

A LIVING ROOM FOR A TOWN



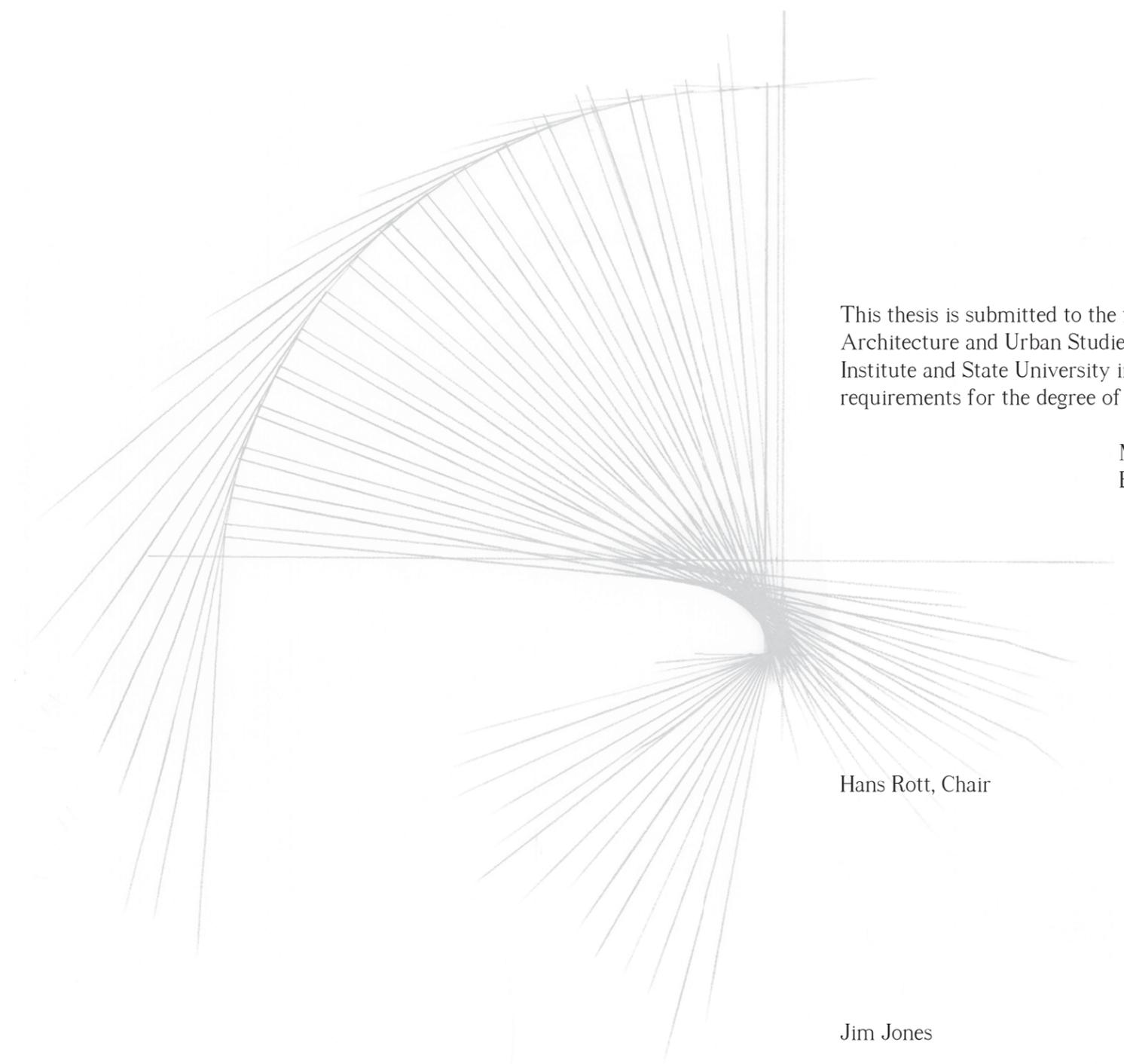
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ABSTRACT

A LIVING ROOM FOR A TOWN

Catherine Gayle Calvert

My thesis is an urban intervention into the small town of Blacksburg, Virginia. The ideas and explorations of this project are derived from the placement of a canopy over the Main Street of the downtown. The thesis addresses the existing energy and essence of the town, while introducing the external object of a canopy and a grid to establish a level of order and unity for the area.



This thesis is submitted to the faculty of the College of
Architecture and Urban Studies at Virginia Polytechnic
Institute and State University in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Architecture.

May 4, 2007
Blacksburg, VA

Hans Rott, Chair

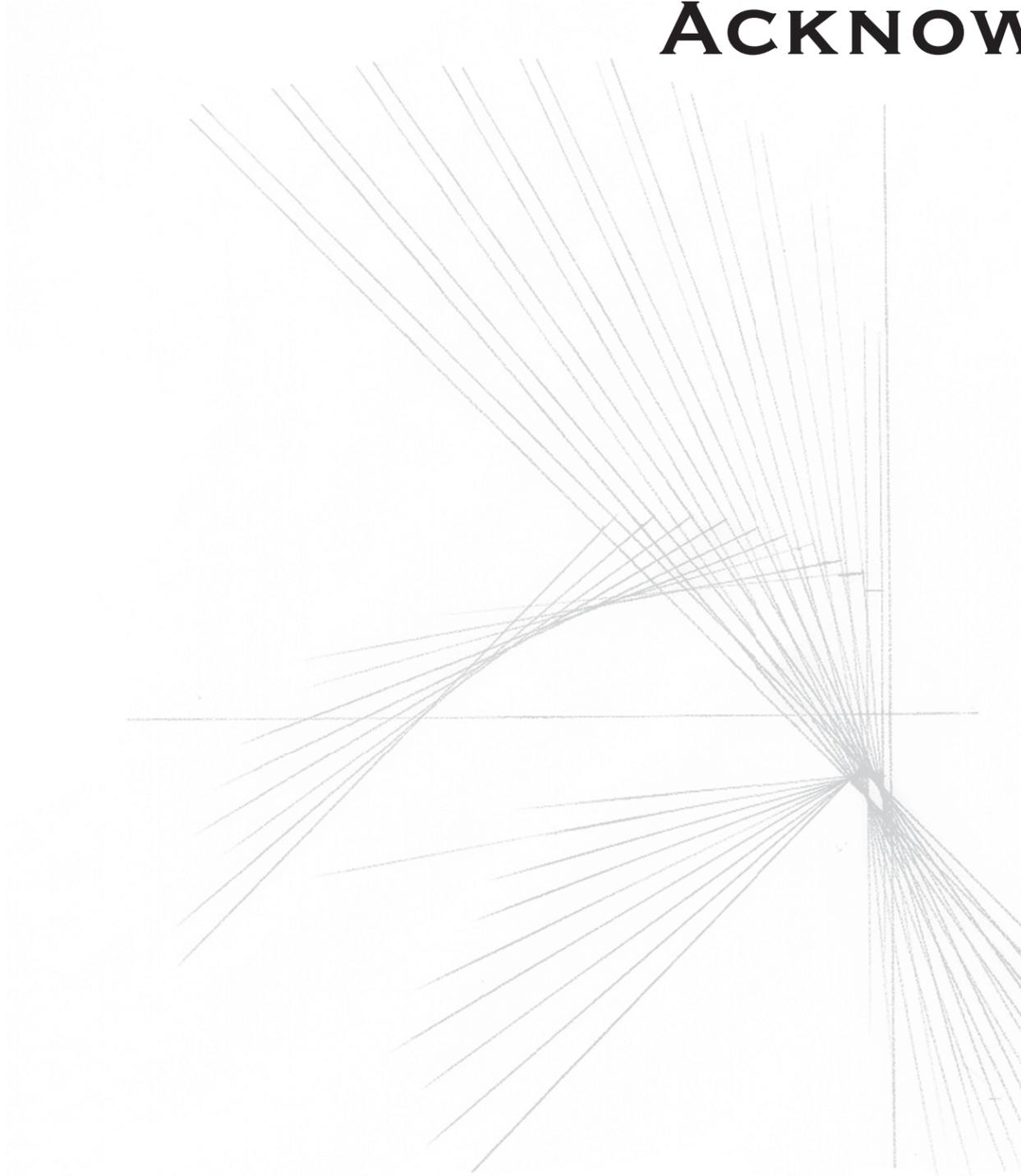
Jim Jones

Bill Galloway

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INTRODUCTION

Blacksburg, Virginia is a town that is comprised of two groups of people. One group comes from the town and the second group comes from the university. The townspeople and the college students are guided by separate goals, influences, and intentions. Therefore, it is the purpose of this thesis to generate a space where the two groups can coexist as a unit rather than as separate societies.

In addition, this thesis is about reclaiming and preserving a small town. Currently, the downtown of Blacksburg is overshadowed by contributions from the university and college life. Bars, clubs, shops for sporting paraphernalia, and sports bar restaurants are all dominant features of the downtown. These places attract college students, yet provide little appeal and allure for an older community member who still wishes to partake in the downtown. As a result, the townspeople and college students occupy the downtown at separate times and utilize the area in different ways.

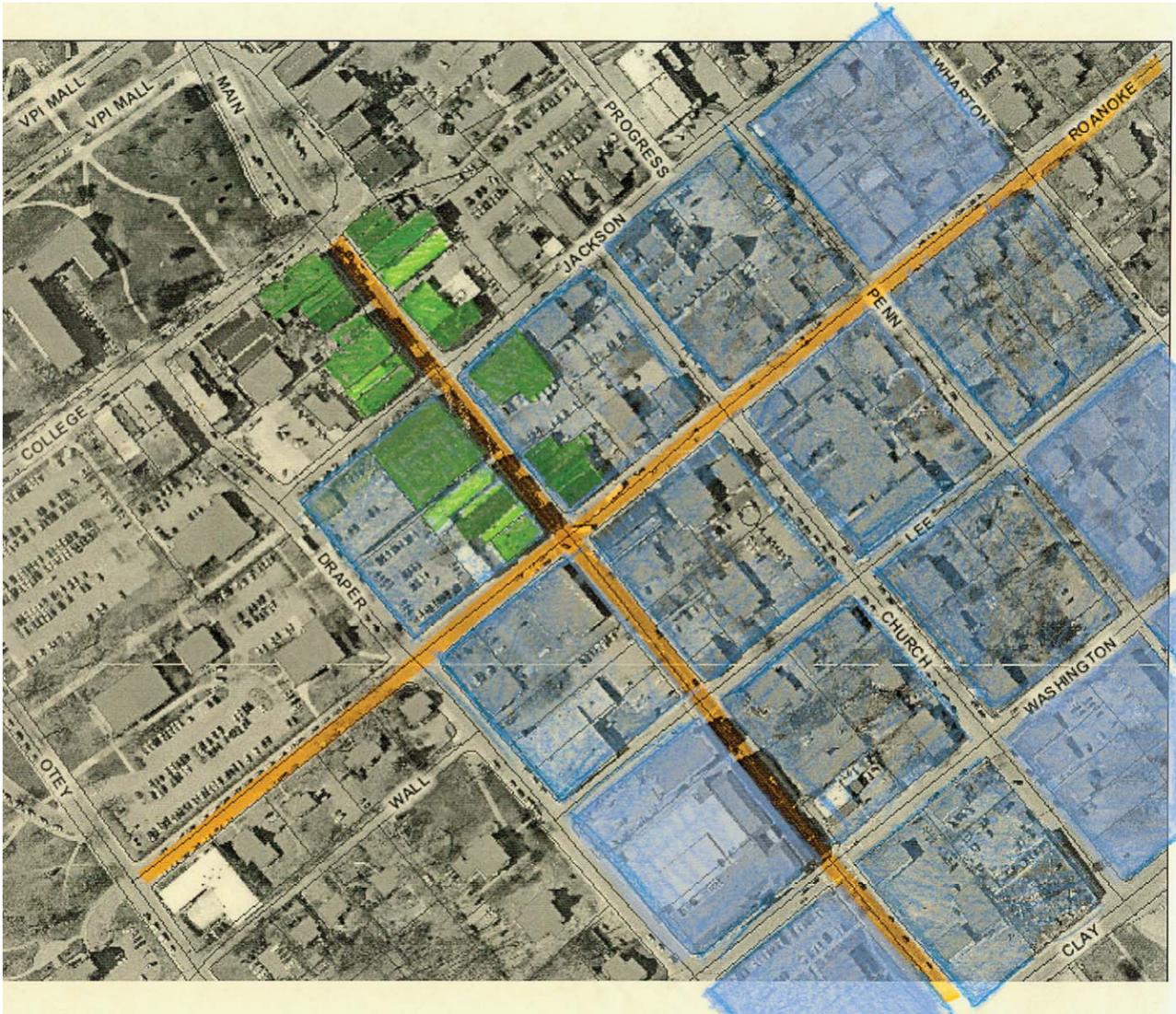
The intention of this thesis is to create a room from a street. Through the introduction of a series of objects into the downtown, the redesign provides a sense of order which is currently absent and it acknowledges the spirit and energy that already exists within the downtown. This thesis is about the establishment of an environment to bring two groups of people together in one “room”.

THE SITE

The site is an important factor in the redesign of the downtown of Blacksburg. On one side of the site the area is dominated by the residences of the townspeople, while the university is located on the other side. Due to the site's position between both groups of the town, the area for the thesis becomes an important moment of connection and interaction for Blacksburg.

SIXTEEN SQUARES

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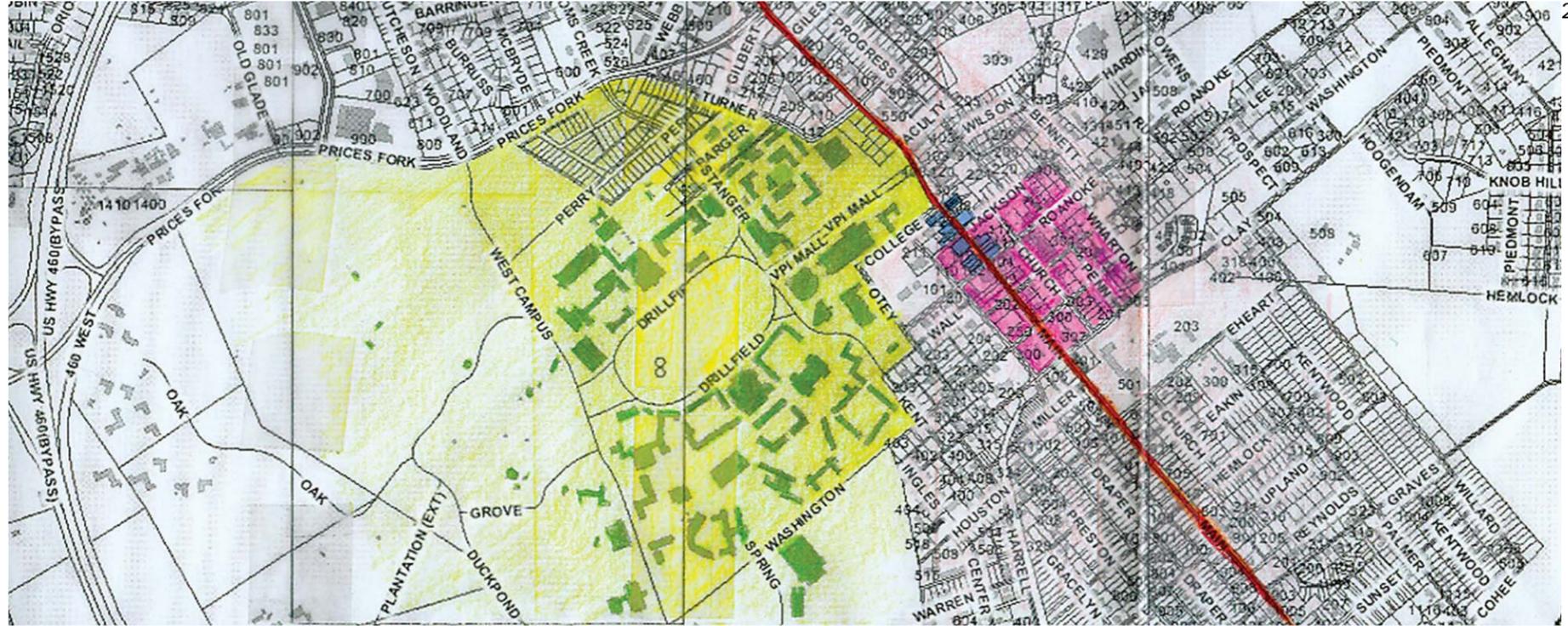


This thesis intends to create a moment of unity between the college and the town by designing a transition in a location that is shared by both students and townspeople. Therefore, it is important to understand the composition of the town, the college, and the street in order to appreciate the need and resolution of this project.

The proposed design is situated along the northwest and southeast directions of the original sixteen square grid of the town of Blacksburg. Half of the design lies among two of the sixteen squares, while the remaining portion occupies a piece of land that lies between the original plots of land and the university owned land.

In the graphic above, the blue squares represent the grid of sixteen squares, while the related buildings are indicated in green.

THE UNIVERSITY VS. THE TOWN

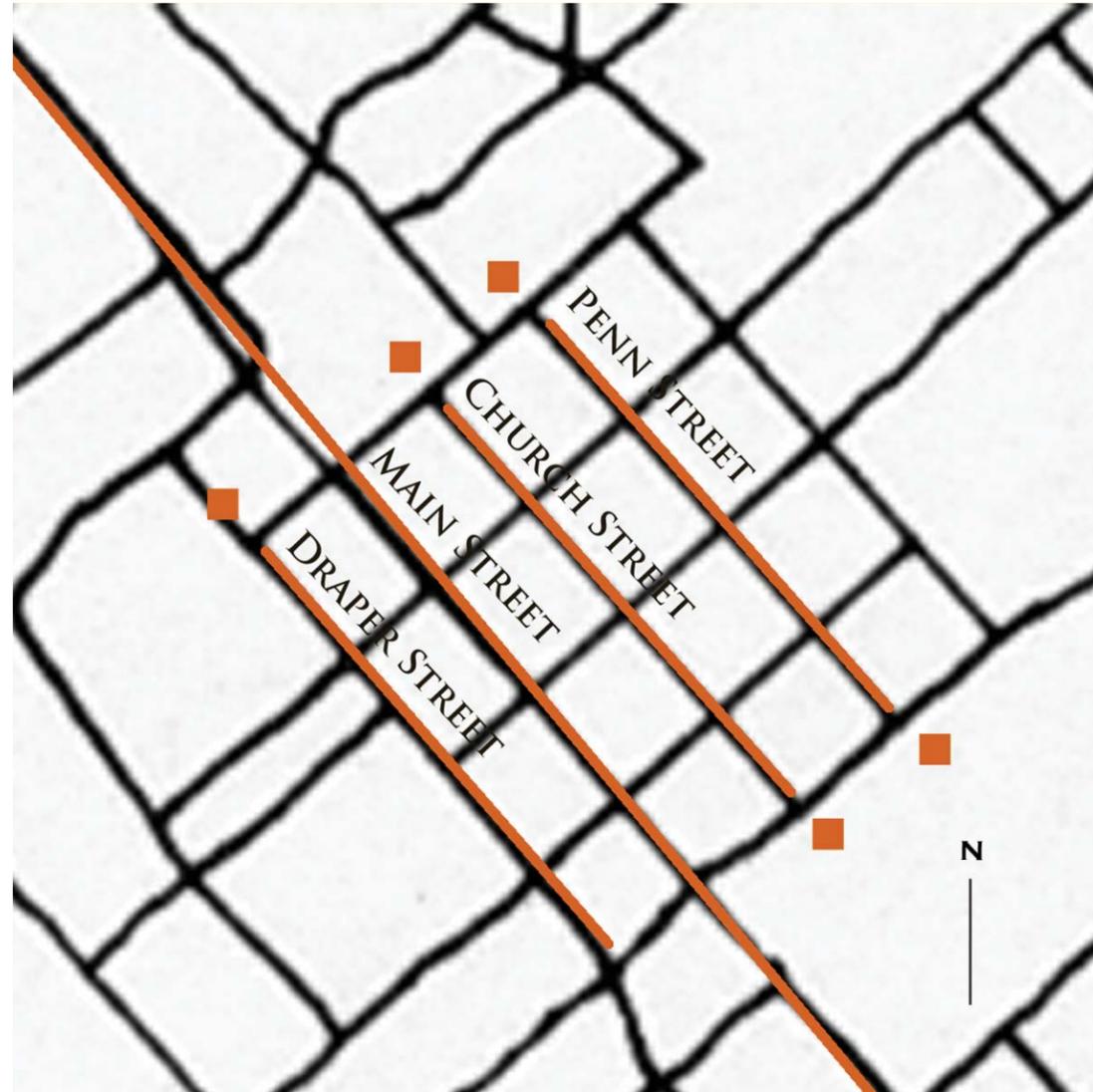


The town of Blacksburg originated with sixteen square plots of land. Eventually, the town began to grow with the introduction of the university in 1872. However, while the town and the college have continued to expand in the past 135 years, the growth has not yet united the two groups. There still remains an abrupt transition from one to the other.

In the map above, the university is designated by green and the town with its center as the sixteen squares is represented in pink. The area noted with blue is the place of investigation for this thesis. Through my examination, it is viewed as a key transitional moment from the town to the university, and visa versa, as it lies along the most heavily traveled access route to and from both conditions.

STREETS WITHIN A GRID

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The original outline of the Town of Blacksburg is a grid of sixteen squares. These squares represent the plots of land owned by the first inhabitants of the town.

A street divides each of the squares into the grid of sixteen. Each of the streets running in the Northwest and Southeast direction carries a special condition. Penn Street is like a back alley. It is quiet and residential. Church Street is the most civic street within the grid, containing six institutions. It has the greatest sense of community presence. Main Street is the street with the most commercial presence. In addition, it is the only street to pass all the way through the sixteen square grid. Meanwhile, Draper Road can be viewed as a barrier from the campus to community.

RESIDENTIAL



Image 4 shows the residential density of the town of Blacksburg. The centers of both the town and the university are represented in green outlines; the town is represented by the sixteen square grid and the university is shown by the oval drill-field. The majority of the residential activity occurs away from the portion of Main Street where the site is located. This is an important issue for the thesis because it clarifies that the site is not a private area. Therefore, it is a good moment for shifting from the college to the town. The blue highlight designates the site.

BUSINESS

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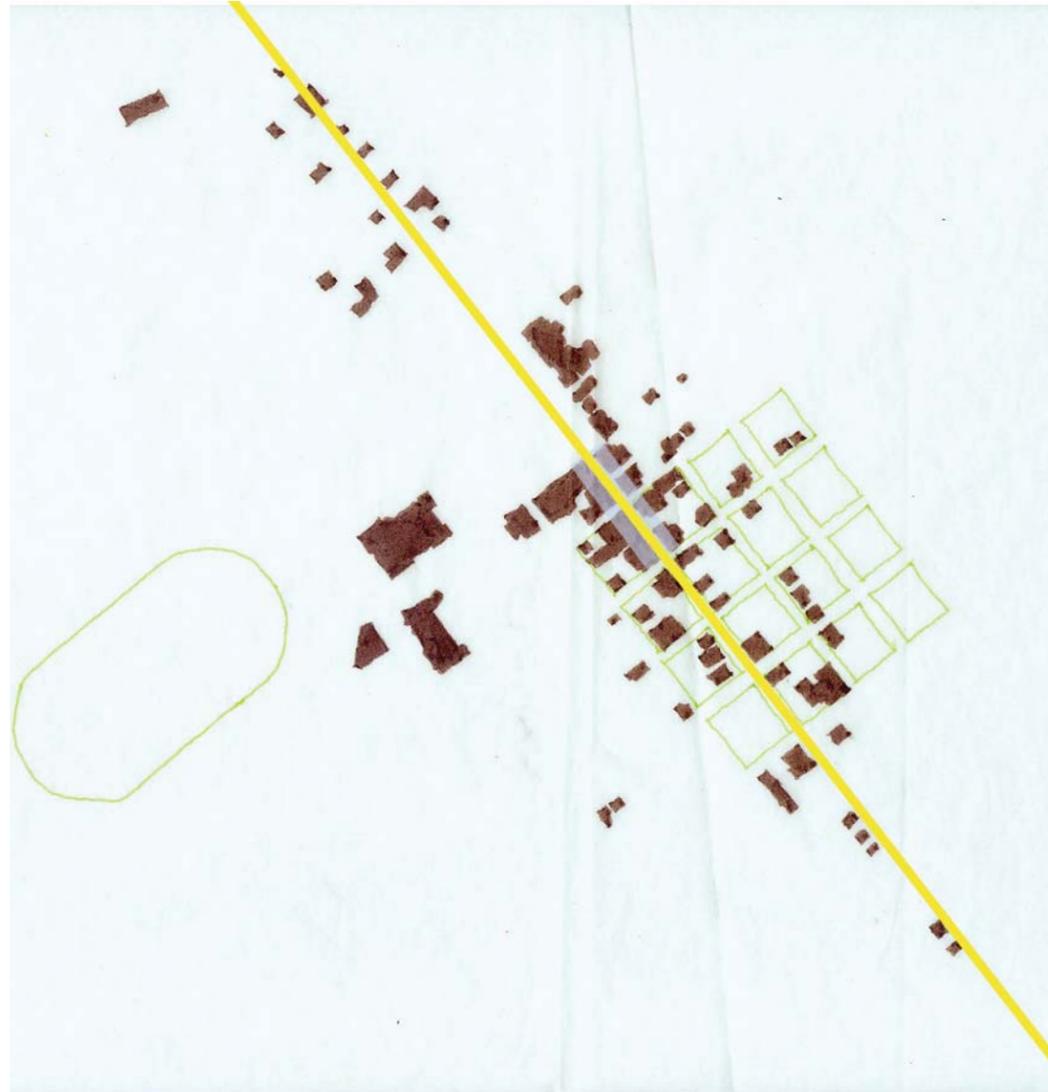


Image 5 indicates the retail and business locations in the town. Once again, the town and university centers are indicated with a green outline. In addition, the image describes the thesis site (which is highlighted with a blue rectangle) to be the area with the most dense population of businesses.

Due to its high density, this area regularly serves both the townspeople and the university. It is an area filled with places to eat, drink, find entertainment, and shop. Therefore, it is an ideal location to serve as a place of connection for the two distinct groups that comprise the town of Blacksburg.

THE STREET



Image 6 graphically shows the expansion and compression of the Main Street which runs through the center of the site. The buildings that compose the site are highlighted in orange and at this juncture in the street, the road is at its most narrow. Moving away from this area in either direction, the street widens and the buildings begin to pull away from the street, decreasing the density.

The compression of the road and the buildings at this portion of the street create a solidity to this area of the neighborhood; making it an ideal converging point for the university and the town.

INSPIRATIONS AND INFLUENCES

The following examples of architecture served as influences for the thesis. The search for inspirations was geared towards finding environments that created a third room out of the street, sidewalk, or alleyway. The Passages in Paris, France, the Bus Station in Chur, Switzerland, and the Galleria in Milano, Italy were all selected because of the sense of place and environment that they create.

THE PASSAGE

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The passages in Paris, France are an urban intervention in response to new technologies and more leisure time among the population. The spaces are defined by a street-like atmosphere with a glass covered, iron roof. The spaces are filled with light filtering in through the glass roof above. Consequently, the canopy creates a third room from the space between the buildings.

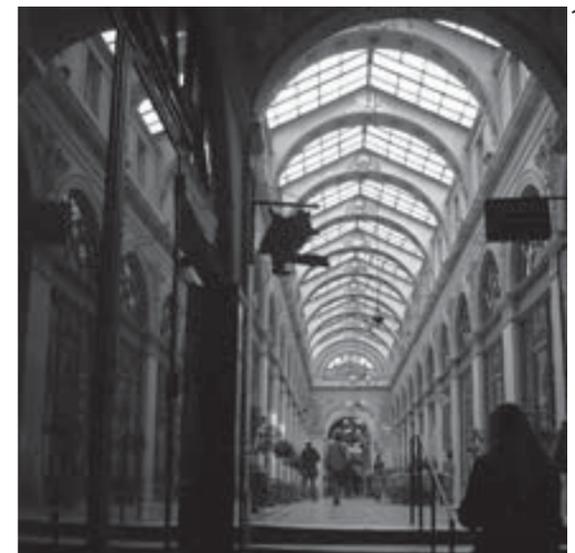
THE PASSAGE



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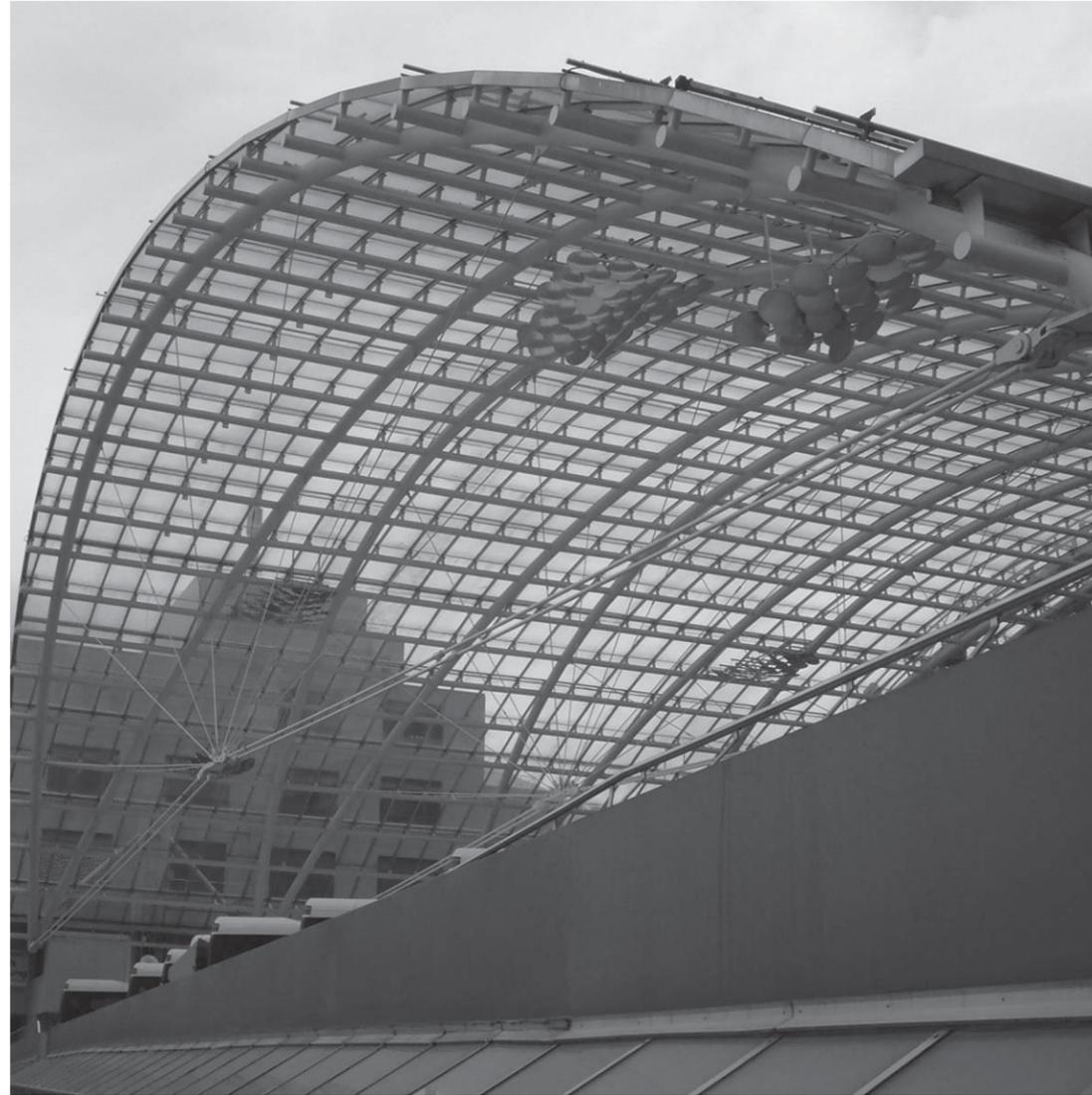


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In the redesign for Blacksburg, the desire is to create a similar feeling. The thesis addresses the street as another room. Therefore, as people pass along the street and the sidewalk, they have the sense of being in an intimate space, even though the scale is large.

CHUR BUS STATION

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The bus station in Chur, Switzerland is a canopy over a flat platform area. The covered space is left open to the outdoor temperature changes, however, it is designed to protect people from weather elements such as rain, snow, and wind.

One enjoyment of the space is that it is still a part of the outdoors, but it provides enough protection to make the space a comfortable area to occupy.

The main component of the design is the massive canopy that spans the entire platform of the bus station. It is a steel construction enclosed with glass panels that attach to metal clips. Due to the transparent construction of the roof, even on a cloudy day, the station is filled with natural light. In addition, the steel members of the canopy create an interesting play of shadows throughout the platform, thus enhancing the depth and complexity of the space.

CHUR BUS STATION



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My design for the canopy over the downtown of Blacksburg contains similar ideas and elements as the Chur bus station. For example, the web and space frame construction of the thesis roof are designed to maximize the play of light and shadows throughout the town. Also, because the redesign is addressing an outdoor space, it is important to maintain the feeling of being outside. Therefore, the canopy is designed to provide protection from the elements without completely enclosing the street.

GALLERIA DE MILANO

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The Galleria in Milano, Italy is a covered double arcade, an arcade with two intersecting streets. It is a street open only to pedestrian traffic and is an important point of shopping, eating, and drinking in the area. The massive canopy overhead is the main feature of the space. It is a steel and glass roof that rises 96 feet above the street level. The presence of the roof, although extensive, provides a sense of place to the street. Even with the grand scale of the buildings and the canopy, the roof addresses the people within the space by blocking out the weather and capping off the height of the buildings, making it a pleasurable and exciting space to experience.

GALLERIA DE MILANO



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In my redesign for the downtown of Blacksburg, the intention was to capture the same sense of place that one experiences in the Galleria in Milano. The desire is to have the canopy generate a feeling of grandness and presence by following similar guidelines and elements found in the Milano canopy.

THE COMPONENTS OF A LIVING ROOM

The redesign of the downtown of Blacksburg can be summarized into three components. The first element is a wall that is placed between the street and the sidewalk. The second element is a series of beams that span across the street at designated intervals. The final element is the roof which caps off the street, the buildings, and the beginning and end of the road. Each condition enhances the idea of the street as a room for the town.