

# **Anti War Architecture**

Research Plan | Silvia Pencheva  
MSc3 | ExploreLab

Design Mentor: Eytan Mann | Research Mentor: Elise van Dooren  
April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2025 | Q3, 2025 -26

# Introduction

"The world is always ending over and over again in one place but not another and that the end of the world is always a local event, it comes to your country and visits your town and knocks on the door of your house and becomes to others but some distant warning, a brief report on the news, an echo of events that has passed into folklore."

~ Paul Lynch, *Prophet Song*

"I think people need to figure out how to make change. That's the question.

Somebody watches something, they're touched, and then?"

~ Basel Adra & Yuval Abraham, *No Other Land*

We live in a globalized world shaken by local conflicts. The digital space that has emerged through technological advancements enables the free flow of information across the globe. As a result, war has become more difficult than ever to conceive as a spatially finite phenomenon<sup>1</sup>. Regional conflicts stem from global political and economic dynamics, meaning that we all, citizens of democracies, bear responsibility and are, in some way, involved. However, rather than being incentivized to act, Western citizens have been transformed into mere spectators of these events. The media inundates us with photos, videos, reports, and stories from war-affected regions, providing ample information. Yet, it remains unclear how - or even if - we are truly affected. Meanwhile, due to hyper-exposure to information, the observer loses interest in the issue<sup>2</sup>. We have the potential, but not the motivation to intervene.

Through my graduation project, I want to challenge our preconceptions regarding political crises and our roles as citizens in them. I aim to create a space that allows people to empathize with victims of warfare and serves as a backdrop for discussions and debates among individuals with different beliefs and backgrounds. I believe that through education, empathy, and willingness, people have the potential to civicize their everyday lives and, together, discover how to bring about change.

## Relation between War and Architecture

The connections between war and architecture will be explored through the lenses of various disciplines. For each field, a range of examples from the built environment will be analyzed to

<sup>1</sup> Abujidi, 2014, p. 12

<sup>2</sup> Fuller and Weizman, 2021, p.120

examine both its practical potentials and limitations, and to outline possible future directions for the project.

### A) Memorials, Counter-Memorials, Peace Memorials

All of these memorials stand in remembrance of events that caused significant ruptures in people's lives. However, their goals differ. While memorials focus on normative commemoration, counter-memorials encourage thoughtful remembrance and reflection<sup>3</sup>. In addition to memorializing, peace memorials also aim to advocate for peace. The scale on which memorials are built can vary greatly, ranging from landscape interventions<sup>4</sup>, park designs<sup>5</sup>, buildings<sup>6</sup>, and sculptures<sup>7</sup> to installations<sup>8</sup>. Sometimes, these structures can even communicate with one another. An example is the *Monument to the 76th Infantry Regiment* by Richard Kuöhl (1936), with its slogan "Deutschland muss leben, und wenn wir sterben müssen"<sup>9</sup> and the *Counter-Memorial to the '76th Monument'* by Alfred Hrdlicka (2007), located at the same site and created as a response to the original monument. Studying memorial buildings, which can exist on various scales, reveals the different ways architecture can engage with the notions of war, memory, and trauma. While memorials and counter-memorials emerge as artifacts of the process of remembering, peace memorials also look to the future.

### B) Architectural Forensics

Architectural forensics refers to the spatial investigation of crimes, exploring "how events might have assembled in material form"<sup>10</sup>. In the framework of architectural forensics, architecture becomes devoid of its tectonic value and is seen as a happening. Pieces of material data are gathered from the surrounding built environment and with the aid of digital tools puzzled together to reconstruct the moment of impact. The method of architectural forensics observes the ways in which the built environment transforms and allows for the sequence of events to emerge from architecture itself. As such, architectural forensics can be used for investigations<sup>11</sup> and documentation projects<sup>12</sup>. Ultimately, the findings are presented and discussed in a forum, aimed at raising awareness and/or influencing legal decisions on specific issues. Architecture has been transformed from a design discipline into a legal one.

### C) Digital Space & War

<sup>3</sup> Schreiber, 2022

<sup>4</sup> *Memory Wound* by Jonas Dahlberg, project from 2014; unbuilt

<sup>5</sup> *Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park* by Kenzō Tange, 1954

<sup>6</sup> *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum* by James Ingo Freed, 1993

<sup>7</sup> *Peace Monument in Morokulien* by Lars Johan Lehming, 1914

<sup>8</sup> *Brandenburger Tor Installation* by Horst Hoheisel, 1987

<sup>9</sup> Germany must live, even if we must die. (translation)

<sup>10</sup> Weizman, 2010, p. 4

<sup>11</sup> *Locating Xinjiang's Camps* by Killing Architects, 2020

<sup>12</sup> *Russian Strike on the Kyiv TV Tower* by The Center for Spatial Technologies & Forensic Architecture, 2022

In countries at peace, war can be virtually experienced in the digital space. The immense popularity of video games, which often focus on 'fighting' and 'defeating an enemy,' reflects a trend toward the normalization of violence. First-person shooter games are a form of entertainment, but what they stand for is rarely questioned. Beyond these games, users can engage with war through VR and AR experiences. For example, the *War Up Close* exhibition in Ottawa, Canada<sup>13</sup>, allows visitors to walk through war-torn regions in Ukraine and witness their destruction. However, such interventions raise numerous speculative questions about the aesthetization of conflict, the line between informing and entertaining, and the impact of exposure to warfare in digital spaces on our perception of real-world conflicts.

#### **D) Anti-War Literature, Movies, Music, Exhibitions... Anti-War Architecture?**

Although there are countless examples of anti-war literature, movies, and music, anti-war architecture does not exist. The closest one can get to are anti-war exhibitions<sup>14</sup>, which occupy museum spaces. However, in these cases, architecture serves merely as a container, making no statement of its own. Anything else could have been exhibited in those spaces. This presents an opportunity to attempt and connect architecture to the arts - not to view buildings solely as structures, but also as places with the potential to provoke thoughts and emotions.

### **Research Question**

**Can 'anti war' architecture challenge the individual's role in, and responsibility toward, seemingly unrelated global conflicts?**

To make this central question more tangible, it is first broken down into sub-questions. These sub-questions are then grouped based on the research method used to answer them. The first group, which will be studied through project analysis, includes the following questions:

**How can architecture exist on the threshold between comfort and discomfort, both attracting and challenging at the same time?**

**How can architecture go beyond the realm of knowledge and make its visitors recognize or feel the presence of a problem?**

**How can architecture attract and facilitate a discussion/ debate between people from different social backgrounds?**

<sup>13</sup> The War Up Close Project, 2025

<sup>14</sup> *Sag mir wo die Blumen sind* by Anselm Kiefer, 2024

The questions in the second group, which will be addressed through a survey, are as follows:

**Are citizens of Western democracies interested in politics  
and do they believe that their actions can bring about change?**

**What opportunities might encourage people to step out of their comfort zones  
and engage with topics they may perceive as irrelevant to their everyday lives?**

By the end of the research, the findings from both research methods will be integrated into a coherent conclusion and a strong design brief.

# Methodology

The methodology follows the logic presented in the diagram below. As shown, the research methods include project studies and a survey.

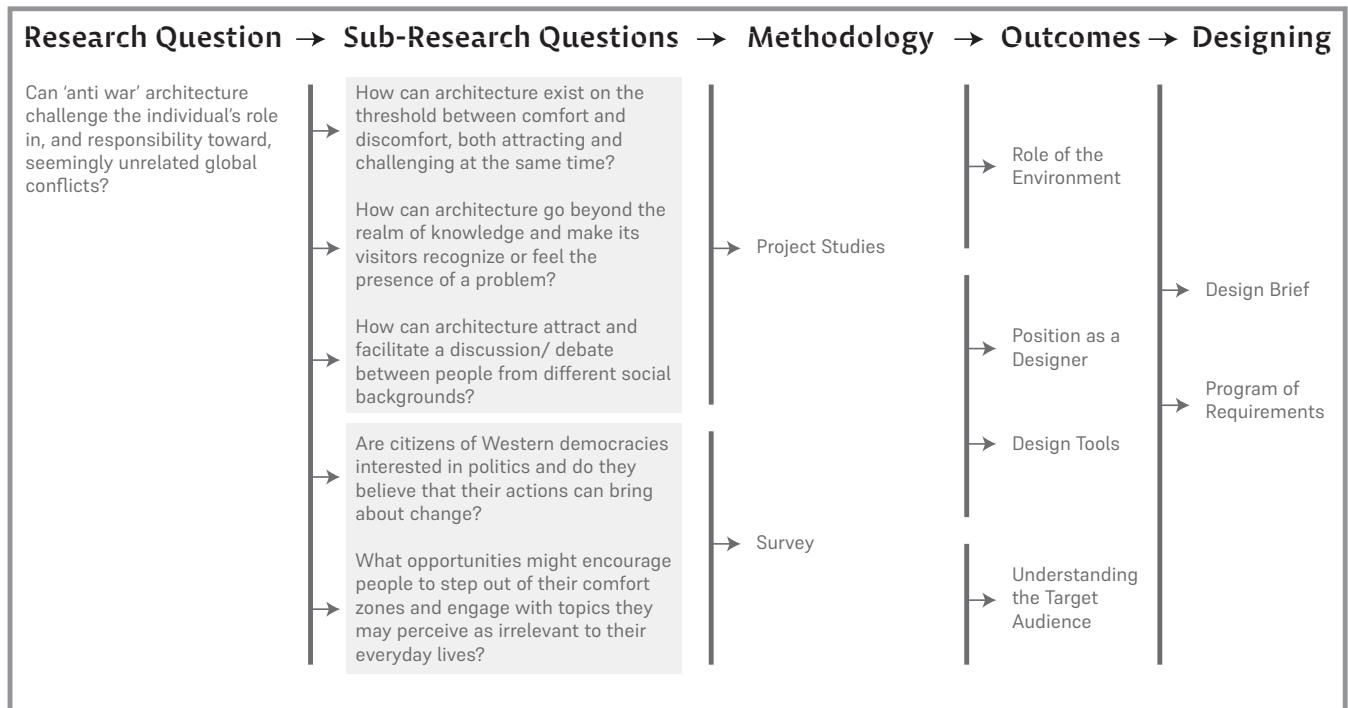


Fig.1 Research outline

## Project Studies

-- war ---- debate ---- peace? --

Projects that deal with the notions of space and conflict are deemed appropriate for the project studies. They will not be limited to urban and architectural scales. This approach will ensure a rich variety of examples, which have the potential to broaden my perspective on what is possible. Examples of projects that do not stem from the built environment might include schools for conflict history education or video games. All projects will be categorized into different groups along the gradient of war - debate - peace?. For example, a military training facility would be placed on the war side, while an anti-war exhibition would be on the perceived peace side.

Establishing these groups along the gradient will be the first milestone of my research, and I would like to display it in a physical model. By bringing all these projects together, I aim to show that, although seemingly unrelated, they are all connected. Additionally, the model serves as an opportunity to highlight the environmental impact that war has on our planet. A shared care

for our habitats might serve as a starting point for people with different ideological beliefs to engage in conversation with each other.

After outlining the different groups, I would like to select an example from each group that best represents it. All the selected examples will be studied in a matrix, which will be split into two parts. The first part will combine a descriptive and analytical approach, showing the title, location, format, etc., of each project and will serve as a background for the second part, which will be purely analytical. In this section, the sub-questions will be answered through the lens of each project, using plan analysis and sketches. By analyzing these projects, I aim to outline key design characteristics for each category and understand the position of their designers. This will allow me to position my project in relation to what has already been done and implement relevant design principles in my own work.

A limitation of this method is that by selecting only one example per category, each field will be examined at only one architectural scale. For instance, in the case of peace memorials, the chosen example is the *Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park* by Kenzō Tange (1954). Smaller-scale examples, such as statues<sup>15</sup> and sacred buildings<sup>16</sup>, will not be considered. This approach is intended to ensure the feasibility of the research within the project's timeframe. However, further studies on additional projects could certainly enrich the findings.

## Survey

Conducting interviews with the target audience will be an essential step in creating a meaningful intervention. It is crucial to understand the needs and desires of the target group to ensure that the design will be appealing to them. The form will be a simple and quick-to-fill-in survey that people can complete online. The goal is to receive many responses from a diverse group of people. The survey itself will be split into two parts. The first part will include general questions such as the age, nationality, occupation, etc., of the respondent. This is necessary to ensure that the pool of responses is not skewed toward a particular population. The second part of the survey will be where I extract the needed information. It will consist of two or three questions, as well as an optional open-ended question for comments and remarks. The questions will be along the lines of: "What do you associate X with?" and "What would convince you to visit X?" where X represents the type of space I would like to design. I plan to distribute the survey among fellow students and friends, as well as share it on social media and online platforms, to ensure a wide range of respondents. A limitation of this method is that the reliability of the results is debatable, especially if people access the survey through social media

<sup>15</sup> *Peace Monument in Morokulien* by Lars Johan Lehming, 1914

<sup>16</sup> *Vishwa Shanti Stupa* or *World Peace Stupa* by Nichidatsu Fujii, 1969

platforms. Therefore, the form will also have a pre-filled field indicating from where the survey was accessed. The aim of this survey is to understand what preconceptions people have about the type of space I would like to design and what would attract them to visit it. This will serve as a guide for establishing the program of requirements for my design.

## Expected Outcomes

By the end of my research, I expect to gather valuable insights that will inform my design process both directly and indirectly. First, I aim to position myself as a designer in relation to existing work and define the approach I wish to pursue. Second, I intend to extract a variety of design tools from different projects that I can apply directly in my own work. Third, I hope to understand the role that shared environments can play in conflict mitigation, and explore how I, as an architect, might engage with them. Finally, I plan to use the survey findings as a foundation for developing my design brief and program of requirements. In conclusion, my research will serve both as a catalyst for initiating the design process and as a practical resource throughout its development.

# Relation to Design

## Design Studies: Short Stories

An important aspect of my design is to attempt to design for empathy, care, debate, and discussion, working with the feelings of comfort and discomfort, attraction and repulsion simultaneously. Through writing short stories, I hope to explore these themes in written form. Successfully creating these sensations with words will serve as a useful stepping stone to addressing them in visual and built form at a later stage of the design process. I hope that through these short stories, I will have the opportunity to explore a variety of imagined spaces, which might serve as an initial inspiration for my design as well. Finally, the stories will be an opportunity to present and develop my own stance on the issue. I see this method as a way to move forward, while maintaining a personal connection to my project.

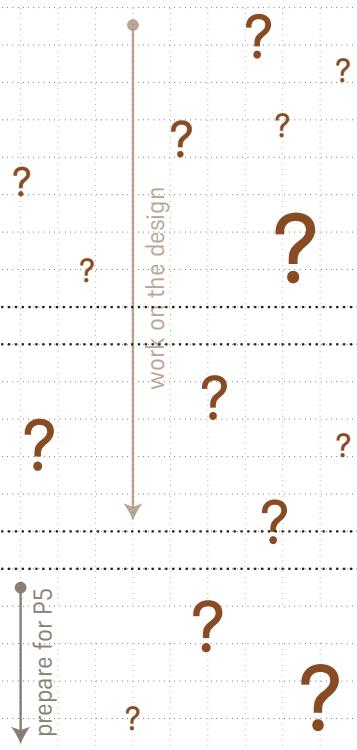
## Potential Design

Influenced by Paul Lynch's novel *Prophet Song*, I want to pursue a design that is "an attempt at radical empathy". I want to create a building situated in a country that appears to be at peace (the Netherlands) and has the potential to go beyond the realm of knowing and make its visitors realize/feel a problem. It would challenge individuals to reflect on their role and responsibility in seemingly unrelated global conflicts. I hope that the building will be accessible and appealing to a diverse range of social groups, fostering discussions and debates among them.

I envision working on the renovation of an existing building or a site with contested history. Choosing the location for the project would be the first statement about what the building is trying to represent. I imagine the project to be located in an urban context, ideally in a socially diverse area of a relatively large city. This would ensure a flow of passersby, whose attention could be captured by the design. My goal is to create a public building that not only serves its function but also has a positive impact on the surrounding public space. Inspired by Teddy Cruz and Fonna Forman in *Socializing Architecture: Top-Down, Bottom-Up*, the design will "challenge the idea of public space as a manicured site of beauty and leisure and reclaim it as a site of civic activity, urban pedagogy and cultural production".

# Planning

			Week	Month	Date	III	Milestone	Research	Design
3.1	FEB	10-16							
3.2	FEB	17-23							
3.3	FEB	24-02							
3.4	MAR	03-09							
3.5	MAR	10-16							
3.6	MAR	17-23	Pitch				• project studies cat. model • first short story		
3.7	MAR	24-30					• research plan		
3.8	MAR	31-06						• prepare survey	
3.9	APR	07-13						• project studies: project studies & categories	
3.10	APR	14-20	P1					• project studies: examples & matrix outline	
4.1	APR	21-27							
4.2	APR	28-04							
4.3	MAY	05-11							
4.4	MAY	12-18							
4.5	MAY	19-25					• design guidelines / matrix		
4.6	MAY	26-01					• choosing the site		
4.7	JUN	02-08						• site search	
4.8	JUN	09-15					• site model		
4.9	JUN	16-22	P2				• initial PoR	• design vision	
4.10	JUN	23-29	P2				• research paper		
SUMMER VACATION									
1.1	SEP	01-07							
1.2	SEP	08-14							
1.3	SEP	15-21							
1.4	SEP	22-28					• fix PoR		
1.5	SEP	29-05							
1.6	OCT	06-12							
1.7	OCT	13-19							
1.8	OCT	20-26	P3				• design & detailing		
1.9	OCT	27-02	P3						
1.10	NOV	03-09							
2.1	NOV	10-16							
2.2	NOV	17-23							
2.3	NOV	24-30							
2.4	DEC	01-07	P4				• final design		
2.5	DEC	08-14	P4						
2.6	DEC	15-21							
CHRISTMAS VACATION									
2.7	JAN	05-11					• booklet w stories		
2.8	JAN	12-18							
2.9	JAN	19-25	P5				• final deliverables		
2.10	JAN	26-01	P5						



# Sources

Abujidi, N. (2014). City, war and urbicide: inquiry. In *Urbicide in Palestine: Spaces of Oppression and Resilience* (pp. 8–21). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315819099>

Cammack, S. (2016). [Review of the book *Shadows of Trauma: Memory and the Politics of Postwar Identity*, by Aleida Assmann]. *Modernism/modernity* 23(4), 929-931. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/mod.2016.0089>

Cruz, T., & Forman, F. (2023). *Socializing Architecture: Top-Down, Bottom-Up*. Hatje Cantz Verlag.

Dainese, E., & Staničić, A. (2022). *War Diaries: Design After the Destruction of Art and Architecture*. University of Virginia Press.

Fuller, M., & Weizman, E. (2021). *Investigative Aesthetics: Conflicts and Commons in the Politics of Truth*. Verso.

Graham, S. (2011). *Cities Under Siege: The New Military Urbanism*. Verso.

Schreiber, I. (2022). Subverting the Historical Narrative: The Future of the Counter-Monument. Contested Histories. <https://contestedhistories.org/uncategorized/subverting-the-historical-narrative-the-future-of-the-counter-monument/>

Staničić, A., Schoonderbeek, M., Sohn, H., & Pilav, A. (Eds.) (2020). *Conflict Mediations*. Footprint, 14 (2#27). <https://doi.org/10.7480/footprint.14.2>

Lynch, P. (2024). *Prophet Song*. Center Point Large Print.

Wallisser, T., & Rieck, A. (Eds.). (2022). *Laboratory for Visionary Architecture: What if*. Birkhäuser.

Weir, D. (2024). The climate costs of war and militaries can no longer be ignored. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/jan/09/emission-from-war-military-gaza-ukraine-climate-change>

Weizman, E., & Franke, A. (2014). *Forensis: The Architecture of Public Truth*. Sternberg Press.

Yabayay Media and Antipode films. (2024). *No Other Land* [Film]. Palestine and Norway.