

Studio Sergison
Autumn Semester 2011

Low-rise, high-density



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Aerial view of Fitzrovia



In the autumn semester 2011 we will begin an ambitious and far reaching study of the European city and the manner in which housing density can be increased without needing to resort to high-rise solutions.

The studio will return to London, the West European city currently experiencing the greatest pressure to increase housing density. To address the current imbalance between supply and demand approximately 300,000 new homes must be built in the next 20 years. This need will in part be met at the periphery of the city, but London's urban fabric is not very dense, and for many reasons densifying areas of the historic center make sense. However, care needs to be taken to ensure that this is not done at the loss of the qualities that make central London remarkable.

Two sites in the Fitzrovia area of central London have been chosen. One was formerly the site of a large hospital building, which was demolished in 2008. Planning approval was awarded for a project of very little merit, which was strongly opposed by local residents. The other site, currently accommodating a large post office, is being considered for a mixed-use project. Our work will be to develop credible alternatives that match the density of the current/previous projects, but are urbanistically and architecturally more sensitive.

Corso Vittorio Emanuele, Naples
Thomas Struth, 1989

Contemporary cities invariably face pressure to expand, densify and adjust in response to a complex set of needs and forces. When this pressure exerts itself upon the historical center of a city, what is at risk is a unique urban fabric, which could be regarded as a form of urban patrimony. The tension between the pressure to densify and the need for preservation differs from neighbourhood to neighbourhood and city to city. We will attempt to meet the challenge of reconciling these different agendas.

Our work will consider how a significant increase in density might be introduced in a part of a city that is highly valued, but under great pressure to densify. Care will be needed to ensure that the quality of the existing situation is not compromised.

We intend to extend this thematic investigation to a number of European cities, each of which has its own unique character. Over time we aim to form a wider understanding of the thematic ambition of our study and develop realistic urban strategies through a comparative method. As in the past, the studio will give priority to the study of the largest normative components of any city, i.e. housing and work-related spaces, rather than public buildings and urban infrastructure.

Our study will begin in the Fitzrovia area, in central London. This is a part of London that was developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth century according to the pragmatic principles and economic logic of the Georgian era. This form of speculation was based on building a refined but limited catalogue of terraced-house types arranged in streets and squares. In time, this relatively uniform and homogenous urban structure has been adapted to meet new needs and opportunities and proved capable of absorbing changing requirements. In some instances only the original street pattern remains, but in others it is possible to form a clear understanding of the initial urban character of a neighbourhood.

The dominance of the canon of Universal Modernism conditioned much architectural and urban thinking about the city in the twentieth century. While this did not result in the *tabula rasa* approach argued by those who advocated a complete rejection of the past, an ambivalence towards pre-modern thinking dominated much of the cultural discourse of this period. For economic reasons, and as a result of the ascendancy of the conservation lobby, the more extreme visions of Modernist ideology remained an only partially completed project.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, things are not so straightforward. The legacy of the Modernist urban project, which has in many



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1
Water Street, New York
Thomas Struth, 1978

2
Crosby Street, New York
Thomas Struth, 1978

3
Shinjuku, Tokyo
Thomas Struth, 1986

instances been alienating and socially problematic, requires critical reflection. There are also positive aspects in the ambition of the movement's programme that strove to make contemporary cities cleaner, better served by infrastructure and more generous in terms of their general housing provision.

The simple proposition that greater density could be achieved through the employment of high-rise typologies is one of the most frequently cited failures of Modernist town planning. High-rise housing solutions, while radical and socially challenging at the time they were first introduced, have frequently proved to be well-liked by their inhabitants. However, they often fail in the manner in which they meet the ground. All too often this relationship is too abrupt or ambivalent.

During the course of the Autumn semester we will explore strategies for introducing high density housing in the center of a city without immediately resorting to high-rise buildings. We will be studying existing buildings that offer an example of how to create successful low-rise, high-density solutions. We will also be exploring existing urban conditions that offer helpful and instructive models.



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1
Piazza Augusto Imperatore, Rome
Thomas Struth, 1984

2
Via Guglielmo, Rome
Thomas Struth, 1984

3
Sommerstrasse, Düsseldorf
Thomas Struth, 1980



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Fitzrovia is a neighbourhood of central London, close to the West End, lying partly in the Borough of Camden (in the east) and partly in the City of Westminster (in the west). It is situated between Marylebone and Bloomsbury and north of Soho and characterised by a mix of residential, business, retail, education and healthcare facilities, with no single activity dominating.

Although often described as upmarket and home to some celebrities, Fitzrovia - like much of inner London - is characterised by wide disparities of wealth and contains a mix of affluent property owners as well as many private, council and housing association tenants. In statistical terms, the neighbourhood is classified as above-averagely deprived: all parts of Fitzrovia are within the 20% most deprived in the "living environment" index and most areas are within the 10% most deprived in England.

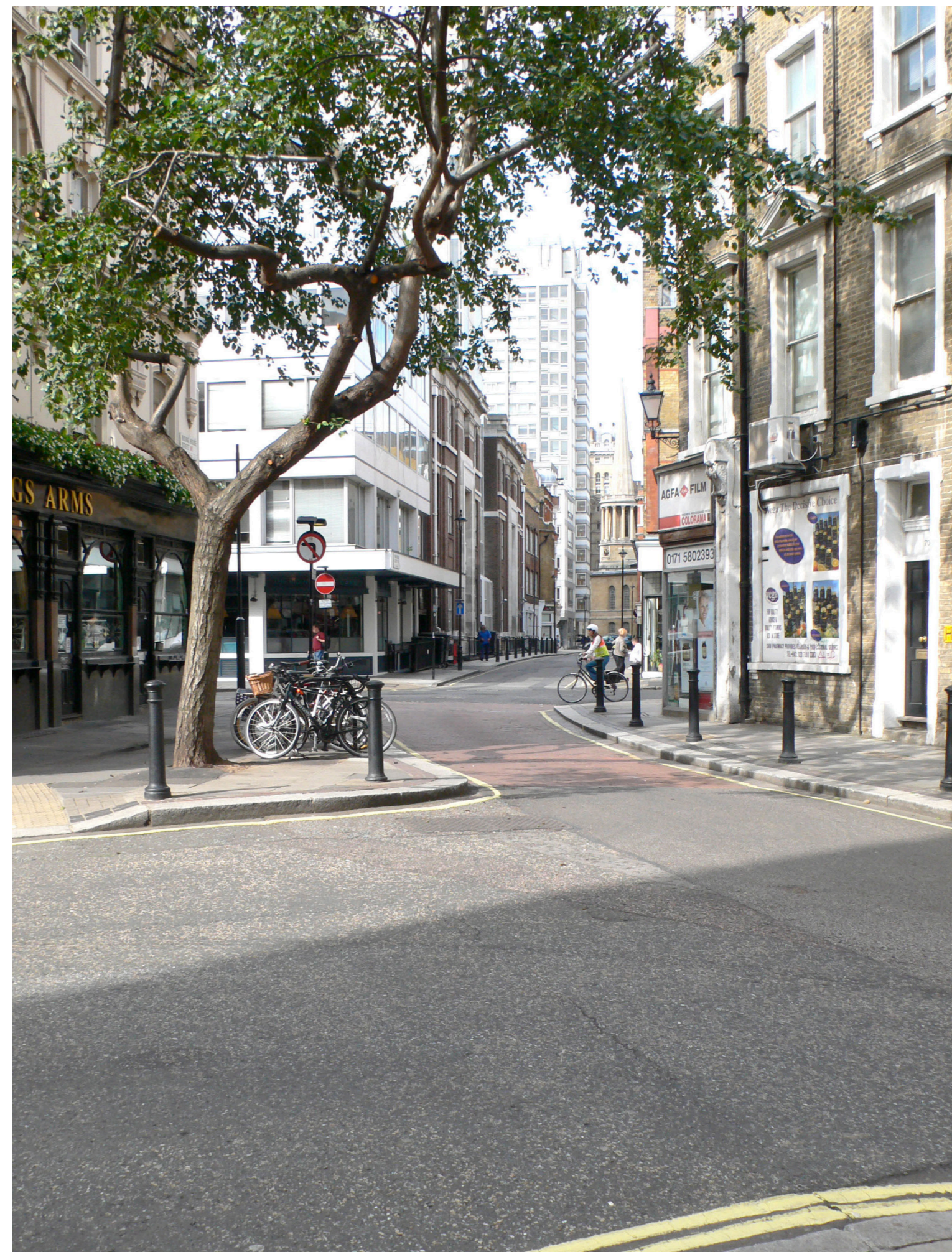
History

Fitzrovia was probably named after the Fitzroy Tavern, a public house situated on the corner of Charlotte Street and Windmill Street within the district. The Fitzroy Tavern, in turn, was named after Charles FitzRoy, later Baron Southampton, who first developed the northern part of the area in the eighteenth century. The square is the most distinguished of the original architectural features of the district, having been designed in part by Robert Adam.

Much of the area was developed by minor landowners, and this led to a predominance of small and irregular streets in comparison with neighbouring districts like Marylebone and Bloomsbury, which were dominated by two landowners, the Dukes of Bedford and Portland, and were thus developed more schematically, with stronger grid patterns and a greater number of squares. While Bloomsbury's squares and Marylebone's boulevards quickly established and maintained prestige (and steep prices to go with it), the Fitzroy properties, by contrast, were soon being carved up into cheap lodgings, or converted into workshops. The area became a starting point for new immigrant families to London, a home for artisans and, as if to symbolise its downfall, artists.

The name Fitzrovia was adopted during the inter-war years initially by the artistic and bohemian community habitually found at the public house. Amongst those known to have lived locally and frequented local public houses such as the Fitzroy Tavern and the Wheatsheaf are John Constable, George Bernard Shaw, Virginia Woolf, George Orwell, Arthur Rimbaud, Paul Verlaine and Dylan Thomas.

In the late 1700s, political thinkers such as Thomas Paine and Edmund



Corner of Wells Street and Riding House Street, looking towards All Souls Church (by John Nash) and Broadcasting House

Burke also lived in the area which later became a hub of Chartist activities after the Reform Act 1832 and was host to a number of working men's clubs, including The Communist Club at 49 Tottenham Street.

Today the area maintains a distinct and bohemian flavour, and although the artists' studios have gone, the artistic tradition is upheld by numerous art galleries, art dealers and publishers. By the same token, the furniture-makers who used to occupy the makeshift workshops have departed, but the furniture emporia along Tottenham Court Road make up for the loss by offering one of the highest sofa densities in the capital. These days, the baton of independent craftsmanship has been passed into the firm hands of the area's countless hairdressers.

The area also has strong music associations, with venues such as the UFO Club, home to Pink Floyd during their spell as the house band of psychedelic London. Pink Floyd and Jimi Hendrix also played at the Speakeasy on Margaret Street and Bob Dylan made his London debut at the King & Queen pub on Foley Street. Oxford Street's 100 Club has been a major hot-bed for music from the Sixties to the present day, and has roots in 1970s Britain's burgeoning Punk rock movement.

Architecture

Although Fitzrovia suffered during the Blitz and the 1960s property development boom, it has not lost its eighteenth century feel, with the Georgian splendour of Fitzroy Square and the modesty of the workers' cottages in Colville Place. There are also some Modernist office buildings (home to Saatchi and Saatchi, the Arup empire, Film Four and the students of London University).

The size of the area's population (about 8,000 residents) has helped preserve local services that have vanished elsewhere: Fitzrovia has a Neighbourhood Association, its own local newspaper and an annual festival. Both Camden and Westminster councils, which are responsible for administering the area, are currently pursuing a policy of encouraging the return of houses used as offices to residential use.

The most prominent feature of the area is the BT Tower, in Cleveland Street, which is one of London's tallest buildings and was open to the public until an IRA bomb exploded in the revolving restaurant in 1971. Another notable modern building is the Y.M.C.A. Indian Student Hostel on Fitzroy Square, one of the few surviving buildings by Ralph Tubbs.

More recently, the site of the Middlesex Hospital, a large part of Fitzrovia, was acquired by the property developer Candy & Candy which demolished the hospital to make way for a housing and retail development called NoHo Square. The Candy brothers' scheme, which was unpopular with locals, failed during the 2008 credit crunch and in 2010 ownership of the site passed to Aviva Investments and Exemplar Properties, who have recently developed a new mixed-use project for the site.

There has also been local-community objection over plans announced in July 2010 to demolish and redevelop the site of an eighteenth-century Georgian building in Cleveland Street, originally a poorhouse for the parish of St Paul, Covent Garden, and later the Cleveland Street Workhouse.

Current population and social mix

Almost half of its 8000 residents are, according to census statistics, from non-British backgrounds: Italians, Greeks, Venezuelans. A blue plaque in Whitfield Street records that this was the site of one of the first Nepalese communities in London. Fitzrovia is in every sense a mixed area: a mixture of shops, offices and housing. In its early days this was largely an area of well-to-do tradesmen and craft workshops,

with Edwardian mansion blocks built by the Quakers to allow theatre employees to be close to work. Nowadays property uses are diverse, but Fitzrovia is still well known for its fashion industry, now mainly comprising wholesalers. New media outfits have replaced the photographic studios of the 1970s–90s, often housed in warehouses built to store the changing clothes of their original industry — fashion. Charlotte Street was for many years the home of the British advertising industry and is now known for its many and diverse restaurants. The district still houses several major advertising agencies, including the world-famous Saatchi & Saatchi headquarters.

A number of television production and post-production companies are based in the area, including MTV Networks Europe, Nickelodeon and CNN Europe. Several publishers are based close by and many media companies are based within the area, including Informa and Digital UK.

Eating out is one of the defining features of the area. Charlotte Street is almost a living atlas of the world's cuisines. There are decidedly smart places and terribly cheap places: some are very old, like the first Spaghetti House, established in the 1950s, and L'Etoile, on Charlotte Street, which recently celebrated its centenary.

Architectural practices, interior designers, landscape architects, urban planners and a number of structural engineering consultants are based in the area, among them the world headquarters of Arup's.

There were once many hospitals, including the Middlesex Hospital, which closed in 2006, and St Luke's Hospital for the Clergy, now re-opened after refurbishment. Also, a handful of minor embassies - El Salvador, Mozambique, Turkmenistan and Croatia - nestle amongst the many and varied public houses, retail use spills into parts of Fitzrovia from Oxford Street and Tottenham Court Road, two of the principal shopping streets in central London.

Housing and community action

During the 1960s a large amount of housing was lost in Fitzrovia and the residential community felt under threat from new large-scale building. The threat from the developers spurred residents in the early 1970s to form a number of voluntary associations to conserve the best of Fitzrovia and resist the efforts of developers to change its character.

In 1970 the Charlotte Street Association was formed to campaign for more housing and to preserve the unique character of the area. A neighbourhood newspaper, "The Tower" (later re-named "Fitzrovia News") was produced in 1973 by a group of activists. The first Fitzrovia Festival was held in 1973 with the theme "The people live here!" in an effort to demonstrate that among the offices, restaurants and cafes there was a residential community that wanted its voice heard. In 1974, the Fitzrovia Neighbourhood Association was formed and raised money to create a neighbourhood centre in a disused glass shop on the corner of Tottenham Street and Goodge Place. The Fitzrovia Neighbourhood Centre, opened in 1975, remains the focus of community action and a place for the various voluntary groups to meet and the office of the "Fitzrovia News". An advice and information service and community projects, including the annual Fitzrovia Festival, are also delivered from the Neighbourhood Centre.



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1 Newman Street, looking south towards Oxford street

2 Eastern boundary of the Middlesex Hospital site, Cleveland Street

3 Rooftop view of Newman Street, looking south

4 Mortimer Street, looking east

5 Newman Street, looking south

overleaf South-east corner of the Middlesex Hospital site



First exercise: Urban strategy

The first part of the semester will be devoted to the development of credible urban solutions for one of two sites identified for development. This will require the study of numerous possibilities before selecting the most appropriate solution.

It should be noted that the brief to produce high-density solutions for these sites is consistent with the planning pressure that exists in this part of London, due to high property values in this area. However, in line with planning constraints, projects should not exceed a height of 12 floors above ground level.

The key component of your work will be 1:500 models studies. We expect you to make several study models exploring different ideas and different strategies before you settle on your final project.

A timber block model of the wider environs of the project sites will be produced jointly by all members of the studio.



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Examples of 1:500 models and
their use as design tools

Second exercise: Survey

An important requirement is that projects in their final form are precise about the density achieved and students are expected to articulate clearly the ideas explored in their building's facade. To assist you in finding answers to these questions, we propose that a number of London buildings are surveyed. These have been selected as exemplary case studies of how it is possible to build densely at a reasonably low scale.

You are required to produce a careful photographic record of the facades of the building, a precisely drawn survey of the facade at a scale of 1:100 and a block model at 1:500 of the building.

You also need to record the density of each project, which will subsequently be used for comparative purposes. A lecture will be given on how to produce a measured survey to help you undertake this piece of work.



1 and 4
Site a, Weymouth Street

2
Site b, Clipstone Street

3
Site c, Torrington Place

5
Site d, Ridgmount Gardens

6
Site e, Gordon Square

Sites

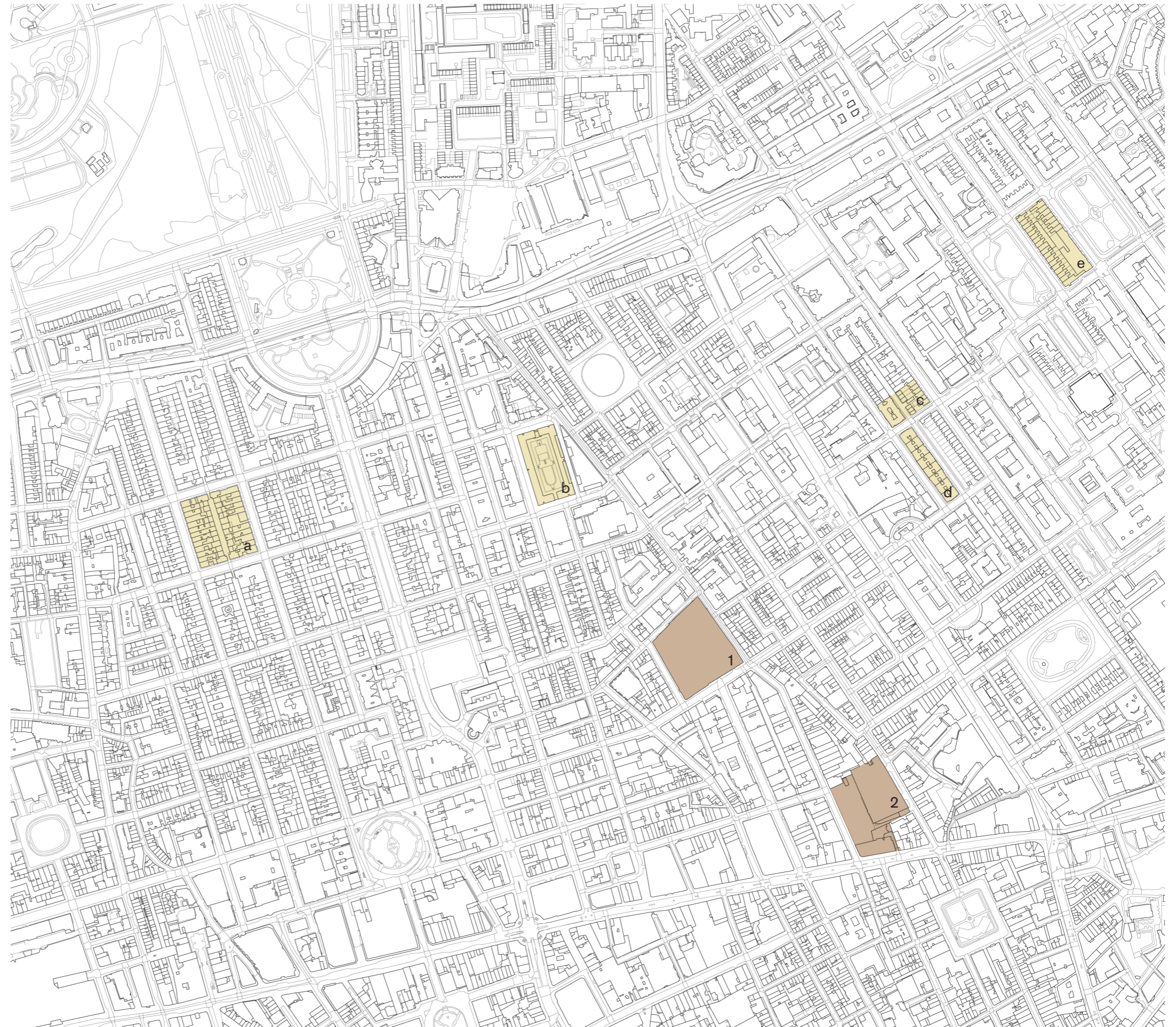
Map showing project sites and buildings to be surveyed

Project sites

- 1 Middlesex Hospital
- 2 Newman Street

Sites to be surveyed

- a Site a, Weymouth Street
- b Site b, Clipstone Street
- c Site c, Torrington Place
- d Site d, Ridgmount Gardens
- e Site e, Gordon Square



Third exercise: Facade studies

Most of the semester will be devoted to developing a concept for the facade of a large-scale building. This will require you to think about the material character and presence of the building, a strategy for openings and the manner in which they are detailed. It is important to consider the range of variations a facade might express and the way in which a project relates to existing neighbouring buildings.

You will be expected to produce a number of 1:100 facade studies. These should be drawn as unwrapped elevations and modelled to the same scale.

It is of course not possible to consider the character of the facade of a building without considering how it is organized in plan. However, this should not be the priority of your work. A lecture will be given on how to design the facade of a building.



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1-5
Model studies produced in previous semesters

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Facade concept sketch

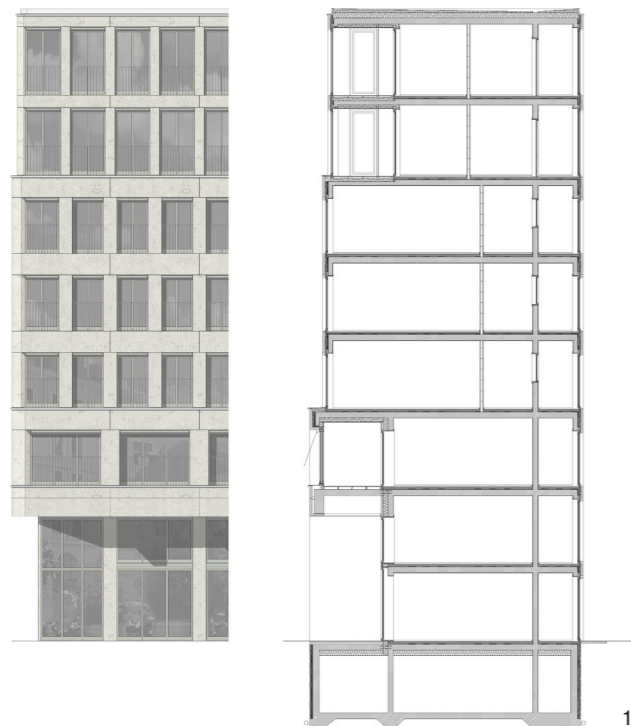


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Fourth exercise: Construction studies

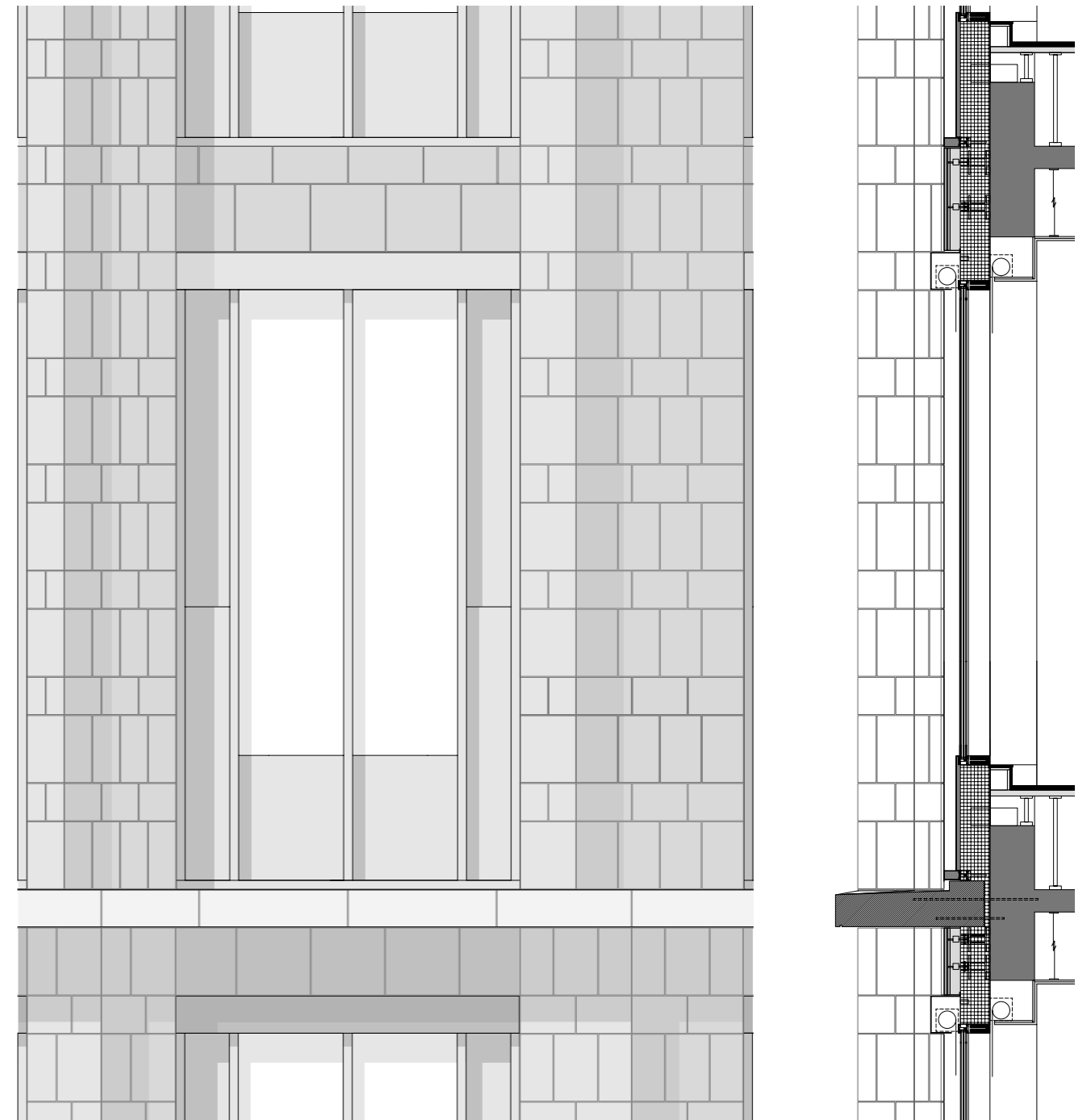
This piece of work is intended to reinforce the issues addressed in third exercise. Students are invited to explain the construction strategy adopted for their building. A knowledge of how the building is constructed will make the drawing of the facade more convincing.

This exercise requires you to draw 1:50 sections and partial elevations of your building. A lecture will be given on the subject.



1
Partial facade section, Rue du
Cendrier, Geneva.
Sergison Bates architects and
Jean-Paul Jaccaud architects

2
Facade detail study, Novartis
Campus, Shanghai.
Sergison Bates architects



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Programme AS 2011

Date	Event	Details	Assignments
22 September	Studio introduction		
23 September	Studio briefing	Jonathan Sergison (JS) presents studio and autumn semester. Introduction to studio assistants Sarah Maunder (SM) and Corinne Weber (CW) Lecture by JS: "Low-rise, high-density"	Allocation of sites Start work on group model Book tickets for London
29-30 September	Tutorials	Studio trip briefing Lecture by Georg Nickisch: "Illustrating architecture" Lecture by SM and CW: "How to make a survey of a building"	1:500 site model
6-9 October	London	Please see separate programme for detailed information	
13-14 October	Review	Review of 1:500 building studies and presentation of survey drawings	1:500 models 1:100 survey drawings
20-21 October	Tutorials	Lecture by SM and CW: "The idea of the facade"	1:200 block model Facade studies
27-28 October	Tutorials		1:200 block model Facade studies
3-4 November	Intermediate Review	Review of urban strategy and facade studies	1:500 site model 1:200 block model Facade studies
10-11 November	Tutorials	Lecture by JS: "Facade Construction"	1:200 block model 1:100 elevations Construction studies
17-18 November	Tutorials		1:100 model 1:100 elevations 1:200 plans 1:50 construction section

Date	Event	Details	Assignments
24-25 November	Tutorials		1:100 model 1:100 elevations 1:200 plans 1:50 construction section
1-2 December	Review	Review of final drawings	1:100 model 1:100 elevations 1:200 plans 1:50 construction section
8-9 December	Tutorials	Submission of final drawings	Start final model
15-16 December	Tutorials		Prepare presentation
20-21 December	Final review	Invited critics	1:500 site model 1:100 model 1:100 elevations 1:200 plans 1:50 construction section pdf/ppt presentation

Reading list

L'Architettura della città
Aldo Rossi, Marsilio, Padova 1966

Das Haus und die Stadt / The house and the City
Diener & Diener, Städtebauliche Arbeiten/Urban Studies
Roger Diener, Martin Steinmann, Birkhäuser, 1995

Dichte / Density
Archithese, Niggli Verlag, 2011

Papers 2
Jonathan Sergison and Stephen Bates, London, 2000

References

Thomas Struth, Photographs 1978-2010
Whitechapel Gallery and Schirmer/Mosel, 2010

Georgian London
H. M. Colvin, J. Summerson, Yale University Press, 2003

London: the biography
Peter Ackroyd, Chatto and Windus, 2000

A Guide to the Architecture of London
Edward Jones & Christopher Woodward, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2009

The Gated City
Ryan Avent, Kindle Editions, 2011

Modern Architecture. A critical history
Kenneth Frampton, (1980) Thames & Hudson, London, 2007

London, the unique city
Steen Eiler Rasmussen, (1937) MIT Press, 1982

The seduction of place: the city in the 21st century
Joseph Rykwert, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2004

Some cities
Victor Burgin, Reaktion Books, 2004

Liquid city
Marc Atkins, Ian Sinclair, Reaktion Books, 1999

Viva Fitzrovia (film)
http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xbyro6_viva-fitzrovia_travel
Paolo Sedazzari, 2010
[A short film about Fitzrovia exploring the area's past and contemporary community issues]

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