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Between intent and use

Who is a design for - and what happens when it leaves the drawing?

Edited by Hemant Jindal

An issue about the distance between intention, experience and use.

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A drawing does not finish the conversation.

A design can be encountered as more than a drawing. Someone enters it with a memory, moves through it with a purpose, or receives it as instructions for the next stage of work. What happens in that passage matters.

Siamak RajaeiRamsheh begins with the person an architect imagines. His first-person essay asks how that imagined person relates to someone who will actually experience a space. Uncertainty becomes a reason to pay closer attention, rather than something a better image can settle.

The PQSE House team moves from representation to the fitted room. Its contributor account asks where the building package, equipment and meal-service routines need to meet. The photographs show a fit-out; they do not establish how the spaces later performed.

The second half moves outwards, then into the workshop. Shaan Khan follows an unbuilt settlement proposal from a private front door to shared resources and a wider network. Its spatial relationships express a charter, not the experience of an existing community.

Star Factory Lantern follows the making of an illuminated figure through frame, surface, colour and light. The horse anchors the account; photographs of separate projects illustrate other processes and settings. It is a manufacturer's workshop account, not independent reporting of every stage of one installation.

Read together, the pieces keep asking what the next person encounters: an image, a room, a shared threshold, a set of instructions or a finished object. The design intention matters, but so do the handover and the limits of what each account can show.

Hemant Jindal / Field Assembly

ESSAY / SIAMAK RAJAEIRAMSHEH

Who Am I Designing For?

The distance between the person an architect imagines and the person who experiences a space.

The person in the room

Once, in the middle of designing, a simple question came to me: who am I designing for? For the person sitting in front of me, talking about their home, their life and what they want? Or for the person I have constructed in my own mind?

On the surface, it was a simple question. I could think about needs, desires, lifestyle, economic conditions, climate, function and aesthetics. But for me, the question did not stop there. If I am designing for a human being who is going to live in this space, how well do I actually know them?

And then another question came to me: who am I, anyway? I did not want to find a philosophical answer. It simply became a question for me.

Perhaps because we have never really lived one another's lives. I cannot see the world exactly from where you stand, and you cannot experience the world exactly from where I stand. We see something in another person. We hear something. We understand something. And then we complete the rest of them in our own minds.

Perhaps this is why architecture is sometimes designed, before anything else, for the image of a person that the architect has constructed - not for the person who will actually experience the space. And perhaps the problem begins there.

The person in the room / continued

I think about dreaming. In a dream, everything feels real. Only after waking do we say: it was a dream. Maybe this distance between knowing and experiencing, between what we know and what we actually live, is one of the important distances in being human.

I mean the 'I' that is afraid, that becomes happy, that remembers, that dreams, that enjoys one street and wants to escape from another. The same person who, when entering a house, does not see only walls, ceilings and windows. Perhaps the smell of a house takes them back to childhood. Perhaps the light in a room leads them to a distant memory. Perhaps a corridor means safety to one person and anxiety to another.

Somewhere among body, mind, memory and emotion, there is something that lives the experience from within. For now, I call that something 'I'. I still do not know exactly what this 'I' is. But this not knowing is not irrelevant to architecture.

Learning to see, learning to live

This question is not only about the projects I work on today. It takes me back to university. Sometimes I think that, in architectural education, we were given an image of architecture before we had a complete image of ourselves.

The classes came. The software came. The styles, the regulations, the renders. And gradually, architecture took shape for us. But somewhere in that process, I began to wonder whether we were learning architecture - or learning how architecture was supposed to look.

This distinction matters to me. Architecture is not only what we can represent. It is also what someone eventually lives. There is always a distance between what the mind constructs and what a human being actually experiences.

Who is designing?

For me, that tension is also present in the relationship between embodied experience and the architectural image: light, sound, smell and material on one side; representation, media and virtual space on the other. Now artificial intelligence has entered that conversation.

A machine can generate an image, suggest a form and participate in parts of a design process. But perhaps our deeper anxiety is not simply about artificial intelligence. If part of what has been a sign of my ability can now be done by a machine, then what exactly is 'me' in all of this?

The question that appeared for me in the act of designing has returned on a larger scale. Who am I designing for? And now I have to add another question: who is designing? The architect? The machine? Or a human being who still does not fully know themselves?

Sometimes I feel lost in architecture. But perhaps architecture is not the problem. Perhaps I am lost in the 'I'. I still do not know exactly who I am, and I am designing for someone whose identity I also do not fully know.

An architect is expected to understand human beings in order to create spaces for them. But the architect is also one of those human beings still trying to understand themselves. The more our tools are able to produce something for us, the more we may have to understand what is supposed to remain ours. Not only form. Not only image. Not only beauty. But experience, presence, memory, belonging - and the human being who actually lives all of these things.

In the end, I still do not know exactly what the 'I' is. I do not know who I am designing for when I still do not know exactly who 'I' am. But perhaps I do not need to know all of this before beginning. Perhaps this not knowing is itself a starting point.

Perhaps we need to look at architecture again - not only from the outside, but from the place where a human being actually experiences it.

A place I cannot reach by sitting behind my desk.

Siamak RajaeiRamsheh is an architecture educator and PhD researcher in urbanism based in Iran.

Contributor profile: LinkedIn / Siamak RajaeiRamsheh

FIELD NOTE / PQSE House team

Where the modular kitchen meets the dining room

Two fit-out photographs show where a building package meets the requirements of meal service.

Kitchen and service-corridor fit-out in the contributor's Oman project record. Metal-lined surfaces, door openings and adjoining work areas are visible; this is not an operating-performance record. Courtesy of PQSE House.

Where packages meet

Meal provision brings several activities into a remote welfare base: receiving supplies, preparing food, serving residents and clearing the dining room. According to PQSE House, the brief for this energy-site project in Oman combined accommodation, administration, meals and service access. The company identifies its role as handling the modular-building work. Two photographs from its kitchen and dining fit-out record show points where that package meets food-service requirements.

In the kitchen and service-corridor view, metal lining runs across the walls and ceiling, with door openings into adjoining spaces. A room enclosure, a doorway and a preparation surface may be delivered or fitted by different parties; a comparable brief needs to explain how they meet. That means checking equipment positions against openings and identifying which finishes, penetrations and installation tasks sit within each package.

A counter is not a service route / continued

Dining-room fit-out in the same record, with tables and chairs behind a long serving counter. No capacity or occupancy is inferred. Courtesy of PQSE House.

The dining-room photograph shows a long metal serving counter in front of rows of tables and chairs, with columns within the hall. Its position raises practical questions for a proposed layout: where do staff replenish supplies, where do residents collect meals, and how are used utensils returned? These activities should be described together before furniture positions are fixed. The photograph makes the questions visible without establishing the final routes.

The next useful document is an interface schedule, rather than an equipment list alone. For each room, it should identify the building work, intended equipment, destination services and responsible parties. Water and waste connections, electrical provision and kitchen extraction need coordination with the intended equipment and the relevant local specialists. The person checking a room should be able to distinguish what has been supplied from what still requires connection, inspection or confirmation.

Keep the limits with the record

A handover discussion can follow one proposed meal, from receipt and storage to preparation and serving, then clearing, washing and waste removal. This is a way to review a comparable brief with an operator, not a reconstruction of the Oman floor plan. Open items can then be recorded against a responsible party, the evidence needed to close them and who will retain the record after handover.

These two photographs document fitted spaces, not verified occupancy, commissioning, operating performance or final circulation. Production-yard preassembly images in the wider archive belong to a different stage and are not presented here as Oman site views. The value of this field note lies in the visible interfaces: rooms, openings, equipment and furniture that a complete food-service brief needs to bring into the same conversation.

Sources and contributor

Contributor project record

Contributor website

PROJECT STUDY

Collective Grid: how a charter becomes a place

A proposal follows shared resources from the private front door to the commons, then out into a wider network.

By Shaan Khan

Shaan Khan is the author of Motus Gridia, the unbuilt proposal described in this study.

Start with a shared choice

Motus Gridia proposes a network of self-governing settlements called Grids. This study takes a community that pools resources and follows how that choice could shape its housing and shared spaces.

It begins at a private front door, then follows a resident into the commons. The plan connects shared food spaces to homes and gives pooled tools a place for use and upkeep. A hall and smaller deliberation rooms give collective decisions a place. Private thresholds remain distinct from the shared spaces.

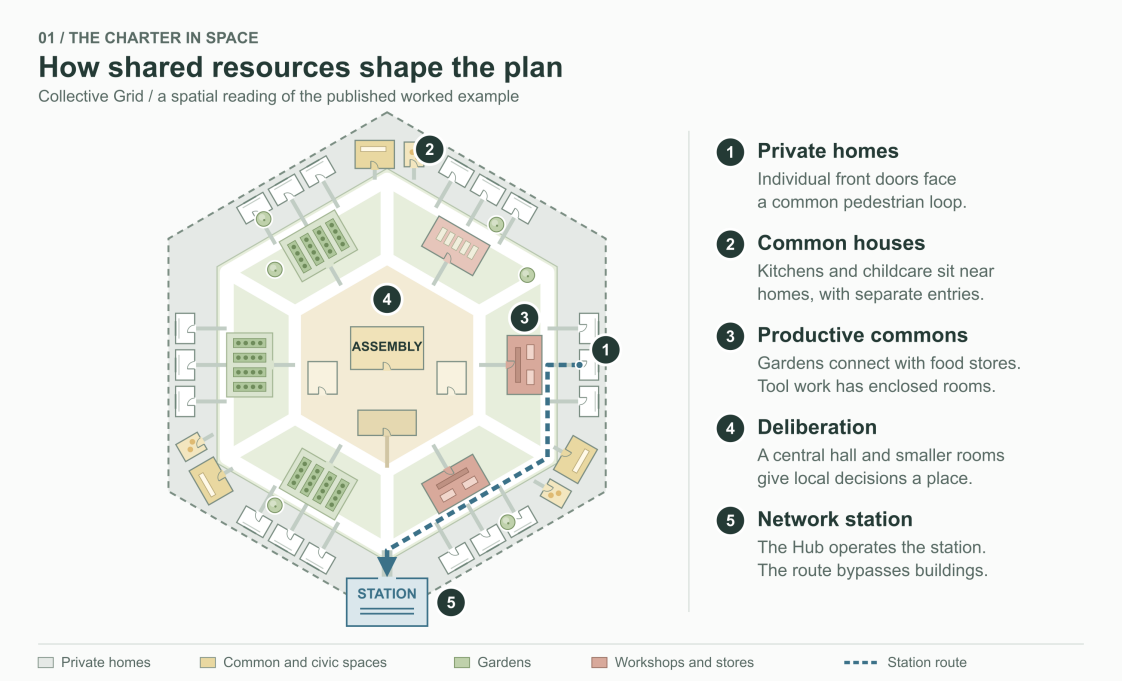


FIGURE 01 / A spatial reading of the proposed Collective Grid. Separate front doors meet a common loop; shared resources and deliberation spaces sit within it. No site, scale or dimensional performance is established.

Credit: Motus Gridia, project by Shaan Khan. Contributor-supplied diagram prepared from the project whitepaper.

Reading the plan

Private homes: individual front doors face a common pedestrian loop.

Common houses: kitchens and childcare are proposed near homes, with separate entries.

Productive commons: gardens connect with food stores; enclosed rooms provide space for tool work.

Deliberation: a central hall and smaller rooms give local decisions a place.

Network station: the drawing assigns its operation to the Hub and shows a route that bypasses buildings.

Keep the route beyond the community

The final diagram looks beyond the Grid. It presents the Hub as a separate service centre shared by communities with different charters and assigns operation of each Grid's station to that Hub. Continued access to care and the ability to leave become part of the architectural proposition, not only the local community's internal rules.

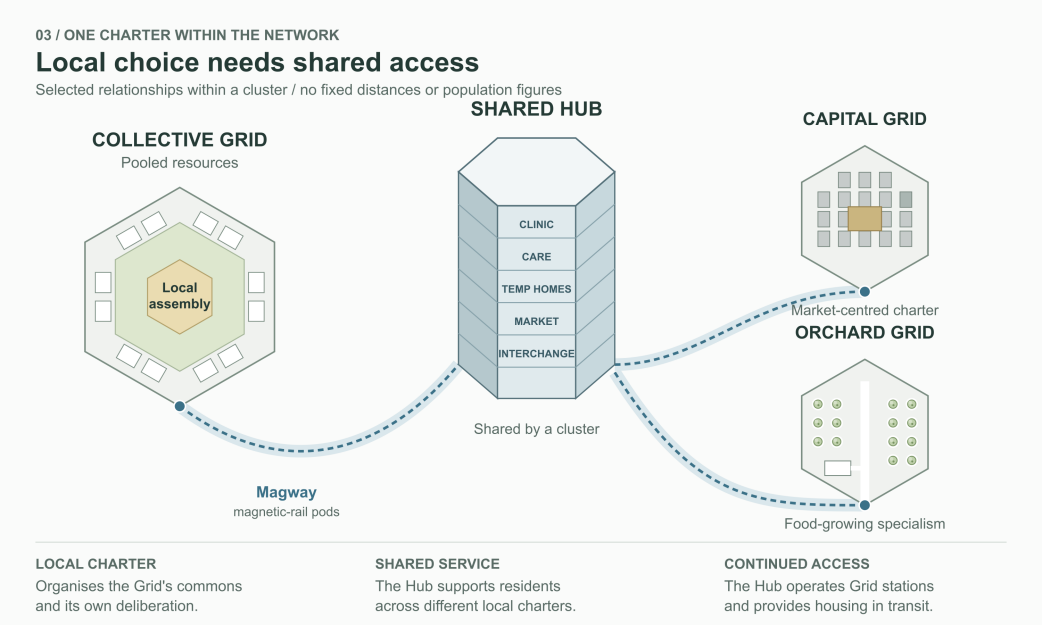


FIGURE 02 / Local charter, shared services and continued access are presented as different layers. The drawing proposes connections, not fixed distances, a delivered transport system or verified service provision.

Credit: Motus Gridia, project by Shaan Khan. Contributor-supplied diagram prepared from the project whitepaper.

Reading the network

Local charter: organises the Grid's commons and its own deliberation. Shared service: the proposed Hub would support residents across different local charters. Continued access: the Hub would operate Grid stations and provide housing in transit. Magway is the proposal's magnetic-rail connection, not an established transport service.

Source and boundary notes

Unbuilt proposal. The contributor describes relationships rather than a fixed site or dimensioned design. The drawings do not document an existing settlement, residents or tested outcomes.

Project and text: Shaan Khan. Visual credit: Motus Gridia, project by Shaan Khan. The contributor says the two diagrams were prepared from the project whitepaper; no whitepaper text is reproduced here.

The plan and network keys transcribe the contributor's drawings so their labels remain readable on a small screen. They do not verify that the proposed arrangements would deliver the intended social outcomes.

Sources

Motus Gridia project
https://motusgridia.com/
Grid
https://motusgridia.com/grid
Hub
https://motusgridia.com/hub

Making an illuminated zodiac figure

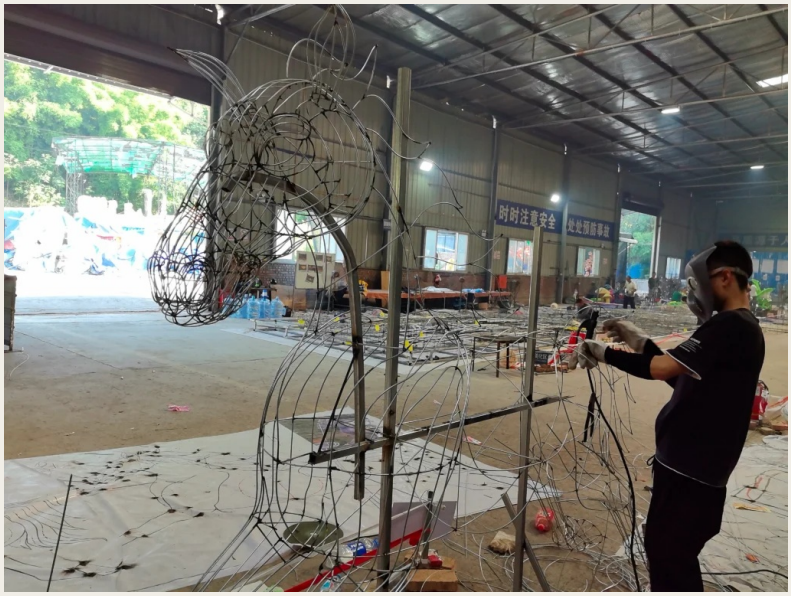
From steel frame to temporary landmark

Star Factory Lantern

Star Factory Lantern supplied this workshop account and the accompanying images. Anna Wong coordinated the submission.

Start with the frame

An illuminated zodiac figure takes shape through a sequence of workshop work: building the steel frame, fitting fabric, applying painted colour and details, then reviewing the completed figure and its illuminated appearance. The horse is our main example. The other photographs in this article show separate projects and are labelled as such; they illustrate particular processes or settings, not later stages of the horse.



A worker shapes an exposed horse framework. Steel and wire establish the outline before fabric is fitted.

We begin with the available space and main viewing angle. The pose must remain recognisable at the intended scale, and a group needs enough separation for individual silhouettes to be seen. The base and surrounding scenery belong in that early discussion.

While the frame is exposed, the outline, connection points and transport divisions can be reviewed together. Production drawings need to translate the appearance into dimensions and joints. Lighting and maintenance access also need consideration before the surface closes around the structure.

Fit a continuous surface

Workers fit white fabric over a horse frame. The uncovered areas show how the surface spans the underlying ribs and curves.

The fabric turns a network of lines into a continuous body. In the workshop photograph, the neck and torso have begun to read as a solid form while parts of the head, shoulder and hindquarters remain open. This makes the relationship between the curved framework and the finished surface particularly clear.

Covering is also a point at which the shape becomes easier to judge. The frame may describe a volume, but the fitted surface reveals how one curve meets the next. Visible seams, changes in contour and the treatment of details need attention before the final colours are applied. The mane and face carry much of the horse's expression, so they need to remain readable from the intended viewpoint.

We consider the daytime finish alongside the illuminated appearance. Colour and painted details should support the form rather than compensate for an unresolved silhouette. A visitor may encounter the same figure in afternoon light and return after dark; both views belong to the design.

Develop colour and detail

After the fabric has been fitted, the finishing artist develops the colour and painted detail. This is a distinct stage between covering the frame and presenting the completed figure. The white surface provides the form; spray work and painted accents give that form its final character.

An artist uses a spray gun to apply blue colour to a fabric-covered deer figure. This is a separate workshop example of the finishing stage, not the horse shown on the preceding pages.

The separate deer photograph shows blue shading following the raised details of the neck, shoulder and back while other areas remain pale. It shows how the artist works across an already covered surface. The colour treatment needs to respect the contours rather than obscure them. For a horse, the face, mane and transitions across the body are part of that same finishing discussion.

Spray shading and painted details should be reviewed together with the intended lighting. The daytime colours need to remain coherent when light passes through the fabric. The photograph documents spray application; it does not document every painting technique used on the horse.

Review the finished surface and illumination

Finished coloured horse figures in the workshop. Their surface treatment follows the frame and fabric stages; the photograph records their appearance in workshop light.

After finishing, the figure can be reviewed as a complete composition. The coloured horses show how the outline, surface and mane read together. The completed appearance is then considered alongside the illuminated effect, from the intended viewing positions.

An illuminated Santa figure from a separate project demonstrates light beneath a fabric surface. It is not a night-time photograph of the horse.

Lighting review considers distribution, colour and the visibility of details. Wiring and component access should remain practical before packing. The lighting, control and electrical checks need an agreed scope for each order; outdoor exposure and venue requirements must be addressed for the particular installation.

The illuminated Santa photograph is from a separate project. It demonstrates light beneath a fabric surface, but it is not a night-time photograph of the horse.

Carry workshop decisions to site

Assembly brings the finished sections into a different working environment. The phoenix photograph shows a large figure suspended from lifting equipment, with crew members and another section at ground level. This is a separate installation example, not a later stage of the horse shown earlier.

A large phoenix figure is lifted into position outdoors. This separate installation example brings the handling equipment, crew and display sections into view.

Crew members work on a floral figure at night. This separate site photograph shows close-up assembly work on an illuminated display.

The receiving crew needs more than a finished photograph. Assembly order, joint details, cable references and handling information connect workshop knowledge to site work. Local labour, lifting equipment, power connections and the installation window must be coordinated. Remote guidance or on-site assistance should be agreed in advance so that responsibilities are clear.

The floral night photograph is also a separate site example. It shows close-up assembly work on an illuminated display and should not be read as part of the horse project.

Become part of a public setting

A separate snake zodiac display in Chinatown Singapore. The completed street scene places the illuminated figure among traffic, architecture and other festival lighting.

A public setting introduces a different scale of reading. The Chinatown Singapore snake display is a separate case, but it shows how a zodiac figure sits within an existing street rather than against an empty background. Its outline and colour must compete with surrounding lights while remaining part of the wider festival scene.

For us, the passage from frame to landmark depends on keeping these contexts connected. The viewing angle informs the pose; the structure supports the surface; lighting changes its appearance; packing and assembly carry the design to its destination. The finished figure is where those decisions become visible together.

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Credits

Author credit: Star Factory Lantern. Anna Wong coordinated the submission.

Image credit: Images courtesy of Star Factory Lantern. This credit applies to all eight supplied photographs.

Credits

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ESSAY

Who Am I Designing For? By Siamak RajaeiRamsheh. Editorial illustration by Field Assembly: a conceptual image, not documentary evidence.

FIELD NOTE

Where the modular kitchen meets the dining room. By PQSE House team. Photographs 029 and 034: Courtesy of PQSE House. The account documents fit-out, not verified operation or occupancy.

PROJECT STUDY

Collective Grid: how a charter becomes a place. Text and visuals: Motus Gridia, project by Shaan Khan. Credit: Motus Gridia, project by Shaan Khan. Contributor-supplied diagram prepared from the project whitepaper.

FIELD NOTE

Making an illuminated zodiac figure. Author: Star Factory Lantern; coordinated by Anna Wong. Image credit: Images courtesy of Star Factory Lantern. This credit applies to all eight supplied photographs.

LINKS

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