

unit hinterlands

a future productive inhabited post-industrial arcadia

George Chisholm first used the German word *hinterland* (meaning: land in the back of) in his *Handbook of Commercial Geography* (1888) to refer to the backcountry of a port or coastal settlement. In the past two years we explored the hinterlands of the Bata Estate in East Tilbury with our RC11 Urban research cluster. This year we will explore Essex further – either as your site for your projects or as inspiration for a broader investigation into how we inhabit spaces. These are areas we would like to continue to work with this year in PG13 – *The Living Laboratory*

The way we are living and inhabiting spaces is not at all a fixed framework; it is in a constant flux - changing not only with fashions, but along gradual subtle changes in culture, economics, the social fabric, and ever more importantly how sustainable the built structures are we are living in. Surprisingly the dream of the single family detached dwelling is still very much alive, set in a perfect arcadian rural or suburban landscape. This used to be in stark contrast with the reality of living near your place of work or being faced with a lengthy commute. Cities used to be heavily dependent on the surrounding land for the supply of food. Slowly our structures within our society are shifting, the work environment is changing, the way we supply ourselves with the necessary provisions can be challenged – ‘off grid’ is suddenly no longer something that is perceived at odds with our modern way of life.

Essex has always been seen as the dumping ground of London, a landfill landscape just outside London. The reputation has not always been positive. Maybe the place names are probably giving it away: Foulness Island, Mucking, Bachelors Bump, Ugely, Rotten End, Barking and Shallow Bowells.

In the past Essex has been a testing ground for a variety of new models of alternative inhabitations and communities. From the Plotlanders leaving the city behind occupying and dwelling in simple sheds, to the company towns of Bata shoes in East Tilbury, the Critall Window Factory town of Silver End, the Hadley Colony for the poor, the Osea Island community for living without alcohol or drugs, the Stanley-le-Hope Vegetarian Colony, Purleigh Colony – a Tolstoy inspired living on anarchist principles, and of course the famous Permaculture Anarchist workshops at Dial House - a community set up by the anarcho-punk band Crass; the list seems to be endless.



Dagenham, the gateway to Essex has for long been associated with progress. Every year a new Ford model to aspire to – The Ford Anglia, the Consul, the Corsair, the Cortina and of course the Capri. This industrial landscape is now a wasteland, the dream lies in ruins. This can be seen as an opportunity for London to invent a new way of living while avoiding the erosion of the important Green Belt.

Nowadays Essex has a very different reputation - being known for its TOWIE (The Only Way is Essex) television series fame, fake blondes with high white stilettos, boy racers, Joey Essex with his ultra Trumpian tan, and a youth wasted in the Lakeside Shopping Centre or the Festival Leisure Centre in Basildon affectionately been called ‘Bas Vegas’. Instead of repairing this broken suburbia we are interested in ways this abandoned industrial landscapes can be used to create a different way of living. Each approach will be different, all your readings should be personal, every solution has to be driven by innovation.

Being just outside of London yet having a poor land value allowed for these experiments to take shape very quickly. These are new models of an urban collective living at the margins of the city we would like to explore.

Unit13 is interested in how we inhabit spaces and cities, what forms new communities can take on, how technology and production can drive this progress and where a different way of procurement can lead us.

‘MANIFESTO’

– a quick response

‘Your PARADIGM’

– a visual research pamphlet

‘The INDIA SAMPLER’

– learning from India

‘An Alternative ARCADIA’

– new models of inhabitation