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Alternative Histories: A Temporal Approach to Public Housing

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Alternative Histories: A Temporal Approach to Public Housing

Abstract
One of the most profound changes in the built environment is that of urban renewal projects from the mid twentieth century. In that name of progress many existing low income areas of cities were labeled “blighted” giving policy makers license to wipe clean and start anew. Many public housing projects were erected in this manner. This tabula rasa mentality is a-temporal and neglects the histories and people that existed there before, undermining the ongoing processes of building and rebuilding between people and place. In the case of the new transformation plan for the Sharswood neighborhood of North Philly, the Philadelphia Housing Authority is repeating this common pattern. But Sharswood is far from “blighted”, and the residents have been increasingly reclaiming much of vacant land available in the neighborhood. This project will critique monolithic methods of development and explore ways to leverage this pattern to create a ‘building environment’ that will foster a continual process of becoming for that will provide a sustainable model for the development of affordable housing.

Keywords
adaptability, architecture, Sharswood, narrative, design

Disciplines
Historic Preservation and Conservation

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ALTERNATIVE HISTORIES: A TEMPORAL APPROACH TO PUBLIC HOUSING

Dana Rice

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in
Historic Preservation and Architecture

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Introduction

For whom are we preserving?

This question has gained much relevance as historic preservation has expanded its range to include more sites that have historical value to other cultures and populations. During a recent trip to New Mexico I had an opportunity to tour many historic site’s, some long abandoned ruins and some occupied by peoples that had no historic ties to them. Okay Owinge was different because it had been continuously inhabited for centuries by the people who built it, however up until recently it was in danger of being abandoned all together as residents moved off the reservation in search of jobs or for modern housing options. With the help of Atkin Olshin and Shade architects the tribal housing authority underwent a major effort to renovate the historic pueblo in order to make it habitable for a modern Pueblo lifestyle. This however, required a more lax interpretation of preservation design guidelines laid out by the National Park Service. Furthermore the concepts of “authenticity” and “significance” that are commonly used in preservation discourse were European ideas that did not fit with the pueblo’s cultural beliefs. If one asked the cultural leaders of Okay Owinge when they would consider their pueblo’s period of significance to be, they would say today. Likewise the Navajo people we studied and encountered on the trip had alternative notions of time and history that made it difficult for the National Park Service to preserve some of the abandoned Pueblo sites that existed on their reservation, which they believed should not be inhabited or touched by humans and instead left to ruin. What was building up through the entire trip was the inability of contemporary preservation policy and practice to deal with alternative understandings of history and place. This theme however is one that is played out in contexts throughout the world as it is clear that many historic places have contradictory values placed on them by different stakeholders which are not consistent throughout time (Karaim 2015).

As racial tensions mount in cities within the U.S. and the disparity between rich and poor widens throughout the globe it is clear that the ‘other’ is constructed in more than
just isolated indigenous places and that controversies surrounding heritage and identity are coming more to the forefront in familiar places. This thesis therefore, is not about the preservation of indigenous heritage, it is instead about controversies that enfold around place as people and populations change throughout time. Despite the profound effects time has on the built environment, many design professionals today still lack a proper consideration of time when constructing new interventions. Architects in particular have often neglected to consider the fourth dimension in the design of new buildings, Jeremy Till notes in his book “Architecture Depends” that the reason for this is that time is a destabilizing force that is beyond their direct control, the result is a built environment of frozen buildings (Till, 2009).

While Historic Preservation differs from many other design professions in its direct relationship with time, it is often utilized and perceived as a stabilizing force on the built environment, selecting “periods of significance” that effectively freeze buildings in time. Both of these approaches negates the reality of a constantly changing and dynamic built environment. Till advocates therefore that time rather than space be used as the “primary context in which architecture is conceived”. As is touched on by Till and is revealed in Stewart Brand’s study in how buildings change over time is that when time becomes a primary consideration it ultimately brings to the forefront the multiple forces (social, environmental, political, etc.) of which architecture is contingent. Both Till and Brand recognize that time represents a paradigm shift, from building as a noun to verb, meaning “the ongoing process” through which the built fabric is made and remade. Rather than responding to the built environment then, this thesis seeks to look at design responses to the building environment and how time can become the primary impetus for design (Brand, 1994) (Till, 2009). Only when a more diachronic approach is taken, which acknowledges that the built environment has changed in the past and will change in the future, can sustainable solutions be developed that can meet the functional and cultural aspirations of users when considering design in historic
contexts. This study not only brings into consideration the multiple social and political factors that effect the building environment but also it includes shifting narratives that influence the way people perceive places and how this influences design decisions. While many development decisions are driven by monolithic narrative that often lead to “tabula rasa” design strategies. The truth is that places are dynamic and are not only in a constant state of becoming but also hold multiple meanings and narratives that relate to the various actors that inhabit them. The challenge then becomes to develop new strategies that can respond to these variables and make it possible to develop new futures that allow a building resource to be used now and for later generations.

One of the biggest changes in the built environment is that of urban renewal projects from the mid twentieth century. Although it is generally seen as one particular moment that has been left behind in the progression of time and history. What is revealed when looking at public housing in particular is that it is part of a longer process of change that continues to this day. As is described by Lawrence Vale in his book “Purging the Poorest: Public Housing and the Design Politics of Twice-Cleared Communities”, the “history of public housing in the United States has followed a cyclical practice of displacement and neighborhood renewal” (Vale, 2013). He identifies three distinct phases of public housing that highlight the relationship between people, politics, and buildings as these sites have periodically become developed and redeveloped by housing authorities. What is a common thread in a three phases is the understanding of these sites as tabula rasa that negates the current occupants, their histories and their futures. In contrast to this ideology, Stewart Brand advocates that architects consider their built environment diachronically or how it evolves over time, this concept is furthered by Jeremy Till with his concept of thick time, “Thick time is time of the extended present that avoids mere repetition of past times or the instant celebration of new futures” (Till, 2009) (Brand, 1994). In the recent redevelopment of the Norman Blumberg Apartments and the
Sharswood neighborhood by the Philadelphia Housing Authority, the area is once again facing a periodic reconstruction by the forces of urban renewal. Looking more closely at Sharswood’s temporal context this thesis will consider how new interventions can respond the ongoing and historic processes that have affected change in the neighborhood and how it can in turn facilitate continual change in the future.
**Polemic**

**Time:** This thesis firstly will examine the relationship between time and the built environment. Drawing upon the ideas of Stewart Brand it will examine the implications of considering time from a diachronic standpoint. In the study of the built environment he writes “buildings can be studied in terms of how they worked and interacted at one time [synchronously]…or in terms of how they evolved over time [diachronically]”. As noted by Stewart Brand the terms diachronic and synchronic were first employed by linguists when discussing the history of a language. To be more specific the terms were first introduced by Ferdinand de Saussure in his Course in General Linguistics published in 1916 after his death. In linguistics he notes that there is a duality in the way a language is analyzed, static and evolutionary or synchronic and diachronic. He uses the analogy of cutting a plant stem transversely versus longitudinally, in the first way you see all the inner workings of the plant at one particular moment, when cut the other way one sees the multiple layers built up over-time (de Saussure 1966). Brand argues that architects typically use a synchronic look at architecture which prevents them from considering how their buildings will stand up in the long run. Brands study of “How Buildings Learn” is essentially a study in how humans interact with the built environment over time. This link between social and physical changes is important because it is because of changes in human behavior and ideology that interventions are made in the first place. In the beginning of his book he rewrites the quotes from Louis Sullivan and Churchill as “function reforms form perpetually” and “first we shape our buildings then they shape us, then we shape them again-ad infinitum” (Brand 1994, 1). Form is therefore always linked to social influences and a buildings become almost a social agent in and of themselves by constantly “learning” by virtue of human intervention. At the end of his book he posits this challenge to architects “what kind of buildings might reflect ‘time’ as formgiver?” urging designers to think about their buildings not as static objects that exist despite time but as intuitive spaces that “flow” with time. This thesis will explore the implications of this not just for new buildings purposefully built to change
in time, but also for how existing buildings especially those with high historical value can be adapted for future use.

**Architecture:** Brand argues that architects in particular are guilty of taking a synchronic view of architectural history, designing new buildings that are strictly working in the current state in time. But it is more accurate to say that architects use neither. If we take Saussure’s definition of synchrony and apply it to architecture practice, while it would exclude concerns about the temporal nature of contingent social factors it would at least consider those that are occurring at the present ‘state’. As is argued in the book “Spatial Agency” by Jeremy Till, Nishat Awan and Tatjana Schneider, the practice of Architecture discourse is generally self-reflexive and has been concerned with the “short-term priorities of clients and the market” and that Architecture as a discipline “tends to prioritize aspects associated with the static properties of objects: the visual, the technical, and the atemporal.” While concerns for the market are surely social this only takes into consideration a limited group of actors and produces iconic architecture that is commodified to suit the desires of one group of actors rather than acknowledging the agency of the multiple ‘others’ that connect with these buildings. The authors argue that architects generally think of their discipline dogmatically and that “critical attention is focused solely on architecture’s own concerns and obsessions. What results is a spiraling effect of critique, which effectively asserts architecture’s presumed autonomy.” Instead it is argued that architects look outwardly rather than critically, they write that “‘praxis’ starts with and open-ended evaluation of the particular external conditions out of which action arises with no predetermined outcome but with the intention to be transformative” this evaluation would be closer to what Saussure had in mind when he was thinking of a synchronic analysis where all external and internal social factors were taken into consideration. (Awan, Schneider and Till 2011)
Building (n.) Building (vb.): Jeremy Till furthers this critique on architects in his book “Architecture Depends”, noting that the reason that architects resist time in their designs is because it presents a destabilizing force, he writes that “time brings to architecture forces which it cannot resist—weather, dirt, occupation—and therefore must admit too” (Till 2009). It recognizes the reciprocal interactions between humans and buildings that were articulated by Brand, “the word ‘building’ contains a double reality…both verb and noun, both action and result. Whereas ‘architecture’ may strive to be permanent, a ‘building’ is always building and rebuilding” (Brand, How Buildings Learn 1994). Likewise Till reinforces this as a call to the architecture profession to a paradigm shift from noun to verb, his definition of ‘building’ therefore becomes “the ongoing processes through which architects, clients, builders, and users all contribute to the making and remaking of stuff” (Till 2009, 116). This brings to bear on the architecture profession two significant points, first that no building is ‘fixed’ and that change is inevitable, and second that these changes always involve human agency in some form or another. Even seemingly natural phenomenon such as weathering is mitigated or accelerated through human intervention or lack thereof. Brand expands upon this in his pace layering diagram in the Clock of the Long Now, where he represents the broader system of the planet as being concentric but connected components that change at different rates, fashion/art, commerce, infrastructure, governance, culture and nature. He notes that these differing rates of change allow for ‘shock’ absorption in the overall system, as faster components such as fashion are able to respond quickly to change and slow components such as nature provides stability and continuity (Brand, The Clock of the Long Now: Time and Responsibility 1999, 32). Likewise in his Shearing layers of Change diagram he note the different components that make up a building and their subsequent differing rates of change. To connect both of these ideas, this thesis will consider the pace layering as part of the contingent factors that affect the building environment through time.
Figure - 1  Stewart Brand, “Pace Layering Diagram”, Clock of the Long Now.

Figure - 2  Stewart Brand, “Shearing Layers of Change”, How Buildings Learn.
**Place:** With Okay Owingehe what complicates the preservation of the Pueblo site is the friction between mainstream preservation intentions and the ambitions of the Pueblo community to modernize. With many historic sites, their ‘use value’ is almost depleted or limited to the interpretation of heritage, but with other’s ‘use value’ is still contingent upon contemporary people living out their everyday lives. When dealing with what Pierre Nora referred to ‘milieux de memoire’ or real environments of memory such as these, what gets complicated is that when trying to ‘fix’ a place in time one is also trying to ‘fix’ the people in that time (Nora 1989). Kim Dovey articulates a more diachronic vision this in her book “Becoming Places,” here she re-examines the theory of ‘place’ and counters traditional Heideggarian essentialist views that construe place as a sense of ‘being in the world’. She refers to the work of Massey who notes that such practice has been deployed in order to establish a larger sense of nationalism or identity within a group -“they construct singular, fixed and static identities for places, and they interpret places as bounded enclosed spaces defined through counter-position against the Other who is outside” (Dovey 2010, 5). From this viewpoint, ‘place’ is seen as a fabrication to create a sense of identity to connect disparate people, but at the same time causes friction between the mainstream and those outside. This further complicates preservation intentions that are driven by the values of traditional national policy but are being applied to places and peoples that can be construed as ‘other’.

The reality, as is represented in the Okay Owingehe case study, is that there are often multiple views of the same historical places or ‘states’ which can lead to differing ideas about how historic or cultural sites should be treated. Instead Dovey posits the alternative concept of ‘becoming in the world’, in this way her definition of ‘place’ becomes something far from static. She proposes that it be understood as an assemblage of differing elements that is constantly being transformed and reinterpreted and subject to external and internal forces, both social and spatial. Drawing from the ideas of Deleuze and Guattari, she writes that "Assemblage
theory avoids essentialism through a concentration on the historic and contingent processes that produces assemblages” (Dovey 2010, 16). She elaborates that places are ‘intensive multiplicities’ and that the identities of assemblages are changed by any new addition or perhaps subtraction. Dovey argues that this conception has more to do with an everyday notion of place than previous definitions, since it acknowledges ‘other’ understandings of such. One could consider Dovey’s definition to be a more diachronic view of 'place' because it considers the capacity of it to have changed and be changed again, and recognizes that whatever state a place may be in is merely transitional. In this way it allows for the flexibility for a place to change along with the peoples within it (Dovey 2010). When taken in this light the idea of a ‘fixed’ conception of ‘place’ that is commonly exhibited by preservation practice and created by architects is completely irrelevant. What it does is allow the architect/preservationist to create solutions that pull from a variety of different value sets and recognize that any change or modification that is made is merely a continuation of narratives and processes that were already set in motion. The only question then becomes can future uses and social changes be anticipated, and if so how can the site be transformed repeatedly?

**Alternative Histories:** Preservation is one of the many social forces that affect buildings as they age over time. But their direct and deliberate ideologies about the treatment of a historic property has a profound impact on the way these buildings live out the rest of their lives. While Brand argues that contrary to architects, architectural historians that take a more diachronic look at history, I would argue that historic preservation lies somewhere in the middle. Although preservationists take an in depth study of a place as it evolved over time, historic buildings are often treated in a synchronic way, as one time in particular is often selected as a buildings ‘period of significance’. Jamie Kalvin takes this argument one step further in his article “the Right to the City” writing about the twice and now sometimes thrice cleared hous-
ing projects of Chicago, he touches on the effects of looking singularly at “official narratives” of place. Looking at the tensions between the often marginalized and disempowered populations that inhabit populations and the top-down interests that drive public housing clearance that often rely on these narratives that often pose public housing in a negative light, and blame the residents and the design in order to justify their demolition. The truth is that these places hold multiple meanings and for many residents hold significant sentimental value and positive memories and as relics of urban renewal also hold much historical value, at the same time he rightly points out that these places are not isolated as many claim but abandoned and are products of complicated histories and structures of racism and power. He writes “the city declared monolithic systems failure. This rhetorical sleight-of-hand produced the opposite of accountability. It effectively gave the political and economic interests that had built the high-rise developments carte blanche to profit from tearing it down” (Kalven 2015, 21).

In particular Kalvin singles out preservationists for their complacency in the face of these monolithic narratives, and argues that they have an obligation to uphold these alternative histories that undermine “official narratives”. Kalvin therefore imagined a new model of historic preservation that would “look past the built environment- past an abandoned public housing high-rise, say- in order to discern the relational ecology essential to the character of the place for those living there” (Kalven 2015, 22). This he notes requires preservationists to set aside traditional approaches that favor architectural and historical significance and instead look ethnographically toward “local knowledge”. Rather than focusing on significance therefore this approach seeks to challenge official narratives “insisting on diagnostic clarity”. These alternative histories would therefore not be undermined or even erased in the face of large scale redevelopment but instead made present in the ongoing and multiple narratives that contribute to place. This thesis will look critically at the dichotomies and relationships between the “official narratives” that emerge as driving forces for change and the many alternative nar-
theses that are not as widely known. This projects therefore seeks to negotiate between these and provide opportunities for these to become manifest in future plans for the site.

**Thick Narratives:** Stewart Brand advocates that architects consider their built environment diachronically or how it evolves over time, this concept is furthered by Jeremy Till with his concept of thick time, “Thick time is time of the extended present that avoids mere repetition of past times or the instant celebration of new futures” (Till, 2009) (Brand, 1994). The difficulty with a diachronic design methodology is that many of the traditional techniques that architects use tend to be reductive, and over simplify the complexity social and temporal contexts. Till notes that multiple modes of communication beyond the drawing must be used in order to adequately convey the complexity of time on the built environment. He notes the importance of combining traditional architectural studies such as drawings and models with atypical strategies, specifically he notes the importance of the narrative or storytelling. For Till the use of the narrative is as a tool to project differing futures on a place, but what he neglects is the consideration of historical narratives, that like other temporal phenomenon are always constantly changing and that these narratives are always plural and contested. For this thesis therefore research will focus on the mapping, and understanding of the multiplicity of historical narratives associated with Sharswood as they have developed over time and use this as an impetus to play-out continuations or future narratives. Like Till’s concept of “thick time” this thesis will look at a “thick narrative” that bridges the past and the future into a continuous narrative(s) of place. However just as time imposes a destabilizing force on the built environment so too does it destabilize narratives. This thesis will consider techniques and methods of design that allow for change and adaptability to occur in the future.
Case Studies

Potteries Thinkbelt: Much of the work of Cedric Price centers on questions of adaptability and change, using modern technologies to create designs that could physically be manipulated and reconfigured to meet changing needs of users. He embraced time as an essential element of architectural discourse and because of that, both social use and phasing as well as dynamic technologies became a vital components of form. His “Potteries Thinkbelt” in particular reuses the existing infrastructure left over from the ceramic industry in northern England. After moving to a deindustrialized economy in the postwar period these historic potteries become underutilized and a sign of economic hardship. Price conceived of utilizing the existing rail roads to create a mobile network of learning facilities that could be reconfigured into a variety of spaces to match changes in educational demands created by changes in economic necessities. His design incorporated modular containers that could be reassembled as well as movable classrooms that could open up and expand as needed (Martin, 2014).

Figure -3 Cedric Price, “Potteries Thinkbelt”.
**Wyly Theater:** One could think of the Wyly theater as the physical manifestation of Price’s Fun Palace design. Originally the Dallas Theater Center was located in a decapitated factory building, what Brand would refer to as a ‘low road’ preservation building, where by its lack of cultural value it maximized the amount of alterations and interventions that the theater was allowed to make to the space, this allowed for maximum creative allowance for the set designers and the creation of unique theatrical experiences for the visitors. The new building therefore had the incorporate that level of flexibility, so a scheme was created which allowed for the stage and seating to be reconfigured in various ways to create different audience and actor relationships as well as provide different uses for the space that would ensure its economic longevity. Additionally differing relationships between the interior and the exterior were made through the skin of the building which could be closed off or opened up to the engage fully with the outside (Adaptable Futures n.d.).
Next 21: Based on the motivation to create a sustainable long-lasting building, this housing project adopted the SI system developed for Japan public housing. In it the different subsystems of the building are identified by their design life-span, in this way the building assemblies can be designed so that those with the least expectancy can be replaced without damage or replacement of the longer lasting systems. The SI therefore refers to skeleton and infill where the longest lasting component, the structure is designed to be a permanent with infill of houses in between. This allows maximum flexibility of the units and the ability to change over time within a single structure. For this project the Osaka Gas company constructed a permanent concrete structural frame and contracted 13 separate architecture firms to design 18 individual units representing different lifestyles. Design guidelines were also developed for eventual subsequent additions or alterations (Adaptable Futures n.d.).

Figure -5  Next 21, Yositika UTIDA, Shu-Koh-Sha Architectural and Urban Design Studio.
Quinta Monroy: Inspired by the informal housing patterns of the residents that were to be re-housed in social housing on the same site. Elemental adopted a strategy of building side by side row homes that maximized space but only built half of each home. For each resident a permanent, fixed, service corridor was built featuring the bare necessities of what a family needed to live, but allowed an open space to the side which allowed the family to invest in their properties and expand over time. This allowed the architects to maximize their limited budget and provide housing for 100 families and balanced formal and informal housing practices (Elemental 2008).

Figure -6  Quinta Monroy Before and After, Elemental.
**Matadero Madrid:** In 2006 the use of this historic slaughterhouse was officially changed to a cultural laboratory for the creation of contemporary art, and has undergone efforts for the rehabilitation of the buildings as well as the installation of works of art which drastically transform the experience and cultural interpretation of the place. Several spaces contain ‘site specific’ interventions that are focused on being reversible in order to allow for flexibility in use as well as to respect the character of the original building. Projects include the Nave De Música by Langarita-Navarro Architects which features the construction of several small pop-up houses centered around a garden space used for the creation and exhibition of music. Another space is the Abierto x Obras space which was the original cold storage room of the slaughterhouse, it has hosted artists such as Quadratura by Pablo Valbuena and Potential Escultorico by Marlon de Azambuja which use low impact interventions that reconsider the use of the space and experience of the visitor while responding to its historic features (Matadero Madrid n.d.).

![Figure - 7 Quadratura, Pablo Valbuena.](image-url)
**Ohkay Owingeh:** Unlike many other historic Pueblo settlements, today this site is still inhabited by the Pueblo people and is part of a Native American Reservation. However the outdated infrastructure has made it difficult for residents to live there full time and the number of inhabited homes had fallen from 200 to 25. In 2004 the Ohkay Owingeh Housing Authority in collaboration with the New Mexico Historic Preservation Division, and Atkin Olshin Shade architects began restoring the Pueblo to make it more habitable for the residents. Shawn Evans of AOS noted that it was important that they site be restored to respect the wishes of the residents “Symbolically, the place is timeless, but these are fully contemporary people, and it was paramount to the leaders of Ohkay Owingeh that it be fully living again.” Spiritual Leader John Cruz noted that buildings to the Pueblo are seen as ‘living’ things that “evolve with those that occupy them” which conflicted with current preservation practice. Because of this during the restoration the NM Historic Preservation Division relaxed their standards of specifying a period of significance. The new project features the rehabilitation of 46 existing homes as well as the reconstruction of over a dozen new homes constructed on historic footprints in accordance with design guidelines developed with the tribal leaders. Compromises between historic integrity and occupancy were made. While the walls of the structures had suffered many improper repairs with cement stucco which were replaced with original mud adobe, many homes also needed additions to meet HUD occupancy standards. Window sizes were enlarged for fire safety, and modern HVAC and MEP systems were put in place along with new kitchen facilities. Through consultation with tribal leaders the Pueblo site was restored in a way the fitted the beliefs and lifestyles of the residents allowing many to move back into the Pueblo and enliven activity there again (Karaim 2015).
Figure -8  Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo Renovation, AOS.

Figure -9  AOS Master Plan for Ohkay Owingeh
Sharswood Thick Narrative

In the case of the new transformation plan for the Sharswood neighborhood of North Philly, the Philadelphia Housing Authority is repeating this common pattern. In several of their reports they have referred to the neighborhood as ‘blighted’ and their own Norman Blumberg housing project which has existed in this area since 1965 as ‘distressed’. The project itself is the PHA’s most ambitious in their history, along with the redevelopment of their own superblock site, their plan involves taking over 1300 properties through eminent domain in order to redevelop them as 1200 units of housing, as well as some commercial spaces. While most of these lots are currently vacant, the PHA estimates that there are around 73 that are currently occupied. In a recent interview the PHA one representative argued that the neighborhood had been ‘blighted’ for over 30 years and the residents failed to revitalize it, so why should they get to stay? Byblanketing both the neighborhood and the residents with the term ‘blight’ they are doing serious damage to the community and the people, undermining the rich history of the area, the hopes and aspirations of the residents and the investment and value they place on the neighborhood as their home. At the same time they are absolving themselves of all responsibility in the decline of the neighborhood and neglecting the fact the failure of the neighborhood is more indicative of much broader historical social and political movements of which the PHA played a role. In the diachronic mapping of Sharswood this project seeks to fill up the ‘blank slate’ of the neighborhood to transcend its current condition and show the tabula inscripta of its past. (PHA, 2015)

Although much has been publicized about the homeowners that are losing their properties to the plan, little has been mentioned about the 1225 residents of the Blumberg towers who have already been vacated, either to other PHA sites or given housing choice vouchers. Many residents feel a strong connection to this place and have chosen to be relocated to other sites in North Philly, and while public housing is intended as a stepping stone to progress many families have lived at Norman Blumberg for multi generations. This
project seeks to look beyond the built environment and instead at the building environment at the Norman Blumberg site, analyzing it as a tabula inscripta, that acknowledges the dynamic narratives that have played out over the sites through time (Philadelphia Housing Authority 2015).

As can be seen in historic maps and aerial photographs, before the erection of the Norman Blumberg towers the site consisted of 8 traditional Philadelphia row house style blocks. By 1965 the site is cleared, but demolition plans reveal that there was already a significant number of vacant lots. In 1967 the towers were the last of the large high-rise projects to be created, and were reluctantly erected in a last ditch effort by the PHA to provide for public housing demand in the city. Photographs from the early 1970's reveal that by then the site was already riddled with graffiti as the neighborhood around it deteriorated. A fortress in a low rise neighborhood it gained the reputation for drug activity and violence. Many Residents were single mothers on public assistance and while public housing was intended as a stepping stone to better situations, many residents have lived there for multiple generations and feel a strong sense of community and support living with people of a similar economic situation. As per the stipulation of earlier legislation the maintenance costs of these sites were intended to be covered by the rents of the tenants. But as many tenants were reliant on public assistance, this was not possible and the Blumberg site became a maintenance nightmare for the PHA. In 2015 the towers were vacated in preparation for their demolition, many residents chose to be relocated to other projects in North Philly to maintain proximity to their neighborhood, the Senior tower is to be renovated and not demolished as many residents voiced a strong desire to return to their units (Bauman 2012) (Bauman 1987) (Vale 2013) (Martin, Moore and Schindler 2015).

In order to gain a fuller picture of the history of the superblock site it is important to place it into context with both the historical narratives associated with the Philadelphia
Housing Authority as well as the larger context of the neighborhood of Sharswood. From 1860 on it is a working class neighborhood of German Immigrants that establish traditional two and three story row homes, churches, businesses and factories as the city grid is expanded northward. By 1934 the neighborhood is mostly African American as the first great migration drove many from the rural south to urban areas in the north seeking work. This leads to the development of a vibrant Jazz scene along Columbia Avenue that becomes known as the “Golden Strip”, this is extended down Ridge Avenue with the establishment of the Pearl Theater and other nightclubs, hotels and Restaurants. As north Philly becomes increasingly segregated tensions between police and residents mount and culminate in the 1964 Race Riots. Many businesses don’t recover and leads to an emptying out of the commercial corridors in Sharswood. 1967 the Norman Blumberg Apartments are opened, this includes 510 units to be rented to poor African American residents. Through the 1970 and 80’s Population and employment decline as the inner city poor become increasingly isolated as jobs and middle class Philadelphians leave for the suburbs. Leading to an increase in vacancy among neighborhood blocks. In the early 2000’s the Neighborhood Transformation Initiative sees the demolition of thousands of abandoned city row homes, leaving 35 acres of vacant lots in the neighborhood. In response the neighborhood has recently begun a process of reclaiming the land for themselves, establishing community gardens and public spaces on many of the abandoned lots. Additionally developers have turned many blocks into more suburban style home ownership areas (Historic Preservation Studio 2015) (Bauman, Public Housing 2012).

The Bulk of the PHA’s housing projects were constructed between 1938 and 1974 that included a total of 45 project sites. Only 14 of these however contained high-rises and these were constructed between 1952-1967. Since 1995 however the PHA has begun a process of demolishing these sites and redeveloping them as mixed income neighborhoods. So far 9 of the original 14 high-rise sites have been demolished. The PHA has utilized several different
By 1895 the site of the future superblock was subdivided into 8 regular city blocks and infilled with row homes. The 1967 demolition plan shows that by that time there was already a significant amount of vacant lots on the site.

1967 The Norman Blumberg apartments were erected in a community already hollowed by riots. Although originally planned to be smaller it was expanded to meet the growing need for affordable housing for African American Residents.

With the growing rate of vacancy in the neighborhood the Superblock site became a fortress for gang and drug activity and soon became known for crime and vandalism.

While public housing was intended as a weigh station, for families to live for up to 7 years many relocate in preparation for the demolition of the towers. Many families chose to re-generations. Although it is known for crime and locate to other north Philly projects such abandonment many families feel a strong sense as Raymond Rosen in order to maintain of community living with people in a similar proximity to their original neighborhood situation.

In 2015 all 1225 residents were forced to relocate in preparation for the demolition of the towers. Many families chose to relocate to other north Philly projects such as Raymond Rosen in order to maintain proximity to their original neighborhood.

Figure 10 Norman Blumberg Historical Timeline.
Philadelphia Public Housing

1937 Housing Act. State legislature creates the PHA to manage the creation of Public Housing in Philadelphia. Most of these housing sites were segregated based on the neighborhood composition.

1942 Responding to increased housing demand for wartime workers, four new projects are created for white residents.

1930-1967 While attempts were made to construct smaller, more integrated housing projects, protests by white neighbors prevented this. In order to cope with the increased demand for public housing among poor African Americans, high-rise projects were created in poor neighborhoods.

Support for large-scale projects declined and with a new CEO, the PHA began redeveloping their old high-rise sites. Resulting in a net loss of public housing units.

By 2009 they owned 4400 occupied and 1500 abandoned sites.

Figure -11 PHA Historical Timeline.
Sharswood

German neighborhood, small industrial operations and rowhomes develop as the city pushes northward. By 1934 the neighborhood is mostly African American migrants from south. Jazz scene emerges known as “Golden Strip.” Tensions between black population and police culminate in 1964 race riots, decimating businesses along Ridge and Columbia. 1967 the Norman Blumberg Apartments are opened. A 2001 anti violence center is created leading to an increase in vacant lots in North Philly. Today many of these same vacant lots have been reclaimed by remaining residents as informal community gardens.

Figure 12 Sharswood Historical Timeline.
typologies of housing throughout its history, although it contributed a great number of units to the public housing inventory, High-rise construction was used sparingly as it was seen as detracting from Philadelphia’s “city of homes” reputation. High-rises were generally used in low-income areas that would pose little resistance to their construction. 1937 Federal Housing Act provided programs to encourage home ownership to the middle class while providing for Public housing for the poor. This led to the subsequent creation of the PHA by the state legislature to manage the development of public housing in the city. The act recommended that the new housing should fit with the prevailing racial composition of the neighborhood and therefore led to deeply segregated housing projects. While initially many of the projects were for African Americans such as the Richard Allen Homes, during WWII the PHA shifted to creating white projects in more affluent neighborhoods to support the growing demand by wartime workers.

After the war as ‘white flight’ deepened the isolation of poor African Americans in the city, urban renewal efforts to help revitalize ‘blighted’ neighborhoods led to the clearance of many ‘slum’ areas of the city. The 1954 housing act required housing authorities to construct one for one replacement housing units for every one taken through public action, leading to a surge in housing projects between 1954 and 1960. While efforts were made by city housing coordinator William Rafsky to scatter most sites in smaller low density projects in transitional neighborhoods to mitigate concentrated poverty, an increasing demand for housing and resistance by white neighborhoods led to the construction of several High Rise developments in poor neighborhoods including Norman Blumberg. By this time High-rise super block constructions already had a bad reputation for vandalism and crime, and these projects were reluctantly constructed. The PHA then turned its attention to its “used house” program which would flip existing abandoned row houses in the city to be managed as public housing scattered sites. By 2009 the PHA had 4400 scattered sites that were occupied, but about 1500
that were abandoned. HUD therefore authorized them to sell off about 1800 properties to the public. As the majority of public housing residents became those dependent on public assistance the PHA was unable to recover the cost of maintenance from tenant rents creating a maintenance backlog. This happened in cities throughout the country due largely to failures in HUD policies and funding cuts. Programs around the turn of the century were created by HUD such as Hope VI and CNI to combat this problem and provide for the redevelopment of these sites into lower density ‘new urbanist’ style housing. The PHA however has been candid about the fact that although these properties may ‘look nice’ on the outside, there has been little affect on the lives of the residents themselves and that housing does little to improve the situations of those living in poverty (Bauman 2012) (BHP 2015) (Briggs 2014) (Vale 2013) (Bauman 1987).

When you overlay all the layers of change on the site, we see a tabula inscripta of the history that has played out on the neighborhood through time and that this neighborhood is not monolithically ‘blighted’ but part of an ongoing and dynamic process of change that includes both positive and negative heritage. Looking more closely at the Blumberg site, we see the superblock as a microcosm of this story. Referring back to Till’s concept of ‘thick time’, we can understand these multiple narratives, jazz and African American cultural heritage, civil rights, public housing, ‘workshop of the world’, etc., as being part of one continuum that converges on the present and extends to any number of possible futures. By overlaying historical narratives with mapping exercises we see the dynamic relationship between people and place, and the processes by which the building environment is constantly in a state of rebuilding through human agency. This thesis therefore will combat monolithic narratives of place by redefining Sharswood and the Norman Blumberg site as a tabula inscripta, and understands any new intervention is simply another entry in its history that will evolve into multiple futures. Design methodology will therefore focus on utilizing the dynamic processes
of change that are revealed through this diachronic analysis of Blumberg, and deploying that to respond to the pressing needs of today in a way that enables them to better facilitate change again in the future.

**Figure -13** Sharswood Tabula Inscripta.


**Project Scope and Methodology**

As can be seen from the narrative mapping exercises of the history of Sharswood/Blumberg, the changes in the building fabric of the neighborhood have been closely linked to changes in demographics, policy, economics and use that coincides with historical events and places. Any intervention made today therefore will be subject to these same forces and will inevitably change. The challenge therefore is to anticipate this change and to design with an allowance for it. Although occupancy cannot be fully anticipated in the future, what is known is that these will change in some way, resulting in operations of addition, modification or subtraction into the built environment. Rather than trying to design completely open-ended spaces that are optimized to suit a variety of unforeseeable uses, this thesis will design in ways that accept these processes as part of their eventual future. In order to design fourth dimensionally this project will utilize the narratives that cause change, the architectural mechanisms that change, and the differing degrees of change that can occur.

**Design Process:**

As is shown by the *tabula inscripta* of Sharswood, any given state of the built environment is simply one in a sequence that embodies changes in the enabling factors surrounding the site. This concept can be applied to the future as well. Any one state can be thought of as a function of the previous state and the enabling factors for change, as changes in the conditions of the neighborhood effect change in the built fabric. Diachronic design therefore does not produce a single moment, but a sequence of moments in the life of a building. In order to produce this, this thesis will begin with the narrative to design tools to facilitate a continual process of change that respond to fluctuating conditions. The design process will enfold as follows:

1. Narrative Storyboarding: Considering the historic narratives, project a series of possible future narratives that may unfold on the site, how does this effect the buildings?
2. Identify Policies and Infrastructural elements that will facilitate change. Understand how these systems will be deployed at the master planning and building scales.

3. Thinking about materials and construction methods as well as spatial and programming strategies identify degrees to which these elements must change.

4. Project How this system will respond to changing conditions in the long term.

**Scope:** This project will therefore produce not just one response but multiple that shows the evolution of the Blumberg site over time. Looking at its future morphological changes as responses to the changes in social, political, natural, economic and technological fluctuations. This project will aim to understand the way the building environment is being built and rebuilt through human interaction. It will identify the broader changes in master planning and policy to spatial organization and circulation and eventually take a more detailed look at the materials and assemblies that can facilitate change. As a public housing site it will look for a design approach that in its flexibility negotiates between the varied future narratives of Sharswood while also providing resiliency for affordable housing against future displacement.

**Site/Conditions:** This project will consider the building and rebuilding of the superblock site as it relates to the neighborhood of Sharswood. It is approximately a 10 acre site that currently hosts two 18 story reinforced concrete towers, one 13 story concrete tower and 15 wood frame two and three story structures. This includes 510 residential units for a mixture of single and family residents, as well as a community center and outdoor recreation space. The areas immediately adjacent to the superblock contain a mixture of two and three story row homes as well as vacant lots that are all in various states of repair.
**Narrative Studies**

What is revealed by the historical narratives of the Sharswood neighborhood is that much of the development and changes that have occurred have been a result of significant changes in population and density as well as a push and pull between top-down and bottom-up interests. For that reason possible future scenarios were determined by weighing those two factors against each other to produce four possible narratives. The first being top-down and increasing in density is considered the “Gentrification” narrative, the second is the “Suburban” narrative top-down and decreasing in density, the third is the “Christiania” narrative bottom-up and increasing in density, and the fourth is the “Killadelphia” narrative bottom-up and decreasing in density. In order to study these changes more closely the current array of actors that were operating in the neighborhood were mapped and a series of vignettes were identified which best exemplifies these activities. These areas were then compiled into a

![Figure - 14 Narrative Matrix.](image_url)
composite streetscape of the neighborhood that represents all of the relationships between actors and the places they are effecting in the community. This was then used to show change overtime in the neighborhood based on the four narratives, these were played out over a span of thirty years to study how the built environment and the people may be effected if each of these were to occur. The goal in this study is not to determine what narrative is going to be the correct one, but to understand that each of these is equally plausible and rather to weigh the pros and cons of each in order to design a solution that will better adapt to these changes and provide opportunities that encourage positive changes to occur.
Figure -15  Sharswood Actor Map.
MARKET PRESSURES ENCROACH FROM OUTSIDE

YUPPIES BUILD CUSTOM INFILL HOUSING

MARKET PRESSURES SEE DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER DENSITY BLDGS

YOUNG PROFESSIONALS INCREASE AS COST OF LIVING INCREASES

BLUM IS DEMOLISHED AND REPLACED WITH NEW LUXURY HIGH RISES

LAND VALUES INCREASE AND URBAN FARMING IS REPLACED WITH NEW CONDOS

YUPPIES BUILD CUSTOM INFILL HOUSING

URBAN FARMING COMMUNITY CONTINUES TO ATTRACT YOUNGER GENERATION

NEW MIXED USE APT BUILDING

BLUM IS SOLD TO DEVELOPER, APPTS ARE RENTED AS MARKET RATE

SMALL DEVELOPERS BUY UP EMPTY LOTS

NEW IMMIGRANT BUSINESSES OPEN UP

PHA HAS $8MIL MAINTENANCE BACKLOG WITH BLUMBERG AND IS READY TO DEMO

KOZONE SEES CONSTRUCTION OF SUBURBAN HOMES

Figure -16 Gentrification Narrative Map.
SMALL DEVELOPERS BUY UP SWATHS OF VACANT LOTS
CONDITIONS DECLINE IN EXISTING BUILDINGS MAKING IT MORE DIFFICULT TO REHAB
PHA DEMOLISHES VACANT BUILDINGS ON RIDGE AVENUE
BIG BOX STORE BUILDS CHAIN ALONG RIDGE AVENUE
REMAINING RESIDENTS LEAVE AND SELLOUT TO DEVELOPER
LARGE ESTATES ARE PUT IN PLACE OF OLD ROW HOMES
STRIP MALLS AND BOX STORES ARE EXPANDED ALONG RIDGE AVENUE
PEACE PARK IS CONVERTED TO A FORMAL MONUMENTAL PARK
BLUMBERG IS DEMOLISHED AND REPLACED WITH LIHTC
PEACE PARK ORGANIZERS DECLINE AS ORIGINAL RESIDENTS LEAVE
MAINTENANCE BACKLOG AND HIGH CRIME MOTIVATE PHA TO GET RID OF BLUMBERG
KOZONE SPURS SUBURBAN STYLE DEVELOPMENT
MARKET PRESSURES SEE FRINGE REVITALIZATION
SMALL DEVELOPER SELLS OUT TO LARGE AND BLOCKS ARE DEMOLISHED AND REDEVELOPED AT A LOWER DENSITY

Figure 17 Suburban Narrative.
**Gentrification:** This narrative expands upon events already occurring in the community such as the growing market pressures from the neighboring areas of Brewerytown and Francisville as well as the fact that many small time developers took advantage of opportunities to purchase vacant lots in the neighborhood a few years back when the PHA was looking to sell off their unused properties. At the same time the Keystone Opportunity Zone that extends down the eastern edge of Sharswood has spurred the construction of suburban style affordable housing developments. This narrative looks at the potential for these factors to encourage small infill developments in the near future that snowball into larger scale developments that ultimately have the effect of displacing current residents and ultimately much of the historic fabric that makes Sharswood attractive in the first place. Ultimately small three story rowhomes give rise to high density luxury residential high rises that attract wealthy professionals, replacing the current cast of public housing residents and longtime homeowners. Top-down development interests dominate and the result is effectively erasure.

**Suburban:** This studies the effects of densification under top-down development influences. As the KOZ area has already provided incentives for developers to build lower density suburban style development and there is a large number of vacant lots in the neighborhood providing further opportunities for development it is perhaps not unimaginable what the community would look like if this pattern were to continue into the future. Large swaths of vacant lots and sparsely spaced degrading rowhomes would be leveled and replaced with cookie-cutter single family and duplex style dwellings, property values would eventually increase and the PHA would eventually demolish the Blumberg towers and scatter public housing throughout the neighborhood. Ridge avenue historic storefront row homes would be replaced with large scale big box stores that enable opportunities for parking and outside traffic and take away opportunities for small businesses. In the end the result is a homogenized building stock as well as a homogenous set of people.
“Christiania”

Figure 18  Informal Narrative.
"Killadelphia"

Figure -19  Ruin Narrative.

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**Christiania:** In the spirit of the autonomous community in Denmark, this narrative plays up informal grassroots initiatives. The prevalence of vacant lots and buildings has provided opportunities for the community to reclaim these as public space or just expansions of their own dwellings. The North Philadelphia Peace Park is a good example of this where through community organizing and activism several vacant lots were reclaimed by the community for use as a communal garden, providing access to fresh fruits and vegetables to a food desert as well as after school activities for idle kids of the neighborhood. Spinning off of these activities, this narrative looks at ways the building environment will change with a lack of top-down forces such as zoning and building codes, and instead favors informal grassroots gestures that aggregate over-time. What is revealed here is the full force of the “commons” that allows for new uses that can spur economic activity such as pop-up markets and conversions of homes to commercial needs, it also provides outlets for the residents themselves to create their own means of affordable housing. The end result is a collage of new and old additions as the “commons” is reclaimed gradually overtime.

**Killadelphia:** “Killadelphia” refers to the large incidence of violent crime that occurs in the city often as a result of drug activity. In the 1970’s this narrative was already being played out in Sharswood, in the wake of the race riots and the erection of the Blumberg towers the neighborhood was plagued by high vacancy rates and deteriorating conditions and ultimately the prevalence of gang activity. By the 1990’s and early 2000’s as the war on drugs saw an increase in police activity, arrests and ultimately violence. Today while the neighborhood is beginning to recover, it is perhaps not completely inconceivable to image if this narrative were to persist and dominate into the future. Current homeowners would continue to flee, eventually spreading to the new homeowners in the KOZ area and perhaps even the PHA would pack up and leave, demolishing the towers without replacement. In the end even the drug dealers would leave as there would be no buildings and no people, it would revert back to a pastoral landscape.
Take Aways:

- Vacant lots and “commons” space provide opportunities for the neighborhood to reclaim space for public use or improvements.
- Early stages of gentrification provide dynamic mixture of old and new, as homes are rehabbed or infilled on a smaller scale, and small businesses are supported along the commercial corridor.
- Lack of building or zoning codes allow for more flexible and inventive solutions on the part of the residents to adapt to change.
- The most building fabric was retained in both bottom-up narratives, in the informal additive processes saw the existing buildings as infrastructures to new add-ons, in the Killadelphia narrative while neglect eventually led to the demolition of much of the fabric, because the buildings were not subject to development pressures much of it was retained intact until the end.
- De-densification yields less dynamic sets of actors as well as building environment.
- Top-down development yields displacement of current residents, favoring wealthier actors and tabula rasa style redevelopment.
- Like the informal narrative, vacancy provides opportunities for bottom up to insert itself, in this case however illegal activities.
- In all narrative the building environment was subject to change
Figure 20  Takeways from Narrative Studies.
Design and Concept

Approach: While the four narratives pose significant challenges to the future of the neighborhood, as each one is equally as plausible as the next the goal of this project will not be to select one as the narrative of the future, but instead use these as a tool for analysis. This will be used to propose an intervention that effectively creates a fifth and alternate narrative responding to the pros and cons of each scenario played out before. The general approach for this project seeks to effectively re-design a new model for affordable/public housing in the city. Leveraging the existing prevalence of vacant lots or “commons” spaces as well as address the variety of building and lot conditions it will provide an intervention that is flexible enough to negotiate between the various narratives that may play out in the future while providing resiliency to provide a place for the current public housing and neighborhood residents in the future of Sharswood regardless of what other changes occur.

This approach will maximize on already occurring activities within commons spaces such as urban farming, pop-up markets, art installations and building to create a sustainable system that will provide an equitable infrastructure for these actions to continue into the future. The goal is to promote a continual process of building and rebuilding that is initiated and negotiated by the residents themselves. In this way the approach will provide enough flexibility to respond to changing conditions, while also having the resiliency to last in the long term.
Figure -21 Commons and Use Diagram.
**Thick Canopy:** This project proposes a new infrastructural system that combines ideas behind building canopy systems that are often used to protect deteriorating buildings as well as plug-in architectures that have parasitic relationships to existing structures and “wheel estate” which uses ideas of prefabrication and moveability. Combined, these strategies create an infrastructure that works more like a tree canopy, with cores that act like tree trunks that branch out to provide key utility sources to units. This also creates interstitial space between cores and units, or “commons” space that provides opportunities for expansion of housing and commercial space. This structure is intended to begin by attaching to existing buildings starting at the superblock and available vacant row houses that are transformed into public usage. Overtime the space between these sites and the super block can grow and fill in creating fingers of development in the neighborhood, these can also be easily retracted and return to a base state, responding to changes in population.

![Overall Master Plan](image-url)

**Figure -22** Overall Master Plan.
Sharswood Land Trust: In order to encourage a continual process of building and rebuilding by the residents and more bottom-up participation, it was important to not only design the physical structures that facilitate this but also the policy and social organizational strategies that would encourage this. In many cities community land trusts have been promoted as the answer to preserve affordability in low-income neighborhoods in the face of gentrification. In this system land is held by a third party, usually a non-profit who then builds housing that is sold to residents for a lower cost. Residents own the homes, but no the land its on and the re-sale price is capped so that it will always be resold at an affordable price. This ensures that the land is always available for affordability. The problem with this system is that it may discourage residents from investing in their properties and engaging in communal activities, as they are perceived as temporary residents and the land itself is always owned by someone else. By pairing the strategy of a community land trust with the spatial condition of the commons and the “thick canopy” concept this project seeks to create a building environment that is constantly being reconfigured and reorganized by the residents. In this system commons space and publicly own land in Sharswood is consolidated under a CLT and the third party builds cores with utility infrastructure creating a series of micro grids across the urban landscape. Residents can plug-in their new homes or connect existing row-homes to these cores in order to tap into these resources and effectively opt-in to the land trust. Residents are directly responsible for participating in the building of their own homes and participating in commoning activities such as urban farming or entrepreneurship.
Publicly Owned Property

Vacant Lots and Buildings

PHA, PRA, SDOP

Land Bank

Community Land Trust

Figure -23 Land Trust Diagram.

HUD

$$

CLT

Micro Grid

Infrastructure

Commons

Homes

Activity

Residents

Figure -24 Organizational Diagram.
The Micro Grid: In this scenario micro grids are initiated through the stabilization of existing buildings in need of repair. In north Philly many row homes quickly decay once their roof has been compromised, rather than simply patching the existing roof, a new canopy is added that floats above the existing structure. Equipped with building integrated photovoltaics this canopy instantly begins to generate energy and establish a new micro grid. Cores are then placed outside the buildings that serve as storage and distribution centers for this energy. Additionally utilities are also centralized within the core such as hot water tanks and furnaces and distributed among, units new and existing, that tap into this grid. In this way the cores act to create clusters of housing that congregate around a common resource. The residents therefore instantly share a common bond around this and it encourages acts of commoning that activate the communal courtyards created around the cores.
Materials and Construction: In order to enable the residents to play an active role in the design and construction of their homes, the basement of the Norman Blumberg apartments is to be retrofitted to become a manufacturing facility for the fabrication of building components. As the more permanent entities the cores will be made of reinforced concrete poured in place on the site. The homes however will be made of manufactured Cross Laminated Timber Panels that are both structural and weather tight. These panels can be made of lumber recycled from demolition or construction waste and are easily recycled again. Base housing units will be constructed in three different typologies that can be expanded as needed later by the residents. The less flexible programming elements will be centralized such as the kitchens and vertical circulation, leaving the more ambiguous programming to the periphery.

Figure -26 Building Assemblies and Base Housing Typologies.
Figure -27  Garden Cluster Evolution Diagram.
Figure -28  Market Cluster Evolution Diagram.
Figure -29  Housing Cluster Evolution Diagram.
Figure -30 Master Plan Evolution.
**Blumberg:** In order to provide for the expansion of the public housing units in the Norman Blumberg towers, and enable them to be reconfigured to behave more like the housing clusters on the ground an additional bay is to be added to the front of the balconies of the high-rise. This will enable CLT floors and ceilings to be clipped on to provide a platform for the expansion of the units. In order to allow for the towers to remain occupied throughout any renovation phase, the retrofitting of the interior units will be incremental as residents have the option to purchase their apartments and opt-in to the land trust. Entire apartments can then be completely reconfigured from studio to three bedroom units while leaving their neighbors completely intact.

**Phasing:** In the initial phase of the master plan the Blumberg tower will be retrofitted with the additional bay and the fabrication lab will be placed in the basement. Additionally a community kitchen will be established in the vacant cornerstore to establish the “market cluster” and a greenhouse will be placed between two vacant houses to create the “garden cluster”, solar panels and cores will also be placed in each cluster to establish initial micro grids. In the second phase new housing units begin to attach to the cores and new units in Blumberg are configured from the old. In phase 3 these units begin to expand into the commons spaces and new units begin to stack up the Blumberg tower. In phase 4 new cores are established as the old one’s max out their capacity.

*“The Long Now”:* While an understanding of how this system will grow was thoroughly considered in the studies above, how this would decline was also studied. Because the cores are the most durable components it is the intension that they last well beyond the maintenance of human agency. In this way they are always available to the re-equipped and activated to become a station for development again. The housing being made of wood materials is easily recycled or degraded by natural weathering processes. But new homes can always be reconstructed again if the cores are re-activated in the future.
Figure - 31  Master Plan Section Showing the Evolution of the Neighborhood.
Figure -32  Re-Photography Render of Nassau St.

Figure -33  - Market Cluster Render Re-Photography.

Figure -34  Blumberg Cluster Rise and Decline Render.
Conclusions and Reflections

*How can designers respond to ‘time’ in their interventions in the building environment?*

In close reflection upon my process and experiences working with the Sharswood community, I keep coming back to the provocation by Jamie Kalvin that preservationists (and for the purposes of this thesis architects) to “look beyond the built environment.” While superficially this thesis raises questions regarding time and adaptability, the core question is about people and their relationship with place. Whether or not it is pro-actively designed for, as with this project and those of my case studies such as the Potteries Thinkbelt, the built environment will always be in a constant state of becoming, is never finished and constantly being modified by the those who live there.

This project accepts this change as a given and then proceeds to propose strategies that will promote a continual process of building and rebuilding orchestrated by the residents themselves. Architecturally this proposal provides vital infrastructures that will be stable and available to development in the future and resist decay in times of decline. Additionally the design provides spatial conditions that congregate residents around collective resources and break down property lines to create ambiguous spaces for common use. In this way, the project creates a new model for public/affordable housing that looks beyond typical models of property ownership, which favor middle/upper class individuals, or rental markets that can be unstable in the face of gentrification. By implementing a modified land trust this thesis proposes a hybrid structure that enables residents to take ownership of their homes and participate in its continual modification, while understanding that any occupancy is only temporary in the long run. This project therefore can distinguish itself from typical architectural projects in its acceptance of its eventual evolution and decline, and in its twofold approach, designing both the physical infrastructures that make the place and also the policy to facilitate its continual functioning.

When thinking about “socially responsible” design, and particularly with issues
of public housing, the question often arises as to what can architecture truly do? One key argument behind the demolition of the infamous Pruitt Igoe public housing projects is that architecture can do little to effect positive change in the lives of those living in poverty and its decline was due mostly to social and political issues. The PHA has also admitted that changing the architectural composition of their projects from the big high-rises to “new urbanist” housing has done little to change the lives of their residents and many of the same issues with poverty and crime persist. That their new developments are effectively “just pretty housing”. This provides an opportunity for architects to rethink the way that they practice, to look beyond the formal to the social.

This project seeks to address this by proposing not just architectural solutions but also organizational systems to facilitate social activity. Latent in this thesis is the provocation that architects must think across long durations and scales to effect greater change both socially and physically. By limiting design to mere formal exploration, the discipline effectively limits the capacity of architecture. The project combats this because it is not the design of a static piece of architecture or a means to preserve an aging building intact for generations to come, rather it is the design of a process.

While many architecture precedents that addressed the question of temporality proposed more “radical” and theoretical solutions. By thinking seriously about the people and buildings that already inhabit Sharswood, this thesis arrives at a solution that is subtle in its architectural moves, but exceptionally more radical in its reimagining of the way people occupy it. By understanding the “building environment” this project recognizes the futility in the construction of large top-down projects. Instead this project proposes small and dispersed utility cores that both re-activate existing buildings and provide opportunities to add new. This decentralization both maximizes the involvement the residents have in the continual rebuilding of their neighborhood, but also creates an environment that is resilient against
cycles of rise and decline.

In conclusion this project suggests that in order for designers to successfully think in four dimensions they must “go beyond the built environment” to the building environment, designing with the people and the processes that continually effect change instead of one-off architectural objects. This project therefore proposes a new model for affordable housing that counters current “tabula rasa” style plans with a multifaceted approach that thinks both organizationally and architecturally about the mechanisms that are needed to create this reality. If both the architecture and preservation professionals are to better respond to time and alternative histories, their core concepts and tools that they use must be reimagined, and they must be willing to scale back their approach to allow for more participation from the community. In this way designers are not aspiring to be the authors of places but contributors to larger negotiations that continue from the past and on into the future.
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