

Catarina De Almeida Brito

Juan Sebastian Lama

Amy Parker

Minh Toan

THE ACROSS THE COUNTRY EXPERIENCE

INTRODUCTION: BETWEEN THE RIOTS AND THE RAINBOW

The making of the local city is a contested and ever-evolving process. The ideas behind any given place are shaped by a variety of voices, each attempting to apply their own definition of what is “local.” Often these voices are not local at all—but consist of broader perceptions with the power to influence, taint or even glorify pieces of the city. Hackney, a borough situated on the northeast corner of central London, has long been viewed in such contested terms. When the Five Mile Act of 1665 banned non-conformist preachers from London, they relocated to Hackney, on the fringe of the city, and so grew the area’s controversial reputation (Hackney Museum, 2012). Later, in the eighteenth-century, New College in Hackney was established as an ambitious “dissenting” academy where students had “complete intellectual licence to pursue political, religious and philosophical truth” (Burley, 2011). Even centuries ago, there existed a tension between the “perceived” Hackney of controversy and the “experienced” Hackney of intellectual freedom. These dichotomous views reveal an important tension shaping the area’s local development.

Fast forward three hundred years, and the tension around Hackney continues, but in different terms. As researchers coming from the outside, our first attempt to understand Hackney began not with its historical grounding in critical thought, but instead with a broad internet search. Our “Google” of Hackney produced popular and sensational images referring to a more recent controversy: social and physical unrest related to the 2011 Riots. We found news coverage depicting chaos, violent behavior and conflict, all of which seemed to overwhelm democratic processes. But upon actually visiting Hackney, we experienced a completely different sort of place: a relatively calm, easy going, and harmonious environment. Any traces of the 2011 riots were invisible to us. Together, these two views of Hackney produced a dichotomy of place more complex than either the Hackney broadly “perceived” or the Hackney we “experienced.” Thus, the tension produced by this dichotomy became the initial lens for us to examine the “local city.” We began our research with an aim to unravel the web of voices, perceptions and tensions that lie between the riots and the rainbows.



△ 01 Hackney during the 2011 riots
Source: The Guardian, Dec 5th 2011



△ 02 Hackney during the 2011 riots
Source: The Guardian, Dec 5th 2011

SPATIAL AND SOCIAL ANALYSIS: WHERE ARE THE YOUTH?

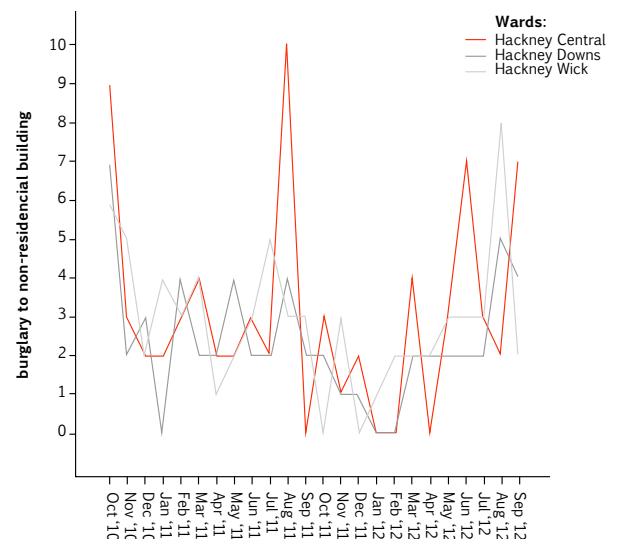
How do we relate these two opposing understandings of the same area? And who is shaping these perspectives? Our first approach led us to map all the possible actors involved in this dichotomy. Venturini (2009) would describe this exercise as a “cartography of the controversy,” with the aim of looking closer at the social construction behind these contrasting views of Hackney. For this, we examined the various actors involved in the riots, which included the: press, political forces, deprived youth and even the urban fabric itself. In this process we began to focus our attention on the conflict between the youth and the local authorities. From one perspective, young people are suppressed and see no alternative to their position in life. Specifically, these young persons are between 14 to 19 years old, are living in some kind of deprivation and are often racial minorities. Without spending power, the right to vote or any political voice, they see no way to change their situation, (Henn, Weinstein and Wring, 2002). Conversely, local authorities (Hackney Council specifically) use youth services and increased policing to define and limit youth participation in the city. In addition, after the riots in August 2011, burglary diminished to zero (dramatically under average) due in some part to increased policing. But more interestingly, this chart shows that the same pattern repeated the next summer, and the previous one too, indicating a cyclical dimension to the conflict. From these conflicting viewpoints, we began to see the riots as a window from which to enter the problem, and thus moved our focus to this particular opposition between youth and authorities.

But the city also plays a role in this conflict between youth and authority. Lefebvre (1996) emphasises the potential of public space as a canvas for creativity that fulfils a fundamental human need for creativity, appropriation and play (*œuvre*) and also as a space for individuals to form a relationship with the greater community. This Lefebvrian idea called our attention to the power of public spaces to affect social dynamics and to serve as an arena for individual and collective expression. More specifically,

by examining the socio-spatial relationships at work in Hackney, we might better understand this conflict between youth and authority. Thus our central research question emerged: how can public space re-imagine the relationship between youth and authority?

To begin, we wanted to find out how young people are using spaces in Hackney, which introduced a fundamental question: “Where are the youth?” To answer this question, we used a combination of sources: spatial analysis, interviews, event participation and a review of secondary sources and official documents.

For the spatial analysis, we performed a rigorous observation and mapping of expression in the public spaces throughout a delimited area, which included Pembury Estate, a highly stigmatised site of social housing in Hackney Central, and Hackney Downs, one of the area’s biggest parks. As both sites were close together, we built a systematised catalogue of visual messages not only inside the park and the estate, but also along their borders. Through this first exercise, we made two discoveries. First, we identified conflicting expressions in public space that reflected and reinforced the existing conflict between youth and authority. Second, counterpublic expressions (i.e. those against authorities’ control) were concentrated



△ 03 Cyclical nature of burglary to non-residential buildings in three Hackney wards.
Data Source: Metropolitan Police 2011-2012

along the borders. Figure 5 maps the instances of public expression we discovered, showing a concentration of messages and expressions from the “authority” throughout the centre of the estate and the park that aim to control public use and behavior. On the borders, however, we found counterpublic expression that questions this control over public spaces. The section on Figure 5 reinforces these observations.

The next step was to ask the same question of “where are the youth?” to the pertinent agents. To do this, we conducted interviews with various stakeholders and started this process with five informal interviews at the event “Have you been affected by last year’s riots?” organised by the NGO “Stop Criminalising Hackney Youth.”

Then, we interviewed:

_Maria and Rachel*, youth-rights activists who both work for JENGbA (Joint Enterprise Not Guilty by Association), and have sons whom they claim have been prosecuted and imprisoned unfairly for being near (but not involved) in criminal activity.

_A patrol officer on the grounds of Pembury Estate.

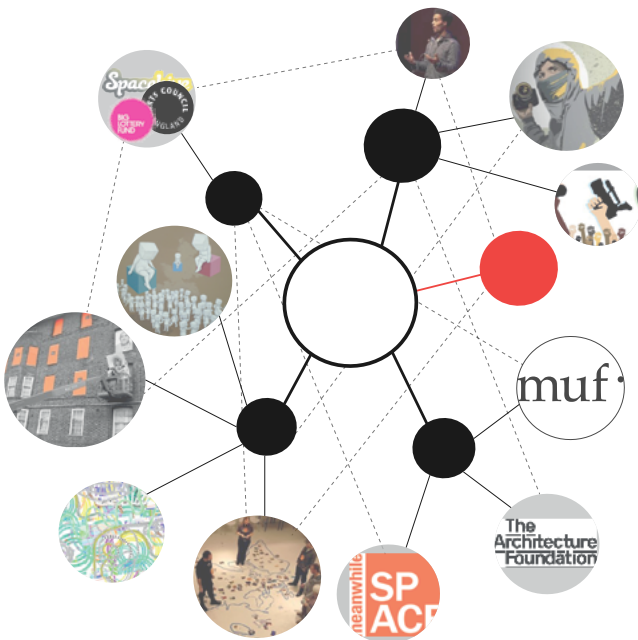
_Andrew*, the director of the Architecture Foundation's Urban Pioneers programme, which teaches young people to think critically about the spaces around them.

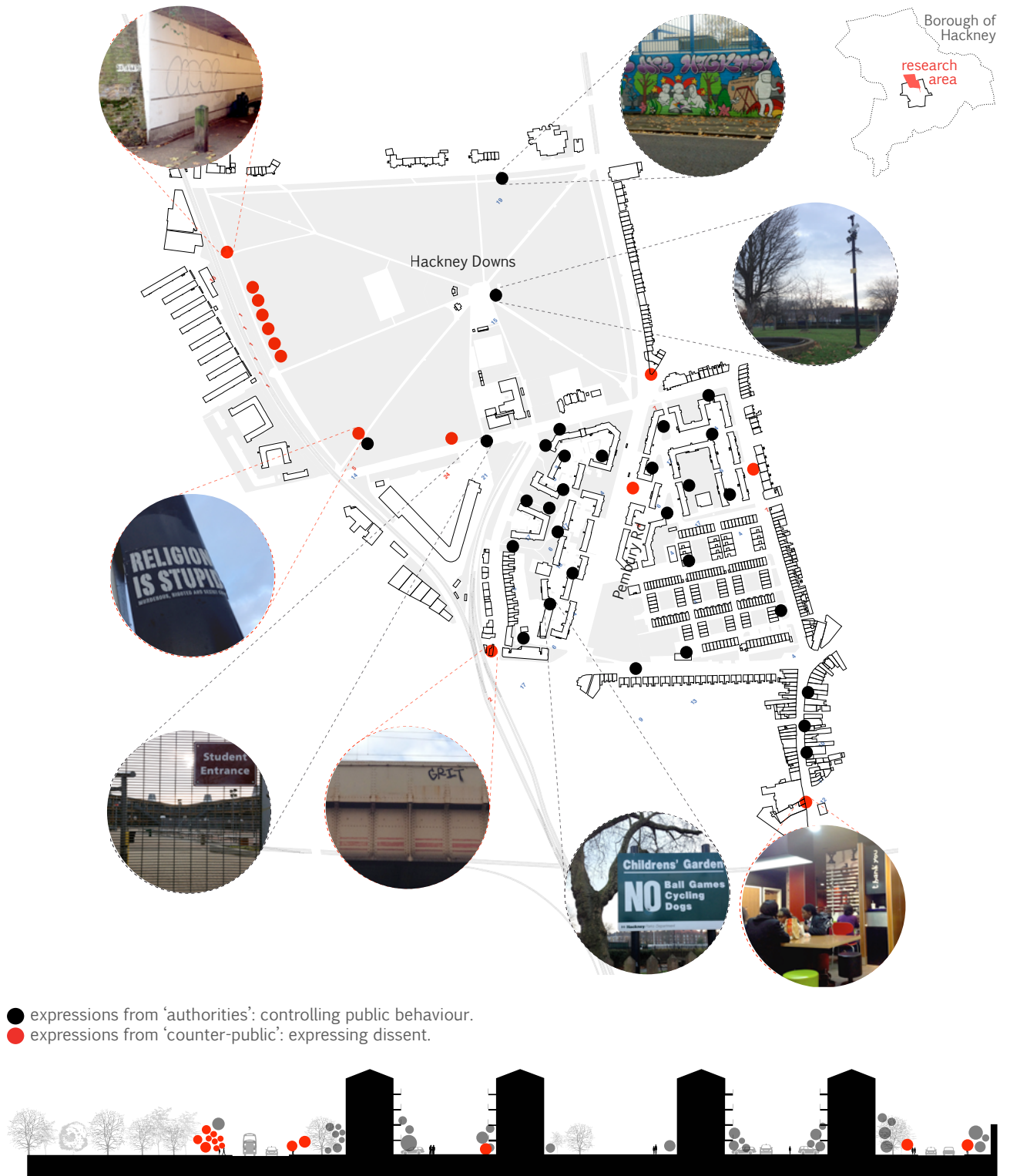
_Said*, a 26 year-old youth activist who was imprisoned and on probation after the 2011 riots. He also studied at Oxford and LSE and is currently producing the documentary “Riots Re-framed.”

The coordinator for Hackney's Youth Services, who strongly encourage us to consult the Council and Young Hackney websites for information.

* the names have been changed

Although these voices will weave throughout the essay, the main conclusion from the interviews is that they provide overwhelming evidence that the Council's approach polarises young people's needs. That is to say, each interviewee expressed how authorities are either trying to engage youth in activities which deter disruptive behavior or trying to securitise the public realm by restricting youth's presence and behaviour. For a deeper analysis of this situation, we observed three dichotomies in the local spaces available to young people that not only explain the spatial dimension of the relationship between youth and authority, but also inform the intervention proposed.





△ 05 Map and schematic section of authorities and 'counter-public' expressions through Pembury Estate and its borders.

THE AIM: FROM ANTAGONISM TO AGONISM

The first dichotomy describes how the spaces available for young people in Hackney are polarised between the area's public and private spheres. On one hand, we have the youth centres provided by the Council, located indoors and isolated from the general public. On the other hand, Hackney offers an abundance of public parks and green spaces ("twice as much green space as some of its larger neighbouring boroughs"), which could be used and enjoyed by young people (Hackney Council, 2008: 3). These spaces, however, are characterised by policing, surveillance and control such that youth occupying these areas are under suspicion. In our site visits to Hackney Downs, the absence of young people coincided with the abundance of prohibitory signs along the park's borders. While private and public spaces each offer an alternative experience for young people, both are based on control rather than on free expression in Lefebvrian terms. Our interview with Said, a young activist from Hackney, confirmed this observation:

"every part of the environment is being controlled and molded into what is socially accepted." The dichotomy of public vs. private is evident in the need to choose between two contrasting alternatives: indoor spaces owned by the Council, or outdoor spaces, which are public but still under tight control.

This informs the second dichotomy, which enlightens how these private or public spaces are used. Young Hackney, the Council's youth services centres, explains the main objective behind creating such centres: "to get young people off street corners and into clubs where they can take part in positive activities" (Hackney Youth Service, n.d.). This plainly stated objective highlights the fact that the local authority has adopted a prescriptive attitude where they provide approved activities to create a certain kind of youth. Meanwhile the parks and public realm, as alternatives to these prescriptive spaces for



young people, offer an ambiguous response. Though these public spaces are meant for general use and enjoyment, we found strict rules banning these traditional uses. Consider Article 38 of Hackney's by-laws for parks (London Borough of Hackney, 1971):

No person shall in any open space deliver, utter or read any public speech or enter into any public discussion [...] or take part in any public meeting except on the site or sites, if any, approved by the Council.

The contrast is evident; youth can choose indoor-spaces with an agenda of conformity or open spaces with an agenda of restricted uses. We describe this finding as a dichotomy of prescriptive vs. ambiguous.

Describing the objectives of these spaces led us to define the outcomes of these typologies. On the one hand, we have the "positive" youth in youth centres who become virtually invisible in private spaces with a prescribed environment. Meanwhile, young people wanting to be visible in public spaces are prohibited from doing so. The prevalence of banned graffiti around Pembury Estate evidences the desire of young people to visibly express themselves and the authority's efforts to make this expression invisible. Maria, the youth-rights activists with JENGbA, explained the predicament facing young people:

We hang out in groups. That's exactly what young people do. If they [local government or police] see a group of young black people together they will call it a gang [...] why don't you call a group of four white children a gang?



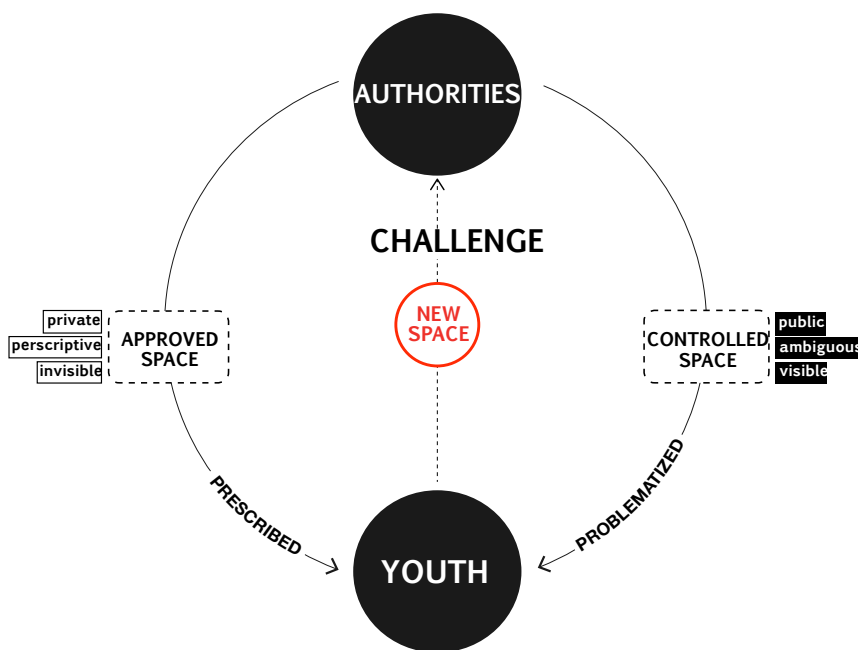
△ 06 Photographic montage of the different actors who inform the question: 'Where is Hackney's youth?'

This quotation illustrates that the visibility of certain groups of young people is more problematic than others, and this tension leads to our third dichotomy of visible vs. invisible. The authorities' approach makes youth invisible, hiding them from the public realm through conformist activities in private spaces. Yet, there also exists a need for youth to see themselves as part of the public realm, which means being visible in the public spaces of the city.

The analysis of these three dichotomies together requires a clear understanding of the actors. The dichotomies do not strictly represent youth's vision versus the Council's, but rather they show the polarisation of spaces available to youth. These dichotomies make evident the contrasting roles of the Council and young people: the Council's function is to provide services for preventing crime, while the youth are wanting a space to gather and be visible in a non-conformist way. While there is legitimacy in both these roles, current approaches use authorities' control to force these two opposite views into consensus about how local spaces should be used. Drawing from Chantal Mouffe (2000), we argue that this search for consensus is exactly the problem in the relationship of youth and authority in Hackney. Each position—that of the youth and that of the Council—must recognise the other's presence in order to establish its own identity and these positions, in turn, provide the democratic objectives for passions to

mobilise around via democratic politics. Thus, the goal is not to overcome the “us/them opposition” or to find a rational consensus to the conflict, but instead to allow this conflict to emerge publicly, transforming antagonism to agonism. It is not that youth and Council should support each other's perspective and agree about the use of public spaces, but that they should treat the opposite position as a legitimate opponent or an adversary. From this agonistic perspective, these adversarial positions serve as “channels through which collective passions will be given ways to express themselves over issues” (Mouffe, 2000: 16), an opportunity currently denied to local youth in Hackney.

Agonism, as a political perspective, will inform our project in two ways. First, rather than removing or merging the identities of the youth and the Council, we intend to make them visible. Secondly, we feel that our intervention should provide a physical and social space where these identities can conflict and challenge one another, particularly from the youth's perspective as they lack a legitimate channel for contestation. And with Lefebvre (1996) in mind, our intervention will incorporate public space into this platform for agonism, which brings a degree of risk and unpredictability to the project. In this regard, our intervention will be presented as an experiment to openly work with conflict in the public realm.



- 07 Concept diagram: while the authorities provide youth either 'controlled' or an 'approved' spaces, our intervention aims to create a new space for youth to challenge the authorities' approach.



private public



prescriptive ambiguous



invisible visible



△ 08 Dichotomies diagram:

a. Private: youth centres around the Pembury Estate vs **Public:** green areas around the Pembury Estate.

b. Prescriptive: youth working at Young Hackney* vs **Ambiguous:** CCTV cameras in the centre of Pembury Downs.

c. Invisible: Youth Parliament Election 2010* vs **Visible:** banned graffiti on the border of the Pembury Estate.

Source: images marked with * from younghackney.org

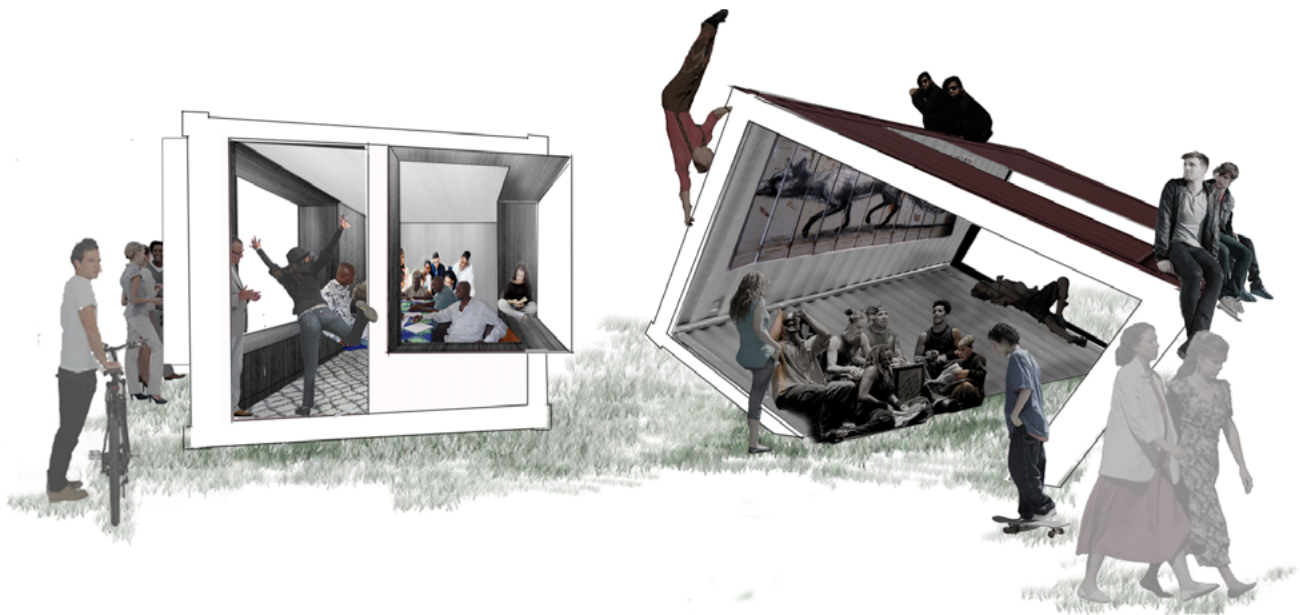
INTERVENTION: THE OTHER SIDE

We propose an intervention that re-imagines the use of public space based on two contrasting and complementary spaces. We call the intervention “The Other Side” because it provides a platform where local voices are presented and contrasted in close proximity, i.e. a platform for agonism. We will explain this intervention in three parts: the programme, the space and the site.

The Programme: curating ideas and building skills

In the next few paragraphs, we will outline the way the programme takes shape. We envision a “head curator” to take over the organisation of the space. In evaluating our project, Said emphasised that “who” organises the space is critically important. Said argued that unlike the youth centres, our head curator needs to have credibility as a local stakeholder from a similar place in life as young people, and thus be socially accepted by them. Indeed, Said’s observation reflects the latest research in social work, which has similarly shown that local peers are the best agents to mobilise young people’s interest and involvement in their environment (Delgado & Staples, 2008). Given Said’s background as an activist and former resident of Pembury Estate, we envision him (or someone like him) as a “prototype” for the project’s head curator.

The “head curator” will be supported by a small network of other local stakeholders, which might include local artists, place-makers, city-wide activists for youth, and funding streams. The curator along with the help of this support network builds a series of discussions and events focused on local conflicts and issues that speak to young people’s presence and stake within the community. In Figure 8, we have identified specific local and city-wide actors whose interest align with the aim of our intervention, and we imagine these as part of the network of contributors for the programme. Some of the events might be knowledge swaps—where young people learn practical skills from local professionals. The point is for them to gain actual skills. Our interview with Said also helped to inform the political and knowledge-building aspects of our programme. Said posed the question of what it really means to “empower” young people. His answer was that true power for young people is achieved by giving them “the intellectual tools to make their own projects, to think for themselves, and skills to challenge the system.” In this sense, the project becomes an explicitly political place where ideas are free not only to spring into existence but also to be challenged or celebrated.

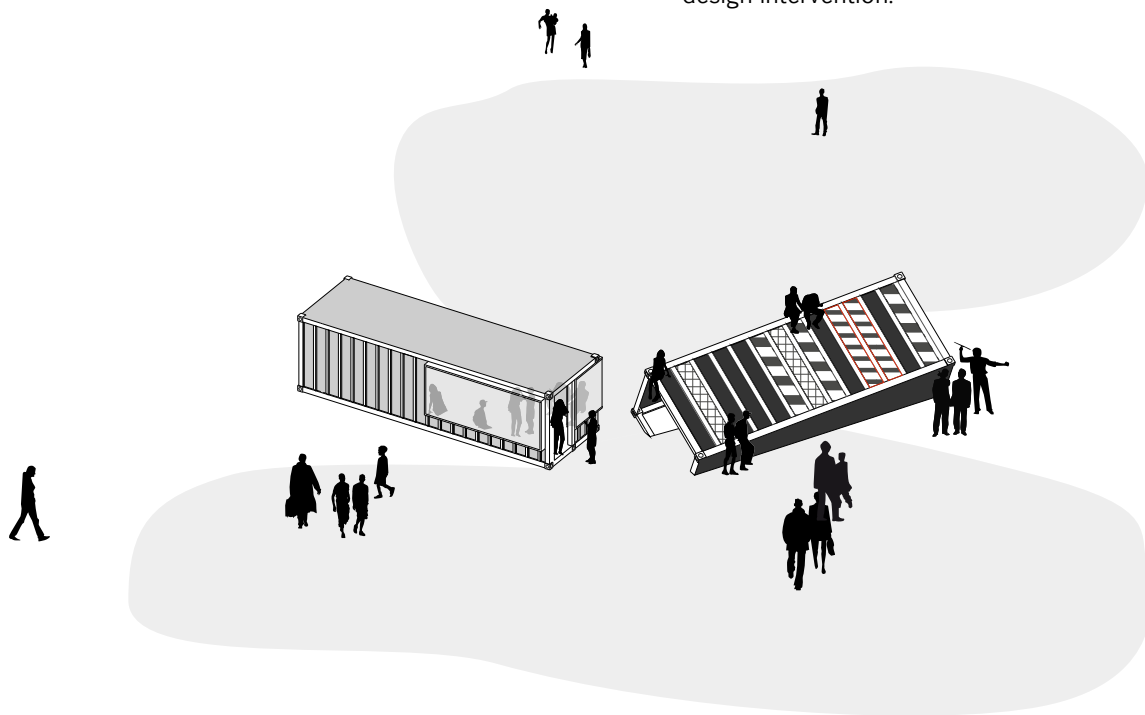


△09 Photo-montage of programme in space.

Building upon this idea, the notion of time is crucial in order to create opportunities for young people to implement newly-gained ideas and knowledge. At the beginning of our intervention, the ‘head curator’ reaches out to community groups to contribute to the organisation of events, workshops, meetings, screenings, exhibitions, etc. As youth’s involvement increases, the curator adopts a more passive role, that of a facilitator. While still helping with resource management, contacts, and publicity, the curator role is gradually handed over to different young people in Hackney. They determine what “The Other Side” becomes by activating it with their own ideas, plans, projects and vision. For example, skills and ideas learned during the initial phase of the intervention equip youth with tools to pursue their own interests and preferences, and the intervention then becomes the platform where they can experiment with these new capacities. This transition to youth leadership of the project is informed by our interview with Andrew, the director of the highly successful Urban Pioneers programme at the Architecture Foundation. Andrew emphasised that young people within the Urban Pioneers programme are treated as adults and held to high standards. In this regard, our programme similarly sees youth with increasing importance, as key actors who share the responsibilities of the programme over time. As these youth capacities are allowed to grow in our

programme, the intention is to achieve what Andrew sees with each Urban Pioneers programme: students (i.e. youth) who become “fearless and to-the-point” with confidence to have an opinion, even a critical one.

It is also a priority to ensure that there are times when parts of the space are not programmed and left to spontaneous appropriation. This blend of programmed events and opportunities for ambiguity is inspired by our experience attending a highly engaging local event for youth called “Have you been affected by last year’s riots?” This event was organised by a local NGO (Stop Criminalising Hackney Youth) and combined political and interactive workshops with time for informal interaction—hanging out, chatting, observing. For our project, the organisation is prescriptive as a series of events/discussions are programmed to happen in the space. On the other hand, the organisation is also ambiguous in the undetermined, unprogrammed time between each event and the flexible role of the organiser and participants. The programme’s content is prescriptive in that it pushes a variety of political ideas, critiques of the status quo and skills-building events. But it is also ambiguous as it allows for individual interpretation, questioning and re-imagination of these ideas. This next section will explain the setting and context for the programme as we describe the spatial elements of our design intervention.



△ 10 Axonometric: side A and B and the grey area in between them.

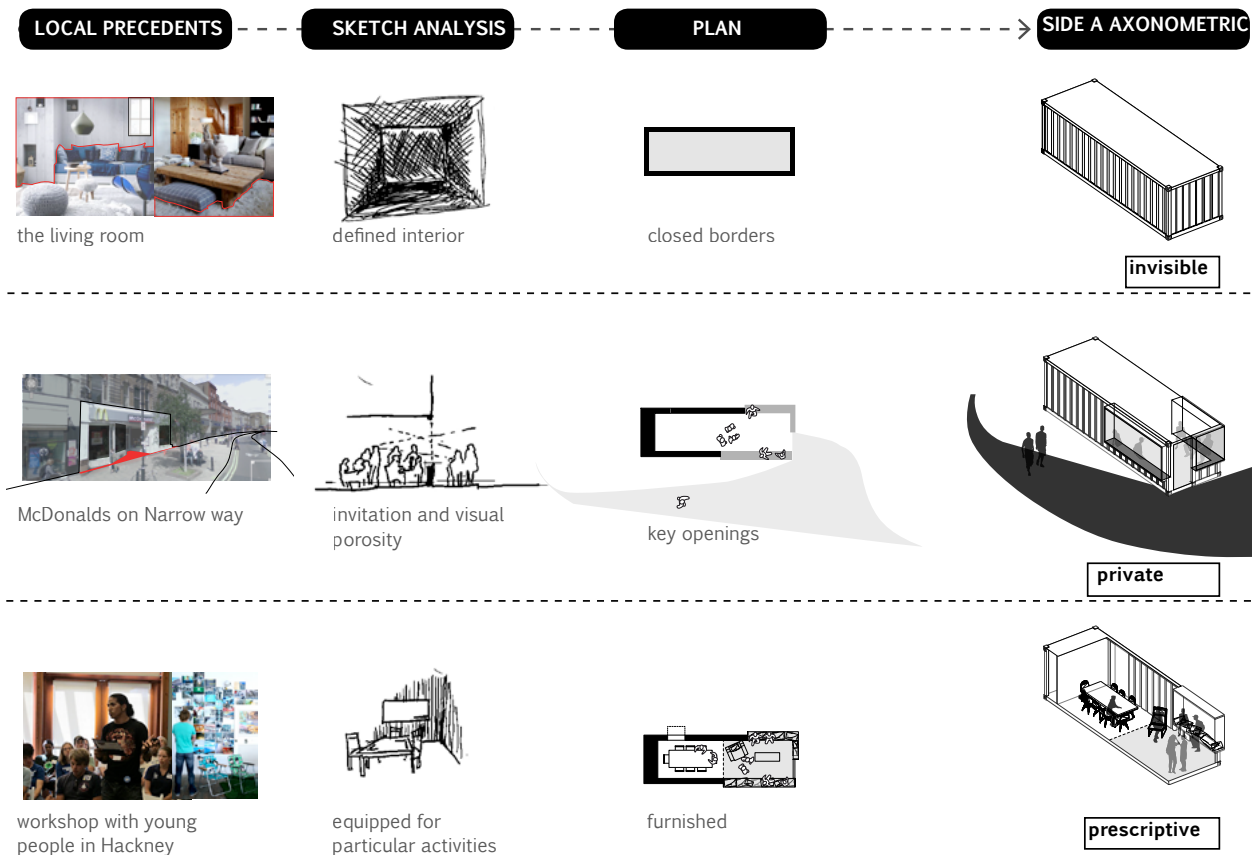
The Space: an experiment that makes the tension visible

The physical space embodies the ideas behind the programme and determines the way the concepts outlined so far will be made visible. In our research, we recognised a set of dichotomies that determined the nature of spaces for youth in Hackney: private/public, prescriptive/ambiguous, invisible/visible. These dualities informed our conception of a space broken-in-two with each one embodying one end of the spectrum. Suddenly these polarised ways of using space are made visible, under the same curation and programme, intentionally creating and allowing a tension between what we named Side A and Side B. The spaces are specifically designed to provoke two different ways of being in public. In this sense, the architectural decisions reinforce the project's political discourse.

Each space is informed by our observations of how young people currently use space in Hackney. Side A was meant to embody the ideas of privacy, prescription,

and invisibility. We therefore analysed spaces such as a private living room and the McDonald's on the local high street, which operates as a public living room for young people in Hackney. Thus, our Side A is enclosed and mostly protected from outside visibility. We decided, however, to include windows at the entrance so that outsiders can engage with the interior and its uses, as we observed at the McDonald's. The porosity of the entrance serves to bridge the gap between public and private worlds. Half of the space includes a communal table for a workshop, meeting, discussion, class, work, etc. The other half approximates the cosy, comfortable, and inviting living room, meant for self or collective reflection, socialising, etc.

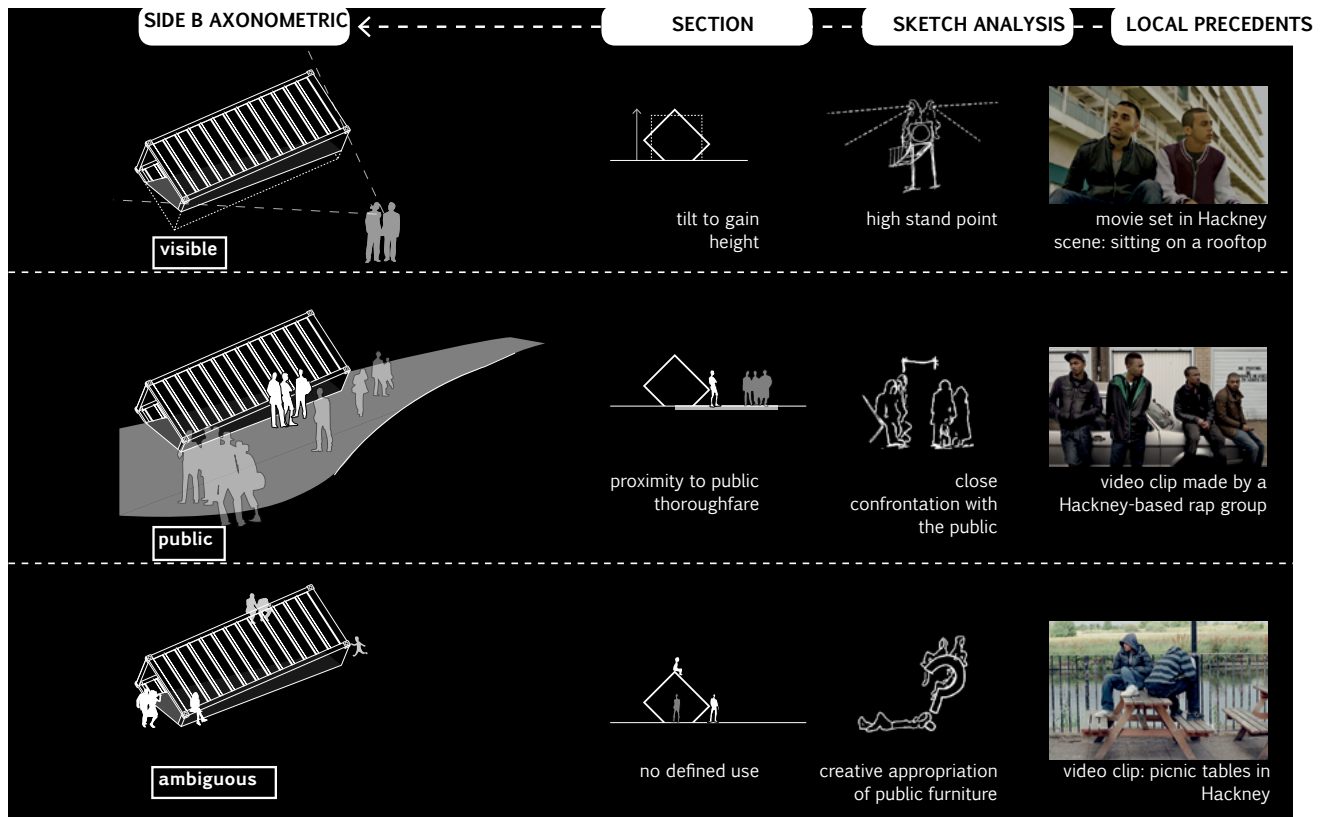
In parallel, the design decisions for Side B are inspired by the idea of being public, appropriating ambiguous places and making oneself visible. We analysed different music and film videos that were set in Hackney and uploaded



online by young people. These videos reveal the different ways in which young people assert challenging positions in public space: by occupying positions of height, by positioning themselves in close proximity to the “action” or public sphere, and by making themselves comfortable through unexpected uses of urban spaces. And thus Side B is placed right on the public thoroughfare, so that users engage with the street and public in a much more confrontational way. We decided to include no furniture as young people will find their own methods of appropriation and use. The container is tilted to assist with the re-imagining of the space, providing new angles and higher vantage points to be exploited.

An interesting and dynamic dialogue is established between Side A and Side B. While both spaces have different natures, each one’s identity helps to define the other. In other words, they complement each other. The

space in between Side A and B is both a territory for programme and the actors to spill out into the public realm and also a grey area where young people interact with “the audience” of the local community. It is in this grey area where risk becomes vitally important, allowing for critical young people to be visible in the public realm. This is the first extension of the social and spatial ideas at the heart of the project: creating a place for dissent, for agonism. As a critical youth interacts with a public audience in this space and its territory, the local views of public space are challenged and re-invented in Hackney.



The Site: extending agonism into the urban fabric

The spatial and programmatic elements of “The Other Side” describe a new kind of critical space for youth in the public realm. But where do we locate this intervention in the first instance? As “The Other Side” is meant to begin as a momentary flash of disruption to the social and spatial landscapes of Central Hackney, a location of high visibility, ongoing activity and connectivity emerge as criteria for our site. We want Space A and Space B and the gray area in between to have an audience and active relationship with the public realm. Another criterion must be considered in determining the site location and that is: “where are the youth?” Our research showed that some youth are in private spaces (Hackney youth centres and their activities, youth Councils/parliaments, private homes, gated schools, McDonalds) but not in over-policed and prohibitive public realms, and we want our site to confront both these worlds. An intervention in one of Hackney’s high streets would not explicitly confront the restrictions of Hackney’s public spaces. And we also fear that in the hustle of buses, pedestrian traffic, and commercial engagement, the space would lose its disruptive nature and have less impact.

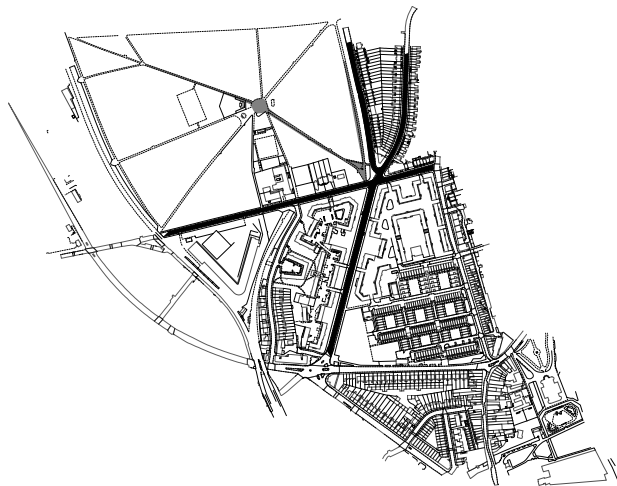
We have chosen the southeast corner of Hackney Downs as the location for our intervention. This site is not only close to where youth are (schools and Pembury Estates) but also connects to Hackney Downs. The location presents a geography of opportunity where youth can be public and visible in formerly prohibited spaces (the park, courtyard space of Pembury Estates and small local streets). This corner is frequented by all types of Hackneyites—students

attending the two schools down the street, users of the park, residents of Pembury Estate and the older housing stock also adjacent to the park. This corner is also en route to Hackney Central and adjacent to two active bus stops. It stands at the intersection of five different streets so that it becomes a stage for action, a natural meeting point where new ideas and new spaces form a platform for the voices of young people and where a local audience can witness them. Indeed, this site possesses the key ingredients for an agonistic dialogue and atmosphere to emerge and eventually move into the local city.

Another Youth Centre? and Other Questions

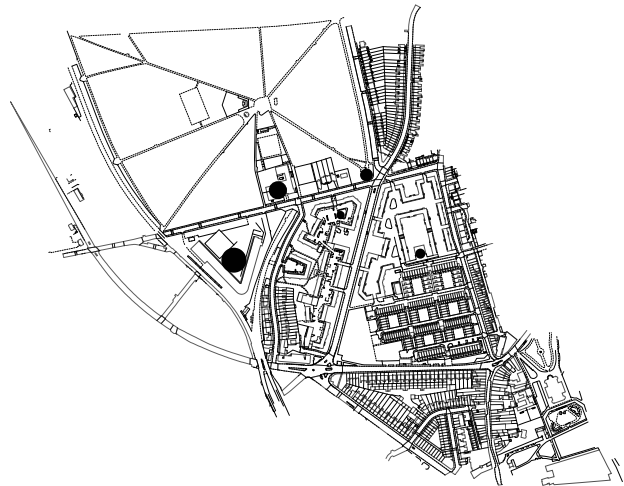
The elements of our intervention have clear differences from Hackney Council’s established youth centres. Is this intervention simply “another youth centre”? How is it to maintain its opposition to the Council’s approach to spaces for young people?

The key difference is in how Young Hackney programmes their spaces so that young people are seen more as “enemies to be destroyed” rather than legitimate adversaries (Mouffe, 2000: 25). The line “enemies to be destroyed” may seem like strong words, but a dual agenda of top-down control emerged after the 2011 riots with public spaces being heavily securitised alongside the resurrection of Hackney’s youth centres—a project costing over £11 million annually (Williams, 2011: 72). These post-riot efforts indicate that certain ideas and behaviours are meant to not only be placated but destroyed. For example,



△ 12 Site analysis: connectivity.

▽ 13 Site analysis: where are the youth? Schools, Youth Centres, playgrounds.



▽ 14 Intervention site

▷ 15 Panorama of the site

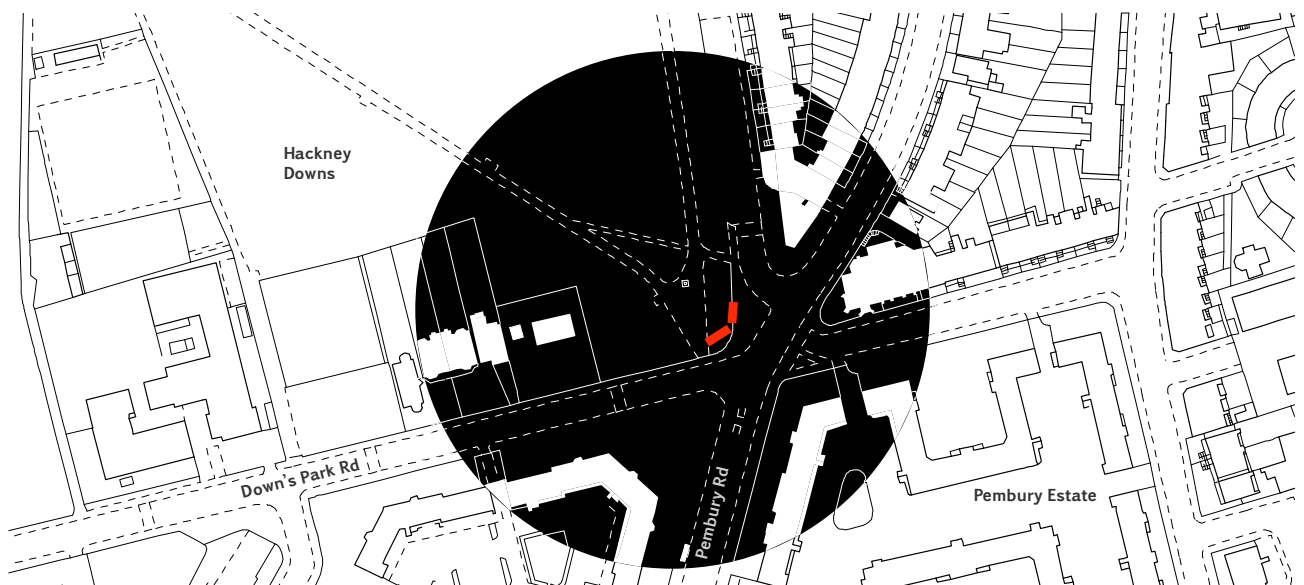
the programmed youth centres are designed to destroy or distract the politically combative nature of youth by prescribing acceptable activities.

Another significant difference between our intervention and Hackney Youth Centres is in the nature of the site. The Other Side is located in a high traffic setting between public open spaces. Simply put, its location within the urban environment allows the energy of the youth to spill over into the territory around the site, open spaces, streets and broadly the city. The Other Side is not about entertaining activities or hiding youth away but is a social and political space where youth can recognise and visibly participate in conflict. The process, if successful, would transform the youth of Hackney into political adversaries to be faced or challenged as opposed to enemies who must be forced into consensus or prosecuted.

The securitisation of space, deactivation of the public realm, and obfuscation of young people in public are factors not only observed in our on-the-ground research

but were also confirmed in our interviews. The undeniable need for this new type of space will open the door for this eight month experiment. The project has an open ending to be decided by a wider public debate, which can provide some reassurance to authorities as it provides an eventual opportunity to assert or regain control. Still, we hope that they either do not desire to reassert the same kind of control or are unsuccessful in their attempt.

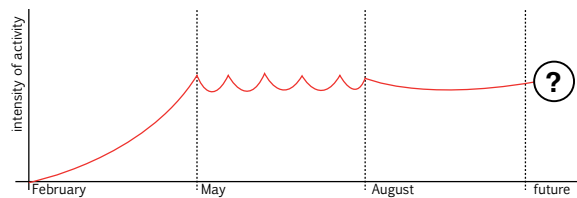
Logistically, the role of the curator is crucial in setting the political and critical tone of the programme while also building relationships with young people in the vicinity. But in our research, we discovered that many organisations and artists within Hackney and London as a whole are questioning the current approaches to policing, public space and young persons (e.g. Akala, Voices that Shake!, Farm: shop, The King's Land, etc.). The Other Side's programme will bring together these various actors, building relationships, energy and momentum to support the political spirit of the project.



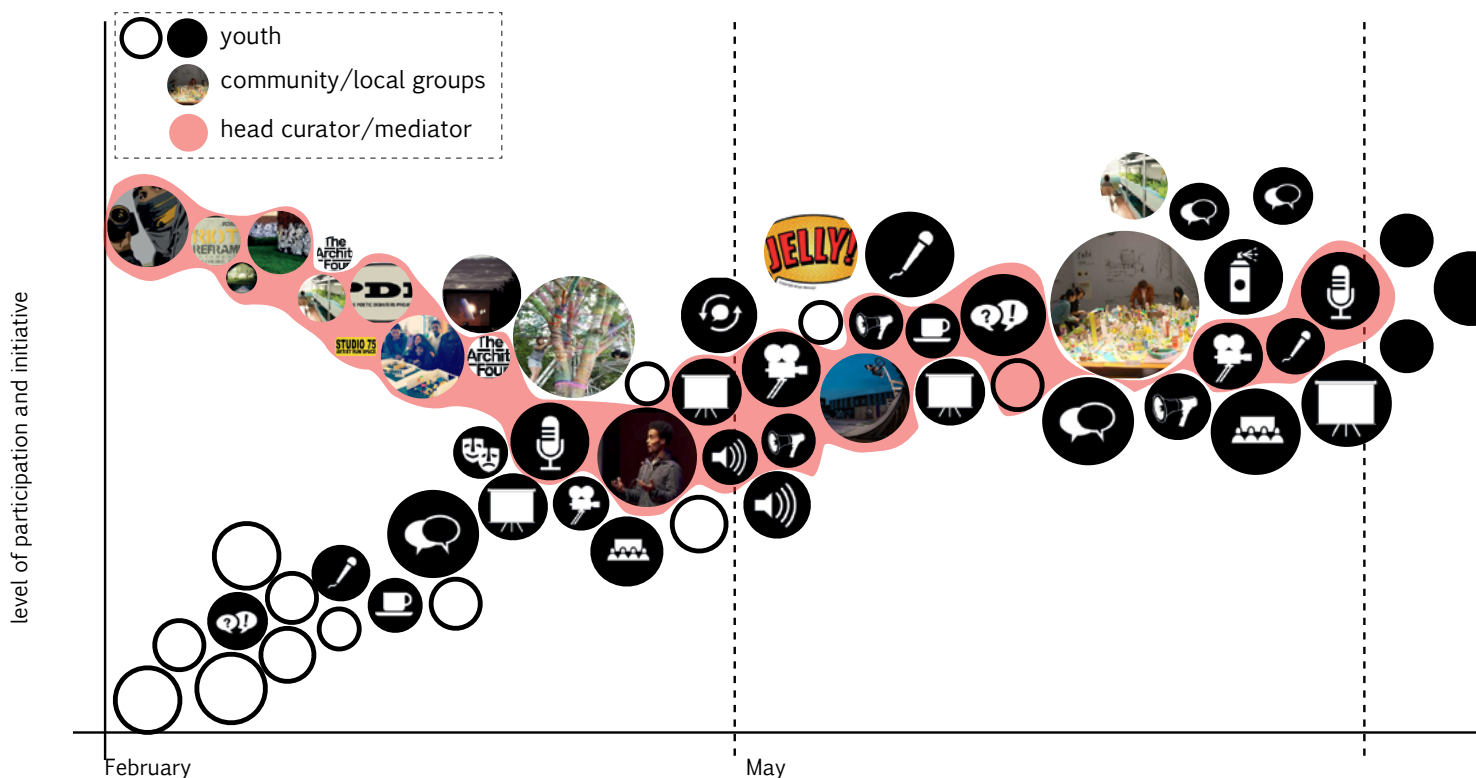
WHAT'S NEXT: FROM EXPERIMENT TO INVESTMENT

Our intervention will span 8 months beginning in February and concluding in November of that same year. We developed this time frame in such a way that the programme's high-energy moments coincide with the summer months, where youth are available and weather conditions are optimal for using public space. The process consists of different momentums of activity that encompass both individual investment in young people while also creating points where collective energies build to collaboration, creativity or production as youth become co-curators of the space. In stages one and two, the intervention begins as a hub and gradually expands as collective projects extend the territory of the space outward into the public realm. Both spatially and socially, the project intends to constantly subvert local assumptions about the political and spatial roles for young people in Central Hackney. We hope that these subversions provide the groundwork for the creation of a political identity for young people, and that this identity can become part of Hackney's political landscape.

The third stage of the project mobilises these interests of young people in deciding the future of "The Other Side." Debates about the project's future first begin amongst the users of the space (young people and stakeholders) with the curator of the space (Said) initiating and coordinating this discussion. Then the debate is extended to the greater community. Young people transform their ideas for the space into a public debate by proposing and campaigning for their vision of the space to the Council, the wider public and other interest groups. The space becomes an aspect of the city's future that is to be contested, and



△ 16 Intensity of activity through the 8 months intervention

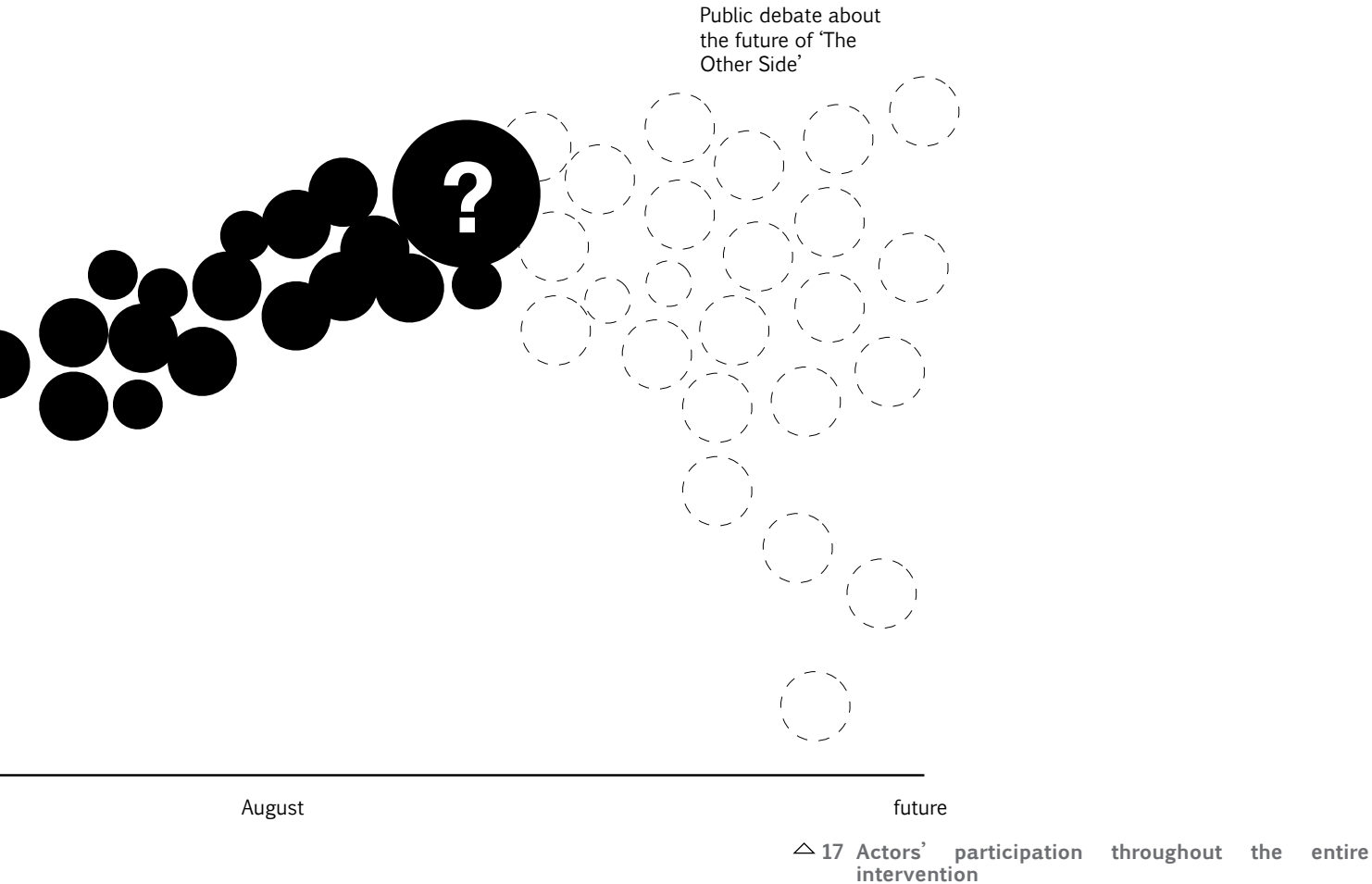


young people have explicit interests in this decision. In this sense, the agonistic characteristics that define the space are injected into the local city. The point is not to generate consensus about the future of this project, but to allow the different actors to become political adversaries over what happens to “The Other Side.”

At this point of agonistic decision-making, we cannot predict what the future of “The Other Side” will be. It is our hope that the previous eight months of experimentation will have equipped young people with the skills and democratic objectives to organise as legitimate adversaries to local authorities and other community interests. In being a physical and social disruption, our experiment will have primed the community to perceive young people as more legitimate actors with a stake in Hackney’s public spaces. We anticipate, however, that this debate will be controversial, and really, that is the whole point. If this project ends in a consensus, we are not sure that it has achieved its aim.

The real legacy to leave behind is young people who can organise and mobilise around certain political objectives and issues in the local city. So the graph of collective energies continues, peaking around local conflicts. These are critical junctures where the youth begin to emerge as legitimate interest groups. Not every conflict will be won by the “young people’s party,” but we hope “The Other Side” will help them to discover what is at stake in these local decisions and develop skills and confidence to assert their interests into the debate. And thus, young people can challenge not only future decisions regarding their social and spatial worlds but also the local’s perception of young people as political actors.

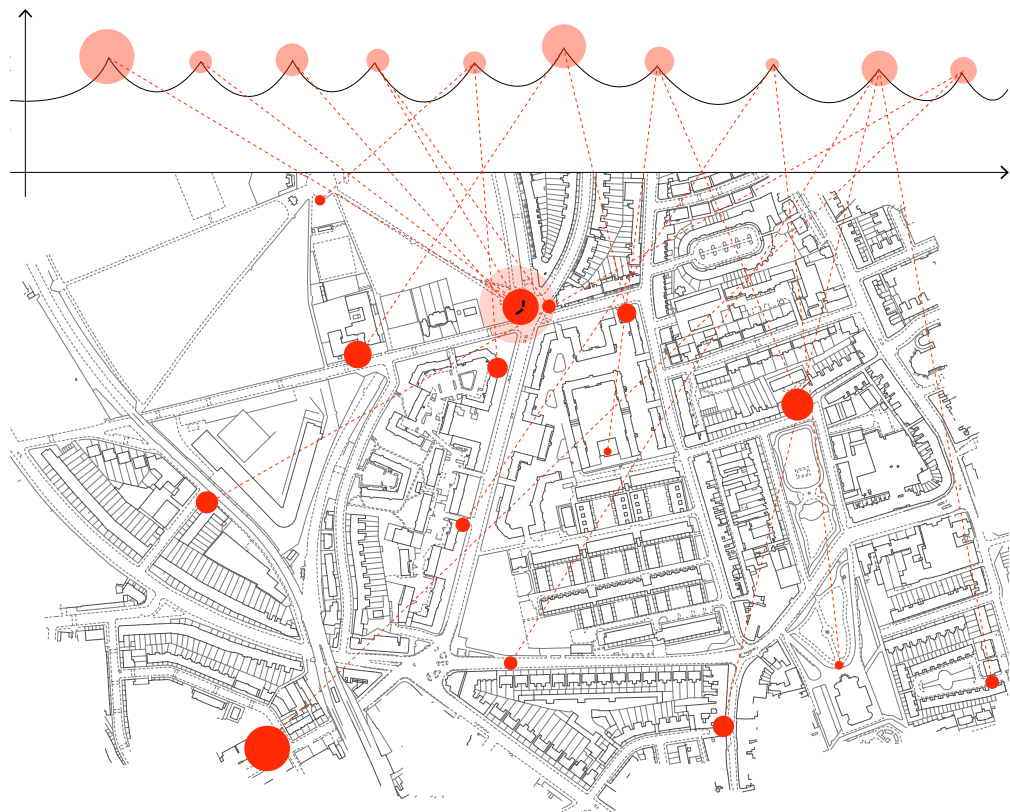
We acknowledge the notion of experiment and risk is key in our proposal: the programme and its space might take off, attracting different audiences and making youth’s voices heard. But it also might fail and the space shut



CONCLUSION: WHAT IS THE LOCAL CITY

down. The possibility of failure in community interventions is key for local appropriation and to preserve the political debate (Delgado and Staples, 2008). We recognise this fact and, taking into account the different outcomes of our research, we developed an intervention that is not only viable as an eight-month experiment, but is also capable of effecting a lasting investment in the lives of Hackney's youth as well as a wider impact throughout the community.

This project argues that the Local city is not static, but dynamic; is not assumed, but contested. Its aim is to subvert the tendency of democratic societies (even in Hackney) “to naturalise its frontiers and essentialise its identities” (Mouffe, 2000: 17). Throughout our research we have identified a local authority that prefers prescription over dialogue, forced consensus over agonism, and social-order over democratic pluralism—in essence, it promotes, maintains and allows only one vision of the local city. These views are reflected in the sets of dichotomies that describe current spaces for young people. Additionally, in our interviews and observations throughout Hackney Central, we have seen how this control extends into the physical environment, thus these “frontiers” become literal barriers controlling (and excluding) young people from the urban fabric. This spatial extension of the Council



△ 18 Imagining how youth will be able to mobilise around different issues in the city after the intervention.

AFTERWORD

approach results in over-policing young people, desolate public spaces, and the constant question of “Where are the youth?”—not to mention evidence of increased policing that is inextricably linked with the riots. Informed by these dichotomies, our intervention brings together both a social and spatial disruption to question this Council’s approach. It offers not only a critique of the relationship between youth and authority in Hackney, but also an alternative approach from an agonistic perspective. This alternative recognises disagreement and the boundaries of exclusion it produces by providing both symbolic and literal room(s) for such dissent. Thus, the local city is not about consensus. It is about difference in close proximity where public space serves as a platform for different voices to be heard. This intervention re-imagines the relationship between youth and authority such that enemies become adversaries and public space is where a monologue becomes a dialogue about who and what shapes the local city.

In conducting our research and developing our intervention, the use of both social and spatial analysis became critical methods that enhanced our understanding and application within the local city. Social analysis provided a tool to understand the actors involved and to evaluate a programmatic intervention. The spatial dimension shapes the urban experience of these actors and frames the many (unexpected) ways that help provoke the necessary discussion. Our intervention attempts to merge these observations into a single socio-spatial experiment, combining a programme and space that acknowledges the complexity of the challenges facing young people. Using this multi-faceted approach means that the complexities of the “local city” are not ignored but instead emerge as dominant forces and energies to be considered and re-imagined. Thus, one of the most enriching conclusions from this project concerns how social science and architecture can join together in improving our understanding and ability to shape local issues and their relationship to the city.



△ 19 Bird’s eye view: the space’s relationship with the extended urban fabric.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Burley, S. 2011. *New College (1786-96): A Selection of Printed and Archival Sources* 2nd ed., Dr. William's Centre for Dissenting Studies.
- Callon, M., Lascoumes, P., Barthe, Y. 2001. *Acting in an Uncertain World*. Cambridge, MA Editions du Seuil.
- Delgado, M. and Staples, L. 2008. *Youth-led Community Organizing Theory and Action*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hackney Council. 2012. 'Chapter 1: We want more young people in Hackney to be in education and training and to have a better range of opportunities between the ages 14-19', *Children and Young People's Needs Assessment*. London Borough of Hackney.
- Hackney Council. 2008. *Social Space: A Strategy for Parks in Hackney*. Community Services: London Borough of Hackney.
- Hackney Museum. 2012. Permanent Exhibition. London.
- Hackney Youth Service. n.d. Creating the Young Hackney centres [WWW Document]. YoungHackney. URL <http://www.younghackney.org/getinvolved/young-hackney-youth-centres2/creating-the-young-hackney-centres-.php> (accessed 3.17.13).
- Henn, M., Weinstein, M., Wring, D. 2002. A generation apart? Youth and political participation in Britain. *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 4, 167-192.
- Laclau, E., Mouffe, C. 1985. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. Verso, London.
- Lefebvre, H., 1996. Right to the City, in: *Writing on Cities*. Blackwell Publishers Inc., Massachus.
- London Borough of Hackney. 1971. *By-laws relating to parks, gardens and open spaces*. London.
- Mouffe, C. 2000. *Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism*. Department of Political Science, Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS), Political Science Series 72, 1-30.
- Young Hackney. 2012. News: Hackney Youth Parliament: RESULTS! [WWW Document]. Young Hackney. URL <http://www.younghackney.org/news/general/hackney-youth-parliament-results.php> (accessed 3.17.13).
- Williams, I. 2011. *Budget Book 2011/2012*. London Borough of Hackney.
- Williams, R. 2011. Rioting is the choice of young people with nothing to lose [WWW Document]. *The Guardian* URL <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/dec/05/reading-riots-nothing-to-lose> (accessed 3.17.13).



INTERVIEWS

Andrew, 2013. Formal Interview: Urban Pioneers and the Architecture Foundation.

Donald, 2012. Informal Interview: Stop Criminalising Hackney Youth.

Lily, 2012. Informal Interview: Stop Criminalising Hackney Youth.

Maria, Rachel, 2013. Formal Interview: JENGbA, Joint Enterprise Not Guilty by Association.

Patrol Officer for Hackney School Children, 2012. Informal Interview: Pembury Estate.

Rachel, 2012. Informal Interview: Stop Criminalising Hackney Youth.

Said, 2013. Formal Interview: Activist and Director of "Riots Reframed."

Sarah, 2012. Informal Interview: Stop Criminalising Hackney Youth.

Sonia, 2012. Informal Interview: Stop Criminalising Hackney Youth.



◀ 20 Photo-montage of the spatial intervention.