

Traces of Belonging

Narrative Gallery Exploring Emotional Narratives in Urban Space

"Space is not a background, but a projection and echo of the inhabitant's emotions."
— Gaston Bachelard

When walking through the city, some places feel warm and alive, while others feel distant or empty. This project explores how spatial design shapes emotional experience and collective well-being through the Emotional Loop, a framework describing how emotions are generated, transmitted, sedimented and shared through space. Through the adaptive reuse of Safehouse 2, the concept is translated into a narrative gallery that transforms research into lived experience. The project invites visitors to reflect on the relationship between people, memory and the city, proposing narrative continuity as a catalyst for belonging, identity and collective well-being.

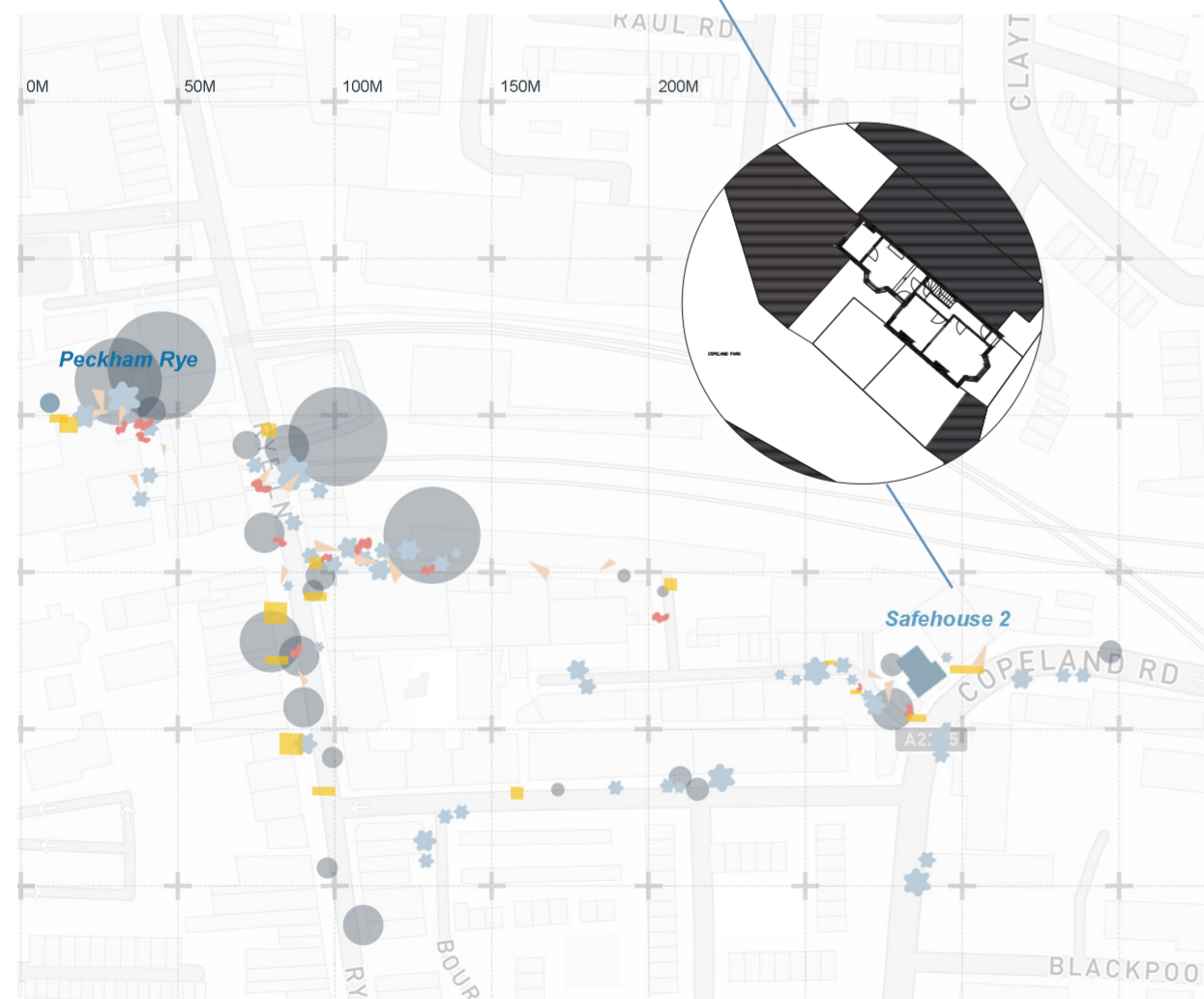
Site

This project is located in Peckham, South London, and focuses on Safehouse 2, a historic building at the gateway to Copeland Park. Originally built as Victorian terraced housing in the late nineteenth century, it has since been adapted into a raw creative event space. Its layered history and visible traces of occupation make it an ideal site for exploring emotional narratives in urban space.

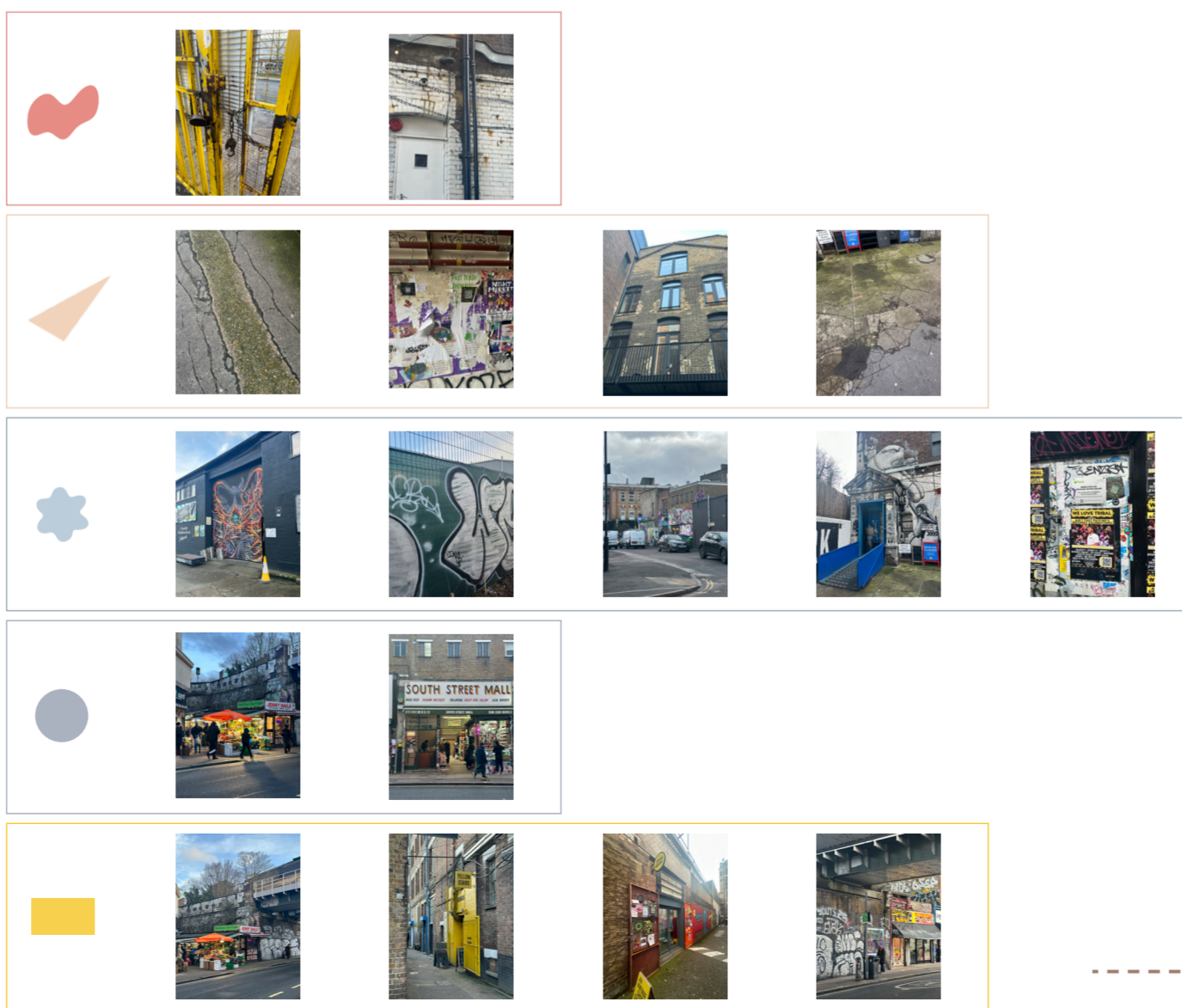
Interior Site Photographs



Exterior Site Photographs



Weathered bricks, worn surfaces, graffiti, repairs and everyday traces reveal a history accumulated over time. These elements act as containers of Material Memory, recording occupation, community presence and local identity. Together, these traces form a valuable commons resource that connects people, place and memory.



The Risk of Urban Amnesia

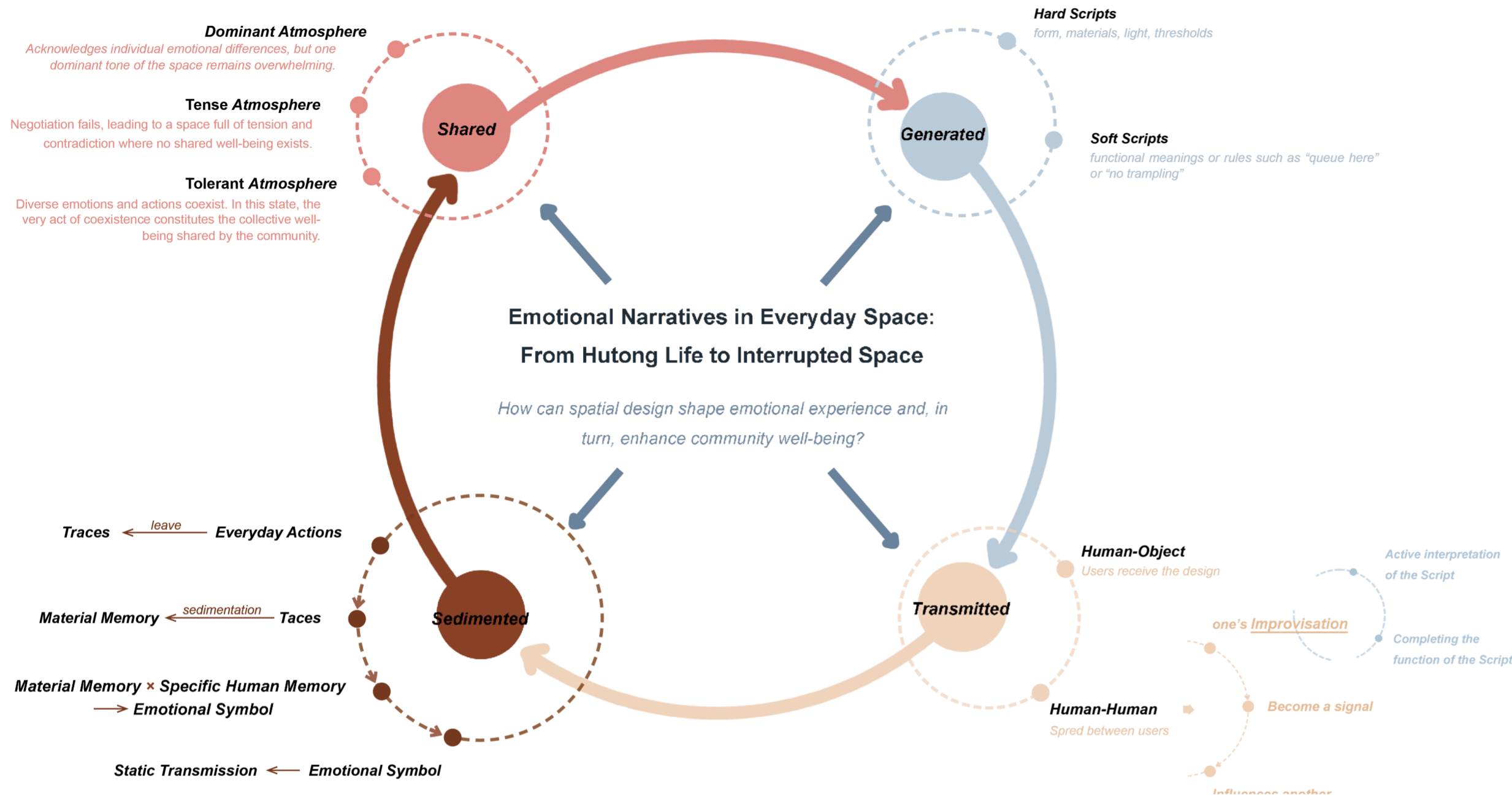


Against this backdrop, contemporary redevelopment often removes the traces that connect people to local history and collective memory, creating conditions of Urban Amnesia and Emotional Sterility. The ordinary traces embedded within Safehouse 2 therefore become increasingly valuable as records of belonging, continuity and everyday life.

The Framework

When walking through the city, some places feel warm and alive, while others feel distant or empty. This contrast led to the central research question: **How can spatial design shape emotional experience and, in turn, enhance collective well-being?**

Through the study of everyday spatial experiences, the research identified a recurring process through which emotional relationships between people and place are formed. This process was developed into the Emotional Loop, a framework describing how emotions are generated, transmitted, sedimented and shared through space.



Film

01. Generated (The Script)

How does spatial design GENERATE initial emotional experiences?

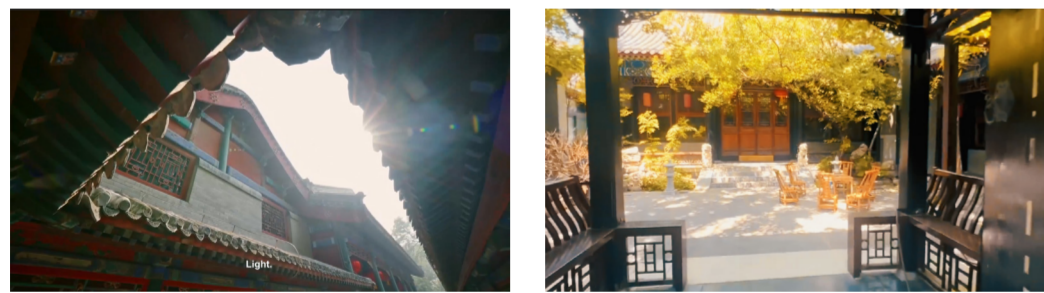


Fig 1. Film stills showing light, materiality, and thresholds as spatial scripts in hutong spaces.

02. Transmitted (Improvisation)

How are these spatially-generated emotional experiences TRANSMITTED among people?

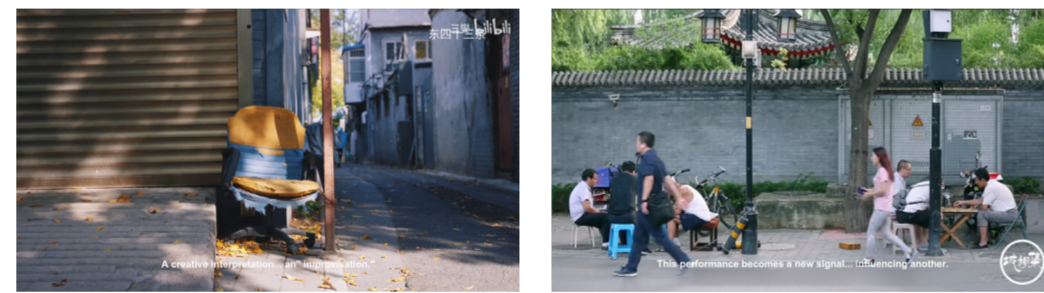


Fig 2. Film stills showing the transmission of spatial emotions through everyday improvisation and informal social interactions.

03. Sedimented (Material Memory)

How do continuous daily actions "SEDIMENT" into a space's material memory?



Fig 3. Film still showing worn architectural details as carriers of lived experience.

04. Shared (Atmosphere)

How is this ("sedimented") spatial atmosphere SHARED by the community, and how does it influence well-being?

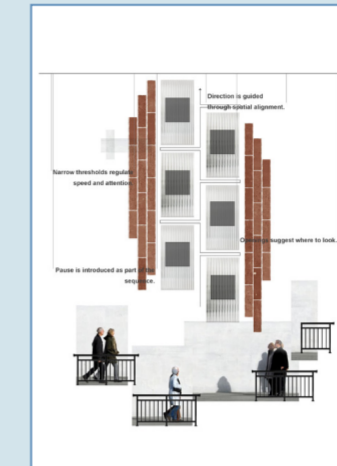


Fig 4. Film stills showing a shared spatial atmosphere formed through everyday coexistence and social negotiation in Beijing hutongs.

Spatial Translation

The project translates the Emotional Loop into a narrative gallery through the adaptive reuse of Safehouse 2. The four stages of the framework become four interconnected spatial environments, transforming an abstract emotional process into a lived spatial experience. Rather than presenting research as information, the gallery invites visitors to encounter emotional narratives through movement, atmosphere and interaction.

01 SCRIPT



- Controlled spatial sequence
- Directed circulation
- Sequential exhibition narrative
- Limited choice of movement
- Analytical captions revealing hidden spatial scripts

Function: Introduction Gallery

- Emotional Loop
- Spatial Scripts
- Architectural intentions
- Peckham spatial examples

02 IMPROVISATION



- Multiple circulation routes
- User-directed exploration
- Interactive engagement
- Seating and gathering points
- Multimedia installations
- Spatial layers overlapping with the Script Room

Function: Interactive Exhibition

- Peckham everyday life
- Local histories
- Community stories
- Personal narratives

03 MATERIAL MEMORY

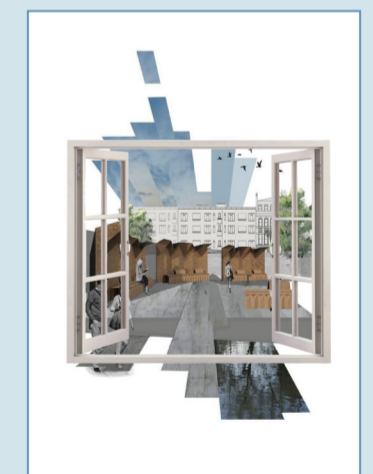


- Preserved existing material fabric
- Viewing tower inserted around preserved fabric
- Ascending circulation tower
- Framed views towards Peckham
- Elevated observation platform overlooking Peckham
- Juxtaposition of old fabric and new intervention

Function: Memory and Observation Tower

- Existing traces
- Building memories
- Relationship between past and present
- City as accumulated memory

04 SHARED ATMOSPHERE



- Open-plan social space
- Flexible seating and gathering areas
- Visual connections to the surrounding city
- Indoor-outdoor relationship
- Transition from compression to openness

Function: Gin Bar & Social Space

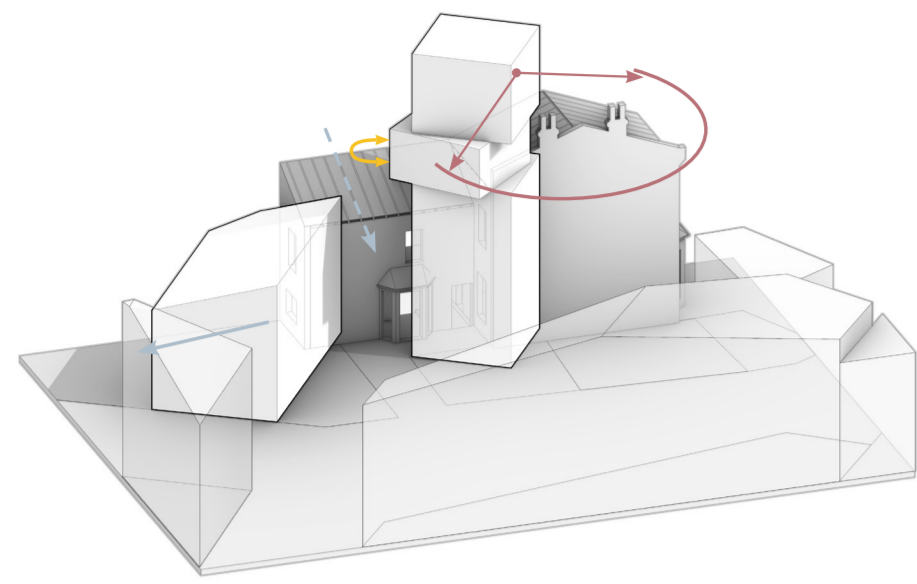
- Social gathering
- Shared experiences
- Locally inspired gin culture



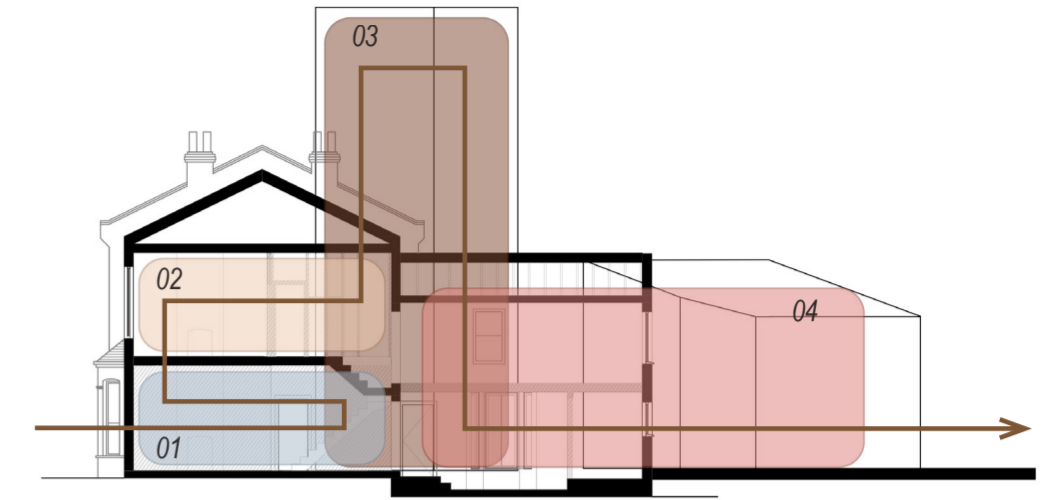
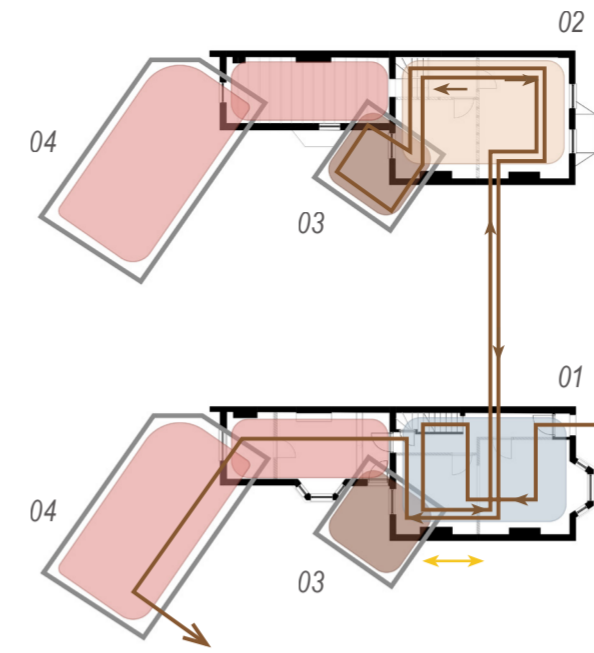
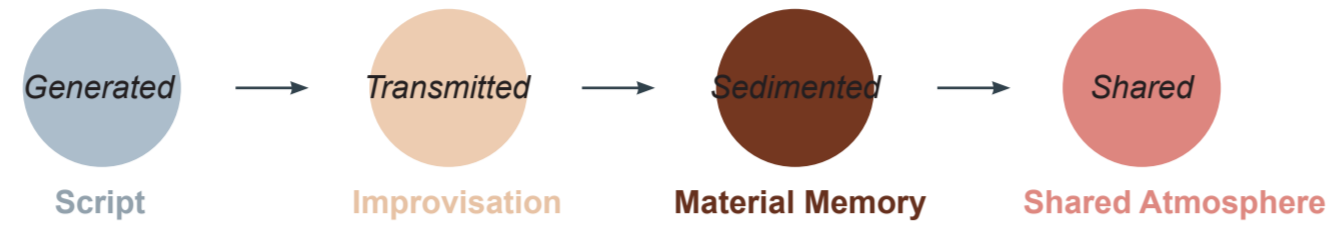
To capture the dynamic and sensory nature of emotional experience, a five-minute film was produced as a research tool. Beginning with observations of everyday life in Beijing Hutongs and later tested against the contrasting conditions of King's Cross and Canary Wharf, the film explored how emotional connections to place are formed, sustained or interrupted. These observations informed the development of the Emotional Loop.

← Scan to watch the film

Design Development

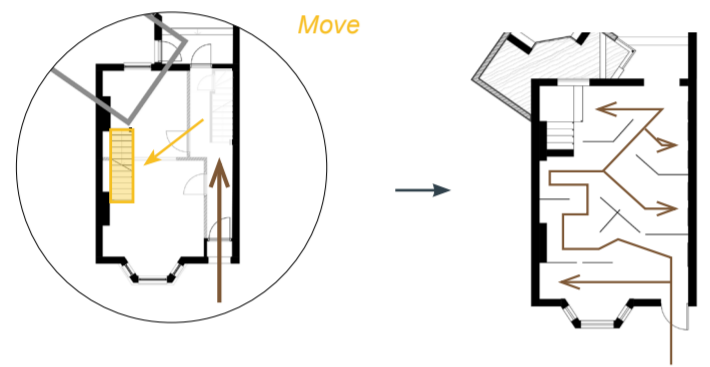


Sequential Visitor Journey

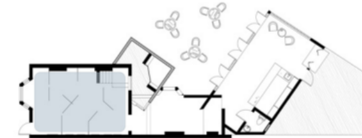
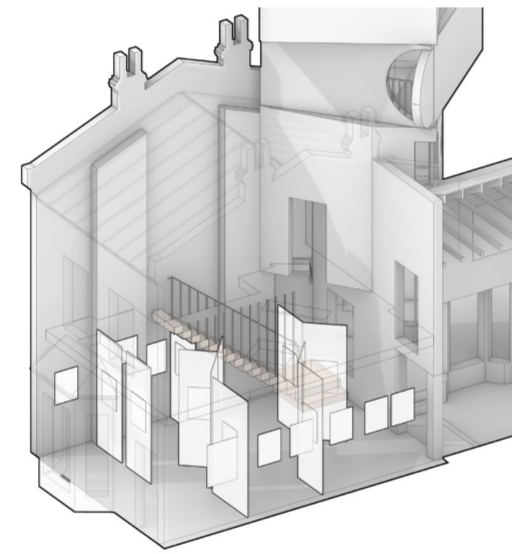
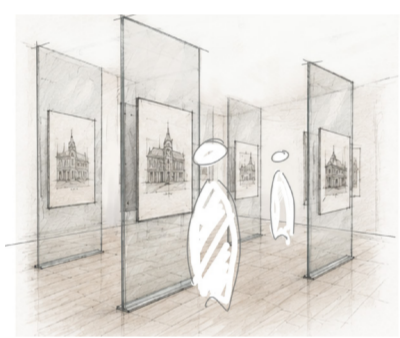


Space 01

Script - Introduction Gallery



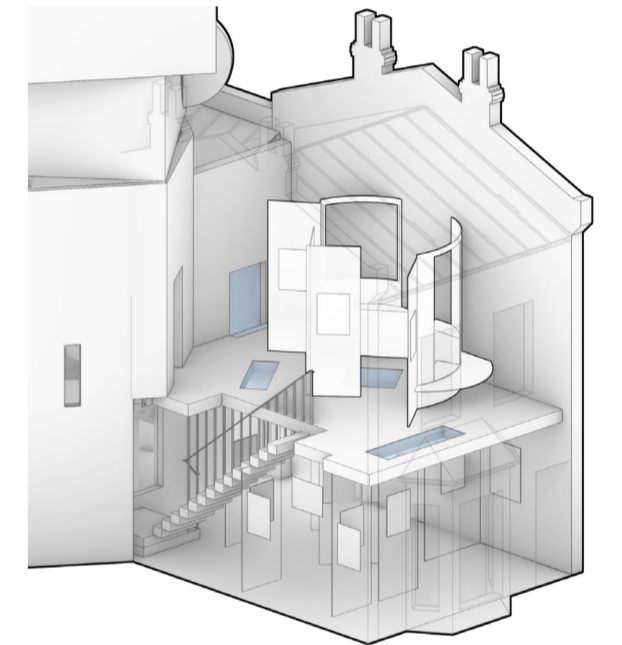
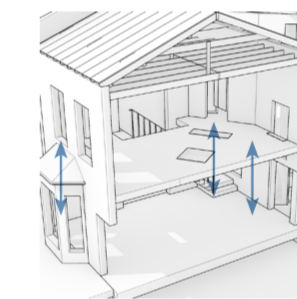
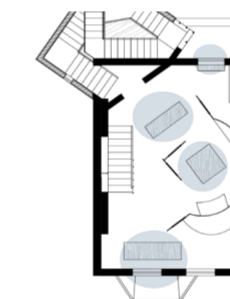
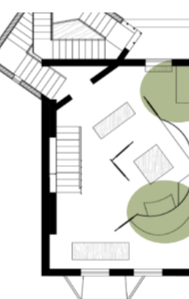
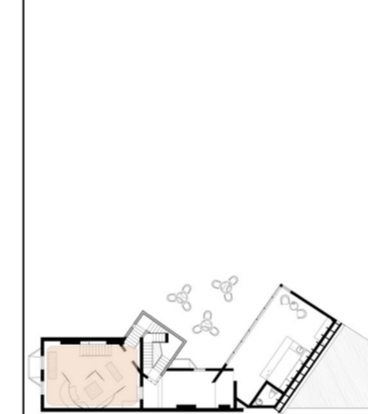
The gallery primarily employs transparent display panels to maintain visual openness within the narrow space while preserving views towards the existing fabric of Safehouse 2. Their arrangement and circulation strategy establish a clear narrative sequence, guiding visitors through the first stage of the Emotional Loop.



Space 02

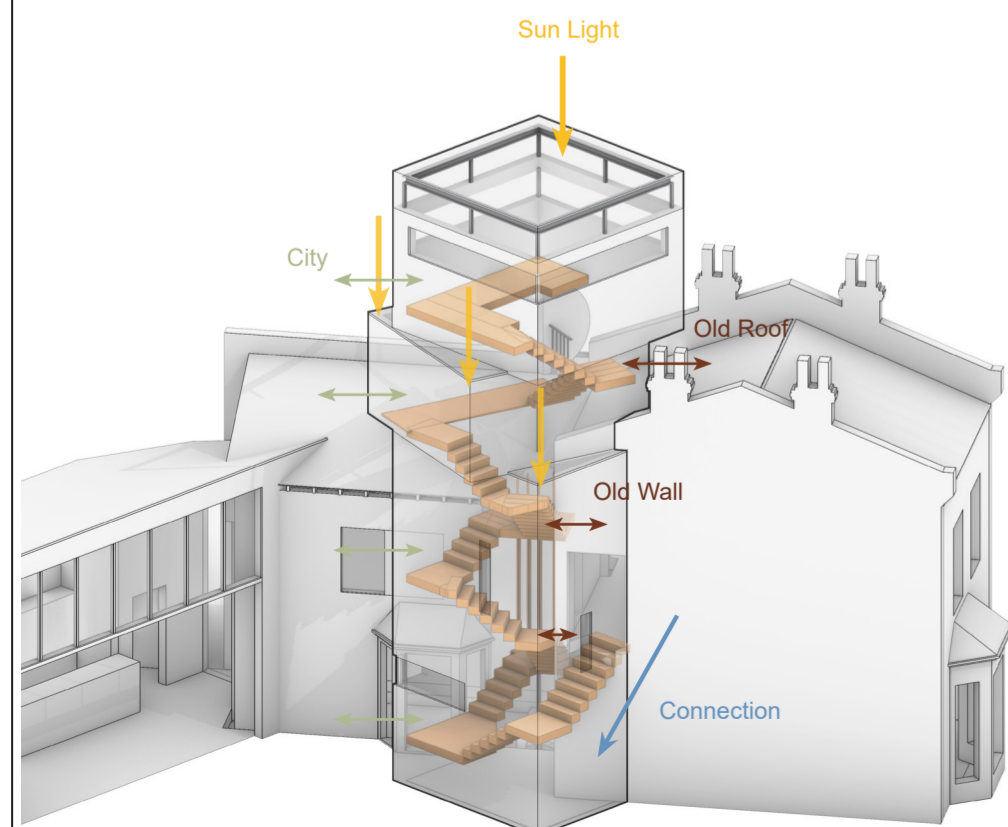
Improvisation - Interactive Exhibition

Continuing the use of transparent display panels, the gallery adopts a more flexible exhibition layout to encourage free exploration without a prescribed route. Seating areas support informal occupation, while visual connections between spaces reveal parallel activities unfolding throughout the gallery. The glass floor panels expose the layer below, expressing how improvisation emerges from and builds upon existing scripts.

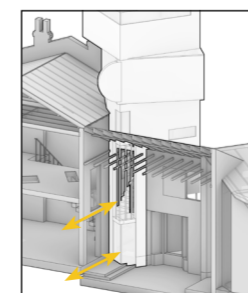
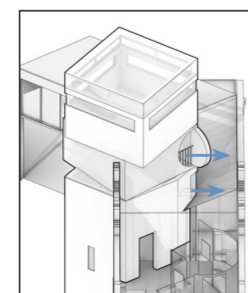


Space 03

Material Memory - Memory and Observation Tower



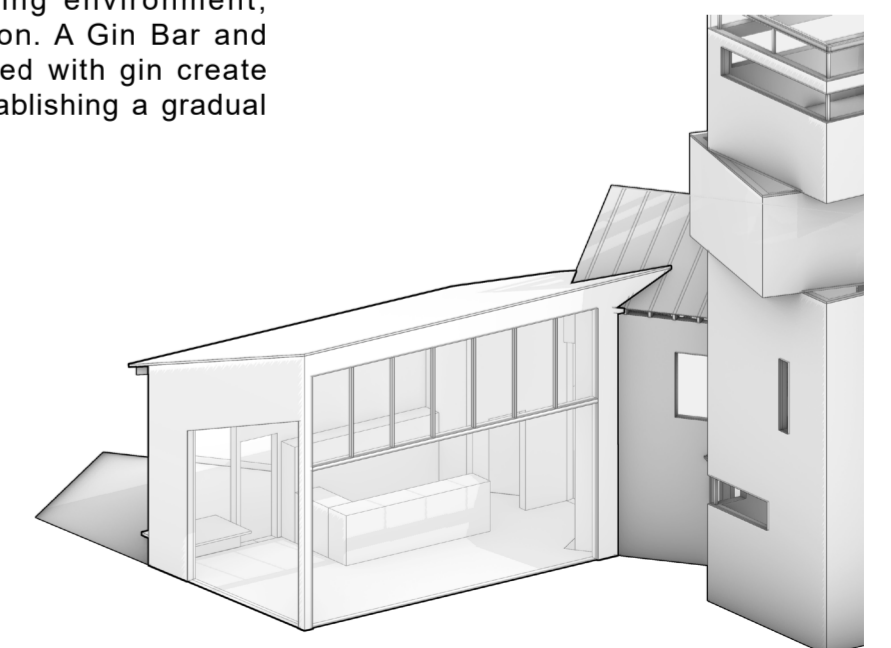
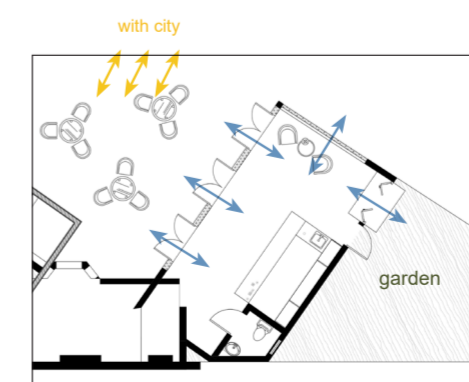
A vertical tower structure creates a spiraling journey through the space. As visitors ascend, they encounter the weathered surfaces and preserved traces of the existing building at close range. Openings frame selected views towards the city, while visual connections to the surrounding rooms maintain continuity across the gallery. The ascent allows visitors to engage with both the existing fabric of Safehouse 2 and the wider urban context.



Space 04

Shared Atmosphere - Gin Bar & Social Space

The gallery opens into a more social and outward-facing environment, encouraging gathering, conversation and shared occupation. A Gin Bar and adjoining botanical garden featuring plants commonly paired with gin create opportunities for visitors to linger beyond the exhibition, establishing a gradual transition between the gallery and the city.



Sectional Perspective



Plan



Key

- | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Script | a. Glass |
| 2. Improvisation | b. Polycarbonate |
| 3. Material Memory | c. Powder coating metal sheets |
| 4. Shared Atmosphere | d. Glass Block |
| 5. Garden | |

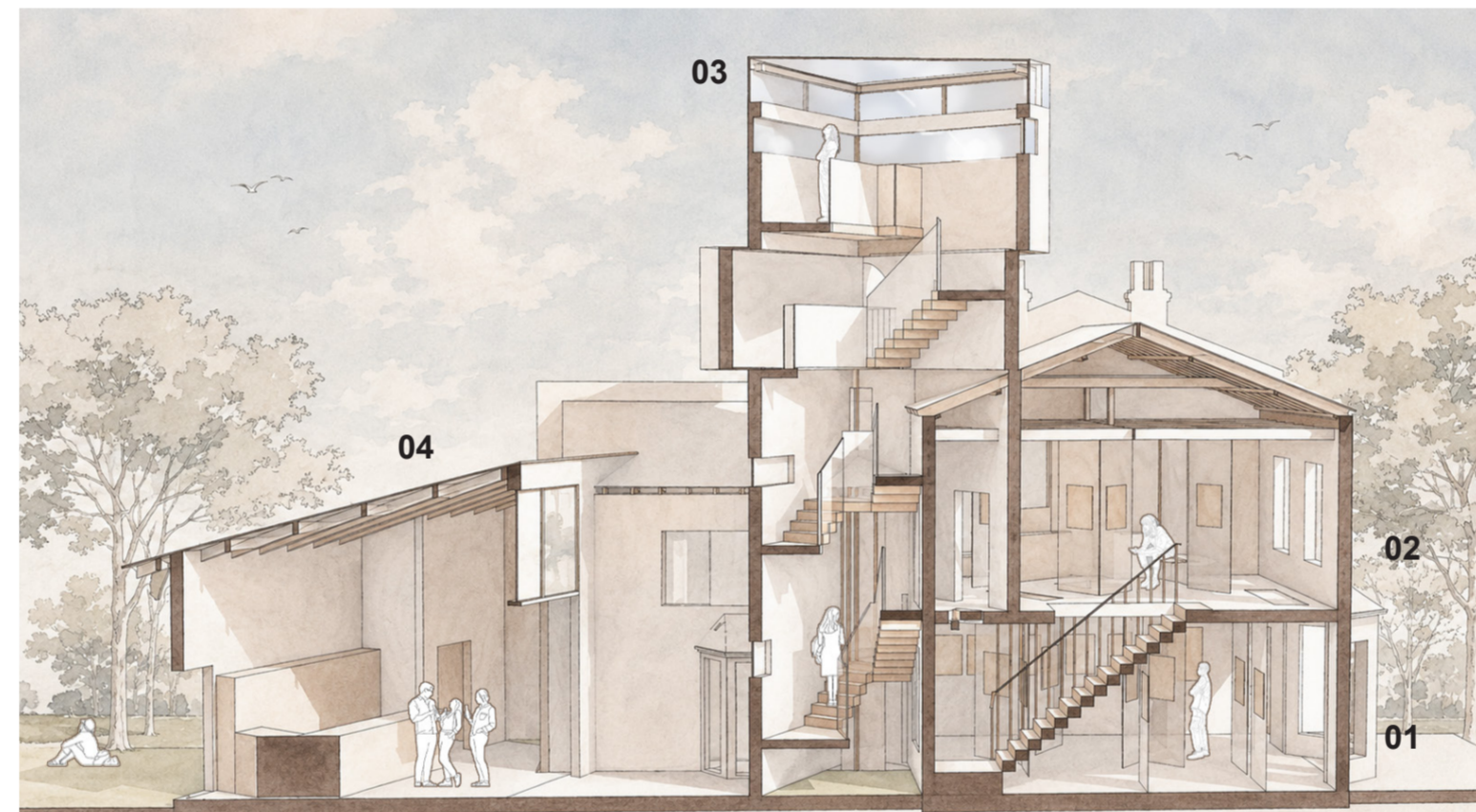
Ground Floor

First Floor

Render Journey



03 MATERIAL MEMORY



02 IMPROVISATION

04 SHARED ATMOSPHERE



01 SCRIPT

