I, Imani Dixon, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Architecture in Architecture.

It is entitled:
Revealing Identity Through the Lens of Appropriation

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Revealing Identity Through the Lens of Appropriation

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ABSTRACT

Historically, African-Americans have had a heavy influence on the construction of American culture and—to a great degree—possess a subculture that is highly visible in creative fields such as literature, fine arts, fashion, music and dance. While the influences in these fields may be easy to decipher from the mainstream, it is not as easy to distinguish the presence of an African-American identity in Architecture. Some theorists and writers have interrogated this concept through evidence of African-originated forms and materials, while others have through the perception of space for the black body. It is clear, however, that signs of African-American cultural identity are evident in many communities throughout the United States, especially in urban environments. While some have a strong visible presence, such as graffiti that descends from hip-hop culture, others are more subtle and may not be identifiable unless bodies are present to imply or suggest space. These uses of space are products of a particular place and time; quite often through complex racial circumstances which many facets of black identity have been born out of.

Architecture has had a significant connection with these circumstances. Often, marginalized communities inherit the built environment of dominant communities who have migrated to other areas. Typically, these groups—pushed into the margins of society—live in areas with limited available resources and consequently construct their own identities, usually through the creative reuse of materials and spaces available to them. The point of inquiry then becomes how identity is assumed and made manifest through this appropriation of materials and space. A uniform identity is not taken on by the marginalized group, but collective memories and shared experiences can define the identity of the group over time. The act of re-purposing space is also a type of resistance for many marginalized groups. For African-Americans in particular, evidence of this resistance can be observed in discussions from the use of African-American Vernacular English to the emergence of music documenting Black life through the present day. For architecture, the appropriation of space and materials can be emancipatory when it allows marginalized groups to seize control of their own communities and establish their own identity.

Feminist critic bell hooks has stated that, “architecture, though one of the least accessible art practices, is the most accessible public art in our nature.” Because the built environment facilitates public life, architecture has the ability to engage with culture and vice versa. This thesis investigates how an understanding of racial and cultural identity can impact the regional architecture of a community in a specific Chicago neighborhood through the lens of spatial and material appropriation. To represent the synthesis of the relationship between Architecture and African-American identity with instances of appropriation in urban environments, this thesis will present a design proposal for a library/cultural center in the predominately African-American neighborhood of South Shore in Chicago, Illinois.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The subject of this thesis is personal to me; as someone who desires representation in subjects that I'm passionate about, it is only natural to investigate a theme that resonates with my personal experiences. Wanting to learn more about myself and where I come from as a Black American—part of a group with a very limited mainstream history of architectural contributions—leads me to an exploration of cultural identity in Architecture. As a minority of both gender and race in architecture academia and even more-so entering into the profession, I find myself identifying with two quite different groups—that of the African-American community, part of an underrepresented group in the decision-making process for the development of our neighborhoods, but also that of the architect and planner community, with the potential power to make decisions that will positively affect my own community and other marginalized groups. Representing these groups led me to becoming increasingly sensitive to humanitarian and social discourses as they pertain to Architecture. This thesis is a way of reconciling with that intersection. I want to thank my parents, Angela Muhammad and Michael Dixon, for their support and always encouraging me to think critically as well as other members of my family, friends and professors who have been active in ensuring my success through years of higher education. I also want to thank the contributions of black architects and academics diligently pushing similar inquiries of Black representation in Architecture who have helped and inspired me.
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Unlike regions where individuals establish a community and create a built environment from a blank slate, cultural identity can be more difficult to decipher in an area that has been inherited by a group it was not primarily intended for, if not much has changed architecturally. The South Shore neighborhood of Chicago, Illinois is a case example due to the various immigrant populations who have inhabited the neighborhood over time. Many buildings in the neighborhood have stayed the same, but the demographics have changed. The question then becomes how the identity of the neighborhood assumes itself, and how to incorporate the nuances of the identity of the individuals who live there into the built environment. Because there was no blank slate to start from with this particular community, the transformation of this urban area is more subtle in terms of the architecture, but an identity can be examined through the means in which individuals manipulate or appropriate space and material to meet their desires. The appropriation of space does not always have to be a visual change in physical structure; it can also be perceived by the events that take place in the area which activate it as a space different than its formalized architectural representation.

This document is organized into four main sections intended to capture a sense of the cultural identity embodied by this evolving neighborhood. These sections are made into chapters on Identity, Appropriation, Transformation, and Assemblage.

The Identity chapter contains literature review on the intersection between African-American collective identity and architecture. This chapter makes references to some of the discourse and representations of “African-American Architecture” that have been documented over time. The Appropriation chapter is an exploration of how materials and spaces have been and can be appropriated, and how an identity can be visually imagined in some of the urban conditions in South Shore. The Transformation chapter is a more detailed outlook on the neighborhood’s transformation over time and its current urban conditions. The Assemblage chapter begins with a detailed site analysis and finally brings the first three chapters together to develop a design process that takes the research and observations of African-American identity, appropriation, and the South Shore neighborhood transformation to design a public community building that embodies all of these aspects connected to the identity of the neighborhood.
Because the Black/African-American experience resonates with other groups of the African diaspora and especially Black Americans around the country as a whole, some aspects of collective black identity, not specific to South Shore, will be part of the literature review in this chapter of the text. Despite the specificity of this particular group of African-Americans in South Shore, the history—including where they came from during the Great Migration and their experience before arrival to the North—cannot be discounted. It is also important to mention that communities on the South Side of Chicago have been no stranger to the discussion of inner city crime, but this problem is a result of poverty and the lack of government funding for schools and programs in these communities, which have historically been neglected in political realms. With this knowledge, this research is intended to be sensitive to historical context, including the political and social climates during the neighborhood’s transformation which will be discussed with more detail in the “Transformation” chapter of the text.

“Essential to the notion of identity is a perception of one’s own existence in the world—a frame of reference by which the individual or group is able to receive, interpret, formulate and communicate modes of behavior and engagement.”

- Edward Ihejirika

01 IDENTITY
Exploring and identifying nuances of the African-American collective experience and how it can apply to the built environment is where this investigation begins. Firstly, it is important to note that many concepts in this thesis can also be applied to other racial and ethnic groups who are marginalized within their societies, especially when tying specifically into the appropriation of material and space. This thesis focuses on African-American identity, as this is the ethnicity of the majority of people in the neighborhood chosen for this topic.

Even with regional differences among African-American experiences, probably most drastically between the North and South during Reconstruction and the Jim Crow era, there are many collective experiences that have shaped—and are shaping—Black life in America. This may not only be from firsthand experiences; it can also be from observations and changes in the country with racial issues as a whole. Even in moving forward and looking towards the future, history and legacy is important to understand where many of these nuances have originated to form a cultural identity.

COLLECTIVE CULTURAL IDENTITIES

To frame what is meant by ‘cultural identity,’ it is useful to define both ‘culture’ and ‘identity’. Raymond Williams, novelist and critic, has three categories for the definition of culture that he lays out in his essay, "The Analysis of Culture." These include the ‘ideal,’ the ‘documentary,’ and the ‘social.’ He sums up these definitions by the following:


There is, first, the ‘ideal’, in which culture is a state or process of human perfection, in terms of certain absolute or universal values. ... Then, second, there is the ‘documentary’, in which culture is the body of intellectual and imaginative work, in which, in a detailed way, human thought and experience are variously recorded. ... Finally, third, there is the ‘social’ definition of culture, in which culture is a description of a particular way of life, a particular culture.

The definition to be referred to most throughout this thesis will be the social definition. Williams expands on this definition with these characteristics. The social definition:
- Expresses meanings in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behavior;
- Always refers to historical criticism. Intellectual and imaginative works are compared to other particular societies and traditions;
- And refers to the structure of the family, organization of production, and structure of institutions which express or govern social relationships in which members of the society communicate.

Because architecture is part of culture, it is important that the proper aspects of cultural identity are present in the architecture of a place. Each individual undoubtedly has their own identity, but a cultural identity is something that they share with others within that culture. They can share this identity based on a variety of principles that certain groups may have in common. Within societies, there are people who share the same historical context and live in proximity to each other. Many of these contexts result in intellectual and creative works that reflect their lives.

2. Ibid, 32.
as individuals but can become part of a collective identity. This section focuses on how African-American identity has been constructed to shape the spaces that were intended or not intended for them and what this means in order to speculate “African-American Architecture” as a variety of possibilities based on that collective identity of African-Americans in a specific location or in America in general.

**‘BLACK’ SPACE**

To a certain extent, cultural identity is subjective. Even as someone who is African-American, it is impossible to speak for what it means to identify as an African-American for every person—there are things that vary between individuals on what it means to belong to this group, not to mention further complexities when discussing the intersection of identities that can accompany the African-American experience. Cultural identities are also constantly changing and evolving over time—they’re not static, and it is imperative to acknowledge this when designing for specific groups. It’s also important to recognize that ‘cultural identity’ is nuanced; every culture is heterogeneous and has outside influences and commonalities with other cultural groups.

Although there are nuances among African-American identity, common experiences have undeniably shaped this identity. Part of it began to take shape when Africans were captured and began their harrowing journey to America through the Middle Passage to work as slaves for the coming generations. This identity has been one of struggle and resistance, and continues to be today, as evident in social justice movements like #BlackLivesMatter. Since Africans arrived to America with no freedom and immediately powerless to the systems of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and White Supremacy, the Black identity in has been one in opposition to whiteness, since the creation of the concept of race. In the essay, “Black Bodies, Black Space: A Waiting Spectacle,” J. Yolande Daniels describes black space from a historical perspective and uses Michel Foucault’s idea on heterotopic space: “the place that is other and yet localizable.” She describes the black experience as one in opposition to whiteness and that of a spectacle. She says “the heterotopic experience is one of loss. In the context of the African diaspora, the mirror is the utopic space distilling ‘whiteness’ in the purge and deluge on to the ‘Black.” She continues with the concept of ‘otherness’ and how this has affected American society:

5. Ibid, 199.

In regards to the black body in architecture and space, that sense of ‘otherness’ is one that lingers and is what inherently makes the discussion of race and culture a political one. It can also be argued that this ‘spectacle’ that has been constructed and is reinforced by the media contributes to the deeper marginalization and stigma of African-American communities. A psychological—and sometimes physical—location of ‘otherness’ is imposed on the black body.

While not discussed often, contemporary black culture in America has had

5. Ibid, 199.
a close relationship with the Modern Architecture movement. Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier, one of the most influential architects of the 20th century and known as a pioneer of Modern Architecture, designed a masterplan for Paris, called Ville Radieuse, or The Radiant City (1924). It is well-known as a descendant of a modern social housing typology—large, high density, symmetrical towers that were designed for improving the lives of residents with access to green space, sunlight and effective transportation. Though this masterplan was never realized, partly because of the controversy of its social implications, other architects and planners were inspired by his solution to urban housing and constructed housing typologies similar to that of Le Corbusier’s masterplan. Housing largely underserved African-American populations, many of these plans, such as Pruitt-Igoe in St. Louis and Cabrini-Green in Chicago have been demolished, becoming “incubators of poverty and crime.”

Michael Ford, the “Hip-Hop Architect,” has dedicated his professional and academic career towards what he calls “Hip-Hop Architecture.” In a 2017 TED Talk entitled “Hip Hop Architecture: The Post Occupancy Report of Modernism,” he argues that the connection between hip-hop (black) culture and Modern Architecture is undeniable. Ford defines hip-hop architecture as “a critique of modernism” because hip-hop culture was birthed through the social commentary on urban conditions. Early forms of hip-hop culture, including rap music, were performed by black people who shared their experiences with these living conditions. New York City is widely regarded as the birthplace of hip-hop and it is in social housing constructed by builder, Robert

8. Ibid.
inspired by Corbusier’s masterplan—where hip-hop is said to have started, 1520 Sedgwick Avenue in particular:

I call [Robert Moses’] implementation of Corbusier’s plan the worst remix, or sample, in history. ... Those translucent prisms of glass and vast lawns would become concrete jungles. The prisms of glass would become monotonous brick towers. This typology would become the typology that defined low-income housing across the nation.10

This critical analysis of Modern Architecture opens up some context for an aspect of contemporary African-American culture, which is that of hip-hop. In analyzing socio-cultural experiences in regards to architecture, there is an opportunity to explore an alternative to traditional Western concepts of space and architecture and towards one that is keen to the experience of those who were affected by the failures of Modern Architecture.

ARCHITECTURE FOR MARGINALIZED GROUPS

One’s ability to access space and/or the ability to perceive it are a result of social circumstances and largely what informs individual and shared identities. This means that individuals and societies can view space in different ways, which informs major consequences in the way space is designed for specific groups of people. Craig Wilkins discusses this in his book, *The Aesthetics of Equity: Notes on Race, Space, Architecture and Music*. Because space is constructed differently among cultures, it is important that architectural design addresses the unique needs of these groups when space is designed for them. Because African-Americans are a marginalized group who typically live in proximity to each other, a “one size fits all” approach will not be able to address the needs of their communities. Wilkins argues against the seemingly “natural” spatial organization of American society:

...I have become increasingly convinced that current notions of space, rather than facilitating, actually impede solutions to long-standing urban conditions in any meaningful and substantive way. In our case, the power of American culture is embodied in a spatial organization that determines who will live where and why, and in physical manifestations that decide exactly what particular architectural forms will symbolize and why. These seemingly ‘natural’ decisions, are, in truth, anything but.11

Individuals are socialized to fit into the current methods of bounding space that are imposed on them, but processes and applications of architectural design exist that are customizable and vary, dependent on its context. It seems to be known that a complete disregard of the cultural, historical, social and environmental contexts can result in failure in terms of financial and credibility loss for architects and designers. What seems to be the most important, however, is the failure in providing dignity through design for the intended group of people. Architects have the skill set to design and provide solutions but the experts on lived life in the built environment are the individuals who interact with it daily. A project resonating with this subject is Chilean architect and 2016 Pritzker Prize winner Alejandro Aravena’s multi-family social housing in Iquique, Chile, Quinta Monroy (2004). To cut costs and allow expansion, a common design exists for every unit but they are also designed to include space that provides the opportunity for customization and improvement to the homes by the tenants.12 A similar typology is employed in another of his housing projects in Constitución, Chile, Villa Verde (2013).13 Advantages in this typology include efficient

10. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
use of space for budgeting of social housing, but this application also allows the freedom to express the identity of those who inhabit the housing—having a space to call home that is unique to a family or group of individuals sharing it. While the transformation of space in this housing is intentional, historical ways of appropriating space and materials for those with limited resources and applying this opportunity to architectural design is essential to the popularity and success of Aravena’s design.

**CONTEXTUALIZATION / DECONTEXTUALIZATION**

As stated earlier, some investigations of African-American or Black identity in Architecture have been analyzed contextually, taking specific groups in the African diaspora and their history into account, while others have been analyzed by starting decontextually. The decontextualization of African-American identity, in particular, can be a starting point for substantial change in cultural identity inclusiveness in Architecture. Displacement is a part of African-American cultural identity and Africa is sometimes used in reference to African-American heritage. Concerned with finding a Black aesthetic distinguishable from mainstream architecture, Jack Travis, an African-American architect based in New York City, has studied blackness in Architecture primarily through visual and tactile means. His brand of African-American Architecture comprises of Afrocentric symbols and motifs on a small scale, applying them to his interior design work. Although his work is classified here as decontextualization, this is only where it begins from a tactile point of view. What makes African-American culture so unique is the history that accompanies it. Different groups of Africans from the diaspora have distinguishing cultural identities—even in America, cities and neighborhoods with higher populations of Black Caribbeans and Black Africans are

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unique from those that are predominately African-American; region and climate can affect this as well. However, referring to an identity that was stolen from a people can be empowering. African-Americans naming their children African names, for example, even without a direct connection to Africa, have shown power in reclamation and a sense of belonging. Tactile means of identifying Black Architecture may manage to give power to those who have a desire for racial and cultural representation, even for architects who use their own identity as part of their design style or process.

We are so connected and so transformed as African Americans. But what is it that binds us as black people worldwide? It is our African-ness. So for me, I go back to the continent. I go back to Kemet, I go back to Egypt, North Africa; then I go back to Zimbabwe and South Africa.”

In this quote, Travis’ description of his Afrocentric approach is seemingly more of an agglomeration of various African styles—surprisingly with West African countries not being mentioned, where many African-Americans and other African descendants of slaves have lineage. Researching deeper into his work, however, it is clear that he finds the context of the environment being designed for very significant. His work includes what is called 10 Principles for Black Culture Design. These principles are named as the following:

1. Economy
2. Simplicity
3. Ease of Construction
4. Ease of Maintenance
5. Spirituality
6. Heritage
7. Duality or Irony of the Condition

8. Earth Centered / Earth Nurturing
9. Strong Indoor / Outdoor Relationship
10. Intense Use of Color, Pattern and Texture

These principles are subdivided into groups: The first three Travis states as basic infrastructure that is often missing in black communities. Ease of maintenance is self-explanatory, and takes a lesson from some of the social housing that has failed black communities. Principles 5 through 7 Travis lists as “…basic specifics that, in their manifestations, tend to differentiate and thus can act to celebrate black culture in ways that differentiate from other cultures particularly Euro-centric or Western culture.” The last set of principles are basic themes relating to successful environmental design. Jack Travis’ brand of architecture is a perspective of the reclamation of his own African identity and how he applies it to design. It can be argued that his brand of architecture is an appropriation of African styles, but there is power in the reclamation of an identity that was never afforded to many in the African diaspora. The 10 principles also add more depth to his design philosophy making his visual work more profound.

REPRESENTATION

In her essay, “If We were a People Much Given to Revealing Secrets,” Mabel Wilson identifies four types of memories—individual memory, having to do with personal experiences; social memory which is the shared history of the particular group, family or neighborhood, collective memory, and public memory. Social, collective, and public memories are manifested in architecture in diverse ways.

17. Ibid.
The shotgun house is one of the oldest and most popular building types that can attest to African-American identity in Architecture. The shotgun house is a simple and straightforward housing typology in which the linear organization of rooms allows one to walk through each space from the front to the back of the home. These houses not only historically reflect the aesthetics of black life in the South, but their spatial concepts can speak to ways this identity has been recreated in African-American life moving from rural to urban areas. Critical spaces for this housing type, especially the porch, can be created through different contemporary spatial experiences. The porch, being a transition space where one can enjoy the outdoors while being covered and protected, is a threshold of domestic private space to public space.

Today, the most traditional manifestation of recollection in architecture is through typologies of public memory, such as memorials and museums. The Smithsonian National African-American Museum of History and Culture in Washington D.C. is one of the most recent examples. While the building is quite monumental and visually and materialistically includes facets of African motifs\(^\text{19}\), there is also an understanding of spatial sequences that the architect, David Adjaye, included in the design of the building, which now exists as a memorial of African-American contributions to America.

This design not only exists as a shell to place content for the museum, but the very notion of the silhouette is intended to evoke the reading of the American experience through the lens of African-Americans. The silhouette, Adjaye says, exists in the DNA of the ancestors of African-Americans—what would have been the capital column in West Africa of the ‘shrine houses’ with structures that would have ziggurat motifs.\(^\text{20}\) More specifically, the shape was inspired by a carved wood figure by Olowe of Ise, a Yoruba sculptor.\(^\text{21}\) Bronze plates cover the exterior of the building, perforated in patterns that reference African-American craftsmanship. Three main aspects of the design were essential in realizing the cultural identity of African-Americans in this project: the inverted ziggurat form of the building, the ‘porch’, which is the extension of the building to the landscape creating an entrance, and the patterned bronze envelope.\(^\text{22}\) In some ways the building even captures the identity of the National Mall and Washington D.C.—the slanted silhouette of the building closely matches the 17-degree angle of the capstone of the Washington Monument and has a setback to other buildings on the National Mall.\(^\text{23}\)

David Adjaye displays cultural identity consciousness in his other works as well. His firm’s expansion of the Studio Museum in Harlem incorporates African-American identity primarily with consideration of the neighborhood’s historical context. The museum is dedicated to showcasing work by artists of African descent and work that has been influenced by and inspired by black culture.\(^\text{24}\) In the design of this expansion, Adjaye has decided to use a popular notion in public housing that adds a sense of safety and security for residents and is popular in the New York area—the stoop. This was not only something that has a significance in being part of public housing; it is a testament to black families who turned these stoops into important gathering spaces, and have been using them this way for a long time. The entrance


\(^{20}\) Ibid.

\(^{21}\) Ibid.

\(^{22}\) Ibid.

\(^{23}\) Ibid.

starts with what he calls a “reverse stoop”—a wide staircase that steps down to the lower level and works as a public gathering space. The city of Harlem was also a specific inspiration for the design of the Studio Museum expansion—he was inspired by “the detailed window framing of brownstone homes coupled with the airy volume of the neighborhood’s churches.” He also says, “I wanted to honor this idea of public rooms, which are soaring, celebratory and edifying—uplifting. Between the residential and the civic, we learned the lessons of public realms and tried to bring those two together.” The relationship between black communities and urban design continues to be an overlooked topic, but references like the city of Harlem in Adjaye’s work is contributing to the discourse about architecture and identity.

Through the complex racial history of African-Americans and the struggle as a result, identity has not only been shaped by the culture in the sense of creative and intellectual work, but also by lived experiences that have inspired social movements both nationally and internationally. This is currently a time period where social consciousness is increasing because of globalization and the ease of access to others, especially through social media and the Internet. Like-minded individuals can easily engage and share their thoughts, experiences, ideas, and creative works with each other. Especially at a time where minorities are fighting for more visibility in the media and to be represented properly, this is a way that they have created an avenue for themselves to support each other and share their work. Architecture can be a part of this.

How can a cultural identity be identified and applied to architecture through forms? This is not a question that can be answered with one statement—it is clear that others have addressed this topic and created structures to represent this. Because of the nuances and constant changing over time it is evident that it is difficult to essentially “freeze” a constantly evolving culture and design for it. However, as evident in some representations of African-American culture in Architecture, it is possible to include some of the reminders from history that have shaped collective experiences and speculate on how the culture might change, or design something that is representative and doesn’t restrict evolution through an understanding of the transformation of the particular space and place of a group.

25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
“Marginalized people are continuously reinventing their understanding of space and territory in the public domain. Resiliency and creativity emerged to commodify every possible inch of available space. The result is appropriation of public space.” – Ivan Nasution

The word “appropriation” and its implications are no stranger to the Black experience—whether it is the dialogue concerning the appropriation of cultural aspects belonging to marginalized people, or Black people’s own creative reuse of inherited languages, customs, and other phenomena. What is fascinating is that in the same way black people have historically manipulated what was available to them, like the language, for survival, this happens too, in the built environment.

While the margin of society is not a preferential state to be in, there is a special circumstance in existing in the margin that bell hooks refers to as “radical openness.” In her essay, “Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness,” she suggests a more elaborate idea for the way the term ‘margin’ is traditionally applied in discourse about issues of race, gender and class. In this case, the ‘margin’ bell hooks refers to is not only a physical margin of segregation that she recalls living as a black youth in the South, but also a margin that is socially and politically constructed, asserting the dominant (white) culture as superior. To look at the history of African-Americans and
the racial landscape since arrival to America, there has always been a margin, but existing in this margin has allowed the opportunity to resist oppressive circumstances through various methods. Through many of these methods, it can be emancipatory. In a tense racial landscape many times throughout history, appropriative methods in architecture have revealed creative opportunities to rethink the surrounding built environment. By optimizing limited resources, many marginalized groups have been able to establish their own identities through architectonic forms which have become part of the group and region’s identity.

After discussing the nuances of African-American identity relating to architecture in the previous chapter, what still remains in need is a methodology for identifying architectonic materials and forms in the specific built environment that can be used in a design application. This thesis will adopt the study of appropriative performances in the built environment for a design application.

**THEORY**

To discuss the appropriation of space, it is useful to bring up Michel Foucault’s discussion on ‘heterotopias’ from his essay, “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias.” Two principles will be used from this essay to conceptualize the approach to understanding these spaces in urban areas—the first is that “norms of behavior are suspended.” Heterotopic spaces can be a more pure representation of the identity of a neighborhood because events take place more naturally. Appropriation of space is something that is common among marginalized communities. Especially with African-American culture, creativity has been able to be released and thrive because of the lack of resources and the need to make something of them. The other principle is that “heterotopias are reflective of the society in which they exist.” As neighborhoods evolve, so can heterotopias and they can have different functions that depend on the political, social, regional, and financial circumstances of the people who use them. This is evident in urban areas where space is activated by the presence of individuals performing some type of event.

These principles apply well to this concept of heterotopic space because it is described as a space where events can happen that are not considered ‘normal’ by the dominant group. In hip hop culture, space was being used for watching performances and displaying art. Rhythm and poetry was mixed together to create rap music. DJ-ing was developed from manipulating record players. This developed an entire subculture and contributed to the identity of a group of people as a result.

**WHAT CAN BE APPROPRIATED?**

For this exploration, three different aspects have been identified as architectural subjects that can be appropriated: typology, program and material. The typology of an existing building can be appropriated for another use—industrial buildings that are made into lofts, for example, change the entire typology of a building. For program, particular spaces in a building can be manipulated to contain or house other uses. Some families use front and back yards of their homes as spaces for celebration or socialization. Despite the boundaries assumed by the streets and sidewalks, some communities use the street and sidewalks for informal ‘agoras’ or gathering spaces. The appropriation of material is another aspect that has historically
taken place due to the lack of available resources. One woman who lived in the Pruitt Igoe Development in St. Louis recalled her mother painting the wall black so she could use chalk to write on the wall and teach school in her home. These are examples of the re-imagination of space through appropriation and provide unexpected releases of creativity.

In urban areas, many items can be appropriated. The exterior of buildings can display artwork or advertisements. Streets and alleys can become playgrounds or athletic fields where people play or practice sports. Parking lots can become space for festivals and fairs. Street corners can be places where one sells goods or performs dance moves, like break-dancing in hip hop culture. Light and electric poles and fences can be where flowers, candles and other items are placed to remember the passing of a loved one. Sidewalks can become gathering spaces or also be places for children to play.

**SPATIAL TYPES**

For this investigation, nine different uses of space have been identified which can apply to the appropriation of the built environment. These nine uses are religion, transaction, recreation, celebration, relaxation, memorialization, performance, socialization, and admiration/viewing. These are several uses of space that can be employed whether or not a formalized space is provided, and other formalized spaces can be transformed to accommodate these events.

These spatial types or events were identified following the first visit to the South Shore neighborhood for this thesis. Investigating ways space can be

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4. The Pruitt Igoe Myth, dir. Chad Freidrichs (United States, 2012), DVD.
manipulated in this particular neighborhood and the formal architectural typologies became an exercise of overlaying photographs of observed urban conditions that could potentially employ a rethinking of space. Events that take place in urban areas—viewing of murals and graffiti on blank exterior walls, memorializing the passing of a loved one, selling music out of one’s car on the street or selling food and other goods on the street, dancing on the street corner as others gather to watch, children playing on the streets—these are all possibilities of the appropriation of space in this neighborhood to be included or amplified in some aspect of this design process or its manifestation.
With the South Side of Chicago having such a large population of African-Americans and African-American history, and the city of Chicago itself being one of the subjects for urban issues such as gentrification, this seems to be an appropriate location for the context of this thesis. The desire to maintain cultural identities of neighborhoods as a result of gentrification has been an important part of some spaces of architectural discourse. There are also current efforts to reinvigorate the South Side of Chicago, and due to its hypervisibility in the media and reputation being largely negative because of crime, a brief investigation in the history and transformation of this area becomes important in uncovering an identity that reveals more about its existence and how it has arrived at its current state.

The South Side of Chicago has a majority Black/African-American population that has increased over time. Many of these neighborhoods feature a mix of architectural styles that have been appropriated and manipulated as well. The neighborhood of South Shore, with a population of about almost 47,0001, is one of several of these

“Architecture, at its best, embodies a society’s consciousness about itself. ... Buildings inherently and unavoidably document the everyday life of a culture. They are repositories of the patterns of activity, association and movement of a society or people.” – Larry Speck
neighborhoods with a rich history from its transformation into a black neighborhood. In analyzing the spatial and material appropriation of this neighborhood, from specifics of the region and the identity of African-American neighborhoods in general, it is possible to expose what types of architectural interventions can develop a sense of empowerment and a representation of not only African-American identity, but regional and historical identity as well, in this neighborhood.

**VISUAL HISTORY**

Located 9 miles South of the Loop (downtown Chicago), the architecture in South Shore has transformed along with the different groups who have occupied the neighborhood and appropriated space due to cultural, political, and social circumstances over time. Like other South Side Chicago neighborhoods, South Shore transitioned into a predominately black community due to the Great Migration, White Flight and other factors. It has maintained lots of the architectural integrity of the neighborhood before its movement into a predominately black one. Once having a large Jewish population, for example, many of the religious buildings in South Shore that are currently churches were once synagogues. The South Shore Country Club, which was a private club that excluded black and Jewish people, went out of business and later became a cultural center.

Once with a population of mostly white protestants, the neighborhood of South Shore changed from the late nineteenth century. The 1893 Worlds Fair in

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3. Ibid.
Jackson Park was the catalyst for the attraction towards the sale of land nearby which led to the establishment of the Jackson Park Highlands, a community enclosed within the neighborhood of South Shore.\(^5\) During the housing boom in South Shore in the 1920s, immigrants and African Americans moved in into the neighborhood and substantially increased the diversity of the neighborhood. The population grew with many new residents being of Irish, Swedish, German, and Jewish descent. Religious institutions also began to grow, with “...15 Protestant churches, 4 Roman Catholic parishes, and 4 Jewish synagogues.”\(^6\) As more African-American families began to move to South Shore in the 1950s, white residents were concerned with the stability of the neighborhood and established initiatives that were unsuccessful at first but still resulted in decline due to commercial disinvestment and real-estate ‘redlining.’\(^7\)

As the population of African-American residents grew, many white residents began to move out. In 1972, South Shore Country Club, once not open to black and Jewish people, was purchased by the Chicago Park District and converted into the South Shore Cultural Center.\(^8\) The New Regal Theater also opened up in 1987 contributing to the cultural life of the neighborhood and by the late 1990s, South Shore became a predominately middle-class African-American community.\(^9\)

Covering an area of approximately 3 square miles, South Shore has a population of approximately 46,650 with a higher population density than that of

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4. U.S. Census Bureau, “Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics”
6. Ibid.
8. Ibid, 279.
9. Ibid.
Chicago itself, with about 5,000 more people per square mile.\textsuperscript{10} The majority of individuals living in this neighborhood are women and the median age is about 38.2 years.\textsuperscript{11} With over 95 percent of the population of South Shore identifying as African-American, less than one percent of people living in South Shore are born outside of the United States and are not native English speakers.\textsuperscript{12}

It is clear that the appropriation of the built environment in South Shore has primarily been through the changing of the program of existing buildings rather than the manipulation of material or typologies. Appropriation of space and material is much more overt in places where there aren’t many governmental or authoritative interventions in housing. In America, it seems more subtle because people live in housing that was made for the purpose of private space and living. In the previous chapter on appropriation, images of the South Shore neighborhood were used to re-imagine various architectural typologies. Re-imagining these spaces in more traditional architectural typologies translate the use and ethos of the space through architectural representation but the integrity comes with it being non-designed. This makes the spaces multi-functional and flexible, as they’ve had to be. Pushing the exercise to realize the potential of the urban conditions can lead to creating architectural interventions embodying collective memories and identity for residents of this neighborhood.

\textbf{TRANSFORMATIVE SPACE}

In the first chapter on identity, a discussion about the presence of African-

\begin{table}
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Population} & 46,650 \\
\hline
\textbf{Female/Male Population} & 56.4% / 43.6% \\
\hline
\textbf{Median Age} & 38.2 years \\
\hline
\textbf{Average Family Size} & 3.03 \\
\hline
\textbf{Average Household Size} & 2.11 \\
\hline
\textbf{Race} & \\
95.5% & Black or African-American \\
1.8% & White \\
0.3% & American-Indian or Alaska Native \\
0.3% & Asian \\
1.6% & Two or More Races \\
0.5% & Other \\
1.8%* & Hispanic or Latino (*of any race) \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{South Shore Demographics compiled from 2010 U.S. Census Data\textsuperscript{4}}
\end{table}


\textsuperscript{11} U.S. Census Bureau, “Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics”

\textsuperscript{12} “South Shore Neighborhood in Chicago, Illinois (IL),” City-Data.com
American identity in architecture made it clear that black culture can have a relationship with architecture. Just as black culture has transformed other art forms throughout time, it can be argued that black culture has transformed architecture in the same way. The transformation of this neighborhood reflects the people who have resided in it so there are remnants of the past which will always be part of this neighborhood. The current demographic population of this neighborhood, however, is evident in the visuals one receives amidst exploration of the neighborhood’s existing buildings—the black-owned banks, the beauty and barber shops, the fashion boutiques, the black empowerment murals on exterior walls—these signal evidence of the identity of the people who call it home and serve as a representation of the transformation of the neighborhood.
As a brief outlook on African American / Chicago / South Shore history, this timeline has been compiled:

1779: Jean Baptiste Pointe du Sable, trader of Haitian descent, founded Chicago

1865-1877: Reconstruction

1881: South Kenwood Station construction led to development of South Shore

1889: Annexation to Chicago

1893: World’s Fair in Jackson Park

early 1900s to end of WWII: ‘Black Belt’ established

1896: Jim Crow Laws in southern states

1905: Jackson Park Highlands developed; Chicago Defender (Black-owned newspaper) founded

1909: NAACP founded

1910-1970: Great Migration

1916: Marcus Garvey & UNIA

1920s-1930s: Harlem Renaissance; Housing boom in South Shore

1929: Bud Billiken Parade founded

1930s-1950s: “Black Chicago Renaissance”

1941: African-Americans in WWII

1945: Ebony magazine founded; African-Americans migrated out of Black Belt

1950s: African-Americans moved to South Shore in large numbers

1951: Jet magazine founded

1955: Emmett Till; Montgomery bus boycott

1960: Sit-in movement & founding of SNCC

1963: Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech

1964: Civil Rights Act

1965: Voting Rights Act; Selma March

1968: Fair Housing Act

late 1960s-early 1970s: Black Power Movement

1972: South Shore Country Club changed to cultural center

1976: Black Ensemble Theater founded in Chicago

late 1970s: Hip Hop originated

1980: South Shore predominantly African-American community

1986: Oprah Winfrey Show

1992: Rodney King Riots

1995: Million Man March

2008: President Obama elected; South Shore Opera Company founded

2013: Trayvon Martin trial; #BlackLivesMatter founded

2017: President Obama’s farewell speech

2020: President Obama Presidential Library to be constructed in Jackson Park, South Side of Chicago
ASSEMBLAGE

“Home is not just the objects we arrange, it is made up of feelings, experiences and memories we bring to a place.” - bell hooks

The neighborhood of South Shore is bounded by Lake Michigan to the east, East 79th Street to the South, East 67th Street to the North where Jackson Park begins, and the Metra train line by Oak Woods Cemetery to the West. Since the proposed design application is to create a public community building that is accessible to those who may pass by, the initial process of selecting the site began with locating a series of city-owned vacant lots in the neighborhood near commercial strips. The density of the neighborhood is lacking in some patches of residential and commercial space so there are many vacant lots with the opportunity to use the identity of the neighborhood and its residents for architectural and urban interventions that will enhance the well-being and sense of place for individuals who live, work and play in this neighborhood. The main boulevards in South Shore are on East 71st and East 75th Streets. Because 71st Street has a wide boulevard with a Metra train line traveling along it, available lots along 75th Street are more ideal since there can be better interaction with the other side of the street and it can be crossed easily.

Several bus lines run along major streets in the neighborhood, including the commercial corridors of 71st and 75th streets. Upon observation of land use maps, the ideal location for a public building accessible to the neighborhood is where there
is a need for green space—which will be incorporated in the design—and near schools so that there is a connection to education and educational institutions. Proximity to residential areas is important for the location and program of the design as well so there is a connection with the community.

SITE ANALYSIS

The proposed site is in the middle of the block surrounded by South Kingston Avenue, East 75th Street, and South Colfax Avenue. Part of it will be urban infill located between two three-story commercial buildings. To the south of this small rectangular vacant lot are two large lots that stretch to meet Kingston and Colfax Avenues. With three access points to and from the street, the proposed design will essentially have three different facades with entrances each intended for different programmatic elements and types of pedestrian traffic. The urban infill attracts attention on the commercial strip of 75th street and draws pedestrians in from the street. The other entrances on the streets with lighter traffic will attract attention from the residential areas of the neighborhood.

The site can be approached by pedestrian, vehicular and public transportation. The selection of the site is also chosen based on these modes of transportation used in South Shore. There are bus stops both at 75th and Kingston and 75th and Colfax. To the east, about a block away, there is a Metra commuter stop at Windsor Park. East 75th Street is also a walkable street where pedestrians can walk right up to the building. Nearby land use is mainly commercial and includes a laundry mat, a convenience store and other vacant commercial buildings with storefronts on the first floor. Across the street from the site there is a parking lot, a post office, a beauty/barber shop, a restaurant, and other miscellaneous commercial shops. The average building heights are 1-4 stories tall including the surrounding residential buildings.
Land use (residential - white, mixed use - light, commercial - dark)

LOCATION

VISUAL LINKAGES

SITE APPROACH

WIND DIRECTION

BUILDINGS NEARBY

TRANSPORTATION

CTA bus & traffic directions

Fig 22a-f. Site analysis
which are mostly multi-story apartments with several units. Key views to highlight from the site include the Chicago skyline to the northwest, South Shore high rises and Lake Michigan to the northeast, and the rest of the neighborhood to the south and west. Prevailing winds are from the south-southwest direction.

The site itself is currently three different vacant lots; one commercial—the one facing East 75th Avenue—and the other two residential, facing Colfax and Kingston Avenues. The lot facing East 75th Avenue is wedged between two commercial buildings, which could potentially be mixed-use. Both buildings have heavy ground floor storefronts that wrap around each corner that faces a street. Adjacent to these buildings and the wedged vacant lot is an alley that runs west to east, with one building featuring a garage to be accessed from this alley. The vacant lot is about 23 feet wide by 125 feet long between two 3-story buildings. The other two residential vacant lots, measuring at 90 feet long and 124 and 127 feet wide each, are separated by an alley with a strong datum running north to south, opening right up to the commercial vacant lot. Again, these adjacent sites give the opportunity for three separate approaches to the site from the north, west and east that will serve different community populations and reflect that in the program elements facing the streets.

ARCHITECTURAL / URBAN CHARACTERISTICS + MATERIALS

The Jackson Park Highlands was mentioned before as featuring a variety of architectural styles and is part of the neighborhood, but that is a small part; the true typical character of the neighborhood is surrounding the proposed sight. As far as residential styles, there is a clear distinction of housing typologies to the west of South Yates Boulevard than those to the east of Yates Boulevard. West of Yates Boulevard features lower density housing consisting mostly of single family homes that are 1-2 stories. These are mostly traditional South Side of Chicago-style bungalows, some
Fig 24. Common architectural characteristics in South Shore

with porches and some with stoops with views of the streets from the front door, out to sidewalks that are a safe distance from the street. Most consist of brick and have large windows in the front. Some have a variation of front yard fences and/or a driveway, but most parking is on the curb. Residential buildings to the east of Yates Boulevard are typically four stories tall with large footprints that snake around to create open courtyards facing the streets. Others are tall and slender with decorative brick facades almost exclusively made with brick in different colors and sizes, with lots of windows aimed at the streets. The buildings are tightly spaced with very little access between them and no need for windows on the sides, unless facing the streets. There is also parking on the street but behind most of the buildings there are garages tall enough to fit the height of a car, typically about as wide as the residential building it sits behind. Alleys are also a major part of the urban characteristics of this neighborhood—when people access their homes by vehicular means, they can drive their car into the garage and enter their home from the back. Trash is picked up from the alleys rather than from the front streets, giving more space and appeal to individual and shared front yards and gated courtyard entrances to apartment buildings. These medium-density residential buildings also feature large brick chimneys that stick up from the back or middle of the buildings.

The commercial buildings surrounding the site typically vary in height depending on their intended use. Most are shorter than the four-story residential buildings and have storefronts facing the main streets. Many of the buildings are boarded up with plywood or OSB and no longer have businesses using these spaces; others are used but typically have some kind of metal gate to keep from breaking the glass, assuming the businesses in this area are prone to robbery. Many of the commercial buildings are also from different architectural time periods, with some featuring a variety of ornament applied to the facades and a monumental aesthetic. Some rely heavily on signage as well, to indicate the use of the building. Many vacant
lots are open, grassy patches closely adjacent to existing buildings, but some are protected by chain-link fences to keep people out. As a matter of fact, the vacant lot of the proposed site wedged between the two buildings has a chain-link fence where it faces with 75th Avenue.

A contrast between brick and wood is another architectural feature found in South Shore. The material and color contrast makes it so appealing—in some of the residential buildings the wooden stairs seem to be wedged between towers of brick. Other commonly found materials in South Shore include varying colors and sizes of brick, as stated before, but also stone and metal—especially decorative metal fences in front yards, as well as concrete and paint from large murals created on blank exterior walls of buildings.

PRECEDENT

There is sort of an appeal in these mostly vacant commercial buildings of South Shore. Because the buildings and their frontages are more public than the residential buildings in the neighborhood, the idea of the appropriation of materials to provide something more positive that is often looked at as a negative in the neighborhood can be applied. Metal gates are meant to keep people out of buildings when not in business, but as far as materiality in the design application of this thesis, metal materials can be used to have to opposite affect—to be welcoming and to attract wonder, leading to a sequence of spaces for the visitor to experience, like the Poetry Foundation by John Ronan Architects, built in 2011.1 A zinc metal screen

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encourages exploration into the building for visitors and appears to have different amounts of transparency throughout the day and at night. In opening up to the street corner, the building is inviting to the community and its street-level appeal makes the building a subject of inquiry because one can almost see what is inside. The three layers of openness with the amount of light diffused into the spaces makes it even more compelling upon entry. The varying levels of transparency and spatial organization of the walls create a narrative that unfolds amidst exploration of the building. With materials of zinc and glass on the exterior and wood on the interior, the building reaches out and evokes a welcoming attitude by exposing its interior to the surrounding context.

**DESIGN PROCESS**

Each chapter has included some discussion about the manipulation of phenomena. While some discussions are more tactile-based than others, it is important to recognize that these are all aspects of this neighborhood that contribute to its sense of place. In the literature review on identity, it is clear that the evolution of African-American culture has taken place from a process of using available materials and experiences to create something new, especially through the combining of existing items with others. Appropriation is explicitly based on the manipulation of space and has identified some ways that cultural identity can and have been applied to the built environment. It is also clear that in the transformation of South Shore, there are remnants of the past which have been inherited by this community.

The programmatic make-up of this design is intended to be similar to a library, with spaces to serve the surrounding community, including a book collection, classrooms and study spaces, multipurpose space for events, computer labs, outdoor engagement with a courtyard, and a gallery. This typology has been chosen because
it is likely to evolve with time, just as the South Shore neighborhood has. Its needs can change with the community and the architecture can celebrate this change and the anticipation of what is to come. The design methodology consists of three steps: Representing the Narrative, Applying Appropriative Techniques, and Reflection of the Community.

One: Representing the Narrative. One of the easiest ways to depict change is to tell a story or represent a narrative. Designing a narrative in a physical manifestation by using material and connections to the surrounding neighborhood, like the Poetry Foundation, is ideal for this design because there is an engagement and interaction with the surrounding community. Inspired by this experience, three iterations for how to tell this narrative have been explored in model form—through linear exploration, clusters, and views. The linear narrative is very straightforward; one transitions through spaces in a linear fashion, sort of like a timeline, and experiences a reflection of the past, present and future in the space. Through clusters, one experiences the narrative by encountering related information and spaces at the same time. Overlapping of clusters can contain related program space. Through views, the design focuses on telling a narrative by guiding one to views to and from the site, responding to its surroundings. Placing one at a point where they confront the historical context of the neighborhood via views is a subtle way of situating this building in the neighborhood. Layering and different material transparency contributes to the discovery and leads one through to depict a narrative. The transparency also gives previews to different parts of the journey as one moves through the space. All three of these techniques can be employed in a design, but in order to have a strong focus on the visual appeal of the neighborhood and engage in a conversation with its surroundings, the technique to be employed for the narrative is through the framing of views.

Two: Applying Appropriative Techniques. Now that there is a method for telling
a story through the architecture, the spaces that will represent or imply spatial and material appropriation need to be explored. Various spatial types were identified in the Appropriation chapter, but what can be created when the representation of those spatial types are mixed together with each other or within themselves? For example, because the traditional techniques for representing collective memory are through memorials manifested architecturally and spatially by monuments, light, materials and/or patterns, what does it look like when these representations are combined, like when light is diffused through a material projecting a light pattern onto a monument? The combination of these spatial types, such as memorialization, can allude to some spatial features in the design. When this is also combined with how memorialization is also represented in urban areas, such as the lighting of candles and flowers left on a bench or near a light or electric pole, there can be a spatial experience that reminds one of this technique. To explore this, a series of models were created that represent some of these scenarios. For admiration and viewing, what does it look like when there is emphasis on maximizing a view to the outside of a space while also emphasizing views to the inside of the space? These spaces can also be designed by making manifest some aspects of the images from the observation overlay exercise dealing with how spaces in the South Shore neighborhood can be appropriated.

Three: Reflection of the Community. From the literature review on the intersection of African-American cultural identity and Architecture, it is evident that the mixture and re-mixture of phenomena is crucial to the black experience in America, especially when considering those aspects of identity that make African-American culture distinctive. Some archetypes, such as the porch or the stoop, the street corner, these are spaces that can be replicated and re-imagined in the design of this building. The application of these three methods are intended to result in a physical building structure that will situate itself with the community and represent the identity of the residents and the neighborhood itself.
CONCLUSION

“A collective will involves the politics of resistance as well as a collective vision amongst a select few to push forward a better opportunity for the many.” - Jack Travis

In the attempt to identify African-American culture in Architecture from past and present perspectives, and more specifically in the appropriation of space and materials in urban environments that are predominately African-American, it is clear that the concept of appropriation is not without historical context—there is a background for these methods of spatial manipulation. It is also important not to discount the importance of a people’s history, no matter how celebrative or solemn that history may be, and the history of African-Americans have included both success and pain with implications on the collective identity.

Architecture is not neutral; it has an impact on the way of life for individuals who use it; the way they live, work and play are conditioned through the interaction of space. With an increasing number of people moving to cities and projections for this movement to grow in the future, the concern of producing effective designs for different groups of people in smaller spaces creates a challenge that innovative design can stem from. As a way of providing solutions, architecture can use studies of appropriation to identify not only the needs of a community, but also what is important to that community, including the preservation of their cultural identity. Using a design process that stems from a thorough analysis of historical, cultural, social and political context of the affected group—which this thesis only touches on—is significant for those who have interest in the intersection of Architecture and identity. Some architects, theorists and writers who use their voice and their work to respond to this discourse have developed ways to approach African-American identity in Architecture, but this all comes from different perspectives. There continues to be increasing publications, discussions and conferences held about this topic. Even among generations there are varying perspectives, from the Harlem Renaissance and jazz music’s connection to the Art Deco movement, to hip-hop culture’s connection to Modern Architecture—these diverse perspectives are to be celebrated. From the very arrival of Africans to America, marginalization has been an important catalyst for the appropriation of not only space and material as it pertains to architecture, but the appropriation of other phenomena in a society that has sparked creativity despite having limited access to resources. This has birthed a massively influential culture. Architecture, both as a profession and as a set of stylistic movements, has potential to employ these concepts and study them further with perspectives of cultural identity that will enhance this potential, especially for those who have struggled to have their voices heard.
“The corner was our Rock of Gibraltar,
Our Stonehenge,
Our Taj Mahal,
Our monument,
Our testimonial to freedom, to peace,
And to love,
Down on the corner.”

– Spoken word by The Last Poets, featured in the song “The Corner” (2005) by Chicago rapper, Common
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“Jack Travis.” YouTube, uploaded by Museum of Arts and Design (MAD), 24 Nov. 2010.


