

RE-IMAGING POPLAR / NEGOTIATING TRANSITION

natasha reid design

in collaboration with Urban Works, South Africa

As part of the New Perspectives research & innovation residency for the
International Architecture Showcase 2014



RE-IMAGINING POPLAR / NEGOTIATING TRANSITION

Natasha Reid Design was one of ten UK-based architecture practices selected by the British Council to be paired with architects from around the world for their International Architecture Showcase in 2014. The teams collaborated to generate fresh ideas and new thinking for sites undergoing regeneration in Poplar and the Lea Valley.

The participating practices collaborated over a two week period critically exploring five themes: housing, culture, town centres, nature and transition. UK practices included Sarah Wigglesworth, Duggan Morris and MUF.

Natasha Reid Design worked with Johannesburg-based Urbanworks to investigate the theme of Transition on an industrial site adjacent to the Limehouse Cut.

TRANSITION BRIEF

“As transformations and changes take place communities are affected. Transition has historically permeated Poplar and affected its communities for better or for worse.

With the dramatic changes set to take place in the area, how can we plan for this transition and how can we assure that communities are engaged and not alienated by the changes taking place?

How can transition be celebrated and harnessed rather than seen as an inevitable outcome of “progress”?

What does a transition in industries and commerce mean to an area and how can this change be managed?”

NEGOTIATION TRANSITION OVERVIEW

The study investigated whether a high-density, more adaptable ownership model for overlapping uses and people can provide a resilient solution for places in transition and create neighbourhoods of character, distinctiveness and vitality.

Drawing upon the industrial history of the Empson Street site, the project presents a reinterpretation of the areas rich heritage as a place of making and servicing London.

A new mixed-use live/work quarter is proposed, where micro-manufacturer and maker co-operatives self-build their environment and become embedded into the place through collective authorship and access to ownership.

APPROACH

The project explores the opportunity for collaborative architectural making as a catalyst for civic empowerment, driven by a focus on the human experience of the city and sense of place.

By giving authorship to existing and future communities, the process aims to create places which have collective meaning and distinctive identity.

The proposal explores whether it is possible to work at a big scale whilst remaining in some way intimate.

By understanding the fragile qualities of the city, its patina, grain, character, materiality, the approach is to reveal and enhance what is already there through humanly-scaled interventions and strategic incisions, rather than overlaying something else on top.

As opposed to creating a singular, iconic visual image, can architecture be instead a framework for combining material, space and light with activity, vitality, interaction?

PROGRAMME BACKGROUND

The residency's programmers, partners and advisors included;

Vicky Richardson, Director of architecture, design and fashion at the British Council

Moira Lascelles, Programme curator

Rory Hyde, Curator of Contemporary Architecture & Urbanism, V&A Museum

Eleanor Fawcett, Head of Design, London Legacy Development Corporation

Mark Brearley, Head of CASS Cities

Matthew Frith, Deputy CEO, London Wildlife Trust

Mark Swenarton, Architectural Historian and Critic

The new ideas of Poplar were presented on 21st June as the culmination of the International Showcase, held at Erno Goldfinger's Balfour Tower as part of the London Festival of Architecture.

Design as Research

Through our work,
we continuously strive
to develop ways to
make better places for
people by exploring
how space can be used
as a tool for change and
transformation.



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TEN IDEAS FOR POPLAR

12-2.30PM

12.00 INTRODUCTION – MOIRA LASCELLES, PROGRAMME CURATOR (CHAIR)

HOUSING

12.10 DK:CM AND AET ADER (ESTONIA)

12.20 KARAKUSAVIC CARSON ARCHITECTS AND BCVA (DENMARK)

12.30 DUGGAN MORRIS AND ZAV ARCHITECTS (IRAN)

12.40 FEEDBACK AND QUESTIONS

NATURE

12.50 FRIEND & COMPANY AND JONATHAN NSUBUGA (UGANDA)

TOWN CENTRE

13.00 STUDIO TILT AND MOE+ (NIGERIA)

13.10 THE DECORATORS AND ISSS RESEARCH&ARCHITECTURE (AUSTRIA)

13.20 FEEDBACK AND QUESTIONS

CULTURE

13.30 MUF AND MoVe (CHILE)

13.40 DELVENDAHL MARTIN AND GAISS ARCHITECTS (LATVIA)

TRANSITION

13.50 SARAH WIGGLESWORTH ARCHITECTS AND KANE YANAGAWA (TAIWAN)

14.00 NATASHA REID AND URBANWORKS ARCHITECTURE AND
URBANISM (SOUTH AFRICA)

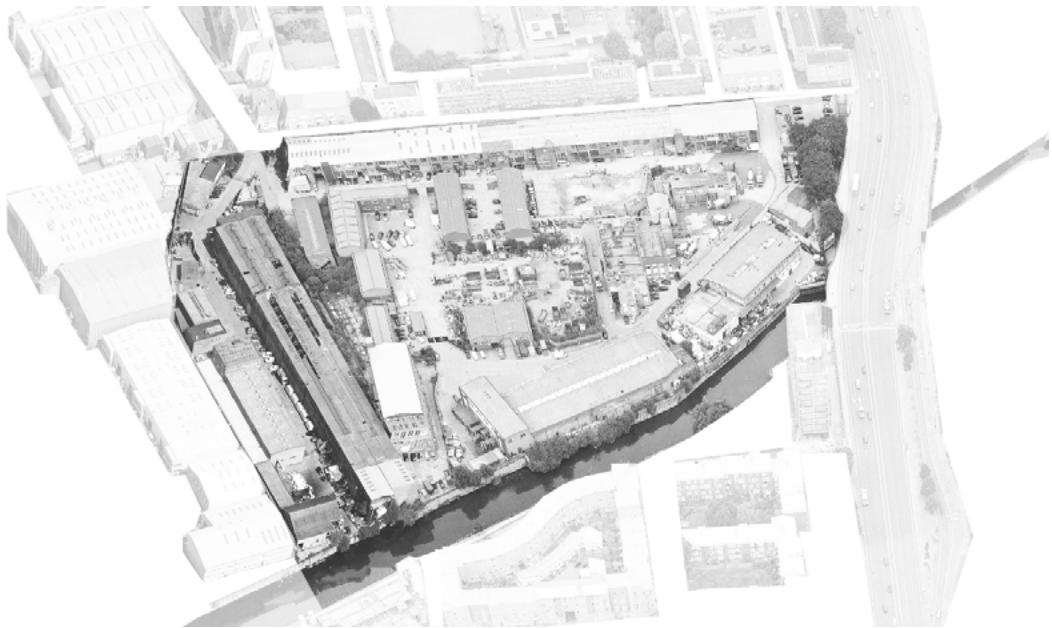
14.20 FEEDBACK AND QUESTIONS – ADVISORS/AUDIENCE

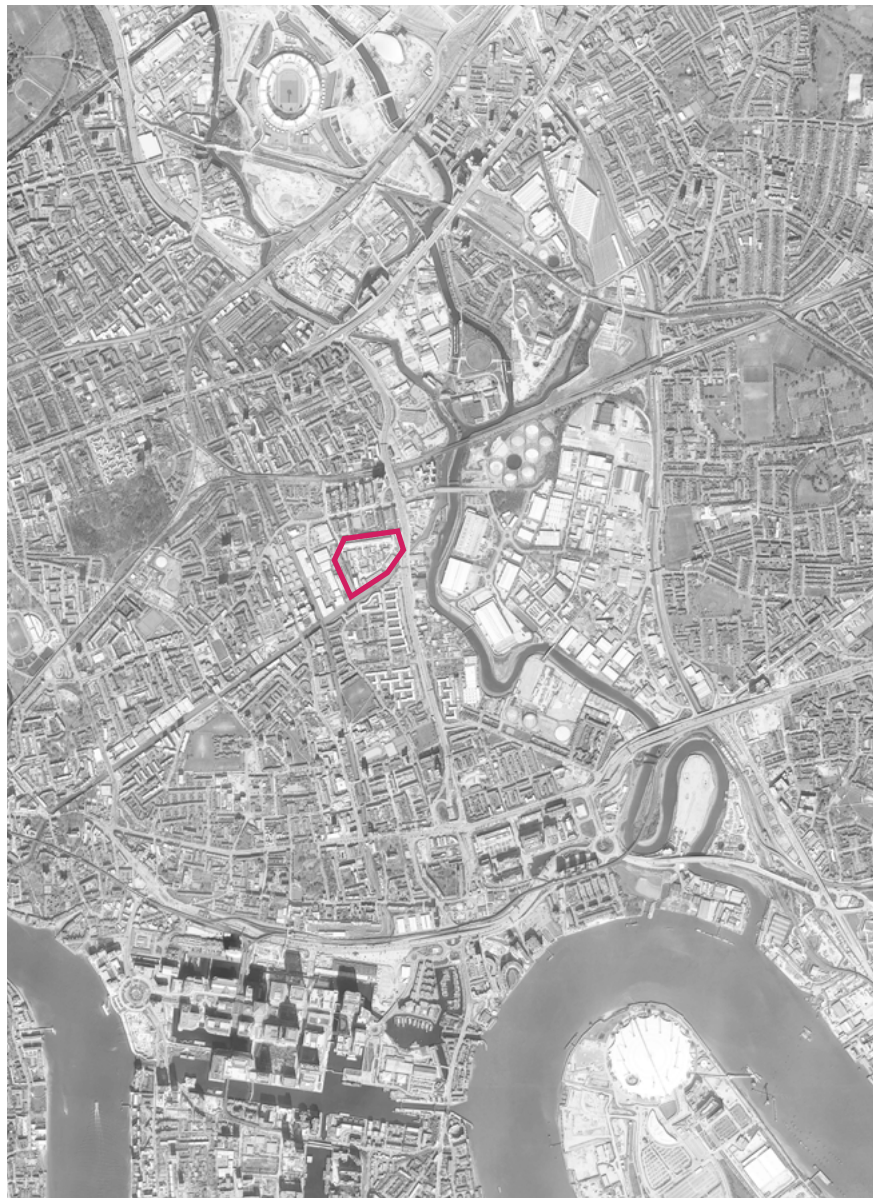
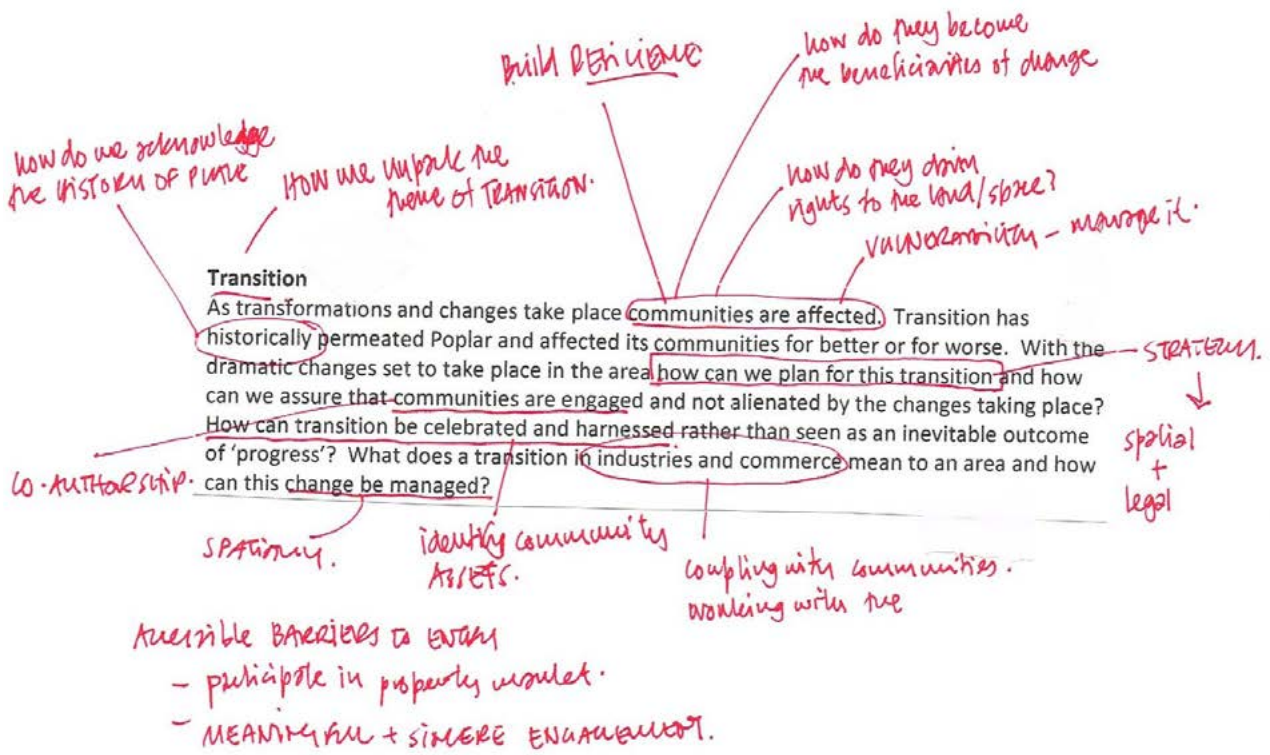
14.30 EVENT ENDS

With thanks to:

Rory Hyde, Curator of Contemporary Architecture and Urbanism, Victoria & Albert Museum, Matthew Frith, Deputy CEO, London Wildlife Trust, Mark Swenarton, Architectural Historian and Critic, Eleanor Fawcett, Head of Design, London Legacy Development Corporation and Mark Brearley, Head of CASS Cities.

10 DAYS
10 TEAMS
5 SITES
5 THEMES





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ATTITUDE

In the context of the dramatic urban transformations taking place in East London, the project interrogates the effects of drastic change on people and place.

Who are the authors of this change and can we ensure that communities are not vulnerable, alienated or displaced by this?

Is there an alternative to the insensitive, generic redevelopment which threatens the areas unique character and identity?

In the face of these towering islands of closed development, built as investment projects rather than homes, can we address the urgent need for cohesive regeneration which considers the everyday experience of the public realm?





PLACE
Honouring sense of place.
History.
Architecture.
Generate civic elements!

ADDINGTONS

LOCK
KEEPERS



RIGHTS

Inclusivity / Access.
Tenures.
Public / Private

APPROACH

The project explores the opportunity for collaborative architectural making as a catalyst for civic empowerment, driven by a focus on the human experience of the city and sense of place.

By giving authorship to existing and future communities, the process aims to create places which have collective meaning and distinctive identity.

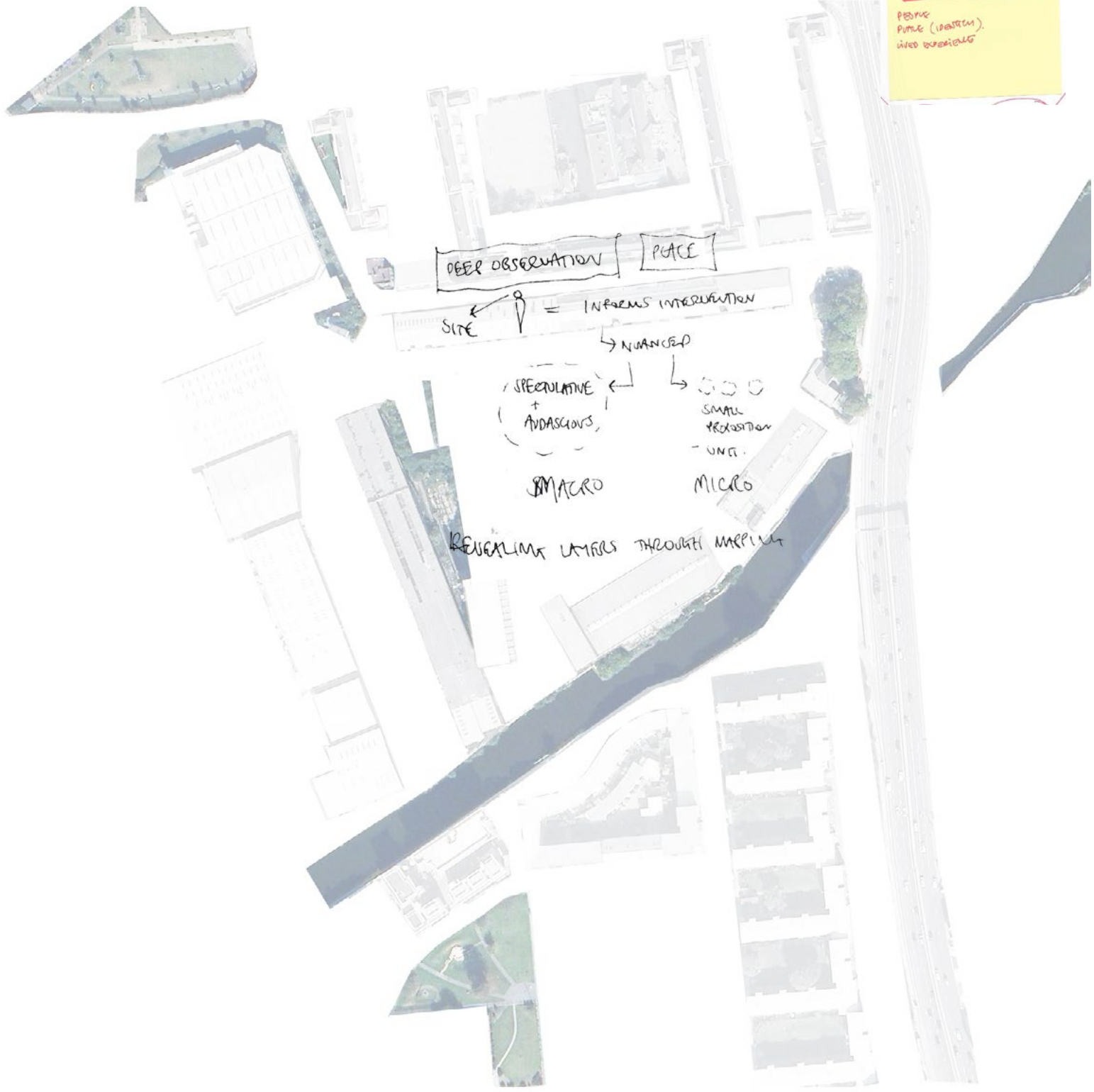
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NARRATIVE

PEOPLE
PLACE (CONTEXT)
INTERVENTIONS



FINDING A SPACE BETWEEN FORMAL AND INFORMAL WAYS OF CITY-MAKING

1

EMBEDDING PEOPLE:
HANDMADE CITY

2

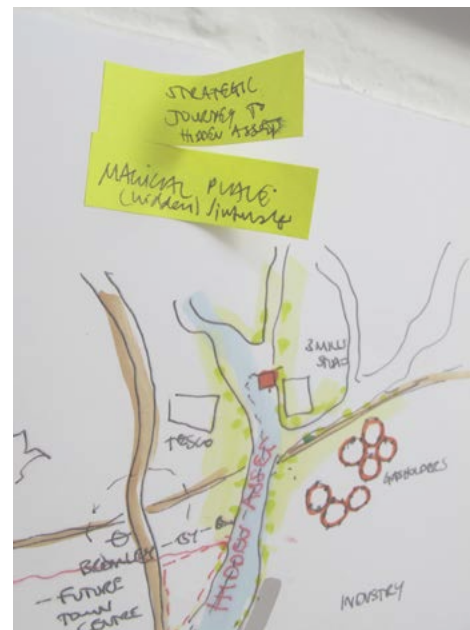
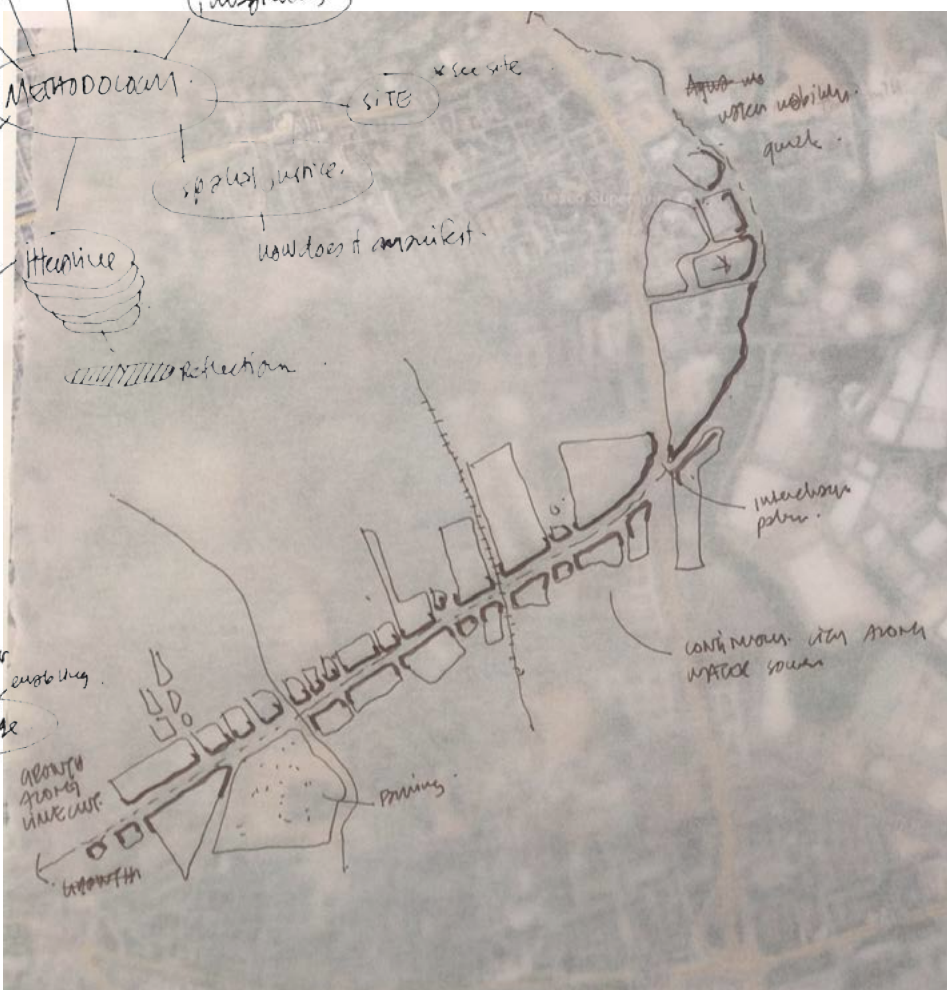
SENSE OF PLACE:
INTIMACY & INFRASTRUCTURE

3

METHODS FOR MAKING:
MULTIPLICITY & MECHANISMS

4

CRITICAL QUESTIONS



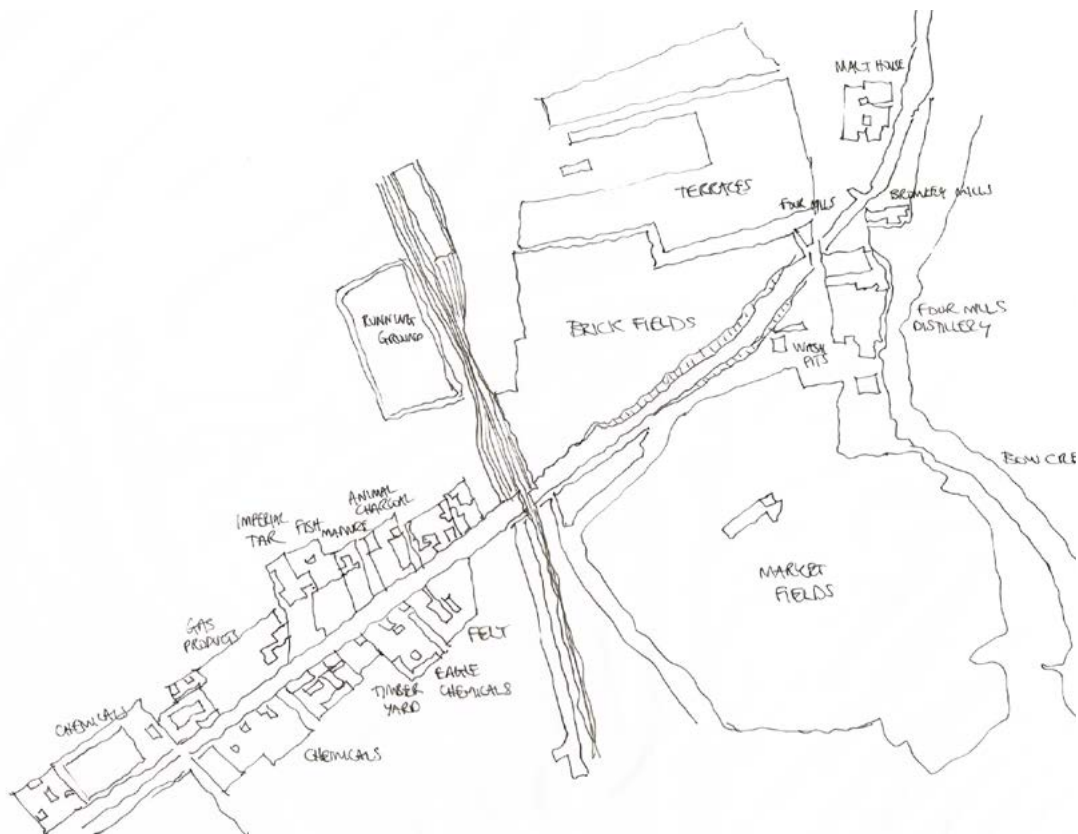
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1

EMBEDDING PEOPLE: HANDMADE CITY

Drawing upon the industrial history of the Empson Street site, the project presents a reinterpretation of the areas rich heritage as a place of making and servicing London.

A new mixed-use live/work quarter is proposed, where micro-manufacturer and maker co-operatives self-build their environment and become embedded into the place through collective authorship and access to ownership.





Live/work. 13a Poplar High St, London | c. 1900 | © Tower Hamlets Local History Library



Early nineteenth-century weavers' workhomes | Crossland Square, Bethnal Green, London | Photograph 1954 | © Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archive

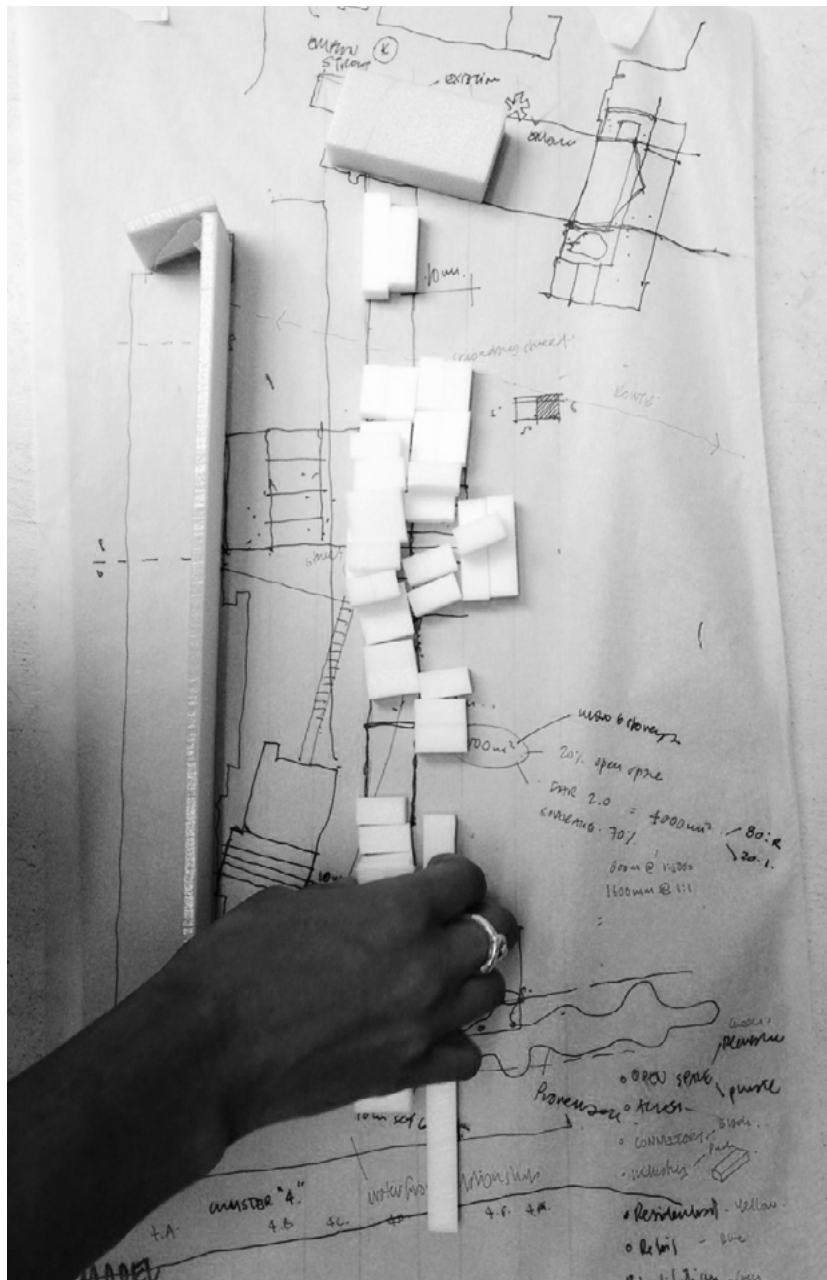


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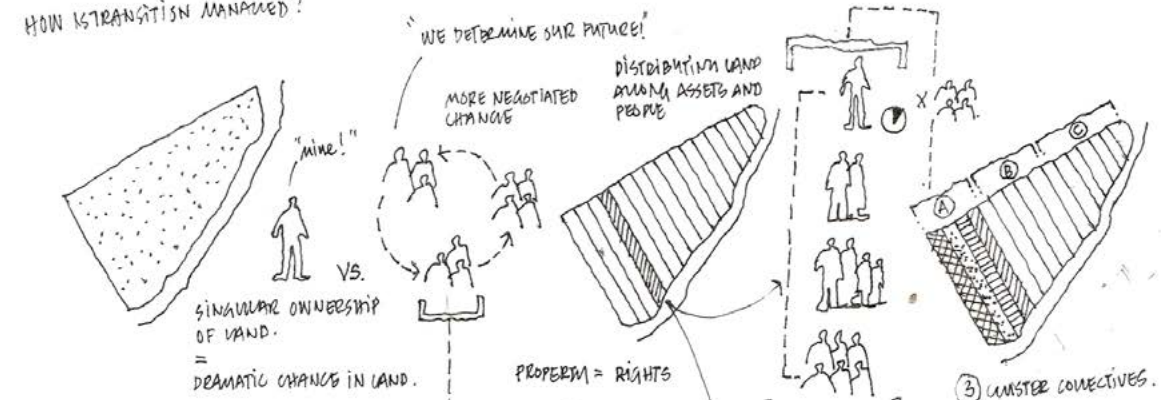
1

EMBEDDING PEOPLE: HANDMADE CITY

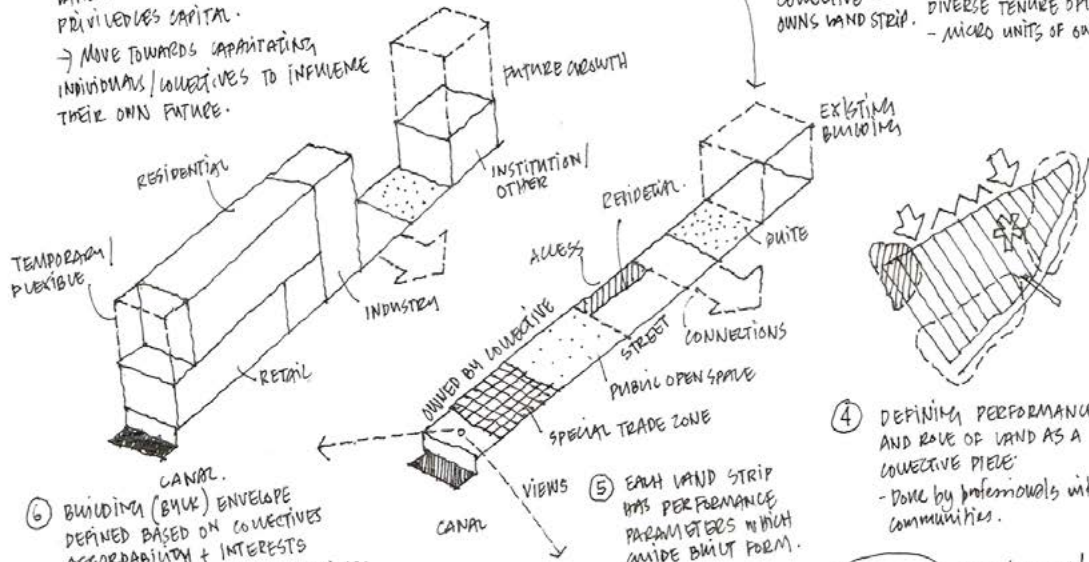
With the desire for close community and co-working relationships as the driving force for spatial organization, would the resulting hand-made urbanism generate a distinctively different type of space?



HOW IS TRANSITION MANAGED?



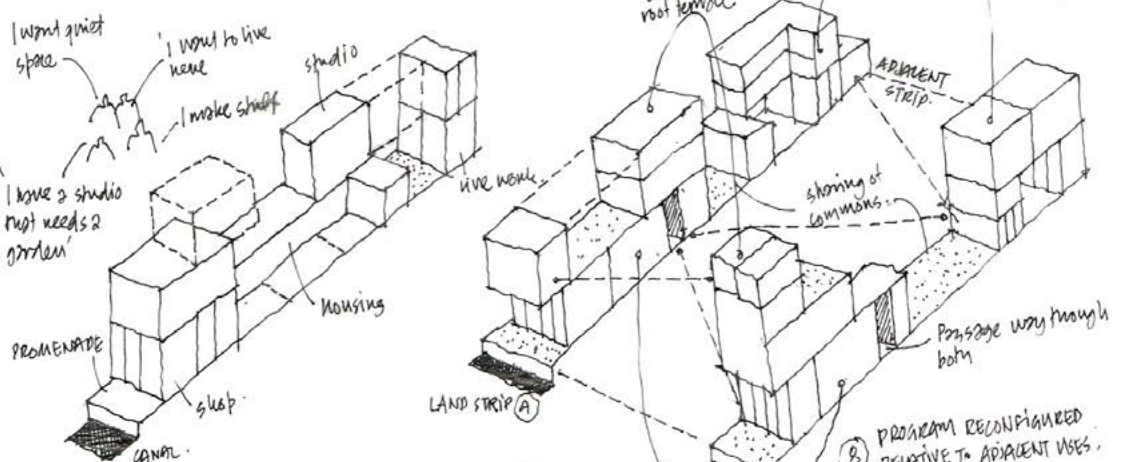
① THE CURRENT RELATIONSHIP OF LAND OWNERSHIP IN LONDON PRIVILEGES CAPITAL.
→ MOVE TOWARDS APPROPRIATING INDIVIDUALS / COLLECTIVES TO INFLUENCE THEIR OWN FUTURE.



⑥ BUILDING (BULK) ENVELOPE DEFINED BASED ON COLLECTIVES AFFORDABILITY + INTERESTS - WHAT'S AVAILABLE / BASKET OF RIGHTS.

④ DEFINING PERFORMANCE AND ROLE OF LAND AS A COLLECTIVE PIECE: - Done by professionals with communities.

⑤ EACH LAND STRIP HAS PERFORMANCE PARAMETERS WHICH GUIDE BUILT FORM.



③ RE-ARRANGEMENT OF RIGHTS BASED ON NEGOTIATION OF COLLECTIVE ON WHAT IS REQUIRED.

⑧ PROGRAM RECONFIGURED RELATIVE TO ADJACENT USES.

2

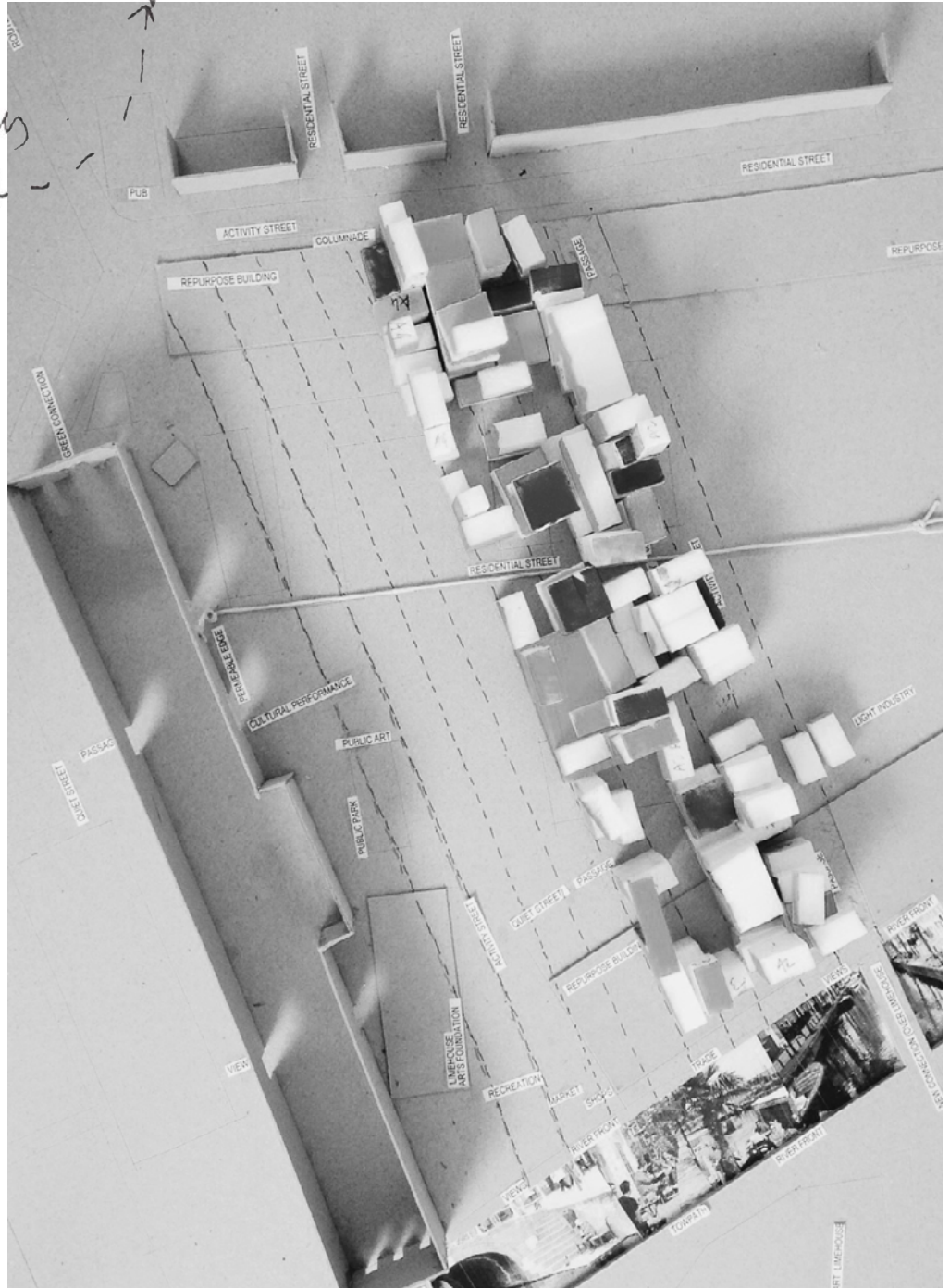
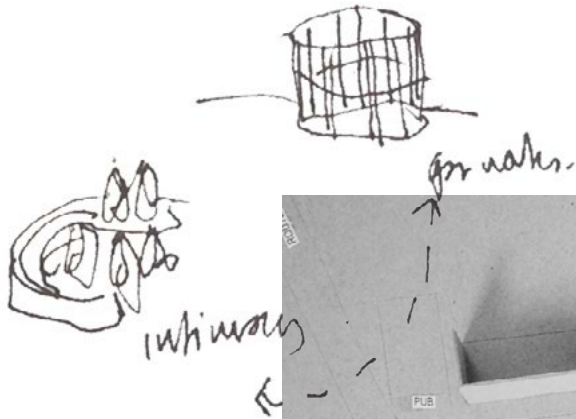
SENSE OF PLACE: INTIMACY & INFRASTRUCTURE

Parallel to the self-organising principles which seek to generate worlds suited the inhabitation of individuals and groups, the project concurrently addresses the macro scale of the urban condition and wider civic concerns.

The existing disjunction of intimate spaces and industrial spaces found in Poplar is celebrated by juxtaposing the scale of the vast industrial buildings forming the edges of the site, with the micro scale of the new insertions.

An urban framework is defined by drawing upon the particular sense of place in order to shape, nuance and translate the new community-led desires to respond to the specificities of the context.





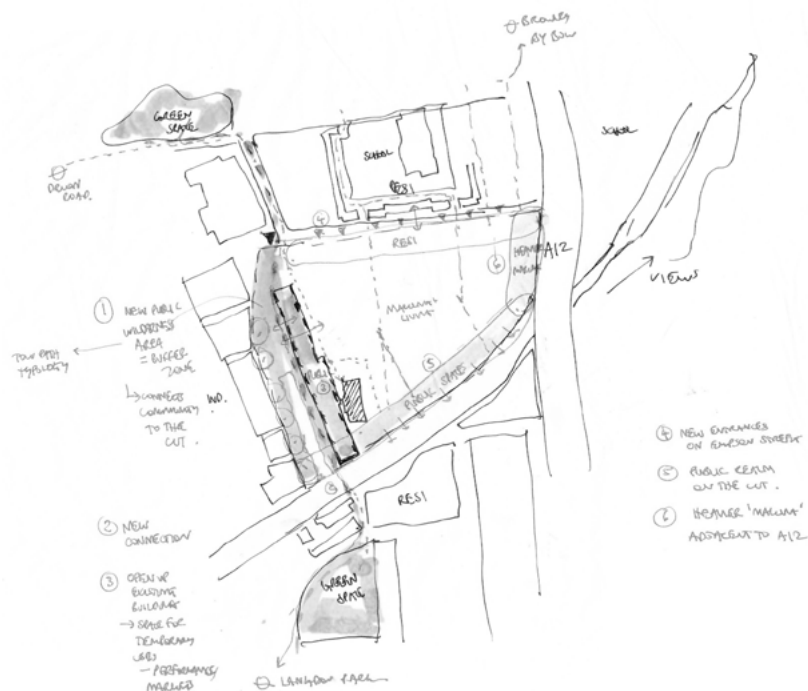
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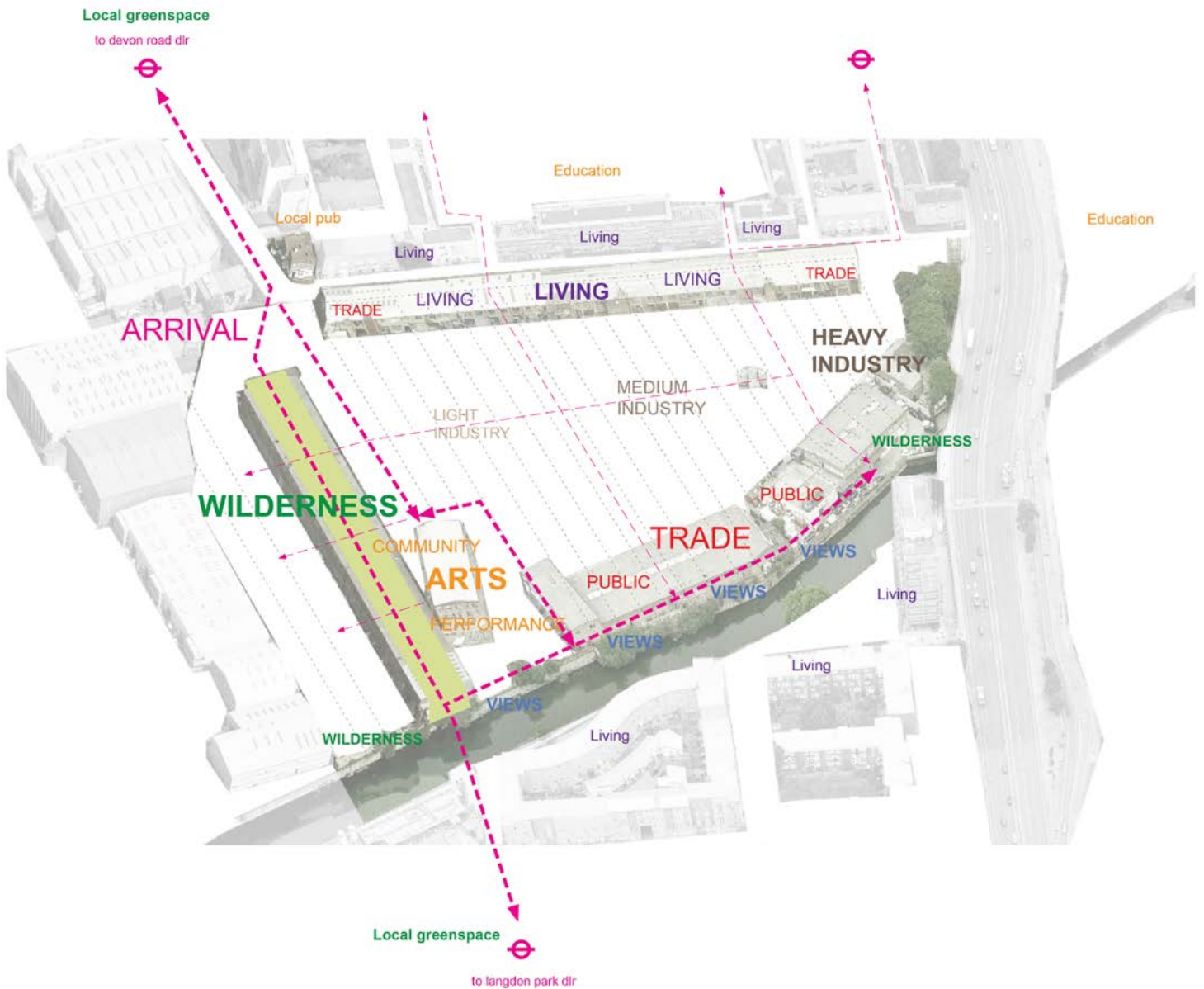
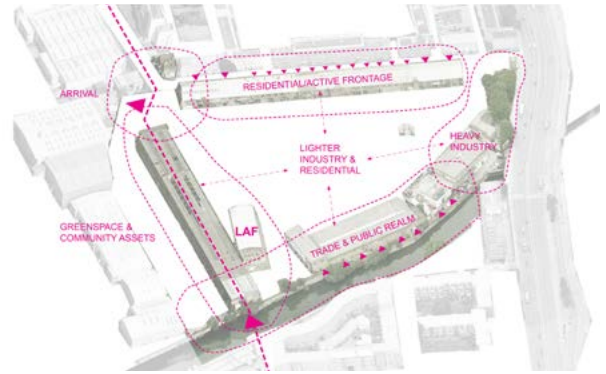
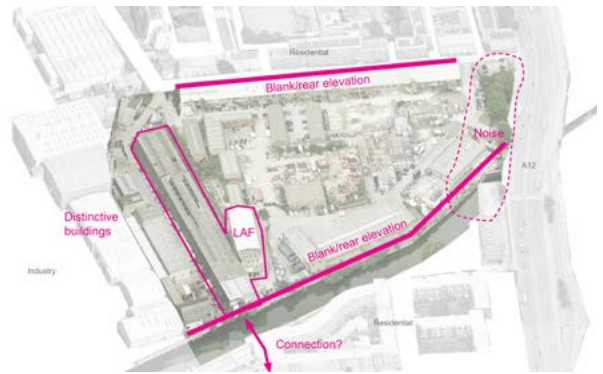
2

SENSE OF PLACE: INTIMACY & INFRASTRUCTURE

As opposed to a Tabula Rasa approach, the existing buildings at the boundaries are appropriated as communal assets, so the memory of the site's history endures whilst its use can evolve and adapt.

Re-imagined as civic infrastructure, the brick structures are made permeable to create a series of distinctive public places and stitch the new quarter into the fabric of the city. Their transformation creates essential connections, reveals the areas hidden assets and brings activity to the underused Limehouse Cut.





3

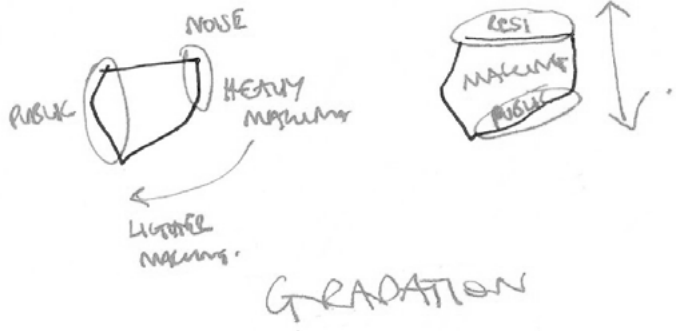
METHODS FOR MAKING: MULTIPLICITY & MECHANISMS

DESIGN BY EXPERIENCES & FRAGMENTS

By taking an immersive approach, designing from inside out, the process explores the character and atmospheres of the new “places” through the tactile nature of materials and through a visual language of intimacy, opacity, depth, discovery, mystery, shadow and light.

Vibrant spaces of activity are juxtaposed with secret spaces of contemplation, whilst the ambiguity of thresholds and boundaries between different types of spaces allows for interstitial, transitional places where not everything is defined.

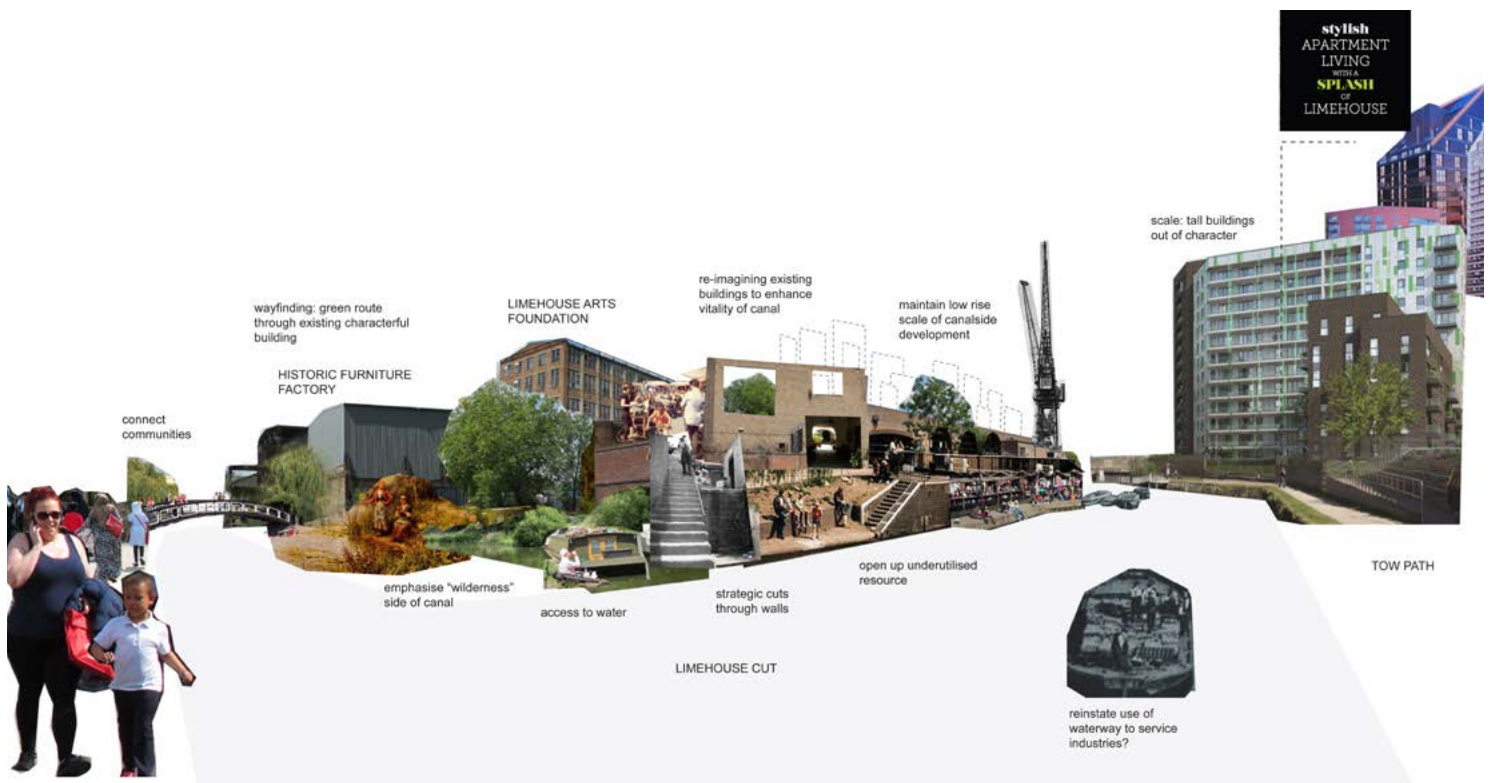
By assembling experiences, the accretive design process develops layers and fragments of spaces which can evolve, transform and adapt.



3

METHODS FOR MAKING: MULTIPLICITY & MECHANISMS

The design process is in contradiction to the process of architecture as “object-making”, which is dictated by a dominant idea which closes down from the concept to the detail. Instead, the aim is for spaces to grow through scenes, journeys, episodes and detailed elaborations. It is concerned with interaction, adaptability, and moments, rather than an idealized realization of a singular image.



wayfinding: green route through existing characterful building

HISTORIC FURNITURE FACTORY

LIMEHOUSE ARTS FOUNDATION

re-imagining existing buildings to enhance vitality of canal

maintain low rise scale of canalside development

emphasise "wilderness" side of canal

access to water

strategic cuts through walls

open up underutilised resource

LIMEHOUSE CUT

3

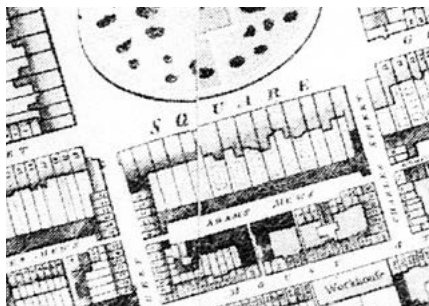
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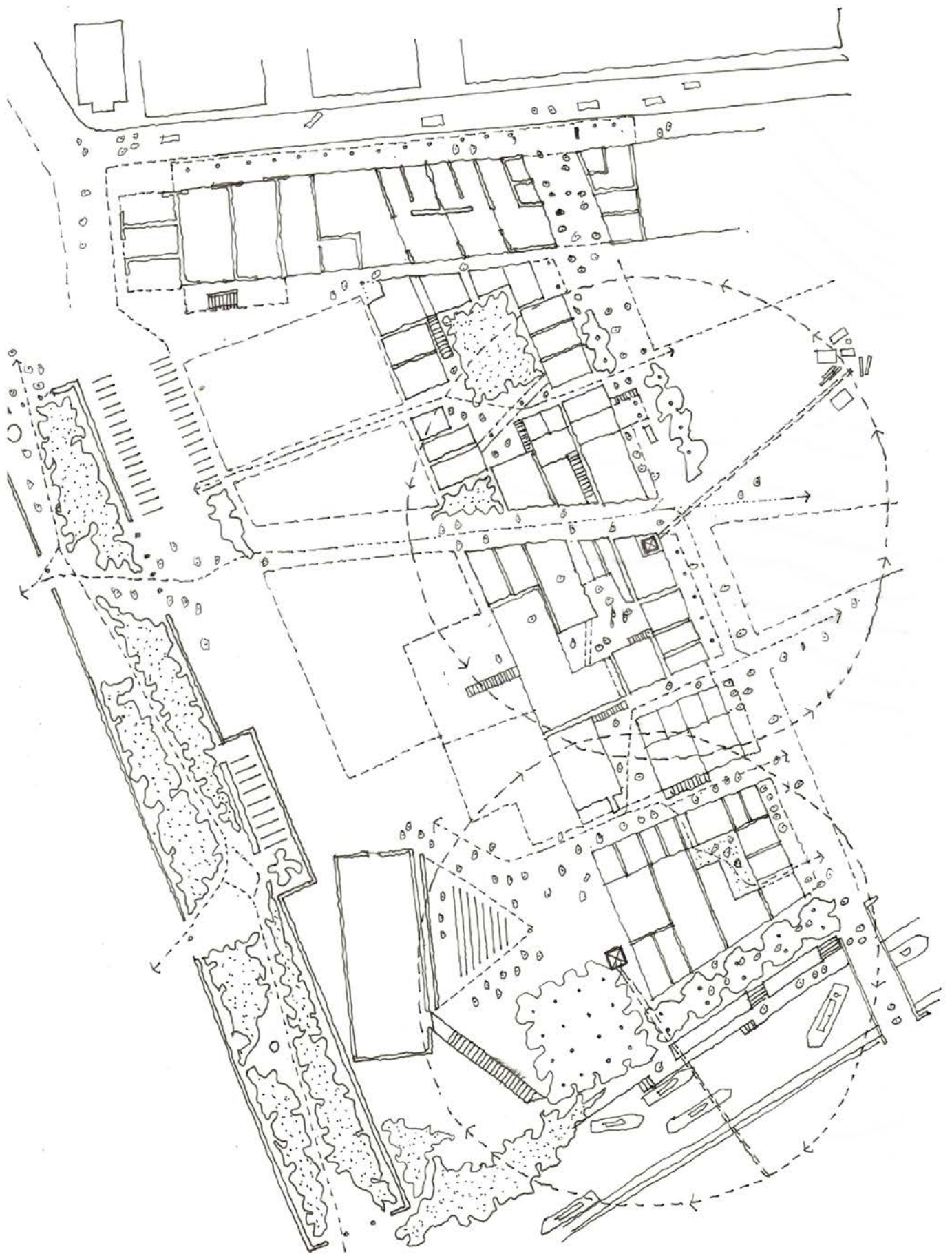
DESIGNING DIVERSITY & UNIFORMITY

The framework for a more informal, “hand-made” approach to city-making is based on humanly-scaled typological components which generate an intimate, complex and vibrant urban realm of dense, overlapping spaces and uses.

The boundaries between places of living and working are blurred and permeated by a network of passages and courtyards, encouraging communal activities.

The formal language of porosity, layering and accretion is juxtaposed with a “pattern-book” approach to materiality and architecture detailing to allow diversity and uniformity to occur at once



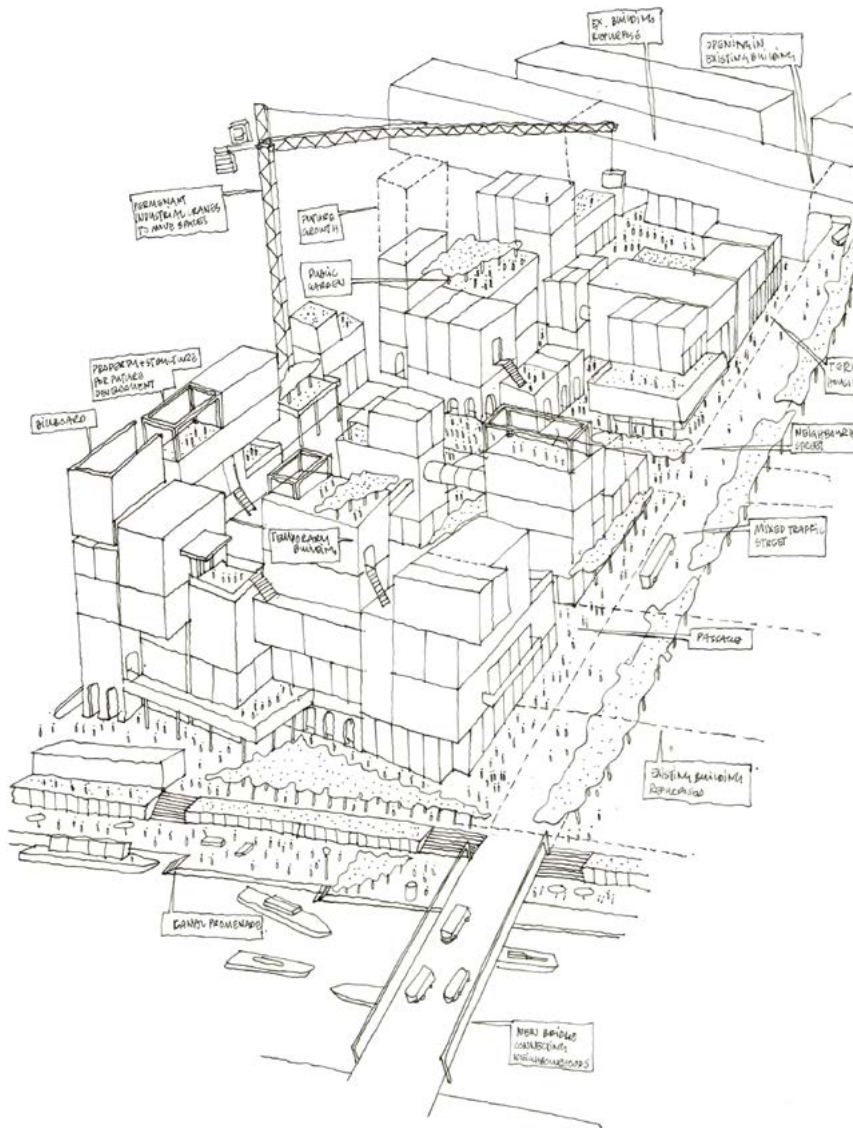


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CRITICAL QUESTIONS

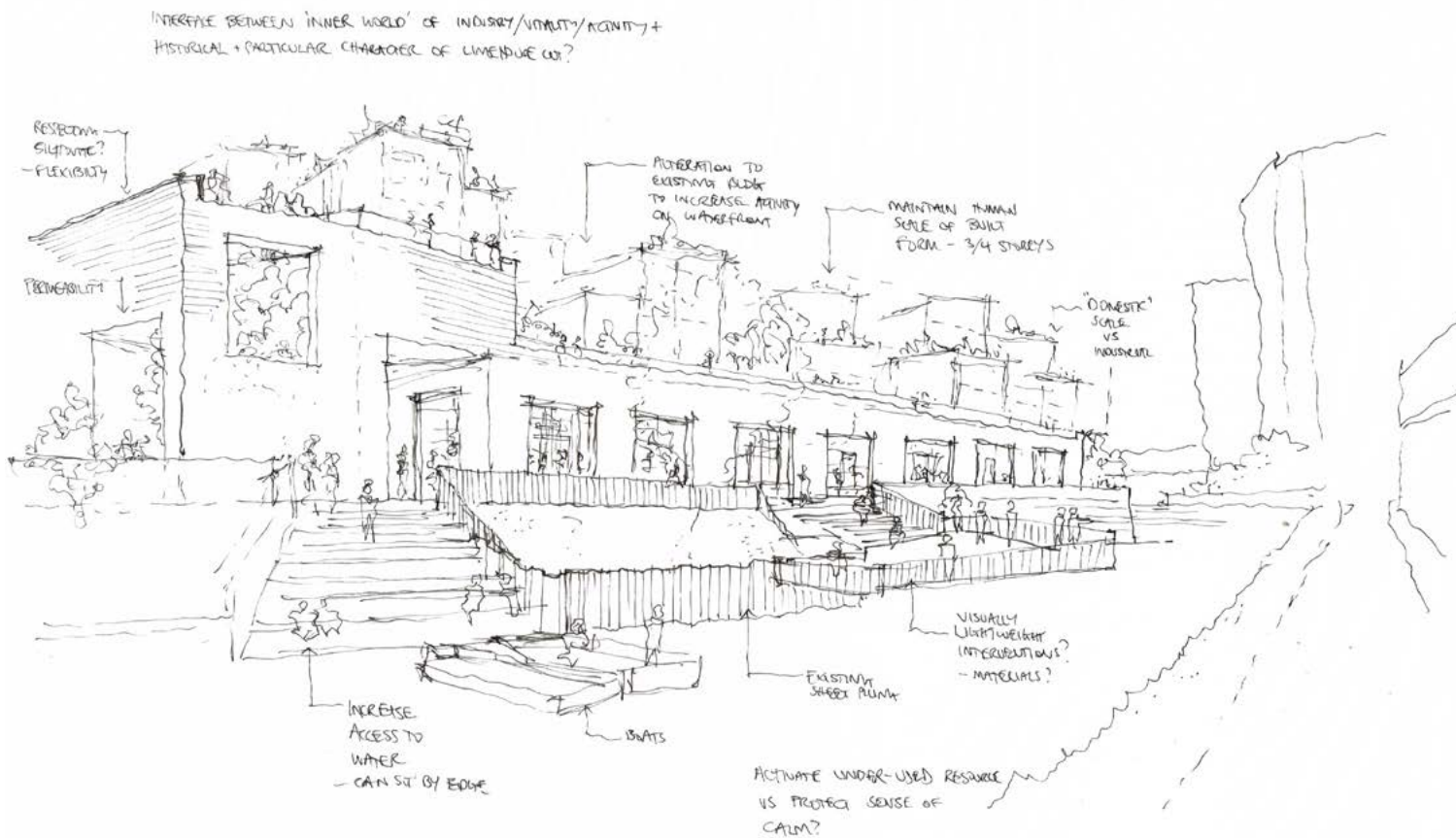
INTERVENTIONS & INCISIONS SENSITIVITY & SUBJECTIVITY

The sense of informality and appropriation of spaces celebrates the spirit of East London entrepreneurship, allowing communities and built fabric to endure and evolve.



However, in order to respond to the sense of place meaningfully, it is important to find a way of making interventions and incisions in a minimum way, requiring critical sensitivity and subjectivity.

For example, how do you celebrate and reveal the hidden intimacy and special character of the Limehouse Cut, and conversely how much of that can you expose before the intimate qualities become lost?



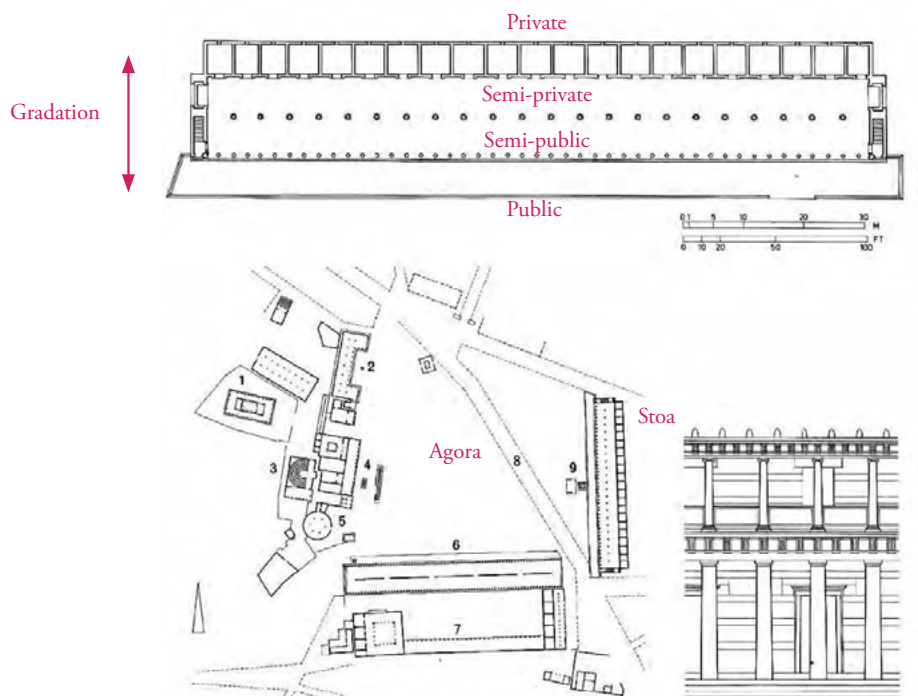
4 CRITICAL QUESTIONS

PUBLIC SPACE, INFORMALITY, VITALITY

Is it possible to “design” informality and vitality?
What are the processes, beyond the formal and visual, for the public to take ownership of spaces?

Can the precedent of the Agora and semi-public, semi-private Stoa inform a more meaningful type of public realm, bounded by porous, permeable buildings which allow activity to inhabit a variety of spatial conditions?

Can spaces of transition, between inside and out, public and private, catalyse civic life and exchange by blurring boundaries between different activities. How can these flexible spaces be appropriated and colonised by different groups of people?





beyond appearances

about NRD

Natasha Reid Design is a fresh-thinking, spatial design agency dedicated to harnessing the potential of places to make life better, embrace the human spirit and enable people and organisations to thrive.

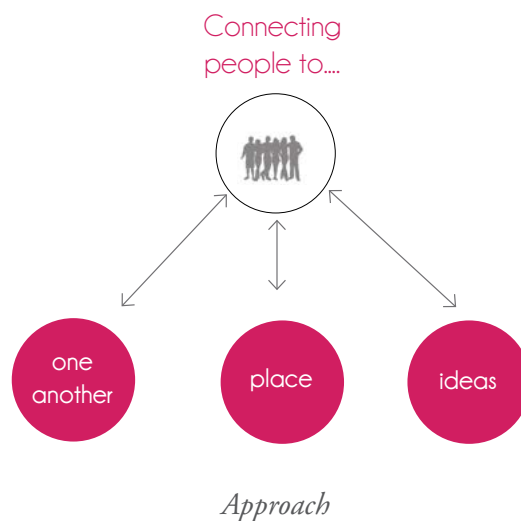
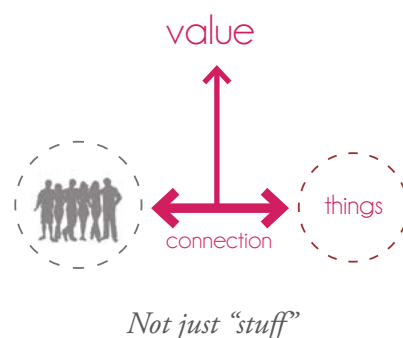
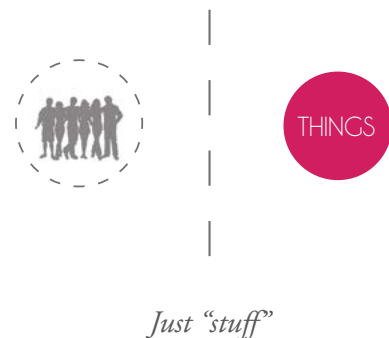
We work with and on behalf of visionary organisations, institutions, businesses and community groups to develop transformational projects that propel their purposes and provide aspirational solutions for those they serve.

We are committed to a “people-conscious” sensibility, the purposeful design of outcomes and spatial solutions that can spark emotion, delight and sociability. We operate across the mediums of architecture, urban design and public art to realise diverse aims. We love working with people to make great things happen, together.

BEYOND APPEARANCES

We believe that as we shape the settings where we live, work and play, they in turn shape us: That great design goes beyond surface appearances and that it is often the things which you can't see that matter the most. For us, it's all about the IMPACT and EFFECT of our proposals and the SHARED JOURNEY we create all we work with to make great things happen.

We focus on the purposeful design on outcomes, not only aesthetics and form. We strive to balance and carefully stitch together diverse objectives; from what is desirable from a human point of view, to what is commercially viable, socially and culturally relevant and what is most beneficial to the character of a place.



contact

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