

Reflection

Public Takeover

Building a Common Ground through Public Infrastructure

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Mentors

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1. What is the relation between your graduation topic, the studio topic, your master track, and your master programme?

My graduation project, which centers on the transformation of the Green Border, harmoniously aligns with the objectives of both my master track in Architecture and the overarching theme of the Public Building Graduation Studio. The studio's current exploration into the Vertical Campus for higher education institutions resonates with my project's emphasis on reshaping urban spaces, albeit in a distinct context. While the studio concentrates on innovative building types that are hybrid, resilient, and futureproof emerging from the needs of urban densification, my project tackles the reinvention of an existing urban area—the Green Border.

My project advocates for a 'public takeover' of the Green Border, emphasizing the infusion of impersonality and autonomy, and the creation of undefined spaces as dynamic spaces for encounter and exchange. This vision aligns perfectly with the studio's pursuit of multiplicity, addressing the pressing need for adaptable and future-proof spaces within the evolving urban tapestry.

From the project's standpoint, truly future-proof designs grant individuals the spatial autonomy they require, allowing them to choose their own territories and set their boundaries. Theoretically, this freedom exists everywhere, but due to the abundance of power clusters, the Green Border presents unique challenges with accessibility, making this autonomy less apparent in the urban landscape. My design intentionally facilitates this freedom and presents a framework to encourage active participation in shaping one's own space.

Moreover, allowing every stakeholder to choose their preferred spaces in the design necessitates a learning process on how to coexist and share these environments effectively. This aspect fits together with another critical studio objective: fostering lifelong learning by bringing diverse groups

together in shared spaces. This not only enhances communal living but also enriches the individual's experience within the public domain, making every interaction an opportunity for personal and collective growth.

Additionally, the interdisciplinary nature of the MSc AUBS program is well-reflected in my project's approach. By integrating insights from social dynamics, environmental concerns, and architectural design, my project contributes to the broader academic discourse on the multifaceted relationships between urban spaces, societal needs, and architectural innovation.

In summary, my graduation project serves as a practical application of the theories and principles learned in my master track, aligning with the studio's exploration of multiplicity in design, and contributing to the interdisciplinary character of the MSc AUBS program. It represents a thoughtful response to the challenges presented by urban densification, reflecting the broader goals of my academic journey within the architecture discipline.

2. How did your research influence your design/recommendations and how did the design/recommendations influence your research?

The project began with extensive qualitative and quantitative research that fundamentally shaped my design process and influenced the narrative. Observing daily life at Central Station, I quickly realized how space could become a playground of interaction or a tableau of indifference. For instance, consider a hypothetical barrier intended to deter bicycles from parking. When someone uses it as an impromptu bench, they're not just grabbing a seat; they're flipping the script on its intended purpose, transforming an ordinary object into a stage for personal expression. This act of creative rebellion exemplifies "engagement" in this context: individuals commandeering their environment in unexpected ways. This type of engagement was observable

in various forms across the area—it was prominent in parks and less so on the streets, and almost non-existent in public indoor spaces. These variations gave me valuable insights into the dynamics of public activity on the site.

Interviews with local residents added depth to these findings, uncovering a significant disengagement. Despite spending considerable time in the area, residents felt disconnected. This led to a deeper inquiry into why there was such a disconnect in a frequently visited space. Our research pointed to a culprit: a high concentration of government buildings that, despite their public facades, remained largely inaccessible. This inaccessibility emerged as a significant barrier, stifling public engagement and narrative development in the area. Entrances existed, but they did not welcome; they were open, yet uninviting. This exploration not only shed light on the importance of physical and emotional accessibility in urban spaces but also underscored the need for spaces that invite, not just permit, public interaction.

The findings challenge me to rethink how urban areas can better serve their communities, turning everyday routes into true communal resources. Informed by this research, I crafted a design manifesto aimed at encouraging people to actively shape their environments. My research question was how could I motivate exploration and engagement? To address this question I identified three key strategies: incentive, ambiguity, and sensory experiences. (see figure 1)

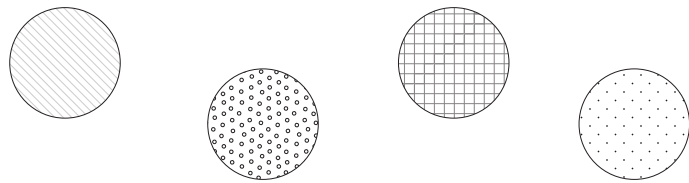
- Incentive: What draws people in? It could be the functional lure of a library, the culinary pull of a restaurant, or the social buzz of a club. Recognizing and amplifying these incentives could transform spaces into hubs of activity.
- Ambiguity: This involves a blending of functions—a café might also host a ceramic painting workshop, creating a multifunctional space that invites curiosity and extended

visits.

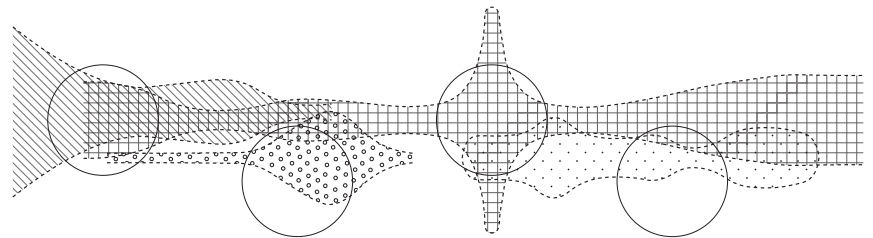
- **Sensory Experiences:** Our senses guide us. The tantalizing smell of coffee or the visual spectacle of a crowd can steer our paths and shape our experiences. Crafting spaces that appeal to the senses can magnetically draw people into and through an environment.

Figure 1. Key strategies of the design

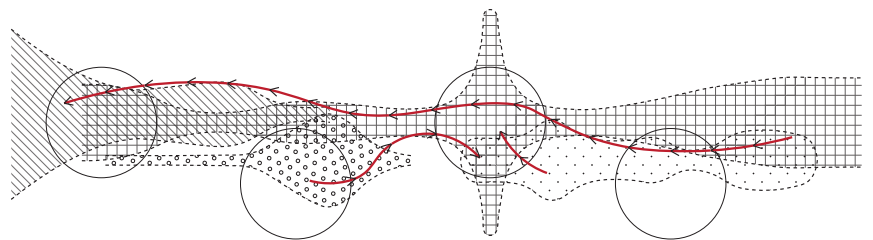
Incentive
programme



Ambiguity
state of transition



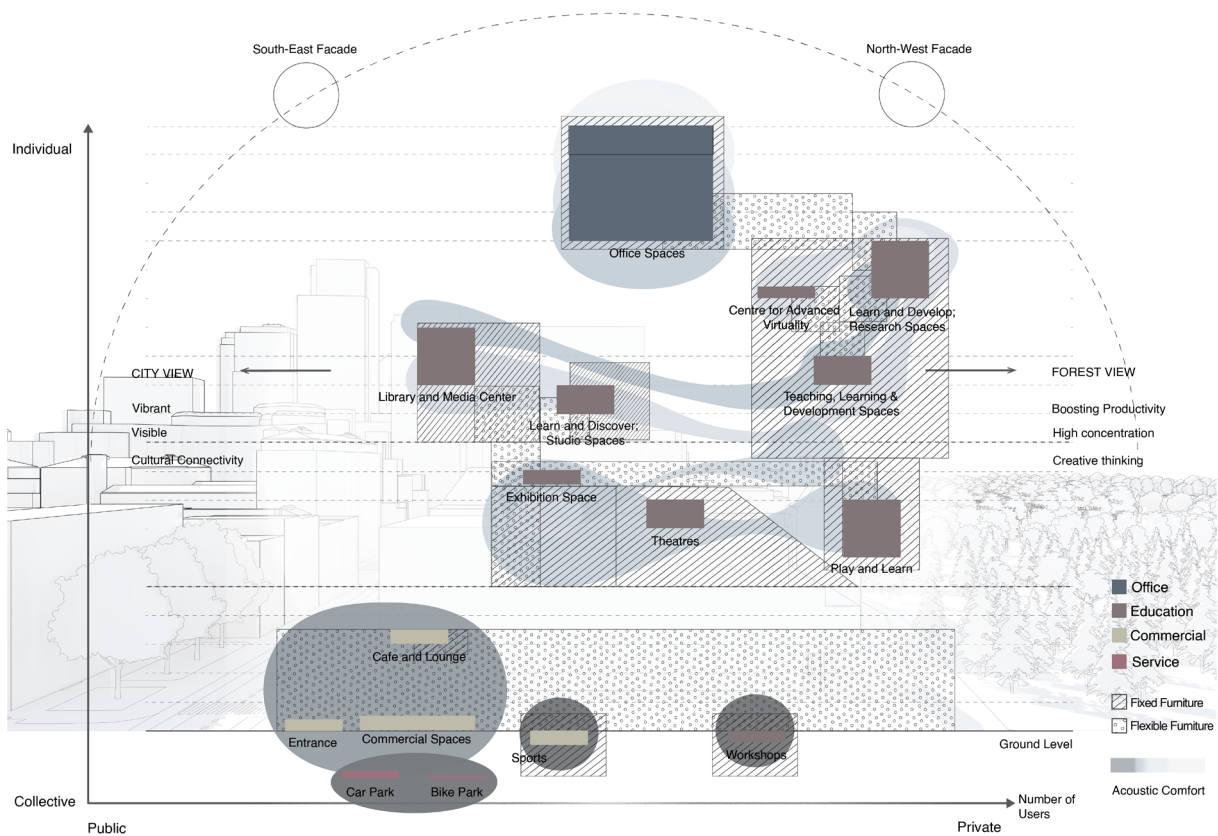
Sensory Experiences
the flow



These principles guided every decision in my design process, constantly asking whether my choices would enhance the incentive to visit, merge functions intriguingly, or lead visitors through sensory-driven experiences. This approach aims to create spaces that are not just functional but transformative, encouraging everyone to see and engage with their environment in new, exciting ways.

As I applied my theoretical framework, I formulated a design manifesto to guide my efforts. However, the question of how to actualize these principles remained unanswered until the design phase. It became clear to me during the design process just how context-dependent the solutions were. While I continued to adhere to my trio of principles, the true method of application lay in maximizing social, visual, acoustic, and ergonomic comfort within the space. (see figure 2) By diversifying the comfort levels within the building, I was able to create a space that offered different experiences to its users. With this design, visitors seeking a quiet study environment are presented with options: they can opt for a serene room equipped with chairs, tables, and books, or they can choose a semi-silent space furnished with bean bags overlooking the forest. The decision-making process and the manner in which the space is utilized hinge on each

Figure 2. diverse spatial comfort within the building



individual's incentive.

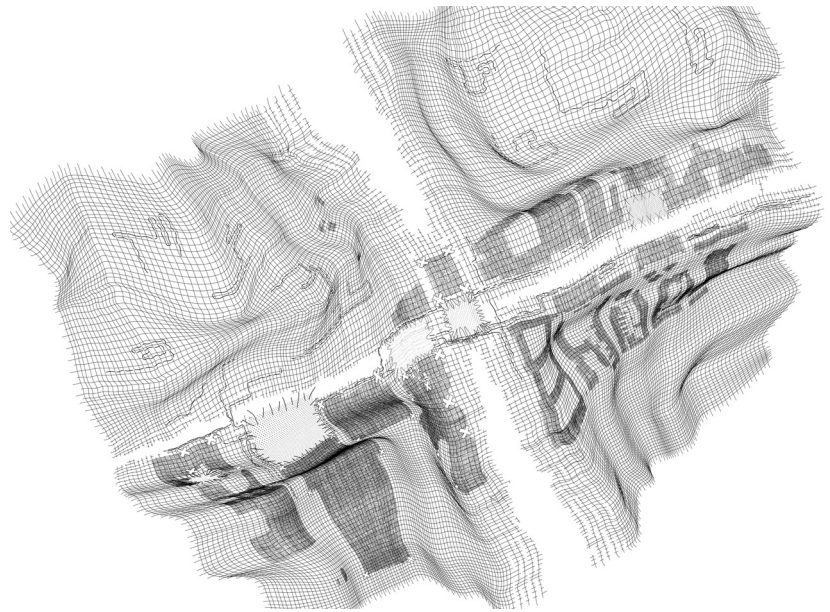
By integrating spatial comfort with my design theory, I arrived at a comprehensive solution to the core research question: "How can a design provoke its user to explore?".

3. How do you assess the value of your way of working (your approach, your used methods, used methodology)?

In the context of my thesis, the methodological approach employed is a dynamic amalgamation of Research by Design that includes both qualitative and quantitative elements. This methodology assessment aims to highlight how the selected methods significantly influenced the research outcomes and the overall project's effectiveness.

The project began with qualitative research methodologies, including in-depth interviews and observational studies with residents and professionals in The Hague's Central Station District. This initial phase was crucial in capturing the different experiences of isolation and social dynamics within the urban setting. The insights garnered from these interactions provided a foundational understanding necessary for shaping the subsequent design phases. Not only did these insights inform the theoretical framework, but they also ensured that the design interventions proposed were directly responsive to the actual needs and challenges identified on the ground. For instance, psychological impressions gathered during site visits were methodically mapped to create a psychogeographical map, applying the Research by Design method to visually represent the emotional landscapes of the area. (see figure 3) Additionally, I utilized techniques like collages to manipulate site perceptions, allowing me to explore new relational possibilities within the space. (see figure 4) These techniques, such as modeling assemblages and creating collages, were used not merely to express ideas but to actively explore and discover new ones. This approach helped make the design process more dynamic and responsive to the site's characteristics.

Figure 3. psycho-geographical map



Quantitative data analysis complemented the qualitative research, involving the examination of municipal data to delineate the spatial and ownership distributions within the district. This analysis was pivotal in identifying specific areas where public access was restricted, thereby guiding the design strategies toward enhancing accessibility and public engagement in these spaces. The quantitative research solidified the project's basis by providing empirical evidence that supported the necessity for the proposed design interventions.

Before designing, I turned to numerous case studies for guidance. Initially, I focused on those aligned with design principles that I had defined after analyzing the research data: incentive, ambiguity, and sensory experiences. However, it was the guidance of my tutor, Nathalie de Vries, that refined my approach. Nathalie stressed the importance of thorough analysis, urging me to review the distinctions of each case study to understand their underlying mechanisms. For instance, achieving ambiguity on a wide floor plan required different tactics than on a narrow one—insights I hadn't fully grasped before Natalie's guidance. I revisited the case studies with fresh eyes, extracting valuable insights to enhance my design process.

Figure 4. collage to discover new relations on the site



Following the data collection phases, the project transitioned into an iterative design process. Initial design concepts were developed and continuously refined through a series of prototypes and models. This iterative cycle was instrumental in testing the viability and effectiveness of design solutions, allowing for adjustments based on feedback and evolving project insights. The prototypes served not only as tools for visualization but also as mechanisms for engagement, enabling clearer communication.

Crucial to this methodology was the constant integration of feedback throughout the design journey. The iterative nature of Research by Design enabled the seamless incorporation of new insights and responses as the project unfolded. My project design tutor, Paul Kuitenbrouwer, played a crucial role by sharing his expertise and case studies, which greatly enhanced my design process. Beyond that, his encouragement during our sessions was a true mental boost. Despite my occasional doubts about the progress of my design each week, Paul's reassuring words made me feel at ease. His support fostered an environment where I felt comfortable exploring alternative approaches and learning from any design missteps along the way. This encouragement was

instrumental in keeping me motivated and resilient throughout the design process. The guidance from my theory tutor, Gosia Golabek, was equally indispensable. As she reviewed my design theory and methodology, her insightful input helped solidify my theoretical framework. Moreover, the case studies she provided played a crucial role in shaping a distinctive visual and spatial identity for my design theory. Her persistent questioning of every design decision served as a constant reminder of the theoretical foundation upon which my design was built—a critical aspect that can easily fade into the background over the course of a year-long design process. Working alongside Paul and Gosia, I gained invaluable insights into the importance of effective idea presentation and the significance of meticulously crafting project deliverables. Through countless iterations of my presentation with them, my research framework became more robust and well-defined. Moreover, I must acknowledge the invaluable support of my building technology design tutor, Piero Medici. His encouragement to embrace innovative technical details empowered me to overcome challenges and pursue ambitious ideas. Whenever I felt hesitant due to the perceived complexity of a concept, Piero reminded me that true innovation stems from creativity and vision. This mindset shift enabled me to craft a design that not only remained grounded in reality but also reflected my creative vision. With each cycle of feedback and revision, the project progressed closer to realizing a design that not only met practical requirements but also resonated deeply with the needs of the community.

Briefly, this methodological approach effectively bridged theoretical research with practical application, resulting in a robust design proposal that addressed complex issues of urban densification and both physical and emotional inaccessibility, ultimately combatting detachment from our built environments.

4. What is the relevance of your graduation work in the larger social, professional, and scientific framework?

My graduation project adopts a comprehensive approach by initially addressing the issue of inaccessibility and emphasizing the relationship between a declining inclination to engage with one's surroundings. This investigation integrates social, psychological, and political perspectives, extending their impact into the spatial dimension. This holistic problem-solving approach underscores the importance of designing not only for physical needs but also for the complex social dynamics that shape human behavior and well-being.

The project analyses the intersection between social dynamics and spatial design, positioning itself as a prospective model for both social and psychological studies. It vividly demonstrates the transformative role a building can play as a catalyst, fostering meaningful conversations within a neighbourhood. Emphasizing the pivotal role of the 'user autonomy' in design, it prompts a discussion on the ontology of public spaces, highlighting the significance of people's engagement with the spaces they inhabit. The project seeks to decode the dynamics of how a space becomes truly public, emphasizing the collaborative and participatory aspects that enhance its democratic character.

Moreover, the project addresses the challenge of densification in a heavily populated neighborhood, aiming to set an example of how existing buildings, in harmony with their context, can contribute to enhancing the overall quality of the neighborhood. The design endeavors to exemplify how buildings can play a role in enriching the narrative of a community.

Finally, the project explores the creation of a public space open to interpretation, acknowledging that enhanced human autonomy allows for the recognition of patterns and newly established relationships. The design strives to exhaust the possibilities, representing, in a modest and sincere manner,

the vibrancy of this distinctive locale. In essence, it contributes to the ongoing exploration of designing public spaces with enduring significance.

5. How do you assess the value of the transferability of your project results?

The project is molded specifically to the environment of The Hague Central Station. I firmly believe that even if the project were located in a different part of The Hague, the proposed design would vary. The decision to incorporate a high-rise building, for instance, is directly tied to the dense urban setting of The Hague Central Station area. Similarly, the presence of numerous ministries and embassies along the Green Border underscores the accessibility issues that form the cornerstone of my design narrative. Thus, the challenges addressed in this project are unique to this particular location. However, there's a line of thinking rooted in empirical data and logical reasoning (see figure 5) that suggests this project's principles can be applied elsewhere, provided similar challenges exist. The theoretical framework developed for this project addresses the central issues of The Hague Central Station area, but it also offers a structured approach that can be adapted for other locations facing comparable challenges.

Also, the project's application of research by design contributes significantly to both academic knowledge and practical urban development strategies. It demonstrates how design can be used as a research tool to explore complex urban issues and develop innovative solutions that are both functional and beneficial to the community. The findings and methodologies from this project can serve as valuable references for future research and projects in similar urban contexts.

In essence, this project not only provides a solution for The Hague Central Station area but also offers a well-structured guide for any project aiming to prioritize human auto-

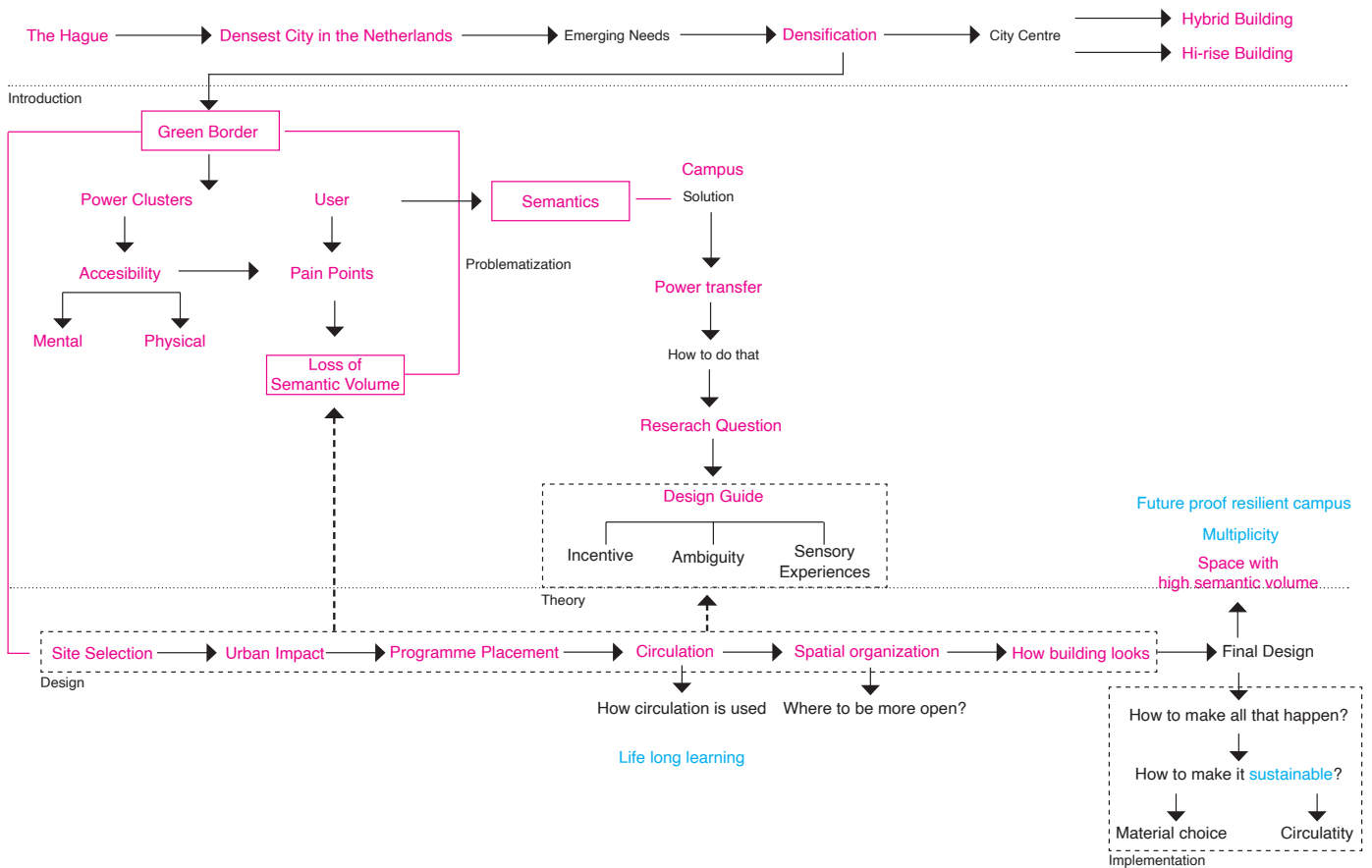


Figure 5. my line of thinking/ project framework

my within their buildings and seeking innovative ways to achieve it.

6. In what ways did your personal experiences and observations in urban environments influence your approach and solutions in the graduation project?

I've come to realize that the design process begins long before any formal research is conducted. It's deeply rooted in who we are—as individuals, our identities mold our perspectives and priorities, shaping what we choose to focus on and what we identify as problems. My fascination with public spaces led me to this studio. I was eager to unravel the complex dance between our environments and our routines, between how we shape our surroundings and how they, in turn, shape us.

Before joining this studio, I took a course on Public Building

Perception, Composition, and Identity, which was eye-opening. We all navigate through unique perceptions and interpretations, each anchored to our distinct realities. Reflecting on my own childhood, I saw prison not as confinement but as freedom. Barred from reading, watching cartoons, or indulging in simple pleasures until I earned my place in prestigious educational institutions, I paradoxically viewed physical boundaries as liberating, unlike the intangible social and mental boundaries that constrained me. This experience brings to light a profound question: Is it really possible to design an ideal? Can one person's utopia be another's dystopia? This paradox pushed me to scrutinize the very essence of architectural design: If our desires, movements, and perceptions are influenced by layers beyond our control—some of them invisible—how can we, as architects, truly hope to create genuine solutions? Are we even addressing the right problems?

When a design is constructed, it slips beyond the architect's control—that's the moment it truly begins to live. My philosophical studies in my first master's year broadened my view further, particularly regarding technology's role in our lives. We define a private space as a room enclosed by four solid walls, but what of a room full of people, where isolation is achieved through noise-canceling headphones? Such barriers suggest a threshold, a gatekeeper to personal interaction, and it is actually a boundary that a person can set themselves without needing any physical companion. This realization rocked the very foundations of my understanding of architecture. I had always thought it was about setting boundaries, yet often, these boundaries are not once again in our control.

In a world where technology enables greater autonomy in public spaces, can a building still encourage public interaction, or indeed, achieve any significant purpose? This dilemma precipitated what I've come to regard as the 'death of the architect.' As our tools evolve, encouraging further withdrawal into autonomy, the traditional role of the building as

a stage for public life seems increasingly unstable. How can we, as architects, design meaningful public spaces when the very definition of 'public' is being continually reshaped right beneath our feet?

This existential crisis in architectural discourse was my starting point in this graduation studio. It spurred me to observe, to decode people's routines, movements, and desires. This exploration led to the identification of an accessibility issue in the area, rooted in both physical and mental boundaries. My design proposal aimed to address these challenges in a deliberately undefined manner, as Richard Sennett suggested—was a real puzzle. How does one design something that is intentionally not over-designed? I am content with my design theory, which integrates spatial comfort elements with my foundational trio of design guides: incentive, ambiguity, and sensory experiences. This strategy led to the creation of what I call a 'space palette,' allowing users to choose from different environmental qualities, thus adapting the space to their individual needs while still retaining a subtly manipulative design. This strategy not only adapts to the individual's preferences but also aligns with the studio's goal of creating multiplicity with its future-proof design. In essence, my design doesn't dictate how spaces should be used; it simply provides the backdrop for comfort and interaction, which will remain relevant regardless of future technological advancements or shifts in user behavior—like using a VR headset to establish sharper personal boundaries in a public setting. Although I am pleased with this solution, I acknowledge that it represents just one possibility in the vast spectrum of architectural solutions. As I progress in my architectural career, I remain dedicated to discovering and testing even more innovative alternatives.

7. What is the ethical responsibility of urban designers and architects in shaping the future of urban living, especially in culturally and economically diverse settings?

I have caught on that the influence of architecture on the future is far from unilateral; it's a complex relationship of social, economic, and, yes—predominantly capitalist—forces. The notion of a distant, preconceived future or a past awaiting reconstruction seems increasingly obsolete. Instead, what we have is a continuous creation of space that coexists with our present experiences. Today is where the pen meets paper, and the narrative of our environment is being drafted by the very people who inhabit it.

Winston Churchill once said, “We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us.” This statement charges architecture with a formidable power—a power that, in reality, it does not possess. In my view, it is the technology that molds us, transforming our behaviors and, in turn, prompting us to adapt our environments to these new ways of being. Thus, the role of the architect is less about exerting control and more about interpreting and mapping these transformations onto the landscape of human history.

In this context, the responsibilities of architects seem to pivot more towards environmental stewardship than sculpting the human experience. Moreover, it is becoming clear that we ought to prioritize the environmental impact of our creations more thoughtfully. Personally, sustainability wasn't always at the forefront of my interests. However, I'm now keen to explore how more sustainable solutions can be integrated into our designs. While I do not see this becoming my singular passion, it's a path that I am increasingly committed to exploring, recognizing that our planet may well depend on it.