

# *The Dark Arts.*

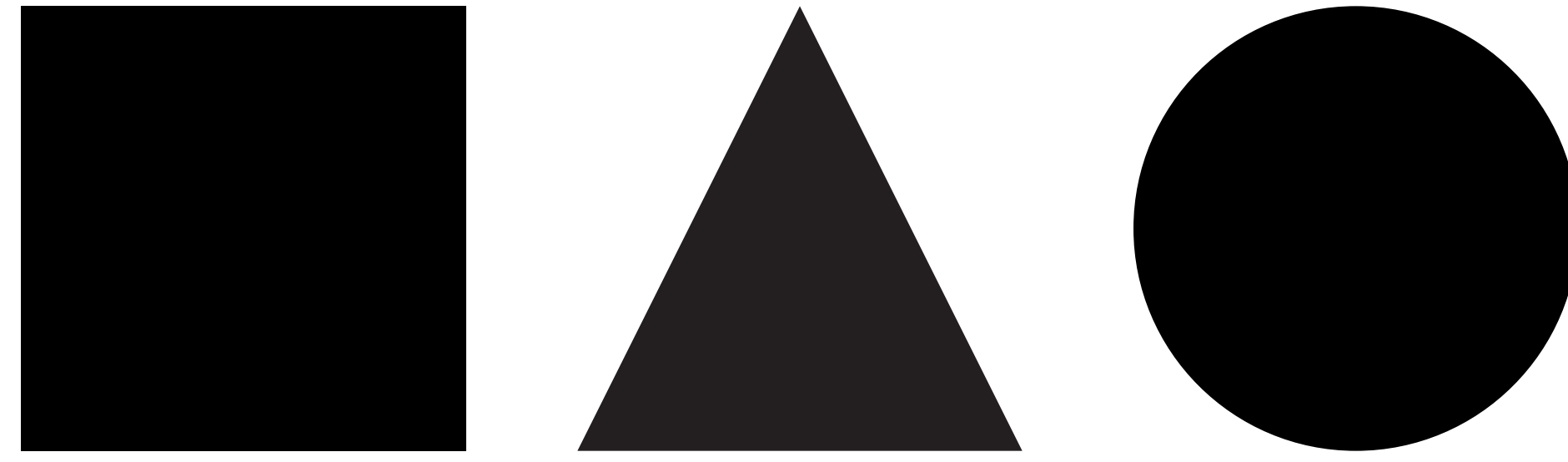
*A Future for Practitioners of Architecture.*

Michael Donaldson

The University of Calgary.  
School of Architecture, Landscape and Planning.  
*Doctor of Design Symposium, June 2023.*



*In Darkness,*  
*How can you tell when you're lost?*

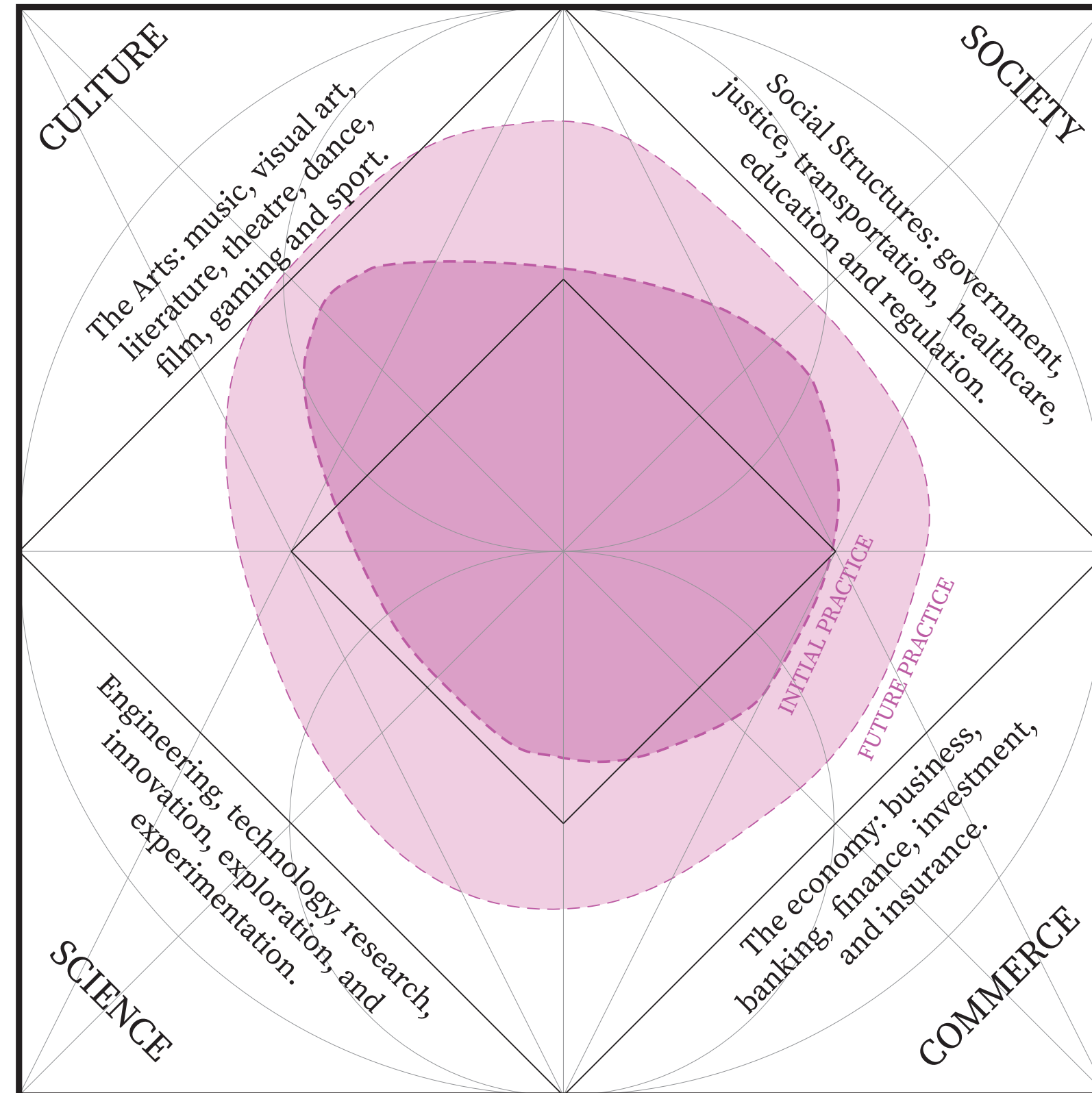


# *The Past.*

## *A Return to the Ambitions of Architecture.*

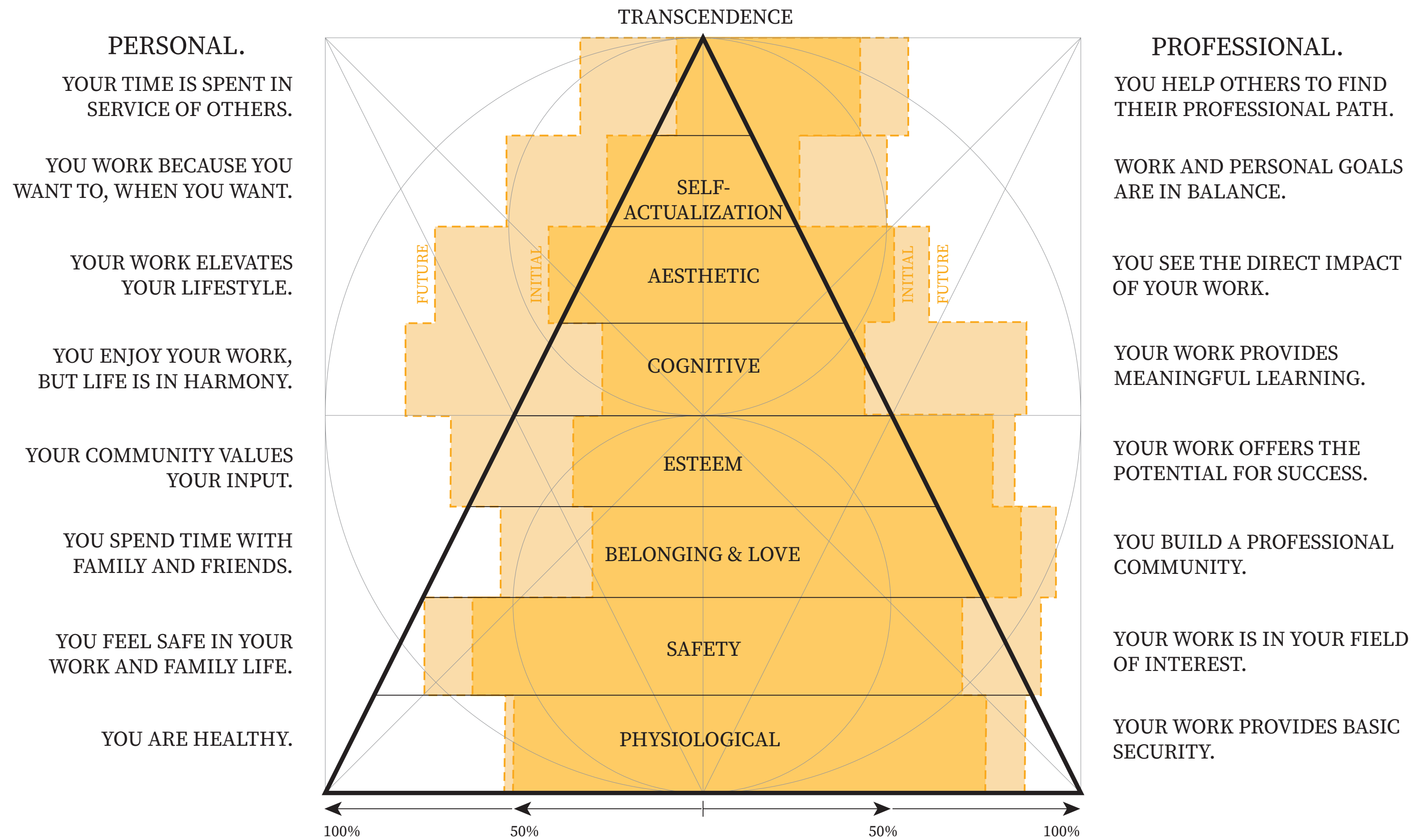
*Did you ever feel...as though you had something inside you that was only waiting for you to give it a chance to come out? Some sort of extra power that you aren't using – you know, like all the water that goes down the falls instead of through the turbines?*

Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World.*



## ***The Spaces of Practice.***

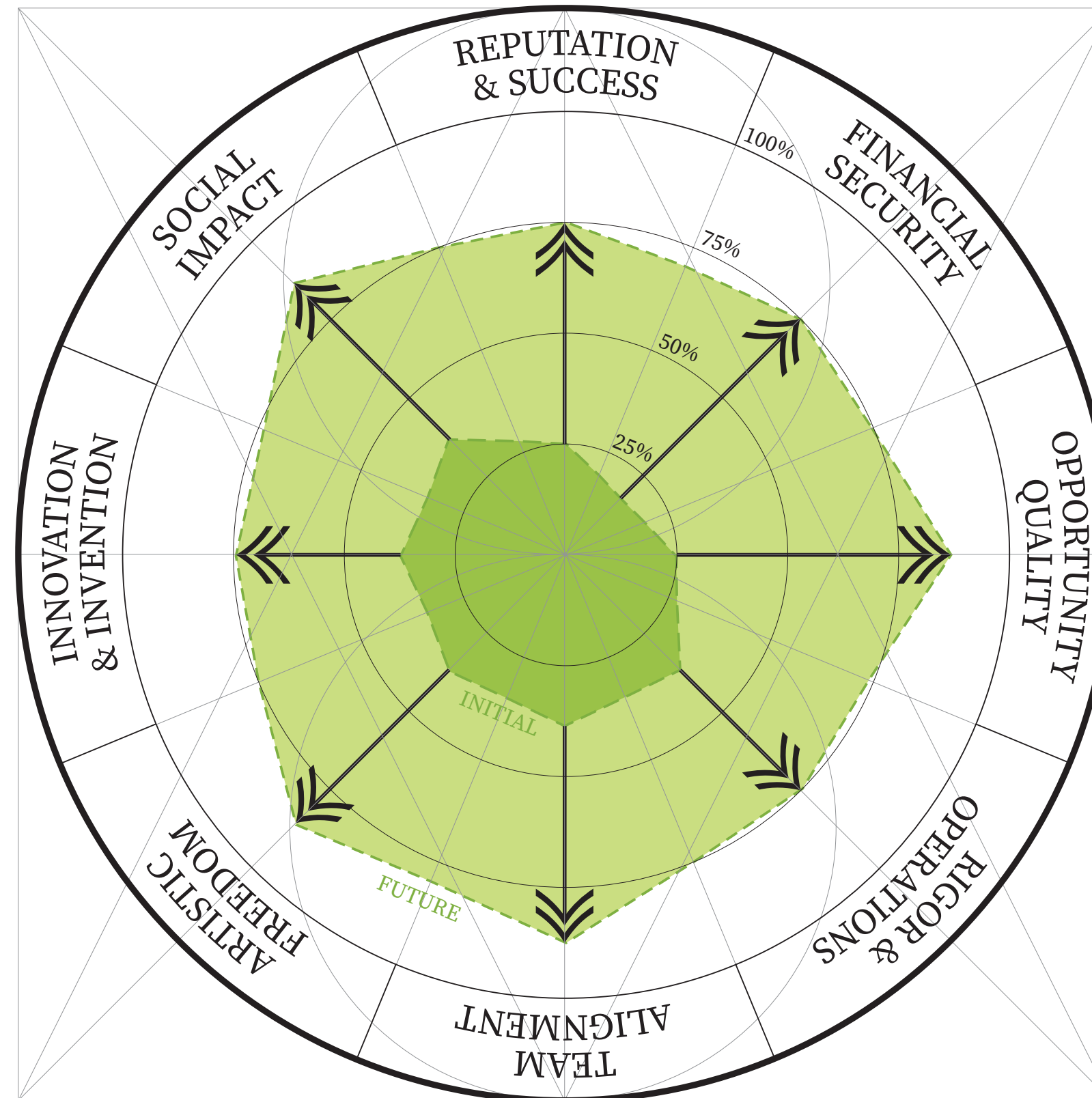
*Identifying where your work is situated relative to other disciplines, and where you want it to be. This is about establishing your range.*



## *The Experience of Practice.*

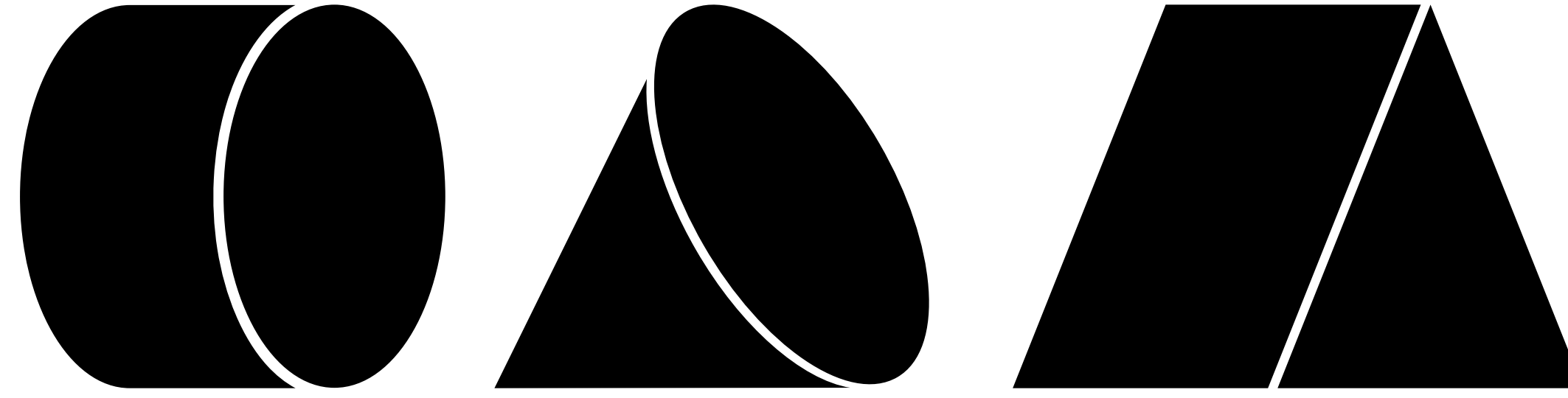
*Your practice is your life's work.*

*This is about considering how you feel about your practice.*



## *The Dimensions of Practice.*

*Practice is multidimensional, and at least some of these dimensions can be measured.  
This establishes where you need to direct your activities to be able to advance.*



# *The Present.*

*Reformulating the Essence of Architecture.*

*“We” are the empirical decision makers who hold that uncertainty is our discipline, and that understanding how to act under conditions of incomplete information is the highest and most urgent human pursuit.*

Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan*.



## ***Criticality.***

The ability to observe, question and establish a well-founded response to information received.

## ***Teambuilding.***

The ability to assemble and lead groups of contributors in service of a complex undertaking where compromise will be required.

## ***Situational Awareness.***

Being able to quickly take stock to assess risks and opportunities, and take action based on the assessment.

## ***Political & Policy Savvy.***

Understanding the tone and debates that exist in contested spaces and being able to manage through them in service of goals.

## ***Spatial Intelligence.***

The ability to envision, react, and manipulate concepts spatially; the essence of visual communication.

## ***Capacity for Learning.***

A capacity for continued learning and development, and a learning-forward attitude towards knowledge and new concepts.

## ***Future-forward Thinking.***

The ability to imagine future states and work towards them.

## ***Patience.***

An understanding of the time and complexity necessary for delivering important or long-timeframe work, and the ability to break tasks down to make them manageable.

## ***Open-mindedness.***

An attitude that assumes that there may be other considerations that could change one's mind, or that new learning or information might require re-evaluation.

## ***Inventiveness.***

The capacity to take novel paths to solve a unique problem, and the ability to combine known techniques with new ideas to go around difficult roadblocks.

## ***Optimism.***

The conviction that change is worth the effort it takes to drive it forward, and the faith that the effort will at least partially succeed.

## ***Holistic Thinking.***

Nothing in architecture is really independent of any other consideration, and an architect's success depends largely on their ability to absorb and synthesize considerations that are in tension.

## ***Social Justice Priorities.***

A general belief across the profession that decisions regarding the built environment require responsible and equitable consideration to ensure access.

## ***Cultural Awareness.***

The understanding that work happens in the context of a culture, and that any deliverable will be read differently by different parties, and that success of the work requires anticipation of those readings.

## ***Technological Capacity.***

A willingness to engage with new technologies at multiple levels, and a general ability to absorb new work processes or design considerations into the stream or normal work.

## ***Empathy.***

An appreciation for the concerns of others, and the ability to put oneself in the shoes of various stakeholders.

## ***Heritage.***

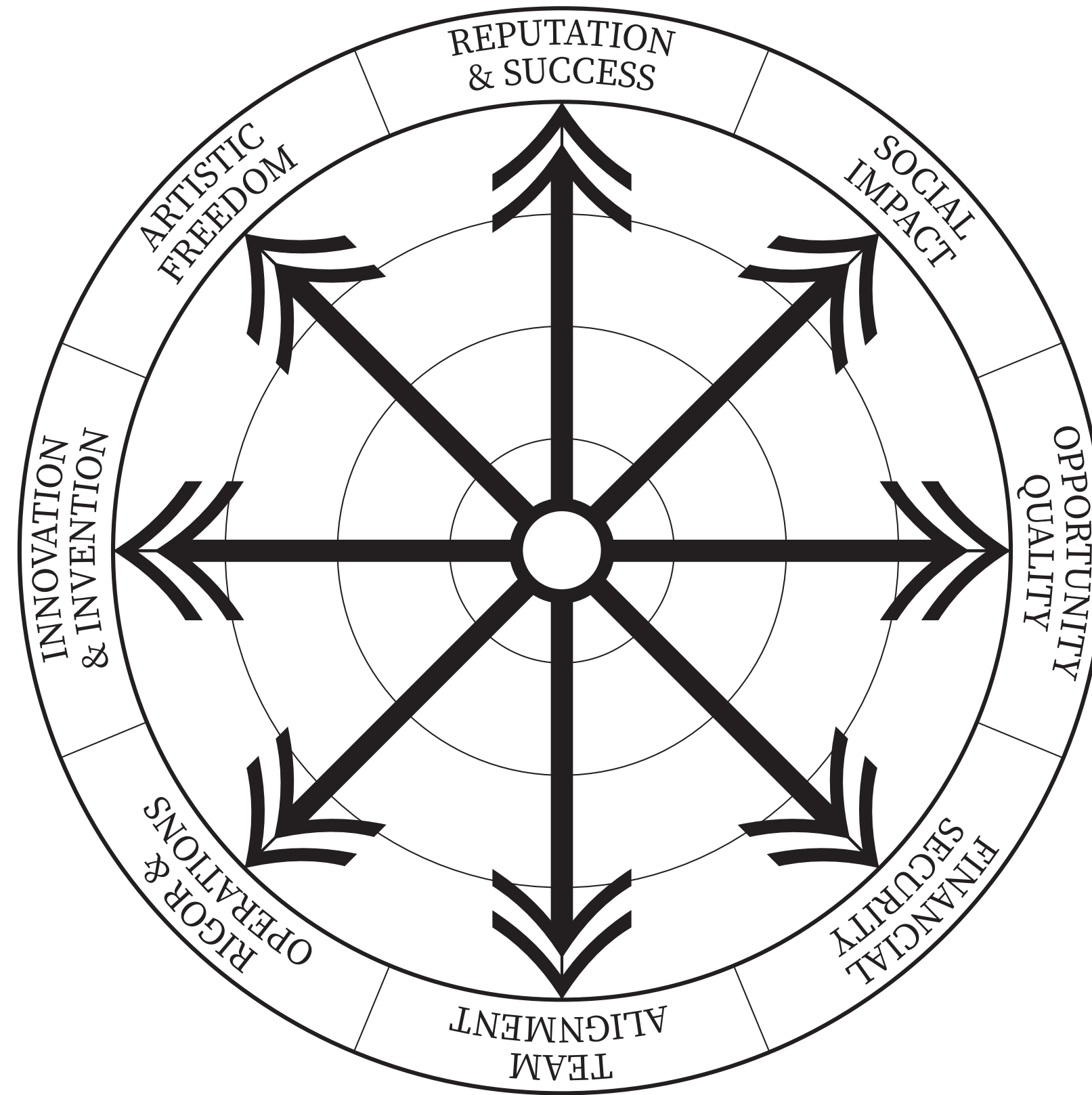
An understanding of the long and storied history of the profession and related activities, and the important mission of pursuing meaningful shelter and services through the built environment. This also includes the (maybe flagging) public perception of the intelligence and creativity of architects.

# ***Architecture as Strategic Design.***

*These are some of the essential strengths of an architectural mindset.*

*Each of them is applicable to problems and tasks beyond conventional architectural scope.*

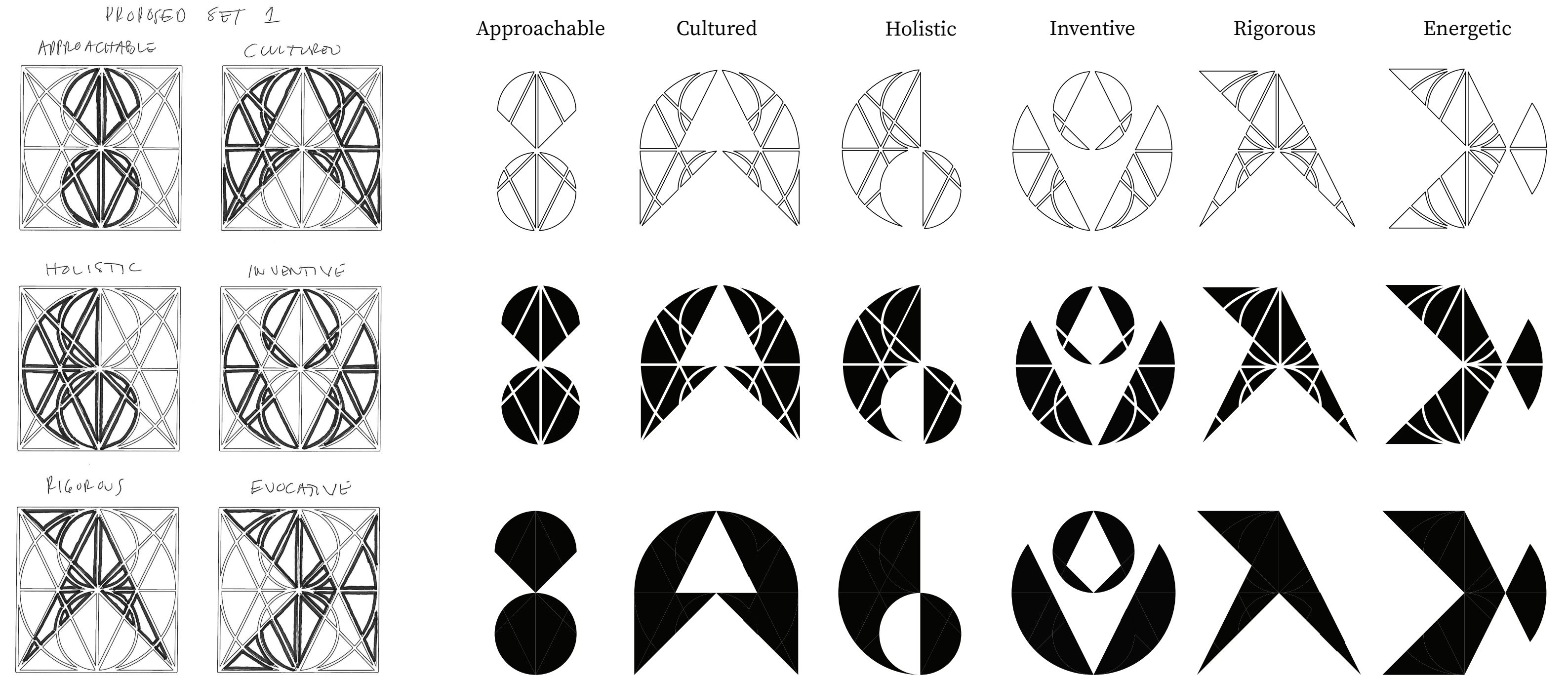
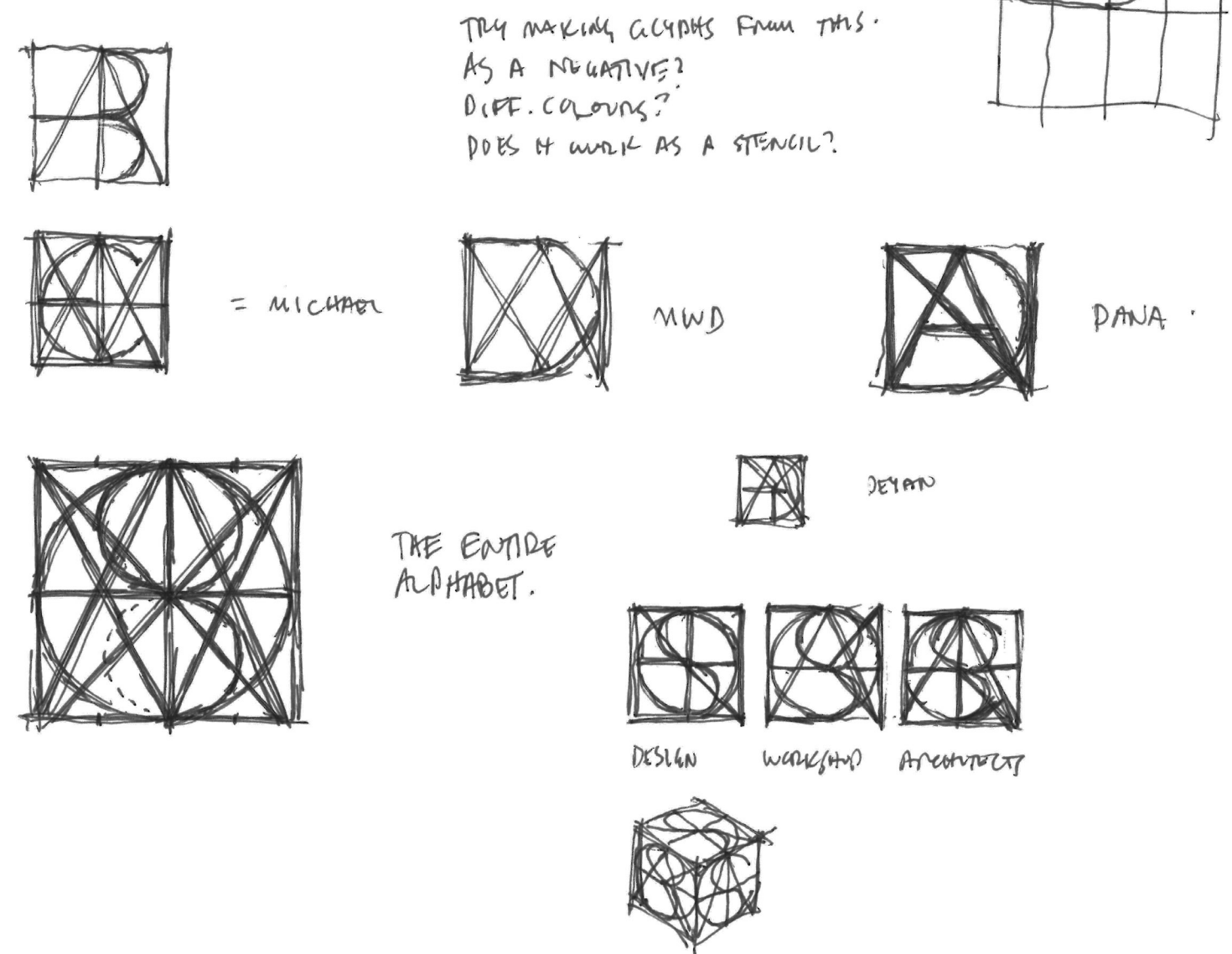
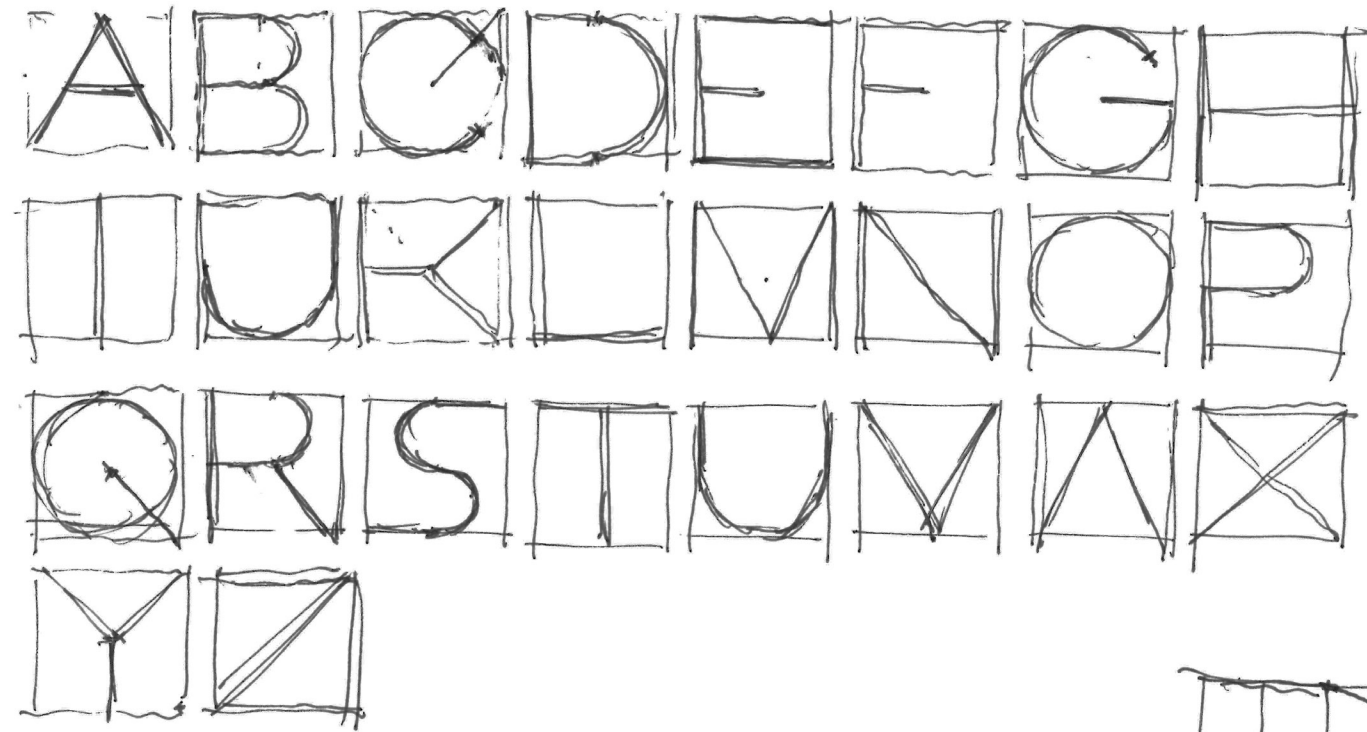




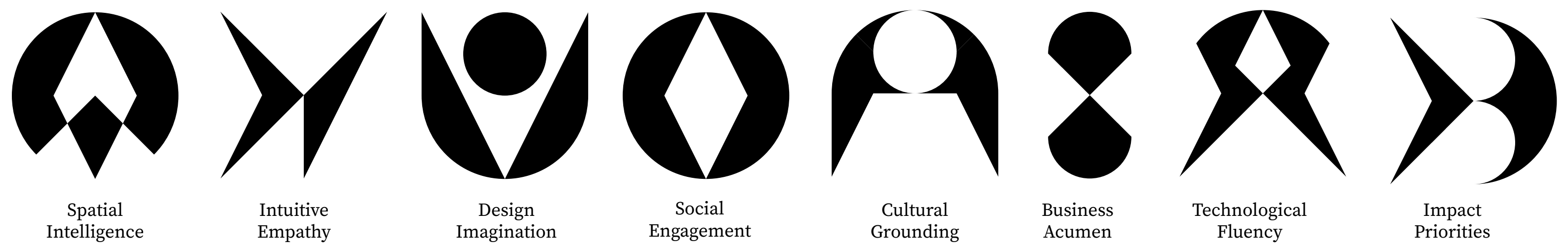
## *The Strategic Axes for Practice Reformulation.*

*Keeping the goals in mind, every aspect and decision made in practice can be plotted and aligned to move each axis towards an ideal state.*

# DWA "Essence" Glyph Development



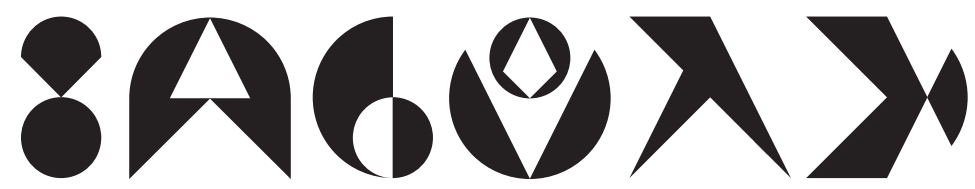
# FW "Perspectives" Glyphs



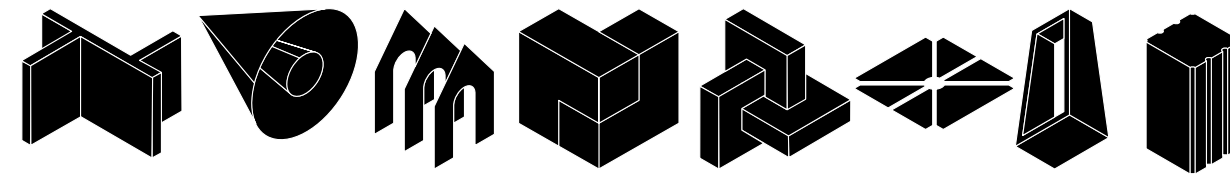
## Exploring Communications for a New Mode of Practice.

*Development of a graphic language aligned to the goals and priorities of the practices and finding a means for describing the critical skills of each side.*





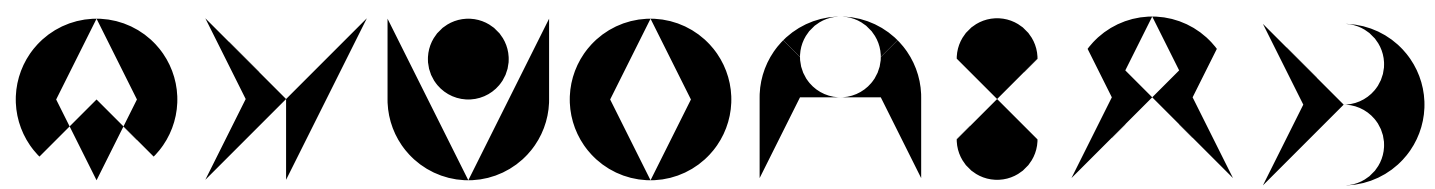
*“Essences”*



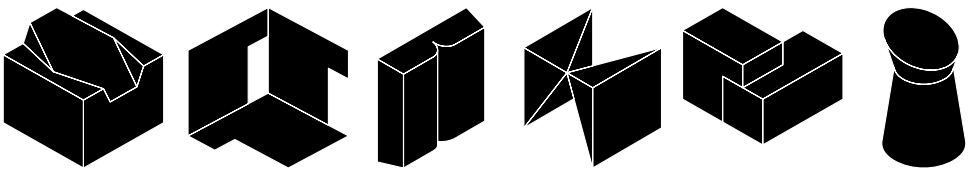
*“Services”*



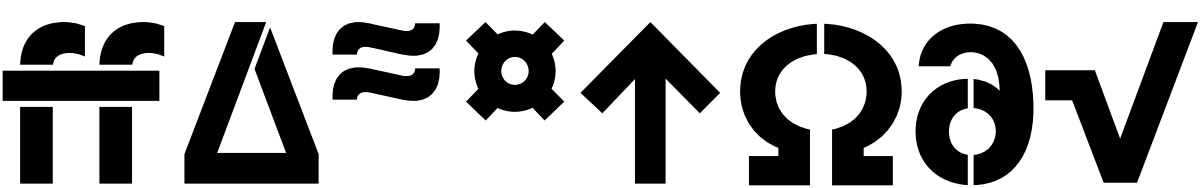
*“Tone”*



*“Perspectives”*



*“Vectors”*



*“Transformations”*

## *The Expression of Practice.*

*Splitting the practice into the light and dark side of the moon.  
A conventional and unconventional practice in orbit around each other.*





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We use the Matterport photogrammetric and LIDAR enabled camera systems to capture spaces and a suite of design solutions to apply the information we gather.



# SETSQUARE



## 9 HOLD YOUR FUTURE IN YOUR HANDS.

- UNIFY** An implied belonging accompanies the ownership of an artifact, of having been part of something unified.
- ELEVATE** Articulate ideal futures at your roots. Physical items that are vessels of emotional connection.
- CONNECT** Build in word-of-mouth emotional connection conversation starters with an enduring quality.

**TIME**

0Y 5Y 10Y

**COST**

0 5M 10M 15M 20M

**COMPLEXITY**

L M H

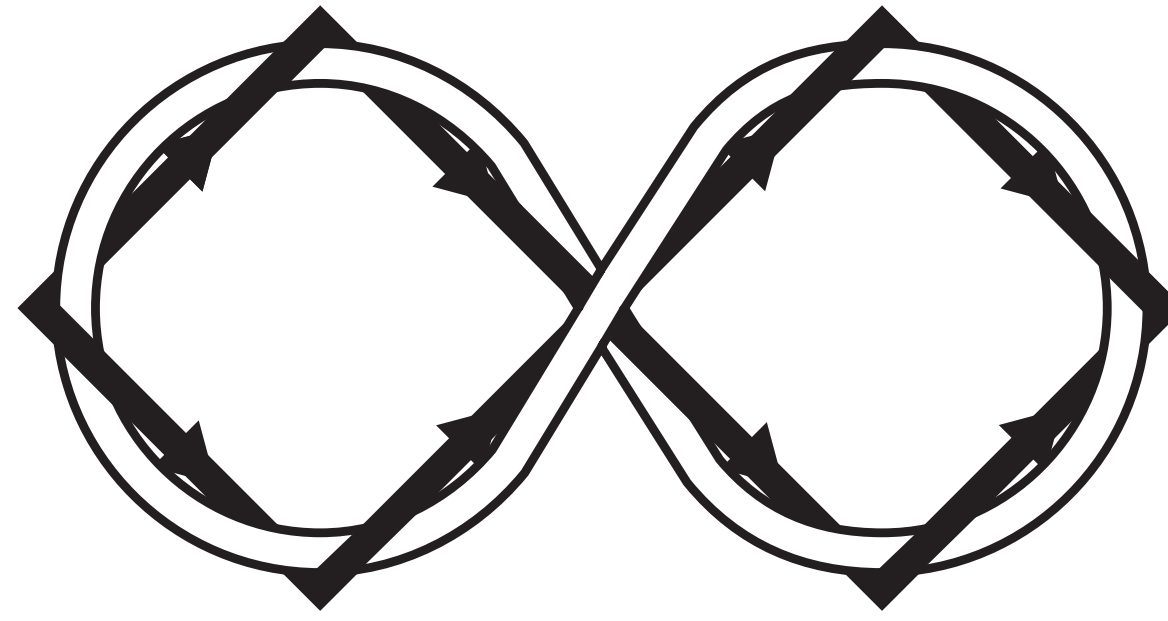
**FUTURE WORKSHOP**

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## *The Pursuit of Practice.*

*Starting by starting - putting the ideas into play in the real world.  
Testing and iterating the tools and methods of strategic design.*



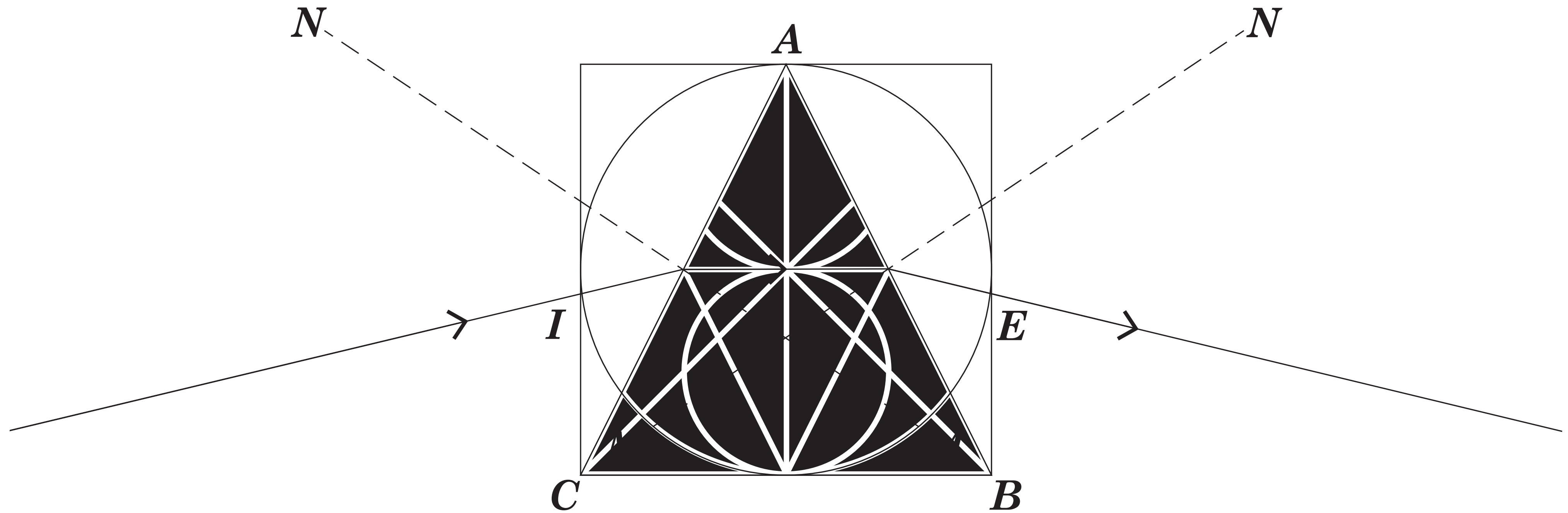


# *The Future.*

## *Reflections on an Eternal State of Change.*

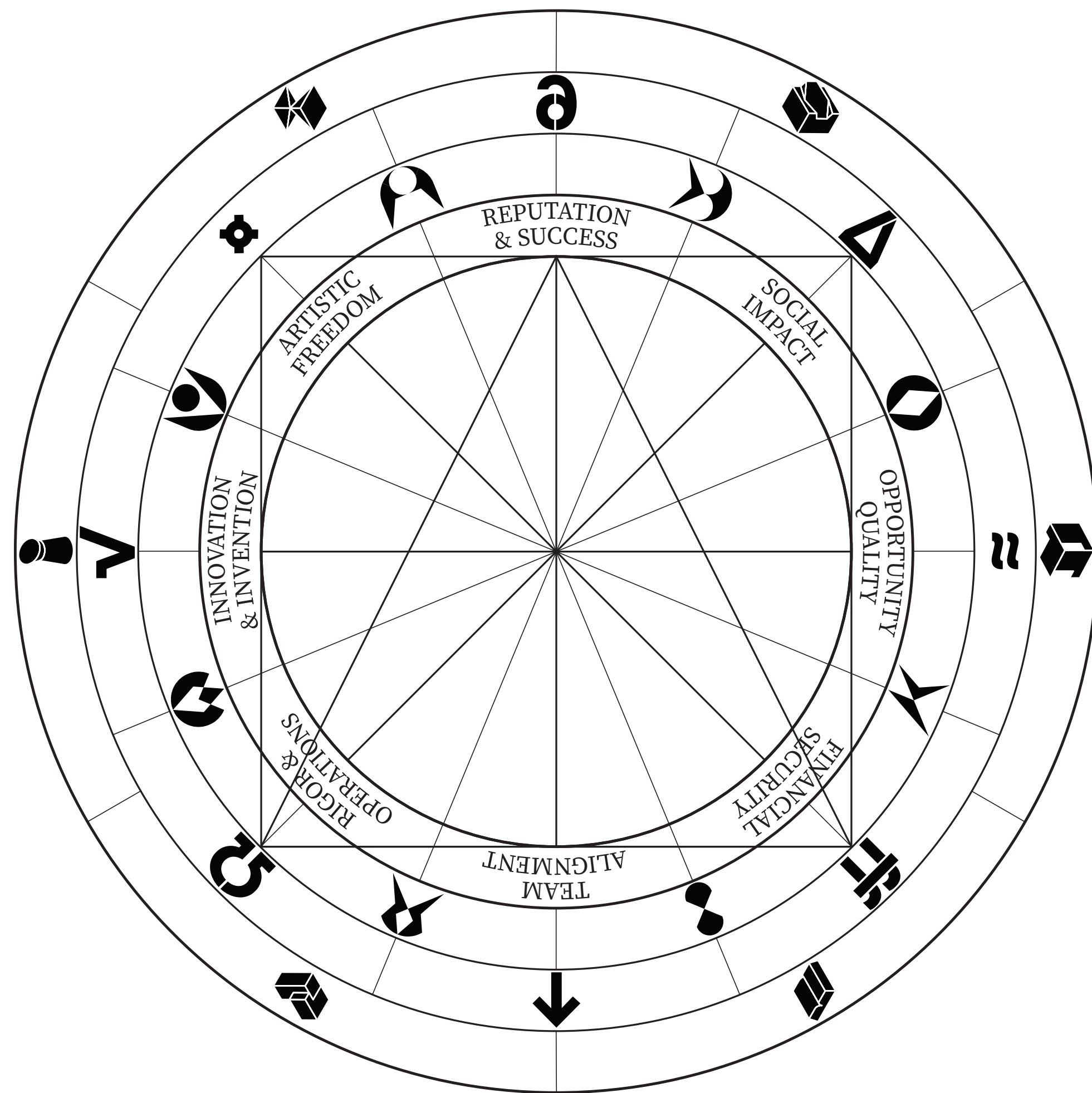
*A still more glorious dawn awaits, not a sunrise, but a galaxy rise, a morning filled with 400 billion suns, the rising of the milky way. The sky it calls to us, if we do not destroy ourselves, we will one day, venture to the stars... how lucky we are to live in this time...*

From Carl Sagan's *Cosmos* television series, as remixed by the artist 'Melody Sheep'.



## *Refraction.*

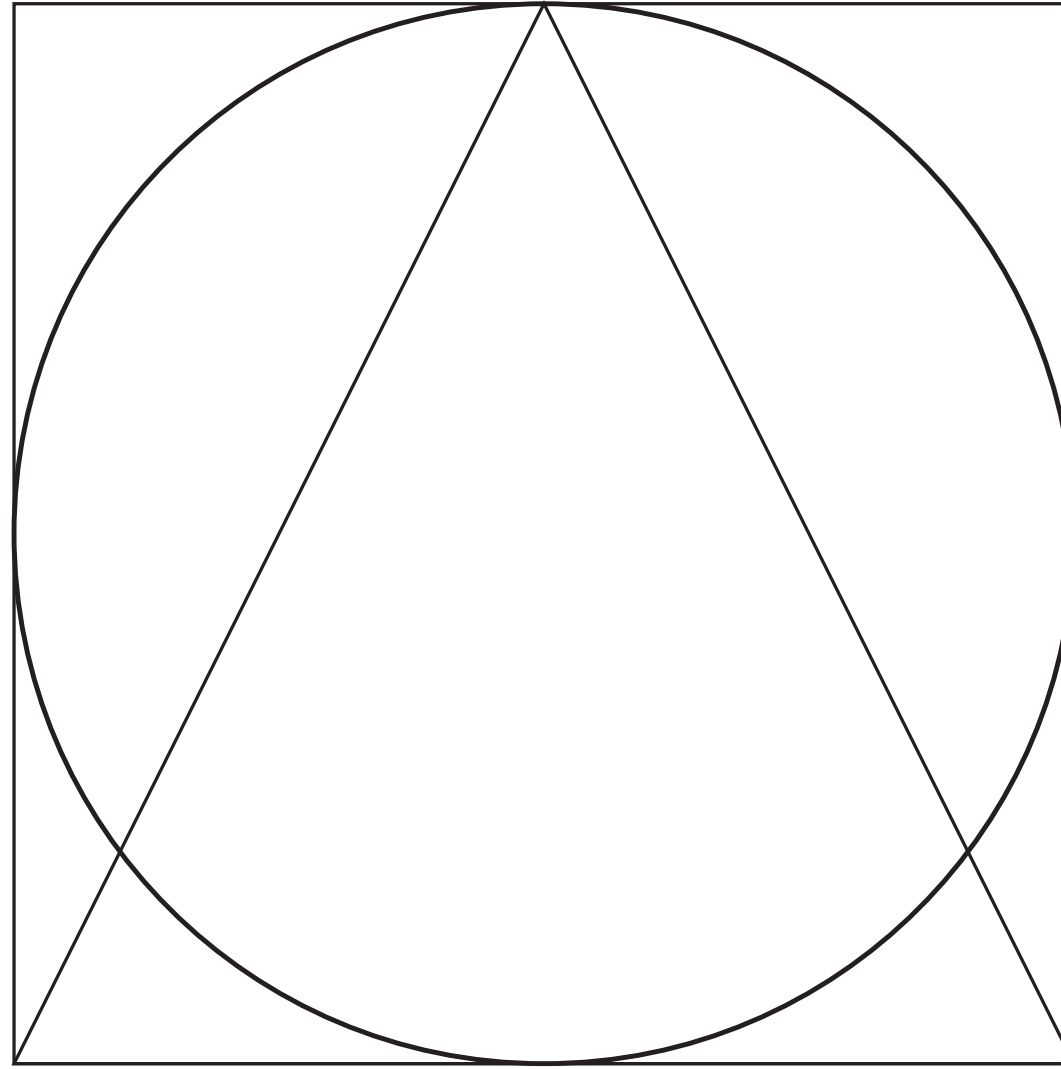
*The medium of practice changes you, as much as you change external elements through it.  
An unlocking of potential, a realignment of priorities, and a new energy.*



## *Practice Integrity.*

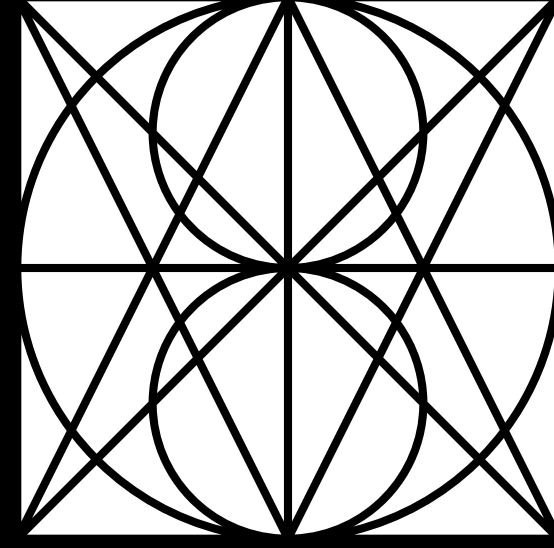
*Architecture reformulated as the basis of a strategic, expansive, critical & transformative practice.  
The result has been to install a habitude of all of these on both sides of practice.*





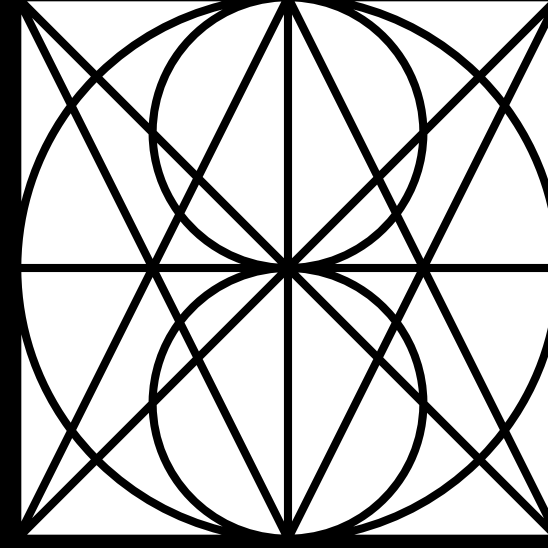
## ***Enabling the Deeper Processes.***

*Allowing for the longer-running subconscious process of design, and creating pathways for the emergence of more potent abstract thinking.*



# *The Dark Arts.*

*Transformed into a discipline of looking to the night sky, in a search for the wonder and undiscovered potential of design.*



*Thank you.*

Michael Donaldson

**DESIGN WORKSHOP ARCHITECTS**

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**FUTURE WORKSHOP**

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