18 Arcolas

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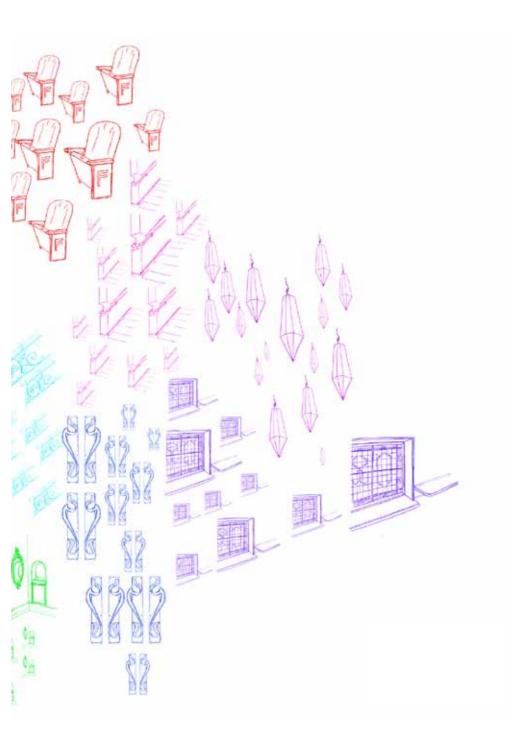


Projects by Diploma Unit 5 London Metropolitan University 2008–9

with essays by David Kohn Ben Todd Michael McKinnie Neill Woodger

Supported by David Kohn Architects Students of Unit 5 Arcola Theatre Arup Theatre architecture understood as a constellation of detailed moments over time Charlotte Mockridge





Beyond Found Space

Dalston began to grow in earnest with the arrival of the North London Railway's City Extension in 1865. The small village was transformed into a thriving city quarter characterised by a tight grain of varied property ownership along its major axis, Kingsland High Street, that has ensured a constantly changing streetscape. The arrival of the East London Line station at the southern end of the High Street in 2010 will again bring about significant change. 500 new flats, public facilities and a new public space, Dalston Square, will shift Dalston's centre of gravity, alter the scale and grain of property ownership and establish a new economic paradigm that will challenge that of the surrounding 19th century urban fabric.

For old Dalston, both the urban fabric and its inhabitants, a current challenge is to understand the relationship between the existing urban fabric and its institutions, so as to better steer changes to wider advantage. This raises questions, such as to what extent has Dalston's architecture affected the character of its institutions? As the scale and grain of the city changes, what effect will this have on the day-to-day practices of those who live and work there?

These questions are exemplified by the plight of the Arcola Theatre. The Arcola grew out of a local Turkish theatre project started in 2000 and is housed in a 19th century warehouse on a backstreet some distance from the transport and social centre of Dalston. Its modest beginnings were matched by its setting and its theatre spaces were no more than warehouse floors. Columns regularly appear on stage, there is no room for flying sets yet the theatre is widely regarded as one of the most exciting venues in London. Nonetheless, like other local institutions, the Arcola is now under pressure to relocate due to the future value of its warehouse as housing. Given the success of the theatre and its importance locally, the new sites being considered are in a much more prominent location than Arcola Street — across the road from the new Dalston Square.

The last great period of theatre building coincided with the arrival of railways in central London at the end of the 19th century which allowed suburbanites to satisfy their burgeoning taste for music halls and theatre. Many of the conventions of theatre architecture, the grand facades, elaborate foyers and proscenium arches, were established during a building spree that saw more than 200 theatres built in 25 years. Through these conventions, theatre architecture attempted to achieve a kind of metaarchitectural language by both expressing its civic purpose as a significant cultural gathering place while at the same time imparting a sense of the nature of theatre as self-reflexive communication.

The potency of theatre in a warehouse can be seen in this context of architectural conventions and layered meanings. The Arcola warehouse becomes a hidden theatre, a provisional theatre, a raw, essential, architecture stripped of ornament, as though the space in which theatre takes place has expanded from the stage to the whole building, pushing at the envelope of the city beyond. The implications, therefore, of the Arcola moving from its backstreet location to a prominent site beside a major development requiring a new building is highly problematic, but a rich field of investigation. To what extent should the architectural language of the new building articulate resistance to gentrification? How does the scale of a theatre condition the choice of an appropriate architectural language?

In this context the eighteen students of Diploma Unit 5 developed proposals for a new Arcola. Whilst difference in approach was encouraged and as a consequence the schemes present an array of possibilities, nonetheless certain themes emerged: The many-faced theatre addressing different Dalstons; the theatre as a picturesque topography co-opting surrounding urban and natural landscapes; hidden architecture, or new architecture camouflaged as existing; the progression from the familiarity of the street to the other-worldliness of the theatre interior; the decorum of the interior architecture and its relationship to both character and flexibility.

At the beginning of the year, the unit set out to map the historical relationship between theatre buildings, theatre practice and audiences, and the role theatres play in cities culminating in an attitude towards found space theatres such as the Arcola. Our research involved watching performances, group surveys of six London theatres from the last 150 years and visits to theatres in Milan and Vicenza. Workshops were held with theatre directors, set designers, acousticians and theatre scholars. In the following pages the students' eighteen propositions are set out interleaved with essays kindly contributed by several of the unit's visiting critics. Collectively the work hopes to contribute to debate surrounding theatre architecture in a changing city.

David Kohn



Peace Mural, Dalston Lane Crystal Whitaker



Shunt Vaults, London Bridge Sam McNeil





Performance of "The Real Mcoy Reconnected", by Trix Worrell

Hackney Empire, designed by Frank Matcham 1901, Tim Ronalds 2001 1:25 & 1:100 Models by Georgina Fall, Nisha Kurian, Catarina da Via

The sloping stage, increasing rake of the balconies and the way in which they encircle the performance effectively compress the large interior to achieve a strong sense of tension and suspense. The sectional model also reveals how every balcony has its own bar reflecting the social hierarchies of the day.





Performance of "In the Red and Brown Water" by Tarell Alvin McCraney Young Vic, designed by Frank Dunlop 1970, Haworth Tompkins 2006 1:25 & 1:100 Models by Stephen Chown, Keigo Shinada, Sam McNeil

The auditorium combines a provisional character with very successful proportions that achieves both flexibility and actor/audience intimacy. The stage was flooded for the performance of "In the Red..." The 1:100 model describes how a former butcher's shop is trapped in the section of the building.

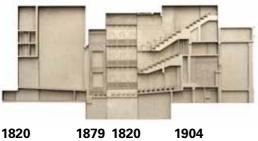




Performance of "...Some Trace of Her," directed by Katie Mitchell Cottesloe, National Theatre, designed by lain Mackintosh 1976 1:25 & 1:100 models by Nick Maari, Ummar Rashid, Crystal Whitaker

The 400 seater auditorium can be adapted to create different stage and seating layouts to suit a variety of performance types. The theatre possesses an ephemeral and lightweight character, sitting within the heavy concrete shell of the National.

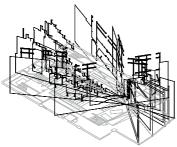




Performance of "Girl with a Pearl Earing", directed by David Buckley Haymarket Theatre, designed by John Nash 1821 1:25 & 1:100 models by Paul Fanning, Charlotte Mockridge, Adonis Papkirykos

The sectional model illustrates the five incarnations of the theatre. The 1820 design by John Nash included boxes for the aristocracy with poor stage views that prioritised the visibility of the audience. Stanley Peach's 1904 remodelling prioritised stage views and equality by installing tiered seating.





Performance of "Radio Golf" by August Wilson

Tricycle Theatre, designed by Tim Foster 1980 1:25 model & 1:100 sight line analysis by Richard Gatti & Yougesh Bhanote

Originally a conversion of a Foresters Hall, the stage is in front of the proscenium arch of the former hall. The seating is supported on scaffolding which extended onto the stage in this performance, blurring the boundary between actor and audience.





Performance of 'Norman Conquests: Living Together' by Alan Ayckbourn

Old Vic, designed by Rudolph Cabanal 1818 1:25 & 1:100 models by Katarina Bjorling, Michael Tze Wei Na, Aleksandra Tarlowska

For this performance the Old Vic was transformed from a proscenium theatre to a theatre-in-the-round by moving the stage to the centre of the auditorium and erecting temporary seating on the former stage. The design was highly effective in creating an unexpected sense of intimacy.

Arcola Today



Arcola was founded by Mehmet Ergen and Leyla Nazli in 2000. Starting with no public subsidy, no wealthy patron and not a single charitable grant, it challenged orthodox views of what makes for a viable arts organisation from day one. But Mehmet, how will you finance it? People asked. Boxoffice takings, he would reply, and beer sales. Since then Arcola has grown in to a million pound organisation with 15 full time staff, 3 fully programmed studios, an extensive youth and community programme and a globally celebrated approach to environmental sustainability.

When I came across Arcola in 2004 it was the audacity which gripped me here was a place where decisions were made, action taken and success enjoyed without reference to historical precedent or deference to 'how things are done', only to the simple arithmetic of is it a good thing to do and how can it be made to pay for itself. I set my self the task of developing around Mehmet and Leyla an organisation which could grow to accommodate their boundless artistic and social aspirations without losing the magic which made it all worthwhile. At the same time I wanted to create an innovative place for engineers developing sustainble technology to interface with artists and the wider public.

4 years later, having quadrupled in size, Arcola has a unique 3-strand business model comprising exceptional theatre, community engagement and environmental sustainability. We are now about to embrace what is typically the single most unsustainable step a fledgling arts organisation can take — to build ourselves a new venue. Bigger, better and 'more' than that Arcola was born in. We have spent nearly 3 years considering upgrades and extensions to



our existing site, sketch-adapting alternative buildings, and finally and with much trepidation, identifying alternative sites for new-build. At the same time we have been searching for what defines Arcola, what makes people come back, what it is that established artists see in Arcola which they bemoan the loss of in those now established, previously fledgling, venues which came before us.

Out of all of this have come the vision, and the beginnings of a plan, for a venue which embraces sustainability in all its guises — the financial which makes it possible, the social which makes it worthwhile, the cultural which makes it relevant and the environmental which means everyone in the world could enjoy something similar.

Something which is obvious now, but was not at the outset, is that this multifaceted word 'sustainable' is the perfect framework for scaling-up the fledgling Arcola. For example, it justifies maintaining the reuse/recycle aesthetic of things and buildings, contiuing the use of local tradespeople and retaining an ad-hoc evolutionary create-it-as-you-need-it approach.

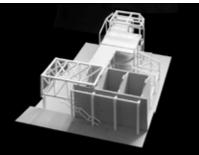
Ben Todd

1:25 model of Arcola by Haakon Gittens and Stephen Hogan







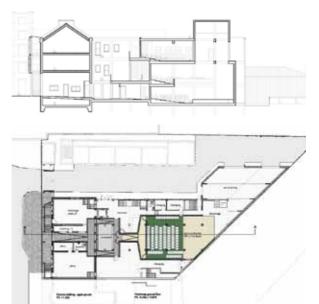


Add and Subtract Richard Gatti

A collection of existing houses, warehouses and a factory on Ashwin Street are stitched together and converted into a four stage theatre by a process of structural addition and subtraction. The different characters of the foyers and performance spaces are achieved throught the interplay of new and old layers of construction.







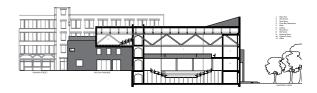


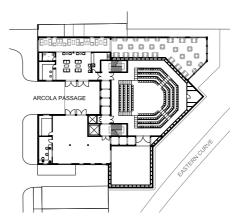


Janus Theatre Nisha Kurian

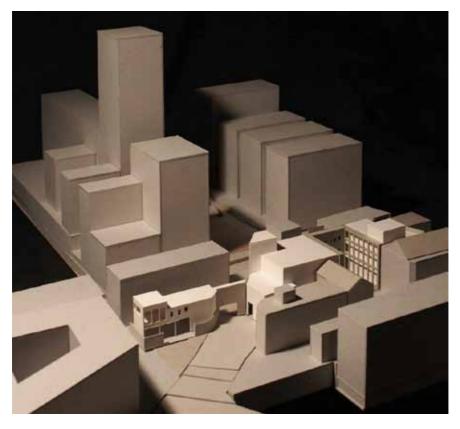
The site lies between the C19th grain of the high street and the the Eastern Curve, a disused railway line earmarked as a linear park. Both connecting and separating these two worlds, the new Arcola would develop two faces as Janus, the Roman God of doorways. To the West, the entrance is concealed in a modest passage while to the East the auditorium forms a monumental prow projecting into the park. The diaphragm wall construction uses bricks reclaimed from the demolished houses currently on the site.









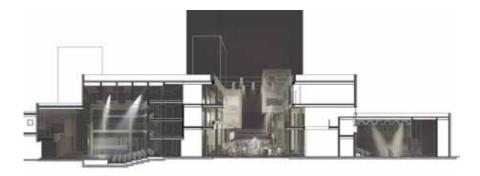




Arcola City Michael Tze Wei Na

A finely scaled picturesque cityscape of towers, streets and courts stands opposite the new Dalston Square development. Ambiguity between outdoor and indoor, public and private spaces is heightened by street bridges, gateways, terraces and lighting that cross Ashwin Street and the Eastern Curve.





The World's First Truly Sustainable Theatre

Over the last ten years while working with Arup on theatre design in the USA, it became clear to me that the design process was broken. Owners were ending up with obese, super-sized venues, due to the misinformed fear that they would not attract 'the best' or 'it wouldn't work' unless it was bigger and better than the last. Consequently performing arts centres required huge fundraising efforts to pay for their construction and then relied on yet more gifts, year on year, to keep running. Operators spent their time focusing on raising money while the diversity of artistic content was compromised to maintain revenues.

I was reminded of the similar financial conundrum the UK faced when the National Lottery began funding local authorities to build new theatres without anticipating the huge subsidy needed to stay operational. A simple rule of thumb for most theatre operations is every pound taken in ticket sales costs three pounds to generate, while for opera its more like ten. Building a theatre without a clear funding strategy for ongoing operational costs therefore is an unwise investment and inherently unsustainable.

As a theatre designer, I was aware from studying historic venues that great experiences in music and theatre can be achieved with very little beyond the artistic quality of the work and some basic conditions for seeing and hearing. In fact, modern larger venues can be counterproductive achieving intimacy and engagement between artist and audience, and the excessive use of technology can disconnect this vital relationship yet further. But building economically sustainable theatres ought to be possible, right? In recent years I have tried to challenge the way theatre planning and design is approached and to look for opportunities to develop buildings and operating models with clients that result in affordable and economically successful theatres without harming the environment.

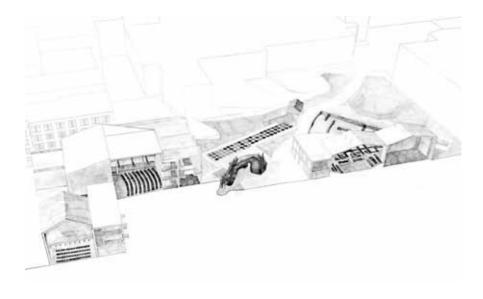
In London there is already an enormous amount of enthusiasm and momentum in the Green Theatres movement that was sparked by the Mayor of London's Climate Change Action Plan. London's theatres were challenged to reduce their carbon emissions to 60% of their 1990 levels by 2025. Theatres are not the biggest polluters by a long way, in fact their emissions in London account for probably less than 10% of that of London's buses, but it was generally understood that theatres are good communicators, and their ability to influence is significant. The incentive to London's theatres to implement these measures was that reduced energy use would reduce operational costs, and that 'being seen to be green' could improve their business success.

Over the last year Arup has been working with the Arcola Theatre to define what sustainability really means. This has included a full assessment of the design and operations using the Arup SPeAR model that measures the social, economic and cultural impact, a full energy study of the proposed building design to determine how to achieve carbon neutrality and the relative benefits of different energy reduction measures and renewable energy sources, and a theatre planning and design study to determine the optimum balance of spaces to maximize revenue streams, and the optimum scale and size of each space to maximize the artistic potential.

What has become apparent is that a 'truly' sustainable theatre cannot be achieved within the four walls of the theatre building. It has to be conceived as a much larger entity that connects itself at many levels to the things around it that are needed to balance the equation of social, economic and environmental impacts. For example, carbon neutrality is more efficiently achieved using district-wide renewable energy sources shared with other businesses, revenue generation is enhanced using innovative internet-based broadcasting techniques to a much larger virtual audience, and the development of synergistic alliances with local businesses, transport networks and suppliers in the local 'district' are essential for sustainable operations.

A truly sustainable theatre is therefore more than just well-designed, energy efficient and artistically excellent building, the building design has to facilitate a business plan with a totally new model of local collaboration and cooperation, combined with global outreach. This describes an even more influencial role than that envisaged by the Mayor's office to help combat climate change, and defines a scenario that puts the theatre back at the centre of community, with the potential for great leadership and influence at both a local and global level. Future Arcola has the potential to rise to this challenge, if it can achieve these two ideals within its design and operating model, to become the world's first, truly sustainable theatre.

Neill Woodger





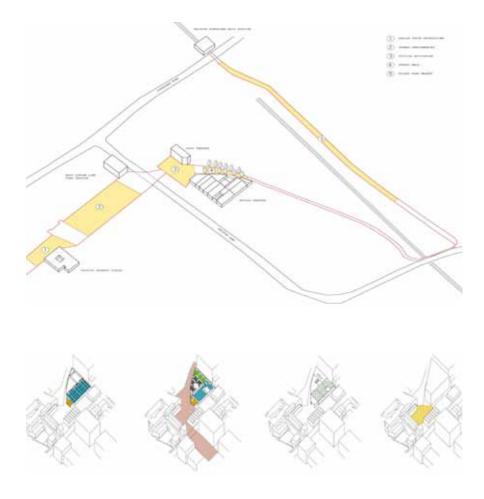
A Garden of Theatres Stephen Chown

Three theatres sit within a garden at the heart of Dalston. The proposal responds to the large, rectilinear public space to be developed within the new Dalston square development within one hundred metres of the site. The gardens provide much needed open green space within Dalston and are characteristic of the cultural patchwork quality of the local area. As visitors to the theatre progress from city to auditoria, a series of spaces, rich in colour and pattern reduce to become raw concrete theatres allowing the performance to become the focus within the city.



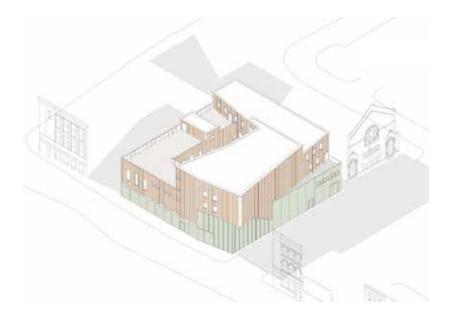


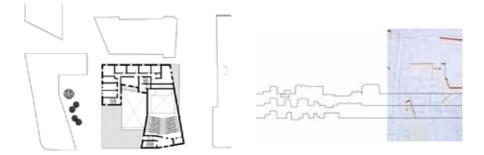




Theatre Depot Sam McNeil

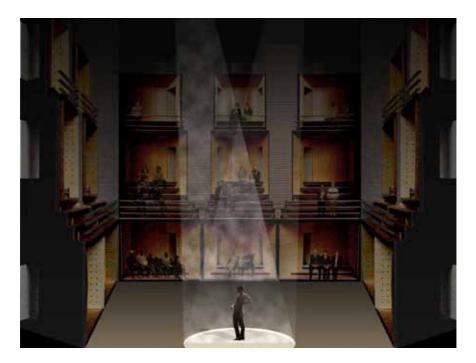
Until the financial markets recover, there is an opportunity to snatch the derelict bus depot for use as a temporary theatre space, with the understanding that eventually the site will be developed when the theatre will change form again. The building can be manipulated for each production, with parts removed or added, as this theatre is not precious. The process could begin with the Dalston Festival celebrating diversity through theatre, music and food that follows a route from schools through the site to the market.

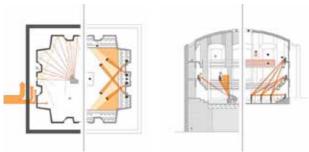




Theatre / Landscape / City Ummar Rashid

The proposal sits within a constellation of public spaces, mediating the transition from Kingsland Road to the transport interchange on Dalston Lane. An internal landscape defined by the expression of the auditorium's seating rake surrounds a calm courtyard. A tectonic language of concrete and timber stratifies the proposal to create two distinct worlds, with a series of terraces negotiating the change in material and connecting the proposal back to the city.



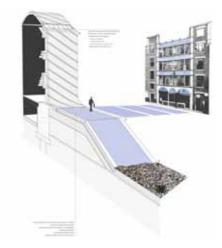


Junction Theatre Haakon Gittens

The theatre creates a new east-west passage that intersects Dalston's front and back, urban and natural spaces counterbalancing the dominance of the High Street. The cubic auditorium is a configuration of boxed seating with splayed reveals. These forms spill outwards to create bay windows that provide both greater room for circulation and key moments on the new pedestrian route from which to see and be seen.





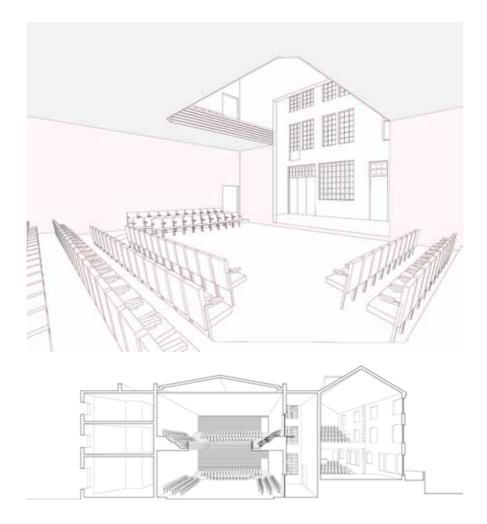






A Theatre Huddle Yougesh Bhanote

Retaining and extending the existing buildings along Ashwin Street, a series of key spaces of differing characters — foyers, auditoria and gardens — are agglomerated to create a dense, informal world for theatre. Each part is given its own architectural language to increase the sense of many distinct moments coexisting.



Captured City Stephen Hogan

A new auditorium building is inserted into an existing tangle of heterogeneous buildings on Ashwin Street. In each auditoria, different aspects of the surrounding architecture are revealed — C19th facades become interior elevations, broken walls become passageways.

Infinite Variations

It is notable how often theatre occurs in buildings that were created for other purposes. The Arcola Theatre occupies a former textile factory in Dalston. In one sense, its spatial story is a familiar one that has unfolded in many cities around the world: an industry declines or moves away from a city neighbourhood; at some later point a theatre company takes over the building; and the past use and design of that building become part of the aesthetic and administration of present-day performance.

There's a lot more to this story, of course, and the risk is that such a straightforward narrative masks tensions that are difficult, if not impossible, to resolve. A building that is affordable for a theatre company may be located in a part of the city that is awkward for audiences to access. A building prized for its historicity may be cold and uncomfortable for its users. A building with a distinctive architectural inheritance may frustrate attempts to stage performances in unexpected ways.

These functional problems are compounded by the fact that, arguably, we often want too much from our theatre spaces: to be intimate and awe-inspiring at the same time; to be a refuge from the city while playing a leading role in that city's urban development; and to attest to the legitimacy of the theatrical enterprise without appearing culturally elitist or too commercial. There's arguably no way to solve these problems and, indeed, many of them are not problems at all — just a shifting constellation of tensions that spatially condition the work that we do in theatre (from our different positions as, say, audiences, artists, architects or planners) and the work that we want theatre to do in the city.

But it's not very often that a theatre company imagines a new building. Theatre scholar Marvin Carlson has noted how "all situations involving the performance of theatre begin with the same basic dialectic — a confrontation of the observer and the observed." He adds, however, that "the historical variations upon this basic theme have been almost infinitely varied, allowing the physical organization, location, and ornamentation of the theatrical space to provide for a vast variety of messages relevant to the cultural concerns of those who utilize it." Carlson is concerned with how these variations have occurred across Western Europe and North America during the past five thousand years. The projects in this collection, though, try to imagine some of the "infinite variations" of the Arcola, in Dalston, now and in the future. In doing so, they illustrate a diversity of approaches to issues that are particularly acute in contemporary urban theatre.

For me, two are key. First, there are the ways in which the built form of theatres attempt to anticipate, through their interior and exterior design, the ideal spatial and aesthetic conditions under which the Arcola, its audiences, and its neighbourhood might engage each other. But what happens when ---as the history of performance spaces demonstrates repeatedly — these ideals run up against theatrical and social practices that cannot be controlled or were not anticipated? Responding satisfactorily to this question requires a more expansive and complex conception of "flexibility" than we have commonly deployed in modern western theatre and it is a concern that the proposals included here grapple with repeatedly. Second, there is the question of what these theatres' role in the urban development of Dalston can or should be. The construction of new theatres has often been promoted by theatre companies, politicians and planners as an opportunity to spur regeneration in urban areas that, like Dalston, are marked by profound socio-economic challenges. Empirical evidence that theatres can lead such transformation is mixed — theatre is only one piece of the puzzle, and, of course, not all change is desirable. But an environmentally sustainable Arcola may model a different type of relationship between theatre, audience, and neighbourhood than those we are familiar with. If sustainability is most efficiently achieved through sharing resources across an urban area (and not hording them within the walls of the theatre) this invites a rather more sympathetic and holistic conception of theatre's place in the city than has often been the case.

Maybe, then, it's not so much that we ask too much of our theatre spaces. Maybe it's that we haven't always asked enough of the right things. It's refreshing that the Arcola and these projects are starting to do this.

Michael McKinnie

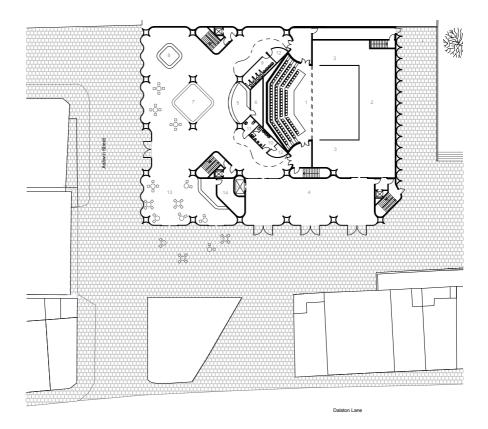




Grand Details Charlotte Mockridge

The provocative juxtaposition of the facades of the Haymarket and Arcola Theatres led to an investigation of how utilitarian brick structures might be elevated to the role of civic monuments. Weighing the implications of form and detail a vault and brick star-shaped column arrangement was developed that sought to balance the scale of the facades and interior with the scale of the body.





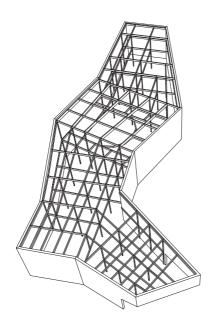




Wall Theatre Katarina Bjorling

The new theatre rediscovers the existing qualities in Dalston by creating a series of public spaces emphasizing forgotten positive aspects. Urban spaces are closely linked to equivalent interior spaces for performance and social events establishing both a social and an architectural closeness. A permeable urban wall defines the spaces, setting up a dialogue between the theatre and it's nearest surrounding.











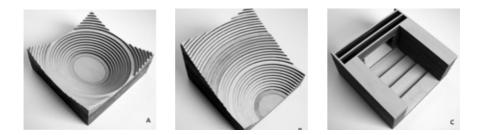




Cave Theatre Georgina Fall

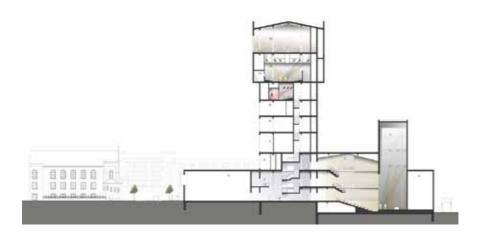
As the railways introduced a radical new geometry to Ashwin Street in the 1870s so does the Cave Theatre enter into dialogue with the surrounding streets. Somewhere between a picturesque hillside and a quarry face, the theatre invites exploration. Circulation is through passages that run the length of the perimeter walls finally rising to the auditorium balconies.

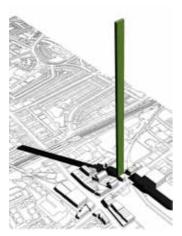




Overlapping Theatre Adonis Papakyrikos

An interest in creating a highly flexible theatre building which is nonetheless compact lead to investigations into how the proportions of a single auditorium might be varied using a scaffolded stage and flying the proscenium arch. The final scheme is capable of being adapted for proscenium, thrust and theatre-inthe-round performances.

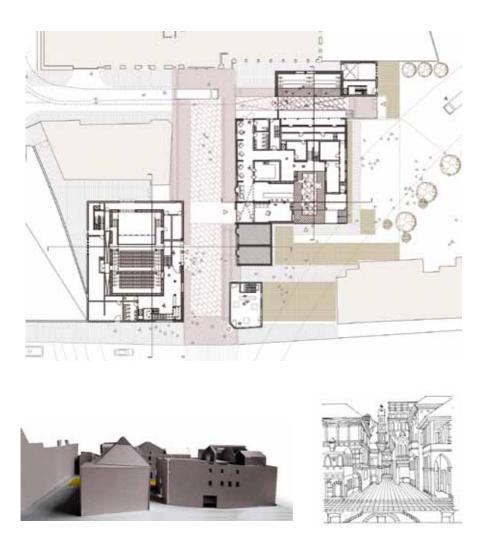






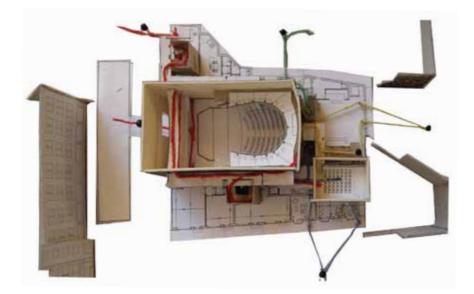
Tower Theatre Nick Maari

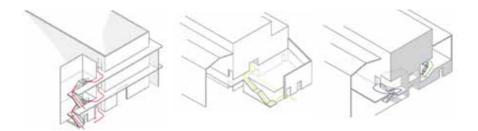
Initial studies of the Arcola Theatre's own brief lead to the realisation that if all of the desired programme was to be achieved on one of the proposed sites, a tower at least twice the height of the new Dalston Square's residential towers would be required. This led to speculation about how different scaled theatres could be stacked one on top of each other to create a vertical foyer and views of the city.



Houses and Carpets Crystal Whitaker

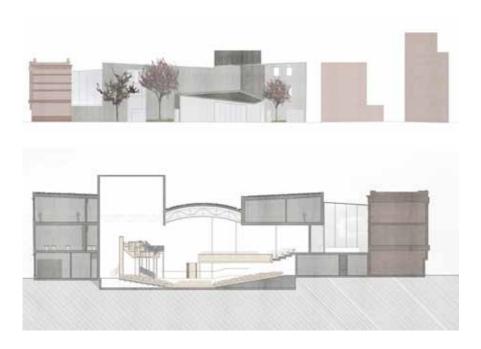
Following Serlio's drawings of ideal theatres, Ashwin Street has a latent comedic theatricality resulting from an architecture of accretion, deletion and agglomeration. The New Arcola constructs a theatrical frame for informal moments of public spectacle, through the decoration of streets with carpetlike paving and the placing of a number of theatre houses adjacent whose picturesque profile gives a coherent identity.





Four Doors Catarina Da Via

Following a study of the multiple entrances and the separate circulation and public spaces in the Hackney Empire, the proposal develops four distinct facades to the Arcola, each with its own scale and sequence of spaces: An intimate suite of living rooms in the former houses of Ashwin Street, a grand entrance facing Dalston Square, an informal broad bar facing the Eastern Curve and a performers entrance to the north.



Interchange Arcola Aleksandra Tarlowska

Following studies of the highly successful conversion of the Old Vic from a highly conventional large capacity proscenium theatre into an intimate theatrein-the-round for the staging of "Norman Conquests: Living Together" the scheme sought to make these two stage arrangements interchangeable on a regular basis.





Kulu-Kulu Theatre (round and round theatre) Keigo Shinada

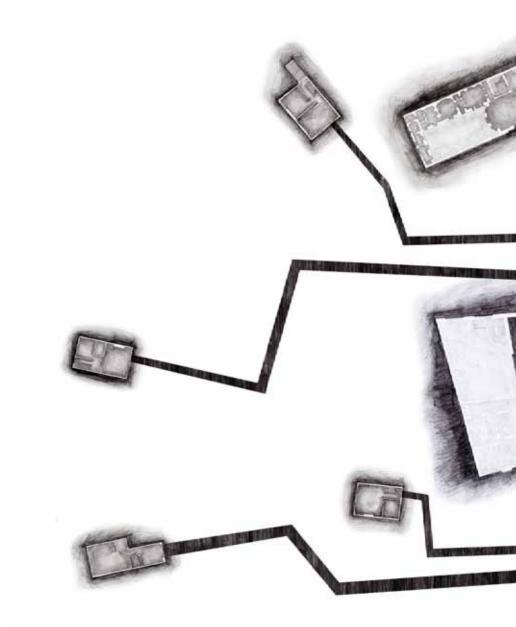
The scheme revolves around a journey through the building. A continuous ramp winds its way up through the building passing through existing neighbouring structures, balconies and rehearsal spaces leading to a rooftop performance space with views across the city.

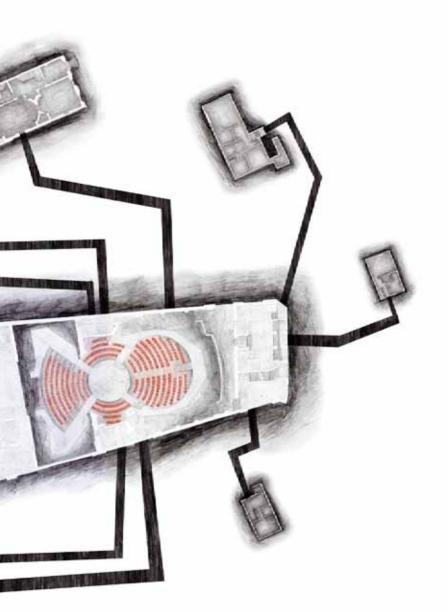




Routes to the Theatre

Stephen Chown





David Kohn is Diploma Unit 5 leader at London Metropolitan University and principal of David Kohn Architects. His teaching and practice reflects his interest in exploring the relationship between social encounters and architectural language. Recent teaching projects included 'Social Gravity' a course looking at restaurant interiors which lead to a commission to design a temporary restaurant at the Royal Academy of Arts.

Silvia Ullmayer teaches Diploma Unit 5 with David Kohn at London Metropolitan University. Silvia Ullmayer has worked for Caruso St John, Florian Beigel, Wilkinson Eyre and with Allies and Morrison before setting up Ullmayer Syvlester Architects in 2005 with Allan Sylvester. The practice engages in urban, civic and domestic context attempting to make high quality, beautiful yet frequently economic projects and environments. Her best known projects are a summerhouse in London and the collaborative housing scheme 'In-between'.

Ben Todd completed his PhD on the Modelling of Solid Oxide Fuel Cells for Power Generation at Cambridge University Engineering Department. He has worked in R&D, technical and strategy consulting on both commercial and government projects including at Cambridge Consultants, Ti Cycles of India, Rolls-Royce Fuel Cell Systems and Synnogy. As well as managing the Arcola Theatre, Ben works as a technology broker for the Low Carbon and Fuel Cell Knowledge Transfer Network run by the UK Technology Strategy Board.

Michael McKinnie is Senior Lecturer in Drama at Queen Mary, University of London. He is the author of, among other publications, "City Stages: Theatre and Urban Space in a Global City" (University of Toronto Press) and the editor of "Space and the Geographies of Theatre" (Playwrights Canada Press). His research focuses on theatre and cities and theatre and the state.

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Diploma Unit 5 London Metropolitan University 2008–9

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