Authenticity and Architecture: A Contemporary Stamp of Incompleteness

Eric Richard Rivera

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AUTHENTICITY AND ARCHITECTURE: A CONTEMPORARY STAMP OF INCOMPLETENESS

by

Eric Rivera

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Architecture
Major: Architecture

The University of Memphis
May 2021
This book is submitted in pursuit of my master's in architecture. However, the people in my life and those I have met since moving to Memphis share some credit for its completion. Thus, this acknowledgment gives thanks to those individuals. I would like to first give thanks to my mother; you deserve more credit than this entire book can fit. I thank you for the sacrifices you make in your life to raise my siblings and me. I can only try to understand raising four kids as a single parent. I know to some degree that you put your life to the side so that we could achieve our dreams. I remember those times when you would say to us, "Study... Don’t be like me, don’t struggle like I struggle." You played the best hand out of the cards you were given and this book represents just a piece of my gratitude to tell you I did it. Thank you and I love you.

To my father: I know you would give anything to help me. You supported me in anything that I wanted to do and helped me along the way towards this achievement. Thank you and I love you. Thank you to my brothers, Roger and Kenny, and to my sister, Johanna. All of you are the family I hold closest and I want to share my gratitude for the support you have given me in taking time to call me just to check in during this intense process. I appreciate every single moment you all took to show me you supported me and I love you all more than I can say.

I would like to also thank my beautiful girlfriend, Julie. You have shown me nothing but support and love during this process and even helped with my partner in crime. Thank you for all that you do for me; I love you so much.

I would like to thank the people I have met during my time in Memphis and those who have supported me during my time here. Thank you to Alex and Kylie, for providing a place to stay when I first moved here and had no where to go. Thank you to Christian, Giles, Edgar, and Sophie for all being great friends to me. I cherish every single moment created these past two years. To those who helped me to turn my passion into architecture: an exceptionally large "thank you" to my thesis committee members Jennifer Thompson, Brian Andrews, and Andrew Guthrie. Not only did each of you provide support and guidance throughout this process, you also challenged me to continually question and refine my thoughts and ideas. I was left with my best work. To those who made this project possible: another special thanks to Jennifer Barker, Michael Hugg, Sherry Bryan, and all at the Department of Architecture at the University of Memphis who gave me the opportunity to pursue my dreams of gaining my master's degree.
Moving to Memphis (Figure 1) was a choice I made to continue my pursuit towards becoming an architect. Upon my arrival, the adjustment phase was quite difficult. The social and cultural differences were apparent and the lack of ownership I felt towards Memphis further inhibited my growth as an individual and group member within the community. However, just as Memphis had given me an opportunity, it was only fair to extend the courtesy back. Thus, this thesis is an opportunity to broaden my perspective and shift my views, contingent on my willingness to become more than an entity within the city, but instead a part of the city.
ABSTRACT

This thesis engages a discussion of authenticity and its relationship to architecture, and utilizes the design process to understand the result of employing authenticity as a conceptual approach. The city of study is Memphis, Tennessee. To establish solid grounding, the project utilizes an abandoned building and examines its historical record to understand the site context and history. This project’s typology (primarily housing) aims to promote an active zone, known as a “micro-neighborhood,” for the public to engage socially to reinforce collective gathering and community ownership. This is accomplished through an adaptive urban renewal process that includes economic, environmental, and social redevelopment in an effort to foster community growth.
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MANIFESTO

We design symbols reflected in the food we cook, the music we play, and the architecture that shelters us. Each example represents an act of expression and insight in an effort to deepen our coexistence with the natural environment. They are solutions meant to address its creator’s place and encapsulate its values with the ultimate goal of becoming the next widespread standard or tradition. Architecture’s best examples survive as artifacts that follow this line of thinking. They are only bound by the ideas that serve as the blueprints to improve the human condition. Since this is the only constraint, the aesthetic is purely a product of its time; the form becomes the skin for the building, but does not dictate the intent. This leaves the responsibility of the architect to maintain the integrity of architecture while also seeking to innovate the existing; to generate new ideals to explain the heritage of current architecture for future generations, to improve on through their own iteration. In return, another chapter is added onto the timeline of Architecture’s immortal heritage.

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INTRODUCTION

The world is selective in the architecture it chooses to keep. Buildings left often embody the ideal standard of approaching design with a simple solution, and they live on as artifacts. Surviving examples provide a glimpse of architecture’s agreement with a particular climate and also shed light on the status of an era’s technical advancement and social values. As the timeline of architecture continues to extend further beyond its region, reference to past era’s success is important in meeting lessons for developing or authentic concepts. The development of a concept is fundamental to creating authentic architecture, as concepts provide reasoning for declarations made and a design’s potential values unity on the lightcollecting of the concept with its context of place and present time. Buildings that do not live up to this standard often burn doors prematurely, becoming abandoned when they do not suit well in a particular place or time beyond their time of intended use. The challenge for the current generation of architects is to re-usher the discipline of abandoned, but architecturally significant, buildings in hopes of integrating them into the future of architecture. By blending past and current architectural practices to guide the design of an extension to an older building, the contemporary attachment is appropriate to the nature of the existing shell and the present time. This is all in an effort to better grasp the concept of authenticity and its relationship to architecture.

To begin, one must first understand the multitude of layers applicable to the notion of “authenticity”, relative to architecture. David Fixler, an architect and harvard associate professor says, “the topic is intensely discussed in philosophy and psychology in an effort to bridge the dialogue between the modernist’s search for truth and the postmodern hunger to extract meaning from this truth and re-present it in a contemporary fashion.”

This project seeks to accomplish a successful readaptation of the existing site by considering any aspect capable of being defined as authentic, with the aim of communicating between the new and existing design. The project includes a prefabricated housing modules designed to consider the characteristics of the church, era, neighborhood values, and context. Each aspect is addressed in an area plagued by disinvestment. The project aims to support the community’s values attributed to its authentic characteristics in an effort to create a living space for the residents and provide genuine utility in the use of the church. These levels create a sense of community. The next two levels are prefabricated housing modules stacked atop the first floor, and alongside the walls of the church. These levels create a market for the neighborhood’s climate, income, values, and materials. The first floor of the church includes a public “needs-based” program to create a market for the church. These levels create a living space for the residents and provide genuine utility in the use of the church’s structure as a means of circulation during the readaptation phase. The prefabricated housing modules are designed to consider the characteristics of the church, era neighborhood values, and context. Each aspect is addressed by the design in terms of material, program, housing typology, and precedents. This subject seeks to accomplish a successful readaptation of the site by considering any aspect capable of being defined as authentic, with the aim of understanding what the architecture is serving and how it might manifest in a genuine form.

DESIGN SOLUTION

America has been a place heavily influenced by outside forces. This is reflected in the architecture produced, which often stems from this country spanning across various regional climates and the influential stamps left from cultural conditions. Consider a city example like New Orleans, Louisiana, distinct for its mix of French and African American culture that is responsible for the development of the shotgun house. This housing typology developed over a span of years to seamlessly adapt to New Orleans’s climate and culture. The shotgun house is authentic in its iteration of architecture focused on environmental, contextual, and cultural demands. The house demonstrates a generated concept intended to satisfy genuine utility, furthering the natural integration of design into the environment.

Overview of Design

This thesis proposal targets an opportunity to develop a sense of community in an area plagued by disinvestment. The project aims to support the community’s values attributed to its authentic characteristics in an effort to communicate between the new and existing design. The project includes a blended system of on-site construction and prefabrication that considers the neighborhood’s climate, income, values, and materials. The first floor of the church includes a public “needs-based” program to create a market for the community. The next two levels are prefabricated housing modules stacked atop the first floor, and alongside the walls of the church. These levels create a living space for the residents and provide genuine utility in the use of the church. These levels create a living space for the residents and provide genuine utility in the use of the church’s structure as a means of circulation during the readaptation phase. The prefabricated housing modules are designed to consider the characteristics of the church, era neighborhood values, and context. Each aspect is addressed by the design in terms of material, program, housing typology, and precedents. This subject seeks to accomplish a successful readaptation of the site by considering any aspect capable of being defined as authentic, with the aim of understanding what the architecture is serving and how it might manifest in a genuine form.

1. Fixler, Material Idea, and Authenticity.
2. Lenartowicz, Authenticity in Architecture.
3. Material Idea, and Authenticity, para. 27.
5. Fixler, Material Idea, and Authenticity, para. 11.
Site Selection—Soulsville (Era/Context)

Since 2016, Memphis has been experiencing increased growth architecturally. Many of the city’s areas are in the mold of rehabilitation to update the city and preserve its rich history. One area in need of this attention is Soulsville in South Memphis, a neighborhood that seeks to re-emerge as a center of a resilient black population growth in the 1920s with the establishment of Orange Mound, the country’s first community built by and for African Americans. Ultimately, as residential tensions increased, this led to the sale of many properties in South Memphis and a major shift in the demographics of Soulsville in the 1950s and 1960s. Many of its previous white residents sold their land and left for surrounding suburbs. During the early part of the 1980s, the area that once was also known as Soulville, a neighborhood once a major hotbed for introducing soul music into American pop-culture, suffered a decline in the area’s vibrancy and a once vibrant community has now become in need of attention. Figure 47 Plans to revitalize the community with efforts from long-time community members aimed to provide housing for low-income residents and spur economic growth by opening more brick and mortar stores.

Bound by E.H. Crump Boulevard, Soulsville’s perimeter overlooks Vance Avenue to the east, Ridosee-58th to the west, South Parkway to the north, Interstate-55 to the west, South Parkway to the south, and Bellevue Boulevard to the west. Figure 21 south of the neighborhood’s major street, McAlmont Avenue, is St. Thomas Catholic Church on East Twig Avenue. The church is a large Romanesque-styled church that has been党校 for nearly 40 years. As a circa 1920s building, St. Thomas Catholic Church also provides an opportunity to preserve the historical value, which contributes to the building’s authenticity. The adaptation of the church introduces a housing design that celebrates a historical artifact in a contemporary manner and highlights the qualities and influences of African American-owned housing. The design stems from Orange Mound’s founding houses, which tell the story of the community’s beginnings and are aesthetic because they were built in spite of limited resources and harsh social conditions. The houses established a sense of community and a sense of safety, allowing for the community to thrive until disinvestment fractured the neighborhood.

Abandoned

Abandoned

Abandoned

Abandoned

Abandoned

Figure 3

Contextual Collage, South Memphis

Figure 4

Contextual Collage, South Memphis

Concept of Authenticity

Authenticity in architecture, as seen through past examples, sheds light on the technical and aesthetic differences between past periods and those which exist today. Authenticity in architecture is a narrative of the site context, of course, and the genuine intent the building wishes to accomplish. Taking into consideration the origins of architecture as the traces from past buildings deepening the understanding of what makes people uniquely human.

**Context**

“Context is defined as the interrelated conditions in which something exists or occurs. In the words of Frank Gehry, architecture should stand out of the time and place, but remain timeless. Architecture should be connected to the larger historical, technological, and social context. Furthermore, contextual and architectural responses to its surroundings becomes what is already there.”

The site context is best seen in the analysis of a project design to provide a functional building that conforms to the local rules of nature. The site context is essential to designing with the surrounding environment. The site allows the project to be in context and avoid the site’s reliance on nature. Site context creates cultural traditions, which respond to local conditions such as climate and geography.

**Authenticity**

An era is defined by its inseparable connection between time and the built space. There are three aspects of time that are important in this conversation between time and architecture. The first of these is the influence a space has on time. The second is the passage of time. The third is the quality and influence of the space. Each building preserved stands as yet another artifact set along a pathway to improve upon humanity’s quality of life.

**Era**

Architectural concepts are primarily generated from the site, design brief, and building typology. Design intent is one of the only consistent elements that follow a project from beginning to end. The organization enables it to achieve a building typology. These aspects seem to encapsulate the human condition of a period through its craftsmanship and consistent attempts to improve upon humanity’s quality of life.

**Site Selection**

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1. Fixler, “Material, Idea, and Authenticity.”
5. Tapscott, “Aligning Organizational Architecture.”
6. Ibid.
7. Kane, “History of Memphis.”
10. “Memphis History: Memphians.”
11. “Memphis Neighborhood: Soulsville.”
13. “Memphis History: Memphians.”
About a mile southwest of the Soulsville area, at the intersection of Willie Mitchell Boulevard and East Trigg Avenue, are the remains of a historic Catholic church and convent (highlighted in red in figure 9). The 1926 church has Romanesque characteristics and is recognized from the street for its architectural significance. Not only was this church a physical landmark, but it also had an impact on religion within the neighborhood. Due to the majority of non-Catholic residents, the church received opposition to its construction. Despite the resistance, the church thrived through various demographic transitions of racial and religious discrimination, as well as economic and social strife from the 1920s to the 1960s. With the neighborhood's ethnic mix-up changing to predominantly African American, very few of whom were a part of the Catholic congregation until the 1980s, the church slowly began to decline. Though the church once served as a house of worship for the community in South Memphis, today it stands as a dilapidated structure (figures 5-8) in need of new life. Blight has also touched the immediate corners of the adjacent intersection, as all three corners are vacant (figure 10). The distinctive form of the church, derived from churches built during the Early Christian Era in Western Europe and rendered in simple materials, made the church a visual landmark of the South Memphis community in a period of significance. The period of significance for the church begins with the construction of the earliest building on the site—the convent built in 1907—and concludes with the completion of the last remodeling of the church building in 1948. The remodeling work carried out in 1948 did result in some changes in surface materials but did nothing to compromise the overall Romanesque Revival design of the building.

The population of South Memphis in the early twentieth century was largely composed of working-class Protestants employed in the furniture manufacturing, cotton warehouse, and grocery distribution industries of the area. The non-Catholic residents of the area objected to the establishment of a Catholic church in the neighborhood. Community lore suggests that when the original church was under construction in 1906-1907, opposing residents would appear after the workmen had left for the day and take down the masonry and other work that had been accomplished earlier. The story continues that an unnamed local cleric of St. Patrick's was determined to prevent further delays on the project by watching over the building site on a nightly basis, and occasionally discharging a blast from a gun to discourage vandalism on the project site. Despite whatever resistance the neighborhood may have shown towards the church, St. Thomas thrived until its closure in the 1980s.
Contextual Needs-Based Program (Context/Era)

Establishing the idea of creating a micro-neighborhood led to the first floor's serving as the public's commercial space. The church has been in conflict with the neighborhood since its conception and so the design solution aims to heal/mend these struggles with new programs that will serve the community and support new growth and connectedness among residents. The first floor program was established to purposefully fulfill the needed essentials for a functional community, considering the current conditions have wiped out essential businesses. Statistical data (figure 11) was used to establish housing types that are considerate of the neighborhood's populace and provide a program that increases the accessibility of essential services to the residents and surrounding neighborhoods.12

One important part of the program, outside of housing, is the grocery store. The closest grocery store is within 3.8 miles, which is not far for an individual who owns a car, but for public transport, this can be another two-hour task just to acquire healthy food. The program serves the neighborhood by bringing essential needs to the residents, so that ventures to basic goods are closer and therefore considered ideal conditions of a functioning micro-neighborhood (figure 12).

12 US Census Bureau, “Census Zip Code 38106.”

96.5% African American or Black
3.0% Caucasian or White
+/- 1.0% Hispanic or Latino/a/x
24,029 Total Population
48.8% Non-family Households
38.0% Single Parent Households
13.2% Married Households
3.42 Average Household Size
3.82 Average Household Size
1.12 Average Household Size
91% Over the Age of 60
9,241 Total Households
50.0% Non-family Households
52% of Population Pays Rent
34.0% Drive Alone to work
33.8% Carpool to Work
32.2% Uses Public Transport
7,555 Workers Over the Age of 16
55.0% Travel Time 60+ Minutes

Figure 11 Soulsville Demographic Diagram

Figure 12 Programmatic Analysis Diagram
Architectural Approach (Era/Intent)

The architectural approach is meant to adapt the existing buildings based on their new purpose, yet preserve the existing shell and re-conceptualize the building's original power in a new synthesis. Precedents utilized in this design seek to blend architectural principles inherent to certain epochs relevant to this thesis. Places of excellence, sites similar to the project, and contemporary housing designs were explored in order to group these ideas into a cohesive design to be presented in a seamless manner. Since the approach is focused on authenticity, it was appropriate to span the precedents over time, to reveal that although the aesthetic is purely a product of time, the principle underlying the examples are the true values of architecture. To begin, this thesis describes the application of precedent ideas to visualize how the spaces interact with the site's existing materials as well as contemporary ideas.

Application of Precedents and Materiality

Figure 14 describes the development of an interior and exterior design through the implementation of precedent ideas to visualize how the spaces interact with the public and consider the building's role within the neighborhood. Utilizing materials of the existing church helps to visually integrate the new design. These materials include the use of iron spotted brick, which was used to construct the church's original walls, which was once celebrated for its intricacy on the church's floor, will be refinished in this design to once again become the welcome mat for the community to observe the history left behind. The existing materials will also be preserved as they hold authentic value in the form of their original power in a new synthesis. Precedents utilized in the design seek to blend architectural principles inherent to certain epochs relevant to this thesis. Places of excellence, sites similar to the project, and contemporary housing designs were explored in order to group these ideas into a cohesive design to be presented in a seamless manner. Since the approach is focused on authenticity, it was appropriate to span the precedents over time, to reveal that although the aesthetic is purely a product of time, the principle underlying the examples are the true values of architecture. To begin, this thesis describes the application of precedent ideas to visualize how the spaces interact with the site's existing materials as well as contemporary ideas.
Connection Beyond The Site (Intent/Context)

In order to satisfy another quality of the church’s genuine intent, effort was focused towards community outreach. This specifically meant including a bike path in the project to connect the site to various community resources (Figure 15). Installation of the bike path would provide better circulation around the site and allow for travelers to have easier navigation and transport beyond the project site. Orientation of the main bike path is important to lead users to immediate green space, while also allowing those who use the path to view off south towards South Memphis Farmer’s Market to grab fresh produce, or north towards Memphis Delta Prep and Stax Records. An alley, which is currently underutilized, is the proposed location for a perpendicular bike path that connects E Trigg Avenues with a small red located north and south of the site. The alley bike path would be a simple design with the addition of a few street lights for safety, allowing the site’s outreach to extend further and activate a corner of the city outside of the downtown area.

Connection At Site

Highlighted in red on figure 16 is the footprint for the building’s proposed extension. The eastern half of the “L” shaped site will remain undeveloped to allow for future phasing in the current state of design, the space remains as a park for public use. The site plan explains how access to and around the site is gained through the mapped out crossings, as well as other elements such as parking.

Figure 15 - Amenities to the East

Figure 16 - Site Map
The first floor executes the first two precedents from the architectural approach. The new courtyards take on the ideas of the Temple of Bacchus as the interior spaces flip to become exterior spaces. The new courtyards serve as the main circulation spaces for the public to convene, as well as a preserved interior exemplifying authenticity shown in the architectural qualities, time passage of being in the space, and the patina left from years of age.

Shown next in the first floor is the new program that wraps around the existing buildings, following along the ideas set from the second precedent, the Palazzo della Cancelleria. To remain consistent with the Cancelleria, a new grid was extended from the original grid lines to form the new adaptive structure that is symmetrical and seamless. The new grid lines were defined from the church’s original columns and are partially represented by the dotted lines shown in figure 17 as an example of how the grid was created. The second building, the convent, also follows the same ideas; however, it was important for the second building to keep its own identity separate from the first building. The exterior of the second building is not as important since the interior is now the highlighted space. The exterior of the second building is not as important since the interior is now the highlighted space. However, keeping the interior’s symmetry intact was important for styling the two buildings, which serve similar purposes but have different intents. The defined spaces on the first floor would then be the host for the needs-based program. The highlighted spaces in figure 17 are color coded to match the program analysis (figure 12). Surrounding resources are placed in close proximity, such as the playground to the left of the new building adaptation, which sits close to the day care. By installing this program, the first floor offers an opportunity for individuals to seek economic progression within the neighborhood and beyond to the city.

Second Floor

The second floor utilizes the last precedent of the 1000m² Prefab Houses. The design of the modular units began with references to home designs local to the context. Therefore, the design utilizes the shotgun house, which was a prominent housing type during Orange Mound’s founding as a community. As a previous plantation, Orange Mound was redeveloped for housing in 1889 by E. E. Meacham who purchased the property in 1885. “He developed the property as efficiently as possible by arranging the streets in an unrelieved grid with narrow lots”, which he would sell to African Americans as a safe haven to escape the harsh conditions of the Jim Crow era.” From these conditions, new property owners would build shotgun houses given their limited resources, to adapt to the narrow lots and to withstand the southern summers.” “The neighborhood originally contained 982 shotgun houses that sold for less than one hundred dollars each, an inexpensive price even for the time.” From this example, each module in this project takes precedent from Orange Mound’s original houses and, therefore, are adapted to the project’s contextual relationship with the climate, neighborhood, and existing buildings. The units consider the significant portion of single parents and older single individuals to develop modules for one and three bedrooms. The materials on the exterior of the units reflect the existing materials already local to the site and neighborhood. The call out in figure 18 shows a complete unit, which will be examined to further uncover the qualities that define the adapted units.

Figure 17. First Floor

Floor Plans (Intent/Era/Context)

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Shown next in the first floor is the new program that wraps around the existing buildings, following along the ideas set from the second precedent, the Palazzo della Cancelleria. To remain consistent with the Cancelleria, a new grid was extended from the original grid lines to form the new adaptive structure that is symmetrical and seamless. The new grid lines were defined from the church’s original columns and are partially represented by the dotted lines shown in figure 17 as an example of how the grid was created. The second building, the convent, also follows the same ideas; however, it was important for the second building to keep its own identity separate from the first building. The exterior of the second building is not as important since the interior is now the highlighted space. However, keeping the interior’s symmetry intact was important for styling the two buildings, which serve similar purposes but have different intents. The defined spaces on the first floor would then be the host for the needs-based program. The highlighted spaces in figure 17 are color coded to match the program analysis (figure 12). Surrounding resources are placed in close proximity, such as the playground to the left of the new building adaptation, which sits close to the day care. By installing this program, the first floor offers an opportunity for individuals to seek economic progression within the neighborhood and beyond to the city.

Second Floor

The second floor utilizes the last precedent of the 1000m² Prefab Houses. The design of the modular units began with references to home designs local to the context. Therefore, the design utilizes the shotgun house, which was a prominent housing type during Orange Mound’s founding as a community. As a previous plantation, Orange Mound was redeveloped for housing in 1889 by E. E. Meacham who purchased the property in 1885. “He developed the property as efficiently as possible by arranging the streets in an unrelieved grid with narrow lots”, which he would sell to African Americans as a safe haven to escape the harsh conditions of the Jim Crow era.” From these conditions, new property owners would build shotgun houses given their limited resources, to adapt to the narrow lots and to withstand the southern summers.” “The neighborhood originally contained 982 shotgun houses that sold for less than one hundred dollars each, an inexpensive price even for the time.” From this example, each module in this project takes precedent from Orange Mound’s original houses and, therefore, are adapted to the project’s contextual relationship with the climate, neighborhood, and existing buildings. The units consider the significant portion of single parents and older single individuals to develop modules for one and three bedrooms. The materials on the exterior of the units reflect the existing materials already local to the site and neighborhood. The call out in figure 18 shows a complete unit, which will be examined to further uncover the qualities that define the adapted units.
Housing Unit Study (Era/Intent/Context)

The housing design derives from success of southern examples such as the shotgun house, a housing typology built in the founding of Orange Mound (figures 21 and 22), and also the dogtrot house shown in figure 19. The modules are 31'-6" long and 8'-6" wide and the program is organized to fit within the defined modular space. Although the length is not a constraint in terms of transportation, the width is limited in order to reduce cost and eliminate the "wide load" signage attached to homes that exceed the limit. This makes the units easier to transport (figure 25) and prefabrication an affordable option. The common spaces such as the front porch, living room, kitchen, and laundry are placed within a singular module (figure 26) and the master bedroom and bathroom are placed in another (figure 27). The singular modules are then stacked atop the first floor by a crane lifting them into place, and each module is organized in a sequence shown in figure 24. Each module is then bolted together (figure 20) to transform the individual modules into a complete housing unit.

The material palette used in the unit's design is derived from the materials already existing on the site. The combination of metal, wood, and brick adapts the units with the site to create a cohesive project that embraces the unique qualities of the site's climate, neighborhood, and existing materials. The housing units are designed to consider the context and demographics of the area by the means of creating a one bedroom unit to house older single individuals, and a two bedroom unit addition to create a three bedroom unit for single parents and their children (figure 23), aiming the design to help the two largest populations within the community. Designing for context and climate facilitates a space familiar to its new residents, and although few examples of shotgun houses remain in the community (figure 24), this design methodology will foster a housing project that aims to engage with its community members.
Figure 26: Common Space

Figure 27: Master Bedroom
Residential units continue to be aligned along the third level; however, the third floor introduces additional elements of design aimed to resolve circulation issues and unused space. The first important design element is represented in the center space, called out as the residential courtyard shown in figure 30. This space is designed to bring light into the second level by opening up the third level connecting slab to the two existing buildings. The courtyard also acts as a common space for the residents to enjoy, as well as allows for the housing design to function properly as it expels the hot air from the large openings on the third level (figure 31). The bell tower firepit completes the building design in terms of program, and places yet another common space for residents in the space above the third floor (figure 32). The extra space is semi-open to allow for an extra firepit to be added within the bell tower, utilizing the entirety of the building within the adaptive reuse process.

Building and Unit Study—Passive Ventilation (Context)

The design uses passive ventilation systems in addition to mechanical ones. The entrance south of the larger courtyard will have the largest opportunity to capitalize on the influx of wind. The triple height space of the courtyard creates a stack effect. The housing unit shown in figure 28, captures wind from certain times of the year and funnels it into the new courtyards (figure 29). The public porch, which separates the two existing buildings, captures the east and west winds during certain times and acts as a breezeway similar to the housing example of a shotgun.
Figures 34-37 highlight a few aspects taken into consideration throughout this design. The first that is noticeable is the stained glass, which is an abstraction of the glass once in the original materials palette provided by the existing building. The color is used to differentiate each unit from another, giving each unit a sense of identity in an otherwise uniform project. Different brick patterns are used to display the difference between old bricks and new bricks. Figure 33 shows the east exterior alongside the walking path to give an understanding of how the community may interact with the new design.
Existing Bell Tower

Existing South Facade. New Stained Glass Installed

Figure 34 South Elevation

Existing Trees

Picnic Tables and Grills

Daycare Playground

Food Pavilion

Figure 35 North Elevation

Existing Trees

Figure 36 North Elevation

Existing Trees

Figure 37 East Elevation

Public Porch

New Roof

Existing Roof Structure

Figure 36 West Elevation

Existing Trees

Figure 37 East Elevation
Courtyards (Intent/Context/Era)

A major component of the overall building design is the re-adaptation of the church and convent to serve as courtyard spaces. The large spaces allow for public use and interior access to ground level programs. The only change to the existing structure involves removal of the roofs and the lowering of side windows to allow for stained glass doors to be inserted at entry ways. Circulation at the various levels is connected within the church to allow for a full integration between the existing buildings and the new adaptation.

The existing columns, walls, and archways were preserved to encapsulate the interior as a space built during a previous era (figure 38). The cracks, faded paint, and exposed structure highlight the historical value, which further deepens the approach to authenticity. The layout of the space was simplified by creating seating areas for locals to enjoy the semi-exterior space, as well as adapting the area to serve as a stage for the neighborhood’s rich music history. The stage references cultural elements of the neighborhood by abstractly mimicking the set up of the closest neighborhood anchor, Royal Studios. A water feature was added along the existing grid line of symmetry to provide interest in the courtyard.

North Courtyard

The courtyard in figure 38 is the converted convent. Based on the original intent of the building, it was important to express this courtyard as one of peace. The walls are consistent with the existing age, yet the third floor above reveals the new design and materials. This courtyard also serves a similar purpose to the first in that the space acts as an access point to surrounding program and the existing windows were brought down to allow for entryway into the new wrapped spaces. A single tree is placed on the center line of symmetry on the courtyard and the seating area next to the tree promotes peacefulness as a reflection space. The hybrid planter-seating contains lavender plants to further promote peace.
CONCLUSION

Since my move to Memphis, assimilation meant attending festivals, games, and general Memphis tradition to better acquaint myself with my new home. By becoming part of the city’s local culture, this allowed me to better grasp what this city holds most important. On a smaller scale, this same approach aided in the process of this thesis, as small encounters with locals of the neighborhood gave me a better sense of the unique qualities that separate Soulsville from the rest of the city.

Furthermore, immersion also best answered the inherent question of, “Can you be authentic to a place when you are not from that place?” Addressing the community members in person broadened my understanding of the area beyond what statistics could account for. Eventually, this led to step one in the year-long process of this thesis, which was to find a place to live within South Memphis, as living in the area seemed necessary to pursue total immersion. Once settled on Douglass Avenue in Orange Mound, resources such as articles and documentaries provided a grounding for the research, eventually leading to visits and attendance at places like churches and longtime restaurants.

The research of this thesis also determined authenticity through historical reference, to discover the similarities between residents and personal immersive investment in neighborhood archives. Entry and engagement with friendly community members was an approach to reach a sense of transparency when looking at why the architecture would be helping, in an effort to reach a higher authentic value within the thesis. In order to shed light on the complete concept, it was important to take coming from a place does not necessarily disqualify as architect for designing with authenticity in mind. The solution more lies in the immersive grounding the architect possesses, which is both bound by willingness and time.

The intent of this thesis is to produce meaningful architecture by attempting to understand what is authentic to a place where the architecture is taking place. Personal immersion into the site, as well as an understanding of the neighborhood’s conditions, needs, and history provided a different approach to the use of such a large space. This thesis brings those strains of architecture together to test the relationship architecture has to its environment. The project attempts to seamlessly integrate into its surroundings to maintain the relationship between the neighborhood and the new addition of the project (figures 40 and 41).

The theory developed around authenticity attempts to explore the possibility that authentic values can be extracted by exploring the context, era, and intent of the program while still representing a contemporary approach. The definition of authenticity through architecture presented in this document holds that the architecture must be responsive to the users’ needs. Considering the past and present coming together requires critique about how people have adapted individual and community living over time. Recognizing this prompts further consideration about how adaptable the living modules are to the needs of the people that would live in them.

Figure 40: West Perspective

Figure 41: View From Southwest Corner
Further Consideration (Intent/Context/Era)

One critical oversight made during the process of this project development was the strict adherence to the module dimensions, which may prevent the residential units from having functional and comfortable interior spaces. Limitations on space based on the normative module could make the buildings for the two main user groups (singles and single parents with multiple children), to address concerns about the authenticity of living in such constrained spaces given the current way the people live, if suggested that the modules become representative of the particular use like in the given room. Building the exterior walls then becomes a paneled facade separate to the program and designed by prefabrication. Each program listed in figure 43 would be designed within the availability of the new floor plate (figure 42). Since the organization of spaces can change, figure 44 shows the program potential layout generated by prefabrication. Each program listed in figure 43 would be designed within the pre-determined dimensioned boxes, still allowing for simple and affordable transport.

The flexibility is only limited to the amount of bays a resident wishes to utilize within the availability of the new floor plate (figure 44). Since the organization of spaces can change, figure 44 shows the program potential layout generated by prefabrication. Each program listed in figure 43 would be designed within the pre-determined dimensioned boxes, still allowing for simple and affordable transport.

The new structure is embedded into the existing buildings and supports the second and third floor plates with a column system shown in the floor plans. Since this structure is self-supporting the interior program could then be placed using a cross and bolted with their arrangement has been finalized. The exterior walls then becomes a paneled facade separate to the program and defined by the interior use of the place. This quality would produce a unit made exterior that is still addressed through the existing materials but is designed by the residents. Furthermore, this lowering of the exterior will allow residents to consider the incoherence and placement of the colored glass it becomes more experimental to the interior of the residence.

Examples of floor plan layouts are shown in figure 43, and follow the similar design to the shotgun, to exemplify that the program spaces could still be arranged in the shotgun fashion to adapt with the context and the already established principles developed over time.
This article is important because it explained the history and architecture of the Cancelleria. Thus, a better understanding was formed in the precedent and, therefore, its application to the thesis was enhanced.

This is a governmental form used in nominating individual properties and districts for historic preservation. The form describes the church's architectural value as authentic in the beginning of the design solution. This form was important to this thesis because it explained the architectural and historical significance of St. Thomas Church. This helped address the design in a meaningful manner to bring together old and new architecture.


This article is important because it highlighted the importance of placing a structure with nature. The author argues that “though contrast renders the context’s surroundings, materials, and local populous, the project is in sync with the vernacular” (76). He then explains the consistent battle between arts, science, technology, and daily life, entailing on the one hand the need for art and design and on the other the need to transform everyday objects to work with technology. The research led to identification of a few defining parameters that in the designing of buildings in a context-rich setting. The results showed that the element of surprise turns a utilitarian form into a life-like phenomenon after a point, just as the old French townhouse turned into a romantic narrative.


This article is important to this thesis because it is one of the precedents that helped define the project. The spotting of housing on this project became the principle from the concept of the beginning definition of the design solution.


This article by the Historic Center of Preservation at MTSU discusses Orange Mound, the oldest African-American neighborhood in Memphis, Middle Tennessee State University’s Historic Preservation program’s a regional heritage education program funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

This article is important because it set the ground work to better range of applicability for the notion of ‘authenticity’ as it relates to architecture. This article is important to this thesis because it set the ground work to better understand the principles of the thesis.


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Statistics from US Census Bureau

This article is important to the thesis because Smith provides an inside perspective of the neighborhood. He is the CEO of the Tapscott Group. He is an executive, author, consultant and speaker, who specializes in business strategy, organizational transformation and the role of technology in business and society. He is the author of the book Beyond Default.

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Appendix 1: Presentation Materials

Figures 45-50 are the final presentation boards used at the time of the thesis defense. Figures 51-53 are the final model and defense boards. Figure 54 contains the research forum presentation.
This thesis proposal targets an opportunity to develop a sense of community in an area plagued by disinvestment by way of immersion into the existing architecture to return the church to its original purpose of presenting values, and materials. Adapting the base level of the church to include fabrication acclimated to consider the neighborhood's climate, income, communication between the new and existing Development will include a hybrid system of on-site construction and the pioneering technology of prefabrication.

The design aims to support the communities within Memphis will be put under a microscope, examining the historic estimation of its own culture as a byproduct. For this thesis, a neighborhood therefore much more authentic.

Project Site

- Front of existing church
- Concept - Authenticity as a design tool
- Thesi Statement
- Means of transport to work

32.2% - use public transport
34.0% - drive alone to work

This place within the church's large space will be put under a microscope, examining the historic stamp of this era's original vision for generations to come. However, in a place within the church's large space the needs of the community will be put under a microscope, examining the historic stamp of this era's original vision for generations to come. However, in a place within the church's large space the needs of the community will be put under a microscope, examining the historic stamp of this era's original vision for generations to come. However, in a place within the church's large space the needs of the community will be put under a microscope, examining the historic stamp of this era's original vision for generations to come. However, in a place within the church's large space
Thesis Statement

As designers, a responsibility is handed down to safely guard the legacy of architecture’s achievements. Granting authority for today’s architects to further continue the dialogue between the past and present in order to define the future of the practice. Utilizing today’s advancements in materials, structures, and envelop pushing ideas to leave a unique stamp of this era’s original vision for generations to come. However, in a world that becomes evermore globalized, placing importance on the present context and culture focus’ architecture on the essential utility of design rather than reaching for false expression. Pushing back against the “because we can” notion of designing with the question of “why?” architects practice in the first place. Providing opportunity for architecture to consider a path which strives to be genuine in its expression and therefore much more authentic.

Concept - Authenticity As A Design Tool

Authentic Cities arise from its unique adaptions to their distinct context. Utilizing the unadorned framework as a canvas to aid in the manifestation of its own culture as a byproduct. For this thesis, a neighborhood within Memphis will be put under a microscope, examining the historic importance and current conditions to distinguish unique characteristics as design elements. Therefore utilizing a city’s authentic value as a tool to design in today’s present Memphis.

Thesis Objective

This thesis proposal targets an opportunity to develop a sense of community in an area plagued by disinvestment by way of immersion into the area’s rich past in order to promote its unique qualities while also providing the needs of the community. The design aims to support the community’s characteristics attributed to it’s authentic value in effort to create communication between the new and existing. Development will include a hybrid system of on-site construction and the pioneering technology of prefabrication acclimated to consider the neighborhood’s climate, income, values, and materials. Adapting the base level of the church to include a public “need-based” program that facilitates essential daily activity as well as pay homage to the building and neighborhood’s authentic qualities. Creating a market for the community to inhabit as well as a neighborhood anchor. Once the base level is set, the prefabricated housing modules will then be placed atop the base slab and positioned along the existing church walls to allow for circulation into the housing units to take place within the large space of the church’s interior. Thus utilizing the existing architecture to return the church to its original purpose of presenting a sense of nourishment for the neighborhood within its walls again. Weaving the future of architectural design through the adaptive reuse of the church in today’s existing city.
Appendix 2: Process Piece

This process piece is a concrete disc that takes the form of a musical record (figure 55). Since this thesis is focused on cultural and contextual influence on the urban environment, I felt it to be appropriate to create a piece that references all aspects of the project site. The construction began by breaking up pieces of marble and brick from the project site to be placed within the concrete mixture. The mold was then made in the shape of a musical record to reference the neighborhood’s rich music history. By taking the contextual materials and referencing the musical past of the project site, this process piece seeks to display the authentic qualities of the local Memphis neighborhood.

Figure 55 Concrete Record