

Unhomed:

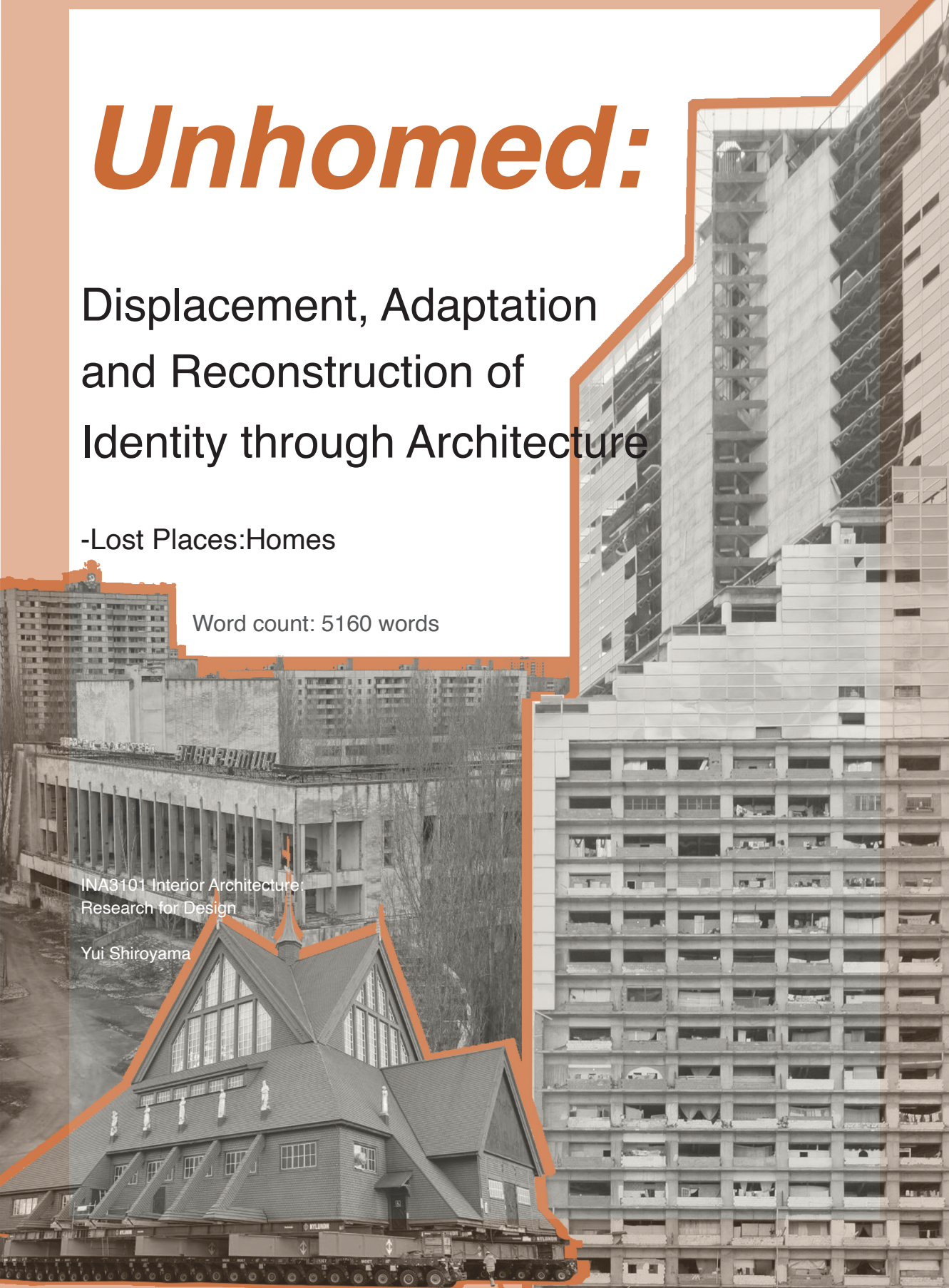
Displacement, Adaptation and Reconstruction of Identity through Architecture

-Lost Places:Homes

Word count: 5160 words

INA3101 Interior Architecture:
Research for Design

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Abstract_

This journal investigates the emotional and architectural consequences of displacement and the ways in which people reconstruct identity through built form. Drawing from the research strand Lost Places: Homes, it traces a narrative of recovery through three case studies: Pripyat (Displacement), Torre David (Adaptation), and Kiruna (Reconstruction). Each site exposes a distinct stage in a journey from loss to renewal, revealing how architecture can both preserve and transform memory. It examines the emotional and architectural results of losing one's home and considers how architecture can contribute to a new sense of belonging.

As part of the primary research, I conducted a participatory exercise within my research strand group to explore how individuals define and visualise 'home,' and how collective interpretations can reveal shared values, emotions, and spatial identities. Asking participants 'What items make you feel at home?', I gathered personal responses that were then translated into a collective visual composition with the items which make them feel at home. This process deepens my understanding of how individuals from different backgrounds identify what 'home' means to them and what makes them feel at home, even when separated from their original domestic spaces. Ultimately, this research positions architecture as a framework for empathy, bridging memory, identity, and place in contexts of displacement.

Positioning Statement_

Lost Places: Homes, this research strand explores the idea of home as a contested space, and how architecture can respond to the emotional and spatial conditions of loss. It examines how the idea of 'home' is not fixed, but continually negotiated through memory, identity, and environment. The strand looks at homes that are physically lost through demolition, abandonment, or disaster, as well as homes that are felt to be lost when individuals move across cultures or social conditions and must renegotiate where they belong. In this study, I am interested in displacement, which includes how those people who are forced to leave their homes reconstruct a sense of identity and belonging in a new place.

For me, 'Lost places' are not only the abandoned buildings or forgotten cities, but also the personal and collective experiences of people whose connections to home have been disrupted. Both a personal and architectural curiosity shape this research. I moved from Japan to the UK with my family seven years ago. This experience influenced my awareness of how cultural memory, domestic rituals, and spatial familiarity form the foundations of belonging.

In this journal, I approach home not simply as a physical dwelling, but as a lived and continually negotiated spatial condition. Home is experienced through familiarity, routine and embodied memory.

For example, the way light enters a room, the sound of familiar morning news on TV, the presence of personal objects, or the repetition of daily rituals. These sensory and emotional anchors form a sense of belonging that is deeply felt yet often unnoticed. When displacement occurs, what is lost is not only a building but these subtle patterns of living that make us feel oriented in the world. Therefore, the home must be understood as dynamic rather than static, something that can dissolve, fracture, and be reassembled in new contexts. This perspective is central to the study as it recognises that the reconstruction of home is an ongoing process of meaning-making that unfolds through both architectural environments and personal memory.



Unhomed: Displacement, Adaptation, and the Reconstruction of Identity through Architecture



The primary site for design interventions that sit alongside this journal, **St. Mary's Church** in Somers Town, London, embodies both continuity and change. Somers Town has been a place that's shaped by migration, redevelopment, and social struggle. Situated between Euston and King's Cross in London, it has been a site of transition. This area used to be a home to working-class families, migrant communities; however, now it's a place under the pressure of gentrification. There is a visible transformation in the architecture of the area: social housing blocks are being demolished, replaced or redeveloped.

In June 2007, early infrastructure works began at King's Cross area, and by November 2008, major development was underway¹, a momentum that has continued to spill into Somers Town. Another example is the council has proposed a redevelopment scheme for the Agar Grove estate that involves demolishing existing blocks and constructing a greater number of new homes overall. While this initiative appears to support the community, only six additional council flats will be provided, and a big part of the new housing is for private sale. This means that there are fewer homes for low-income residents.

¹ King's Cross. 2019. "About the Redevelopment of King's Cross." King's Cross. King's Cross. 2019. <https://www.kingscross.co.uk/about-the-development>.



One of the old social housing blocks is being rebuilt as entirely private flats. This shows how the council is relying on private sales to fund the project. Furthermore, the council also plans to build a 25-storey tower of luxury private apartments on public green space in Somers Town. Residents and community leaders are strongly against this proposal, saying it's unfair for the Labour council to replace public space in a poor area with luxury flats that locals cannot afford. In Camden, 51% of children live in social housing, far higher than the London average.² This highlights how many families in the borough rely on stable, affordable homes and accessible communal spaces. In this context, public green space carries profound social and emotional value.

Homes that once represented security and identity are now replaced by impersonal, profit-driven architecture.

"This transformation is leading to the fragmentation of established communities, leaving behind "lost places" that exist only in memory."³ Sites where social networks, cultural practices, and local identities once converged. As redevelopment accelerates, these lived environments are replaced by profit-driven forms of architecture that carry none of the relational or historical meaning of what stood before.

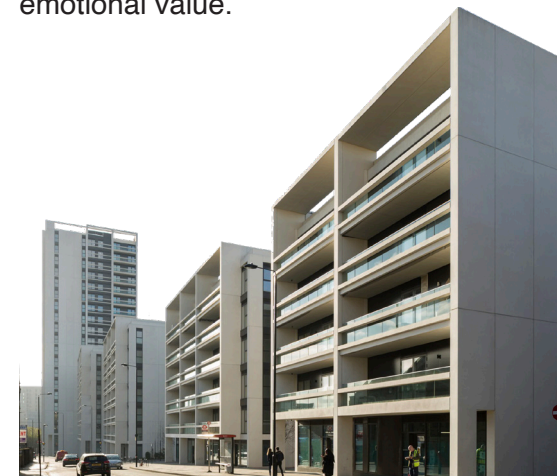


Figure 1

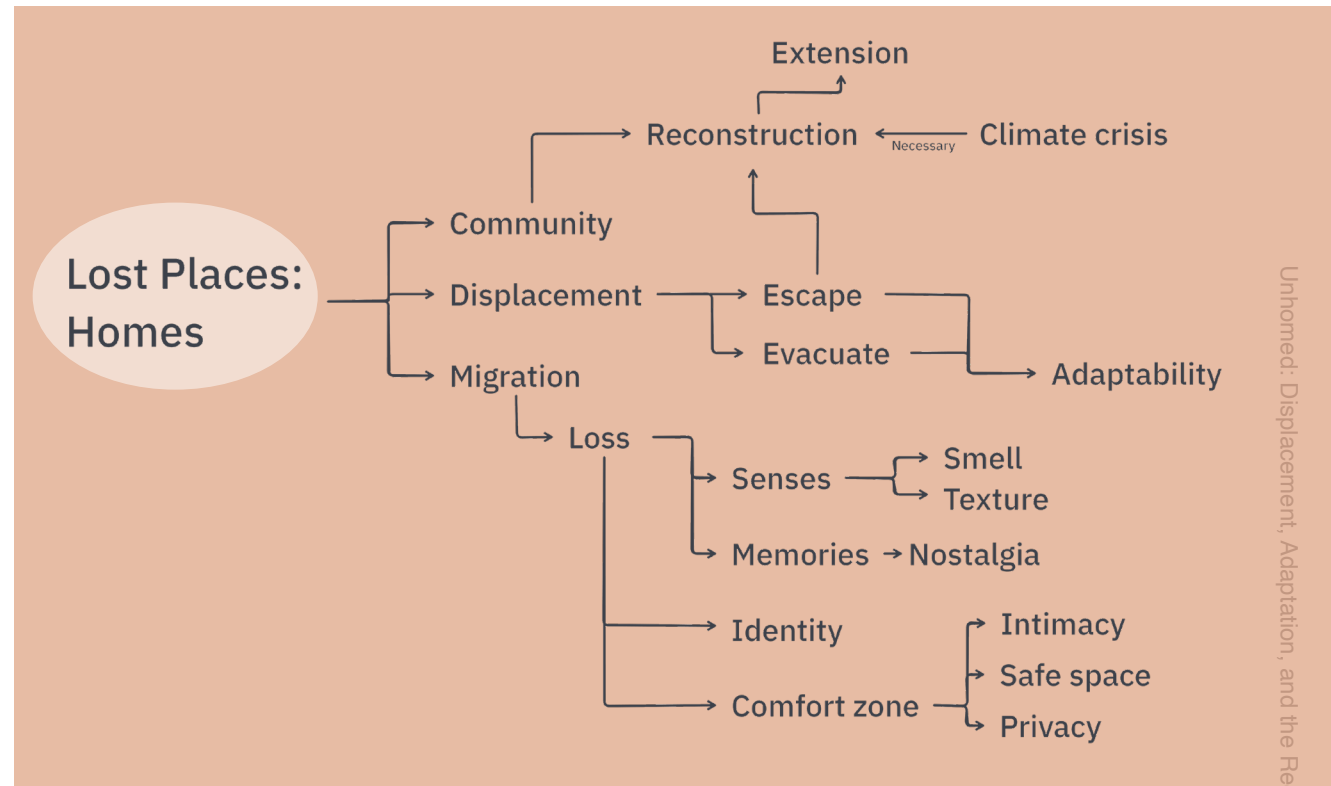
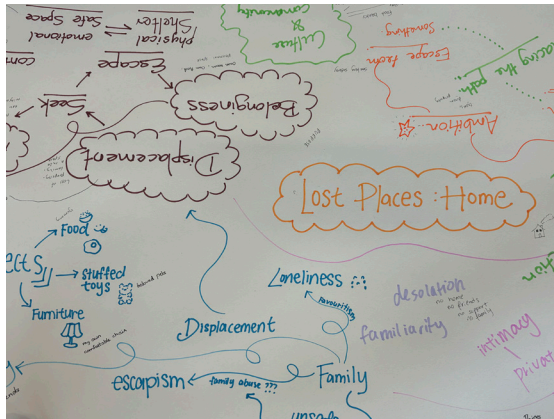
² "Focus On... FAMILIES & YOUNG CHILDREN." n.d. <https://www.camden.gov.uk/documents/20142/20682755/Families+and+Young+Children.pdf/e13e7c0c-5ea5-d1aa-a081-fb276bd5988f>.

³ Oliver, Wainwright. 2019. "Council Housing: It's Back, It's Booming – and This Time It's Beautiful." The Guardian. The Guardian. June 20, 2019. https://amp.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/jun/20/council-housing-its-back-its-booming-and-this-time-its-beautiful?utm_

Figure 1- Oliver, Wainwright. 2019. "Council Housing: It's Back, It's Booming – and This Time It's Beautiful." The Guardian. The Guardian. June 20, 2019. https://amp.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/jun/20/council-housing-its-back-its-booming-and-this-time-its-beautiful?utm_img-5.



This journal focuses on the impact of displacement on individuals and communities, particularly in relation to the loss and reconstruction of home. Aligned with the research strand Lost Places: Homes, it examines how people adapt to new social and spatial environments following forced relocation. St. Mary's Church in Somers Town provides a local example of displacement caused by gentrification. It used to be a working-class and migrant neighbourhood, but Somers Town is now under intense redevelopment pressure. A place that once provided stability and identity is now being replaced by profit-driven architecture, resulting in fragmented communities and shrinking public spaces. By analysing this transformation, the study questions how architecture might contribute to emotional continuity and belonging in contexts of urban change.



Unhomed: Displacement, Adaptation, and the Reconstruction of Identity through Architecture



Introduction_

Displacement

- the situation in which people are forced to leave the place where they normally live.⁴

⁴ Cambridge Dictionary. 2025. "Displacement." @CambridgeWords. May 14, 2025. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/displacement?q=Displacement>.



In today's rapidly changing urban landscapes, the idea of "home" is unstable. Across the world, communities are being displaced due to gentrification, redevelopment, economic instability, and environmental disasters. Architecture plays a crucial role in this process, both as a cause of displacement and as a potential means of healing and reconstruction. **The loss of a home can represent a fracture in personal and collective identity. This journal examines how architectural change reshapes the lived experiences of communities, and how places absorb the social, emotional, and spatial pressures that accompany displacement.**

The term 'displacement' in this study refers to the **forced movement of individuals or communities from their living environments** due to external pressures such as urban redevelopment, economic inequality, or natural and industrial disasters. The phrase 'Lost Places' involves both physical places of abandonment and the emotional or psychological experience of feeling a loss.

⁵Blunt, Alison, and Robyn Dowling. 2022. Home. London: Routledge.

⁶Bloomer, Kent C, and Charles W Moore. 1977. Body, Memory, and Architecture. New Haven: Yale University Press.

As Blunt and Dowling describe in **Home** (2nd ed., 2022), home is "an emotive place and spatial imaginary that encompasses lived experiences, everyday domestic life alongside a wide, and often contested, sense of being and belonging in the world."⁵ Their definition highlights how home extends beyond the physical dwelling, existing simultaneously as a material, emotional, and political construct. **A 'home,' therefore, is not only a dwelling but a spatial condition shaped by memory, routine, and identity.**

In **Body, Memory, and Architecture** (1977) by Bloomer and Moore, it is proposed that architectural space is experienced through the body and sustained in sensory memory. As they write, "to at least some extent every real place can be remembered, partly because it is unique, but partly because it has affected our bodies and generated enough associations to hold it in our personal worlds."⁶ From these perspectives, home is positioned as an embodied and affective condition, one produced through the body's sensory encounters with space and the emotional intensities that attach to them. It is carried in gesture, muscle memory, atmosphere and association, allowing a home to endure through movement, memory, and adaptation, even when its physical structures are lost.

To broaden my understanding of displacement and the effect on people and place, I analyse three case studies that outline a progression from loss to adaptation and ultimately reconstruction: **Pripyat (Displacement)**, **Torre David (Adaptation)**, and **Kiruna (Reconstruction)**. Each reveals a distinct condition of loss, reconstruction, and adaptation, and each offers insights relevant to the urban transformation of Somers Town.

Pripyat, abandoned after the 1986 Chernobyl disaster, represents the sudden rupture of home. The city was evacuated within hours, leaving domestic interiors frozen in time. Furniture, books, and toys remain as haunting traces of interrupted lives. Pripyat transforms from a city of vitality into a landscape of trauma and remembrance, where **architecture becomes a silent witness to collective displacement**.



Torre David in Caracas illustrates a powerful form of adaptation. Originally designed as a luxury office tower, the building was abandoned during Venezuela's economic collapse. Later, hundreds of displaced families occupied its unfinished structure, transforming it into a self-organised vertical community. Residents built homes, shops, and gathering spaces inside the tower. They turned an emblem of economic failure into a living architecture of resilience. Torre David demonstrates how belonging can emerge through improvisation and shared care, challenging conventional ideas of domesticity and ownership. **It represents the first stage of recovery after displacement, an act of making a home where none was intended.**

In contrast, **Kiruna**, in northern Sweden, tells the story of controlled reconstruction. Due to ground instability caused by decades of mining, the entire town is being physically moved three kilometres east. In this process, architecture becomes an act of translation: landmarks such as Kiruna Church are carefully dismantled and rebuilt, preserving fragments of collective identity. Kiruna raises the question of whether belonging can be relocated and how communities reconstruct emotional attachment when the physical ground beneath them shifts. **It embodies the final stage of renewal, where design consciously translates memory into a new urban fabric.**

Collectively, these three case studies trace a spectrum of spatial and social change. From sudden loss, to informal adaptation, to planned reconstruction. Together, they show how architecture holds the memory of human life even when function, ownership, or stability are lost. This study reflects on **how the reconstruction of home, whether physical, emotional, or symbolic, can inform new forms of architectural empathy**, particularly in places like Somers Town, where the meaning of home continues to evolve.

The journal is structured into five parts. The positioning statement outlines the theoretical and personal framework of the study. Three case study chapters examine different stages of recovery. Pripyat (Displacement), Torre David (Adaptation), and Kiruna (Reconstruction). Finally, the conclusion reflects on how the lessons drawn from these sites may inform architectural practice at St. Mary's Church in Somers Town and proposes how interior architecture can foster a sense of belonging in contexts of instability and change.



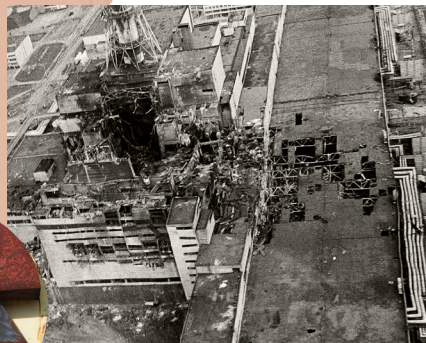
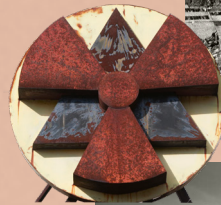
Key thematic terms in this study:

Displacement: The forced, traumatic separation of people from their physical and social environment.

Spatial Identity: The deep emotional and psychological bond that connects an individual's sense of self to the spaces they inhabit.

Reconstruction of Home: The active, often improvised, process of developing new bonds, narratives, and community within new or adapted structures.

Chapter 1_ Suspended Home



Case study 1: Displacement_

- Pripjat (The Frozen Home)

On the 26th of April 1986, an accident at the **Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant** caused Reactor No.4 to explode and burn. Within hours, the nearby city of Pripjat, a model Soviet community built for the plant's workers, was evacuated. What had been a thriving urban centre was transformed overnight into a deserted landscape, leaving behind furniture, toys, and photographs. Everyday artefacts that now serve as silent witnesses to an interrupted life. More than a hundred people died or suffered severe radiation injuries, and "More than 30 years on, scientists estimate the zone around the former plant will not be habitable for up to 20,000 years."⁷

Pripjat today embodies what might be described as an **architecture of absence**. The physical traces of domestic life endure, yet the human presence that once animated them has vanished. In these frozen interiors, time appears suspended. Wallpaper peels, toys left behind (Figure 2), paperwork decays (Figure 3), and playgrounds rust, but the arrangement of objects remains strangely familiar. This unsettling familiarity resonates with Sigmund Freud's definition of the uncanny, developed in his 1919 essay 'The **Uncanny**,' in which he describes it as

"that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar."⁸ In Pripjat, the domestic landscape retains the recognisable order of everyday life while simultaneously revealing its abrupt abandonment. This tension between the familiar and the estranged produced an atmosphere of quiet disturbance, intensifying the city's status as both a ruin and an unintentional memorial to Soviet domesticity.



Figure 2



Figure 3

⁷ BLAKEMORE, ERIN. 2019. "The Chernobyl Disaster: What Happened, and the Long-Term Impacts." National Geographic. National Geographic. May 17, 2019. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/chernobyl-disaster/>.

Whipple, Madison. 2023. "A Generation Later, What Does Chernobyl Look like Today?" TheCollector. May 19, 2023. <https://www.thecollector.com/chernobyl-today/>.

⁸ Freud, Sigmund. 1919. "The 'Uncanny.'" Massachusetts Institute of Technology. <https://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/freud1.pdf>.

Figure 2- 2025. Wp.com. 2025. https://i0.wp.com/travelbred.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/DSC_0410.jpg?w=3840&ssl=1.

Figure 3- 2025. Wp.com. 2025. https://i0.wp.com/travelbred.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/DSC_0400.jpg?w=1280.

The **uncanny** atmosphere of Pripjat is not only psychological but also sensory: the rusted playgrounds, peeling wallpaper, and frozen domestic arrangements register in the body, eliciting unease, nostalgia, and fascination simultaneously. The affective response of these spaces demonstrates how architecture can shape emotional experience in the absence of inhabitants.

From a trauma and memory perspective, Pripjat functions as a repository of social and personal history. The preserved domestic spaces record traces of everyday life and sudden rupture, aligning with James E. Young’s argument that architecture can materialise absence and mediate collective memory. As Young warns in the context of memorial architecture, “to memorialise becomes a substitute for action.”⁹ In Pripjat, the built environment itself becomes a witness to catastrophe, not through heroic monumentality,

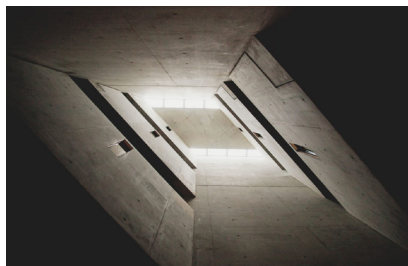


Figure 6

but through remains of ordinary life abandoned in haste.

The Jewish Museum Berlin, designed by Daniel Libeskind, provides a compelling contrast. Unlike Pripjat, the museum is intentionally structured to evoke absence and rupture: voids (Figure 4), disorienting circulation (Figure 5), and tilted floors (Figure 6) immerse visitors in the emotional and cognitive experience of loss. Yet, like Pripjat, it produces a form of uncanny familiarity; spaces are legible as domestic or urban but rendered estranged through design. Both sites demonstrate how architecture can preserve trauma and mediate memory, whether through unintentional abandonment or deliberate spatial strategies.



Figure 4

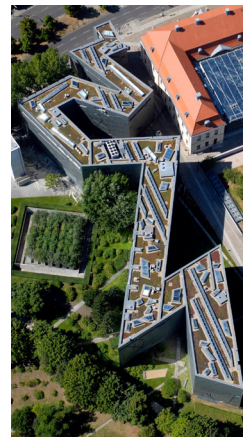


Figure 5

⁹ Lee, Anne. 2024. “Young Speaks about 9/11 Monuments and Memory.” Massachusetts Daily Collegian. 2024. <https://dailycollegian.com/2002/10/young-speaks-about-911-monuments-and-memory/>.

Figure 4- 2025. Dezeen.com. 2025. https://static.dezeen.com/uploads/2022/04/daniel-libeskinds-jewish-museum-deconstructivist-architecture_dezeen_2364_col_13-1704x1897.jpg.

Figure 5- 2024. Dezeen.com. 2024. https://static.dezeen.com/uploads/2022/04/daniel-libeskinds-jewish-museum-deconstructivist-architecture_dezeen_2364_col_0-1-scaled.jpg.

Figure 6- 2025. Readcereal.com. 2025. https://www.readcereal.com/images/2023/09/Jewish-Museum_08-1536x1024.jpg.

The documentary “**The Babushkas of Chernobyl**” (2012) offers a touching counterpoint to Pripjat’s silence. It follows elderly women who illegally returned to live within the exclusion zone, choosing to die in the place they once called home rather than in a state-assigned apartment. Their presence reintroduces a fragile human rhythm to the stillness of the city and raises critical questions about belonging, resilience, and the right to remain.

Pripjat, therefore, represents the first stage of displacement in this study. A moment of sudden rupture in which the home becomes inaccessible but materially preserved. It invites reflection on how architecture records trauma and how designers might engage with such preserved sites. Not simply as an artefact of catastrophe but as spaces that could support **remembrance and reflection**.

“We still want to go home because our life happened there. Our childhood, raising children, celebrating marriages, seeing loved ones off to the army. Everything. Motherland is Motherland.”

- Bogart, Anne, and Holly Morris. 2015. Review of *The Babushkas of Chernobyl* Documentary. Journeyman Pictures.



Chapter 2_ Improvised Home



Case study 2: Adaptation_ - Torre David (The Architecture of Improvisation)

In the heart of Caracas, Venezuela, stands Torre David, an unfinished 45-storey skyscraper that was originally conceived as a symbol of economic ambition during the country's oil boom in the early 1990s. However, following the financial collapse of 1994 and the death of its developer. For more than a decade, the building remained abandoned, a vertical monument to failure in the centre of the city.



Figure 7

By 2007, during a period of housing crisis and economic uncertainty, Torre David became an unexpected refuge for over 750 families who had been displaced from formal housing⁵. What was once a symbol of economic aspiration was transformed into an improvised vertical neighbourhood. Residents collectively adapted the unfinished structure. Installing makeshift walls, stairs, rails, plumbing systems, and communal areas (Figure 4). Through this process, Torre David evolved into a powerful example of adaptive reuse from below, **a space reimagined through necessity rather than design.**



Figure 8

Figure 7- 2025. Googleusercontent.com. 2025. https://blogger.googleusercontent.com/img/b/R29vZ2xl/AVvXsEhxOTN-WWxwZQLOBYRahb7TMzahFeKLWAd5FXMMCloocucJJRdO2AGINL6sW1j7zTddNzt4hyphenhyphen8GF95ejPdbjqE-uNO-ML_-sofKmVCXCTCCxhpnGNtt1gT505pFBTeoVkrRrk1yGbDISDmPdD/s1600/tumblr_n1bpt22kYF1sx9zdwo8_r1_1280.jpg.

Figure 8- 2025. Googleusercontent.com. 2025. https://blogger.googleusercontent.com/img/b/R29vZ2xl/AVvXsEik713k-gNjwa9CzObyTGWEvTTrDNZNeDxu_3zWkw0cA_WhyphenhyphenecXMAx6QXvoRPByr8UZn2ORzoZuvtnx_dYCC0t-p66J7XR9s9dHq35C9SjrhuH7O9LfuOAEtOfm3F9fsO6NYQ8hZjSpFbAKJW/s1600/tumblr_n1bpt22kYF1sx9zdwo5_r1_1280.jpg.

¹⁰ Gerben Helleman. 2014. "Torre David; Informal Vertical Community." Blogspot.com. Blogger. March 28, 2014. <https://urbanspringtime.blogspot.com/2014/03/torre-david-informal-vertical-community.html>.

This case study introduces the concept of improvised belonging. The idea that a sense of home can emerge through informal, collective acts of reconstruction. Torre David challenges conventional notions of architecture as something fixed or professionally authored. Instead, it demonstrates **how displaced communities negotiate dignity, safety, and identity through everyday acts of adaptation.** Within its raw concrete frame, residents redefined what it means to inhabit, creating an architecture that is both practical and deeply human.

Torre David can be understood through Henri Lefebvre's proposition that space is not a neutral container but is socially produced. As Lefebvre writes, "(social) space is a (social) product,"¹¹ emphasising that urban environments emerge through lived experience rather than solely through architectural intention. The residents of Torre David embody this principle: through improvised construction, shared labour, and communal governance, they actively produced a lived space within an unfinished structure.

Their occupation aligns with David Harvey's interpretation of the right to the city, which he describes as "a collective rather than an individual right, since reinventing the city inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power over the processes of urbanisation."¹² In reshaping the abandoned tower according to their needs, the community enacted this collective agency, asserting their right to produce urban space in the absence of formal provision. Through these theoretical lenses, Torre David emerges not simply as an improvised dwelling but as a powerful demonstration of how displaced people reclaim belonging, identity, and urban citizenship through everyday acts of spatial adaptation.

The adaptive practices within Torre David can be understood as forms of spatial "hacking", informal modifications, repairs, and inventions that enable inhabitants to make an unfinished structure liveable. These interventions resonate with broader traditions of squatting culture, where communities occupy unused or derelict buildings and transform them through collective labour. Squatting operates not only as a response to housing scarcity but also as a political challenge to state control over land and property. A parallel can be drawn with Christiania (Figure 6-9) in Copenhagen, a self-governed community that has occupied a former military site since 1971. "hippies, artists and activists cut a hole in the fence to the military barracks in Bådmandsgade, and declared the area a free town, independent of Danish government laws and regulations."¹³ Like the residents of Torre David, Christiania's inhabitants created an alternative urban order through **shared responsibility, informal construction, and communal decision-making.**

Both contexts demonstrate how displaced or marginalised groups build forms of home grounded in autonomy rather than ownership, asserting the right to inhabit and reshape space beyond conventional property frameworks. In this sense, Torre David is not merely an improvised settlement but part of a wider lineage of spatial resistance in which **home becomes a collective practice of making, negotiating, and claiming urban life.**



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11

¹¹ Lefebvre, Henri. 1991. "The Production of Space." *Economic Geography* 68 (3): 317. <https://doi.org/10.2307/144191>.

¹² Harvey, David. *Rebel Cities : From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, Verso, 2013. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/mdx/detail.action?docID=5176996>.

¹³ "Freetown Christiania I See & Do." n.d. VisitCopenhagen. <https://www.visitcopenhagen.com/copenhagen/planning/christiania-gdk957761>.

Figure 9- 2025. Smugmug.com. 2025. <https://photos.smugmug.com/Denmark/Copenhagen-2018/i-GRJnLPw/0/744d9e2c/L/P1210078-L.jpg>.

Figure 10- 2025. Smugmug.com. 2025. <https://photos.smugmug.com/Denmark/Copenhagen-2018/i-r9QWkxv/0/c3e9f7dc/L/P1210076-L.jpg>.

Figure 11- 2025. Smugmug.com. 2025. <https://photos.smugmug.com/Denmark/Copenhagen-2018/i-sSgqFL/0/c2a0cb99/L/P1210052-L.jpg>.

The Architecture of Belonging: An Autoethnographic Study

Alongside the study of collective adaptation in Torre David, I conducted a small-scale qualitative exercise within my research strand group to explore the intimate, personal dimension of reconstructing home. This primary research, titled “The Architecture of Belonging,” asked participants to reflect on how they define and visualise the idea of home. Each participant responded to two questions:

1. What objects or spaces in your current home make you feel a sense of belonging?
2. What items left behind in your former home or country of origin would instantly evoke that same feeling if they reappeared?

The responses were collected and translated into a visual composition (Figure 12). A single, imagined domestic interior filled with these chosen items. The result revealed that home is not defined by architecture alone but by the small, often overlooked artefacts that carry emotional and cultural meaning. Objects such as the sound of a familiar radio, the specific scent of a piece of furniture, a family photo frame, identity, and memory.

Together, this study and my lived experience suggest that **belonging is not static**. It is an evolving relationship between people, memory, and place. Just as the residents of Torre David reshaped their environment to recover dignity and identity, individuals continuously reconstruct their own sense of home through memory and sensory continuity.

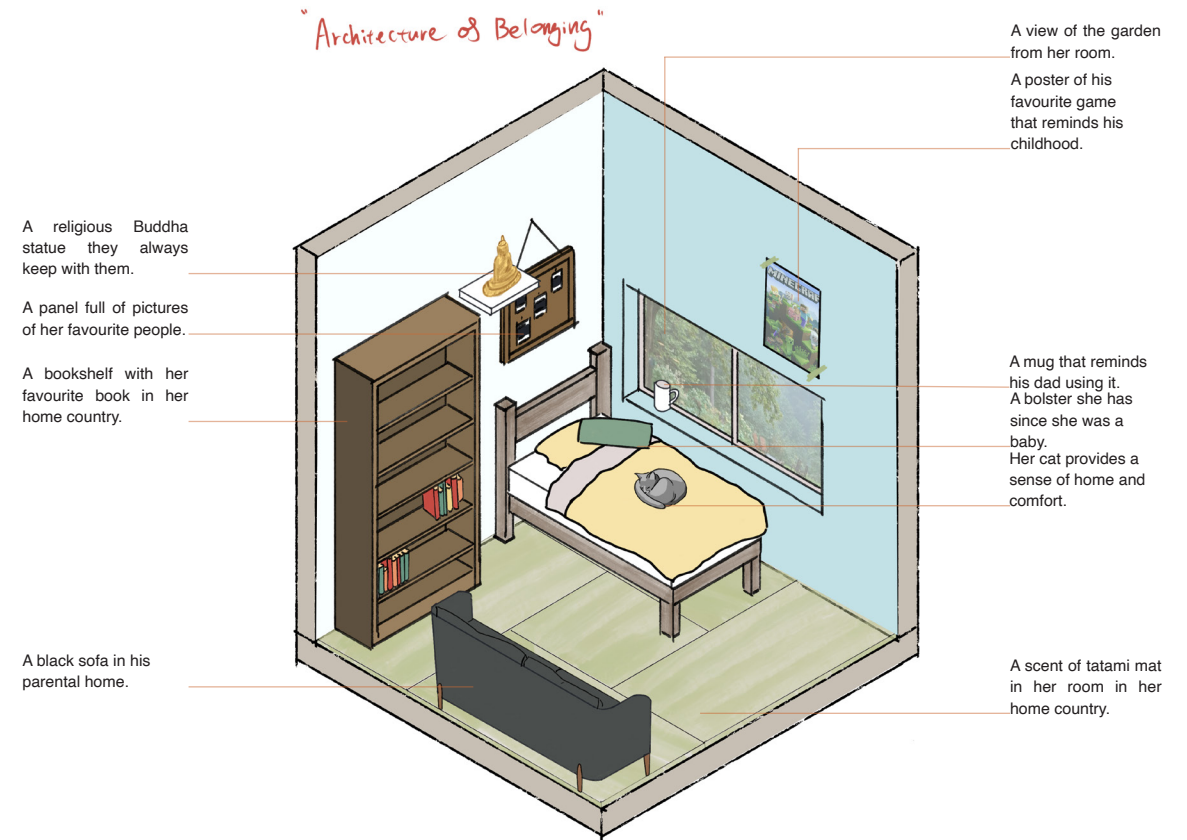


Figure 12- Illustration of collective items

Chapter 3_ Relocated Home



Case study 3: Reconstruction_

- Kiruna (Community resilience)

Kiruna represents the final stage in this study's spectrum of displacement: **a form of reconstruction in which a community attempts to carry its memories, rituals, and shared identity into a newly built environment.** Unlike Pripyat's rupture or Torre David's improvised adaptation, Kiruna's relocation foregrounds the role of memory as both a cultural as both a cultural resource and an architectural challenge.

Located in the far north of Sweden, Kiruna is a mining town built directly above one of the world's largest iron ore deposits. For over a century, the town's existence has depended on the operations of LKAB (Luossavaara-Kiirunavaara AB), the state-owned mining company that forms the backbone of its economy. east. This project is now recognised as one of the largest urban relocations in modern history.⁵

However, decades of extraction have gradually undermined the ground beneath the town, causing severe structural instability. By the early 2000s, geological studies confirmed that continued mining would eventually render large sections of Kiruna unsafe for habitation. In response, the Swedish government and LKAB made the unprecedented decision to relocate the entire town approximately three kilometres. The relocation plan includes not only residential areas but also schools, shops, and public infrastructure, all to be rebuilt in phases over several decades. Approximately 6,000 residents will move as part of this process.⁶ At the centre of this transformation is a question of cultural and architectural continuity: **how can a community maintain its sense of identity when its physical ground is literally shifting?**



Figure 13



Figure 14

¹⁴ Kinder, Tabby. 2014. "Kiruna: How to Move a Town Two Miles East." BBC News, March 6, 2014. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-26447507>.

¹⁵ Lo, Andrea, and Eoghan Macguire. 2017. "How Sweden's Arctic 'Millipede Town' Kiruna Is Slowly Moving." CNN. November 22, 2017. <https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/sweden-kiruna-relocation>.

Figure 13- 2025. Forbesimg.com. 2025. <https://specials-images.forbesimg.com/imageserve/60420072b87a1dfc730a68b2/Ingenj-rsvillan-building-being-moved-to-its-new-location-in-Kiruna--Sweden-/960x0.jpg?fit=scale>.

Figure 14- 2017. Cnn.com. 2017. https://media.cnn.com/api/v1/images/stellar/prod/171110110256-18-kiruna-sweden.jpg?q=w_1160.

This process foregrounds the role of memory as an active element in urban reconstruction. As Bruno Charal observes, “from individual memory to collective memory, architecture can impact what and how we remember.”

Kiruna Church

Kiruna Church was built between 1909 and 1912, commissioned by LKAB in collaboration with local craftsmen. Consecrated on 8th December 1912, the church has been regarded as the symbolic heart of Kiruna, a place where shared rituals mark the rhythms of community life. In 2001, it was named Sweden’s most beautiful public building, **reflecting its deep cultural and architectural significance.**

Due to the ground subsidence caused by continued iron ore extraction, the church could no longer remain in its original location. However, rather than demolish or replace it, the community insisted on preserving its material and symbolic integrity.

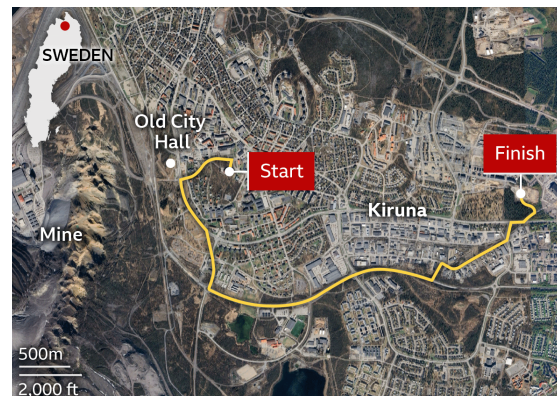


Figure 15

¹⁶ bruno. 2016. “Architecture and Memory | Bruno’s Blog.” Blogs.ubc.ca. April 13, 2016. https://blogs.ubc.ca/bruno-charal/2016/04/13/architecture-and-memory/?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

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The relocation, therefore, became a careful act of dismantling and reassembly. Each wooden component has been catalogued, numbered, and restored before being transported to the new city centre, where the church is currently being reconstructed between the cemetery and the new town square. This relocation plan was carried out over several years, ensuring that the church’s form and character are retained while allowing it to continue as a living centre of community identity. Finally, after careful planning, the relocation (a five-kilometre journey) was completed over two days. (Figure 9)

In this approach, the relocation of Kiruna Church becomes more than a technical operation. **It represents an attempt to translate memory, carrying not only a building but also the intangible sense of belonging that it has embodied for over a century.**



Figure 16



Figure 17

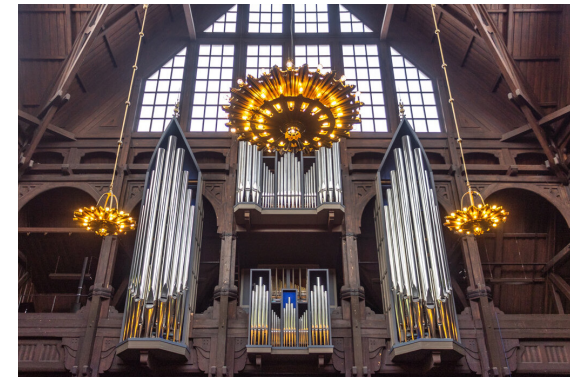


Figure 18

Figure 16- 2025. Bbci.co.uk. 2025. <https://ichef.bbci.co.uk/ace/standard/800/cpsprodpb/vivo/live/images/2025/8/20/d580a732-3def-4c45-b2c4-a89894f53408.jpg.webp>.

Figure 17- 2023. Go-Kiruna.com. 2023. <https://go-kiruna.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2023/03/eglise-kiruna-et-son-clocher.jpg>.

Figure 18- 2023. Go-Kiruna.com. 2023. <https://go-kiruna.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2023/03/eglise-kiruna-orgue.jpg>.

While Kiruna’s relocation represents a large-scale, state-supported effort to preserve architectural memory, Shigeru Ban’s **Paper Log House** (1995)(Figure 16) offers a contrasting example of how communities reconstruct “home” under conditions of sudden displacement. Designed as emergency housing for victims of the Kobe earthquake, the Paper Log House was built from inexpensive, recyclable materials, paper tubes, beer crates, sandbags, plywood and etc (Figure 17), assembled by volunteers and the displaced residents themselves(Figure 18). Unlike the meticulous dismantling and reassembly of Kiruna Church, which aimed to maintain historical continuity, the Paper Log House embraced impermanence. Its purpose was not only to restore a past architectural identity but to provide dignity, privacy, and agency to people living in transience(Figure 19).

Despite the material and methodological differences, the values underpinning both cases are remarkably similar. Each community sought to protect a sense of belonging in the midst of rupture. In Kiruna, this meant physically carrying memory into the new town through the relocation of the church;

in Kobe, it meant creating new forms of domesticity rooted in collective participation and care.

Both examples demonstrate that “home” is not defined by permanence but by the ability to anchor memory, identity, and social life, even in temporary or shifting environments. The Paper Log House, through ephemeral, functioned as a container for everyday rituals; Kiruna Church, through relocation, remains a vessel of collective remembrance. Together, they reveal that communities preserve homes not only by safeguarding buildings, but by sustaining the practices and meanings that give those buildings significance.



Figure 16



Figure 18

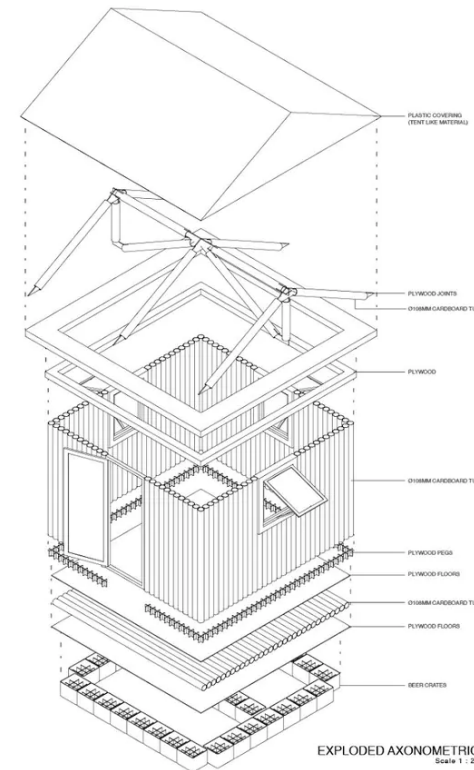


Figure 17



Figure 19

“Paper Log House - Kobe.” 1995. Shigeru Ban. September 19, 1995. <https://shigerubanarchitects.com/works/paper-tubes/paper-log-house-kobe/>.

Nagaraj, Spoorthi. 2021. “Paper Log Houses by Shigeru Ban: Recyclable Materials and Architecture Paper Log Houses by Shigeru Ban: Recyclable Materials and Architecture.” RTF | Rethinking the Future. August 18, 2021. <https://www.re-thinkingthefuture.com/case-studies/a4922-paper-log-houses-by-shigeru-ban-recyclable-materials-and-architecture/>.

Figure 19- 2025. Re-Thinkingthefuture.com. 2025. <https://www.re-thinkingthefuture.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/A4922-Paper-Log-Houses-by-Shigeru-Ban-Recyclable-Materials-and-Architecture-Image-2.jpg.webp>.

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Conclusion_

Displacement, in its many forms, unsettles not only where people live but how they understand themselves in relation to place. This journal has explored the **emotional, architectural, and cultural consequences** of losing one's home, tracing a spectrum from **rupture to adaptation and reconstruction** through the case studies of Pripjat, Torre David, and Kiruna. Each site revealed a distinctive way in which **memory, identity, and the built environment** become intertwined in the aftermath of displacement. When brought together, these narratives illuminate how **architecture can both register the trauma of loss and foster new forms of belonging**. The central argument emerging from this study is that **home is not a static location**, but a dynamic spatial condition constructed through **lived experience, embodied memory, and social relations**. In contexts of instability and change, such as Somers Town. Architecture has the capacity to act as a framework for empathy, enabling individuals and communities to negotiate **continuity amid transformation**.

Pripjat introduced the initial moment of rupture. The sudden abandonment of the city leaves behind an **architecture of suspended life**, where domestic objects remain in place yet stripped of human presence. Pripjat demonstrates that even when emptied, architecture retains affective charge. It becomes a **witness to trauma** through its stillness and deterioration.

The uncanny familiarity of these spaces, **recognisable yet estranged, reveals how deeply home is embedded in sensory memory**. It also shows that displacement is not only a physical removal but a psychological dislocation, producing a fracture in the rhythms and rituals that structure everyday life. From Pripjat, we learn that the remnants of home can endure long after communities are dispersed, and that built environments have the ability to **materialise absence in ways that continue to shape collective memory**.

Torre David, by contrast, illustrates a moment of **creative and communal response** following displacement. Here, home is not mourned as a lost ideal but actively rebuilt through **improvised agency**. In appropriating an unfinished skyscraper, the residents of **Torre David demonstrated that domesticity could emerge from below, produced through acts of labour, negotiation, and shared care**. The tower became a vertically layered community where spaces were adapted, hacked, and reshaped in response to need. Through this process, the building transcended its origins as a monument to economic ambition and became a **testament to resilience**. Torre David challenges architectural discourse by showing that well-being and belonging are not contingent on formal design. Instead, they can arise through collective agency, **the right to shape one's environment, to claim space, and to generate new forms of urban life beyond traditional housing models**.

Kiruna represents the final stage of this continuum, a deliberate reconstruction in which memory is consciously transported into a new context. While differing from the spontaneous adaptation of Torre David, Kiruna's relocation also centres on the relationship between built form and identity. The dismantling and reassembly of Kiruna Church demonstrate how architecture can act as a vessel for cultural memory, enabling a community to maintain continuity even when its physical environment shifts. Unlike Pripyat's frozen ruins or Torre David's ad hoc reappropriation, Kiruna's reconstruction is planned, negotiated, and state-supported. Yet it raises similar questions: What aspects of home are essential to carry forward? What forms of memory can be translated materially, and what remains intangible? The relocation of the church embodies the idea that belonging is not solely attached to the original ground but to the social and ritual practices that architecture holds.

Across all three case studies, a consistent theme emerges: home is always under construction. Whether preserved through ruins, improvised through occupation, or rebuilt through careful planning, the home exists as a spatial and emotional process rather than a fixed architectural object. This insight is reinforced by the primary research conducted by me.

Through the participatory exercise on objects that evoke belonging, it became evident that home is composed not only of architecture but of sensory cues, material attachments, and deeply personal memories. Everyday items, familiar sounds, scents, textures, and images carry an emotional weight that can reconstitute a sense of home even when one's environment drastically changes. These findings resonate with my own experience of migration from Japan to the UK, where home has been renegotiated through cultural memory, domestic rituals, and the reassembly of familiar practices in unfamiliar places.

Taken together, these case studies and research findings build a conceptual framework for approaching the shifts occurring in Somers Town. The neighbourhood's ongoing redevelopment, driven by gentrification and the logic of profit-oriented housing, is generating new forms of displacement similar in emotional consequence, if not in scale or cause to those examined earlier. Long-standing communities face the erosion of their social networks, the loss of communal spaces, and the replacement of deeply rooted spatial identities with anonymous architecture. Somers Town, like Pripyat, bears traces of what once was; like Torre David, it contains the potential for grassroots forms of adaptation; and like Kiruna, it requires strategies for carrying memory forward into an uncertain future.

St. Mary's Church, as the site of the accompanying design intervention, becomes a critical point of reflection and possibility. Situated at the intersection of community and change, the church already holds layers of community identity, ritual, and history. It offers a spatial anchor within a neighbourhood undergoing rapid transformation. The question, then, is how architecture can amplify this role, how it might support forms of emotional continuity, collective memory, and everyday belonging in the face of displacement.

The lessons drawn from the case studies provide a set of guiding principles for this task. From Pripyat, the intervention can adopt an attentiveness to traces, recognising the importance of preserving fragments of the past and creating spaces for reflection. From Torre David, it can embrace adaptability, enabling users to shape the environment through participation and agency. From Kiruna, it can incorporate memory into design, translating narratives, rituals, and identities into spatial form. Rather than viewing architecture as a solution that fixes places, the intervention can position it as a framework that accommodates changes, supports community resilience, and enables belonging to be continuously redefined.

Figure 23- Design Concept Poster

Ultimately, this journal argues that architecture alone cannot prevent displacement, but it can play a significant role in mediating its effects. By engaging with memory, supporting community agency, and creating spaces for emotional continuity, architecture can foster a sense of home even amid instability. In Somers Town, where redevelopment threatens to erase local identity, the opportunity lies in designing with empathy, valuing not only buildings but the lived experiences they hold. Home, as this study shows, is constructed through the interplay of memory, social life, and spatial experience. When architecture recognises these dimensions, it becomes not just a container for dwelling, but an active participant in the on-going work of belonging.

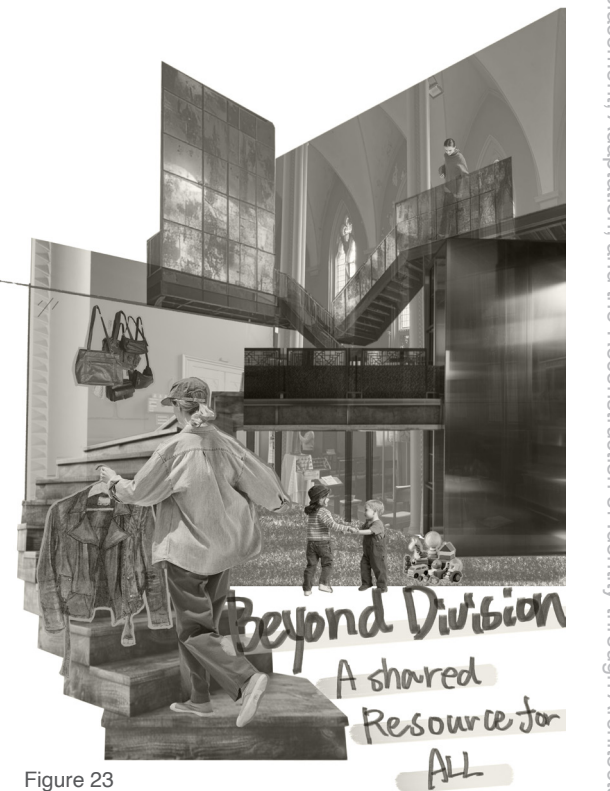


Figure 23

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