

CUBE CINEMA, BRISTOL, ENGLAND



PROJECT - DESIGN, BRIEF, CONCEPT, PROCESS, HISTORY.

THE PRESENT/PAST

The Cube Cinema is an Artist Run Cinema with an entirely volunteer workforce. The Cube Cinema is a company limited by guarantee, constituted as a workers co-op.

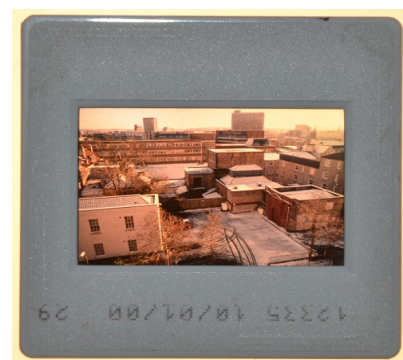
The new owner of the building is Microplex Holdings, a CLT ben-com set up by the Cube Cinema as an instrument to fund raise and develop the building. It has exempt charitable status.

The Cube buildings are based on elements originally built in 1916 specifically as workshops for the Bristol Centre for the Deaf.

In 1964 a team of amateur theatre enthusiasts converted the workshops into a theatre with stage, seating rake and fly tower. In the 1970s further additions were made mainly the projection room and cinema screen.

The Cube has occupied and operated at the site since 1998. In that time it has undertaken several small scale developments of its own namely the conversion of small rooms to public areas, creation of a doorway to facilitate FOH and bar operation, fitting out of the bar, substantial technical investments throughout the building, the creation of an outside/garden space and the reorientation of the main public entrance way.

The Cube auditorium seats 108 people. The Premises License capacity of the site is 120.



THE IMAGINARY FUTURE

The starting point for future developments comes out of understanding how the building functions, where it works and where it doesn't. The building is old, dilapidated in parts and arranged and formatted according to users in the 1960s.

As owners we need to **secure the building as a public arts resource for the long term future**. We also want to re-produce the building in the image of its own organisation.

From internal working notes:

The 'consultation' should really be a 'process' whereby an artistic collective produces a work (the building) in the image of its aims and ambitions, history and philosophy.

That way we can expect/encourage/curry a recognition and engagement with these things from participants [both long term and casual] more directly and vividly than the typical anecdotal interest in and passing 'curiosity' with its past.

From this then it should be understood that building works are not only necessary for their own obvious ends but also as a **new kind of activity that volunteers collectively produce** in order to further understand and progress the entire organisation.

We know from 15 years of use the issues that are facing us:

A: At capacity (120) the current bar and lounge spaces are too small.

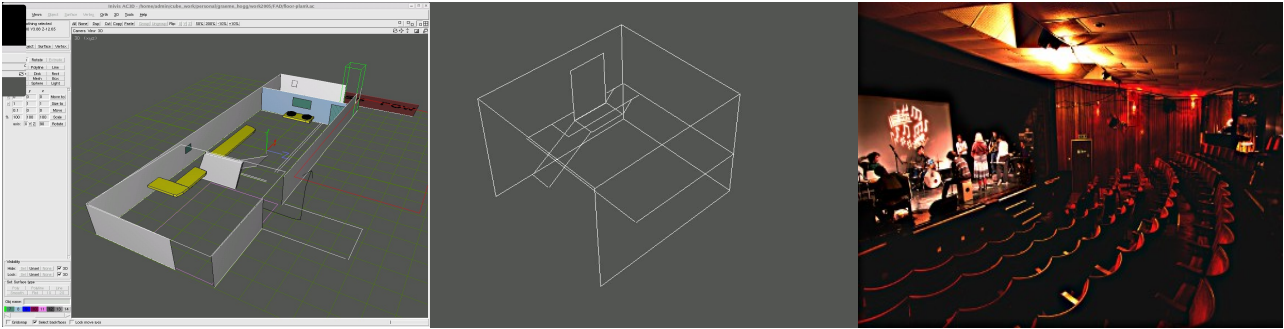
B: The current *Staff* areas lack natural light, are badly arranged, are not conducive to daytime use.

C: Difficult Access issues are caused by multiple floor levels throughout the building.

From this train of thought comes the realisation that the Cube needs to:

1. create NEW SPACE out of its limited floorspace.
2. Repair, renovate, restore and conserve specific areas and building elements.
3. Look at improving services, M&E, insulation, etc.
4. Address ACCESS issues.
5. Develop further its technical facilities specifically; Theatre system restoration/improvement, Special Cinema/Film customisations, Music and Sound facilities, Archive development.

(These 5 areas also form the basis of a Framework for developments.)



We know from extensive study of the buildings that it is theoretically possible to address all the above 3 things [A,B and C] with the following sequence:

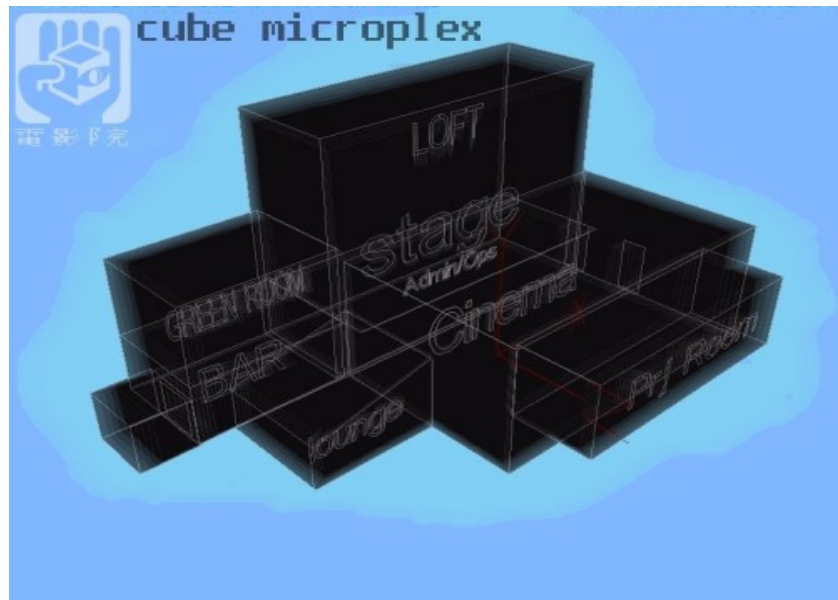
- Design and remodelling of the area known as the Zone to accommodate a new mezzanine storey that will become the main staff admin/office/workshop space. An existing large double window provides vital natural light.
- Rationalisation of the ground floor (PARQUE floor) so that the toilet block can be raised to provide continuous Access from this floor.
- Rearrangement of whole ground floor to extend the bar/event space. **(pictured above left)**
- Re-design/building of the Lounge to create more floor space, specifically to extend it outwards into garden and upwards to level with the Zone. **(pictured above centre)**

As the workforce is as important as the public (the division is constantly collapsed in general practice) there are 2 space-categories that are understood very well and that work in parallel.

- 1: The Staff office/production/admin/workshop/stage spaces used by volunteers and artists.
- 2: The Public areas consisting of auditorium, bar, lounge and garden.

Its worth saying that ALL public areas are also used by Staff/Volunteers for events and at other times. Within these areas there are rooms that we see as conservation level projects that we want to intervene into as little as possible (the auditorium for example, **see above right**) except for hidden M&E type works and things like acoustic and insulation treatments.

Then there are spaces that by virtue of being double height have large unused cubic capacity (the Zone.) Then there are rooms/structures that could be remodelled to provide better and more spacious environments for both the above space-categories (the Lounge.)



ARTISTS

It was mentioned at the start that the Cube was an Artists Run Cinema. It needs to be restated that as Artists engaged with a 'building' as a project as well as an 'institution' as a cultural organisation that everything will pass under this scrutiny and is likely to result in the general trend for nothing to be standard, normal, usual, fixed or third-party specified. Where technical building and structural issues are at hand of course the regulations must be conformed to but its worth bearing in mind that every part of the development will need to be considered from an Artist-User perspective.

For example where windows are to be installed its likely that the aspect ratio of the opening will be of paramount importance, also the likely inclusion of ideas like designing for bio-diversity where certain Bird or Bat species are considered when repairing upper masonry sections of the building. Being Artists means that many different factors will come into play when making decisions about the dimension of things, the look, materials and reasons for decisions as well as just simple and down to earth aesthetics and sculptural considerations.

Its a CORE aim that the essential DIY, Jerry built, vernacular and amateur character of the building is maintained. This could mean in practice that as much as and wherever possible that volunteers undertake works.

This is likely to mean in practice that all second fix works are self-built or that materials are chosen for their ease and volunteer friendly nature (internal walls from 'Steko' for instance) and possibly that a series of workshops are planned to transfer skills, teach and educate that run in tandem with major building works schedules.

To summarise. The Cube needs to secure the physical building for the long term future, adapt it for the improved experience of the general public and remodel and develop it to better facilitate the progress of the Artistic project as a whole. As far as possible volunteers will be carrying out works or assisting with them.

THE REAL FUTURE

The Cube (actually Microplex Holdings) will be applying to Locality for funds to produce a Feasibility Project. This project will cover detailed examination, designs and plans for all the above things as well as a QS report and final Construction Plan.

