

FATBERG & THE SINKHOLES

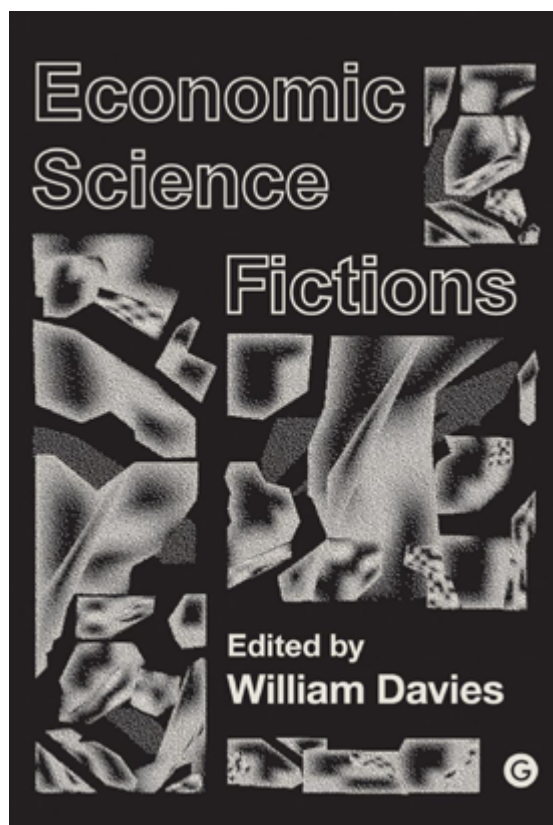
A REPORT ON THE FINDINGS OF A JOURNEY INTO

THE UNITED REGIONS OF ENGLAND*

BY

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Fatberg (NOUN)

A congealed lump of fat, sanitary items, wet wipes, and similar items found in sewer systems, which do not break down like toilet paper. Such deposits are officially referred to using this term by authorities at Thames Water in London, UK.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fatberg>

Sinkhole (NOUN)

A depression or hole in the ground caused by some form of collapse of the surface layer. Most are caused by karst processes—for example, the chemical dissolution of carbonate rocks or suffosion processes. Sinkholes vary in size from 1 to 600 m (3.3 to 2,000 ft) both in diameter and depth, and vary in form from soil-lined bowls to bedrock-edged chasms. Sinkholes may form gradually or suddenly, and are found worldwide.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sinkhole>

FOREWARD
TO THE UNITED REGIONS OF ENGLAND

Things are going well in London. Productivity and the economy are booming. **Disrupt, Capitalise, Optimise, repeat.** The decimal of time is moving left and the decimal of profit is headed right.

Could things be any better in the great city? Yes. In the city we are always improving, cutting the fat, but no one would have expected the fat to cut itself! When the English regions voted London out, the ground shook, but what we thought was the end actually fomented a new beginning..Indeed, we have thrived on City-State status, with the rest of the country lagging out our bandwidth no more. Now, it's London and it's the United Regions of England.

“For London, Labour, Imports, Commerce, Finance and Politics, had been a largely extra-GB phenomenon for nearly two centuries. From our perspective the metropolis was so large and globally oriented that it was effectively self-sufficient in national terms. Where did that leave the rest of us?”

Dave, 31, Political Editor, North Eastern Herald. Has always believed in another way Northumberland is his paradise. Where he feels truly at peace.

-PR-

There was always a disparity between London's absolute economic dominance and its relative lack of political influence.

Set-adrift we are politically and economically unencumbered.

In London we were happy with the split: there was very little we had to do with the rest of the country beyond the quaint or the nostalgic.

However, our predictions and analysis for the new United Regions of England (URE) became increasingly inaccurate. What was going on there?

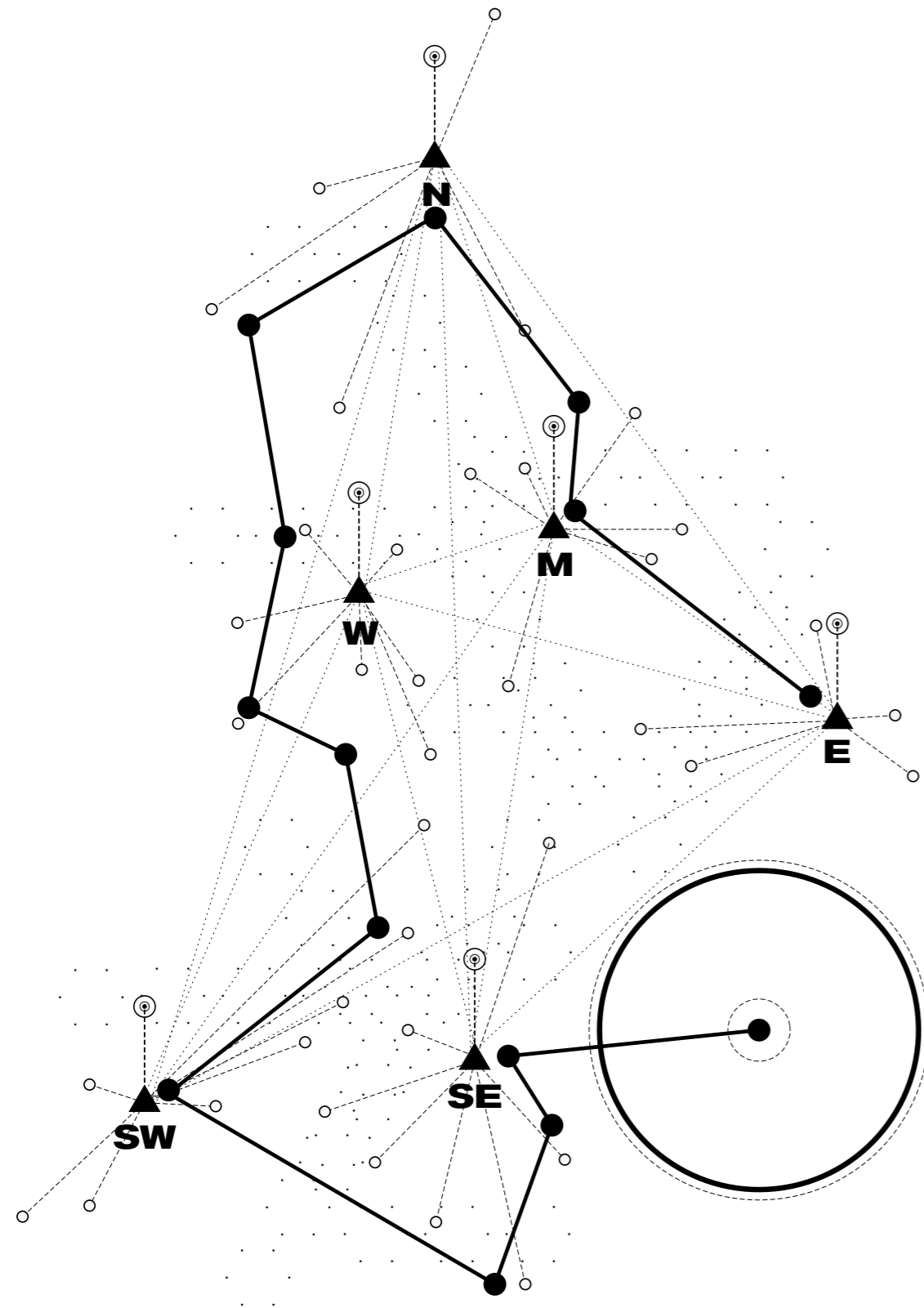
Certainly, stagnation was obvious.

Growth had ceased and yet, the URE still functioned.

“What in the name of Keynes is going on out there!? I want to know. NOW!”

Morduch, 72, CEO, Cloudnet, (London). Hates Losers. Has only ever lost once.Hated it

Why should you care?



Credit: Mike Lim

Proximity is critical. London may have separated from the URE but you can't do much about geography.

What is going on next door could either be a threat or an opportunity.

To ignore the URE could render us defunct, or worse, irrelevant.

That is why you should care.

-PR-

Enclosed in the pages of this report is the PostRational. perspective on the developing divergent economic system for the United Regions of England.

Welcome to the URE
Welcome to Absorbism



OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

Why?

Because it was stagnation like we'd never seen: capital accumulation flat lines but social mobility continues to rise.

It became clear to us at **PostRational.** that an analysis of Capital flow in the URE was not appropriate to understand the new Zeitgeist. We could not observe from a distance any more - we were compelled to journey into the world beyond M25.

What?

This report documents what we saw beyond the city limits.

This report is for you, the time-pressed reader, to discover the world that we saw too.

We do not pretend that it is exhaustive - nor do we proclaim to be right.

But we went on the journey and **Absorbism** is what we saw.

When?

Last year, lasting 5 weeks
(2 in-field, 2 in deepmental analysis, 1 writing)

Where?

The United Regions of England!

How?

We designed a bespoke approach to mirror the significance of what was going on :

A mixed-methodology plan of attack, combining the anecdotal, the observational, the metaneural and the analytical. In order to glean the sharpest responses, we prioritised extreme users, experts and cultural clairvoyants to form the most forward-thinking and future-proofed assessment. We applied cutting edge, cross-cultural technological techniques to find the spaces in between the stories¹.

¹ We would recommend a further study based on quantitative behavioural data and conjoint analysis to provide a more robust segmentation to incorporate 'real people' and 'rich human stories' and map their holistic experience

- 12x F2F expert interviews with regional leaders and cultural instigators (including travel)
- 6x cultural assimilation workshops with mixed demographic and psychographic makeup
- 4x urban safaris
- 4x suburban and rural safaris
- 4x ethnographic sit-ins and digital ethnographic sit-ins
- 2x immersive experiencing excursions
- Multi-faceted environmental design audit
- Infrastructural forensics mapping
- Interactivity swabbing

“We had to go to the orbitals’ other bank to see for ourselves. Places like Wookey Hole, places like Stoke, places like Yeovil and Chipping Ogden.”

Jake, 24 PR. researcher,
Likes to see beyond the surface. Bachelor in micro economics Misses 35mm film

You might even wish to work with **PostRational.** to discover more.

PROTOTYPICAL HYPOTHESIS

The modern world has always prioritised growth, with extraordinary results.

First, the industrial revolution facilitated this, from mass production to global expansion. Then the 20th Century marketing revolution saw mass consumption from mass desire and fierce competition through brands. More recently, the Internet revolution of the early 21st century created growth via value-extractive platforms. New opportunities arose as more and more people could acquire new value from one another. Seamlessly. Unthinkingly.

Or at least we thought so. These periods are posited as great paradigm shifts, but in fact, they weren’t revolutions at all. Simply put, each acted as an accelerant and megaphone for its predecessor.

Social revolution	Growth typology	Suburban impact
Industrial >>>	Productivity >>>	Exhaustion
Marketing >>>	Competition >>>	Inequality
Internet >>>	Optimisation >>>	Suffocation

What appeared different was actually just quicker, slicker and more single-minded. It created incredibly powerful networks, and fragile individuals. It is our hypothesis that:

1. London’s insatiable capacity for growth pushed against the constraints of the system

Growth didn’t come from creating new value or higher standards, but from optimisation: becoming so efficient as to be invisible. “Seamless” growth had implications for the physical, real world, where things still have to be made and exist. London was anything but invisible. It was consuming everything, exhausting supplies and pushing surplus to unseen places. Blockages grew in the system, creating ruptures with the result that something had to give.

2. London was kicked out, and the URE was formed, as a reaction to its insatiability,

London, the blocked fatberg, burst through. To put it more accurately it was expelled as a separate entity, seen as the route of the problem...the blockage in the drain. No city in the newly formed URE stepped up to take up London’s hegemonic mantle. This wasn’t the consequence of regulation, as we first thought. Equity arose from mutual consideration and cooperation between regions - the new direction of the URE.

3. The URE has set out, driven by necessity and opportunity, to do things differently

This new path marks a move from the quantitative to the qualitative, the immaterial and imperceptible to the tangible and weighty. It has also retained a sense of the symbolic. The URE has taken the first steps to an alternative mindset for governance and exchange. This mindset, is a new relational dynamic predicated not on growth but on the ability to withstand shocks.

In short, we think that:

A new economy, the product of a network-diverse-hyper-localism, is emerging in the URE. We have called it **Absorbism**.

Welcome to Absorbism

“In a world of perpetual optimisation, the margins for value creation and extraction become increasingly, imperceptibly small, and the physical ceases to matter. In this space, we become more attuned to the projection of reality on the screen than reality itself. Big changes happen without being seen. Hardness and spikiness disappears from view: the literal corners from your iPhone are softened, controversial urban developments disappear into background of average, uncontroversial design.. A totality of smoothness, impossible to get a grip on. I had to get out”

Su, 45, Sociable Theorist.
URB Newcomer / London
Defector, (lives mostly in a van)
Loves to rock climb. Is terrified
of an average existence. Hoping
to scale every significant peak
before she dies



ABSORBISM

AN INTRODUCTION

The URE is not working in service of London, is not bound by its philosophy, and is averse to new super-city hegemony. The absence of London created fertile grounds for something different.

Serving London’s insatiable economic appetite for growth left the rest of the URE exhausted, unequal and suffocated. In such a weakened state, the URE was incredibly vulnerable, due to the decades-long impact of systematic industrial closure, of low-cost globalised workforce, and of London-centric infrastructural investment.

Without London, the URE has taken action to counter such historical vulnerability with a mindset that grew from an interest in resilience, not growth.

Absorbism (n)

A system of social organisation in which all members (at individual, community and regional level) are able to withstand shock through the quality of relationships they form with each other. This is facilitated through:

New communality that blurs boundaries between public and private space

New regionalism that is founded on local identity, external curiosity and non-utilitarian exchange

New openness that creates multiple formal and informal relationships between members in spirit of non-competitive discovery and celebration

New drivers of status that are less concerned with what you have, and more with how you do it

Absorbism, Wrung-Out...

Conventionally, the more people use a network, the stronger the network becomes.

Here, the more a member uses a network, the stronger the member becomes.

The strength of the network is immaterial. What matters is the formation of bonds that are free from hierarchy or the burden of financial return. The URE appears to operate on a system of exchanges between members, where the point is not what-ness (the thing you are exchanging) but we-ness (the process of exchanging with each other). These could be about trading goods together, exchanging knowledge, sharing stories, or embarking on joint missions of discovery, salvage and reconnaissance . Members thrive off creating bonds and relationships with each other, almost for the sake of it.

What exchanges are all about	
Not	But
<i>efficiency</i>	<i>redundancies</i>
<i>things</i>	<i>people</i>
<i>competition</i>	<i>transparency</i>

To get a young person’s perspective on the networks in the community and beyond, we spoke to Rahul, an 18 year old school-leaver about to embark on a 2 year research trip with his friends. He said that there wasn’t any great designed intent between communities and regions, but then described something which sounded an awful lot like that to us.

“Yeah, I don’t know what you mean by networks. Like, a phone has a network, not people. We just click, whether you’re north, north west, south, everyone’s got a story everyone is capable of something cool.”

Rahul, 18, Student, South Wales
Loves his mates. Loves his home town. Scared of swimming

Components of exchange in the new regionalism

Redundancies of exchange:

This has some of the qualities of an old alliance system where members have abundant (even surplus?) places to turn to when seeking benefit (rather than everything angled towards London).

Exchanges with people:

People and places enjoy talking to each other, sharing ideas with each other and arguing with each other. Where London has extremely successfully designed lived experience to be an exercise in individual decisions and choices, the URE lived experience has shifted the centre of decision-making to multiple parties from multiple regions at the same time.

Exchanges of transparency:

This has hallmarks of genuine compatibility and collaboration between members, since there is no explicit goal of winning the exchange.

In other words: relationships through trade > trade through relationships

This **new regionalism** is mediated through the **infrastructural ombudsmen**, who exist solely to ensure that diverse relationships grow and decisions are made through them. They are, in effect, facilitators of high quality exchange.

Absorbism is an emergent theory - Capitalism is an angsty teenager by comparison. To support the model we will describe what we saw on the ground. We will catapult you headlong through three chosen scales:

The infrastructural

The architectural

The personal

THE INFRASTRUCTURAL OPTIMISE, ATOMISE, BURN OUT

The UK, pre-split, was the most centralised OECD country in the world. Much research from both the left and the right argued that greater devolution and distribution amongst the regions could lead to a much more stable society.

However, as the focus on optimisation grew - driven by the rampant expansion and elevation of London-centred financial and technological institutions, little was actually done to effectively counter the ever-growing weight of the capital city.

How can you reverse such a trend when the mass is so great?

The irrefutable mass of London was evidenced by the decline of the classical modern infrastructures (roads, rail, canal) that did not directly serve it. The density was reduced to a totally London centric organisation. Despite the infrastructural picture of GB being so optimised, the government sell-off of the remaining arteries to private enterprise led to atomisation as well. More infrastructural branches were shut or fell into disrepair on the grounds of low demand. Atomisation led to a simplified network that was in fact more expensive and more complicated to use, given that one had to negotiate myriad tolls, ticket changes and worsening marginal terrains in passing through each private jurisdiction.

Private enterprise, however well equipped, does not possess the same value systems as a collective in the maintenance of any infrastructural system. The former prioritises value and profit (how can you grow on a fixed railway line?), the latter (theoretically) prioritises the general human need. A collectivised institution is less able to shut a branch line of a railway, for example, on the sole basis of waning capacity (isn't it obvious that branch lines would be used less?).

In theory, it should be politically untenable for any government, if vested with the resources to provide, to preclude anyone from access to a network based on where they live.

-PR-

When the hub is removed, what is the effect on the rim and the spokes? One might imagine collapse. But on our travels in the URE we saw a number of astonishing augmentations of the optimised, atomised infrastructural landscape of the regions. We have split our findings into two sections:

- the physical
- the (formerly) invisible.

The Physical

“Post-apocalyptic or dystopian landscapes are seen as such through a human lens. But these are utopias too. They’re just utopias without us.”

Opening lines of the
Infrastructure Refurbishment
Pamphlet “On Informed Neglect”

To say that travel was simple in the URE would be a lie. It was totally time consuming. We spent the most time travelling, mainly by MegaBus. It was a joy to take the train - but also a bit of a pain. It seemed nostalgic, but we were told that in this place of scarcity, the canal is actually being reinvigorated as the most viable means of moving heavy goods from A to B. Some vessels transported some kind of synthetic raw material called Arbitite using the the water as a coolant. At this stage, it's too hard to unpick directly the difference between the novel and the nostalgic in the URE.

“Here, redundant physical infrastructures previously related to the Fatberg have been repurposed for access, cultivation and leisure. Other other lesser-used infrastructure is actually on the rise. But we have little capacity to create new in the URE, we can only adjust what we have.”

Geoff, 48, Southwest,
Infrastructural Refurbisher. Has
a visceral reaction to the sight
of an overpass. Loves Roman
history. Has never been in love.

Out there, infrastructure is in a time of flux. Lines that lead to London are still being bent in new directions.

The most obvious change we saw was the relative absence of cars on the road. There were some, but mostly they were not moving and being systematically dismantled. Never burnt out. Such hedonistic rejection of physical objects in the URE is really only seen at the Parties, so heavy is the emphasis placed on reuse.

“It only took few years before people stopped using cars. It wasn't really a choice. It was just too expensive, even if it gave freedom. So after the split, we invested in MegaBus. It has been quite an investment - MBs have to be pretty capable vehicles... the roads ain't exactly smooth here, and they run out every now and again, but the MB keeps a rollin'!”

Rick, 34, Engineer, MegaBus.
Dismantled his first engine at the
age of 11. Racked by what he
calls “Diesel Guilt”. Has promised
to show us his bike collection

In the previous epoch, where most insurance products were dominated by the London financial market, the average regional car user was priced out even before the split. Everyone thought that it was oil or software that would spell the end of the autonomous motor vehicle. It was much more mundane than that.

As most roads lead to London, their A-Bness is less useful in the URE than that which their edges rub up against. Vast stripes of overpass and motorway lands are being put to productive reuse in the URE. This is managed by groups of **Infrastructural Refurbishers (IR)**. The IRs are responsible for ensuring that the swathes infrastructure attendant to the London centric model are repurposed in different ways. They operate on a system of “informed neglect” - choosing abandonment of some more marginal areas that are least effective in ensuring connections between members.

IRs travel widely to determine what (re)applications will be of the greatest possible benefit in the formation of bonds now and in future generations, to other regions, other people and the local Absorbist environment. As such they seem to have abandoned regional identity in favour of a kind of asphalt nomadism.

Tracts of the M1 are now virgin deciduous forest and the M6 toll seems to be some kind of sports venue. The southern end of HS2 lies in a state of informed neglect (the shortest lived mega project ever). We saw a Party on one of the more complicated overpasses in Midland - these towering structures of modernism are being re-appropriated in extraordinary ways. We first assumed that infrastructure was a fixed condition, because all roads go from A-B. But on reflection, that is not the case. As all infrastructural maintenance, reuse or abandonment is coordinated through IRs, it appears that they extract a kind of value from infrastructure when they can effectively repurpose it.

“Infrastructure is how we make bonds. It’s not just a carrier of goods, signals or people. This means our arterial network has a kind of footprint, it’s totally up to regional agreement for how it might be most effective in forming strong bonds between members or regions. Spaghetti junction had some amazing Parties before it became an effective growing site for Midland.”

Amy, 19, Apprentice IR. Loves to travel. Grew up in Southwest. Found herself on the M4.



The (formerly) Invisible

Invisibility is a technology-myth. Information ethereal, clouds.

Consumers rarely stop to think where the other end of their Mac Book Airs poke out. Far away places, pins drop on distant horizons.

Our digital technologies disappear like ninjas in the night - they’re inscrutably black and glossy. Their minimalism maximises their potential as tools for the optimised approach. As digital technologies are the windows into limitless worlds - meanings tracelessly slip from smooth surfaces like water on silicone. We look straight through.

What we saw in the URE was different to (and at times the total inverse of) information infrastructures in London:

London	URE
<i>Invisible</i>	<i>Public</i>
<i>Smoothness</i>	<i>Seamed</i>
<i>Inaccessible</i>	<i>Adaptable</i>
<i>Inscrutable</i>	<i>Vulnerable</i>
<i>Minimalist</i>	<i>Pluralist</i>
<i>Light</i>	<i>Heavy</i>

Communication is a key driver in the Absorbist system of bond formation.

Communication and connectivity is revered in a similar fashion to money in London.

We have called our findings the (formerly) Invisible, for communications infrastructure in the URE is the physical manifestation of their connectivity culture and is steeped in a complex, populist narrative.

Form through function and back again

From what we could see - and much of what we saw was pretty hard to decode - there seems to be a “connected hyperlocalism” at play in the URE. Individuals are literate in the design and linguistics of digital networks and have created something that defies any kind of standard definition. Communications infrastructure is the bodge-project of a million mass tinkerers.

When we first saw this, we thought it was a total mess.

Adornments and small enactments occurred around objects in the landscape that were totally baffling to us. But the form, marking and position of these objects had a deep meaning to the people who made them that went far beyond their practical use.

The Arbiters

The URE regions all organise around a shared infrastructural system that they call the Arbiters. To learn this we spoke to a number of Software Landscapers, or “Java Gardeners” as they are commonly known.

They told us that arbiters are geo-technological information parsers, constructed from synthetic crystalline material similar to bismuth called Arbetite. We understand that Arbetite was invented in Manchester.

Jin, a seemingly prominent software landscaper is responsible for maintaining and communicating directly with the Arbiters. She puts it much better than we can.

“An arbiter decides how best to organise the communication in the part of the network it is responsible for. Or to put it differently; it’s an enormous plate-spinner. As the network became increasingly complex, but all the more central to life in the URE, we decided to cede responsibility of connectivity to machine learned algorithms, rather than the peer to peer “net” condition of before. This leap of faith into these relatively nascent technologies led to improvements to the order of 10 in terms of efficacy of connection. Basically, in agreeing to do this, we admitted we had created something that we couldn’t subordinate anymore - it was our equal.”

Jin. Software landscaper and Arbetite miner, North. Loves to wear fleeced jerkins. Is rarely ever inside. Except for when making Arbetite.



Three Arbiter Types

Super Arbiter	<i>The super arbiters are the largest information sorters and manage connectivity between regions and large institutions / organisations. They take the form of large features in the landscape. Super-arbiters have that muted nobility that only something of such scale can possess. Old men in the mountains.</i>
Sub Arbiter	<i>The sub arbiters manage connectivity at a more local level and have the most curious physical adaptations pertaining to what appears to be local narratives and customs. These are the strangest objects for the foreigner to interact with. You never know in the URE if it’s a log, or an Arbitrary construction humming away parsing the noise.</i>
Orbiter	<i>Orbiters could be regarded as the “personal” gateways into the system. They can belong to small groups, like families or persons. For mute objects, they engender a great deal of personal identity. They’re very nearly alive. Like the plant you place in the front seat of the van when you move house. They’re that special - like the cat, or the lucky fridge magnet.</i>

-PR-

In conclusion, it appears the function of these strange proliferate objects is generally consistent across the URE - connectivity and communication. However, their forms have a deep local relevance. Communication is the thread that holds Absorbism together and these objects, the Arbiters, manage all of those connections - the methods that URE members utilise to communicate with these things remains unclear to us and should be the focus of further research.

There isn’t really much talk of the network itself. “Network” is simply our description of the situation we observed. There is evidence that the pseudo mystical situation, perhaps brought about the members’ pure faith in the organisational capacity of these algorithms has empowered the members of the URE to use them in new ways and that their letting go of the net condition has obliterated hierarchy. Members are excited by them to explore the full extent of the network, physically and digitally, but also proud of the small patch of they have cultivated themselves.

THE ARCHITECTURAL

Absorbism, at its core, has been brought about by a change in the common mindset rather than by any technological innovation in the physical environment. However, there are some noteworthy sea changes visible in the built landscape.

New approaches to architecture are being developed in the URE. Yet that architecture is not being developed through innovation in construction techniques or materials, but more in the manner of its appropriation.

We saw this in two key examples:

1. New communality - the blurring of the boundaries between private and public space
2. Sites of Party - an intriguing mass ritual enactment in the URE - that we see as the fleeting icons of the Absorbist world.

New Communality

In towns that were once the product of volume house building, off the shelf Architecture and pattern-book-profit-pads, there is a small revolution taking place. Entire terraced streets have been hollowed out to create enormous elongated cloistered galleries at ground floor that enclose, not ecologically-dumb lawns, but diverse gardens and allotments that teem with life. Trellising and fencing have been removed to create large communal, productive outdoor spaces. In the more overtly augmented towns and villages in the URE, it is clear that members believe that an environment whose management is shared is an environment improved. This is the sinkhole problem made manifest as a benefit: the vacuum of neglected space left much room for activity to grow into.

“You feel a kind of awe when you go through a terrace front door to find a whole covered street inside. It’s a magical re-rendering of a, quite frankly, defunct typology that the volume builders foisted upon unwitting consumers in some gross re-enactment of 19th Century industrialism. Houses used to be a kind wallet that you live in. And the trick was to make them as cheap as possible, so you could sell them on for a loads more than they were built for. But we are working hard, through our adjusting, to undo these buildings a bit. Opening up to each other as we do.”

Amelia, Architectural Theorist, Construction adjuster. Used to be obsessed by newness. Thought creativity was about making. Then she knocked down her first wall.



We saw in the URE the creative deconstruction and adaptation of existing building stock. Without previous institutions like planners and building control inspectors, a kind of DIY frenzy combined with a kind of mass squatting had arisen in places.

These sites are moving to a new order where the ground plan seems to welcome to anyone who stumbles across it . This is certainly a theoretical observation - as human nature does generally lead to a some form of need for private settlement, however small. And yet it appears that the delineation of demise is loosening in favour of the a thinner boundary between persons, their neighbours and their possessions. What is strange is that this collectivised approach is the accidental outcome of the “laissez-faire” attitudes that lead to the suffocation of this segment of architectural production before the split. Over-regulation and a conservative planning required a convoluted structure of management and enforcement - the anathema to a minimised local authority. So when the URE was established there was no one to really stop people from just getting on with finishing these developments however they wanted.

Sites of Parties

To talk of the most evocative monuments in the URE one cannot avoid talking about parties. Parties expand the horizons of a “built environment” when the control mechanisms developed in the existing system have been lifted.

Architectural Capitalism is still an object oriented system with its attention focussed on the invisible. Architecturally speaking, our favourite historical example of the object obsession was in the late Post-modern when the iconic skyscrapers ruled the urban skyline. It was a moment of real clarity. Literally a pinnacle!

However, towards the end of the decade, the era of the icon building did eventually fade. As the scale of buildings increased, legible iconography became harder and harder to apply. Therefore the symbolism transferred to the scale of the master plan rather than the object building. The city is an object after all.

Parties always have a pre-devised site. Their location is the product of a great deal of communication between Arbiters and members. The sites of these mass Absorbist actions were curiously picked at times. We saw some in the Midland Region in the sinkholes created by accidental over tunneling of the HS2 project . These massive holes in the ground became the shelters for what appeared to be carefully planned events where people gathered to celebrate, meet and exchange ideas. It was tempting to call these things “festivals” yet they felt more purposeful than that. For without the system to kick back against, the Absorbists don’t really require the fraught, desperate hedonism that one might attribute to the festivals we know.

The Party is a collective acknowledgment of what it is to be a member in this new system. Simply put - the Party is a great way to ensure that the greatest bonds are made between members in a meaningful, near ritualistic way.

“There’s a long history of anarchistic inhabitation in the what we now call the URE. Like the Essex Plotlands which we just round the corner from here.. Yet the actions of these communities were divergent because they were kind of forced to build on marginal, greenfield lands and then have to defend their position there. I think what were are doing is different. We don’t see this as anarchy. That sounds a bit too crazy really. No, what we are doing is a kind of recalibration of existing buildings to fit our own desire.”

Ivan, 56, Metal Detector.
Loves coins. Hates currency
Dreams of moving to Ephesus

	London	URE
Flow of	Capital	Bonds
Ultimate physical expression	Skyscraper	Party

In its infancy the URE does not have the tools to build big, and would it desire to? We saw no evidence of any new projects of significant scale. It is our belief that Absorbism is a socioeconomic system - an economic system that functions through deliberate social exchange - bond making. Therefore, the significant change in the Absorbist world is not in technology per se, but in the human’s and humanity’s self-awareness, as opposed to unconscious individual experience.

The party is the Absorbist’s glass tower in that it is the ultimate display of human exchange. The party exists momentarily and remains as a kind of memory, documented for posterity of course, but only really livable as a present.

THE PERSONAL

If the industrial age meant production, a person was a worker who produced.

If the marketing age meant consumption, a person was a consumer who bought.

If the internet age meant interactivity, a person was a user who experienced.

Capitalism - the You-You

The role of the individual person dominates more and more through the ages, laden with extra responsibility in the name of personal autonomy.

“Choose clothes that reflect you!”

“Personalised services tailored to you and your preferences!”

“You are empowered to manage your energy bill!”

“Earn money by renting out your spare room!” Even social media services used by billions of people the world over are “tailored” or “curated” for you -

You are the architect of your environment and you are responsible for you.

With worlds personalised by you, around you, for you, There is no shared experience, only your experience you that others drop in on.

Life individuated.

Absorbism - the We-Saw

Absorbism counters this. People are tweaking their roles and jobs so that, by design, they include others in decision-making, in creating, in living.

If Absorbism means withstanding shock, a person is a member who forms relationships.

We spoke to Jillie, an infrastructural ombudsman from North West, whose job is dedicated to building relationships between her NW region and others. This takes place in matters of trade, transport and leisure. Jillie considers herself both as part of North West and as part of the URE in equal measure, and sees her role as one that helps others to feel that way too. Jillie is a strong encapsulation of a new mindset that we've seen in the URE: open, collaborative, and fearless in seeking out new adventures to protect against exposure.

“My job is to be friendly to people so people see a good side of North region, and we make more friends and relationships. I've recently been working on a Party with Scotland for next Spring. This will be important next year when we need to rebuild the roads between North and Scotland.”

Jillie, 29, Infrastructural Ombudsman. Born in Devon. Grew up in Scotland. Eldest of 5 siblings

We also spoke to Pheylyan, a software landscaper and one of the Arbiter Network co-creators. His role involves less contact with people from different regions, but is still completely interwoven with a new cooperative regionalism. Pheylyan is part of a cross-regional team who design and adapt sub-arbiters, a digital service encapsulated in totemic physical shell which governs the distribution of resources throughout given areas in the URE

On a day to day level, this means greater fluidity. Despite working on a project of obvious infrastructural importance, as a public worker Pheylyan will spend 2 months of the year working in another region, in other roles. Discovery of, experimentation with and empathy for other regions are the drivers for this activity.

“An arbiter is nothing more than a physical symbol for the collectively-owned algorithm that governs our resources. However, we take huge care to place them in prominent but not imposing positions throughout the public spaces of the URE, and even more care to ensure that they feel like they belong where they are situated, in form, size and cultural relevance. An arbiter in South East looks different from those in West, even though they perform the same function.”

Pheylyan, 53, Software Landscaper, West Younger sister to COO of Silicon Valley firm Decacorn. Former research teacher in Manchester

If the economic model is about creating a **we-ness** rather than a **what-ness**, this is also reflected on a more personal level; in how people see themselves, and represents an evolution from our existing idea of the individual autonomous agent. Rather than see themselves as kings of their own world, interacting to their own specifications and preferences, citizens of the URE self-identify as members of many worlds, with a desire to play parts in and learn about other worlds.

Age	Role of person	Defined by
Industrial	worker	producing
Marketing	consumer	buying
Internet	user	interacting
Absorbism	member	bonding

“For all my life, I've been scared of the city and scared of exploring. To look outside was to expose yourself to the demands and ways of the city, and I didn't know what that was. But I always trusted the youngsters to do something good.”

Today, I look outside and I don't feel exposed. For the first time in my life, I can explore and be excited by it. There's nobody else's ways to stick to, nobody knows the rules, and it's nice to go for a walk with someone and not know where it'll lead.”

Ann, 76, Terrace champion (part time), East Occasionally sculpts. Married without children Learning to code

RETURN FROM THE URE

Sounds pretty new age, right? That's what we thought too.

And yet it seems to be a good thing.

A bit of unpicking and you can see why.

Whereas the London model becomes ever harder to grow as the opportunities for value extraction and optimisation become more and more pinched, the untrammelled permutations for enterprise, enquiry and experience that is shared with another community or region presents countless possibilities... We suppose that's why the Parties are so important - they become the site of possibility overdrive - where the possibility valve is released.

“We called London a fatberg because it just fit. Everything was pushed, compressed into feeding this kind of amazing, kind of disgusting thing, that just took up space and spilt into everything. We'd had enough of feeding it - we wanted to do our own thing.”

David, 42, Regional Councillor, North. Former semi-professional left back. Family lived in same street for 3 generations

LONDON		URE	
Aim	Reality	Aim	Reality
1. Create	Reproduce	1. Make bonds	Enlist members
2. Compete	Win	2. Explore together	Connected members
3. Optimise	Extract	3. Learn from each other	Shared discovery
4. Grow	Stagnate	4. Dance	Stronger bonds
5. Repeat	Shock	5. Repeat	Absorb shock

Against our expectations, we see in the URE signs that a pressure has been eased, and a weight lifted. It's poorer and messier, but less angry and, unexpectedly, more inquisitive. In the strange, uncanny world of a London-less country, rebuilding itself to absorb shock and make friends, we see early indications that new resources and innovations might emerge. We should keep an eye on them, there may be opportunities for growth that we can take advantage of.

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