

Off the Screen and Onto the Table

Space syntax designs

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Tim Stonor

Space Syntax Limited, UK

Abstract

In the two years since the Brasilia Symposium, the applied research work of Space Syntax Limited has taken a new turn. This invited paper describes a number of projects in which the company has acted as lead design consultant. These projects include the seaside town of Margate in south-east England, the residential area of Greets Green in the English Midlands, and the town centre of Brixton in London.

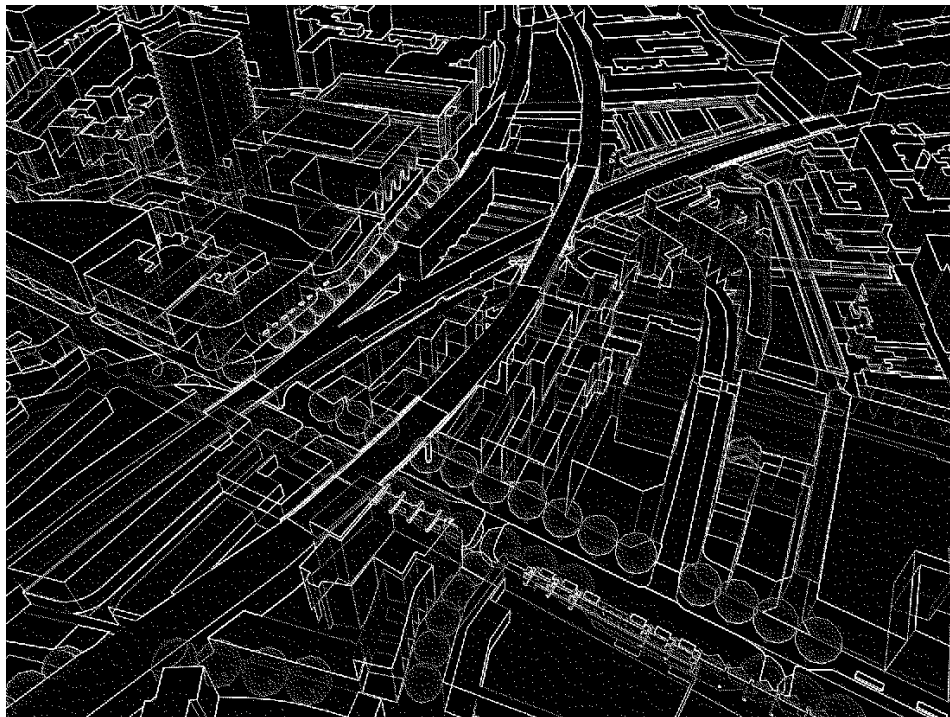
The experience gained from working this way reinforces a long-held view that design is a research-based discipline. It has also stirred a parallel opinion that the process of research is design-led.

But does this mean that good architects make for good researchers, and researchers good architects?

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Tim Stonor,
Managing Director,
Space Syntax Ltd, 1-
19 Torrington Place,
London , WC1E 7HB,
UK
tel +44 (0) 20 7813
4364
fax +44 (0) 20 7813
4363
tstonor@spacesyntax.com

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Brixton Town Centre

Space Syntax Limited was appointed by the London Borough of Lambeth in 2000 to develop strategic redesign proposals for the town centre of Brixton in south-central London.

The local authority aims to encourage more development in Brixton, and the private sector is showing much interest, but over-development risks the displacement of Brixton's historically evolved, multi-ethnic character.

Developer interest is focused mainly on the central part of the High Street, and the area around the main market in Electric Avenue. Other parts of the town centre are seen as being of lower commercial value.

Analysis of Brixton's movement network shows that the town centre is highly fragmented, and linkages from north to south & east to west are poor. Only Electric Avenue and the central part of the High Street are easy to move around. In particular, the spaces around the railway station are unused and have become abused through drug dealing and assault.

Space Syntax Limited's strategic design proposals 'unlock' the potential of the town centre by first creating a series of new pedestrian linkages. These include:

- opening up arches beneath the railway lines to allow people to flow north-south
- removing metal railings in the High Street that currently prevent people from crossing east-west
- widening footways in the High Street (and narrowing the roadway) to provide more space for pedestrians, and to 'calm' through traffic.

These new linkages will encourage movement throughout the town centre. The aim in doing so is to reduce pressure on the High Street & Electric Avenue and 'release' the value of development sites elsewhere.

Detailed design work on the first stage of the proposals began in early 2001. Further work is being progressed to examine links between the town centre and its surrounding residential areas.