Theme of the studio and the subject of study
The Complex Projects Studio addresses all scales of the architectural thinking, details, building, city, and region. Since cities are increasingly transformed by strategic interventions rather than stable long-term Master plans, interventions result in complex developments where multiple public and private interests must be investigated and negotiated simultaneously. Architectural and urban interventions on outskirts or neglected neighborhoods are examples of Complex Project’s focus. Those allow private interest to exploit commercial opportunities by dealing with public interest, which demands resources to improve and develop strategic city sites. As a result, the approach of the Graduation Studio questions and challenges the strict distinction between Architecture, Urbanism, Planning and their traditional, perhaps linear roles. The ultimate goal is generating analytical and critical thinking skills next to the traditional way of designing, thus allowing me, as an architect, to engage successfully future Complex Project demands.

The subject of study is Garfield Park, a neglected neighborhood located on the Westside, in between the city center ‘The Loop’ and the suburbs of Chicago. In the ‘30, this neighborhood was built as an extension of the city to cope with the growth of the white middle class and it was a flourishing and, at the time, it was a vibrant area to live in. During the ‘60 there was a shift of white to black residents, since the white residents moved to the suburbs and the black people moved in. At the same time, gangs grew and took over control of the community, developing a drug dealing trade that lead to a subsequent environment of violence. Over the past few years, residents have started to move out to escape from this situation, leaving behind physical scars in the form of vacant plots and abandoned buildings. As a result, the community has fallen behind in terms of public facilities, social cohesion and economic opportunities. As a result of my research process, I concluded that there is a lack of spatial-, cultural-, and personal identity in Garfield Park. To find clues to develop these different levels of identity, I looked at the history and contemporary aspects of the African-American Culture. I did this, in order to identify strong and positive elements, which I could use in my design.

Research and design
In order to define Garfield Park, the process started with finding a research method that works for a group of eleven persons. The research method was based on a selection of individual topics, or so called layers. Each layer, for instance Demography, Crime, Sustainability or Experience, ends with a singular conclusion. When combined, they might reveal certain overlaps, similarities and differences. The layer I worked on is the Identity of Garfield Park. The knowledge from all the layers is used as reference throughout the design process.

The fact that we have been there and walked around the neighborhood gave me valuable information and knowledge of the people who live there and their circumstances. Especially the interview with one of the residents gave me a lot of input and inspiration for the research process. However, I struggled for a long time with the information I gathered, since I could not put it in a framework. When focused on identity and its specific meaning in the dictionary, I was finally able to put it in perspective. As final result I determined that there is a lack of spatial-, cultural-, and personal identity.

Determining the location of my intervention area was a rather simple step. I analyzed which area was the poorest, most unsafe and with the most vacancy. This in combination with the possibility to make a statement, to show people from inside and outside the neighborhood that this is an African-American neighborhood. From my research it was clear that in the African-American culture, dance, art and music play an important role, as in other cultures. In the African-American culture, HipHop is an important contemporary trend, which consists of dance, art and music and is popular especially among the youth. For my design I decided to use these aspects to strengthen identity. I analyzed these aspects and found out that a stage is the common ground between them, as well as the public and the performer. I was not able for a while to go from this analytic diagram to a design on all levels.
The design of the urban level was a difficult step, since I had to create a concept instead of a detailed plan. I had to go back and forward several times during this process before I came up with a concept. With regard to the building it was very clear to me from the beginning that it should be very accessible for the people from the neighborhood to be performer or public, which means that a certain part of the building should be available for everyone during the day. Furthermore to offer opportunities to the artist with a larger audience, larger stages needed to be available. Since I first designed only the middle part of the building (the public space) and the small stage, I had several problems when I had to connect the large stage to the middle part of the building.

**Line of approach and Method**
The Complex Project Studio puts emphasis on analytical and critical thinking skills, which results in a rather long period of doing research. In this period the aim of the research performed by the students is to cover the whole spectrum, from transportation to identity, from crime rates to experience. The advantage of this approach was that it gave all the information that was needed for my design process. Aspects like identity and experience are topics that I have never analyzed before during my master program, while it is valuable input for the design process, since I even based my design on it. On the other hand, this amount of energy and time put into research, has resulted in less time for designing.

During the design process my tutors often asked me critical questions about why I made certain decisions. They challenged me not only to design based on my intuition, but to have solid arguments for my design choices. This was new for me and challenging as well, because I was used to design based on intuition and most of the times it worked out as well. So now I have to combine intuition and rational argumentation to determine my final design.

In the studio the complexity is in the fact that all possible levels are involved. So it is necessary to design on the urban level, but also at building level and taking into account the social environment. The hard part for me, as before, was the urban level, in which I struggled with the concept and the practical view. Even though social circumstances have been extremely valuable and eye-opening the entire process, it was difficult to find a way to translate.

**Project and Wider Social Context**
The problem that there is no spatial, cultural and personal identity, is probably not only present in Garfield Park, Chicago, but in almost every American city with a huge African American community. The result out of the assignment can be used to give identity to the Black neighborhoods and this could be a tool to overcome “the social frictions”. The gang culture takes a large role in neighborhoods like Garfield Park, so identity of the youth is mainly formed by being a gang member. The solution in this project is to offer them an opportunity to develop their identity through HipHop, apart from the gangs. The public space in the middle of the building offers the residents of the community the stage to develop themselves in a positive way. The result of this development will enhance job opportunities and improve their quality of life.