What are the kinds of materials – whether physical or intangible – that make up the architectural fabric of a global city like London? How can architects participate in the material production of this city, and what insights and techniques might we bring to the design and making of innovative urban materials? It is important always to ask where materials come from, and how they can be transformed and applied. Here it is worth noting that the word ‘material’, from ‘matter’, is derived etymologically from the word 'mater', i.e. 'mother'.

Yet materials are not merely about physical or aesthetic qualities: their meaning also derives from how they are framed and presented. London, like other cities, is as much about the act of display as it is about ordinary social and economic processes. Within an urban setting, therefore, how might architecture play its part in revealing and presenting – whether that is of people, objects or buildings? The Latin origin of the word 'display' has the sense of unfolding and dispersing and scattering, and so could this be used to provoke different ideas of what it means to design for display? Might an investigation of the concept of display, in relation to materials, also create innovative spatial forms spatial as a result?

Following an initial project of their own devising that explores these themes in Term 1, students in Unit 0 will then each be asked to develop their own briefs for buildings or other urban interventions on sites they have selected around London. The field trip this year will be to southeastern India, in order to see different yet also relevant approaches to the idea of materials and how they can be displayed within the urban realm.