

UNIT 05

Soho Entertainment Palace

SZCZEPANIAK + WALKER



Brewer Street , Soho. 1997.

Photo © Rex

Introduction

'Soho, for better or worse, has never been about getting home before midnight.' Marcus Harris, Madame Jojo's.

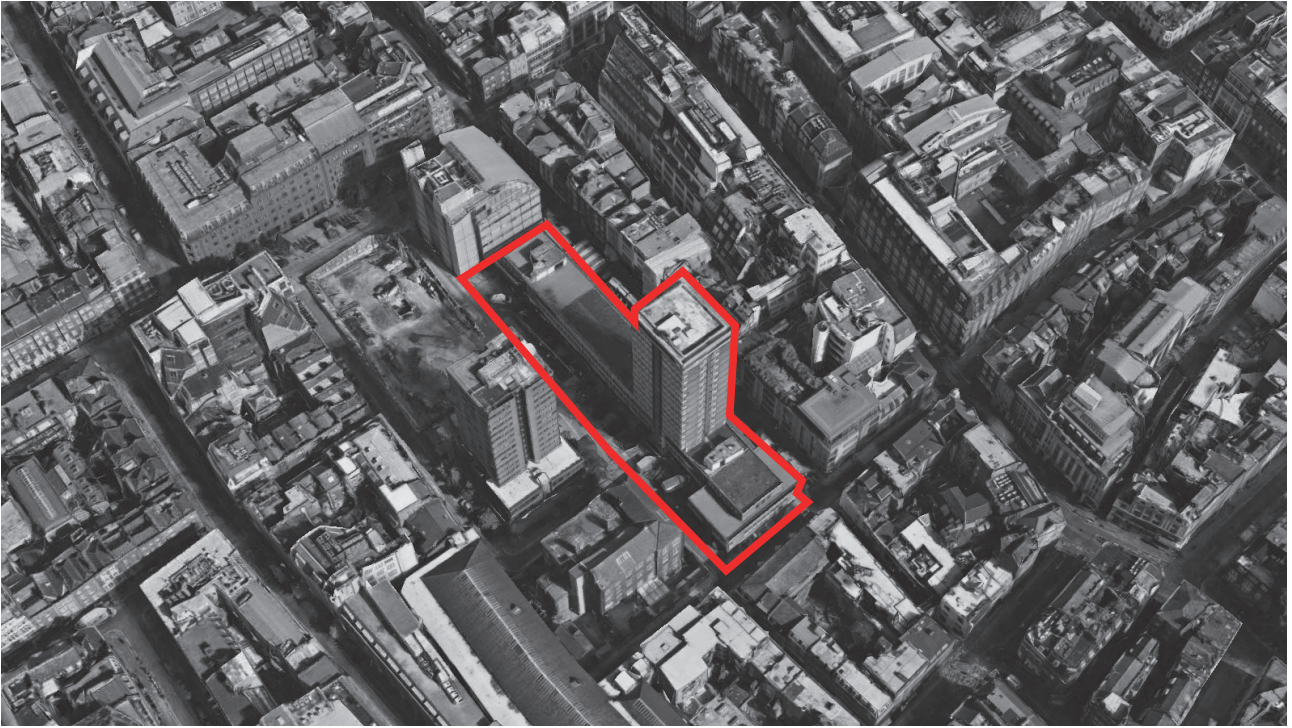
Soho in London is widely known as the entertainment district of London. It is an egalitarian place, where the famous, notorious and mundane can freely mingle. The pursuit of pleasure, however dubious its form, has always been the unifying factor. In recent years though Soho has been under-threat, with increasing gentrification meaning many of the independent businesses, drinking dens, coffee shops, sex shops are gradually disappearing.

This year Unit 5 will look at a relevant typology for Soho today, the Theatre. This building typology has fascinated architects time and time again, notable examples include Denys Lasdun's National Theatre, Walter Gropius' Total Theatre, and Mike Webb's Entertainment Palace (Sin Centre),

The phrase *'the fourth theatre'* was used by Denys Lasdun to describe his design for the National Theatre. In addition to the three auditoria of the complex, the *'fourth theatre'* referred to the spaces where audiences moved about the foyers and around the building both internally and externally. Lasdun wanted performances to take place outside the traditional auditoria space, using staircases and balcony's to create an interaction of human and architectural drama.

Gropius' project was designed for productions employing vast crowds, turntables and treadmills and 'convertibility, flexibility and anonymity' in the design was key. The passive visitor was to become an active participant.

Mike Webb's Entertainment Palace was inspired by a childhood memory; *'...cars in a sea-side resort driving up ramps between buildings led to the notion of a building that can be driven into and can be devoted to the car.'* His Entertainment Palace is organised around its circulation systems with people in cars and people on escalators, themselves becoming part of a performance. The Entertainment Palace was designed for Soho in the 1960's, you are to re-imagine the entertainment palace for Soho today.



The Site

The site for this years project is based in the heart of Soho and is bounded by an eclectic mix of micro contexts. To the East side of the site is Berwick Street, famous for its historic market and rich history of independent shops and restaurants. Whilst to the South, the site connects to small passageways that are remnants of the areas red light district. In contrast to these hustling spaces the West of the site is a warren of quiet back streets that are seemingly forgotten.