

Teaching Ethics & Empathy

Housing Design for the Unhoused

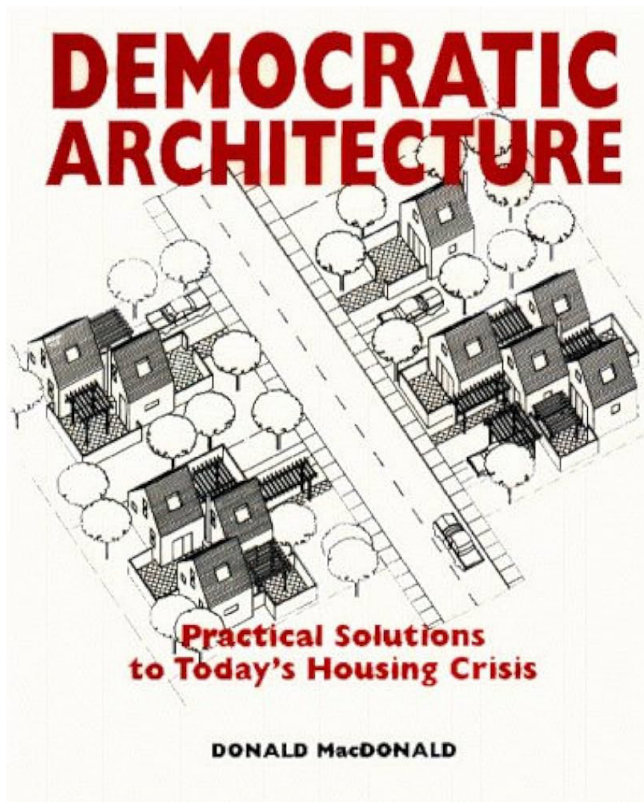
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Associate Professor
Mississippi State University

**2025 ACSA/AIA Intersections
Research Conference:
NEW HOUSING PARADIGMS**

Starkville Strong

Housing Resource Center

READINGS



Chapter One

A HOME FOR EVERYONE

FAILURES IN PLANNING

Until the late 1970s the usual approach to providing low-income, and even some middle-income, housing was to build large institution-like projects, crowding in as many units as possible. The majority were concrete and steel boxes, benefiting little—if at all—from architectural amenities. Psychologist Robert Sommer described the mentality behind them:

"In mental hospitals of the early 1950s [when many of the projects were built], the line was, 'If you give the patients anything nice, they won't take care of it.' For public housing tenants it went, 'If you provide good architecture, they won't appreciate it.' There is the same denigrating we/they dichotomy in all these assessments of people's response to their surroundings. We know what's best for them and they don't. Even if we provide what they say they'd like, they won't take care of it and will probably destroy it."¹

Some projects, however, were designed by distinguished architects, among them Pruitt-Igoe in St. Louis by Minoru Yamasaki and Twin Parks Northeast in New York by Richard Meier and Partners. Pruitt-Igoe, drawing on the Swiss architect Le Corbusier's ideas for urban design, consisted of forty-three eleven-story buildings in a parklike setting. It won a national design award.

The high-rise Twin Parks Northeast was also acclaimed, in this case for the way it was integrated into a neighborhood of low-rise buildings. Today's supporters of contextualism would

Chapter Four

HOMES FOR THE ROOFLESS

If only the government will change its attitude to housing, will remember that a house is the visible symbol of a family's identity, the most important material possession a man can ever have, the enduring witness to his existence, its lack one of the most potent causes of civil discontent and conversely its possession one of the most effective guarantees of social stability.

Hassan Fathy²

FROM REFUGEE TO RENTER

After the devastating San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906, the city's park director, the United States Army, and a relief organization joined forces to build 5610 shacks to house people rendered homeless by the disaster. Ranging in size from 140 to 375 square feet, these "earthquake cottages" or "refugee shacks" were simple one-room wood-frame structures, with wood floors, board-and-batten siding painted green, shingle roofing, and unfinished interiors. They had no plumbing, insulation, or heat, but a wood- and coal-burning stove was provided if the tenant installed a patent chimney. Most were erected at refugee camps established with communal kitchens and toilets in city parks and squares. At one point 16,448 people lived in the cottages.

Tenancy was restricted to people who had never owned homes, and it was decided that the cottages would afford them the opportunity to do so. They were to be sold to the tenants for

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READINGS

Trebek Center Bridge Housing

DNA Architecture + Design



'Impactful and beautiful': how US homeless shelters are getting a radical redesign



📷 The main room of the Path Home Family Village in Portland, Oregon, sets a new standard for design of homeless shelters. It's chic, with soothing colors and curvy partitions that encourage both privacy and community. Photograph: Aaron Leitz

New approach focuses on how physical environment

Advertisement

Architect, https://www.architectmagazine.com/project-gallery/trebek-center-bridge-housing_o, 21 December, 2021

The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jun/26/us-homeless-shelters-redesign>, 26 June 2023

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READINGS

RESIDENTIAL

Small Houses, Big Impact

Two microhome developments in Texas combat homelessness with community.

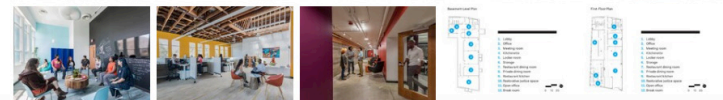
By MADELEINE D'ANGELO



Leonid Furmanskyy

Restore Oakland

Designing Justice + Designing Spaces



Architect, https://www.architectmagazine.com/design/small-houses-big-impact_o, 07 April, 2021

Architect, https://www.architectmagazine.com/project-gallery/restore-oakland_o#Restore%20Oakland%20Designing%20Justice%20+%20Designing%20Spaces, 30 November 2020

Housing Hustle

Exercises about Housing Insecurity



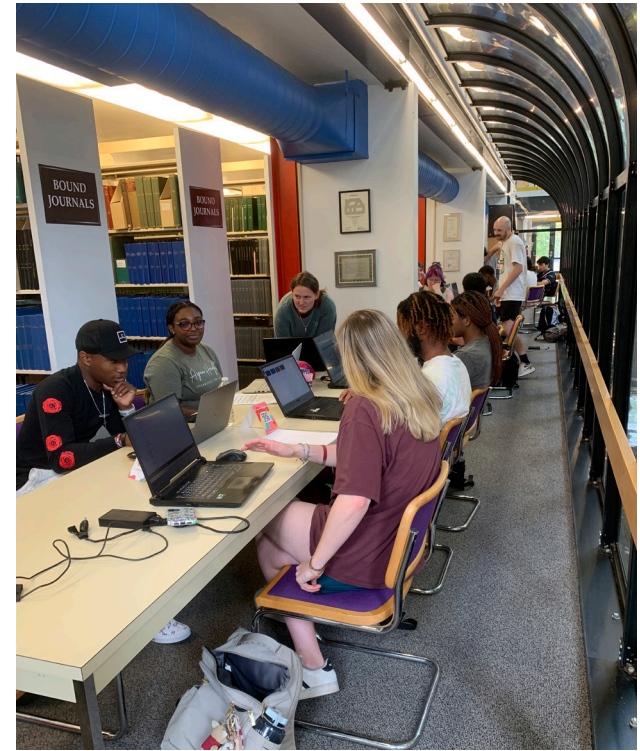
Hospitality Hub

Examples of Housing Resource Center



Teamwork

Student Collaborative Teams



The Program

Housing Resource Center

ASSIGNMENT 2: Housing Resource Center



Eva's Phoenix – Toronto, Ontario
LGA Architectural Partners



Bridge Homeless Shelter – Dallas, TX
Overland Partners Architects & Camargo Copeland Architects

Assigned: Monday, August 21, 2023
Due: Friday, September 1st at the beginning of class

Learning Outcomes:

At the completion of this assignment, a student will be able to:

- Conceptualize design as spatial organizations responding to scale and multiple units
- Design with introductory environmental building systems
- Design with an introductory response to egress and accessibility codes
- Be proficient in Adobe Cloud and Rhino

Assignment:

The second exercise of the semester is a collaborative design for a housing resource center in Starkville. We will be working with Starkville Strong to assess their needs, visit the proposed site for the project, and to better understand what they would like the project to achieve. Students will be organized into teams to work as a group on a proposal for the housing resource center and site design.

The project has four main components: (1) an office for the Starkville Strong staff, (2) a food pantry, (3) an overnight shelter for their clients who are experiencing housing insecurity, and (4) a site design to have outdoor space for the clients of Starkville Strong and limited parking for the staff. The office must

include a meeting room which will be used for various events like classes that help Starkville residents facing housing insecurity apply for housing, learning how to create a resume, and apply for jobs. The project is meant to be open and inviting while still secure and safe. Visual security, dignity, comfort, and community are paramount to the design.

Each studio section will be split into four groups and each group will collaboratively design the Housing Resource Center and the required site additions. There will be twelve total options for the Housing Resource Center.

Program – Housing Resource Center (total of 6,200 SF):

- Reception Area – 200 SF
- Offices – 2 at 150 SF each
- Breakroom for staff – 200 SF
- Meeting room for 15 people – 300 SF
- Office Restroom – 100 SF
- Food pantry with reception desk and food storage (non-perishable and perishable) – 1,000 SF
- Overnight sleeping accommodations – 4,100 SF to include the following
 - Shared handicapped accessible bathing facilities and restrooms for all clients – SF based on number of code requirements for plumbing fixtures and spacing needed for accessibility
 - Shared laundry facilities for all clients – 200 SF
 - Shared cooking facilities for all clients – 200 SF
 - Individual spaces with individual access for a variety of clients from single people to families with children
 - Must include beds for each person and lockable storage
 - Both family-oriented and single-occupancy rooms should be provided
 - ADA accessibility must be provided
 - All rooms should be flexible enough to allow for a variety of occupancies

Deliverables

- Site plan
- Floor plan
- Furniture plan
- Exterior elevations
- Interior elevations
- Longitudinal building section
- Transverse building section
- Exterior renderings of key views to reinforce ideas of dignity, comfort, security, and community
- Interior renderings of all important spaces

Readings:

Various links to readings and project examples on Canvas. **Come to class on Wednesday, August 23rd prepared to discuss the readings.**

Presentations

to Starkville Strong



Continued

Collaboration



Precedents

AIA Housing Award Winning Projects



Gramercy Senior Housing, Los Angeles, CA/Kevin Daly Architects



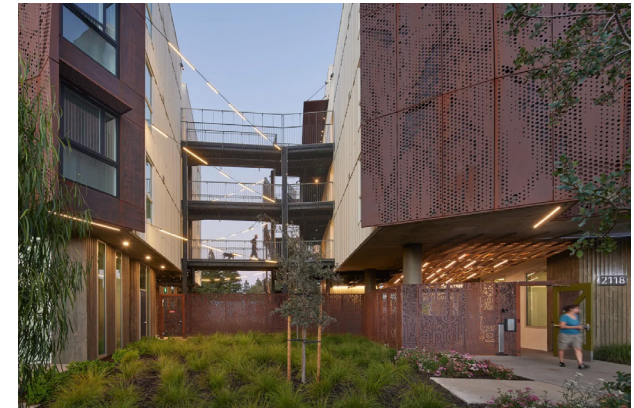
Sister Lillian Murphy, San Francisco, CA/Paulette Taggart Architects



The Six Disabled Veterans Housing, Los Angeles, CA/ Brooks + Scarpa



Nesika Illahee, Portland, OR/Carleton Hart Architecture

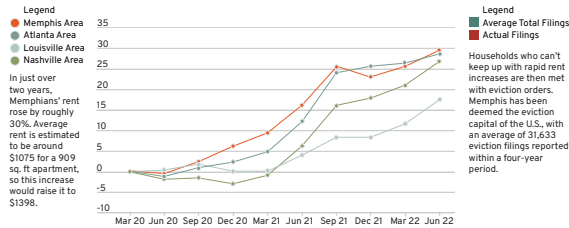


Blue Oak Landing, Vallejo, CA/ David Baker Architects

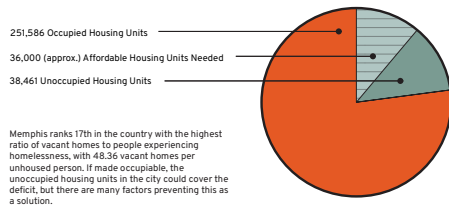
Site Analysis

Memphis, TN Location - Social

ANALYSIS AND DIAGRAMMING | Social

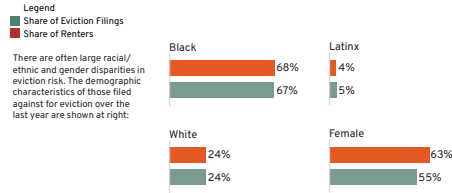


Rent Increase Percentage in Southern U.S. Cities



Existing Housing Units in Memphis vs. Affordable Unit Deficit

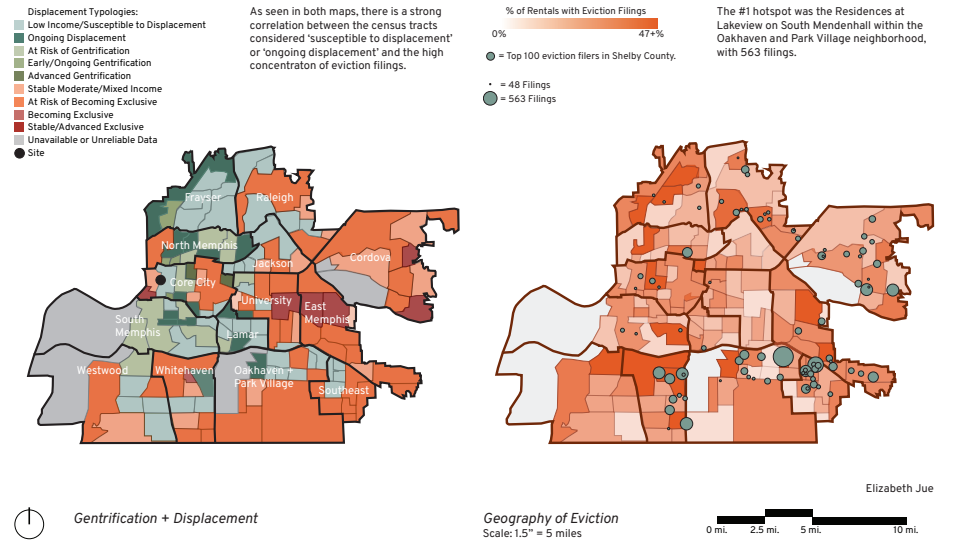
Monthly Eviction Filings



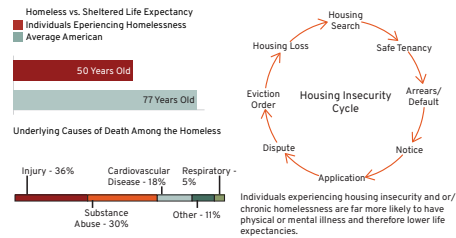
Eviction Filings by Defendant Race/Ethnicity and Gender

Elizabeth Jue

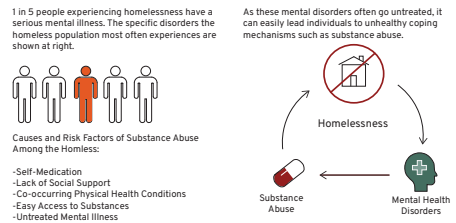
ANALYSIS AND DIAGRAMMING | Social



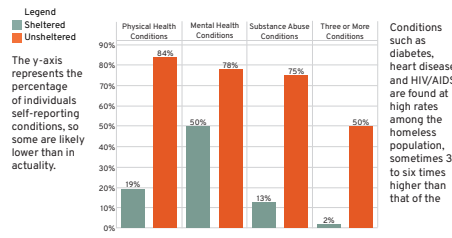
ANALYSIS AND DIAGRAMMING | Social



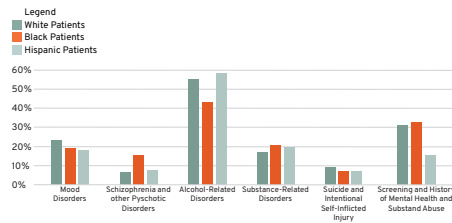
Housing Instability and Its Relation to Homeless Mortality



Homelessness, Mental Health Disorders, and Substance Abuse



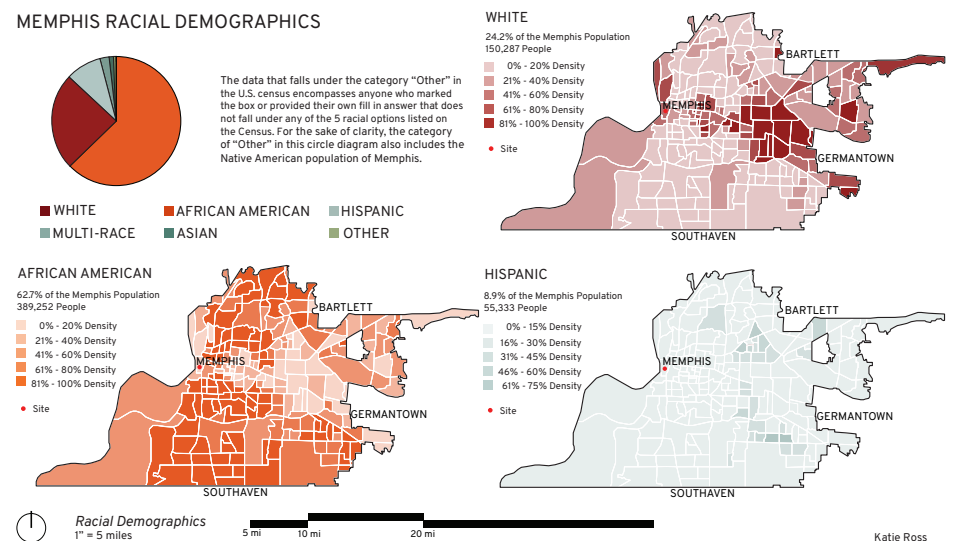
Sheltered vs. Unsheltered Self-Reported Health Conditions



Clinical Profile of Discharges for Homeless at Hospital-Affiliated Emergency Departments

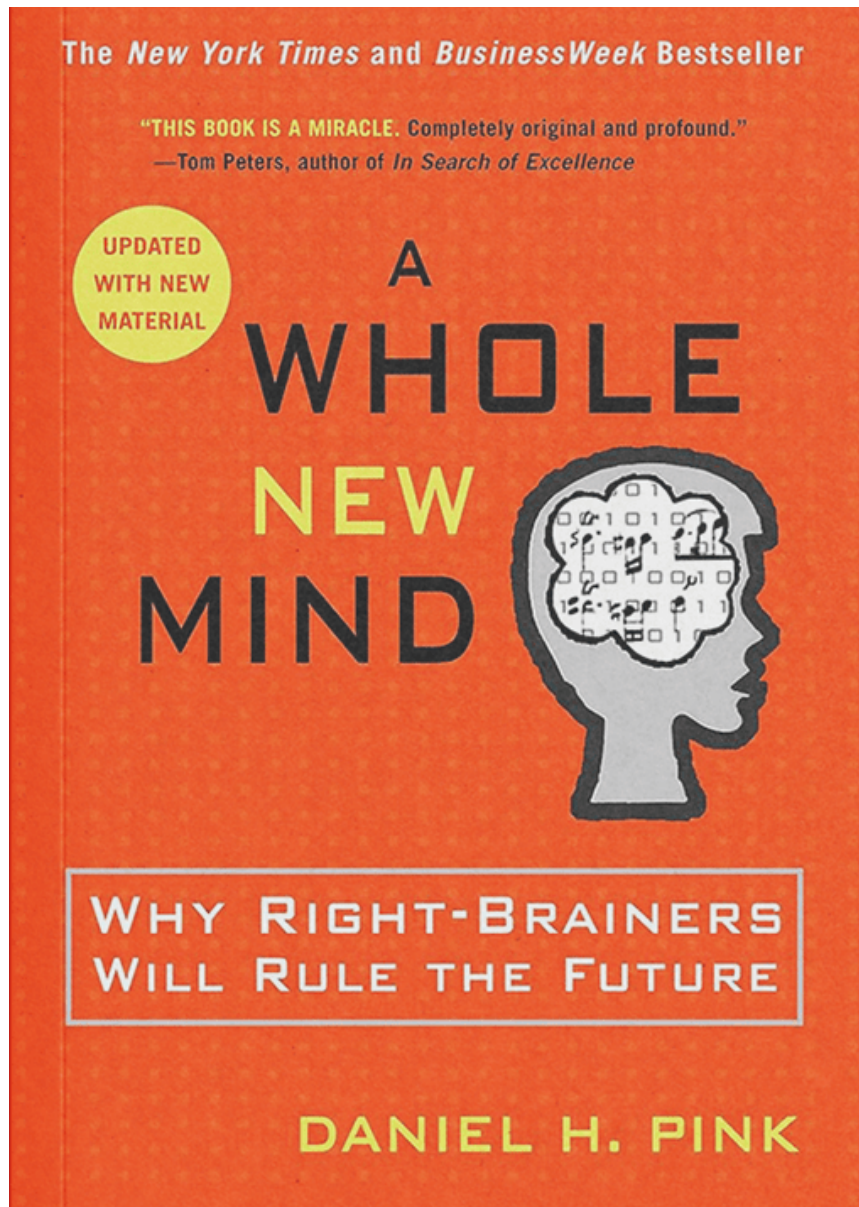
Elizabeth Jue

ANALYSIS AND DIAGRAMMING | Social



Client & Concept

Empathy Exercises



Protagonist Stories

1. Write a Mini-Saga – No more than 50 words are allowed.
2. Whip Out the Tape Recorder – No tape recorder is needed here, but you will be interviewing a classmate and creating another story from the information you learn. Students will be randomly paired with another student in the studio.
3. Riff on Opening Lines – Take the opening line you chose in class and write a story evolving from this opening line. Students will create an opening line and then they will be randomly exchanged with another student in the studio.
4. Play Photo Finish – Find an image from a magazine, newspaper, your own photos, online and craft a story based on what is going on in this photo. Include the image in the exercise.
5. Ask Yourself: “Who Are These People?” – Students are to go to the Drill Field and people watch for at least one hour and observe two people for the resulting story. Do not make contact with the people being used for the story, but instead see what you can figure out by observation.

Client & Concept

Empathy Exercises



FINAL CONCEPT: LIGHT HOUSE

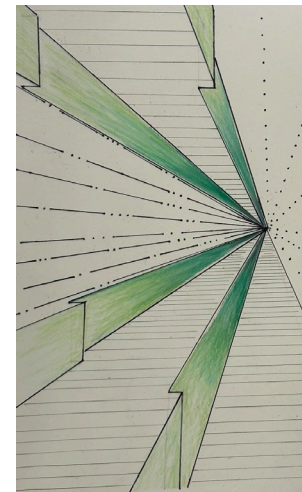
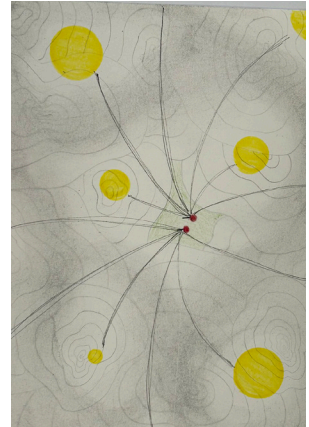
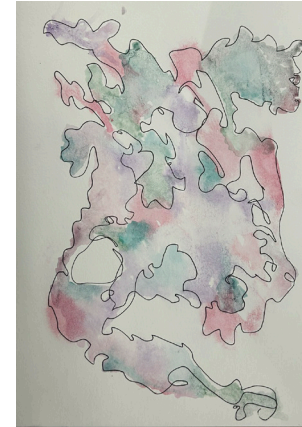
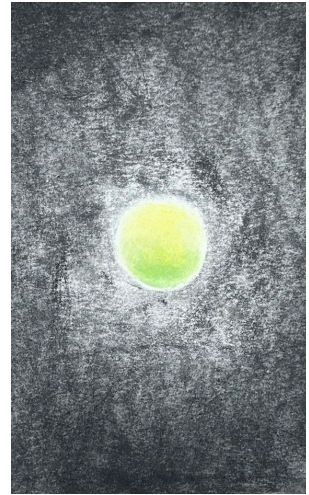
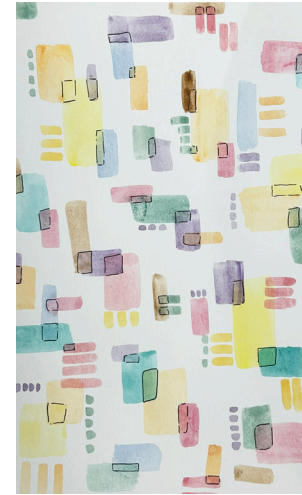
"Lighthouses are not just stone, brick, metal, and glass. There's a human story at every light-house; that's the story I want to tell."

- Elinor DeWire

"A lighthouse doesn't save the ships; it doesn't go out and rescue them, it's just this pillar that helps to guide people home." - Lea Michele

"I can think of no other edifice constructed by man as altruistic as a lighthouse. They were built only to serve." - George Bernard Shaw

Parents want to play the pillar of light in their children's lives. There is a depth of knowledge that comes from having to grow up too fast, and it can be beneficial to help young minds navigate the world around them. Light house values transparency and protection much like parents.



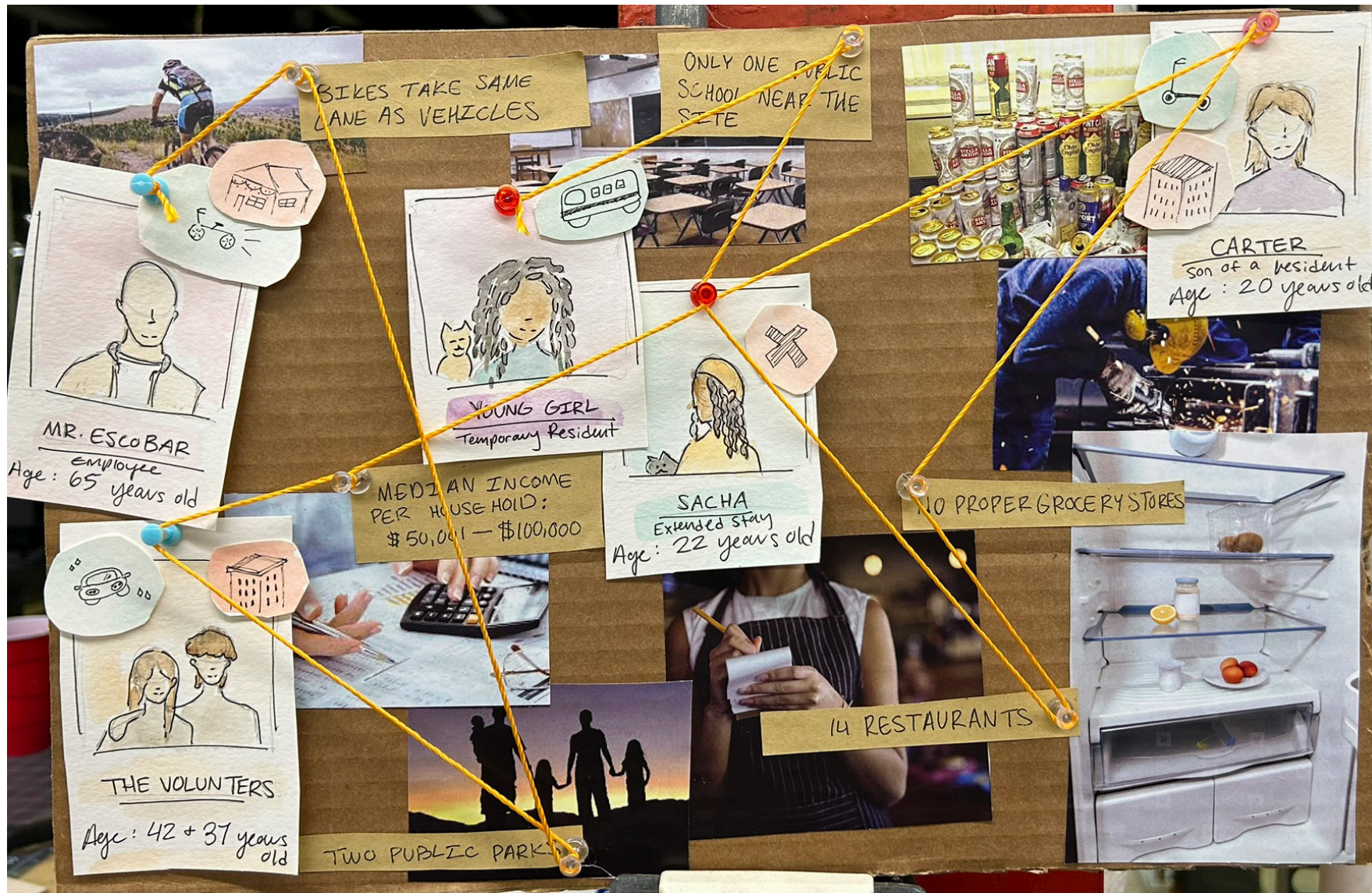
Play Photo Finish

"*Maybe one more day won't hurt.* He thought to himself as he peddled back to the complex."

Jo Aguilar

Client & Concept

Empathy Exercises

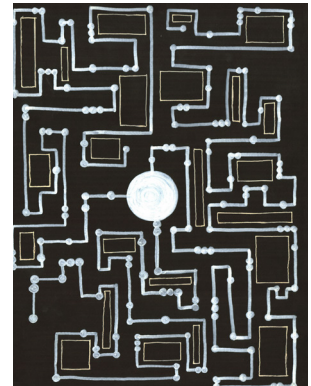
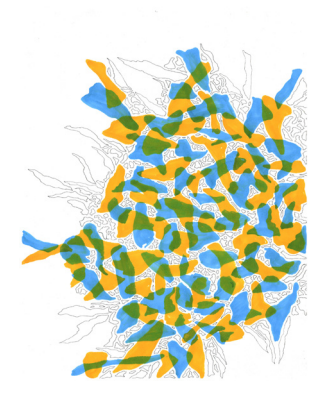
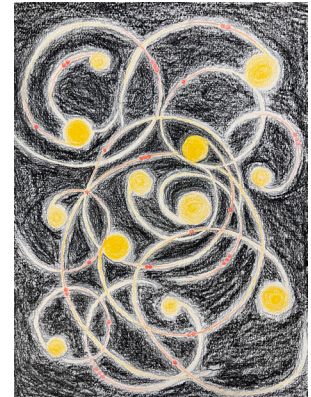
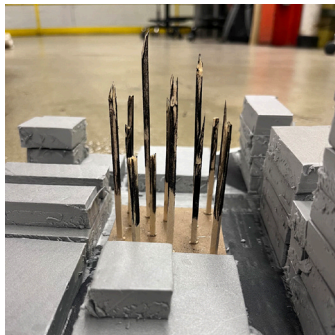
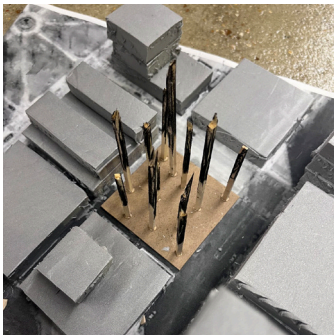
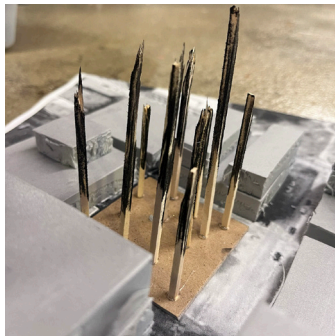


Client & Concept

Empathy Exercises

ASHEN

Forest fires, while devastating, are a source of new life. Fertile soils come from ashes. Growth and abundance can arise where burned trees stand. How does architecture reflect both decay and rebirth?



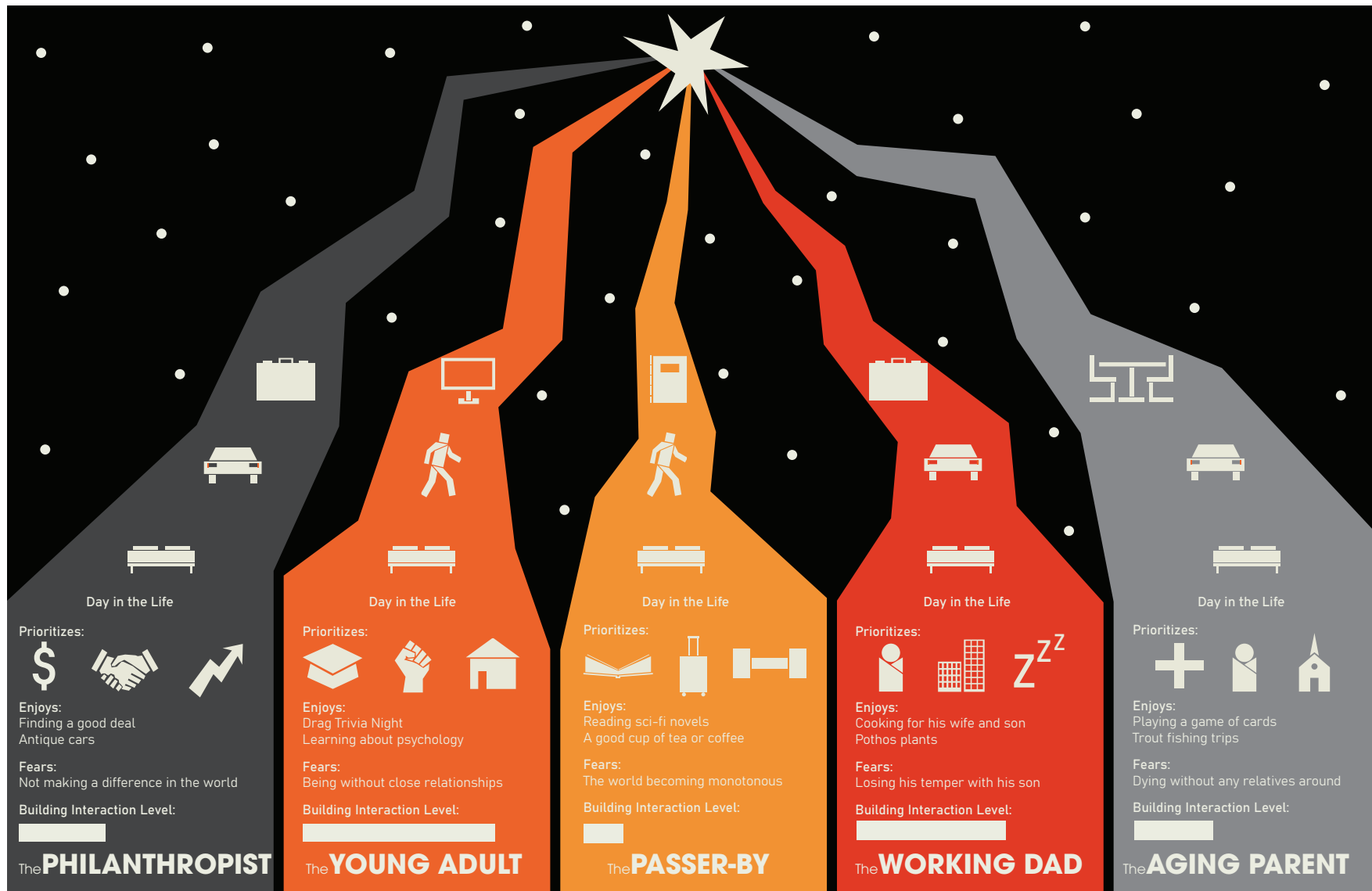
Mini Saga

"I was like them, once. A place like this would have made all the difference to the person I used to be, some thirty years ago. I cannot give a home to the boy I was, so I give it instead to the reflections of him I see around me."

Jay Snodgrass

Client & Concept

Empathy Exercises



Client & Concept

Empathy Exercises

INDIVIDUALITY IN THE URBAN FABRIC

Caught in the midst of the contemporary divisive urban fabric the individual suffers from the intense mono-cultural efforts of a society at large. Society must ask itself: How does the individual remain separate from the collective?



THE ATTORNEY | SINGLE OWNER

PROFILE

A young man losing the idealism of his youth. A slow realization of his mere incapability to solve problems larger than himself is setting in, contributing to his chronic alcoholism and coffee addiction. How do you solve problems the world does not want you to solve?

NEEDS

AFFORDABILITY
PARKING
AMENITIES (GYM/POOL/BAR)
WORK SPACE
PROXIMITY TO LIKE DEMOGRAPHIC



PESSIMISM

THE YOUNG MOTHER | RENTER

PROFILE

A young woman caught in a struggle with an addictive past. Unable to locate employment herself, her husband is forced to work longer hours. Her only hope for the future rests in the hands of her two young children. How do you persevere under a lack of tolerance?

NEEDS

AFFORDABILITY
DISCRETION
SAFETY
PROXIMITY TO SCHOOLS
COMMUNITY



THE JANITOR | STAFF

PROFILE

A middle-aged man reaching a point of crisis in his life. He cleans up the waste left to him by the collective's frays. He is needed by all, but seeming loved by none. It is right to question if society would be anything without him. How do you preserve a society which is against you?

NEEDS

CONVENIENCE
PARKING
AMENITIES (GYM/BAR/PARK)
COMPETITIVE PAY
SAFETY



THE CHILDREN | DEPENDENTS

PROFILE

A blank slate. The unaltered mind of the child is imaginative and pre-occupied, not so with the concerns of this world, but with that of so many others. Maybe we should listen to what they have to say instead of constraining their beliefs. Does individual imagination still matter?

NEEDS

RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER RESIDENTS
EDUCATION
PROXIMITY TO COMMUNITY SPACES
OUTDOOR ACCESS
DEPENDABLE RESIDENCE



THE CAREGIVER

PROFILE

A mother figure. She is engaged in the relationship with those individuals who have been cast out of the institution of this society. Why would they want to rejoin what has never loved them? How could they care for her? How do you unconditionally care?

NEEDS

LOCATION
PUBLIC TRANSIT
PLACE TO DECOMPRESS
WORK SPACE
COMPETITIVE PAY



OPTIMISM

Ask Yourself: "Who Are These People?"

"It was far and few in-between they came here. They both knew what they wanted, but didn't know how exactly to say it. Friends. That's what he told himself. We are just friends. Her pace quickened she wasn't trying to get away from him, she just wanted to match his speed. She could feel he was in pain. What else could she have done here though. "Stop." She said. There was a moment of pause. She looked deep into his eyes and he into hers. She hugged him. He froze. Few people ever seemed to care this much. He pushed back and walked away. A tear ran down her cheek. What more could she had done? The rain kept falling."

Peter Fox

The Projects

Mixed-Use, Multi-Family Housing (2022)



The Projects

Mixed-Use, Multi-Family Housing (2023)

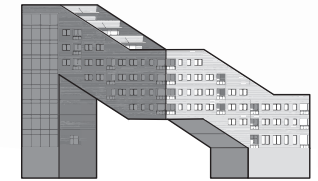
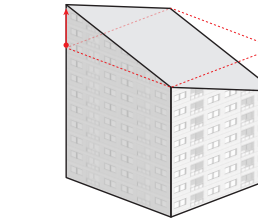
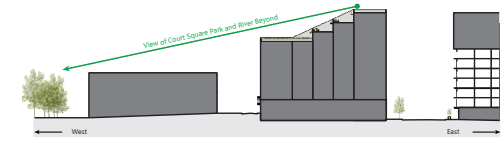
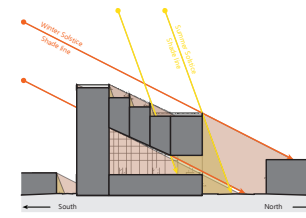


Mackenzie Gibbs

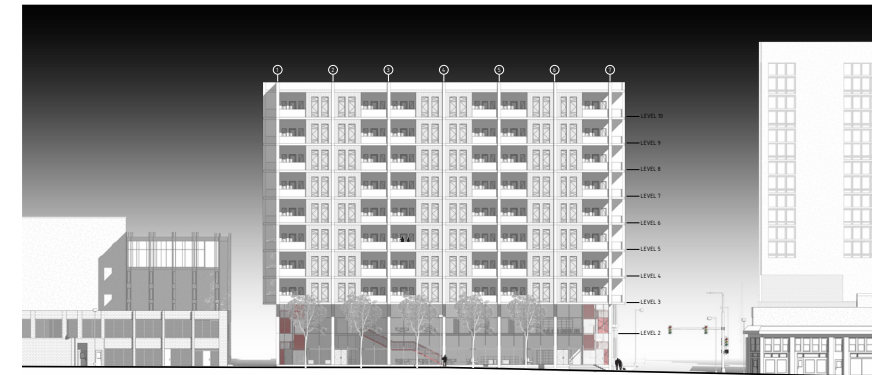


The Projects

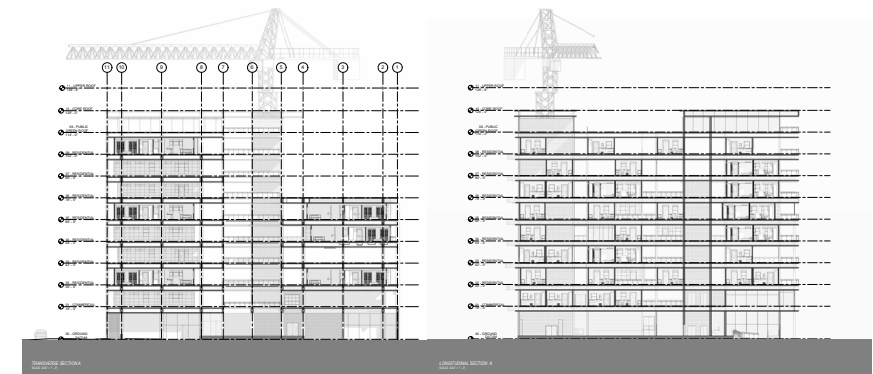
Mixed-Use, Multi-Family Housing (2024)



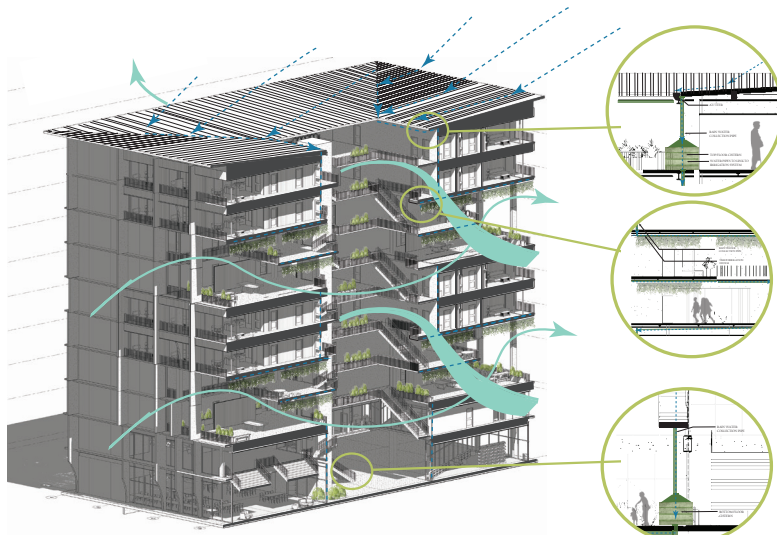
Riley Gamble



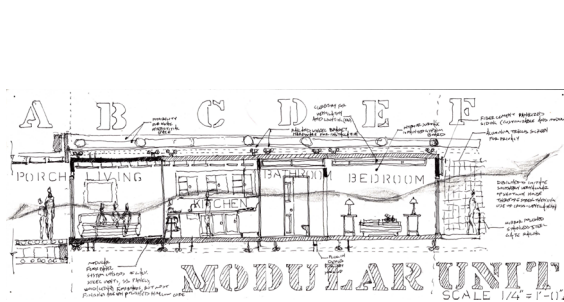
Jay Snodgrass



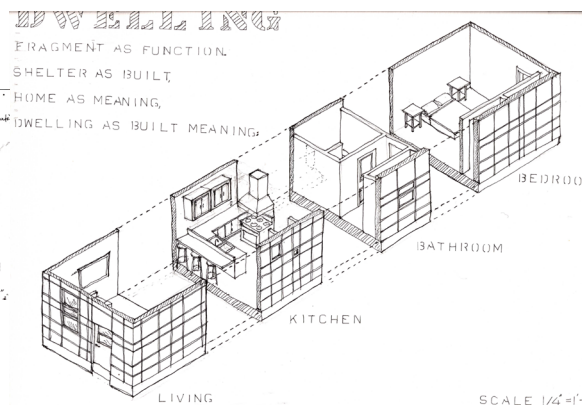
Peter Fox



Megan Andrews



Peter Fox



Conclusions

Lessons Learned

Empathy Exercises

1. Students struggle to decenter themselves and their experiences when doing the Protagonist Stories.
2. The exercises with their classmates often lead to overcoming social barriers and result in new friendships.
3. Students do not always understand the importance of the first project, the Housing Resource Center, with Starkville Strong.
4. Students are more engaged when they select their hypothetical client based on the precedent research. However, they still seem to design based on their own personal experience rather than that of the hypothetical client and “protagonist.”

Conclusions

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Housing Design

1. Students struggle to decenter themselves and their experiences when designing urban housing for low-income clients. They tend to design suburban spaces that we must work with them to understand why they are not appropriate for the housing projects.
2. While students appreciate the importance of the project it is hard for them to balance “cool design” and feasible project ideas for a low-income housing project.