicates its identity as it embodies both public and private realms. The multiple personalities of the Barbican co-exist in close quarters and the tension between being public and remaining private is evident in strict policies regulating the quasi-public outdoor space that serves as both concert-goer's smoking section and resident's backyard.

Recognising the limitations of the impenetrable physical form and enigmatic public-private status of the complex in which it is housed, the Barbican arts centre has attempted to expand its presence and improve its image by extending programming into new geographic areas. Its participation in the Shoreditch Festival, collaborative initiatives such as the East London Jazz Orchestra, and partnerships with schools and youth groups, all represent the Barbican art centre's efforts to extend programming, support, and its own reputation beyond its concrete confines. This outward facing attitude reflects a promotional strategy, but also an acute awareness of audience homogeneity and an attendant responsibility to promote accessibility and inclusivity. Louise Jeffreys (2012), Director of Programming for the Barbican Centre, has noted that "no arts centre has fully explored what it means to be an arts centre" and that this exploration is enhanced and enriched by the cultural heterogeneity that defines London.

Though the Barbican is right to celebrate London for its diversity, increasingly stark socioeconomic contrasts and their spatial manifestations suggest that the city is less a version

of Robert Park's romanticised "mosaic of little worlds" and more an "uneven patchwork of microspaces that are physically proximate but institutionally estranged" (Park, 1925: 40; Brenner and Theodore, 2002: 258). Within this patchwork, the Barbican, located in the City of London, is physically and imaginatively nested in a position of power and privilege. The Barbican, recognising its role to counter this creeping institutional estrangement, has indeed succeeded in extending programming beyond its post code, but the efforts described above are more fleeting moments than a sustained campaign to upset hardening fragmentation. Such a campaign, of course, with its broad range of challenges and implications, requires more than one institutional flag-bearer, but the Barbican is well positioned, both geographically and organisationally, to lead the charge.



Robin Hood Gardens Estate

This image of the skyscrapers of Canary Wharf looming over the Robin Hood Gardens Estate illustrates the stark contrast between our area of intervention and the developments beyond its borders.

Opposite page: Looking East

The area we have chosen for our intervention is one that appears absent from official imaginings of the East; it is an area surrounded by, but not part of, identified Opportunity Areas in the London Plan 2011, such as the south Shoreditch area, the Isle of Dogs, and Stratford.

SPACE FOR AN INTERVENTION

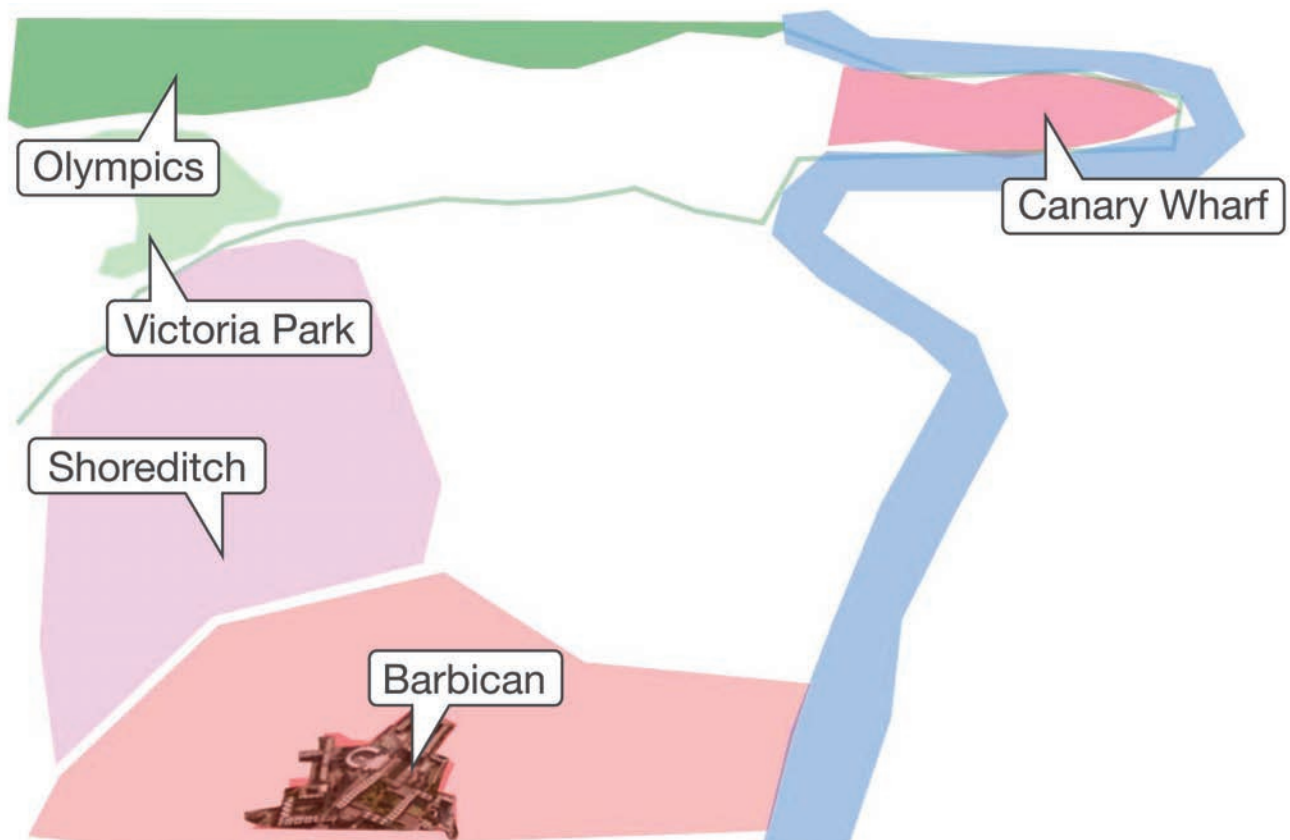
Art and performance, both potent vehicles for expression and experimentation, serve as important mechanisms to advance the public city as we have defined it. With its resources and organisational strength, the Barbican arts centre is uniquely situated to challenge and explore notions of the everyday and encourage exchange and experimentation. Rather than merely operating as one more node in a scattered network of active public spaces, we feel the Barbican can operate in a greater capacity, one where it acts as a prominent champion of the public city. The mechanism to achieve this expanded role is design, though not in the limited sense that prizes the physical over the social. Design is a social, spatial, and political act. Designing the public city is a process of crafting the physical and imaginative space that allows one to not just be in public, but to be public. Being public requires both comfort and risk, curiosity about the familiar and the foreign, and the ability to encounter, challenge, and embrace the diverse collection of bodies that share the same city space. Through a social and spatial design process, the Barbican can facilitate these sensations, experiences, and interactions.

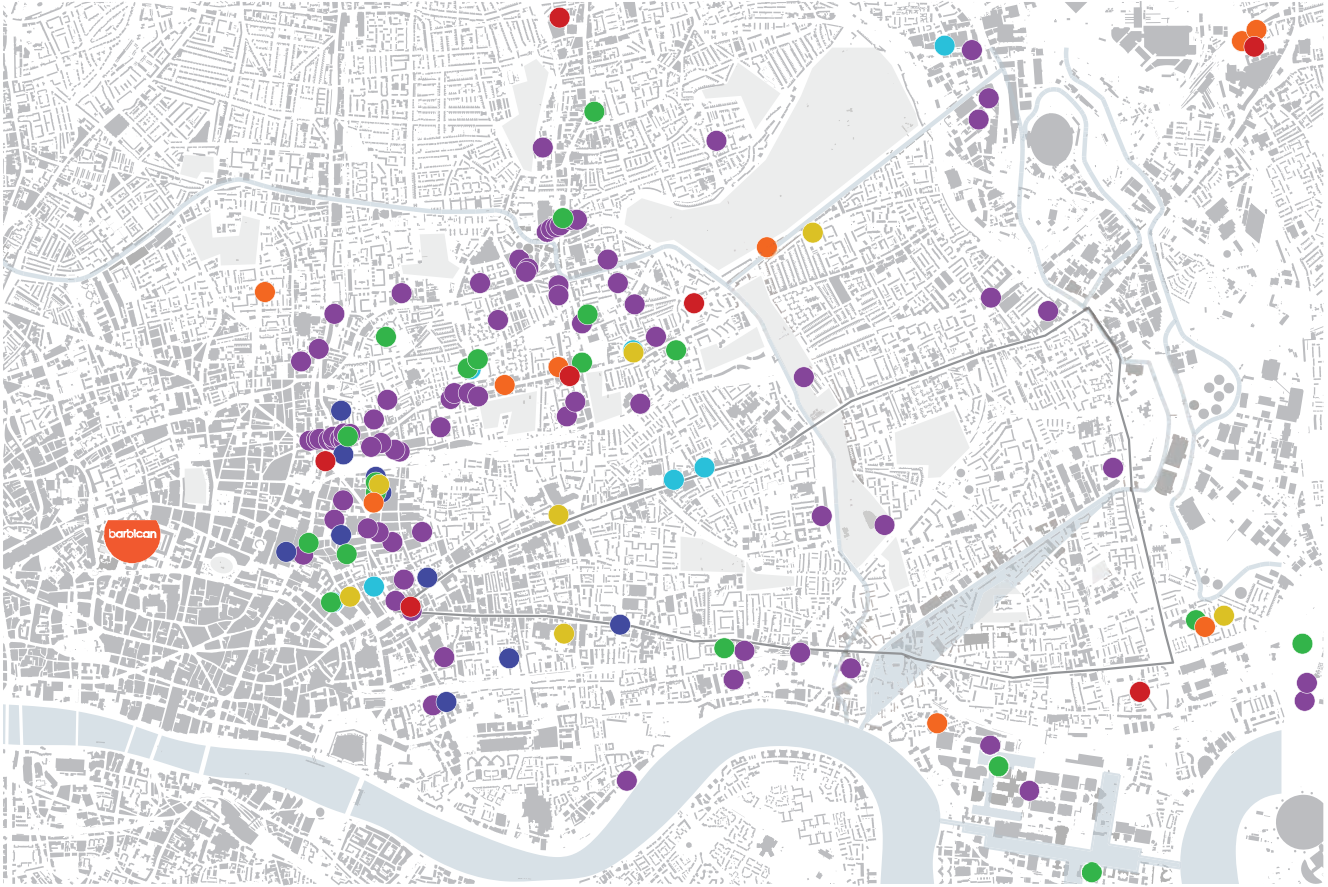
"Located at the heart of the City, the Barbican Centre is uniquely placed to support and nurture the growth of the arts in East London, one of the capital's most exciting and vibrant

developing areas. In our efforts to extend our work beyond our walls, we have strengthened our connections with partners across the East." (Barbican Centre, 2008: 3)

In moving beyond its walls, the Barbican has identified a strong eastward pull. In crafting our proposal, we adopt this eastward focus both to align with the Barbican's existing efforts and because the East reveals one of the most troubling pieces of London's uneven patchwork. Though historically associated with London's gritty industrial past, the East in its current form is a heterogeneous assemblage; indeed, the sheer diversity of populace, activity, and place suggests that the monolithic directional categorisation has exhausted its usefulness. Existing within this vaguely defined piece of city are the towers of Canary Wharf, the perpetually buzzing Shoreditch area, and the Olympic Park (see image on page 3). These hubs of power and excitement challenge outdated conceptions of the East, but their prominence threatens to obscure the very real deprivation that exists in their shadows.

Roughly one mile from the Barbican is a triangular area whose geographic proximity to the East's active hubs is matched by its imaginative distance from them. Overlooked as an Opportunity Area in the London Plan, this area – which we have termed





'the wedge' – ranks as one of the most deprived in London (Greater London Authority, 2011). The wedge is seemingly an area of the everyday; overwhelmingly dominated by housing estates and small businesses, with a scattered assortment of parks and markets, it lacks the aggressively marketed image of the aforementioned developments and exists in a largely ignored void between them. Beyond the selective patterns of commercial and residential investment that seem to have bypassed the wedge, analysis of the area reveals a relative paucity of cultural and arts venues as well. This institutional lack, coupled with the area's apparent ordinariness, makes the wedge an ideal setting for our intervention. The wedge, a patch of the superficially mundane nestled against landscapes of power, prestige, and edginess, is a place to challenge our conception of what constitutes the everyday and reassert its importance in the quest to be public. If we understand the public city to be more than a mere aggregation of the physical, as a place where Tower Hamlets' streets hold the same potential for ownership and enjoyment as Bloomsbury's squares, then our intervention necessarily requires that we adjust our valuation of the 'everyday' accordingly.

KEY

- Comedy
- Dance
- Literature
- Multi-purpose Arts Venue
- Music
- Theatre, Drama, & Live Event
- Visual Arts

Cultural Venues in the East

The narrative created by the absence of the wedge from official imaginings of the East and by deprivation maps of the area is reinforced by its relative lack of assets such as cultural and arts venues.

Data source: London Borough of Tower Hamlets, 2011

A Sequential Exploration of the Everyday

Reflecting the way in which citizens experience the city through both temporal and spatial dimensions, as a series of experiences, sensations, and interactions, our intervention involves a sequential appropriation and re-ordering of space through art and performance. By moving across a sequence of destination, peripheral, and unfamiliar sites within the wedge, our intervention allows citizens to explore and experience urban space not as a single encounter at a single location, but through a network of diverse spaces over a period of time. The adjacent diagram depicts an illustrative sequence of sites.

THE BARBICAN BEYOND THE BOX

Our assertion is that the public city is unfurled across the physical city through the appropriation and appreciation of everyday space. The transformative nature of art and performance, and their potential both for democratic participation and individual expression, recommend them as our vehicles for reclaiming the public city. With the Barbican arts centre as facilitator, our proposal is to use art and performance to disrupt the spatial - and thus the imaginative - order of the everyday spaces of the wedge.

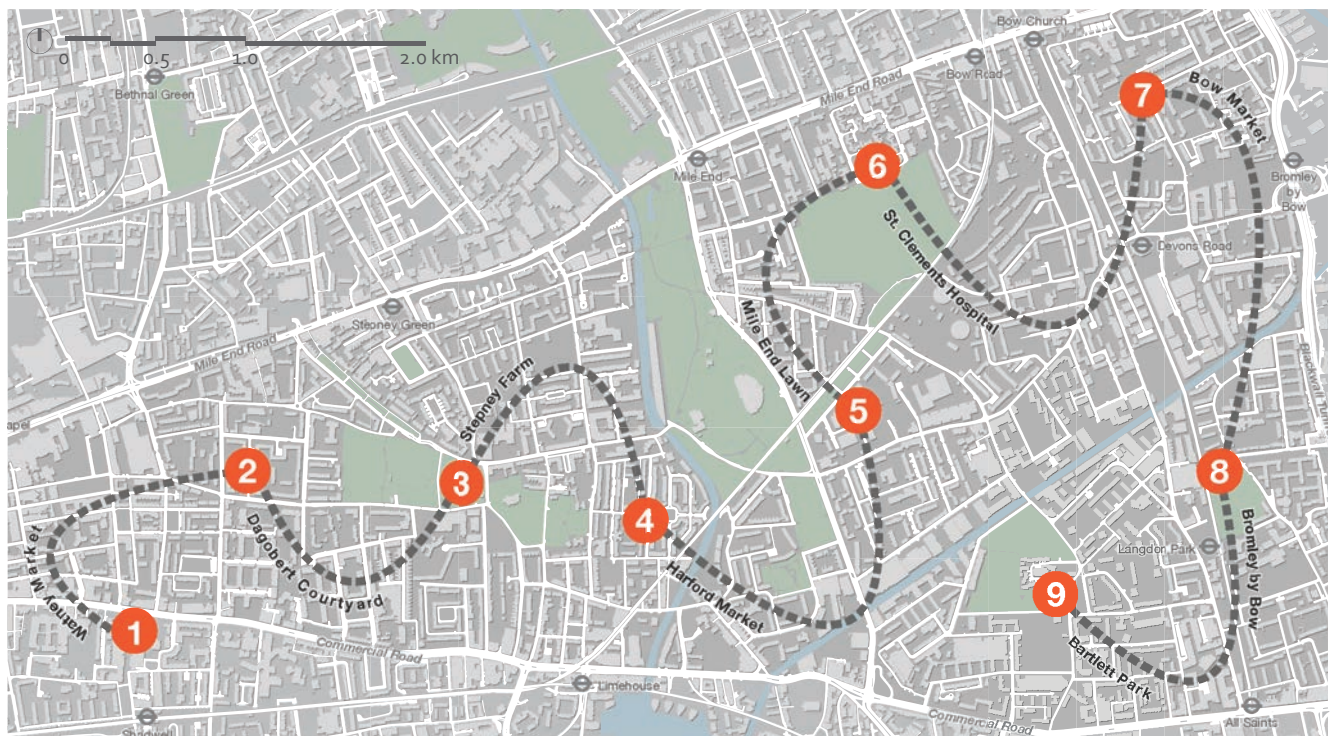
Additionally, a sustained intervention can disrupt the widening imaginative chasm between the wedge and its surroundings, a chasm reinforced through selective investment, deprivation maps, and resultant stigmatisation. Disruption forces re-examination; by disrupting the spaces and routines that have become codified into the everyday order of the city, and by compelling people to perceive and experience space in new ways, we can create opportunities for them to imbue their spaces with new meaning and significance.

Specifically, our proposal is a process that temporarily transforms spaces of the everyday into spaces for art and performance. We envision a symbiotic relationship between the Barbican and the spaces and stakeholders of the wedge; the Barbican, in venturing beyond its walls, receives new spaces, partnerships, and audiences for production, exhibition, and performance. Residents and organisations within the wedge, instrumental in crafting these novel artistic platforms, receive

institutional support, venues for expression and exchange, and ultimately a reclaimed right to shape and experience the spaces that constitute their notion of the everyday.

The 'Barbican Beyond the Box', as we have titled our proposal, seeks to work with a rather large piece of the urban fabric and therefore involves a sustained effort across multiple sites that are activated consecutively. A broad geographic scope also allows us to incorporate sites with different levels of 'everyday-ness'. The spaces that people inhabit are myriad; the corner caff, estate courtyard, and vacant lot occupy varying degrees of prominence in our psychogeographic maps. Our intervention accounts for the variable nature of these everyday spaces by separating performance sites into three general typologies: the 'destination', the 'peripheral' and the 'unfamiliar'.

Awareness and ownership, the intended impacts of the intervention, are realised through art and performance in different ways: in destination sites, a familiar place with a familiar function is jolted by an unconventional use. Peripheral sites, seen but not noticed, suddenly receive the spotlight, gaining new visibility and relevance. Unfamiliar sites become attractions as art and performance unearth the potential in the neglected. By appropriating the destination, the peripheral, and the unfamiliar, momentarily transforming the ordinary into the unusual, even fantastic, we compel people to pay attention to the spaces that they take for granted or overlook and reconsider the value and purpose of these spaces.





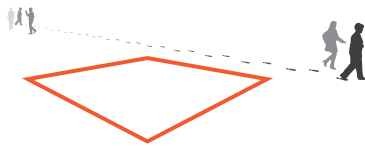
The Wedge from Above

This bird's eye view of the wedge taken from a Watney Market Estate tower block shows a landscape dominated by housing estates. But within this residential expanse lies a variety of spaces with different levels of 'everyday-ness'.



The Destination

Figuring prominently in people's everyday experience and their conception of the familiar, the destination, as the term suggests, encompasses places that people visit frequently. These are places like markets, playgrounds and libraries.



The Peripheral

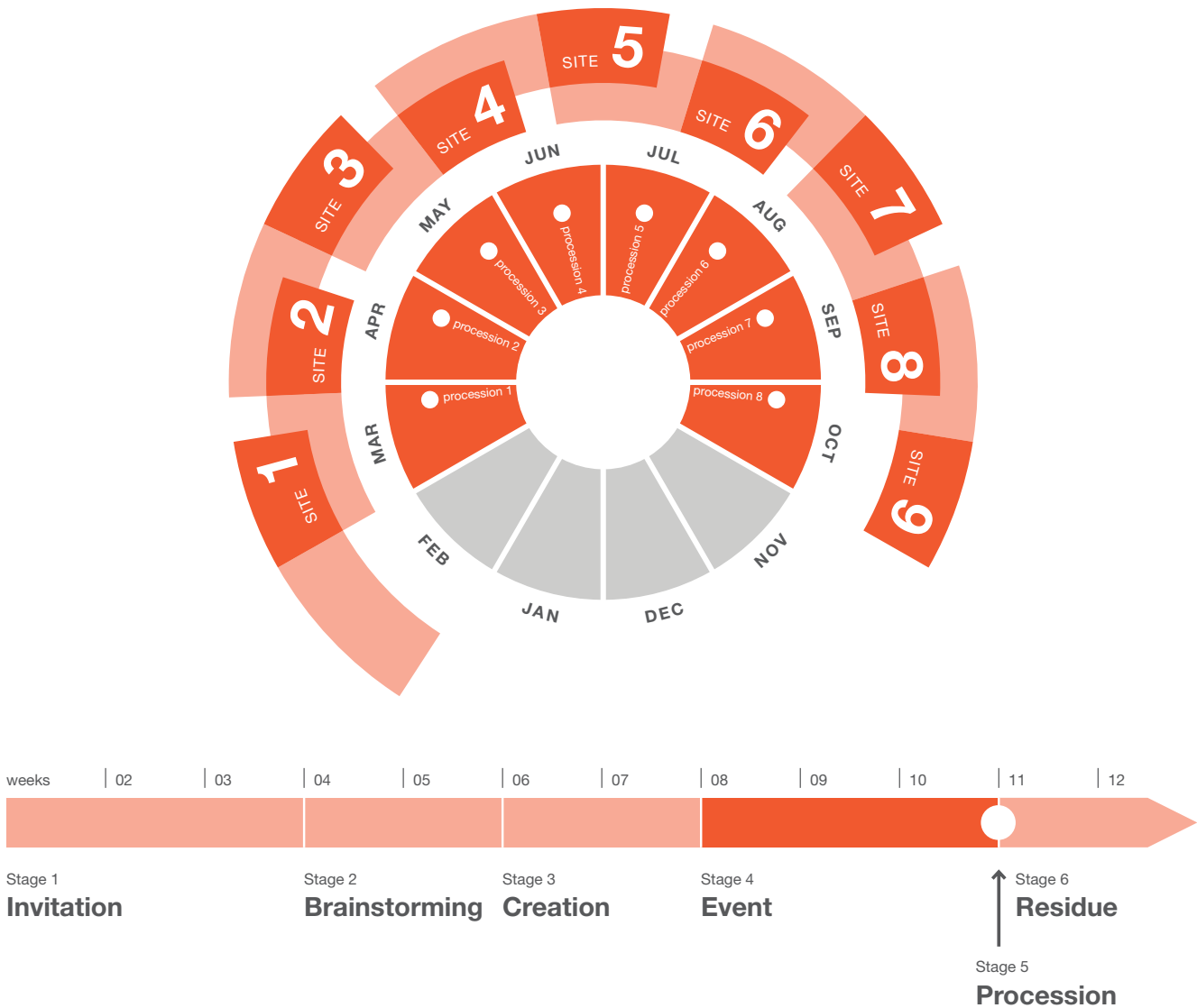
The peripheral also features prominently in people's everyday experience and their conception of the familiar. Unlike destinations, peripheral spaces are seen, but rarely registered. These are the spaces people traverse, the estate courtyards they pass by, the tunnels they duck through, the bridges they cross.



The Unfamiliar

Unfamiliar spaces lie on the edges or just beyond the zone of familiarity and comfort for most people. While part of the neighbourhood, these spaces are ignored or avoided by people who perceive them as unattractive, or even intimidating. These are the empty lots overrun with weeds, the boarded-up buildings awaiting redevelopment, the warehouses bordering the edges of estates.





THE PUBLIC CITY AS A PROCESS

The characteristics that define the 'public city' – the notions of belonging, ownership, comfort, and exchange – defy creation through rigid planning parameters or the construction of designated 'public spaces'. However, we can encourage the development of these characteristics through thoughtful management of how urban space is appropriated and experienced. To our stated end of increased awareness and ownership of city space, we have designed a six-stage process to disrupt spatial order through art and performance. These six stages will be applied uniformly across a sequence of destination, peripheral, and unfamiliar sites. By crafting an intervention that is process-based, sustained, and applicable to disparate locations, we distinguish our effort from earlier Barbican

outreach programmes and create a sense of movement, momentum, and evolution. The sequential nature of the site interventions also helps participants and audiences view the sites not in isolation, but as a network of linked spaces that relate to each other and to the broader urban canvas. The Barbican Beyond the Box is most notably a process of co-production of the public city, one that is applied to the wedge here but may be implemented in other urban locales.

Facing page: A Process in Six Stages

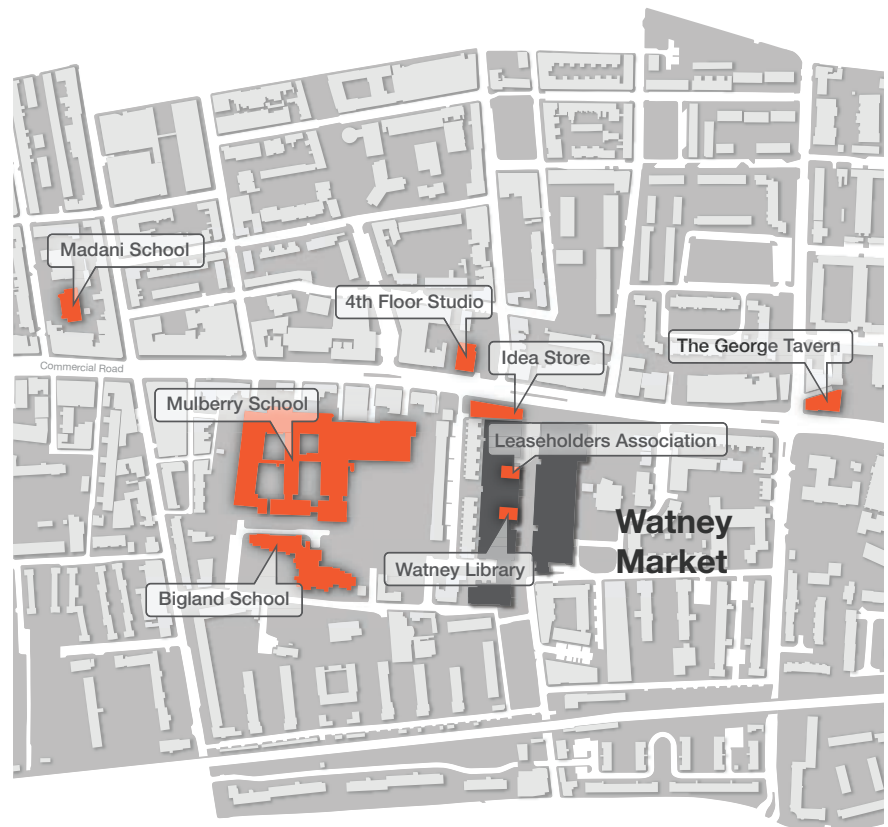
Our intervention involves the application of a six-stage process to transform selected sites into spaces for art and performance. Unfurling over the course of ten weeks, this process is applied in turn across a sequence of destination, peripheral, and unfamiliar sites within the wedge.

Right: A Collaboration between Diverse Institutions and Individuals

Although official representations of the wedge suggest a relative lack of assets, a closer examination reveals a range of institutions with different skills and resources that could be brought on board the project. In the case of Watney Market, the first site in our illustrative sequence, assets in the area that could serve as potential participants include the George Tavern, a pub that also organises and plays host to various arts events, a tenants' association, gallery space 4th Floor Studio, nearby schools and the Idea Store.

Below: An Open Call for Participation

In line with the open and participatory tone of the intervention, direct, targeted recruitment will be complemented by an open invitation for participants. This image of Watney Market shows a visual invitation on site to attract potential participants and audiences.





An Open Exchange of Ideas

The notions of experiment and exchange lie at the heart of the Brainstorm stage: the generation and exchange of creative, potentially radical, ideas about how the selected site can be transformed for art and performance.

Source: <http://ideastorewatneymarket.tumblr.com>



Exploring the Perception and Possibilities of Space

The Brainstorm stage also seeks to highlight the notion that the public city is less a spatial construct than a canvas that citizens imbue with their own meaning based on personal experience. Interactive performance workshops that encourage participants to explore, appropriate, and experience space in new ways are one possible avenue for this. The photo shows one such workshop, held at the Barbican arts centre.

Source: Moss, F. (2012)

Stage I: Invite (three weeks)

Consistent with our goal to facilitate exchange, collaboration is an essential element of our intervention. The first stage of our process entails identifying, recruiting, and uniting a diverse group of stakeholders who, by proximity or otherwise, have an interest in a proposed intervention site. These include tenant associations, art collectives, schools, hobby groups and businesses. Local knowledge is paramount here; being familiar with the site and its surroundings would help in ensuring that the intervention is sensitive to the context of the site and its relationship with those who use and occupy the space. These stakeholders will work with Barbican programming and Creative Learning personnel and will be urged to invite others who are keen on participating. At the proposed site, an open invitation to the brainstorming process will advertise the coming project and encourage broader community participation.

Additionally, involvement by the Guildhall School and artists and creative partners affiliated with the Barbican will be encouraged. The collaboration between these diverse actors, envisioned as an open and organic process, nevertheless requires coordination and management. This crucial mediating role is to be assumed by a design collective tasked with overseeing and implementing each stage of the project.

Stage II: Brainstorm (two weeks)

The Brainstorm stage is the first step in challenging and appropriating the everyday. Here, as the potential for artistic expression in ostensibly ordinary spaces is revealed, spatial consciousness is stretched. If exchange between strangers is the essential quality of the public realm (Sennett, 2008), the Brainstorm stage seeks to catalyse the exchange of ideas between diverse individuals. In this stage, participants will consider how art and performance can be used to physically and mentally transform everyday space. We expect that brainstorm sessions will reveal diverse conceptions of art and its uses; a survey commissioned by Tower Hamlets (Bold Creative, 2009) that asked teenagers from the borough what art meant to them showed a surprisingly even distribution over twenty-one response categories.

The Brainstorm stage is characterised by openness; participants will be urged to explore unconventional uses of the site, using art and performance as the media for this appropriation. Performance workshops are also an integral element of this stage to encourage the possibility that participants' roles might extend beyond the facilitative to the performative. Through this open, exploratory process, the Brainstorm stage ultimately seeks convergence around the following questions:

- What kind(s) of art should there be on the site?
- How might the site be transformed to accommodate this art?
- What form will the participation of the stakeholders take?



Stage III: Create (three weeks)

The Create stage, where ideas begin to find tangible form, is where the exchange between participants and the Barbican, with and within the site, comes to the fore. It involves two interdependent processes: the production, rehearsal or curation of art housed on site, and the configuration of the site to accommodate this art or performance. As mentioned before, the creative conversation at this stage is not necessarily restricted to site stakeholders and Barbican personnel. If appropriate and desired, the Barbican's dense network of partners and affiliated artists can be tapped to participate in the creative process. In the meantime, the involvement of local stakeholders can take on a variety of forms and intensities, from conceptualisation and production to exhibition and performance.

A key emphasis of our intervention is that transforming one's experience of space does not necessarily entail a radical physical reconfiguration. Our central contention bears repeating: the public city is far more than an aggregation of the material; rather, the public city is an ideal, dependent on both personal and collective ownership, enjoyment, and comfort of everyday space. Despite its intangible nature, the public city can be strengthened through physical cues that force us to challenge our perception of our environment, allowing us to see past the façade of the ordinary and capture new significance in hidden potentials.



With this in mind, participants will receive durable, light, and portable building blocks that can be configured in any number of ways. Providing participants with only basic building materials compels them to rely on the transformative properties of performance and art, rather than on the physical structure accommodating it. Keeping the spatial structure basic and portable also has the advantage of minimising the bureaucratic planning permissions and approvals that otherwise might be required. Moreover, keeping the materials simple, light, and human-scaled ensures that the construction process is open to practically everyone, regardless of age or physical condition. Familiarity with this basic material and structure ensures that the Create stage is a democratic one and does not favour individuals with particular material or technical expertise.



The IKEA Philosophy: simple, functional and available to everyone
 IKEA's philosophy inspired the choice of materials to be provided to participants. The use of basic building blocks reinforces the objective to use art and performance, not the elaborate reconfiguration of space, to transform one's experience and perceptions of space.



Stage IV: Event (two weeks)

In the Event stage, the art is the star; the sound, movement and craft of the Create stage are transferred from closed rehearsal spaces and studios to everyday spaces and audiences in the wedge. With the physical setting altered through creative use of the blocks, each site experiences an imaginative transformation as a market becomes a stage, a courtyard morphs into a gallery, and a derelict building assumes new life as a cinema. It is the event that highlights the different textures, potentials and possibilities embedded within the everyday. Art and performance set amidst the hustle and bustle of a destination site take on very different forms and meanings than when inserted into the relatively muted context of an unfamiliar site. More than just a play on art forms and settings, the event is also a play on rhythm. The duration of the event and its frequency can mimic the natural rhythms of the site, or disrupt them, adding another dimension to the audience experience.

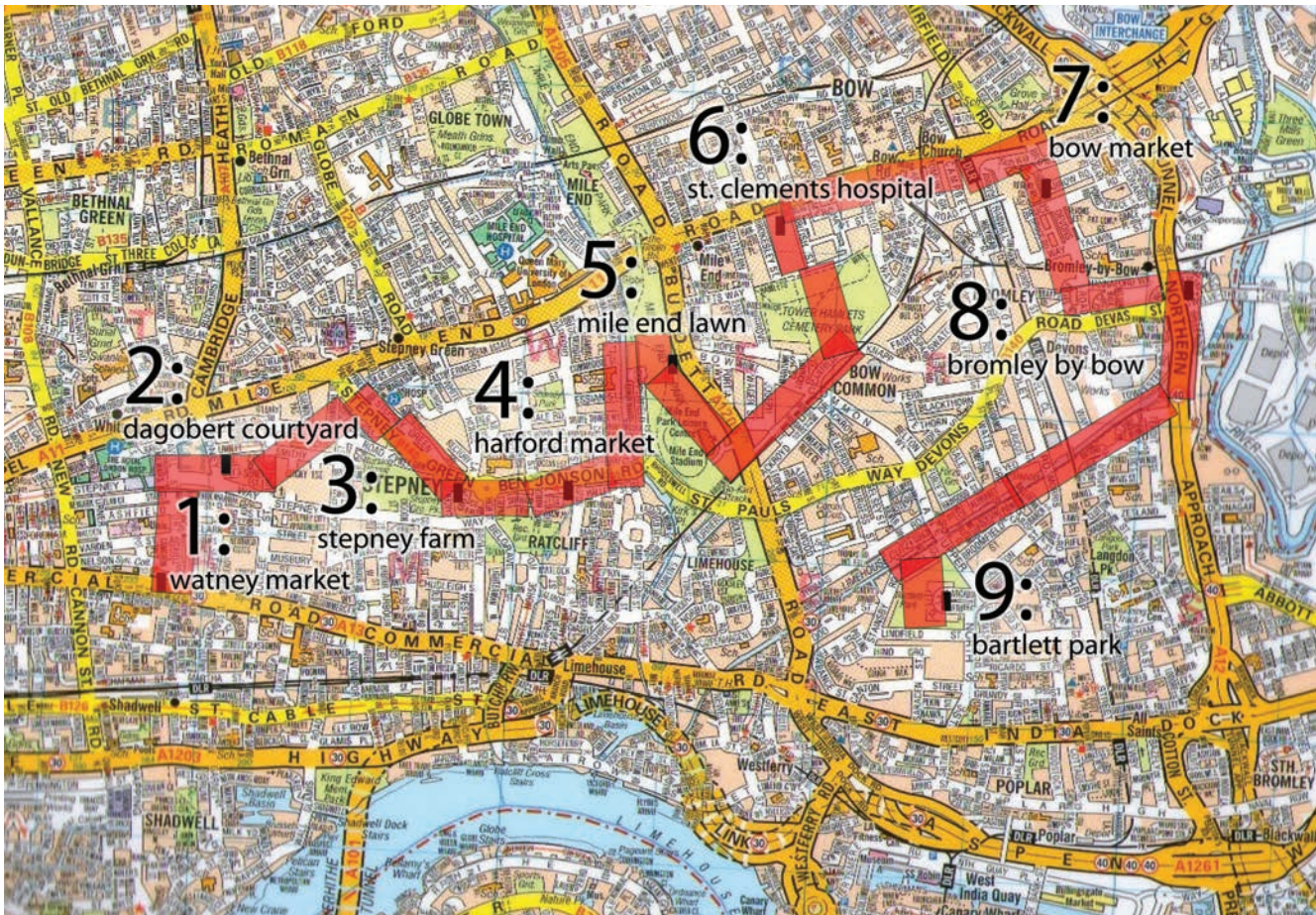
Just as citizens experience the city as a collection of experiences, sensations, and interactions, the Event stage is designed to take place over a period of two weeks to allow audiences to experience the space through more than just a singular encounter. For citizens who inhabit the wedge and consider the site to be a familiar entity, very much an environment of the everyday, the event presents an opportunity to view this space through a different lens and engage with it in a new way. For those who hail from outside the wedge, who are in the area whether by design or chance, the event is an opportunity to encounter art and performance in an unconventional setting, outside of the theatre, the recital studio or the gallery. In drawing outsiders to explore a relatively unfamiliar part of the city, the Event stage colours the seemingly white void amidst Canary Wharf, Shoreditch, and the Olympic Park, emphasising the value and vibrancy of a place too often narrowly perceived through the lens of a deprivation map.



Both Pages: Appropriating and Experiencing Space in New Ways

Although participants are limited in the kind of building materials they are given, the configurations in which they can employ these building blocks are extensive. Whether as audience member or casual passerby, individuals visiting the transformed site now experience it in a radically different context; a stall at Watney Market serves as a stage, a courtyard at Dagobert House has morphed into a gallery, a derelict building on the edge of Stepney Farm has assumed new life as a cinema.





Pathways Exploring the Urban Canvas of the Wedge

The sequential nature of the site interventions underlines their status as inter-connected spaces within the broader urban fabric. As one transformed site completes its event and preparations are made to transform the next, a procession marking this transition creates a relationship between the two. The map illustrates a pathway for the procession(s) between nine sites in our illustrative sequence, a route that winds its way through main streets and back alleys, footpaths and courtyards.

Opposite Page: A Celebration of Being Public

The procession itself transforms and transmutes space. As participants move from one site to the next, bearing the deconstructed elements of their creation, they celebrate the completion of one project and anticipate the birth of another. Streets, back alleys, footpaths, and courtyards momentarily assume the air of a circus, a parade, or a disco.

Stage V: Procession (one day)

In accordance with the principles of continuity and momentum that underlie our proposal, the Procession stage is where the energy and activity of the project is transferred from one site to the next. In this stage, project participants disassemble the configuration of boxes and associated exhibition material at their site, and collectively carry these objects through the streets in a celebratory parade. In its uninterrupted movement from site to site, the procession connects the series of sites within the project, creating a rhythm for the conjunctive network of previously disconnected sites.

Through the procession, the project is literally embraced by local stakeholders; this sustained interaction with the intervention stands in stark contrast to the abrupt appearance and disappearance of trendy pop-ups. The boxes, carried then exchanged with the next group of participants during the procession, similarly function as deconstructed memories of past events and sites, spurring curiosity and excitement as to what will happen next. Carrying rectangular building blocks from one site to the next is more than a mere bodily experience; it instils a sense of ownership of the project, conveying the ease with which you can appropriate and transform the spaces around you.

The procession also pays debt to our notion of exchange between people and their environment; as a passage through a variety of ambiances, it invites participants to interact with their city in new ways. Winding through the chaos of the high street and the hidden labyrinths of housing estates, the procession

route is strategically laid out to elicit a sensual and perceptual response and expand the psychogeographical map of everyday space. The passage through a variety of landscapes allows for two things, both resonating with the larger narrative underlying our proposal. First, the procession is aimed at instilling new meanings into the everyday environment and the experience of moving through it. Too often, our paths take us past the city as opposed to taking us actively through the city; our surroundings blur, our routes are chosen for efficiency rather than enjoyment, and city streets become funnels to places, not places in their own right. A celebratory parade through these same streets makes such a route more meaningful, not just in the moment itself but also in the memories it imposes on future experience. Second, the procession allows for an exploration and discovery of areas that may not be familiar to all participants. They might have never taken this path, noticed that bridge, or walked along these back streets. Introducing participants to lesser-known parts of their neighbourhood increases their awareness space and spurs appropriation, ownership, and pride.

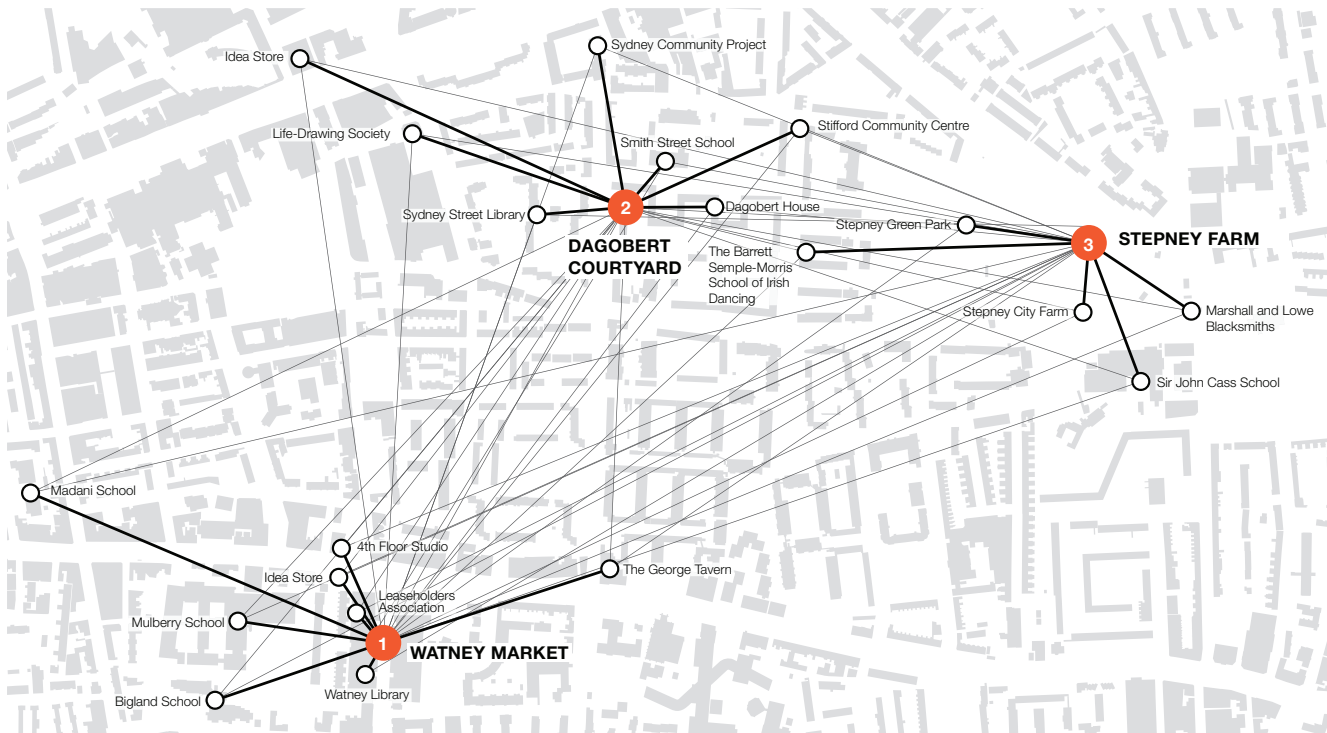
The procession, finally, leaves a visual trace in the form of a painted orange line along the route. Reminiscent of the yellow markings at the Barbican complex, the line invites the urban dweller to experience a similar labyrinthine passage through the wedge. Audiences can be directed to the events taking place on the next site and similarly be introduced to less familiar parts of the wedge. As a trace that is left behind during the procession, the orange line also functions as a residue of the project and is part of the next and final stage of the intervention.

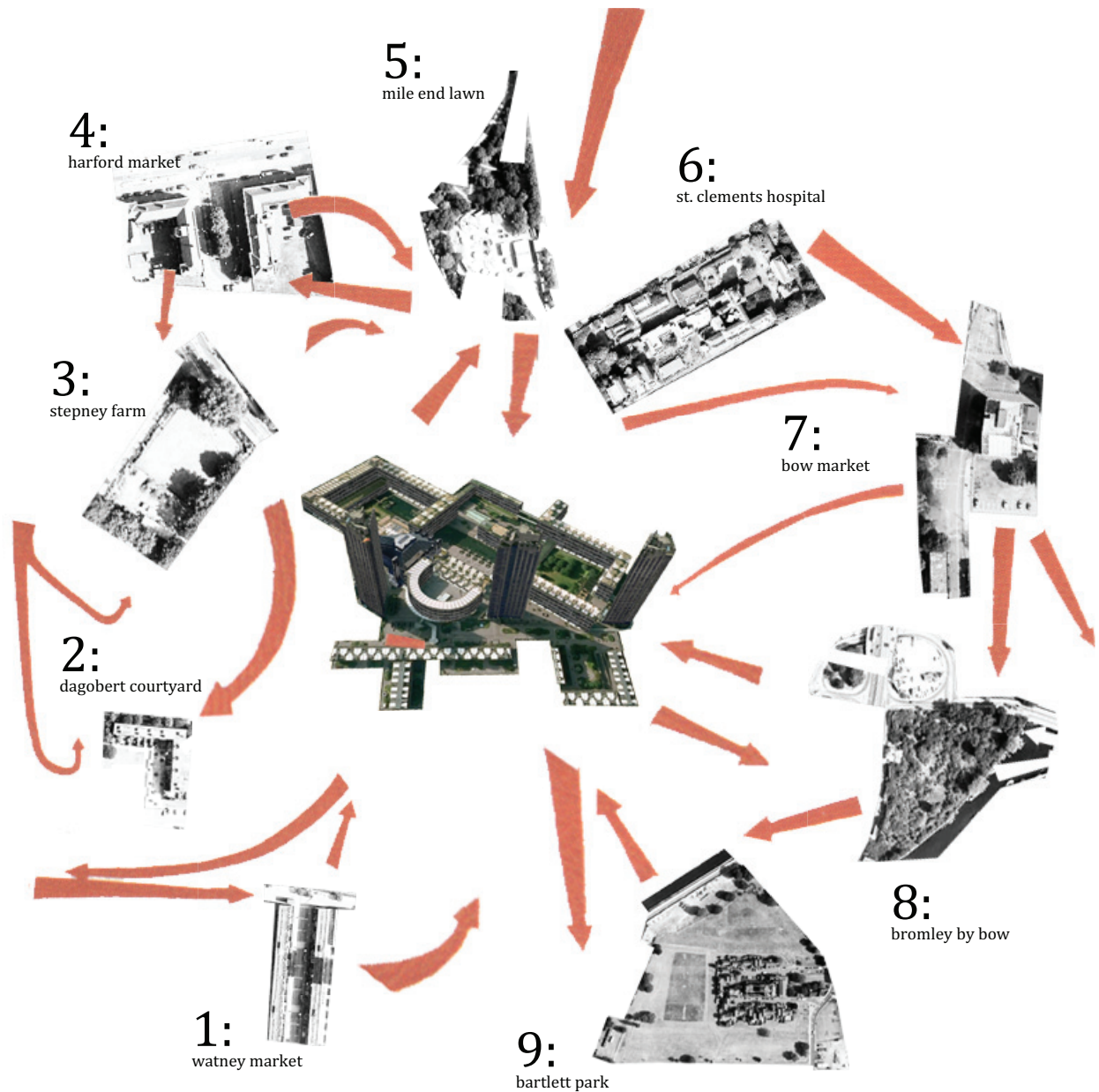


Stage VI: Residue (indefinite)

This final stage of The Barbican Beyond the Box is dedicated to creating a lasting residue, both tangible and intangible. One of the more visible traces is the painted procession line leading through the streets of the wedge, creating a relationship between the destination, peripheral and unfamiliar spaces that are highlighted through our intervention. A second physical residue is left at the sites that have been transformed into spaces for art and performance. A footprint of the particular configuration of boxes at each site is intended to remind us that the space was and has changed, illustrated by a text that hints at the artistic repurposing of the site. Although the tangible residues appear to be minor design interventions, they are intended to serve as visual reminders of the value and multiplicity of uses of everyday space.

Equally significant are the lasting invisible traces left by the intervention. The collaborative process that precedes the various events brings together institutions from disparate worlds and creates the potential for new networks and avenues for communication between them. Beyond the prospect of increased institutional connectivity within and beyond the wedge, we like to consider the possibility that our proposal could mark the start of more sustained communication between centralised institutions and groups of peripheral individuals. The Barbican Beyond the Box project allows for an increased awareness of the Barbican as a visible institutional partner, but more crucially, as a prominent champion of the public city.





Facing Page Above: A Visual Remembrance of Things Past

Although the movement of the intervention from one site to the next entails its deconstruction and removal, a visual trace of what once was is left on the ground. A painted line, not dissimilar to that found on the Barbican Highwalk, traces the route of the procession through the wedge. A painted footprint of the configuration of building blocks reminds passersby that "This is a stage", "This is a gallery" or "This is a cinema". It challenges their conception of the uses of a Watney Market stall, a courtyard in Dagobert House, and a derelict building at Stepney Farm.

Facing Page Below: Intangible Residues

Equally important as the tangible traces of the intervention are the invisible traces it leaves behind. Uniting diverse stakeholders to work on a common project provides the seeds to create a dense web of interactions and relationships. These networks allow for future collaborations, within and beyond the Barbican's walls.

The Naked Barbican

Just as the podium from the 1959 Barbican plans sought to encourage integration and exchange between the Barbican complex and its immediate surroundings, the Barbican Beyond the Box project seeks to establish a similar conversation, but with a much broader piece of the urban fabric. Engaging in this social and spatial design process, the Barbican establishes itself as a key node in the network of exchange loci that comprise the public city.

CONCLUSION: A CANVAS CREATED FOR THE PUBLIC CITY

Beyond the visible traces adorning each site and the newly formed networks of institutional connectivity, the ultimate legacy of our intervention, and the underlying goal of our design process, is a strengthened and expanded arena for being public. Our contention is that the public city looms larger than a simple collection of designated spaces; the public city is an ideal that can be unfurled across the physical city, an abstraction that can root itself in everyday space. The development of the public city is less a gradual geographic swelling than it is an appropriation and expansion of the space that we use, own, and enjoy. This expansion, we argue, relies on heightened awareness and appreciation of everyday space; art and performance are our chosen instruments for bringing about this deepened spatial consciousness.

The wedge, when viewed from a distance, resembles a piece of everyday city; aerial photos and statistical mapping portray a landscape of brick and mortar ordinariness and relative socioeconomic hardship. Our intervention is an act of recognition where the rich texture and variety of ordinary spaces are celebrated and incorporated into the public city. Rather than viewing the wedge through traditional measures of economic investment, we propose a new kind of investment, where meaning and value are attached to space through heightened

engagement with it. By using experimentation to foster spatial revaluation, interpersonal exchange and psychogeographic expansion, we assert the value of the wedge as an important canvas for being public and challenge the prominent-peripheral paradigm that divides the city in our imagination.

We view Louise Jeffreys' statement about the unfulfilled roles and potentials of arts centres as a challenge to extend the reputation of the Barbican beyond its narrow association with a quasi-public space, and reposition the institution as a prominent exponent of a vibrant public city. The Barbican cannot alone engineer a flourishing public realm; awareness, engagement, and ownership, all requisite for being public, defy cultivation by a single entity. But by recognising the immense potential for experimentation and exchange that lies latent in the overlooked, and by using a process of co-production to rethink, actualise, and celebrate this potential, the Barbican can facilitate the sensations, interactions, and experiences that together form the public city.

Tracing the Barbican Beyond the Box from a distance

The boxes arrive at their next location and the balloons participants carried during the procession are released.



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