

**Tottenham: Re[dis]covery
Architectural Intervention in a Post-Traumatic Urban
Environment**

by

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ABSTRACT

Set in 2011 following the London riots, this thesis explores the way architectural design acts as a tool of societal recovery and a catalyst for creative change in a post-traumatic urban environment.

Based on the assumption that conflict was within the society itself I searched for traces of its origins in the history of the building that underwent the greatest destruction during the riots. A time-based dialectical approach to the design of that building capitalized on the therapeutic potential of the distortion left after the riots.

The design method created devices as catalysts in order to frame the inquiry into the complexity of causes, symptoms and traumatic events in that particular place. The project itself presents a new scenario to stimulate further questioning rather than to suggest a singular understanding or resolution of the issues.

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Finally, to my wife Olga, my biggest inspiration, for her unconditional love and support. I could not have done it without you!

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

It's always been a city based upon heterogeneity, upon contrast... It's always been a city in a state of becoming. It's always been a city which is endlessly renewed out of its own ashes. In that sense it cannot be defined, it has no meaning, it's only meaning is the process, the process of becoming. (Ackroyd 2000)

The history of London is the history of conflict and confrontation. This has always been the city where conflicting ideas collided producing the new developments of thought. It is where the rise of the industrial capitalism gave birth to socialist movement, it is the birthplace of a labour movement and neo-liberalism, the English nationalism and globalization. It is where the oldest established modern democracy, the system based on allowing the voices of dissent (manifested in the ideas of soapbox and speakers corner), meets the largest surveillance system designed to monitor and suppress those voices. This is where all of these and multiple other movements and ideas come to collide and subsequently reinvent themselves.

This applies to the cultures which come to London to (inevitably) clash and forge new ways to live with each other. The centre of one of the world's greatest empires attracting people from every corner of the world, London has become a kind of "a modern Babylon" (Disraeli 1881). And just as the "original Babylon" it attracted the images of destruction both in fiction (from the William Morris's "News from Nowhere" and Macaulay's "New Zealander" to Danny Boyle's "28 Days Later") and in reality (the Great fire of London, riots, the Blitz, etc.).

In the city where the society lives in the condition of a constantly flickering conflict the role of the mob becomes central to the idea of confrontation. As noted by Peter Ackroyd, the historian of London,

The crowd is not a single entity, manifesting itself on particular occasions, but the actual condition of London itself (Ackroyd 2001, 389)

As crowd disturbances and riots became a common occurrence, they started to represent a special kind of spectacle and even possess carnival-like qualities. Here is an observation of a Dutch traveller in 19th century, witnessing the London mob in action for the first time,

Half-naked men and women, children, chimney sweeps, tinkers, Moors and men of letters, fish-wives and elegant ladies, each creature intoxicated by his own whims and



Collage representing the carnivalesque character of London riots (superimposition of the images of the carnival and the riot in Notting Hill)

wild with joy, shouting and laughing. (Ackroyd 2001, 391)

The suspension of the “norm” during conflict creates a great opportunity not only for destruction but also a creation. The intensity of a confrontation and violence inevitably spills over into a form of creation. The best example is the area of Notting Hill, which was a setting for the largest racial riot in 20th century, and the following year became the place for a largest carnival in Europe celebrating multiculturalism and artistic expression.

This tendency can be traced throughout the history of London, both violent and non-destructive conflicts almost always sparked waves of creativity, which manifested in music, poetry, art and architecture.

Calmness and civility in urban history are the exception not the rule. The only interesting question is whether outcomes are creative or destructive. Usually they are both: the city is the historical site of creative destruction. (Harvey 2003, 939)

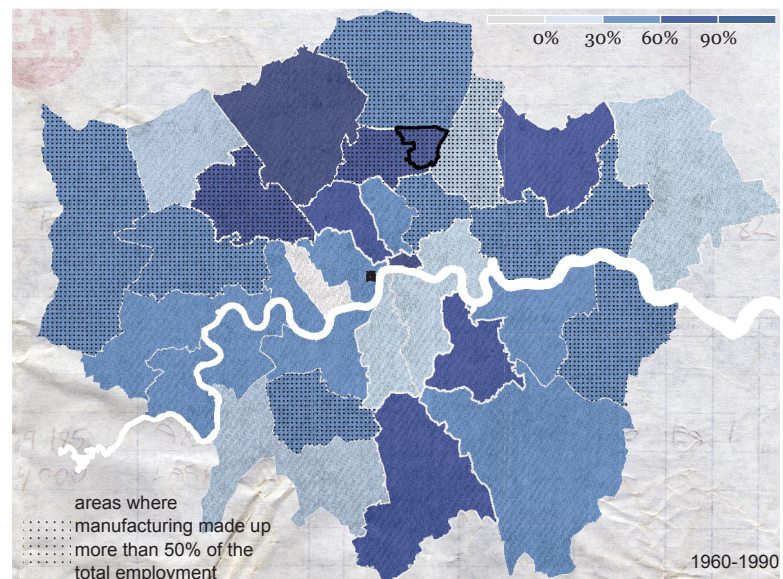
The theme of this thesis is to see how architectural means can address the most recent and very telling societal conflict of 2011 riots and become part of its creative output.

CHAPTER 2: PLACE AND EVENT

Historical Context

2011 riots originated in and subsequently became associated with the area of Tottenham in North London. Its history is emblematic of many neighbourhoods on the outskirts of major English cities and satellite towns. Tottenham was first settled by rich Londoners by building large country houses and later, in the period of rapid industrialization, families of factory workers moved into the area after the establishment of many modern factories in the 19th century. Like many other industrial areas it was one the main targets of bombing during the Blitz. After the war there was major housing construction in the area and the factories were also reestablished in their previous locations. With the beginning of the neoliberal era and the refocusing of the economy on the white color jobs, the industries began to close. The area found itself stripped of its main function of industrial production and become the periphery of the new “Great British economic model” focused in financial services and

Industrial decline in London by borough.
 Outlined - the area of Tottenham, data from City of London report (Chance 2015)

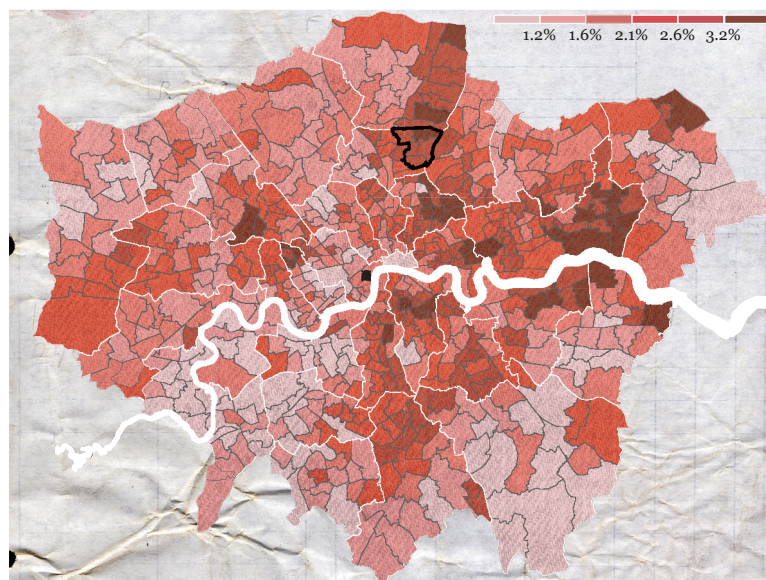


what David Harvey has called an “economy of mirrors”, that is, no longer based on the reality of production but solely of speculation.

Social Conditions

Not surprisingly these developments led to a high level of deprivation in the area, with one of the highest levels of unemployment and child poverty in England. The area has been neglected by the authorities which as always preferred to concentrate on the areas that have more potential within

Long-term unemployment;
data from UK Census 2011
(House of Commons 2009)



Child poverty;
data from UK Census 2011
(House of Commons 2011)



the set economic system than those requiring fundamental restructuring.

To quote the Mayor of London report from 2012,

Since the onset of its economic decline in the 1960s, Tottenham has seen no coordinated effort to address its fundamental challenges, and governments of all political colours have found it easier to disregard the area. (Lipton 2012, 8)

There is a widespread opinion among Londoners from “outside of N17” (the postcode of Tottenham) that it is an area prone to violence and crime. However, the official government statistics do not indicate the level of crime (including violent crime) to be any higher than elsewhere in London (see map below). In fact it is significantly lower than in a more affluent Westminster. This statistics merely show that violence and criminality are not more of a part of Tottenham’s day-to-day life and its character than anywhere else and that local people only resort to violence in the “extraordinary” circumstances.

Crime in London by borough;
data from London Metropolitan
Police (Metropolitan Police
Service 2015)



Popular Dissent



Broadwater Farm Estate riot;
(Herbert 2015)

In the first of recent outbursts of popular dissent, one of the local housing estates become the setting for the Broadwater Estate riot in 1985. The bleak black and white, high contrast images of the post-war concrete modernist housing estate under destruction published in the press exaggerated their run-down living conditions. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that one of the post-riot measures commissioned by the government was to paint a multi-storey mural of a waterfall on one of the building as if to impose colour on those black and white images from the newspapers. The conversation seemed to never move on from that superficial level of the image: “modernist architecture took the blame” (Moore 2015), some cosmetic changes were introduced (porches and walkways) and the real issues were not

Broadwater Farm Estate riot and 2011 riots superimposed; an article in the daily newspaper showing both the damage and the remedial measures they provoked (in colour).



addressed. Just like they were not addressed following the riots in Brixton, Handsworth and Toxteth in the 1980s and in



Spread of the riots in the UK; data from The Guardian (Lewis 2011)

Oxford, Cardiff and Tyneside in the early 1990s.

More recently and infamously the whole area has become a place of 2011 Tottenham riots, the largest act of civil disobedience and violence in the modern English history that spurred a chain of riots in other deprived areas of London and the UK.

The Event



Spread of the riots in London; data from The Guardian (Lewis 2011)

On August 6th, 2011 a peaceful protest in front of Tottenham Police Station following the death of a local resident Mark Duggan turned violent. What followed were clashes with police, looting of shops and burning of police cars, buses and buildings. The following three days saw similar riots in other boroughs of London and across large cities of England while continuing in its cradle. The statistics of post-riot arrests made in North London suggest that most rioters came from Tottenham and three neighbouring areas. According to the study conducted by The Guardian and London School of Economics titled "Reading the Riots",



Where rioters came from (in black - Tottenham High Road); data from LSE and The Guardian (Lewis 2011, 5)

Although mainly young and male, those involved in the riots came from a cross-section of local communities. Just under half of those interviewed in the study were students. Of those who were not in education, 59% were unemployed. Although half of those interviewed were black, those involved did not consider these "race riots". (Lewis 2011, 4)

The reasons and motivations for violence and looting varied greatly among all of the people interviewed during this enquiry. Most mentioned poverty, social and economic injustices, closure of youth services, increase in tuition fees; others treated them as their chance to get "free stuff" under "a perceived suspension of normal rules" (Lewis 2011, 5).

Post-event

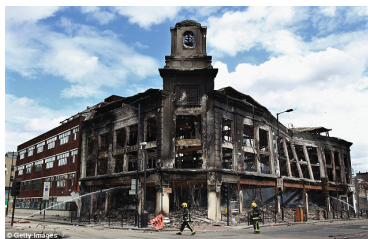
Despite the large media coverage and attention from the politicians the level of response from UK government has largely been equivalent to the one from 1985. Some activist groups, media sources and universities issued several reports and had public consultations which were largely overlooked by the government. Only 3 days after the beginning of the riots, the conservative Prime Minister, David



"This is criminality, pure and simple" (David Cameron). Collage representing the level of political response to the riots

Cameron already came to the conclusion, calling the riots "criminality pure and simple". Satisfied with this label which did not require any further analysis and facing existential

issues, the British society moved on to the next spectacle.



The destruction left after riot
(Christian 2011)

Meanwhile the streets were cleaned and buildings were restored or rebuilt, looking exactly as they did before the riot. The moment of a thoughtful pause and contemplation of what happened and where to go from here was missed.

Sociologist Richard Sennet notes,

If we could increase the complexity of confrontation and conflict in the city, not polarize it, the aggression, still there, would channel itself into paths that allow at least mutual survival. This, I believe, is not as grim a prospect as it might seem. For when a man fails to achieve coherent ends, when there is too much complexity impinging on him for him to advocate something “pure and simple,” the failure that results leads not to dissolution of his social resolve, but to exactly the state of mind now open only to a few among those who have experienced revolutionary conflict. (Sennett 1970, 149-150)



Reconstructed buildings - erasure of memory (Google 2015)

Instead, the capital jumped on the opportunity to invest in a cheap property and authorities were glad to follow capital's lead to get rid of the image in order to erase the memory of the riots.



New developments disregarding the neighbourhood (Populous 2015)

This is where the similarities with 1985 end. The new development plan (led by Populous designed new football stadium for Tottenham Hotspurs) looks like it is trying to ignore the community rather than deal with issues of the area that could not adapt to the “new ways”. It follows “successful” examples of doing just that in Stratford, Kings Cross and numerous other areas often led by the so-called “starchitects” and bankrolled by foreign investors. These developments introduce programs and typologies that disregard the character of neighbourhoods, while trying to substitute the idea of “the common good” for wealth production and accumulation. This in the end leads to social cleansing by pushing the people, who can not



Collage mapping capital driven “regeneration” of London neighbourhoods

afford to become shareholders and consumers of the new environment, out of the neighbourhood instead of making use of the existing social and physical characteristics of an area and providing viable social and economic choices to the community itself.

Position

Since I disagree with the effectiveness and ideology of both approaches of erasing the memory of the event and pushing

those discontent and marginalized towards the edge both physically and metaphorically, I am going to situate my thesis in 2011 immediately after the riots in the search of a different way forward which would acknowledge the event and the community instead of disregarding them.

My intention is not to try to get rid of the causes that led to the riots or to suggest a singular understanding or resolution to the issue of the societal trauma that they caused, but rather to look into a way to build within this context of psychological complexity of causes, symptoms and events in an effort to contribute to the recovery of the community.

A crucial part of it is to consider the reoccurrence of a riot as inevitable and not undesirable but a natural manifestation of attitudes of the society and finding ways how it can coexist with the ordinary life of community.

Thesis Question

How can adaptive reuse (as opposed to building a copy and introducing the entirely new typology) be an active agent in rebuilding a community following the traumatic experience of the riot?

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Framing the Research

There is little doubt that the riots of 2011 were a highly traumatic experience for everyone involved. It is however important to note that the turbulence of the social conditions and changes that led to the riots could be and should be considered traumatic as well. As noted by Slavoj Zizek,

The victims of socio-political traumas present today the same profile as the victims of natural catastrophies (tsunamis, earthquakes, floods) or grave accidents (serious domestic accidents, explosions, fires). We entered a new era of political violence where politics draws its resources from the renunciation to the political sense of violence. (Zizek 2008, 258)

It is very hard to compare and quantify the levels of traumatic impact from the slow burning trauma of socio-political actions and the trauma of violence, and, in the end, it is not clear what value this comparison would bring. However it is safe to assume that both of these aspects affected all groups involved in a conflict and the community as a whole. This gives us a reason to refer to the condition of the community as “post-traumatic”.

The term ‘post-traumatic’ refers to the evidence of the aftermath – the remains of an event that are missing. The spaces around this blind spot record the impression of the event like a scar. How does a system make sense of an experience that exceeds its capacity for integration? (Lahoud 2010, 18)

This definition requires attention in the way we conceive of the efforts to restore the community. Architecture presents a unique venue in this pursuit. Traditionally being one of the main symbols of stability, the architecture affected by the violence is the most obvious example and a physical

embodiment of the deviation from the norm, of the trauma itself. In an effort to heal this trauma the initial reaction and the most common solution is the demolition of the affected buildings and their rebuilding or building a new structure that bears no memory of the incident. These approaches in psychoanalytical terms can be equated to the restoring the memory to its pre-traumatic state and erasure of the traumatic memory respectively. There is a strong criticism in the theory of dealing with Post-traumatic Stress disorder of both of these approaches (Allan Young, Jonathan Shay). The alternative approach coming out of this criticism is put forward by Joanna Saleh Dickson with respect to recovery of the community in Philadelphia that was affected by the conflict around MOVE,

Recovery after trauma is only possible once the experience has been properly constructed as a memory, allowing the individual affected to move forward while still living with and learning from his traumatic experience. (Dickson 2002, 11)

For Dickson as well as for Young and Shay, memory is a critical construct in the process of recovery from trauma. And post-destruction architecture is a unique venue in activating it, as “the memory of the events endures through material absence” of its parts (Stasus 2012, 24). The distorted architecture and its remnants imply the sort of resilience that can provide us with an opportunity for communalization of memory on phenomenological level. An architect and urbanist Teresa Veiga de Macedo argues,

The challenge to interpret the city built landscape through a careful analysis of the defects of its urban shape and the conflicts that emerge from them, suggests borrowing some aspects of psychoanalytical therapy that refer to the concept of trauma - focusing on the evaluation of the city's space wounds and of the traumas held on its memory. By heading psychoanalytical therapy to a completely different ambit, of architectural intervention

within the consolidated city built space, we are proposing an approach of architecture to narrative that, as an embroidery, would be focused on holding together parts of fragmentary past grating them a renovated sense within the city landscape, which is more than offering the superimposition of a new autistic cosmos protected by the limits of a new architecture shelf. (Gadanhó 2010, 71)

Therefore, if architecture were to perform a therapeutic function, the site of memory (in this case of the site of distortion) appears in need of preservation for architectural intervention. Geographer JB Jackson argues it in his essay "Necessity for Ruins":

There has to be (in our new concept of history) an interim of death or rejection before there can be renewal and reform. (Jackson 1980,102)

In order not only to preserve the memory but also to instigate the process of creative renewal the remnants will have to be incorporated into the newer structure. The merger of the two will provide a new attempt at how they can coincide and share the same space in a dialectical tension between the past, present and the future. Walter Benjamin trusted the value of the dialectical method in establishing this relationship,

It's not that what is past cast its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill. (Buck-Morss 1989, 166)

The image of the 'present' in this case is the distortion, the debris and the social order left as a result of the riots. This image appears shocking and disturbing and goes beyond the established notion of 'good taste'. It is precisely that lack of refinement that gives it certain intrinsic values that are necessary and are not only the core of this dialectical relationship but also represent a very natural part of our lives (particularly in London as shown through its history)

that can not be ignored. In the words of Richard Sennet,

Aggression is so deeply engraved in the life of men, than a society that regards aggressive outbreaks as a hindrance rather than a serious human experience is hiding from itself. (Sennett 1970, 179)

Additionally, remnants of these events and other accidents that lead to destruction of buildings also give us a way into understanding the very nature of the way our society is structured. Susan Buck-Morss shows how Walter Benjamin addresses this issue in *The Arcades Project*:

The debris of industrial culture teaches us not the necessity of submitting to historical catastrophe, but the fragility of the social order that tells us this catastrophe is necessary. (Buck-Morss 1989, 170)

For this reason I incorporated the remnants of the building in ruin in the design of the new structure. This design strategy was meant to do more than just monumentalize the events and its history. My spatial investigations were an attempt to find a resolution to a societal conflict and express a didactical moment to show how we can learn from a traumatic experience.

The new spaces of habitation constructed on the existential remnants of war and natural disaster do not celebrate the destruction of an established order, nor do they symbolize or commemorate it. Rather they accept with a certain pride what has been suffered and lost, but also what has been gained. (Woods 1997, 15)

The stripping of layers provided by destruction made the past and present apparent and material. The fact that it was material gave me an opportunity to investigate the intrinsic qualities of its materiality as related to the time frame they represent. I then incorporated them into a new structure in order to create new juxtapositions and making the old ones more apparent. This is the moment of the best educational potential.

In establishing the relationship between the past and the present Walter Benjamin draws on allegories as an instigator of this didactical moment.

In allegory, time finds expression in nature mortified, not in “bud and bloom”, but overripeness and decay of her creations. (Buck-Morss 1989, 168)

Materiality, being the most tangible of all characteristics of the building, capable of the fullest sensory engagement, is the one that possesses the most memory information. Pierre Nora in his influential essay *Between Memory and History Les Lieux de Mémoire* argues that material remains are “the ultimate embodiments of a memorial consciousness” (Nora 1989, 12). I believe that representing the allegory and memories associated with its parts can best be done by associating them with their materiality. The post-riot remnants and other material traces of the past provide the most suitable elements that can be collaged together to create allegories, the architectural potential of which I attempted to explore.

Translation (from References to Intentions)

My intention was to preserve the distorted ground and build upon it, incorporating the site of trauma into my intervention and **treating a scar as a mode of recovery.**

Additionally, using the material memory of the building I attempted an investigative method of design based on the technique of allegory inspired by Walter Benjamin’s use of montage as described by Susan Buck-Morss,

The image of the “ruin,” as an emblem not only of the transitoriness and fragility of capitalist culture, but also its destructiveness, is pronounced. And just as the Baroque dramatists saw in the ruin not only the “highly meaningful

fragment,” but also the objective determinate for their own poetic construction, the elements of which were never unified into a seamless whole, so Benjamin employed the most modern method of montage in order to construct out of decaying fragments of nineteenth-century images that made visible the “jagged line of demarcation between physical nature and meaning.” (Buck-Morss 1989, 164)

The first step towards it was to investigate the history and materiality of the site of the greatest destruction in the area of Tottenham and assess the potential for the allegorical method.

CHAPTER 4: SITE INVESTIGATIONS

Mapping the Neighbourhood

“Ordinary”

The epicentre of 2011 riots in Tottenham was its High Road, a local example of a high street typology characteristic of neighbourhoods in London and UK in general. The high streets are usually located along the main transportation routes and were town centres before neighbourhoods were amalgamated by cities or metropolitan areas. As such they accommodate the venues of a public life and everyday activities in a local sense. In the words of Jane Clossick, they serve “people excluded from more prestigious public realms and are the common place or territory for those who are increasingly excluded from public life” (Clossick 2014, 2). They also serve as main traffic and bus arteries of the areas and accommodate municipal government institutions, local library branches, places of worship and small educational institutions such as schools.

These streets are not the centres of civic life in terms of the grand public institutions of the city centre, nor of business life, in the sense of the central business districts of the modern city; rather, they are the nexus of ordinary life, of daily shopping, of local trades, and day-to-day socializing... the local street is just there, available as a setting for everyday life; available, it transpires, as a setting for rioting. (Till 2013, 72)

Tottenham High Road matches this description exactly. It combines Victorian houses with ground floor shops, services and pubs and residential units above, old and new churches, supermarkets built in 1990s, early 20th century civic buildings and 1950-60s housing estates. If you go one lot deep from the street edge you discover an elementary

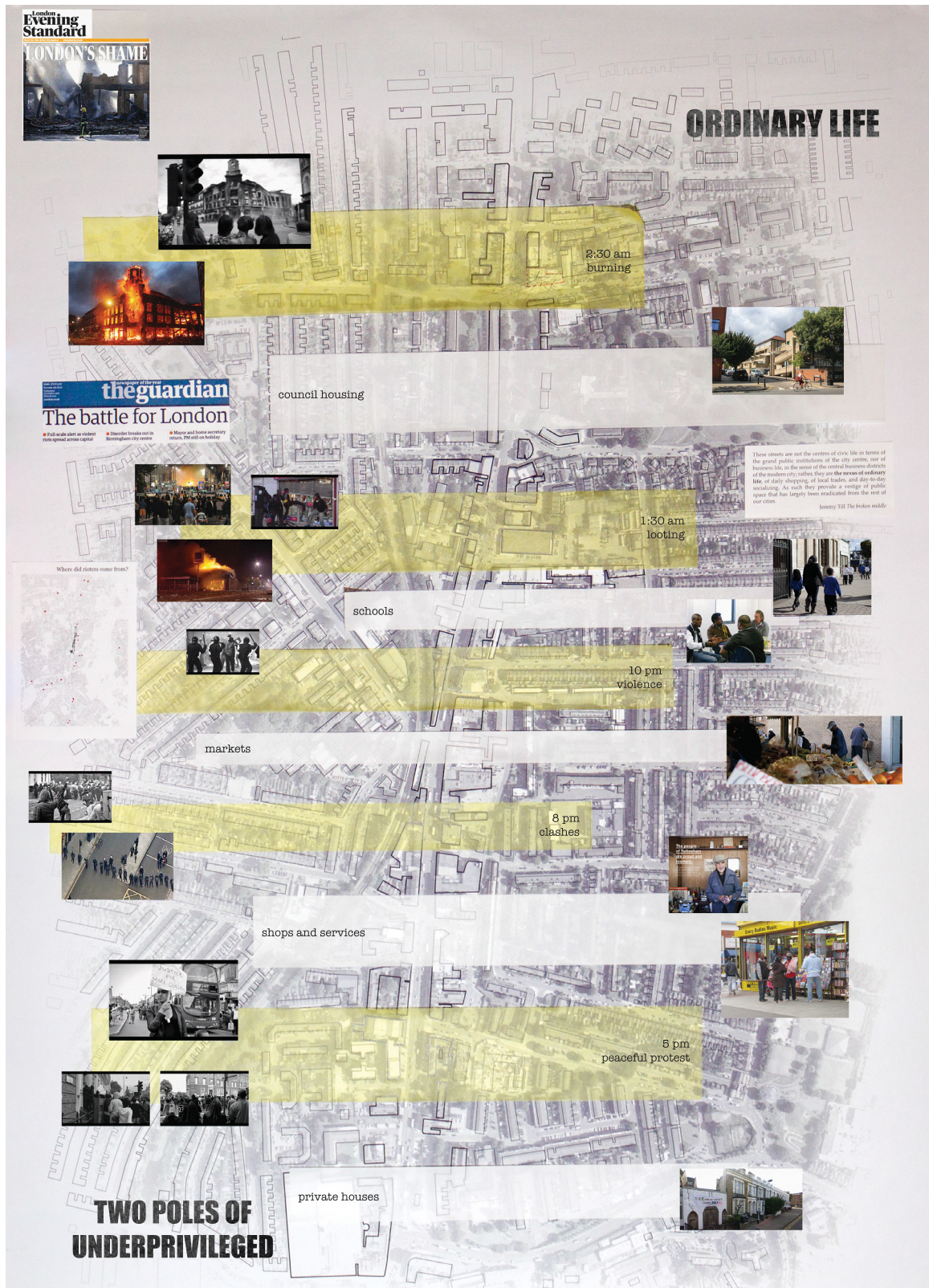
school, light manufacturing housed in a warehouses, a football stadium, more houses and plethora of other functions. All of these buildings and typologies coexist and mix along two edges of the street in a collage-like fashion, seemingly unplanned and sporadic, creating its own rhythm and dictating a rhythm of movement along it.

“Extraordinary”

It is no accident that the protest on August 6th, 2011 happened on the High Road. Local residents (man and women, black and white) gathered “on their turf” in front of a local police station. The first outbreaks of violence started happening there and continued further up the street gathering force and increasing the damage. The police used a tactic of containing the disturbances to the High Road and blocked off the Southern edge making sure they do not spill towards Central London, leaving the rest of the street open for looting and destruction.



Riots on the high streets of London

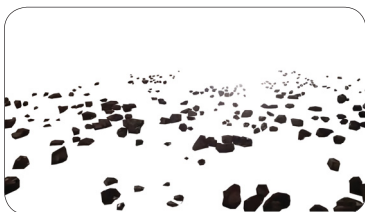


“Ordinary” high street events vs. timeline of the “extraordinary” event (August 6, 2011, Tottenham riot)

In the next four of days of the riots in London, among numerous other locations the major disturbances happened in the areas of Lewisham, Croydon, Brixton, Hackney Central, Islington. Not surprisingly the epicentres of destruction and confrontation with the police were again high streets in these areas. All of these areas share the similar history with Tottenham and are on different stages of a timeline of “regeneration”, with some (Islington and Brixton) becoming unaffordable for local residents and the rest on the way to it. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the majority of the rioters came from the local areas and were “operating” on their own respective high streets. As rightfully observed by Slavoj Žižek,

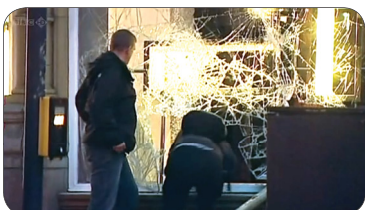


The truth is that the conflict was between two poles of the underprivileged: those who have succeeded in functioning within the system versus those who are too frustrated to go on trying. The rioters’ violence was almost exclusively directed against their own. The cars burned and the shops looted were not in rich neighbourhoods, but in the rioters’ own. (Žižek 2008, 259)



Materiality of the Event

Being the most recent large-scale civil disturbance in the UK the 2011 riots were extremely well-televised. The footage captured during became the basis for a number of documentary films that followed. These documentaries portrayed different viewpoints and served different purposes but the original footage was very helpful at establishing a timeline of the event and revealed the transformation of the streetscape during the riot. I have analysed these films to collect information about the materiality of the event. The films analyzed were:



Materiality of riots

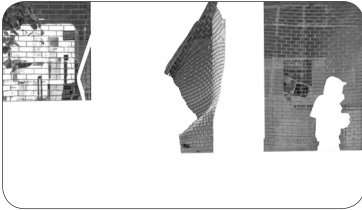
- Our Crime, Riot. BBC Three (2012)
- Perfect Storm, The England Riots. WideShut (2011)



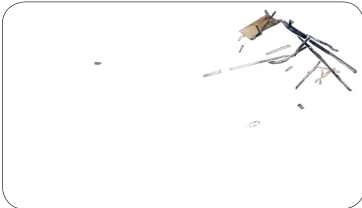
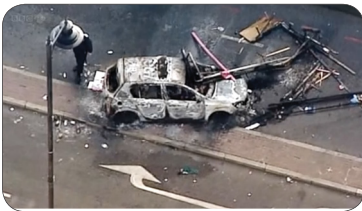
- Riots Reframed, Chapters 1-4. Voice Over (2012)

- The Riots.: In Their Own Words, Part One - The Rioters. BBC One (2012)

- The Riots.: In Their Own Words, Part Two - The Police. BBC One (2012)



I borrowed the technique of Urban Think Tank to extract specific meaningful materials from the stills I took in these documentaries. (Brillembourg Tamayo 2005). My aim was to detect the recurring materials in their distorted state, such as twisted metal grill, shattered glass, charred lumber, concrete, and bricks. This was the first step in creating a material palette of the event that would later be compared with and added to the materiality of building I chose to focus on. These materials possess the memorial consciousness necessary for an allegory and were the basis of a first attempt at creating new relationships and juxtapositions between them essentially becoming a testing ground and analytical tool for the future design development.



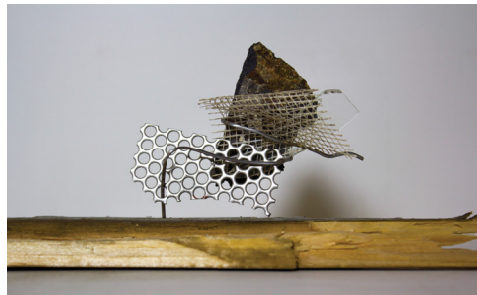
Materiality of riots

Taking the developed material palette, the next step was to look how its components can be put back together in a meaningful way. An experiment was carried out through a series of non-scalar conceptual models. Additional connecting materials were added as necessary to stitch them together and they became a centre of investigation of what could be the joining element and what shape it takes or how it needs to behave to facilitate the successful “stitching”.

Without an illusion of finding a clear answer to all of the problems this exercise was used for intuitive inspiration and also as an introduction into the implications of working with the materiality of the distorted ground. However, what became apparent as a result of the experiments was the

necessity of the supplementary element with certain properties of plasticity to be present to connect different elements of different shape and state of destruction together. Additionally, as observed from the last model, the preservation of the element embedded into a base (ground) can be beneficial for anchoring the structure into a site as well as serving as a focal point. However, if it were to behave structurally, the introduction of the above-mentioned supplementary element would be necessary.

Model 1. The elements were raised off the base. The steel wire goes through the metal screen utilizing its structural properties (mainly firmness) and acting in tandem with it [screen] to support the rest of the structure.

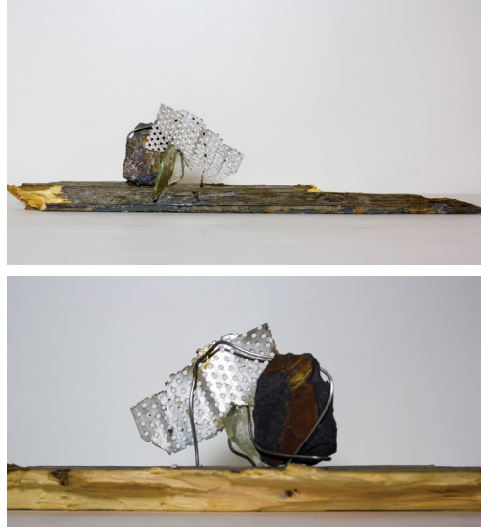


Model 2. The structure has two support points. The stone part is resting on the ground providing additional stability.

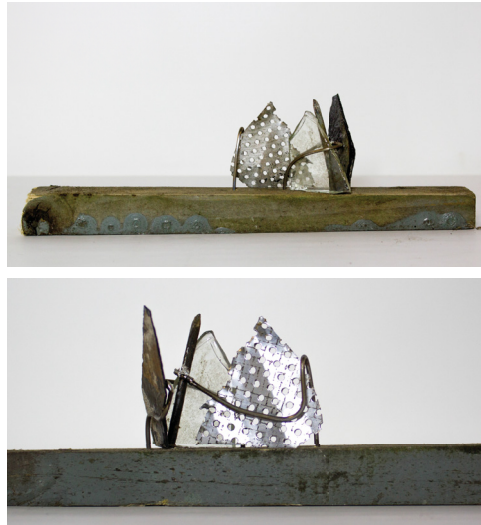
The wire wraps around it vertically providing lateral stability. The glass joins the stone in this “wire pocket” once again but since it is supported by the wire in two places, it is slightly offset towards the metal screen.



Model 3. Glass is resting on its side against the slope of the wooden base and is supported by a metal wire wrapping around it. It also provides a primary support for the screen and additional support for the stone. The screen is friction-fitted between the glass (meanwhile stabilizing it) and the wire arch.



Model 4. A remaining post-destruction element (a nail) is introduced. Both the elements and the wire supports gravitate towards it for support. Only one wire is directly connected (soldered) to it. Both glass and stone resting against it, while the screen is resting on the glass. The wire provides a surface for the stone to lean against.



The Site and the Building



1:200 site and building model

The building chosen as a site of investigation for this thesis is nicknamed “Union point” and is located on the corner of High Road and Lansdowne Road. It is located on the confluence of a residential block and the commercial part of the High road where small retail and service businesses are combined with dwellings and some municipal institutions. The other four corners of this intersection are occupied by



Destruction of union point building (Independent 2014)



Destruction of union point building (Stanton 2011)



Destruction of union point building (Spectator 2011)



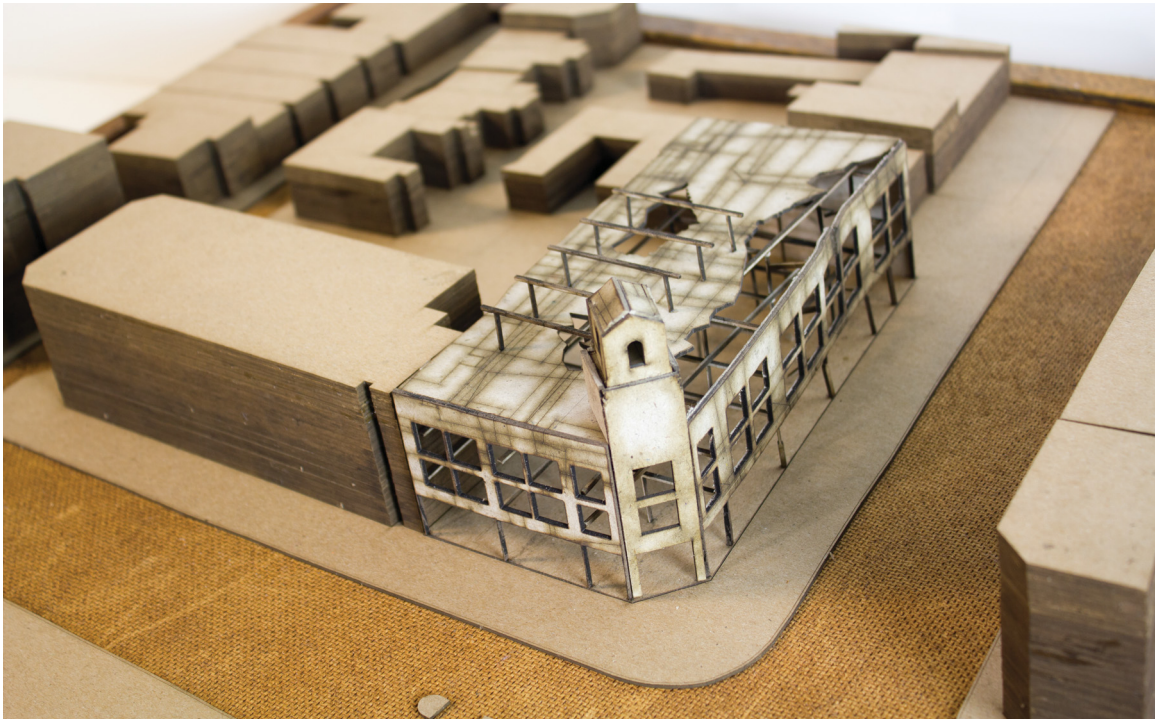
Model of the building post-destruction (scale 1:200)

a 1960s housing estate, early 20th century built municipal enterprise centre (in the former Tottenham Gas Company headquarters) and a pub with residential units in a Victorian building. The building itself is bordered on the North by a 1980s four-storey office building (housing a government employment centre) and one-storey auto body shop on the East.

Images of the destruction of the Union point building became iconic of London riots. It also was the site of the where the force of rioters' destruction reached its peak on August 6th, the first day of the riots. The building which housed a carpet shop on the ground floor and flats on the floors above was not looted but broken into and set on fire in a seemingly inexplicable act of pure violence. What local residents and the firefighters found the next morning was a carcass of the building with only iron beams and columns and crumpling brick facade remaining and sitting in a pile of rubble, fortunately no residents were injured.

The original structure of the building consisted of an iron frame (beams and columns) on a grid 8m by 6m adjusted along the edge to fit the unusual geometry of the urban plot and to accommodate a chamfered corner facing the intersection. The upper floors were built up with wooden joists and hardwood flooring. The building also featured brick facades with plaster work, brick exterior walls, interior walls with light metal studs, sheet metal roofing and a roof attic.

The history of the Union point building gives us a great insight into the history of the neighbourhood. The additions and alterations to it through its history were very distinct both



Model of the building in a post-destruction state in its immediate context

materially and stylistically and highly representative of their time periods which makes it a good platform for establishing time-based allegorical connections.

It was built in 1930 as new headquarters of the London Co-operative Society. The Co-operative movement was born in the early 19th century out of co-operative worker run flour mills and by the 2nd part of 19th century it expanded into the retail sector. By the beginning of 20th century the Socialist Co-operative Federation ran stores in several locations across London. The profits were directed back to the communities of workers who ran them. The new flagship department store was built in a thriving industrial area of Tottenham. The Art Deco style building featured lavish interiors with dark wood cabinets and counters and



Collage of three lives of Union Point building



Union Point building in 1930s;
 photograph obtained from
 Steward Drummond (Rolfe
 Judd Architecture 2016)

a “richly detailed white rendered façade has a prominent square corner tower with Tuscan pilasters and entablature” (Haringey 2009, 27). The building’s distinguished feature was a tower facing the intersection at a 45 degree angle with a square panel with the society’s logo (intertwined LCS letters) and “1930” (see fig. 47). The three above ground floors were used as a retail space with the storage in the basement.

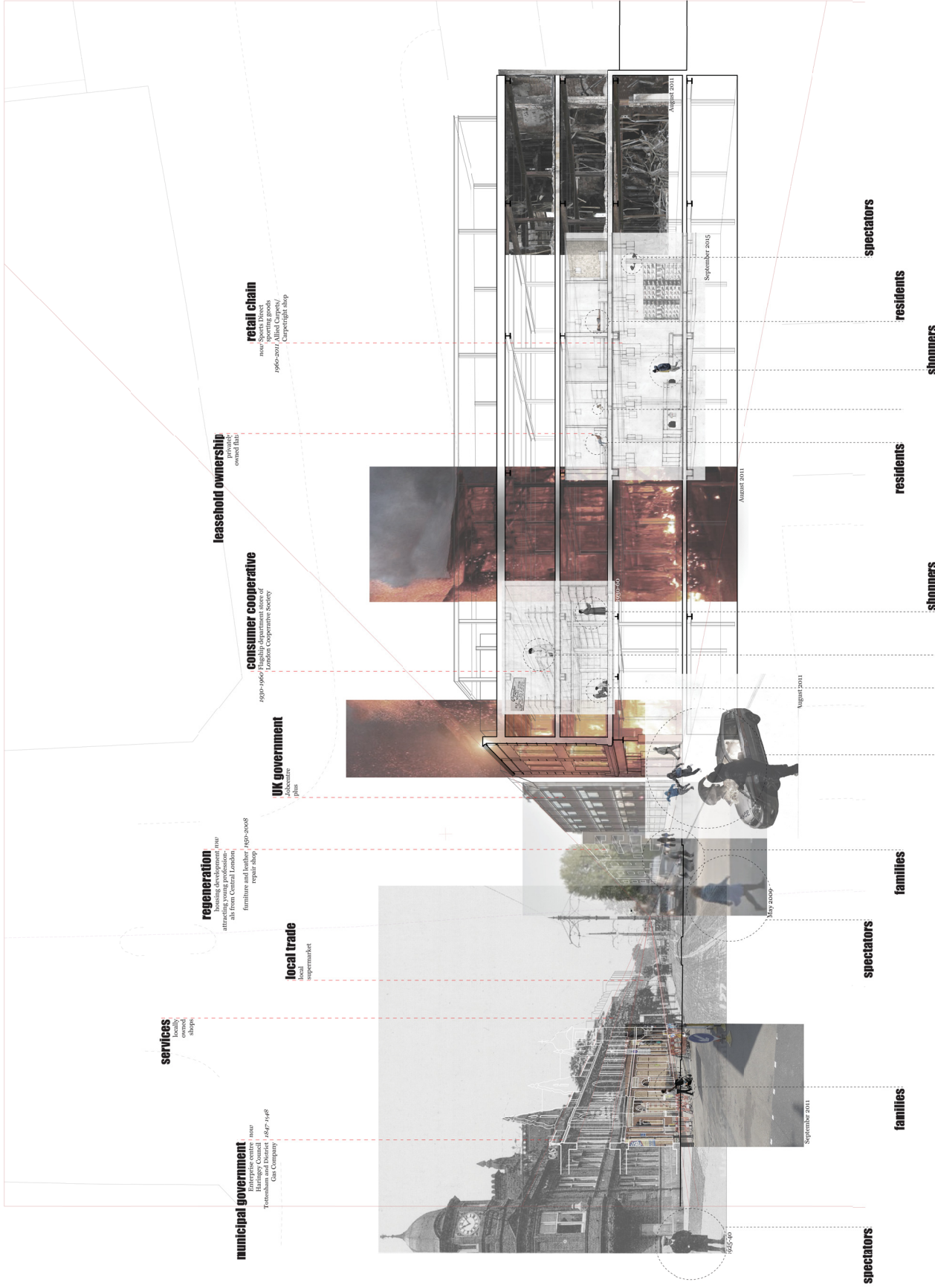


Union Point building in 1980s;
 photograph obtained from
 Steward Drummond (Rolfe
 Judd Architecture 2016)

From 1960s Co-op department stores across England started to close down undermined by the multinational corporations and by the 1980s the Union point was sold to the type of retail chain the London Co-operative Society was created to oppose to, Allied Carpets and Doors. In came the alterations in the interior and the exterior of the building. Following the 1980s retail fashion the windows on all facades were covered by large advertising and signs (see fig. 48). The LCS logo and the year of construction were covered by a large “Open to all” neon sign. The ground floor columns on the facade were decorated with marble veneer (later to be plastered over and painted green). The upper floors of the building became superfluous to the requirements of the carpet shop and were sold to Metropolitan Housing Trust to be refurbished to become flats. Portions of the ground floor were separated to accommodate and separate the circulation of the residents from the retail area. In the 1990s a third residential level was added to the roof. This was more or less the state the building was until its eventual burning in the August of 2011.

Time Frames

I carried out an investigation of the history of occupation of the Union point building by mapping out the layers of history



Longitudinal historical section, depicting the occupation of the building as well as actors and situations on the street throughout time

on a longitudinal cross section based on city records of the structure and historical photographs of the elevations. Then I overlaid on that “historical cross section” a series of vignettes that frame a number of activities taking place in the building at various key moments in its history. Each frame presents groups of actors at certain time periods, i.e. people and forces involved in various situations on the street. When photographs of the interior of the actual building at certain time periods were not available, I reconstructed the scene based on photographs and written descriptions of the similar buildings in London.

While it would be overly poetic and sentimental to suggest that the destruction of the building by the rioters was a subconscious reaction for the changes in the society manifested in the alterations done to the building, it is nevertheless important to say that the building’s history parallels that of that particular community and England in general. This aspect adds a new dimension to a time-based design approach and adds layers of complexity to the dialectical tension between the successive periods of inhabitants in the building. The changes in the materials and styles for the successive alterations embody the values of the “worlds” that created them. If we were to attempt to create a place for memory with an aspiration have a therapeutic function for the community, we should consider creating a dialogue between these worlds.

The proposition set forth in this thesis is to attempt to establish these relationships in an architectural expression of these “worlds” as a prototype of how “they” (and by extension “we” as their representatives) should relate to each other in going forward, using the trope of the allegory as a way to bridge

different (and at times opposite) lives of the building as well as using the technique of my earlier material experiments.

CHAPTER 5: DESIGN

Active Monument

As part of the investigative structure of the project, the treatment of time becomes its crucial aspect. When thinking about introduction of a time component into the new design of a building, the idea of an age-value monument (as defined by Alois Riegl in “The Modern Cult of Monuments”) seems to provide the best framework.

[age-value monuments] Do not refer directly to their original significance and purpose; rather, their aim is to reveal the passage of time. (Riegl 1998, 624)

The passage of time in this case represents more than just reflection of the past but should encompass the possibility of the new program being introduced and re-introduced for the monument to become ‘active’ and extend its purpose beyond the commemorative one.

The ‘active’ component of the monument can be represented not only by an alternative program that is to be accommodated but also by the ability of the community to activate it by engaging in it.

Allegorical Method and Devices

One of the aspirations of this thesis was to attempt to devise a speculative method of designing by creating material allegories and using them to create architectural devices of different degree of abstraction to be deployed in an effort to expose the public to the different “worlds” that played a part

in the history of this building.

Taking materiality of these “worlds” as a starting point by looking at the overlaps created in the historic sectional drawing, I have established several materials that represent each of the periods. They were then used to create material allegories which were analyzed and used as generators of these devices.

The first step of the process was to make an abstract model using only the materials provided in whatever state and try to create a connection based on their physical properties and join them with an supplementary element with a level of plasticity that could accommodate their connection. Although these models were abstract, they suggested ideas of structure and behaviour of the additional element as well as relationship between the materials.

The next step was a creation of an analytical model of a proto-architectural device inspired by the abstract model, that would add (but not dictate) a sense of scale and provide further information.

The third step was a series of sketches that started to represent the space that was implied in and inspired by these investigations in model form. The sketches were also intended to test the perception by the people moving through the created space and the capacity of devices to facilitate creating architectural events, i.e. “situations”. The following step was a scale model of the device with indication of both sectional and planar organization of the space trying to materialize the findings and aspirations of the sketches and earlier models.

The final stage of this enquiry in the architectural potential of the allegorical method was the perspective collage showing the ways in which the space was to be perceived dynamically and testing its possible application by the 'actors' (i.e. representatives of the community). The collage also represents the material articulation of space inherent in the earlier models which allows for the allegory to be still active.

Smooth exposed concrete was chosen as a material for the supplementary element. This is an economic material with a necessary degree of plasticity and structural capacity. It can be neutral enough in its colour and texture to attenuate the materials used in allegories. It was not featured in the original structure, nor its later modifications, therefore it is also neutral on the level of the embedded memory of the site. The use of concrete will relate well to the materiality of the streetscape.

Device 1. Arcade



Intersection of frames 1

The first device is based on the intersection of the frames on the street level with the aspiration to create a public space as an extension of High Road. In the words of Jeremy Till,

The choice of operations on the broken middle is to either further fracture it by erecting spatial barriers between its constituent parts, or else to accept the patchwork for what it is (a healthy and honest spatial mix) and reinvest it with more, not less, genuinely public space. (Till 2013, 73)

It becomes especially relevant in the context of Tottenham High Road where, according to the post-riot government report,

The quality of the built environment in terms of streets, spaces, places, civic amenities, and entertainment

venues declined, with some facilities disappearing completely. (Lipton 2012, 21)

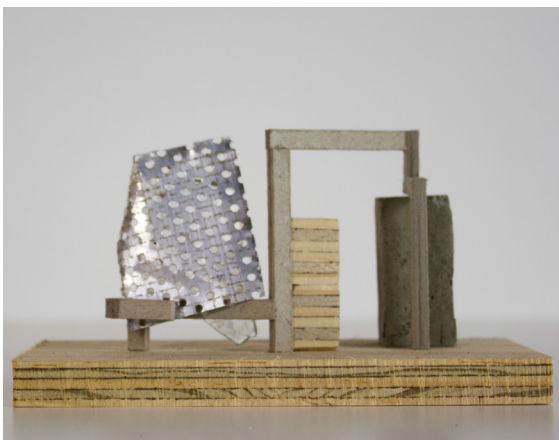
By restoring the presence of a public function and extending the public space from the street we would show the trust that we can put in the community and its ability to regenerate itself. It would also give the members of the public a new perspective on the street life of their neighbourhood and their high street.

An evocative public program, using multiple sites in the urban landscape itself, can build upon place memory, in all of its complexity, to bring local history, buildings, and natural features to urban audiences with a new immediacy as part of daily life. (Hayden 1997, 227)

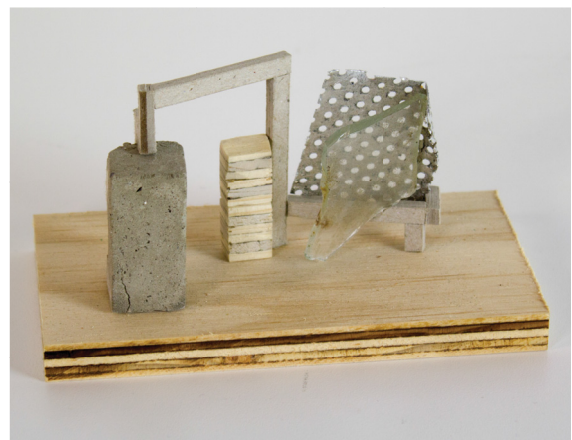
With the influence of the abstract models this public space took a form of an arcade.



Abstract model of device 1



Analytical model of device 1





Collages interpreting the models and imagining potential use



Streetscape perspective

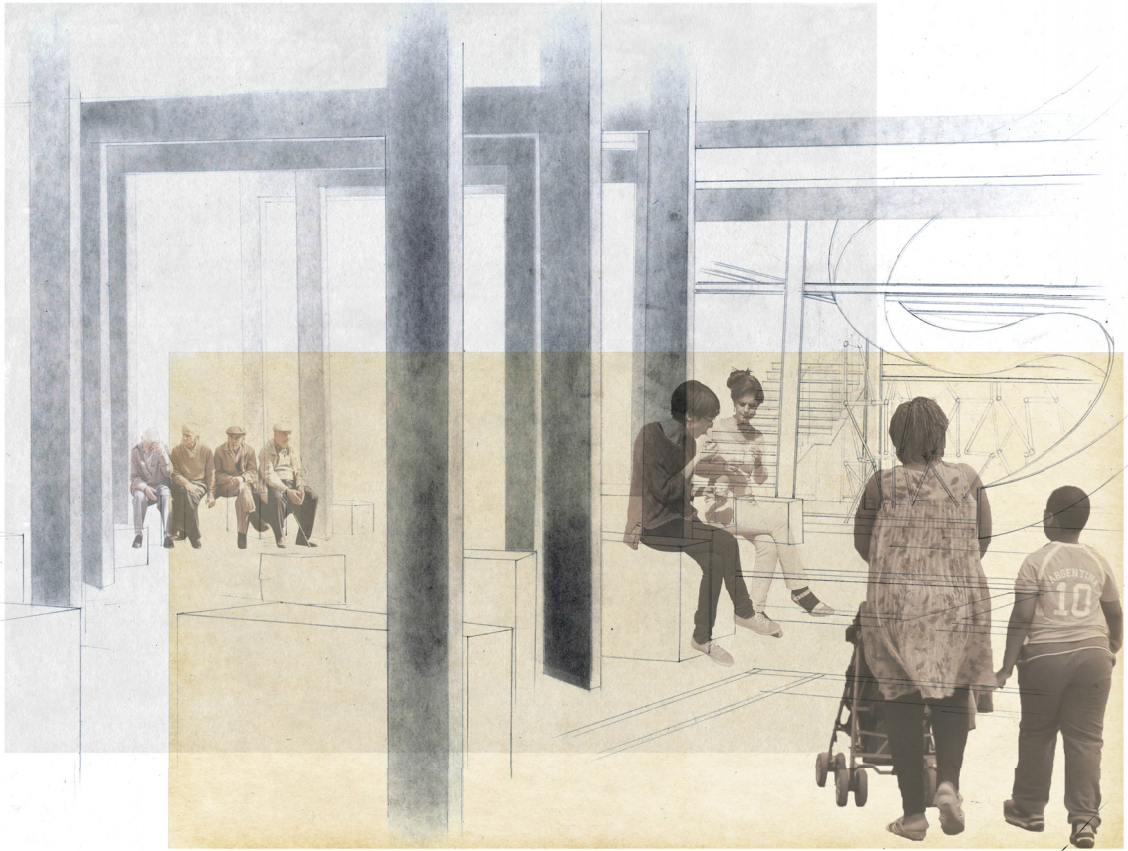
The building exists on the High Road and with the relationship between its new and old elements contributes to the overall “patchy” character of the street (its mixture of buildings of different ages and different functions)



Arcade provides a barrier-free extension of the street and restores the presence of a public function beyond the pavement of the High Road



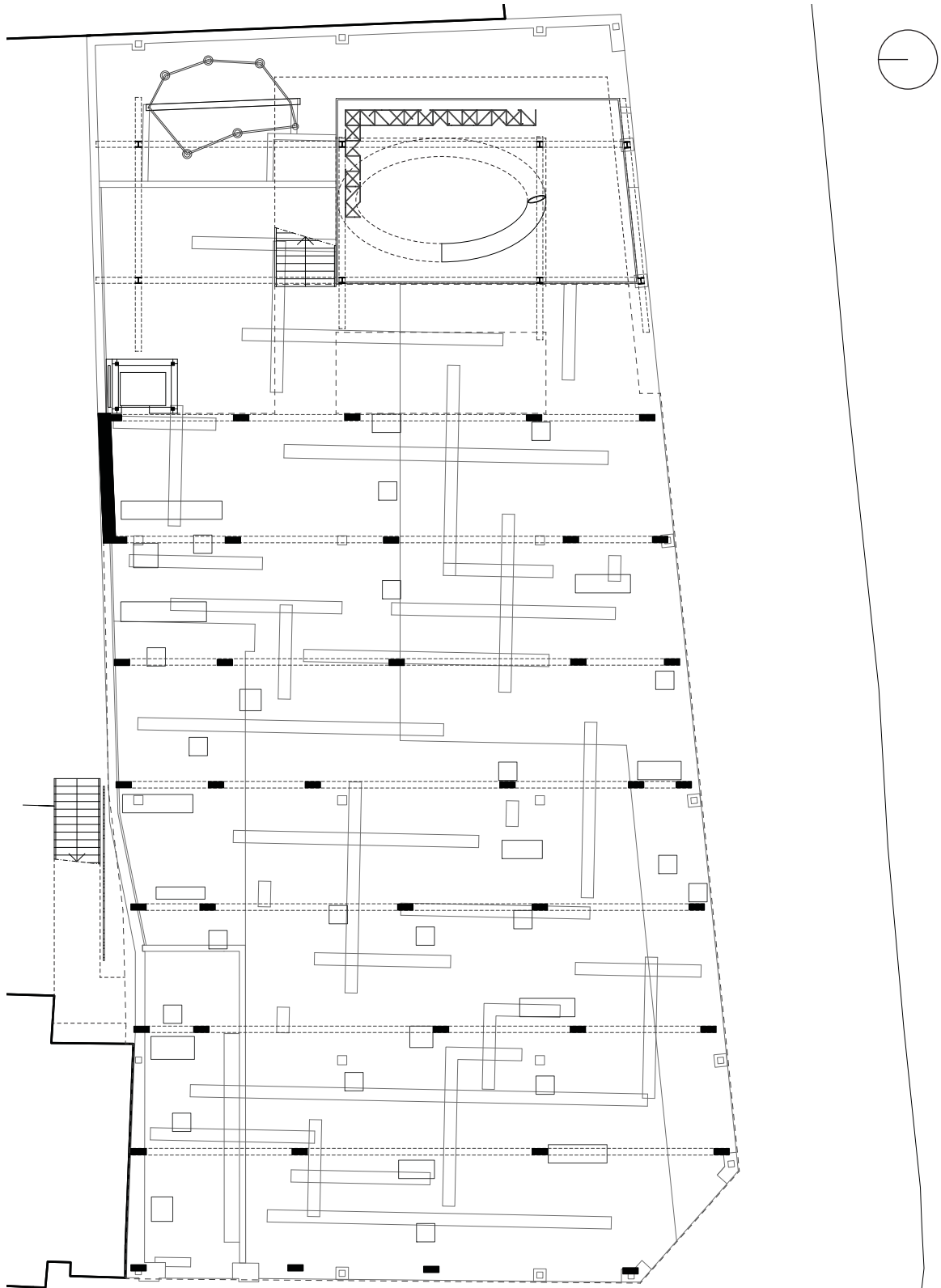
The arcade is used as a framing device to express an important moment through material memory. Among such moments are benches that come off the ground and support the laminated shattered glass used for seating. The metal shutter screen acts as a screen for the fire escape from the level above. The ground surface adds to the memory process. The grid of the concrete joints on the floor traces the various layouts of the ground floor over time thereby recalling the different lives of the building.



The arcade was envisioned as a place for potential use for community events as well as a place of repose, to get away from the street, be protected from the rain and engage in leisurely activities. The layout of the arcade tries to negotiate the sense of meandering suggestive of a place repose with the sense of directionality that would guide the movement and exploration the rest of the building.



Arcade variations
The plurality of spaces of different sizes within the arcade is intended to accommodate gatherings of different size and different situations but does not define them. The versions of its layout were explored in a series of scale models testing different rhythms and proportions of columns and arches.



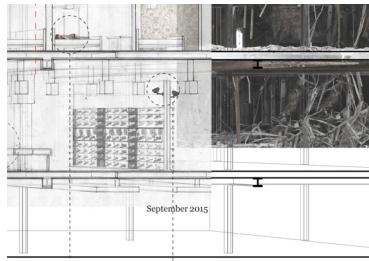
Ground floor plan. Scale 1:200

The ground floor is open to the two streets and the car park to its North allowing and encouraging movement through it not only for the users of the building but also people passing through it.



Section (NTS)
 The directionality of movement is expressed in section, where the arcade gradually opens up to the next device.

Device 2. Playground and Stair



Intersection of frames 2

The second device took form of a playground and a main staircase wrapped around it. The application of a playground in post-traumatic environments follows the argument set forth by Johan Huizinga in *Homo Ludens* about the civilizing function of play. This theory was later masterfully realized by Aldo Van Eyck in his playgrounds built in the neighbourhoods of post-war Amsterdam.

Filing them with life, in the face of these facts, was a redeeming, therapeutic act, a way of weaving together once again the fabric of a devastated city. The intention was to thwart what Huzinga in his chapter entitled 'Play and War' had called the 'agonal' by overcoming it through play. (Lefavre 2002, 45)

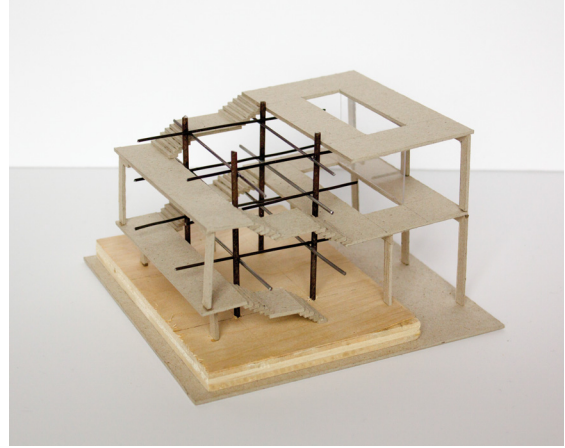
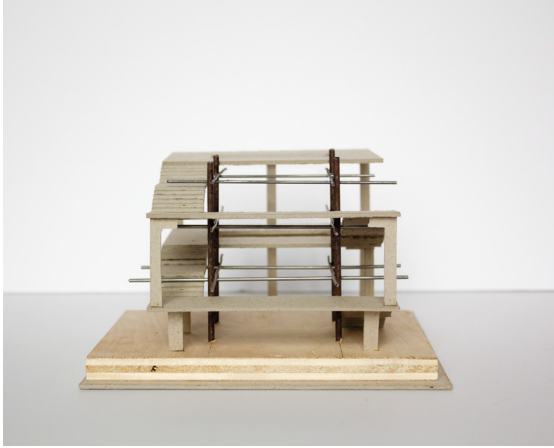
By creating both the public space and the playground we also establish a connection with the argument of Henri Lefebvre for a city to be a place for enjoyment and pleasure independent of the economic imperatives (Stanek 2011).

This device was developed using same process of creating of material allegory between the materials of the chain retail store and a post-destruction condition of the building.



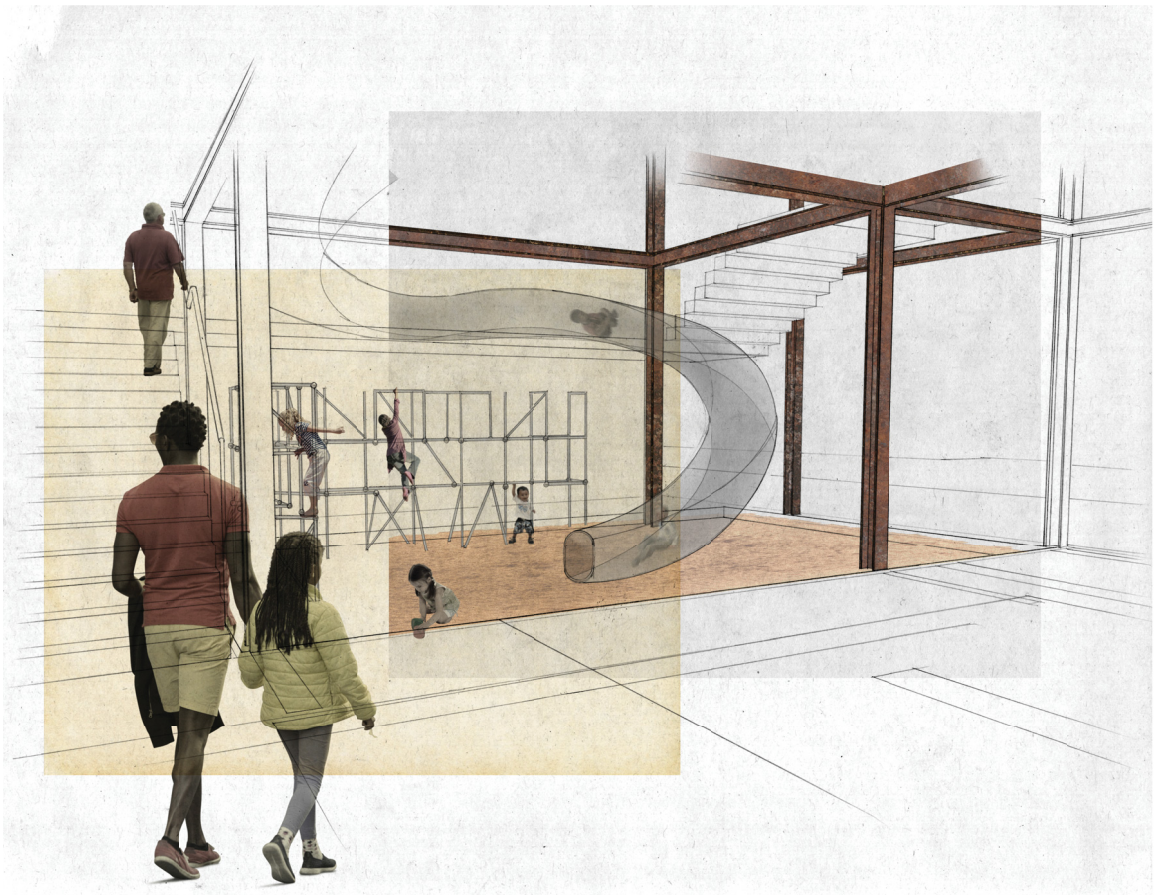
Abstract model of device 2.

The supplementary element (represented by a wire) wraps around the iron as it goes up, simultaneously giving it stability.

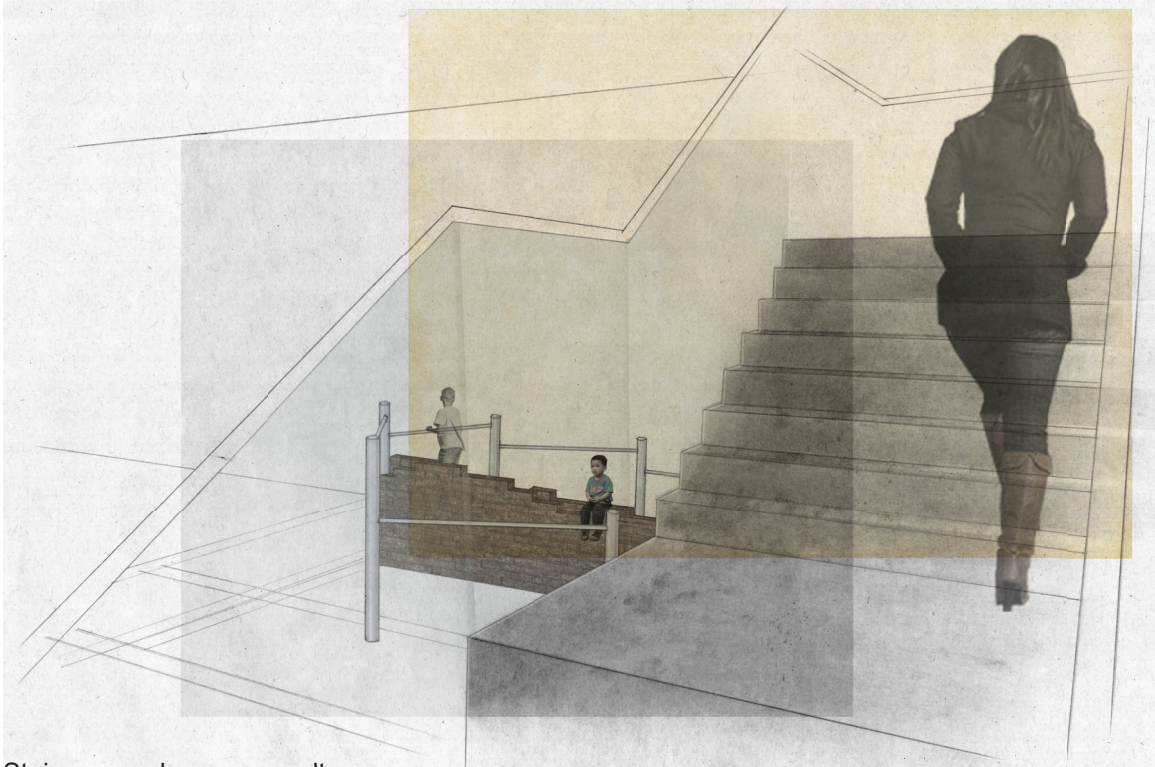


Analytical model of device 2

In its analytical iteration the model was interpreted as a staircase that goes around the survived iron frame of the building that is suppose to provide a support for it, given its fragility after the fire.



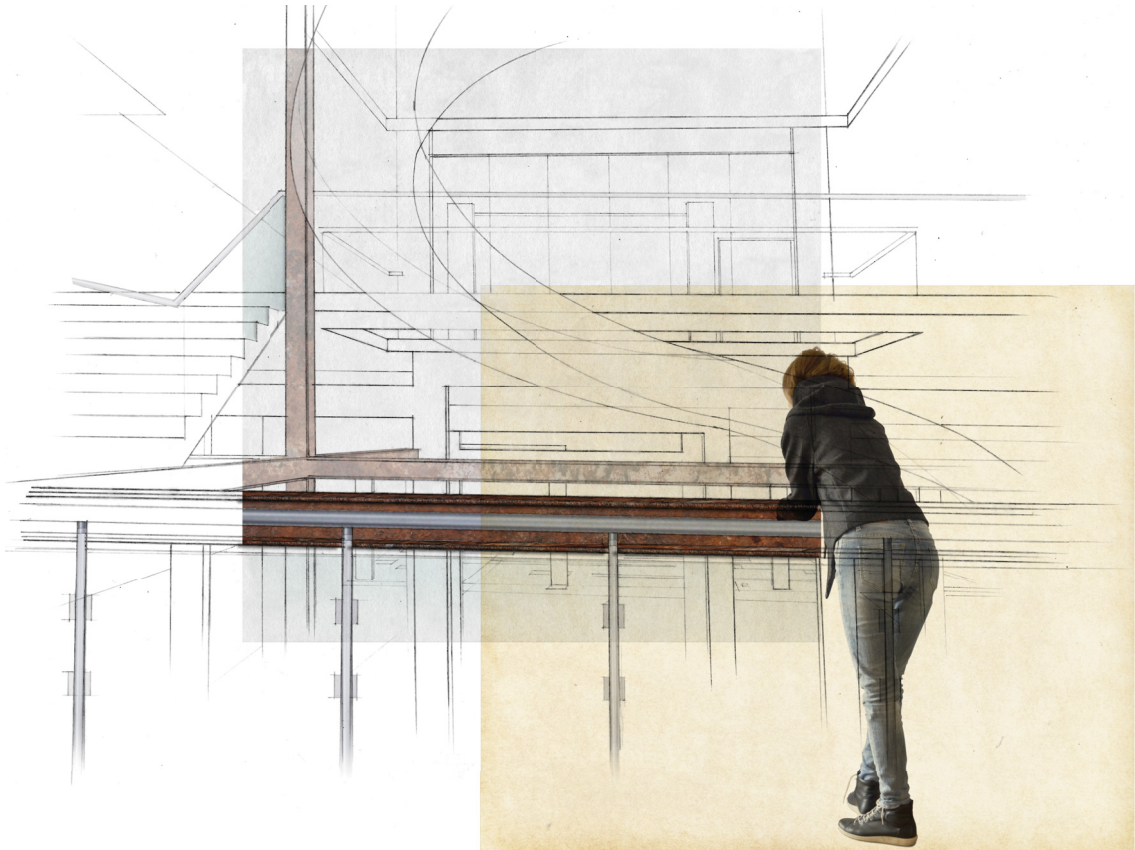
The existing iron columns and beams were juxtaposed with the transparent plastic and aluminum of shop's display windows and detailing which are represented in a more interpretative way in materiality of the slide, climbing frame and somersault.



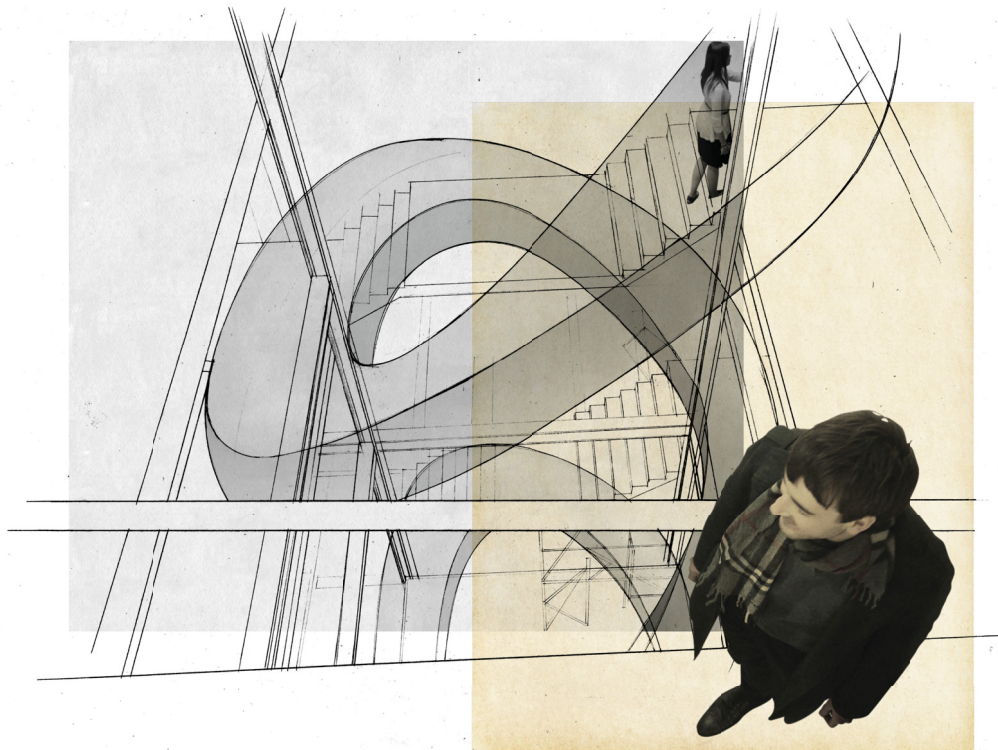
Staircase and sommersault



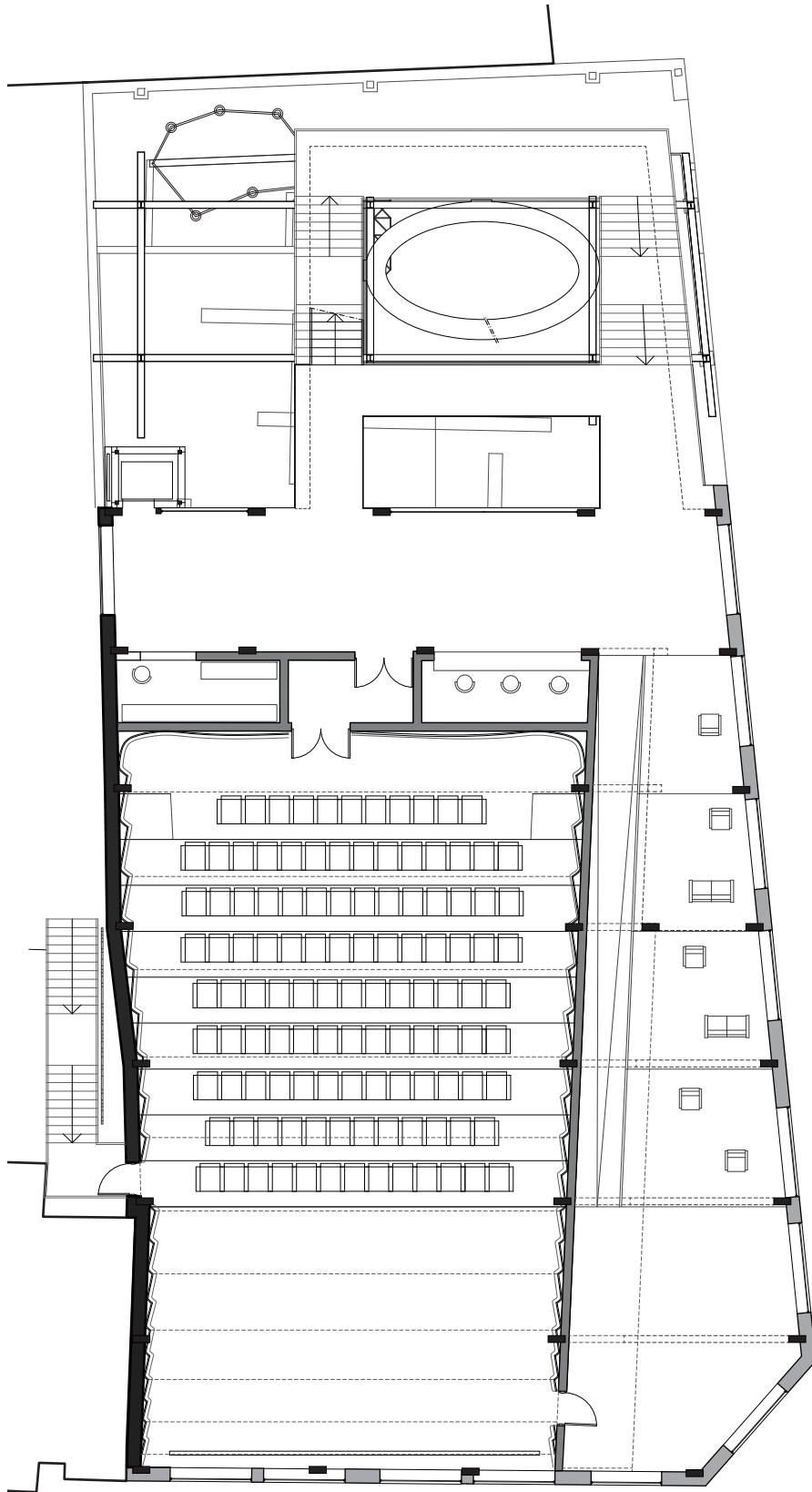
In a more literal way the materiality of the shop was represented in the material treatment of the foyer on the 1st floor.



The procession of the people going up the staircase is choreographed around old columns and beams which in some cases act as support for handrails and a slide.

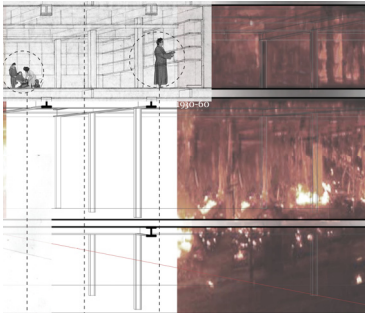


Staircase wrapping around a slide



First floor plan. Scale 1:200

Device 3. Cinema and Screen



Intersection of frames 3

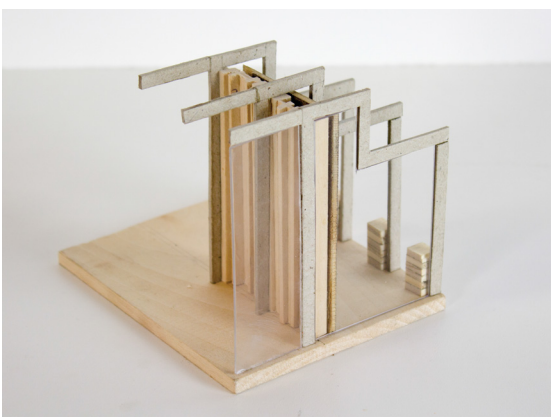
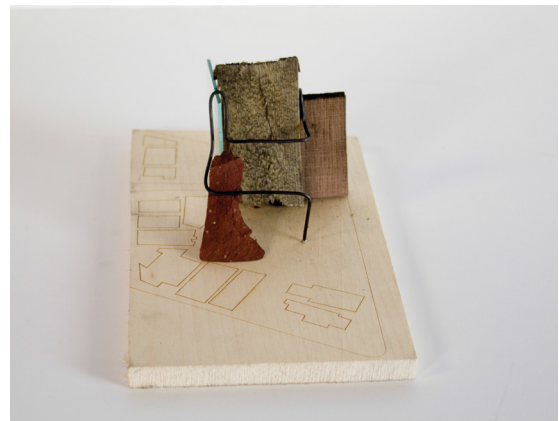
The third device is an indoor public space and a cinema. The cinema and film have a similar effect as the act of play on the psyche of a post-traumatic albeit through a different set of senses. According to Susan Buck-Morss' analysis of Walter Benjamin's writing,

... film shows a healing potential by slowing down time and, through montage, constructing "synthetic realities" as new spatiotemporal orders wherein the "fragmented images" are brought together "according to a new law". (Buck Morss 1989, 268)

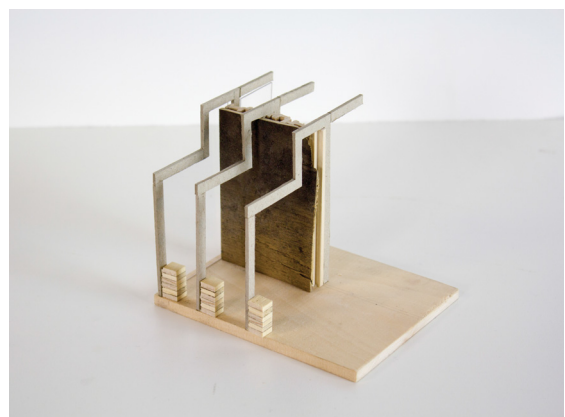
He also argues that cinema can act as a "shock absorber" of the effects of an urban crowd and other modern conditions which are even more acute today.



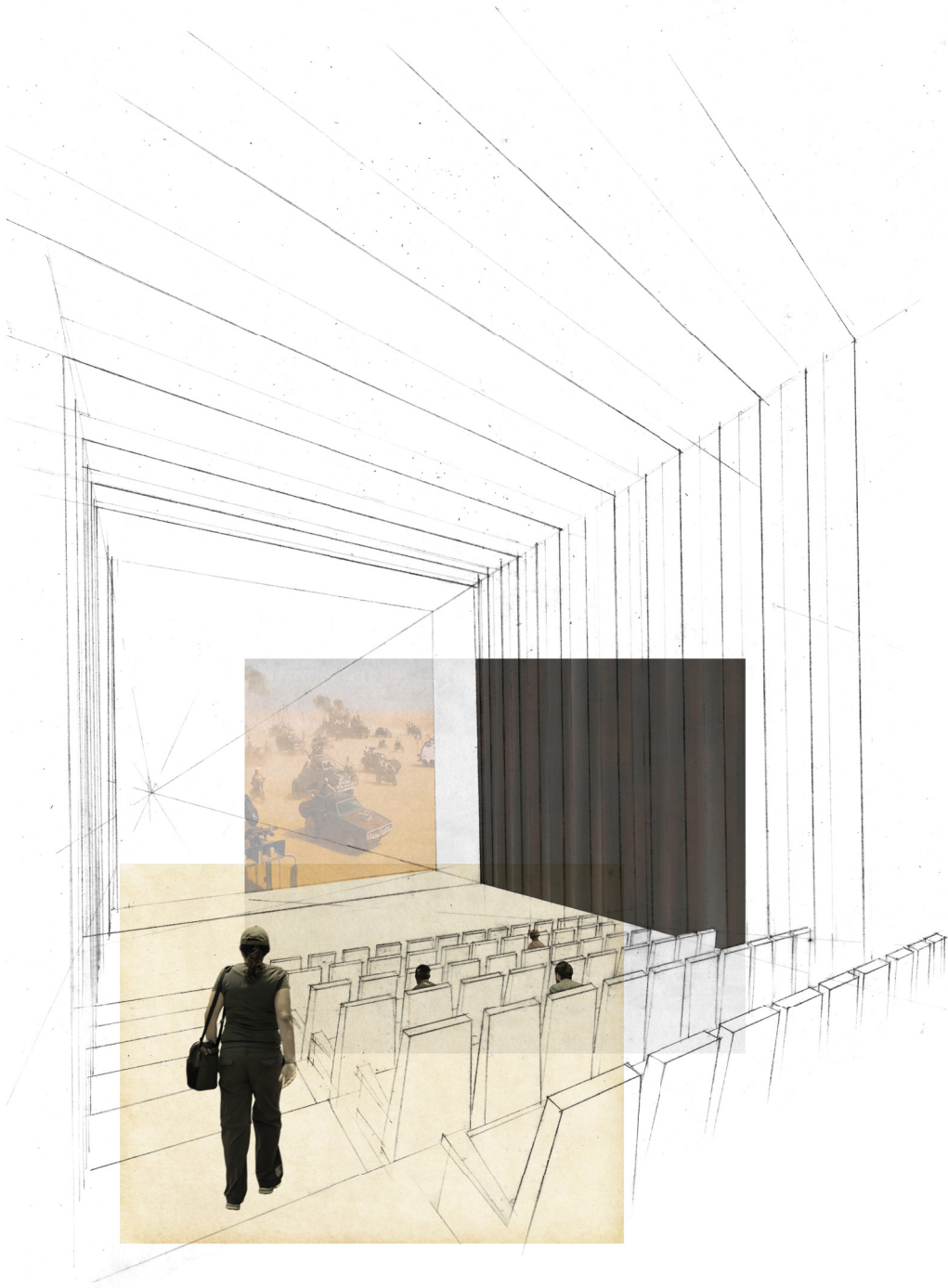
Abstract model of device 3



Analytical model of device 3



Shocks are “intercepted, parried by consciousness,” in order to prevent traumatic effect. Film provides the audience with a new capacity to study this modern existence reflectively, from “the position of a expert” (Buck Morss 1989, 268)



The cinema hall features dark wooden interior panels and ceiling in reference to the 1930s department store.



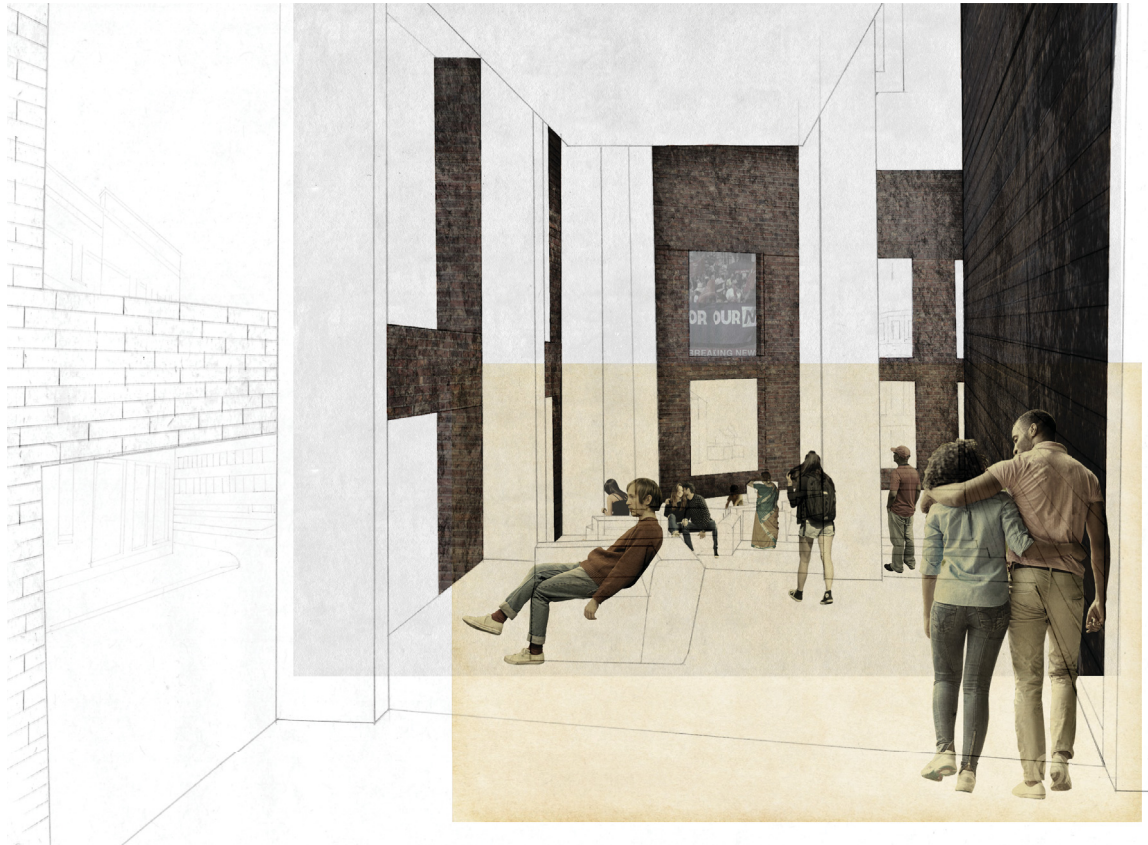
View from Tottenham High Road

The screen is positioned against the windows of the façade facing the Tottenham High road so that people on the street can see when the film is being shown through the windows of the existing façade of the building.



Indoor view of the screen

Beside the cinema hall there is the indoor public space along the south façade steps down towards the high street and opens up to it, establishing a strong visual connection.



Indoor public space

The public spaces are framed by a burnt brick wall of the existing façade and burnt wood-clad wall on the other, employing what Aldo Van Eyck would call “the ‘positive’ aspect of ‘plastic’ reality of its roughness” (Lefavre 2002, 29).

The focal point of the indoor public space is a large screen fitted in one of the window openings of the tower in the South-West corner of the building. The screen is used for projection of the news of social significance and advertising community events. This element follows the scenic character of the project and the event of which it is meant to keep memory.

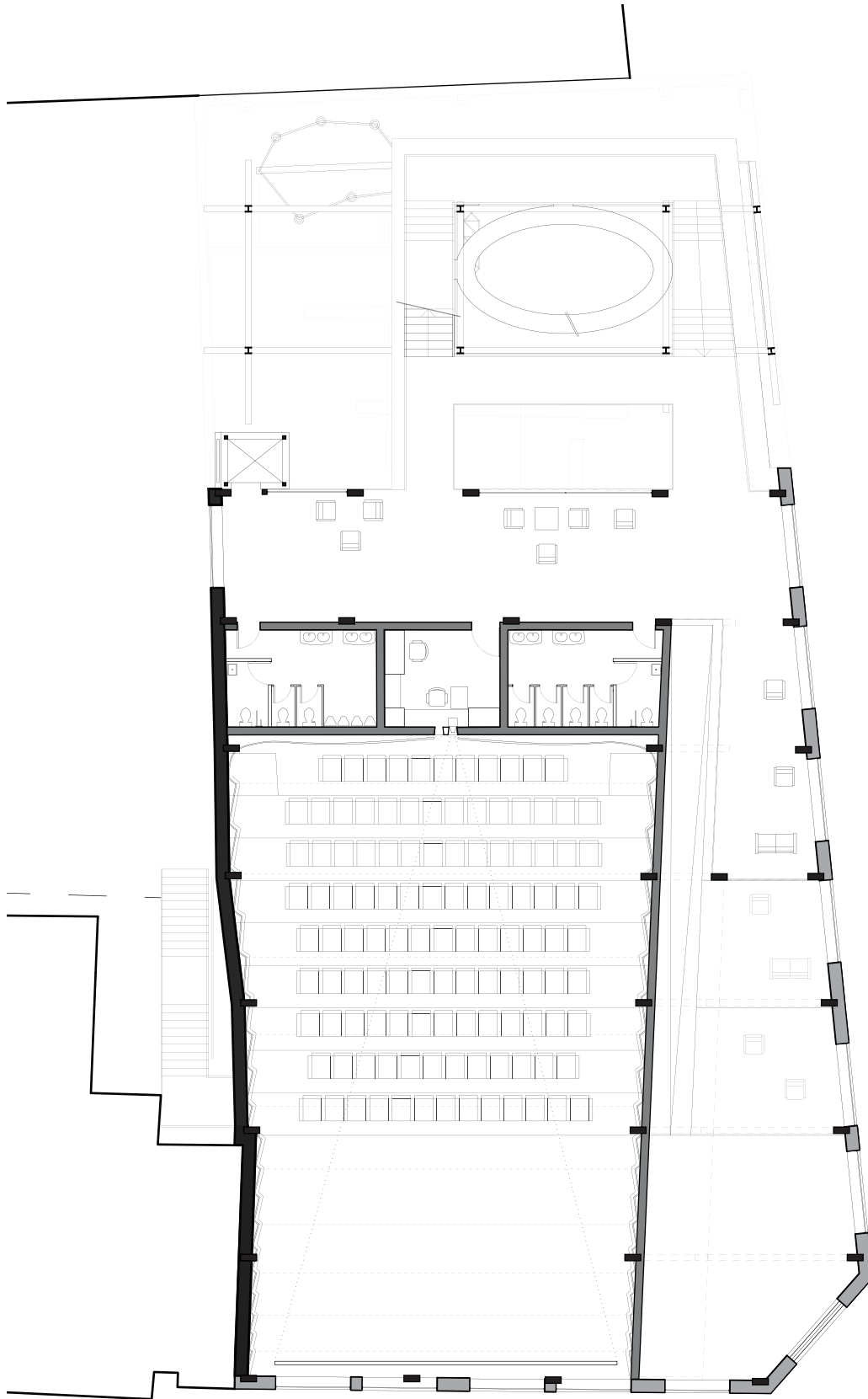


View of the screen from the intersection

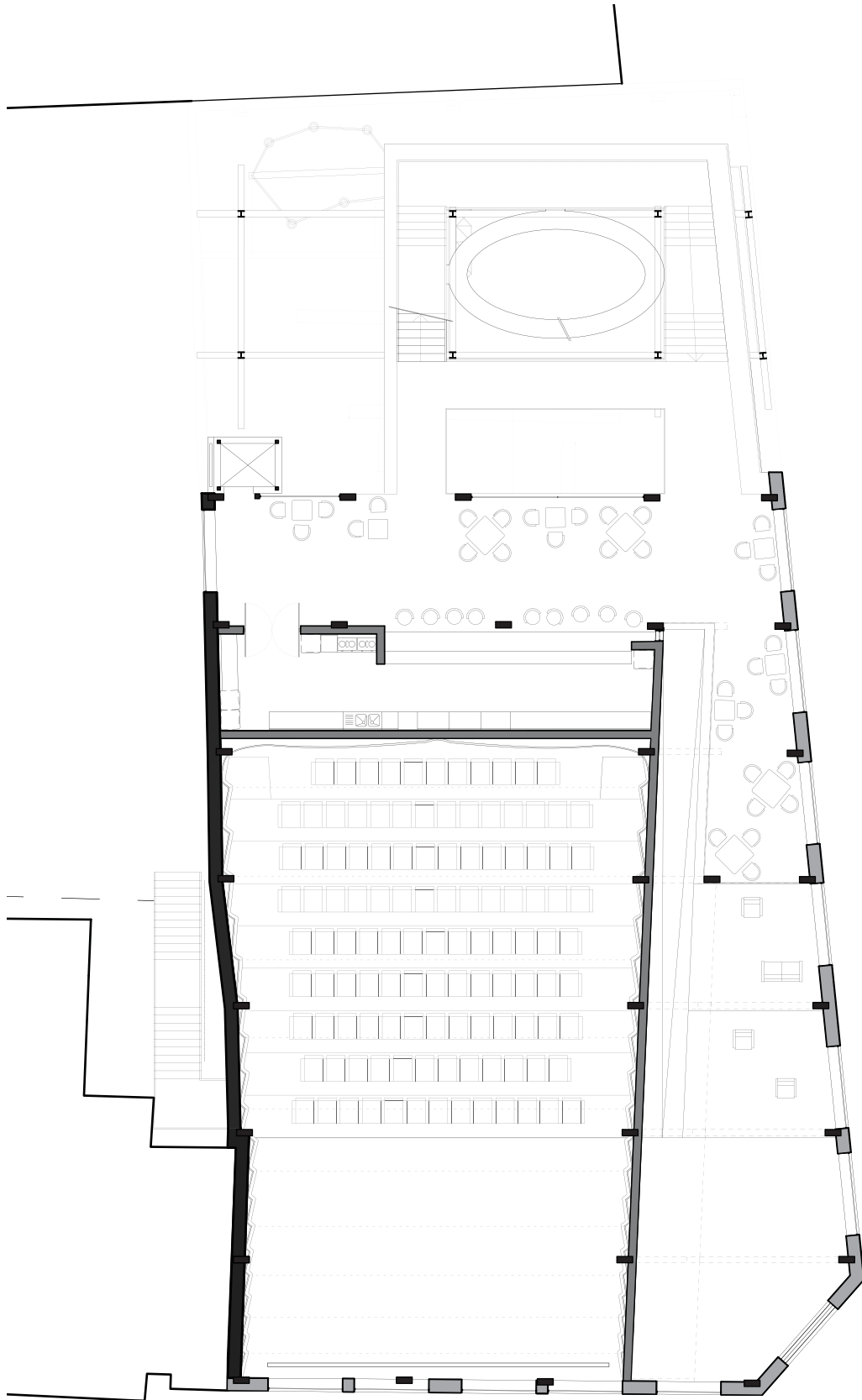
The second screen is installed in the same window facing the intersection. It shows the same footage as the screen directed towards the interior space. This device utilizes the same technique as used in the capitalist-driven Piccadilly Circus but with an aim to achieve an opposite effect of information as opposed to the disinformation of corporate advertising. It also emphasizes the presence of the building on this intersection and gives the building even more of a social significance in the neighbourhood.



The aesthetic of the indoor public space is replicated in the rooftop garden running along the South facade of the building



Second floor plan. Scale 1:200



Third floor plan. Scale 1:200

Aspirations

The mix of public programming, combined with a material palette rich with historical references of the building and the events that turned it into a ruin, is meant to engage people of all ages and social groups. The experiential immersion that is created by these spaces is meant to make the intervention more potent.

The different worlds represented through their respective materials migrate from floor to floor and intersect with one another and cannot be occupied separately making users cross the territories.

By mixing the signs and triggers of memory the design refers to the allegory and attempts to borrow the techniques used in cinema in constructing “emotional experience through montage and assembly” building on “the relationship of fragmentary and continuous experience” (Coates 2012, 38).

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Visions are needed today as much as they ever were, they sharpen criticism and strengthen hope. Whether they point to heaven or hell will depend on the degree to which they are understood as comments on reality rather than as blueprints for reality. (Markus 1985, 18)

When the society strives to be inclusive and democratic for architecture to also become inclusive is the ultimate goal. This means that we, as a profession, cannot hide anymore behind the facade of the so-called “good taste” as established by the elites and corporate interests but seek beauty in what is considered “mundane” and “disturbing” as they both are no less important in the way they contribute to our collective memory.

This “honest spatial mix” (Till 2013) can not only reflect the mix that already exists in the society but possibly lead by example when the society itself is on the crossroads and is not sure about its direction (as, one can argue, is the case in England now). We need to create more architectural attempts, more scenarios of how this can be achieved to encourage further questioning.

This project has sought to create one of these scenarios utilizing the symbolic site but trying to merge it with the words that were lost and forgotten behind the drama and shocking image of the riot. This proposal is a vision rather than an instruction and it strives to be a catalyst for dialogue not only within the profession but in the wider community as well.

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