

STUDIO 12

HOUSING TERRITORIES

Academic Year 2019-20 / AD570-571-670-671



BACKGROUND: WHY HOUSING?

The housing situation in the UK is at its most critical state since the end of World War II. 320,000 people are recorded homeless by Shelter with over 4,700 sleeping rough each night as of 2017 (up 15% on previous year and +50% since 2010). The number of families on the waiting list for council housing tops 1 million. With each passing year there are fewer council houses and flats available due to the program of estate demolition followed by replacement with 'affordable' rental properties (80% of market rate) and shared ownership schemes (where you in fact own a secure tenancy rather than the property¹). In addition, further council properties are lost each year to the Right to Buy Scheme. At the same time the private rental market is now at the point where tenants pay over 41% of their salary on rent (it is 61% in Camden). Buying a home has now become out of reach for many people and with those who are able having to save up for longer and paying a higher proportion of their salaries into a mortgage (in turn making their financial situation tenuous and threat of losing their home a very real possibility).

These issues might be considered to be political and economic, to do with policy and not architecture. However, if we consider the architecture of new housing we find that the UK has the smallest average size (71.9 sq.m) for new homes of any country in Europe. For comparison, France averages 112 sq.m., Sweden 83, Germany 109, and Denmark 137. This is despite the fact that the UK is the second wealthiest country in the EU.² The quality of design and build is difficult to measure objectively but a survey of housing in different EU countries gives the impression that there isn't a great deal of innovation or experimentation in our context. Housing design continues to be based on outmoded norms codified in the Victorian era – relationship between public and private, homes based on bedrooms, living rooms, dining rooms, kitchens and bathrooms. These categories have remained stable for over 100 years despite the radical changes in family and social structure over the same period. Many of us work from home for some part of the week, in total 4 million people in the UK. This figure has doubled in the last 10 years. Technology has radically altered the way rooms are used and how we occupy our domestic space.

Thought experiment: We wake up tomorrow and find that the obstacles to building new housing have disappeared. There are no political barriers, no policy barriers and the financial resources need to build 100, 200 or even 300 thousand home a year are in place. We get to work the next day. What are we designing? What models would we use? Would we even be prepared intellectually, would we have the necessary skillset to not squander the opportunity? Or would we simply keep designing and building this:



The issues involved in our housing crisis and the related design problems are too complex and large to be dealt with by a single studio or in a single academic year. Studio 12 has been cycling through different areas of focus ranging from problems of suburban housing to high rise housing, looking at new build, additions and extensions, and exploring various social concepts. Although the themes have been different each year a certain thread has linked each of the studios – this is to do with the relationship of spatial organisation to social interaction. Put another way, how does architectural space encourage or inhibit opportunities for individuals to

see themselves as part of a wider community (from individual to family, to building resident, to block, neighbourhood and ultimately city resident)? Studio 12 believes that space can encourage and discourage certain activities but it cannot *determine* them one way or another. But while design cannot force anyone to do, behave or act in a certain way, it is not neutral; it is not just a background – it informs, enables, and encourages but if one is not careful it can also misinform, disable and discourage activities.

THEORY-METHODOLOGY: BEYOND HOUSING

The general arena of investigation for Studio 12 has been the relationship between the spatial configurations of architecture and the way in which people inhabit, appropriate and transform them. Although we explore this through housing this relationship is a fundamental condition of architecture. We do not design merely for uses, to solve basic functional problems, but to provide something beyond that which becomes the basis of meaning, sense of belonging, and which projects unknown possibilities into the future. Our way into this is to reflect on how people act in space by focusing on daily and mundane routines (washing, resting, putting the rubbish bin out, etc.). We use this to go past spatial labels such living room, dining room, kitchen – but this can easily be applied to any programme by challenging office, shop, entry, storage, passage, etc. We look for the ways in which routines cut across labels and easily defined spaces. The routine of arriving can blur the lines between street, garden, door, corridor and bedroom depending on one's particular routine.

In contemporary life categories are constantly overlapping – we live both real and virtual lives (offline, online) often simultaneously (using WhatsApp while commuting on the bus). We constantly multitask and have competing and conflicting demands on our daily lives. In what way then, does it make sense to continue to design by referring to neat spatial categories, each contained within neat little boxes (office, shop, bedroom, toilet, train carriage, etc.)?

Architectural ideology has taken up the complex and pluralistic character of contemporary life and translated this into singular and unique designs that tend more often to reflect the author's/designer's pre-occupations rather than that of users. The iconicity of contemporary skyscraper and museum architecture is merely the sharp end of this trend. It infiltrates far beyond these more visible arenas.

Our approach is different. We see the complexity of life as required more adaptable and generic architecture (rather than more specific and unique); an architecture that allows the uniqueness of each individual's life to flourish. We there design from fragments of daily life – it might be a spatial idea for entry, a pocket of space or a detail.

The blurring of uses and actions that takes place when we multitask or combine real and virtual space has a physical and architectural corollary: a piece of structure can be a place to sit, a canopy can also be a balcony, a bench can be a structural element, and so on. We reject functionalism in terms of seeing use and form as having a one-to-one relationship – that is, each form solves one problem. Instead we ask you to think relationally – forms, spaces and things can related to multiple things at once, either at the same time or at different times of day.

In terms of design process, we enable this by rejecting linear design – the move from large to small scale in incremental steps. Instead we encourage a constant move across scales and issues. And finally, we do not 'conceptualise' before designing. We do not image projects beforehand. Design is not the act of working out something already known to the mind, something declared beforehand, but rather the discovery of relationships, opportunities and possibilities as you go along.

In the example at right, the idea or concept of the entry could not be known beforehand. It could only emerge from understanding its urban, building, exterior, interior, material and detail aspects. In short, we see ideas and concepts as things that emerge from a design process rather than something that is formed beforehand.



This entry element combines canopy, entrance, terrace and bench. Note the vertical blank panel which is a backrest, structural support for the terrace, railing at the terrace level, but which in turn is supported by the bench (the bench being both furniture and structure). At the same time the orientation of the elements indicates direction of movement into the school while also articulating an 'archway' which links play spaces at different levels. This is a good example of forms which do not stop at solving individual problems but which combine both problems and solutions into a complex resolution. The result is clear and direct and multifaceted. (Image: Herman Hertzberger – Bickershoek School and Housing, 2004, Amsterdam)

TERM STRUCTURE

In **Term 1** we will explore the theoretical and methodological ideas behind this belief. The importance of understanding the role of routines and rituals for designing spaces will be explored throughout the term. It requires thinking about design differently – non-linear, working from fragment to whole, assembling ideas rather than working from controlling concepts, etc. We will work through a series of exercises culminating in an architectural fragment as the main design for the term. Summative assessment is based on your overall performance for all the exercises – it is not based solely on the final exercise.

In **Term 2** we will work on a major project for the Brighton and Hove Council. The council is currently running a programme called *New Homes for Neighbourhoods* providing newly built or refurbished homes for rental. The site will be revealed in January when the brief for the major project is introduced. The theme, however, will revolve around challenging the assumptions about territories in housing. This challenge will range from questioning the assumptions we make about standard rooms (living, dining, sleeping, kitchen, bathroom) to those having to do with the contiguity of the dwelling itself. That is, could a home be distributed across a territory rather than contained within an easily defined envelope? Does a dwelling need to be contained within a single volume or dispersed/fragmented over a larger territory? What criteria could we use to explore and test this idea?

There will be a separate and more detailed brief issued for Term 2 in January.

TUTORS

Luis Diaz, Design
Sean Albuquerque, Design
Phoebe Padley, Design
Ryan Southall, Technology
Kevin Wider, Technology

Luis will tutor one to two days a week. Sean will be in on Thursdays. Phoebe will do a couple of days in the autumn and approximately eight days in spring term focusing on the main project housing design. Ryan will provide guidance for the environmental aspects of technology while Kevin will focus on structures and materials. Combined design and technology sessions will run on Thursdays in Terms 2 and 3.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

We have, in the past, appended an extensive bibliography aimed at providing a wide range of sources. This year we are providing only the most critical texts – those that most strongly link with the studio approach.

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¹ Unless you purchase the full 100% shares for the property.

² IMF 2018

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EXERCISE ONE:

Using the selected or assigned detail fragment develop a drawing that describes a spatial situation inspired by the image.

Parameters:

All drawings must be in scale / the scale is up to you

The drawings must describe a three dimensional spatial condition, i.e., a plan and section, an axonometric, a perspective, perspective section, etc.

Drawing media is open / pen, pencil, computer, collage, mixed-media

Guidance:

The detail can be used and interpreted in many ways. You may wish to imagine the context in which the detail sits, where is it, what surrounds it, etc. You can also develop a spatial idea from conceptual themes you see in the image (layering, assembly, character of materials or space, spatial relationships suggested by the image, construction technique, etc.). You can include the detail (redrawn or collaged image) in your drawing but you do not have to – you might redraw it in whole or parts of it, or even take it apart and reassemble it. Your spatial interpretation does not have to have a use (don't design a building or room) but you can imagine things that happen in your space. For the purposes of this exercise we are not interested in you developing a story or narrative. The space can just 'be'. Look carefully for things beyond the obvious – don't immediately fix on the 'centre' of the image.

Things to think about: surface, texture, light quality, filter, view, heaviness, solidity, lightness, frame, layering, spatial positioning, joints, juxtaposition, body, inhabitation, depth, shallowness.

Due: Monday 7 October 2019 & Thursday 10 October (tbc)

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EXERCISE TWO:

Select a place that you have lived in, preferably for a long time, and prepare a series of drawings that document the route from the city (or exterior) to your home (this can be the front door or interior space – bedroom). This is a documentary drawing using plans, sections and axonometric and drawn in a scale of your choosing.

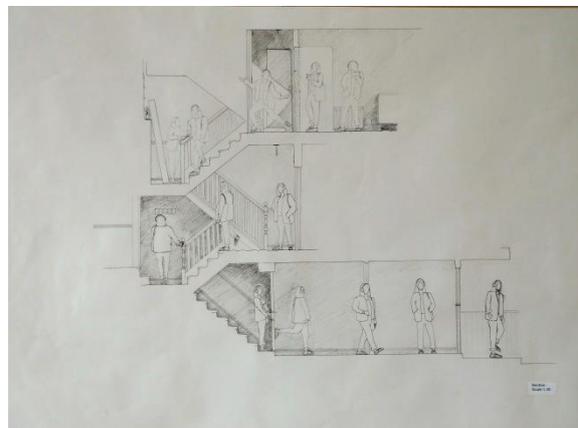
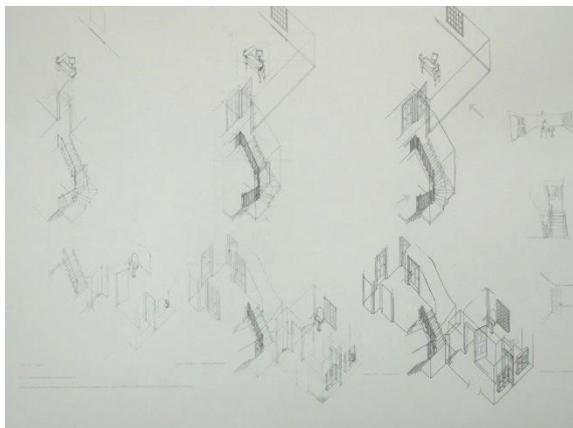
You are looking to document a trajectory through a series of spaces. Focus on drawing only those elements which impact on the journey. If drawing a street you might draw only the side on which you walk. On the interior, again, draw only those elements which frame your journey. You are not drawing full floor plans, but excerpts or fragments of the spaces that you identify with.

The aim is to explore your sense of belonging, home and the various thresholds you pass as you come home. This brings us issues of identity – where are you a member of the city, the street, the neighbourhood, the home, etc. Where is the point at which you identify as 'being home'; where are the spaces which construct 'home' versus those that construct or frame 'your place'.

You can experiment with drawing types. You can unfold or fold plans and sections; you might overlay drawings, etc. Do not draw any diagrammatic lines indicating your route - instead draw the spaces that define the route. You may use colour, textures, underlays, overlays, etc., to indicate different materials, thresholds or territories.

The space you are drawing may be one you can no longer access. This is fine. Use your memory, photographs, ring up your parents, etc. The scale will likely not be perfect – the key is for it to be proportionally accurate, a scaled impression and memory of the space.

You can incorporate photographs or other material that describes the space you are drawing.



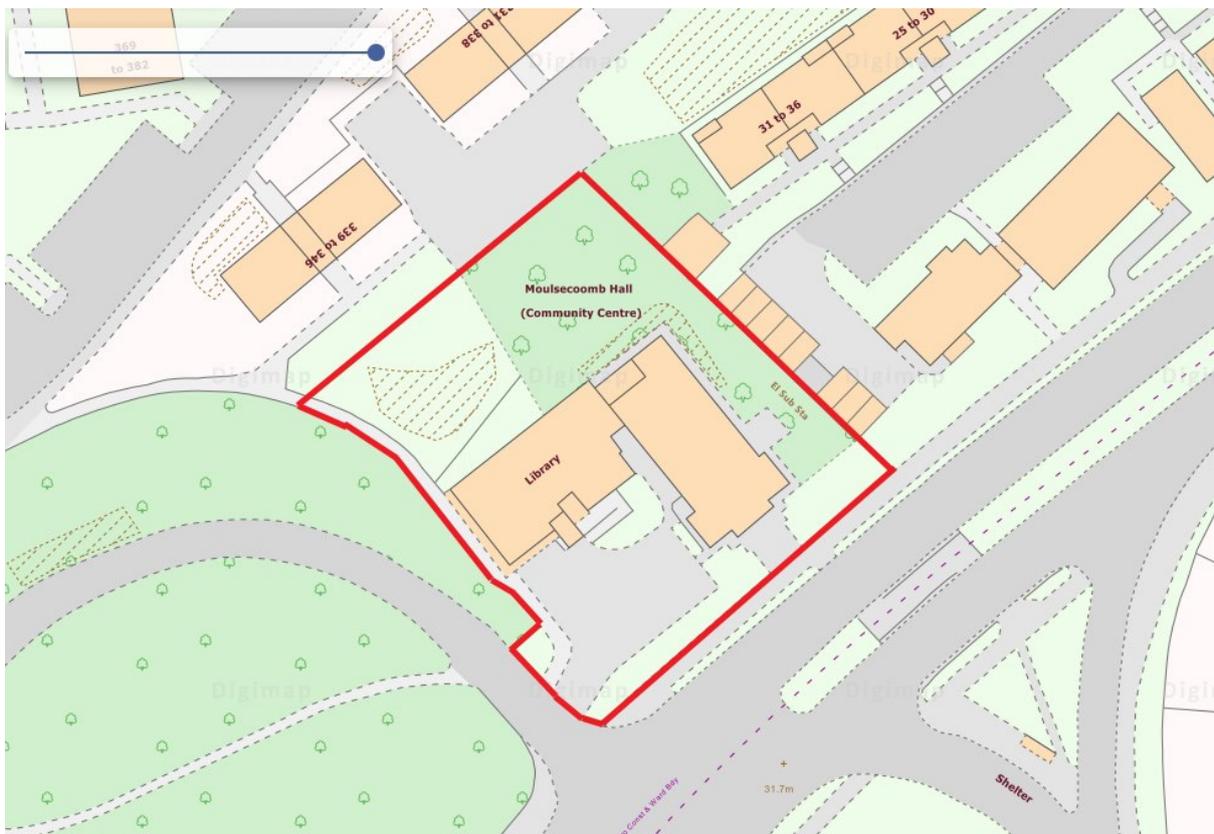
Due: Monday 14 October 2019 & Thursday 17 October

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EXERCISE FOUR



SITE Moulsecoomb Hall & Moulsecoomb Library

BRIEF

- Provide a point, or points, of entry into the site
- Transform the open space into a coherent territory
- Develop points of vertical movement (one or more) up into an imaginary vertical extension

NOTES

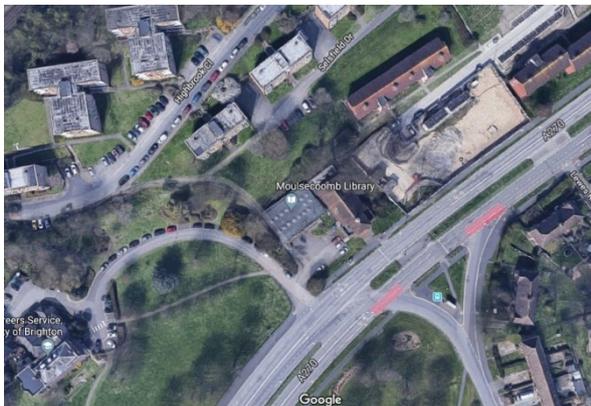
The points of entry are into the site, not the buildings. You can develop this in relation to the entries into the existing buildings or suggest new entry points. The focus is to develop a clear overall identity for the site as a whole (and in relation to its surroundings) and to provide distinct points of arrival or entry into it.

You will therefore need to consider the site as a whole, understanding its different edge conditions, orientations and so on.

To do this you will need to reorganise and redefine some or all of the surrounding open space. You can remove, relocate or redefine any of the existing paths through the site but you are not allowed to remove the existing buildings (you may gently alter them). Landscape, street furniture, and any other elements can be removed or altered. You can assume that the existing parking will be relocated or removed and therefore use this space for other activities.

To propose means of moving vertically you will need to suggest the outline of the volume that you are moving into. You do not need to define anything other than its overall shape or orientation.

The exercise is essentially about circulation – but at two levels of development, one strategic and the other in detail. You are asked to develop a coherent organisational strategy but also develop the specific architecture of the circulation spaces.



DUE Wednesday 4 December (Year 3) & Thursday 5 December (Year 2) 2019

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TERM 2/3 2020: AD571/671



LOOKING BACK

Reviewing Term One we can outline a series of 'lessons':

- a) **Exercise 1** – exploring the role of architectural aspects to create identity and sense of place (surface, texture, light quality, filter, view, heaviness, solidity, lightness, frame, layering, spatial positioning, joints, juxtaposition, body, inhabitation, depth, shallowness) /

*"The problems of point-line-plane-volume, the facts of square-circle-triangle, the mysteries of central-peripheral-frontal-oblique-concavity-convexity of right angle, perpendicular, perspective, the comprehension of sphere-cylinder-pyramid, the questions of structure-construction-organization, the questions of scale, position, the interest in post-lintel, wall slab, vertical-horizontal, the arguments of two dimensional-three dimensional space, the extent of a limited field, of an unlimited field, the meaning of plan, of section, of spatial expansion-spatial contraction-spatial compression-spatial tension, the direction of regulating hues of grids, the meaning of implied extension, the relationships of figure to ground, of number to proportion, of measurement to scale, of symmetry to asymmetry, of diamond to diagonal, the hidden forces, the ideas on configuration, the static with the dynamic, **all these begin to take on the form of a vocabulary.**"*

John Hejduk: 1972

b) Exercise 2 – understanding the way an individual's routine establishes links the broader urban territories and the home /

*“Whatever the case may be, housing, fashion and food have tended and still tend to constitute autonomous subsystems, closed off from one another...Once the dominant forces making it possible for these elements to combine with one another is understood, the artificial mechanism of their grouping is recognized and the fatuousness of their diversity becomes intolerable. The system breaks down...**The everyday can therefore be defined as a set of functions which connect and join together systems that might appear to be distinct.**”*

Henri Lefebvre: 1987

d) Exercise 4 – exploring the organisation of open space strategies to create coherence and identity while developing movement strategies for entry and vertical circulation /

*“...the mechanism of the plan must integrate with precise relationships, with a total use of the area available avoiding residual spaces. The sequences which require immediacy of contact, house and private open space, house to communal open space, house to the pedestrian system, to car parking, to the attendant functions, with continuity and ease of movement, seem to favour horizontal organisation rather than vertical. The primary decision is therefore taken; to build low, to fill the site, **to geometrically define open space, to integrate.**”*

Neave Brown: 1967

c) Exercise 3 – exploring the relationship between architectural aspects and elements of arrival routines /

*“**On the way home to our apartment, we pass a number of spatial transitions.** The path leads from public urban space to the building. We open the doors to the building and enter. Corridors, elevators, stairs, and steps lead us past the neighbour's apartments and up to our own four walls.”*

Ulrike Wietzorrek: 2013

LOOKING FORWARD



Over the next two terms you will be developing a housing project on the site of the **Moulsecomb Library and Community Hall**. There are a number of issues that we are looking to explore and present to the council.

- The first is that demolition is not necessarily needed. BHC has declared a climate emergency and in light of this we'd like to raise the possibility of retaining the whole or parts of the existing buildings.
- The second is to challenge the tendency to create simple and contiguous dwelling volumes and plans which feed the commodification of homes as things (cells, units) to be bought and sold.
- Connected to the second aim is an interest in exploring the way in which parts of the territory of a home (seen in its broadest sense, from the city to the neighbourhood to the dwelling) can be shared and become the focus on community building.

You are asked to develop between **30 and 60 social housing dwellings** ranging from 1 to 4 bedrooms. The precise mix is to be determined by the designer. The aim, however, is not to deliver a specific number of dwellings, but to experiment with organisational strategies, movement schemas, and patterns of occupation that explore the three aims listed above.

*"The individual house is itself a puzzle, but **housing is not just a collection of houses**, high or low. More fundamental are the concepts which hold housing together, relate each house to its neighbour and to its open space, determine the desirable relationships between housing and the attendant functions of shopping, schools, social and welfare buildings, the circulations systems for pedestrian and cars which hold the area together and establish contact. These concepts are concerned with more than utilitarian criteria. They concern interpretations of desirable relationships in order to make perceptible and therefore meaningful the contact between one activity and another, and their mutual dependence."*

Neave Brown: 1967



In order to facilitate the preservation of either the library, community hall or both buildings you may propose an **additional non-housing programme** such that it contributes positively to the housing project as a whole. The addition of housing while preserving some or all of the existing buildings suggests a number of approaches: **collage, layering, weaving, fragmentation**, etc., (issue 1). Whichever approach you take your aim is to use this to develop an **identity** for the site, its buildings and dwellings (issue 3). Further because you are dealing with existing buildings **structural and material strategies** become aspects that need to be **considered from the start**, integrated conceptually and strategically into your design approach (issues 1 & 3).

In terms of developing your programme ideas (dwelling type, number of bedrooms, anticipated users, etc.) the task of **challenging pre-conceived notions of unity** (the dwelling packaged as a single volume) suggests that you start by examining what can and cannot (or should not) be shared among family members, neighbours and the larger community (issue 2).

A third arena of investigation is material and structural. We will be focusing on the use of **stone and timber** as major elements of structure. Steel and concrete may be used but not as the primary load bearing structure. This addresses the ecological, climate and sustainable aspects of design – and in terms of housing, presents new challenges for planning, organisation and form-making.



YEAR 2 & 3 SUMMARY

Achieving the learning outcomes above is not likely in isolation, that is, done on your own. Architecture is a discursive practice and you need to become accustomed to talking through your work and the thinking behind it. In this way we can help you align your designs with your intentions and aspirations.

Further, the **Year 2 LO5** and **Year 3 LO1** cannot be met by satisfying the pragmatic and purely functional aspects of the brief: that is, by providing working dwellings, arranged functionally within a building, and siting within the prescribed site. These aspects are expected but do address the broader aspects of **Y2LO5** or the theoretical aspects of **Y3LO1**.

This is spelled out to reinforce the necessity for conversation along the way and for engagement with the issues raised by the brief. In short, simply designing housing will not meet the criteria for the brief or learning outcomes.



TEACHING STRUCTURE

The term will be organised around a series of presentations, workshops, seminars, group feedback, group tutorials and individual tutorials. For the majority of the term these will be organised as follows:

Monday AM: presentations, workshops, seminars

Monday PM: group feedback and general guidance

Thursday AM: group or individual tutorials

Thursday PM: individual tutorials

Mondays will focus on general background knowledge, which could be historical, theoretical or strategic. It is likely that housing, more than any other programme, relies on an understanding of precedents and history to make the most out of a brief and site. These sessions will provide rules of thumb, reviews of strategic, material, and other aspects that can feed into your projects collectively.

Thursdays will focus on what you produce individually in response to this. This will be done through a combination of group and individual tutorials.

Term Two integrates studio and technology with Thursdays dedicated to both those modules. Luis Diaz & Sean Albuquerque will continue as the main design tutors. We are joined by Phoebe Padley for 9 sessions over Term Two. Ryan Southall and Kevin Widger will cover technology, with Ryan focusing on Task 1 and Kevin on Task 2 (roughly speaking).

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ONLINE RESOURCES

London Housing Map: <https://goo.gl/csVFoc>
Single Aspect Blog: <http://www.singleaspect.org.uk>
Municipal Dreams: <https://municipaldreams.wordpress.com>
Housing Prototypes.org: <http://housingprototypes.org>

