

object as foundation for homeless design

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The laneway located between Chicago's North Milwaukee Avenue and Division Street and intersected by Paulina Street and Hermitage Avenue is in the midst of everything yet nowhere. It abuts the CTA's Blue Line where the L emerges from underground and transitions to elevated tracks. The laneway is narrowly situated between the tall fencing surrounding the L tracks and a row of century old three-flat buildings lining Milwaukee Avenue. Behind these buildings, free and unmanaged parking allows cars to arrange themselves among the dumpsters and broken glass of previous petty car window break-ins. Amongst the clutter of this forgotten space and anchored by a large concrete pad that sits along the laneway, is a homeless encampment, an ad hoc, ever-changing arrangement of cardboard boxes, plastic tarps, blankets, cast off furniture and clothing, shopping carts, and food scraps. This rambling shelter is home to a changing cast of people who inhabit the space. Based on observation, an average of 4 to 6 people use the space, some just as a base during the day while others sleep there overnight. The laneway is owned by the City of Chicago and there have been attempts over the years by local businesses to work through the area alderman's office to clear out the space and disperse the homeless who make their home there. However, the settlement is able to remain fairly untouched and co-exists in a tenuous, strangely invisible way with the surrounding businesses and residents.

Frank is one of the people living along the laneway. It isn't initially evident that he is homeless. He prides himself on that fact. He is dressed neatly in well-laundered clothes and a stylish leather jacket, but it is the bag that hangs heavily from his shoulder and his aimless walk that gives it away. He is a 56-year-old black man who served in

the Marines. This is how Frank introduces himself. He grew up in the South and was one of many children in a very poor family. He started delivering papers at the age of 5 and gave his earnings to his mother every week because he knew she could use the extra income to buy food for the family. He talks often of the Bible, of his faith and of the devils that tempt him and others, particularly the devils of crack, methamphetamine and other addictions that inflict most of the people who inhabit the laneway. During the day Frank walks the neighborhood, talking with people on the streets and trying to panhandle the \$27 that will allow him to get a room in a cheap hotel for the night.

According to a 2006 study conducted by the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, 21,078 people were homeless on a typical night in Chicago between 7/01/05 and 6/30/06. “Of those, 4,654 were served in shelters and 16,424 did not access shelters” (Chicago Coalition for the Homeless 3). Over the course of the year, less than 20,000 total were served by the shelter system while close to 55,000 were living in the streets “doubled-up, in cars, in abandoned buildings, or in some other location that was not a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence” (2). While the Milwaukee laneway has its unique characteristics, there are many more forgotten spaces like it in Chicago that serve as a ‘home’ for the homeless population not served by shelters or other transitional housing.

Signed into law by President Ronald Reagan, The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1986 (Pub. L. 100-77, July 22, 1987, 101 Stat. 482, 42 U.S.C. § 11301 et seq.) is a United States federal law providing federal money for shelter programs. It was the first significant federal legislative response to homelessness

(National Coalition for the Homeless 1); a reaction to the growing number of visibly homeless families, elderly and veterans surviving on America's streets during the 1980's.

Since its inception, the Homeless Assistance Act has been amended several times, but unfortunately, its mandates have often been under-funded by the federal government (3). Over the last 20 years shelters in the U.S. have struggled to stay open let alone provide the adequate support services needed to transition homeless people, in particular, the chronically homeless population, to permanent homes. Even within a perfectly funded shelter, many homeless advocates question if the shelter system is the optimal setting for providing transition services (National Alliance to End Homelessness). In addition, the under-funding of Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) initiatives like Section 8 housing and other programs that provide housing options to previously homeless individuals and families has limited the number of available housing units to transition people to (National Alliance to End Homelessness). Many advocates argue that the current system has allowed homelessness to be swept under the rug with shelters acting as a band aid solution that do little to interrupt the cycle of homelessness. "Building more shelters simply makes it easier to stay on the streets, says Nan Roman, president of the National Alliance to End Homelessness" (Paulson).

The reaction to the current state of homelessness in the U.S. is a different approach. "Housing first' is an alternative to the current system of emergency shelter and transitional housing, which tends to prolong the length of time that families remain

homeless. “The methodology is premised on the belief that vulnerable and at-risk homeless families are more responsive to interventions and social services support after they are in their own housing, rather than while living in temporary/transitional facilities or housing programs” (Beyond Shelter). The goal of this strategy is that permanent housing, will allow previously homeless individuals and families to regain self-confidence and control over their lives.

Chicago like many other U.S. cities has signed onto a “housing first” approach for dealing with its homeless issues. Mayor Richard Daley hopes to end homelessness in the city by the year 2013. The plan is to “significantly reduc[e] the number of shelter beds and creat[e] interim housing and increase[e] permanent housing linked with the necessary social services” (Levin, McKean, and Raphael 1). However, this goal is offset by some startling realities, including increasing instances of homelessness. In 2006, across the America, homelessness was on the rise. An average of 23 percent of the requests for emergency shelter by homeless people overall and 29 percent of the requests by homeless families alone are estimated to have gone unmet (The United States Conference of Mayors and Sodexo, Inc. 62). Chicago saw a 3.3 percent increase in the number of requests for emergency housing between 2005 and 2006 (78).

Despite Mayor Daley’s goal for eradicating homeless, Chicago’s per capita spending on homelessness falls short when compared with other U.S. cities. According to a study conducted by the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, Chicago spends \$3 per homeless person, while San Francisco spent more than \$100 per homeless person;

New York invests \$37 per capita while Philadelphia spends an average of \$11 per person per day (Ferkenoff and Bigelow 3).

As reported in a Time Magazine article on May 24, 2007:

"The city hasn't pledged its own wallet, and that pretty much makes it impossible," says Julie Dworkin, policy director at the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless. Although \$150 million was invested in the cause last year, and some \$400 million has been pledged since the plan became public in 2003, critics point out there is no fixed price tag on Daley's plan. "Let's just say the number would most likely be in the billions, and not the millions," Dworkin said (Ferkenoff and Bigelow).

The Chicago Coalition for the Homeless supports the city's plans to construct more permanent units but is doubtful of the city's ability to do so in the current real estate market. A recent study released by the Coalition states, "the stock of affordable housing is actually flattening or shrinking as rich developers gobble up empty space and redevelop once ramshackle areas of town" (2). There are concerns that the discrepancy between the city's goals and the realities of the market place and the complex needs of the homeless population will not only hinder Chicago from reaching its goals of ending homelessness but will ultimately leave more people out of the housing loop.

The decision to focus on permanent housing is logical; people are more likely to benefit from support services such as mental health and substance abuse counseling, debt and employment counseling and training, etc. when they are in a stable environment and no longer just trying to survive on the streets. The problem, however,

is in its implementation. While this mindset change takes place and funding shifts from shelters to permanent housing, many people are literally left out in the cold. Less shelters with no housing alternative yet online spell disaster. However, this potentially dangerous gap holds tremendous opportunity for social designers interested in creating fast, flexible, affordable housing solutions. What is needed are designs that can be ready in a matter of weeks instead of a matter of months or years as commonly the case with government sponsored housing projects and programs. There is an opportunity to meet the immediate needs of the homeless and to work closely with the range of support services to have them in place once a homeless individual or family moves into their new homes from day one. The impetus for designers is to reconsider what permanent housing could or should look like. This new focus on street to home transitions is an opening for redefining home, its function, its ability to adapt to non-traditional new homeowners – the homeless. The inability for government, agencies and architects to create new models is, perhaps, what has hindered the kind of thinking needed to move forward and finally solve the problems surrounding homelessness.

There are examples of innovative design that can be followed and used as inspiration for a new generation of homeless design. Several designers from across the globe are considering ways to make viable, short-turnaround housing available to the homeless. They are rethinking form, materiality and site. And while not always meant as an optimal solution, their design initiatives are intended to meet the immediate need and deal with the issue at a very direct, grassroots level. This kind of bold design is needed at a larger scale where more people can be helped.

design as intervention_paraSITE

Michael Rakowitz's paraSITE is a portable shelter meant for one or two individuals. He designed this urban tent like structure after observing homeless people sleeping on heat grates during the winter months and seeing the wasted heat exhausted from building heating systems. "paraSITE proposes the appropriation of the exterior ventilation systems on existing architecture as a means for providing temporary shelter for homeless people" (Rakowitz) He worked with local homeless people in Boston to refine his designs and customize them to each person's needs and desires for his/her home. Constructed of plastic and tape, the units are lightweight and affordable. "The paraSITE units in their idle state exist as small, collapsible packages with handles for transport by hand or on one's back. In employing this device, the user must locate the intake ducts of a building's HVAC (Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning) system" (Rakowitz).

As Rakowitz is clear to state on his website, the paraSITE was not created as an end all solution to the homeless problem:

"This project does not present itself as a solution. It is not a proposal for affordable housing. Its point of departure is to present a symbolic strategy of survival for homeless existence within the city, amplifying the problematic relationship between those who have homes and those who do not have homes. The issue of homelessness is of global proportions

and it is foolish to think that any one proposition will address all the issues associated with this problem.”

The paraSITE uses design as an intervention. The design recognizes a direct opportunity to make clear, logical connections, in this case, between a source of wasted heat and people who need heat to survive. The simple logic of the paraSITE is its beauty and its message for other designers seeking to create shelters that have a meaningful function in the realm of the homeless.

p(LOT)

Another of Rakowitz’s projects is P(LOT) which “questions the occupation and dedication of public space and encourages reconsiderations of ‘legitimate’ participation in city life” (Rakowitz). By turning municipal parking spaces into rentable lots, Rakowitz is creating new urban real estate. He converted ordinary car covers into portable tents that could be rented and stayed in on these former parking spaces. “The acquisition of municipal permits and simple payment of parking meters could enable citizens to, for example, establish temporary encampments or use the leased ground for different kinds of activities” (Rakowitz).

This concept opens up different opportunities for locating innovative housing for the homeless. The Milwaukee Avenue laneway is located in Chicago’s Wicker Park, an increasingly gentrified neighborhood where developers are building and rents are significantly increasing each year. In fact, on the other side of the subway tracks from the homeless encampment, a new condo development is just opening. Had the laneway

been a bit bigger developers might have tried to squeeze a few units into a lot there but the space's unprofitable nature is probably what has allowed the homeless to exist there fairly unnoticed.

Applying the same ideas as P(LOT), the laneway, its ad hoc parking spaces and other parking spaces in the surrounding area could become affordable real estate to create safe, flexible housing solutions. Without this kind of thinking, public housing will continue to be built in out-of-the-way, otherwise undesirable areas. This tactic has been shown over and over again to be unsuccessful as with traditional public housing projects, which served to only further disenfranchise the poor. P(LOT) uses design as an intervention to use existing public spaces for a broader, more sustainable (less parking = less cars) purpose.

design as catalyst_bus shelter house

The work of Sean Godsell pushes new design solutions into the realm of public policy. Instead of designing public spaces to keep the homeless out, he is working with municipalities to create public spaces meant for the homeless. This is an 180 degree shift from initiatives such as those in the city of Cambridge which made a series of vents in Harvard Square 'homeless-proof' by tilting the metal grates in order to make them impossible to sleep on. In Los Angeles, "the city installed an elaborate overhead sprinkler system programmed to drench unsuspecting sleepers at random during the night" (Rakowitz). Sean Godsell's work includes the Bus Shelter House – a structure that serves as a bus shelter during the day and at night converts to a homeless shelter.

The bench becomes a bed (a woven steel mattress is contained underneath the bench), the advertising panels become a dispenser for food, water, and blankets. Godsell is looking at the potential to make this structure solar powered, utilizing panels on the roof (Godsell).

park bench house

In a similar vein, Godsell also designed the Park Bench House. At night it transforms into a shelter while by day it's an inconspicuous steel bench located in a city park in Melbourne, Australia. A 'home' symbol located on the top of the bench hints at its convertible capabilities. Once night falls, park employees travel through the park, lifting and locking the benches into their shelter mode. The urban version of a lean-to emerges revealing a woven wire bed frame. An automatic nightlight shines onto the ground beneath each bench house, signaling that someone is occupying that bench (Godsell).

Godsell's designs act as a catalyst for municipal government to take a different approach to homelessness. It is a pragmatic, ethical approach. It recognizes that homelessness is a problem but instead of trying to make it go away or waiting for big sweeping changes, it tries to incorporate the homeless population into the design of the city in small steps. In doing so, the city is able to offer safer, more controlled environments both for the homeless and for the general public. Homeless people already mingle and interact with other members of society every day, but usually in invisible, negative ways. Godsell's designs provide a defined, more equitable interaction

that meets the immediate needs of those needing shelter and of municipalities' seeking accessible solutions.

It is interesting to look at the Milwaukee laneway as an opportunity to catalyze Chicago into better incorporating the homeless into the functioning of the city. Besides bus shelters and park benches, there are other possibilities for a city like Chicago to create multifunctional public spaces. The laneway is situated on city property. Municipal garbage is collected there, city parking is available there – is there a way to design safe, ethical housing in the laneway that ties in with the necessary functioning of the city in a more efficient way?

The other consideration is the complex needs of the homeless population. Design can also be used to catalyze public officials to better respond to the support services desperately needed by the homeless. Substance abuse and mental health issues are significant factors – how can access to services be incorporated into the design of housing for the homeless? Syringe depots, medical house calls, medication dispensing may be some design considerations that recognize the realities faced by the homeless and work around dysfunctional systems such as the current state of the health care system. Such large, looming systems are out of the immediate control of the designer and the city but have a tremendous impact on the poor and homeless.

Laudan Aron, a research associate at the Urban Institute discusses the situation very clearly when looking at the goals of Chicago to eradicate homelessness by 2013. "The 10-year plans are an important start, she says. "But this is a problem that's the very tail end of poverty. All the systems that you regularly see reports on - the mental-

health system broken, or employment and training programs limited - this is the end result. Until those systems get their acts together, we're going to have homelessness.” (Paulson).

design as discourse_refuge wear

The work of artist Lucy Orta questions the meaning of home and the body and proposes clothing as a home that acts as a refuge both physically and emotionally. Resembling tents and walking sleeping bags, her creations use both traditional (i.e. canvas) and high performance outdoor materials, but go beyond the basic qualities usually associated with these fabrics to include built in hoods, pants legs, and sleeves. The resulting ‘body architecture’ offers a sometimes startling look at the interaction of the individual with the external world - the elements, encounters, crisis and sense of self. Orta’s series of Refuge Wear speaks as much to the wearer’s place in the world as his/her physical protection. Jerome Sans explains of her work,

“The body is a building, and society too has a spatial morphology. Refuge Wear - Habitent, being a necessary element of an individual’s need for a minimum personal space, allows the wearer to isolate himself from the world and create a place of reflection and meditation; a closed, four-dimensional universe. It is similar to a mountain refuge, that is to say a temporary shelter providing a basic comfort where he can stop off before continuing on his way. Refuge Wear can help him rebuild an inner strength and, like any house, allows him to plant his axis mundi. The artist

developed the Refuge Wear series in conjunction with certain homeless people whose paths she had followed over a number of years. The aim of the Refuge Wear is to serve as objects of meditation, made more poignant as some of the homeless have since succeeded in reintegrating into society. Unlike the committed political artists of the sixties, Lucy Orta prefers to confine herself to the world of art rather than seeking to denounce the 'deficit-generating' systems in society. She confronts reality face to face; a reality that she herself has summoned by acting on the very terrain of these actions" (Orta)

Though Orta's work has traditionally resided in the realm of galleries and public performance, its functionality is not lost in its message. Applying these ideas to the Milwaukee laneway, it is interesting to juxtapose Refuge Wear to the realities on the streets, to the new 'housing first' or 'streets to housing' strategies now being implemented. The view that homeless individuals and families can better receive and benefit from the support services needed to permanently transition from the street once they are actually living in permanent housing coincides with the notion that body architecture can help the wearer "plant his axis mundi" (Orta). Orta's straightforward approach to creating a home simply by enclosing the personal space that surrounds us, and in which we need to thrive, is an important lesson for social designers and designs intended for the direct use of the homeless population. Her Refuge Wear or some pragmatic 'next generation' of it could be brought to a place like the Milwaukee laneway where chronically homeless individuals reside. These designs could offer some physical

and emotional refuge, provide a better 'planting' while larger plans play out to provide these people with permanent housing and meaningful integrated services.

responses to organic growth _tent cities and city policy

Tent cities are nothing new. Where there are significant numbers of displaced people, whether they are refugees displaced by war or famine or the urban homeless displaced by poverty, abuse and addiction, tent cities emerge as a means for people to create a base, share resources and garner some protection, whether real or perceived, in numbers. The question is how officials, municipalities and citizens choose to interact with tent cities and their inhabitants.

reactive_toronto

Toronto, Canada's largest city, was home to a large tent city that organically emerged over a span of a few years. In September 2002, the residents of Tent City were evicted by the owner of the property, Home Depot (Bacque). Situated in the downtown core, near the waterfront, the Home Depot lot had sat empty for many years with no eminent plans for use. The eviction took place over a matter of hours and many residents were unable to gather their belongings before being forced to leave the property under police force (CBC News).

At its peak, Tent City was home to hundreds of people who had no other places to live. Despite its name, Tent City was not just a collection of tents or rag tag tarps and make shift shelters. Many of the residents built their own structures, some looked like

small traditional homes with planted flowers and small vegetable plots. Crew members from the nearby movie studios would sometimes drop off left over sets and props from which residents created homes and outdoor spaces.

Despite being forced to leave the property by the City of Toronto Police, traditionally Tent City remained fairly self-governed. One of the oldest residents of Tent City became the appointed 'mayor' overseeing the operations of the encampment and dealing with the crime that occurred. The police would not usually enter Tent City unless a major crime was committed. While Tent City was not an idyllic environment or a positive aspect of Toronto, Home Depot's action's and the City's support of the abrupt eviction of hundreds of otherwise homeless people from their 'homes' served to further displace them and build resentment that heretofore had been a fairly benign relationship.

proactive_seattle

The Tent City Project in Seattle is the first known to be organized by a sponsoring organization (a partnership between the Seattle Housing and Resource Effort and Women's Housing Equality and Enhancement League - SHARE/WHEEL). It is one of the first in a major U.S. city to be largely accepted by local governments. After some legal wrangling regarding the granting of a permit allowing the Tent City to locate to a particular location in Seattle, King County Court of Appeals decided in 2001, that "tents are obviously habitations" and that the use of tents is not in itself sufficient reason for declaring a zoning violation or refusing to grant a land use permit (Freeman). "In

March of 2002, the Seattle City Attorney's office signed an agreement with SHARE recognizing the legality of Tent City and setting standards for its operation similar to those that SHARE has been practicing” (Freeman). Some of the standards include the requirement for Tent City to relocate every three months. It cannot be located on public property, but instead needs to be invited by private property owners like churches, schools, etc. in order to obtain a permit for 90 days. Tent City has a roster of churches and other organizations that host it on a rotating basis (Northshore United Church of Christ).

As organizers and residents of Seattle’s Tent City are quick to point out, Contrary to some stereotypes regarding the homeless, many residents of Tent City are employed, mostly in temporary or day labor jobs, but have insufficient income to obtain more permanent housing (Freeman). Despite early misgivings about the granting permits to homeless encampments, Seattle’s government officials have come to an understanding with Tent City’s organizers and with the private entities that have rallied around the homeless encampment. As a community, they have realized that Tent City serves an important function in their city offering refuge and a sense of home to those who would otherwise lack it.

home as designed object

Whether building permanent housing, inventing structures that can be worn in the laneways and viaducts that alone serve as shelter or creating new designs for Tent Cities, there is a tremendous opportunity for designers to improve upon what already

exists and to create new realities that have not yet been thought of. A new kind of empathy, a new aesthetic, a new sensibility of material, site and market and a keen understanding of the past's successes and failures will equip designers with the tools needed to make great strides in creating and building meaningful design solutions within the homeless community.

Answers may lie in viewing the home as a designed object and in the power of the social object designer to break free from the strong and beautiful yet sometimes stifling traditions of architecture. Considering home as an object is powerful, not in order to treat or observe the home as an entity separate from its context or from inhabitants, but as a means to get a fresh view on something that has millennia old attachments and associations. The result may be a new definition and design of home that considers a emerging market (newly transitioning homeless families and individuals), new materials (environmentally and socially sustainable), new technologies (environmentally and socially sustainable), new partnerships (with social and medical services), new business models (designer as developer for the poor?). The result may be a real solution that can help put an end to homelessness.

historical benchmark_sears house

Accessible, affordable and reflective of the time and culture in which they were built, Sears mail-order homes provide many lessons to modern designers. Sears never intended to be an innovator in the areas of design and architecture but this company

was able to take the leading home designs of the early 20th century and devise revolutionary ways to construct and distribute them across a nation (Sear Archives).

Aspiring homeowners could flip through a catalog and choose their dream home by style and cost. This new design of the home as an accessible, customizable object gave aspiring owners the freedom that traditional stick frame homes did not. Once consumers chose the style, they had a broad range of detail options allowing them to customize their home. To help customers pay for the houses, Sear introduced an affordable financing plan to allowing them to pay in installments. The desired home was then shipped by railcar and was received in over 30,000 pieces for the new owner and to put together. Sometimes a professional contractor was hired to build the house from accompanying plans but in many instances, the homeowners did it themselves often with the help of family and friends.

The Sears mail order house spanned the first three decades of the 20th century though its impact on housing and construction remains. The holistic approach to design, fabrication, customization, distribution assembly and financing was an important aspect of the Sears home's success over time and it is the piece that can and should be revived in current design, particularly when designing for the homeless. Thinking through and designing the entire process from beginning to end will ensure meaningful solutions for providing permanent housing for the homeless.

historical failure_FEMA trailer

An abysmal failure of a home designed and implemented as an object separated from its site and user is the FEMA Trailer. Poorly constructed, made from unsafe materials, and lacking any semblance of individuality, “the ubiquitous FEMA trailer has sheltered tens of thousands of Gulf Coast residents left homeless by Hurricane Katrina” but has also left them sick and in need of a much better solution (Brunker). Called ‘toxic tin cans’ by MSNBC, “Air quality tests of 44 FEMA trailers conducted by the Sierra Club since April (2006) have found formaldehyde concentrations as high as 0.34 parts per million – a level nearly equal to what a professional embalmer would be exposed to on the job, according to one study of the chemical’s workplace effects” (Brunker). Formaldehyde, the airborne form of a chemical used in a wide variety of products, including composite wood and plywood panels is considered a human carcinogen, or cancer-causing substance, by the International Agency for Research on Cancer and a probable human carcinogen by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Moreover, FEMA now has a surplus of these uninhabitable trailers. “The Federal Emergency Management Agency hurriedly bought 145,000 trailers and mobile homes just before and after Katrina hit, spending \$2.7 billion largely through no-bid contracts. Now, it is selling off as many as 41,000 of the homes, netting, so far, about 40 cents on each dollar spent by taxpayers” (Hsu). The lack of a clear, readily-available housing solution that can work in emergency situations like Hurricane Katrina and the need for permanent housing in the months following the storm, resulted in grossly inefficient expenditures and thousands of environmentally comprised products that now just sit in storage.

next step in homeless design

Architects and designers around the world are creating examples of proactive, flexible, environmentally responsive, efficient, affordable, safe, and healthy structures. Many examples of these lies within the realm of global emergency shelter design. The responses to the Asian Tsunami have created a new generation of emergency shelters that has pushed the boundaries of form, set-up, distribution and new materials. Much can be learned from these initiatives and applied to design for the homeless population in a North American context. Even the design responses to Hurricane Katrina that are closer to home have not branched out into the broader context of homeless design as seamlessly as one might think possible and logical. As a result there are many opportunities to adapt successes of well-designed emergency shelters to design permanent housing and even new categories of housing for the homeless.

The Global Village Shelter (GVS) “is an alternative to current solutions for disaster relief housing.” Ferrara Design Inc. creators of this shelter describe the characteristics of the design:

“The present disaster relief field relies heavily on tent and tarp structures; these structures offer little protection from outdoor elements and no sense of personal space. The GVS is a rigid structure that can be assembled in the field by two people in approximately 15 to 20 minutes. The instructions are simple graphics with limited text. The user simply unpacks the base

and the roof modules and assembles the GVS on site” (Ferrara Design Inc.)

Removable windows, locking doors, options for stove pipes and different flooring material makes the GVC flexible and customizable to climate, culture and comfort. “Built in cross ventilation creates a temperature equilibrium with the outdoor temps in warm climates - it will not get warmer than the outside temperature - the silver tarp reflects the heat away from the shelter. In cold climates the corrugated acts as a strong insulate; the blue tarp absorbs heat” ” (Ferrara Design Inc.). Smart passive design along with its affordability and many other features make the GVC an important model to study for homeless design.

The Global Village Shelter can be order for \$550 per unit, with volume discounts for large quantities. It weighs 170 pounds and provides 67 square feet of living space with an interior height of 7.5 feet (maximum) and 5.1 feet (minimum).

While not meant as emergency housing, new approaches to size and conscientious use of materials are another lesson that can be learned by social designers creating new housing solutions for the homeless. There are some examples of U.S. companies offering a smaller alternative to the monster ‘McMansions’ (typically defined as in the range of 3000 to 5000 square feet) often found in suburban housing developments (wikipedia). The Tumbleweed Tiny House Company designs and builds small efficiently planned homes 400 square feet and smaller, with the majority of homes in the 70 to 120 square foot range. Offering plans, consultation services as well as ready-made homes that can be transported to a new owner’s site, Tumbleweed Tiny

homes use space and resources conscientiously. As the owner of the company and of a small home, Jay Shafer explains the motives behind his sustainable designs on his website:

“My decision to inhabit just 100 square feet arose from some concerns I had about the impact a larger house would have on the environment, and because I do not want to maintain a lot of unused or unusable space. My houses have met all of my domestic needs without demanding much in return. The simple, slower lifestyle my homes have afforded is a luxury for which I am continually grateful.”

Tumbleweed Tiny homes retail for around \$35,000 and up and the cost estimates for utility usage depending on location a set-up can be nominal. “The materials list for each Kit recommends some of the greenest appliances available including dual flush toilets, and on-demand water heaters and biodiesel heaters. The houses can be positioned for excellent passive solar heating, and photovoltaic panels are easily incorporated” (Shafer).

conclusion

The Milwaukee laneway is a microcosm of the state of homelessness in America. While improvement have been made since 1987 when the Homeless Assistance Act was first passed, there is no doubt that it is still a major problem in the U.S. for municipalities and society in general. While the problems and contributing factors have remained much the same, the gaps between those who have and those who lack, between those living in

5000 square foot homes with three cars and the latest technology and those lacking basic shelter has grown over the last 20 years.

This being said social design is the tool for creating a new generation of homes for the homeless and urban poor. A new approach to viewing and defining housing, real estate and the marketplace can mean breaking out of dated, useless ideas of North American housing and pushing the need for new flexible models that better encompass everyone's needs for shelter. Design as intervention, as catalyst and as discourse, as a proactive approach that studies and imagines housing almost as for the first time, as a new object free to emerge and serve in new meaningful ways is the future and is a test for the willingness of designers to attempt to change the face of homelessness.

The few square feet bounded by one side by dumpsters, the other by a concrete slab, a forgotten otherwise unwanted space in Chicago is place to start re-imagining and designing an end to homelessness.

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