

**Professional Undermining:
Homelessness and Service as Method**

by

Andrew John Gilmour

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Dalhousie University is located in Mi'kmaq'i,
the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq.
We are all Treaty people.

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Abstract

The present thesis investigates homelessness and architectural practice. This thesis argues that homelessness defies deterministic solutions to housing and underscores the importance of non-market-based solutions for housing and homelessness action. Despite this, housing solves homelessness. This thesis follows practice-led work completed by the author between November 2021 and November 2022. The design projects collected in this thesis were completed while volunteering as a builder within a community association supporting people experiencing homelessness, housing insecurity, and barriers to housing at a low-barrier supported housing facility in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. This thesis raises questions about the ethics of practice, social responsibility, and the architects systemic role in reinforcing property ownership and housing as commodity.

Acknowledgements

In the spirit of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action, I want to acknowledge that this thesis took place at Dalhousie University in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq People. This thesis acknowledges that Indigenous Peoples are overrepresented amongst Canadian homelessness populations.

I would like to acknowledge and send my appreciation to the many people who helped contribute to this thesis. Thank you to my Thesis Committee members, Roger Mullin and Frank Palermo. Their invaluable knowledge and feedback shaped this work.

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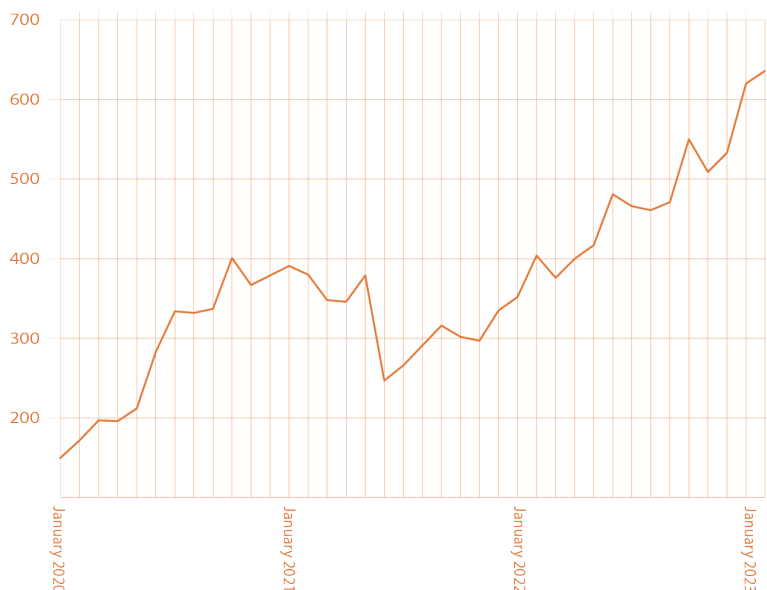
Chapter 1: Introduction

Homelessness and housing exclusion is the outcome of a broken social contract (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness 2012; Gaetz 2013; Please 2016; Chen, Cooper, and Rivier 2020, 2). We are responsible for the fractured agreements to which we have consented and to whose networks we explicitly or tacitly abide and preserve.

Context

Between January 2020 and January 2023, the percentage of people experiencing homelessness in the Halifax Regional Municipality (“the Municipality”), Nova Scotia, Canada increased by approximately 445% (Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia 2023).

Homelessness is defined as lacking access to stable, permanent, appropriate housing or the immediate prospect,

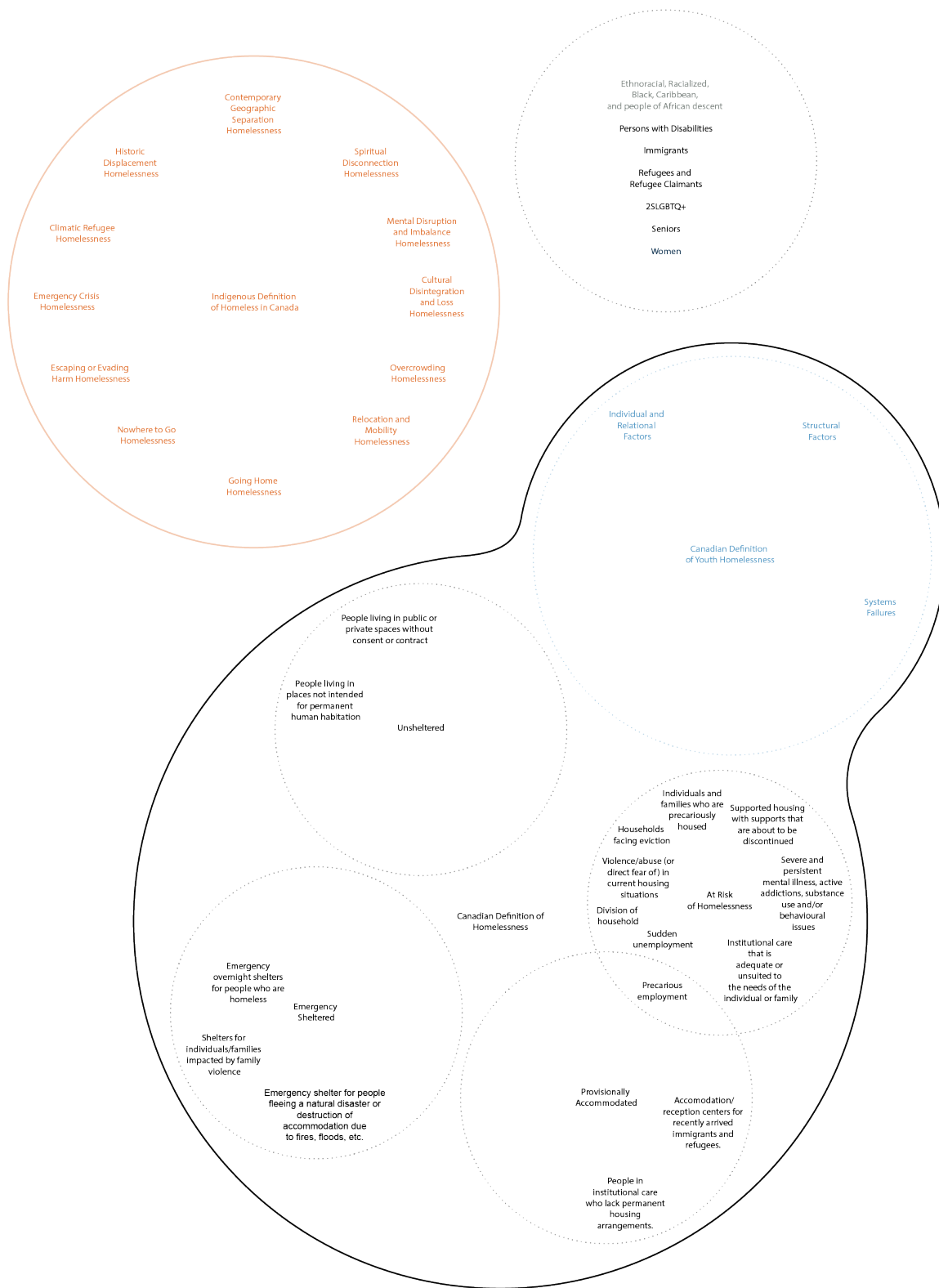


Data from “Reaching Home Chronically Homeless Tracking: April 2019 to January 2023” which illustrates the number of people experiencing homelessness in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada from January 2020 to January 2023. (data from Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia 2023)

means, and ability of acquiring it (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness 2012). For Indigenous Peoples, homelessness is more fully described and understood through a composite lens of Indigenous worldviews (Thistle 2017, 6). Indigenous homelessness is not simply an effect of housing markets and housing availability, but is understood as “the outcome of historically constructed and ongoing settler colonization and racism that have displaced and dispossessed First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples from their traditional governance systems and laws, territories, histories, worldviews, ancestors and stories” (Thistle 2017, 6).

People become homeless due to a combination of factors like poverty, lack of employment, low welfare wages, lack of affordable housing, childhood abuse or neglect, mental health symptoms, impoverished support networks, and substance abuse (Morrelli-Bellai, Goering, and Boydell 2000).

In Halifax, the rise in homelessness was aggravated by structural, systemic, and individual factors (Breakey 1997; Morelli-Bellai, Goering, and Katherine 2000; Gaetz 2013; Please 2016; Johnstone, Lee, and Connelly 2017; Chen, Cooper, and Rivier 2020). These factors included: precarious or unsustainable employment and unemployment (Storring 2022), issues including illness and death due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Baral et al. 2021; Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Nova Scotia 2021, 4; “2022 Point in Time Count” 2022), a 1.91% population increase (Statistics Canada 2022a), a 1% rental market vacancy rate and inflated housing and rent prices (Gaetz, Scott, Gulliver 2013, 10; Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation 2022), a housing crisis (Thomas and LaFleche 2022), and a 9.3%



The “Canadian Definition of Homelessness” (Gaetz et al. 2012), the “Canadian Definition of Youth Homelessness” (2016), and the “Definition of Indigenous Homelessness in Canada” (Thistle 2017). (data from Gaetz et al. 2012; Canadian Observatory on Homelessness 2016; Thistle 2017)

increase in consumer prices and a 8.8% increase in food costs (Statistics Canada 2022b). These factors were further aggravated by wages which failed to meet basic household needs (Saulnier 2022, 4). The Centre for Policy Alternatives Nova Scotia writes that the difference between a living wage (Saulnier 2022) and the actual minimum wage (Government of Nova Scotia, n.d.) was \$9.90 less per hour than it should have been at the end of 2022 (Saulnier 2022).

Despite their obvious and important correlations, homelessness cannot be directly and uniformly conflated with the factors listed above.

Human Rights and the Social Contract

The “Canadian Definition of Homelessness” and the “Canadian Definition of Youth Homelessness” both presuppose that homelessness is the denial of basic human rights (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness 2012; Canadian Observatory on Homelessness 2016, 1).



The Municipality has said that “housing as a human right does not mean that this right can encroach upon the rights of others. With the safety of all residents as a top priority, encroachment must be acted upon by appropriate enforcement of existing laws and regulations” (Woodford 2021g). Photograph by Zane Woodford. (Woodford 2021a; Woodford 2021g)

In Canada, fundamental freedoms and human rights are guaranteed constitutionally under the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982). Shelter and housing are not explicitly affirmed by the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

The human rights of Indigenous Peoples in Canada are protected internationally by the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (2007), which affirms all human rights recognized by international law for Indigenous people and states that “Indigenous Peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security” (art. 21).

Canada is a signatory to the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (1966), and part of the *International Bill of Human Rights*, the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, and the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*. The Covenant declares that all signatories must “recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing, and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions” (art. 11.1). The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) states that all people have “the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control” (art. 25). Other relevant treaties to which Canada is a signatory include the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (1966), the *Convention on the Rights of the*

Child (1989), the *Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women* (1979), the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (2006), and the *International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination* (1965).

Despite Canada's diplomatic heroism, Indigenous Peoples (Gaetz et al. 2012; Thistle 2017), Indigenous youth (Baskin 2006; Baskin 2013; Brown et al. 2007), 2SLGBTQ+ people (Cochran et al. 2002; Gattis 2009; Abramovich 2013), and ethnoracial, racialized, and black youth (Springer et al. 2007; Springer et al. 2013) are overrepresented amongst Canadian homelessness populations. International treaties and covenants may do little to protect Canada's most vulnerable and marginalized. "Burned by the System, Burned at the Stake: Poor, Homeless and Marginalized Women Speak Out" described how violations to the social and economic rights promoted in covenants unfold in the lives of women: homeless, migrant and Canadian-born, racialized, Aboriginal, psychiatrized, senior, disabled, queer, mothers, and survivors of violence (Feminist Organization for Women's Advancement, Rights and Dignity 2009).



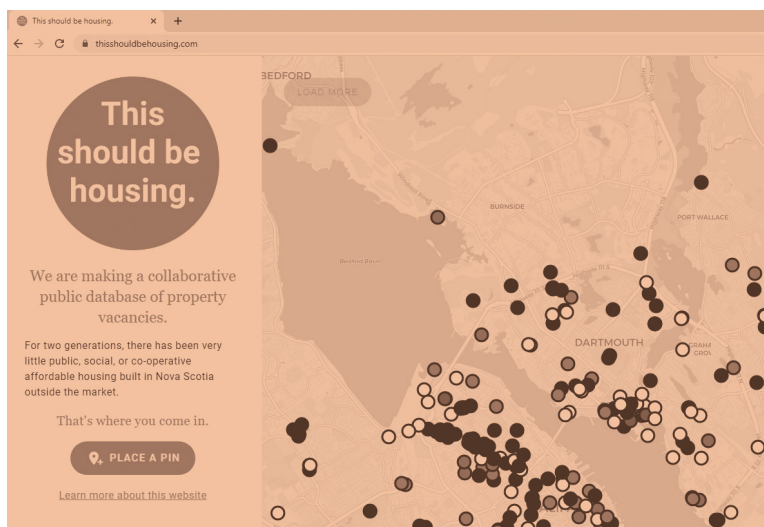
Replica "This should be housing." sticker.

In Halifax, Indigenous, African Nova Scotian, Black, Caribbean, of African descent, youth and former youth in care, 2SLGBTQ+, and people with disabilities and health issues are overrepresented amongst homelessness populations (Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia 2023).

Case Study: “This should be housing.”

“This should be housing.” is an online collaborative public database of vacant properties in the Halifax Regional Municipality (This should be housing., n.d.). The website features a map with pins showing the locations and addresses of vacant properties categorized by their ownership: Federally-owned, Provincially-owned, Municipally-owned, private-ownership, and unknown.

The “This should be housing” project believes that housing is a human right. The purpose of the online public database is as “a memory aid, and a space for proposal” (This should be housing., n.d.). The project cites the Canadian Centre



“This should be housing.” is an online collaborative public database. Anyone can contribute by pinning the locations and addresses of vacant properties in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. (This should be housing., n.d.)



"This should be housing." sticker on the door of a vacant property in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. Photograph by Cam Towner. (Towner 2021)

for Policy Alternatives Nova Scotia's "Keys to a Housing Secure Future for all Nova Scotians" (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Nova Scotia 2021), which proposes a plan and budget to create 30,000 units of permanently affordable housing for Nova Scotia's "core housing need" including people experiencing homelessness. The project also cites creative solutions to housing, like Halifax Mutual Aid (Halifax Mutual Aid, n.d.).

Solutions to Homelessness

The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, a non-partisan research and policy partnership, generally agrees that housing solves homelessness. They write that ending homelessness is a goal which seeks to ensure sustainable and long-term individual, collective, family, and community housing stability (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness 2012) by addressing structural disparities and equity (Kuhn and Culhane 1998). Housing stability means that all people would have a fixed address and housing that is appropriate, affordable and costing less than 30% of total before-tax household income, safe, adequately maintained, accessible and suitable in size, with enough bedrooms for the size and composition of the resident household (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness 2012; Gaetz, Scott, Gulliver 2013, 10), and with required income, services, and supports to enhance personal well-being (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness 2012).

In Canada, homelessness strategies at all levels of government include prevention strategies, restorative and recovery-oriented strategies, and integrated strategies (Government of Canada 2021; Government of Canada, n.d.). If social services exist in Canada, then what is going

wrong (Ward 2004, 1)? Strategies often suffer from a lack of uniformly recognized standards for types of indicators, targets, and verification processes (Turner, Redman, and Gaetz 2017). Johnstone, Lee, and Connelly (2017) write that despite self-sustaining and self-resolving social service provisions in Canada, homelessness “defies a profit-based sustainable solution,” and require a “collective caring responsibility” (1453).

Preventative strategies to end homelessness address structural disparities and equity and seek to end new and chronic cases of homelessness (Kuhn and Culhane 1998; Gaetz and Dej 2017; Turner, Redman, and Gaetz 2017; Chen, Cooper, and Rivier 2020).

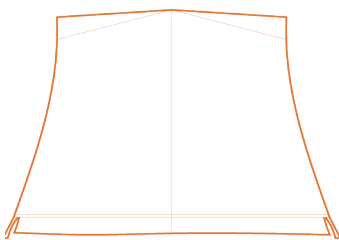
Restorative and recovery-oriented strategies to end homelessness include Housing First initiatives. Housing First (Padgett 2007; Tsemberis, Gulcur, and Nakae 2004; Waegemakers-Schiff and Rook 2012; Huffman 2018; McLane and Pable 2020) is a recovery-oriented approach to ending homelessness which centres on moving people experiencing homelessness into independent and permanent housing with no readiness or compliance contingencies (Gaetz, Scott, and Gulliver 2013, 2). Examples of readiness and compliance contingencies to housing include mandated and successful completion of treatment and with sobriety and abstinence preconditions (Rollings and Bollo 2021, 3). Differently, Housing First is a right-based intervention based on the idea that adequate housing is a precondition to recovery. Examples of Housing First projects include Pathways to Housing in New York (Tsemberis and Asmussen 1999), Houselink and Mainstay Community Housing in Toronto (Waegemakers-Schiff and

Rook 2012), and Housing First for Youth or HF4Y (Gaetz et al. 2021).

Integrated care strategies (Kodner and Spreeuwenberg 2002; Government of Canada 2022) and systems integration strategies (Evans et al. 2011) are systems approaches to preventing and ending homelessness by coordinating and strengthening collaborative care between service providers and service sectors (Phillips et al. 1988; Turner and Harvey 2016). This strategy is exemplified in “Reaching Home: Halifax Homelessness Plan 2019-2024”, a Halifax coordinated care plan with substantial community engagement. The plan’s mandated outcomes by 2024 include: a 50% reduction in chronic homeless, a reduction in Indigenous homelessness, a 100% reduction in a return to homelessness from housing, a general reduction in overall homelessness, and a reduction in new inflows into homelessness (“Reaching Home” 2020).

Homelessness in Halifax

The Municipality’s “Approach to homelessness” has advertised a preference for “relationship building, learning, education, and voluntary compliance” (Halifax, n.d.). But has more generally exemplified a “top-down approach” (Woodford 2021c; Luck 2021) which frequently targeted and criminalised homelessness through patterns of spatial exclusion, control, and marginalisation (Snow and Anderson 1993; Smith 1996; Wright 1997; Amster 2003, 195; Covin Jr. 2012).



Drawing of a tent, like those used by people living in Municipal parks and land.

Randall Amster (2003) writes that anti-homelessness legislation and regimes of spatial control aim to “locate a behaviour particular to the target group and criminalize it. With the homeless, it is very apparent: panhandling,

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Approach to homelessness

- The municipality's approach to homeless encampments centres on treating people experiencing homelessness in our public spaces with dignity while working to find ways to best support them within our capacity and scope as a municipality.
- The right to adequate housing is embedded in international law, federal legislation, and municipal strategies and frameworks. Accordingly, the municipality understands encampments to be in violation of individuals' rights to adequate housing.
- For these reasons, the municipality's approach has been to allow occupants of homeless encampments to remain until adequate housing has been identified and offered, or until the health and safety of the occupants or public are at risk.
- This approach does not condone or support the installation of infrastructure associated with encampments and requires that steps be taken to address demonstrated risks to the health and safety of occupants or the public.
- The municipality's response to homeless encampments is collaborative and community-based. The municipality is the primary funding partner for the Street Outreach Navigators, through the downtown business improvement districts. The Street Outreach Navigators help ensure those experiencing homelessness have access to appropriate supports.
- The Province of Nova Scotia, as well as community-based partners including the Street Outreach Navigators and housing support workers, continue to offer those experiencing homelessness with support – including a range of housing options and/ or temporary accommodation.

As the municipality considers its ongoing support around the issue of homelessness, the following principles are guiding efforts by staff:

- The municipality wants everyone to have a home.
- As supported by the Government of Canada in their Reaching Home initiatives, Housing First is the recommended approach to help individuals experiencing homelessness.
- Every action the municipality takes in assisting people experiencing homelessness should be grounded in a harm reduction approach, consider how it supports human rights, and maintains personal dignity for those affected.
- Relationship building, learning, education, and voluntary compliance are always preferred over an involuntary compliance action.
- Transparency and ongoing communication are essential for the development of trust.
- Whenever possible, the municipality should avoid duplicating the work of other service providers in the community and instead support them in their efforts to serve residents better.
- Nothing for us, without us – the people who will be impacted by decisions and actions should be meaningfully involved in those decisions.
- Everyone is expected to follow the law.
- Halifax Regional Police (HRP) should not be a primary response to many of the issues surrounding homelessness. HRP should be focused on the prevention and resolution of crime. Responses to issues surrounding homelessness should whenever possible be led by Street Navigators, service providers, and civilian compliance officers.

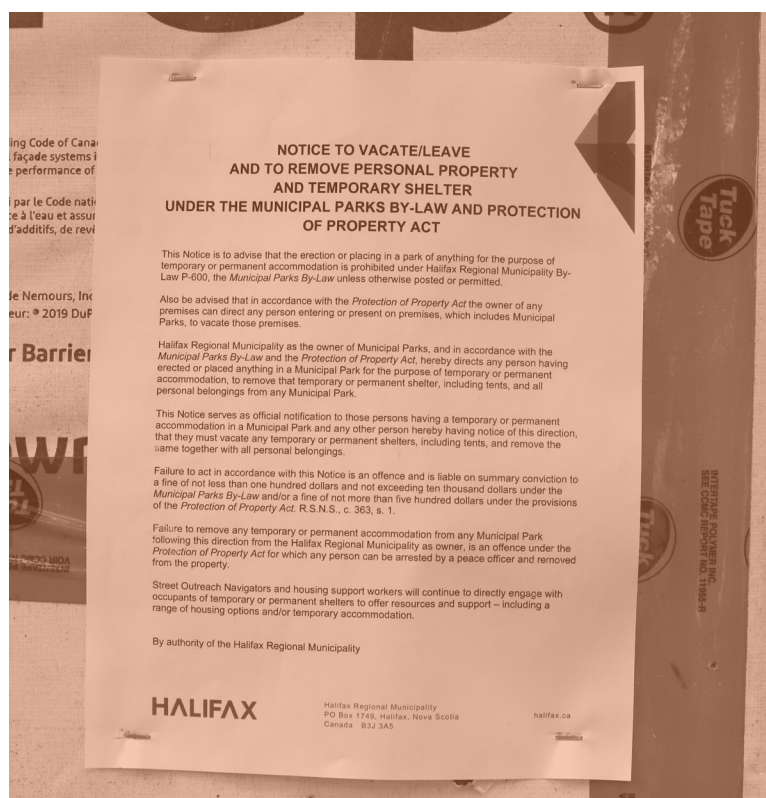
The Halifax Regional Municipality's "Approach to homelessness".
(Halifax, n.d.)



Drawing of a Halifax Mutual Aid crisis shelter.

P-600 *Respecting Municipal Parks* as part of a targeted approach to systematically sanitize (Smith 1996, 230; Amster 2003) and erase (Smith 1996, 230) homelessness and urban camping from Municipal parks and land.

The political issue came to a head on 18 August 2021 in the form of a thousand-person protest later called “the shelter siege” (Walton 2021a; Woodford 2021e). The protest began when Halifax Regional Police and the Municipality began evicting and displacing people from Municipal land and parks, destroying personal belongings, removing tents, and demolishing Halifax Mutual Aid crisis shelters (Halifax Mutual Aid, n.d.; Armstrong, Buckmaster, and Walton 2021;



“Failure to remove any temporary or permanent accommodation from any Municipal Park following this direction from the Halifax Regional Municipality as owner, is an offence under the *Protection of Property Act* for which any person can be arrested by a peace officer and removed from the property” (Woodford 2021d). Photograph by *The Coast*. (Armstrong, Buckmaster, and Walton 2021)



18 August 2021 protest in front of the Halifax Memorial Library. Photograph by Zane Woodford. (Woodford 2021e)

Luck 2021; Ryan 2021; Woodford 2021d) from Peace and Friendship Park, the Halifax Common, Horseshoe Island Park, and the site of the former Halifax Memorial Library (Woodford 2021e). The “shelter siege” expulsion (Kaufman 2020) did not solve, assuage, or prevent homelessness in Halifax (Woodford 2021g).

Rather than protecting and promoting the well-being of its people, the Municipality has made homelessness an unmanageable and nonfunctional problem (Turner, Redman, and Gaetz 2017) where strategies are non-existent and ineffective, and where the demand for services and resources exceed provisions and availability. Despite an increase in demand, between January 2020 and January 2023 Halifax experienced a decrease in the number of shelter beds available for people experiencing

homeless (Lycan-Lang and Amnison 2022). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Municipality offered short-term stays in vacant hotel rooms (Woodford 2021g). Far from promoting self-determination and harm-reduction practices, people reported being rejected from hotels because of past or persistent drug usage, unable to access hotels due to having personal belongings which need storage or cannot be accommodated, and reported feeling unsafe and being or feeling surveilled (Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia 2023). The Municipality's solutions failed to recognize that there is no appropriate space for everybody and which is inclusive of everyone's unique needs (Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia 2023). Their approach has been criticised because it did not seek consultation or development with existing service providers (Luck 2021; Woodford 2021a; Woodford 2021c).

Other Municipal and Provincial strategies included plans to increase housing stock, increase the number of affordable housing units, and promote and protect tenants rights during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to make a distinction between low rental market vacancy rates, inflated



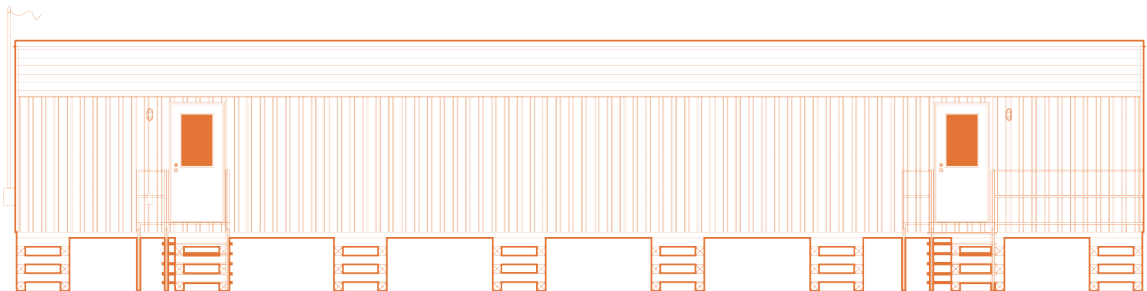
18 August 2021 protest in front of the Halifax Memorial Library. Photograph by Mark Crosby and CBC News. (Luck 2021; Ryan 2021)

housing and rent prices, tenants rights, housing affordability, and affordable housing. Although these issues are factors which contribute to homelessness, they can sidestep immediate and actionable issues like health, welfare, and public service provisions and they risk ignoring the violence, marginalization, incarceration, and the social and material inequities facing people experiencing homelessness.

The “shelter siege” and protest increased media exposure and public interest in the Municipality’s controversial approach to homelessness. Consequently, a 26 August 2021 motion by the Municipality authorized Halifax’s Chief Administrative Officer to spend up to \$500,000 on housing for people experiencing homelessness (Walton 2021a). And on 29 September 2021 a plan was put forward to build modular housing units for 63 people (Walton 2021a) and which were subsequently purchased and managed Out of the Cold Community Association at two locations in Halifax and Dartmouth.

The inadequacy of the Municipality’s response to homelessness was summarized by the Mayor of the Municipality:

The city, we don’t have the appropriate skill sets and the capacity to manage the complexities of the unhoused population. ... We don’t have social workers, mental health services or addiction support. These are forces of the province of Nova Scotia. (Luck 2021)



Drawing of the modular housing units purchased by the Halifax Regional Municipality in 2021.



Boxes with peepholes playing videos of the Halifax Regional Municipality's response to homelessness. (Halifax Regional Municipality 2020; The Coast 2021a; The Coast 2021b; The Coast 2021c; CPAC 2022)



“This should be housing.” sticker on a Halifax Regional Police car. Photograph by Robert Devet. (Connolley 2021)

Homelessness Advocacy in Halifax

Halifax homelessness advocacy has promoted housing-forward solutions like Housing First and affordable housing and has adopted slogans like “housing is a human right” and “This should be housing” (This should be housing, n.d.), among others.

Community groups and homelessness advocacy organizations were founded to provide direct action and stop-gap solutions to homelessness. These include Halifax Mutual Aid (Halifax Mutual Aid, n.d.), P.A.D.S. Community Advocacy Network (Permanent, Accessible, Dignified, and Safer Community Advocacy Network, n.d.) and the People’s Park (Walton 2021b), and the Halifax Community Fridge (Community Fridge Halifax, n.d.), among others. Existing organizations include Mobile Outreach Street Health (North End Community Health Centre, n.d.) and Out of the Cold Community Association.

Human rights are frequently cited, and drawing comparisons to relevant Canadian case law, Halifax commissioner Harry Critchley has argued that evicting people living in parks who have nowhere to live is a violation of their right to life, liberty, and security (Halifax 2022b). The Municipality has responded to stop-gap measures like Halifax Mutual Aid crisis shelters:

Housing as a human right does not mean that this right can encroach upon the rights of others. With the safety of all residents as a top priority, encroachment must be acted upon by appropriate enforcement of existing laws and regulations. (CBC News 2021)

Between 2020 and 2023, building crisis shelters, feeding neighbours, and assembling furniture became dangerous, illegal, and subversive acts (Blackstock 1964).



18 August 2021 protest in front of the Halifax Memorial Library. Photograph by Zane Woodford. (Woodford 2021e)

Professional Undermining: Homelessness and Service as Method

Safe and appropriate housing solves homelessness. But housing is perennial issue to which we are our own limiting factors. Housing design characteristics matter (McLane and Pable 2020; Rollings and Bollo 2021), but design is a futile exercise without fundamental changes to how architecture is practised. Robert Segrest (1997) writes:

The concept of architects as the blessed servants of the public welfare somehow manifests the best and the worst of their possibilities. Public housing goes up in the light of social progress; public housing comes down in the shadow of its failure. (79)

Architecture can do little to solve (Bridgman 1998, 50), assuage, or mitigate homelessness. Homelessness wants a solution: applied design resists ambiguity. It wants an elevator pitch. It wants optimism. It wants determinism. It wants beautiful solutions. It wants solid materiality. It wants plan, section, and elevation. But homelessness defies standard, prescriptive, and deterministic solutions. Instead, it requires new practices based on mutual care, ethics, and patience.

The present thesis investigates homelessness and architectural practice. This thesis argues that homelessness defies deterministic (Mouffe 2000) solutions to housing and underscores the importance of non-market-based solutions for housing and homelessness action. Despite this, housing solves homelessness. This thesis follows practice-led work (Calhoun 2002, 379-381; Haseman 2006; Smith ed. 2009) completed by the author between November 2021 and November 2022. The design projects collected in this thesis were completed while volunteering within a community association supporting people experiencing homelessness,

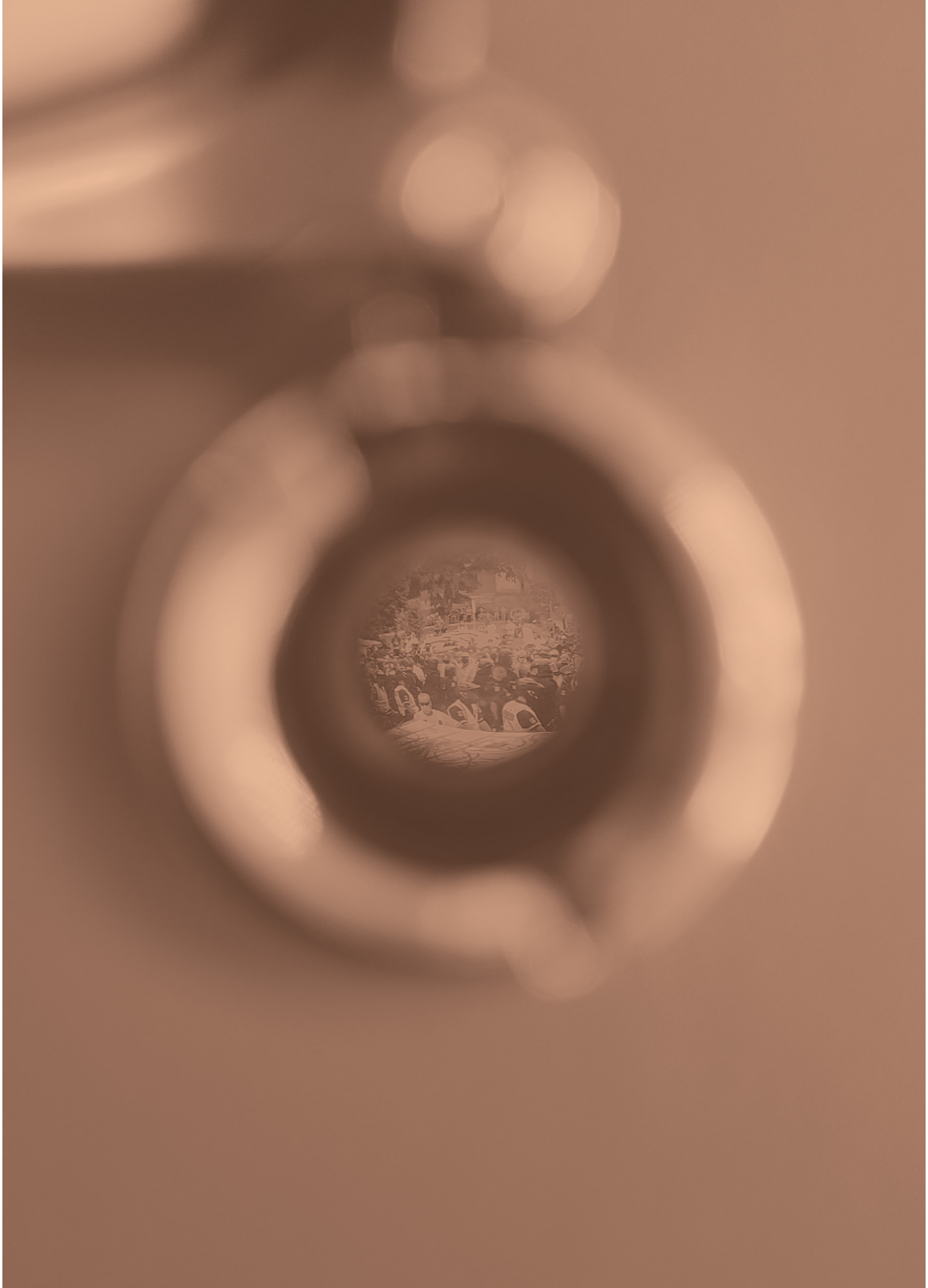
housing insecurity, and barriers to housing at a low-barrier supported housing facility in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. This thesis raises questions about the ethics of practice, social responsibility, and the architects systemic role in reinforcing property ownership and housing as commodity (Proudhon 1876; Turner 1976; Ward 1976; Ward 1985; Ward 2004, 4-5; Coates 2015). Housing and the continued commodification of housing is, all things considered, good news for architects. This thesis underscores the importance of non-market-based solutions for housing and homelessness action.

Should we step out of line to express a concern for human relations (Ward 2004, 24) and abandon disciplinary and institutional obligations, even break the law, overtaking all other imperatives to act in the best interest and to do good (Thoreau 1849; Schneider and Till 2009; Scheuerman 2018)? This thesis is an invitation to undertake radical care and volunteerism and to overcome the anonymous ambivalence often displayed towards people experiencing homelessness.

Literature Review

The present thesis foregrounds the research promoted by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, a non-partisan research and policy partnership.

Homelessness is an interdisciplinary area of study in the social sciences and humanities, health, geography, law, and planning. Homelessness literature often studies typically architectural issues like housing and housing design characteristics (McLane and Pable 2020; Rollings and Bollo 2021).



Boxes with peepholes playing videos of the Halifax Regional Municipality's response to homelessness. (Halifax Regional Municipality 2020; The Coast 2021a; The Coast 2021b; The Coast 2021c; CPAC 2022)

A paucity of academic literature and research from within architecture about homelessness (Davis 1997; Bridgman 2001; Davis 2004; Campbell 2005; Pable 2005; Bridgman 2006; Pable 2007; Verderber, Glazer, and Dionisio 2011; Pable 2013; Evans 2017; Petrovich et al. 2017; Allweil 2018; Pable, McLane, and Trujillo 2021; Rollings and Bollo 2021; Douglas 2022) betrays significant disciplinary and professional limitations. These limitations are due in part to a lack of knowledge and a lack of internal and external research standards. They reveal some of architecture's disciplinary conditions and values (Hillier and Leaman 1976; Cross 1982; Segrest 1997, 77).

Robert Segrest (1997) writes that the prevailing anti-intellectualism of both the architecture school and of the profession is a “force against action, innovation, and change” (79). In both the university and in the profession, architecture does not discriminate between academic journals and magazines—between medias of information and opinion and research. In other disciplines, papers submitted to academic journals follow strict editorial procedures and are single-anonymized, double-anonymized, or open peer reviewed. In contrast, architectural journals have little to with universities (Segrest 1997) and they are usually produced and written by practitioners, professional associations, arts institutions, and private publishers without the same level of review and criticism practised in other disciplines. Few exceptions exist, for example: the *Journal of Architectural Education*, the *Journal of Architecture and Urbanism*, *Design Studies*, and the *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*.

Gary Stevens (1998) postulates that the profession of architecture thinks that schools exist in order to teach.

Despite external obligations to the profession (Jarzombek 2009; Nova Scotia Association of Architects 2015) and to the networks of donors, professional associations, regulatory bodies, and alumni which legitimize architecture schools, universities are not vocational schools. To most corporate universities, education is just a sideline—universities demand research, funding, grants, tuition, student enrolment, donors and alumni, real estate ownership and development, and publications.

The profession is guided less by influence from its academics (Segrest 1997) and is guided more by the ignorance gained from professional peers, professional associations, regulatory bodies, and the promise of clients (Cross 1982; Rapoport 1987; Segrest 1997, 77). Among other issues, ignorance allows architecture to systemically reinforce property ownership and housing as commodity (Proudhon 1876; Turner 1976; Ward 1976; Ward 1985; Ward 2004, 4-5; Coates 2015). It is little wonder why so few architects work with homelessness and with people directly.

Student writing (Williams 1988; Master 1992; Zeitler 1993; Sibiya 2002; Kerr 2006; El-Ashmouni 2007; Dodd 2008; Martin 2009; Mitchell 2009; Nessel 2009; Ghazi-Zadeh 2011; MacLeod 2011; Hallacher 2012; Sayed 2012; Zanutto 2012; Glass 2013; Wilson 2014; Mijin 2015; Chrysovergis 2016; Miller 2016; Burman 2017; Lee 2017; DeBree 2019; Swerdlin 2019; Watson 2019; Baziw 2020; Khokhar 2020; Manoy 2020; Zhang 2020; Chow 2021; Jayaprakash 2021; Pyne 2021; Jabbarimoghaddam 2022; Wyatt 2022), typically in the form of graduate thesis papers and design projects, conflates untenable design (Coleman 2010) with applied research. Student work is detached from the outside world (Cuff 1992; Coleman 2010) without any relation (Reinmuth

2017) to specific social, political, and material contexts. Education-based design-build practices like Rural Studio and Samuel Mockbee (Dean, Chua, and Robinson 2002) promise to illustrate the opposite.

Literature on homelessness agrees that there is no singular suitable housing solution which will eliminate or mitigate homelessness and no singular solution which will suit all people experiencing homelessness. Despite what architects believe, homelessness defies deterministic solutions and distracting pretextual concerns like reductive, environmentally sustainable, aestheticised (Campbell 2005), and modular solutions.

Methods

This thesis follows practice-led work (Calhoun 2002, 379-381; Haseman 2006; Smith ed. 2009) and presents issues of operational significance for architectural practice. This thesis reflects on a collection of architectural creative projects completed by the author between November 2021 and November 2022. The projects were completed by the author acting a volunteer within a community association supporting people experiencing homelessness, housing insecurity, and barriers to housing at a low-barrier supported housing facility. The general concepts of the research programme are interwoven with contextualizing social and political information.

Limitations

It is not the goal of this thesis to conflate the author's creative practice with conceptual and contextual information. Nor is it the goal of this thesis to provide deterministic solutions to homelessness and housing instability through architectural

design, architectural design characteristics (McLane and Pable 2020), housing typology, and shelter design. It is not the task of this paper to provide a comprehensive review of housing and housing typologies, including affordable housing, transitional housing, permanent supportive housing (Rollings and Bollo 2021), cooperative housing, inter-generational housing, or other housing typologies. Home-making and the relative meanings and experiences of home (Kellet and Moore 2003) including the narrowness of the terms homeless, housed, and not housed (Turner, Redman, and Gaetz 2017) are outside the scope of this paper.

This thesis takes a critical position towards prioritizing the safety, privacy, and rights of people experiencing homelessness (Roy et al. 2021). This thesis was written from the perspective of an outsider with limited experience working with people experiencing homelessness. This thesis is not a study of living people and did not employ research methods involving humans, data collection, and data analysis.



Boxes with peepholes playing videos of the Halifax Regional Municipality's response to homelessness. (Halifax Regional Municipality 2020; The Coast 2021a; The Coast 2021b; The Coast 2021c; CPAC 2022)

Chapter 2: Ethics in Practice

Architecture is characterized (Schön 1983, 15-16) by intermediaries which include clients, project managers, trades people, contractors, regulatory bodies, the law, the internet, and more. Bureaucracy is the name of the game. It is a mostly functional whole, characterized by well-defined roles and expectations and is linked by traditional professional-client relationships (Schön 1983, 15-16). Practice (Hillier and Leaman 1976; Robinson and Piotrowski 2001) allows or disallows certain types of work and can lead to “presumptive designing” (Luck 2003, 529).

The Boyer Report, “Building Community: A New Future for Architecture Education and Practice” (Boyer and Mitgang 1996), commissioned by the American Institute of Architects, the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture, the American Institute of Architecture Students, the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards, and the National Council of Architecture Accrediting Boards, Inc., positions community as the central ethical, moral, and political responsibility (Harries 1975; Harries 1998; Wasserman, Sullivan, and Palermo 2000; Ray 2007; Spector 2007; Soeters 2007; Fisher 2008; Till 2009; Fisher 2010) of architecture. But despite good intentions (Moore and Wilson 2013), practice has allowed hostile (Petty 2016; Starolis 2020) and socially—ethically, morally, politically—irresponsible work (Petty 2016; Bader 2020; Rosenberger 2020; Starolis 2020). As neighbours and citizens, we might casually refer to *our* libraries and *our* streets and *our* neighbourhoods (Parson 2018), but, as architects and citizens, it’s hard to claim *our* hostile architecture.



An example of “hostile architecture”. Spikes prevent sitting and lying down. Photograph by James Petty. (Petty 2016)



An example of “hostile design”. Benches which dissuade lying down. Photograph by Robert Rosenberger. (Rosenberger 2020)

Alternative models of practice reconfigure the balance of agency and destabilize the roles of the architect, designer, client, builder, and community. Alternative models often avoid “presumptive designing” (Luck 2003, 529) and employ collaborative, collectivized, and participatory methods (Cross 1972; Sanoff and Conn 1974; Sanders and Stappers 2008).

If architecture wants to make a claim for the social contract (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness 2012; Chen, Cooper, and Rivier 2020, 2; Gaetz 2013; Please 2016) by acting in the best interest of the public (Boyer and Mitgang 1996; Segrest 1997, 76; Nova Scotia Association of Architects 2015; *Architects Act*, S.N.S. ch. 12, §9 2006), then it’s probably time to get to know the public (Sutton 1992; Sutton 2010). Giancarlo De Carlo (2005) asks: “What is architecture’s public? The architects themselves? The clients who commission the buildings? The people—all the people who use architecture?”

Ethics and Practice

What is ethics to architects? And to whom and to what is the architect responsible (Harries 1975; Harries 1998; Wasserman, Sullivan, and Palermo 2000; Ray 2007; Spector 2007; Soeters 2007; Fisher 2008; Till 2009; Fisher 2010)? Architects are responsible not only to their personal and professional interests and obligations (Jarzombek 2009), but to the consequences of their work.

My interest in architecture and homelessness initially developed in 2017 when I attended a lecture delivered by an architect, business owner, and school alumnus on the subject of ethics and the professional practice of architecture. Looking up from the front of a classroom, the lecturer began: "As a business owner, I have to choose architectural projects which make the decision between feeding and paying my staff members or not." He continued, asking a series of questions which betrayed a superficial interest or understanding of ethics: "Which is the more ethical option? To accept only the projects I want to take or projects which pay the bills? What is the right thing to do?"

The lecture exemplified some of what Donald Schön (1983) calls "the situations of practice" (15-16). Situations of practice are commonly used in vocational training programs and architecture schools (Stevens 1995; Till 2009). Characterized by their problem setting and ambiguity, "the situations of practice are not problems to be solved but problematic situations characterized by uncertainty, disorder, and indeterminacy" (Schön 1983, 15-16). The general purpose of the lecture was to train us students to accept the possibility that bad or less desirable work will or must happen.

There's more: The speaker in the example was not simply an architect and ad hoc university educator and lecturer. He was responsible for himself and for those he may be contractually or legally responsible to. As an architect, our lecturer is responsible for negotiating the bureaucracy of his legislative and regulatory authorities. In Canada, this complex institutional mess (Till 2009) includes the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada, the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture, the Canadian Architectural Certification Board, and the National Architectural Accrediting Board. He must also negotiate codes, and federal, provincial, and municipal laws and acts (Moore and Wilson 2013).

Furthermore, the epistemology of practice is linked to traditional professional-client relationships (Schön 1983). Architects operate profitable businesses where customers or clients or users trade money for architectural services. Practice has a formal basis in the legal system and offers a basis in informal understandings, enabling both architect and client to know what they can expect from one another (292-293). Were his ethics contained (Moore and Wilson 2013) in his contracts, the Nova Scotia Association of Architects "Canons of Ethics" (Nova Scotia Association of Architects 2015), the *Architects Act*, S.N.S. ch. 12, §1 (2006), or the "Canadian Handbook of Practice for Architects" Chapter 1.3 "Professional Conduct and Ethics" (Royal Architectural Institute of Canada 2020)?

The Nova Scotia Association of Architects "Canons of Ethics" outlines broad principles of conduct and obligations to the public, to society, to the client, and to the profession (Nova Scotia Association of Architects 2015), but not how to implement them in practice. How do obligations and responsibilities relate, if at all? The "Canadian Handbook

NOVA SCOTIA
ASSOCIATION *of* ARCHITECTS | NSAA

CANONS OF ETHICS

The Nova Scotia Association of Architects (NSAA) is a self-governing professional association mandated by the Province of Nova Scotia, under The Architects Act, to regulate the practice of architecture in the Province. Only licensed members of the NSAA may use the designation “Architect” and practice the profession of architecture in Nova Scotia.

Members of the Association are dedicated to professionalism, integrity and competence in the practice of architecture and are obligated to observe the broad principles of conduct established in these Canons.

Obligations to **PUBLIC**

Members shall act in the best interest of the public.

Obligations to **SOCIETY**

Members shall respect the laws governing their personal and professional affairs. They shall apply sound professional judgement with respect to the social, cultural, and environmental impacts of their work.

Obligations to the **CLIENT**

Members shall serve their clients with fairness and competence and conduct their business affairs without bias.

Obligations to the **PROFESSION**

Members shall be stewards of the architectural profession and safeguard its integrity. They shall strive for service excellence through ongoing professional development in the art and science of architecture.

Approved May 26, 2015

of Practice for Architects” contextualizes general rules of conduct and provides information on the taking of oaths and declarations (Royal Architectural Institute of Canada 2020), but not why these matter. What do these documents tell us about how architecture should be practised or how it should be researched? And what consequences do ethics have on the formation of practice and on architectural research? Unless one considers the taking of oaths as the foundation of an ethical practice, nearly nothing and almost none.

As a business owner, the speaker must also keep ahead of his paperwork. He must run a good business, manage operations, pay salaries and taxes and keep organized books. His business shares structural similarities to all business. The location of responsibility in business can be summarized by Adam Smith’s (1776) proclamation:

It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages.

Milton Friedman (2007) writes that the only responsibility a business has is to deliver profits to its shareholders. Friedman writes that a business cannot be said to have social responsibilities. If our speaker, as an individual proprietor acts to reduce the returns of his business in order to exercise his social responsibility, who and what will be negatively affected? For our business owner, architect, and sometimes university educator, wider social and material responsibility is always up for negotiation.

Toni Robertson and Ina Wagner (2013) write:

When ethics extends from the realm of moral philosophy into the realm of everyday life—that is, when it moves from exploring abstract questions about how to live a good life to influencing how people actually do things—then people need

to take a stand on various issues that affect them and shape the society in which they live... (66-67)

Following Robertson and Wagner, attention shifts from professional ethics and an ethics of architecture (Fisher 2008; Fisher 2010; Jones, Petrescu, and Till 2013; Moore and Wilson 2013; Abendroth and Bell 2015), to an ethics of everyday of life (Singer 1993; Robertson and Wagner 2013; Kaminer 2014).

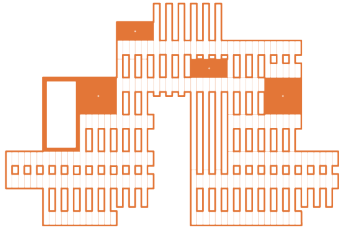
Our speaker likened his dilemma to a Trolley Problem (Foot 1967; Thompson 1976) with two possible outcomes. Our speaker can choose to feed his employees with some bad work, or he can choose to not feed his employees with work he finds pleasing. He seeks determinism and consensus reached through discursive deduction and reason, where he might look for agonistic struggle (Mouffe 2000). The situations of practice make it impossible to be deterministic. We can speculate that there may be repercussions outside of our dilemma's cast of characters—architect business owner operator and sometimes lecturer, and his employees—, to the places and people which may be affected by his decision. For example, to the financial and material problems facing an individual's access to affordable housing, or to the negative environmental impact in the production of plastics for architectural products. Consensus is a contraproductive goal which produces exclusion (Björgvinsson, Ehn, and Hillgren 2010, 129). Despite centring responsibility on the actions and ethics of the individual, the effects compete, overlap, and extend beyond the individual, out to networks of people, places, and things we cannot take account of.

Ethics and Representation

In *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power and Corporeality* (1995), Moira Gatens writes: “We are accountable for the present in that we are responsible for those present possibilities that become actual through our actions” (105).

Representation matters and representations are partial truths. Architects abstract and represent the world, scaling it up and down (Yaneva 2005; Yaneva 2009) through models and images without too much concern for who is represented and why they appear. Images are populated with people from <https://skalgubbar.se> or <https://www.nonscandinavia.com> and are shared indiscriminately on internet-based applications like Instagram, on websites like <https://www.archdaily.com>, and published in print media like magazines and journals. There are many examples of ethically dubious work which profits professional and financially—intentionally or unintentionally—from representations of people experiencing homelessness: see Andjela Karabasevic “One Home for the Homeless” and Craig Shimahara “Illustrating Homeless Architecture”.

Though partial, representations are not “innocent” in that they carry “persuasion” (Robertson and Wagner 2013, 75). They describe a vision for the future or the past. They can welcome others into or preclude a dialogue from taking place (Latour 1986). Toni Robertson and Ina Wagner (2013) write: “When, during a design process, we tell a story or represent a social practice or site in some other way, we are constructing a representation that we intend to contribute to shaping the future social practices or site” (75).



Drawing of the structure built for thesis defense, and which served to mount and exhibit some of the work completed as a volunteer and which itself was an abstraction of that very same work.

The present thesis takes a critical position towards prioritizing the safety, privacy, and rights of people experiencing homelessness (Roy et al. 2021).

Prioritizing people before work and work before proof and validation, I have not carried artifacts, pictures, videos, and drawings back from where I volunteered. I have re-drawn, abstracted, collaged, and re-imagined the volunteer work in an extended form of my architectural and artistic practice. The representations and objects presented here were an opportunity to rebuilt and reflect on the volunteer work. And they serve as a personal memory aid and tool for discussion, not proof. I wonder how partiality can be used as a tool for ethical representation in architecture.

Case Study: “Zero Yen House”

“Zero Yen House” by Kyohei Sakaguchi is a collection of photographs, videos, sketches, and drawings of illegal buildings constructed by people experiencing homelessness in Japan (Sakaguchi 2004). The houses in Sakaguchi’s study are “made from everything” (Margolis 2021): cardboard



An example of a solar-powered “Zero Yen House” house. Photograph by Kyohei Sakaguchi. (Sakaguchi, n.d.c.)



Drawings of a solar-powered “Zero Yen House” house. Drawings by Kyohei Sakaguchi. (Sakaguchi, n.d.a.)

boxes, wood, natural and synthetic sheeting materials, books, telephone booths, and tarps. They include a range of styles: “a mobile cardboard home built on a wooden cart, a house made out of a discarded playground slide, and a house that incorporates a Shinto shrine” (Margolis 2021). The houses are illegal, but persist due to human rights protections guaranteed by Japan’s constitution.

“Zero Yen House” houses exemplify non-market-based (Johnstone, Lee, and Connelly 2017, 1453; INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence 2017) solutions to self housing. Sakaguchi writes, “These houses are built on a shoestring budget by diverting and recycling the rubbish thrown away on the street. ... In this respect, these houses are built out of the resourcefulness of human nature, not by purchasing power” (Margolis 2021).

“Zero Yen House” is an example of practice-based and practice-led work. Sakaguchi’s practice of writing books, tending to a vegetable garden, painting and drawing, creating a suicide help line, and designing recycled housing are all part of the project (Margolis 2021). His practice “seeks to reveal an emerging form of architecture created with the instinct, consciousness and capability of human beings not entrapped by preconceived ideas...” (Hara 2006) Questioning the role of the architect in a country with a large number of vacant houses, Sakaguchi asks: “Is there a way to become an architect without building a house” (Margolis 2021)?

The work emphasizes the ingenuity and resourcefulness of the illegal dwellings (Kieran 2007, 131) while also centring ethics, consent, representation, and privacy. Sakaguchi’s house images do not portray their occupants: “Sakaguchi has created no sense of invitation in the photographs, focusing primarily on each house as an architectural oddity. The photographs remain remote...” (Lam 2010, 41) Rather than reflecting on the lives of the occupants, Sakaguchi foregrounds the distinctiveness of each owner’s vision of dwelling found in the structural peculiarities of the houses (Hara 2006).

Models of Practice

There are many alternatives to the conventional models of practice (Golden 2017) and project delivery models described in the “Canadian Handbook of Practice for Architects” (Royal Architectural Institute of Canada 2020). Sometimes models are both alternative models of practice and project delivery models. And sometimes they are used as a pedagogical or research tool.

Alternative models of practice reconfigure the balance of agency and destabilize the roles of the architect, designer, client, builder, and community. Alternative models often avoid “presumptive designing” (Proudhon 1876; Sculer and Namioka 1990, xii; Luck 2003, 529; Ward 2004) and employ collaborative, collectivized, and participatory methods (Cross 1972; Sanoff and Conn 1974; Sanders and Stappers 2008). SPUR and Gehl’s “Coexistence in Public Space” (Huttenhoff 2021), The Glass-House Community Led Design’s “Empowering Design Practices”, Charles Durrett’s *A Solution to Homelessness in Your Town* (Durrett 2021), and Project for Public Spaces “Place for People Campaign” (2016) are all examples which suggest alternative models of practice and employ collaborative, collectivized, and participatory methods and tools.

In collective and collaborative work, the balance of agency (Awan, Schneider, and Till 2013) is in a constant state of renegotiation. Collaborative work is different than work made by and for a single user (Tang 1991, 143). This work delays the creation of the design object, embracing a democratic agonistic process (Björgvinsson, Ehn, and Hillgren 2010, 129; Mouffe 2000) which does not presuppose the possibility of consensus and rational conflict resolution: “These are activities full of passion, imagination and engagement. As such, they are more like creative innovations than rational decision-making processes” (Björgvinsson, Ehn, and Hillgren 2010, 129). Rachel Luck (2003) writes that “people’s preferences, either from within a defined user group, or as individuals, are neither predictable nor constant” (529). Co-Design models often utilize collaborative methods, exploiting social (Lahti et al. 2016) and collective (Sanders and Stappers 2008, 6) creativity in the design process (Koestler

1964; Foqué 2010, 28; Åsberg, Hutman, and Lee 2012; Lindström and Ståhl 2015, 223). Contemporary examples of collective and collaborative work are rare in practice, beyond the degree to which all work is generally collaborative. Recent pedagogical examples include The Architecture Lobby's "Architecture Beyond Capitalism School" (2021), aimed at rethinking architectural education and systems of power through collective discussion (The Architecture Lobby Academia Working Group 2022), MADWORKSHOP and the University of Southern California School of Architecture's "Homeless Studio" (Borges and Mitchell 2018), and the Canadian curatorial collective Architects Against Housing Alienation formed to represent Canada at La Biennale di Venezia in 2023. Historical examples of collective and collaborative work can be found at the Bauhaus and at the Vkhutemas. Blurring the boundaries between study and labour, pedagogy and practice, the Vkhutemas or Higher Art and Technical Workshops were established in the early years of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics with an objective to create "educated collectives" working together using the "brigadny metod" or brigade method (Bokov 2022). Vkhutemas professor Nikolay Ladovsky established the Association of New Architects, and later members founded the Organization of Contemporary Architects, the All-Union Organization of Proletarian Architects, the Society of Architects of Socialist Construction, and the Association of Architect-Urbanists (Bokov 2022). Later historical examples of collective and democratic, team-based methods include The Architects Collaborative, established in 1945 in the United States of America (Kubo 2022).

Participatory (Jones, Petrescu, and Till 2005; Simonsen and Robertson 2013; Lezaun, Marres, and Tironi 2017) methods

are predicated on the idea that decisions “made on behalf” of a person are different from those “made by” a person (Luck 2003, 525; Kensing and Greenbaum 2014). The need for participation recognises that tensions exist between those with and those without (Kensing and Greenbaum 2013, 22). Participatory Design emerged during the various social, political, and civil rights movements and worker’s rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s. The first Participatory Design Conference in 1990 (Kensing Greenbaum 2013, 22) pulled together ideas and practices based on the tenants of participation, collective action, and shared interest and values (Nygaard and Bergo 1975; Sandberg 1979; Bjerknes et al. 1983; Robertson and Simonsen 2013, 2-23; Kensing and Greenbaum 2014, 23-31), and aimed to equalise power relations while achieving some mutual learning (Kensing and Greenbaum 2013, 21). Toni Robertson and Jesper Simonsen (2013) write:

[t]he motivation was and remains democratic and emancipatory: participation in participatory design happens, and needs to happen, because those who are to be affected... should, as a basic human right, have the opportunity to influence the design of those [things]... and the practices that involve their use. (6)

Sculer and Namioka similarly emphasize a fundamental ideal of democracy: they write that “people who are affected by a decision or event should have an opportunity to influence it” (xii; Ward 2004; Proudhon 1876). Tim Huffman (2018) writes about the potential for participatory and community-based qualitative research methods for the development of permanent supportive housing on Skid Row in Los Angeles, California.

Critiques of place-making (Moran and Berbarry 2021; Douglas 2022), participatory and emancipatory processes, and the Gehlian city (Gehl 2013; Huttenhoff 2021) have

argued that these models and methods can contribute to hostility and can sow the seeds of homelessness expulsion (Smith 1996, 230; Ferrell 2001; Amster 2003, 195; Kaufman 2020) and patterns of spatial exclusion (Amster 2003) and gentrification (Smith 1996).

Models and methods cannot be applied uniformly across social, political, and geographical contexts. Geographic designation does not necessarily constitute an internal shared “sense of belongingness” (DiSalvo, Clement, and Pipek 2013, 184), or social and political heterogeneity among a community (Ingram, Shove, and Watson 2007, 4).

In practice, alternative models, tools, and methods stress and extend billable hours and are only useful if they can be made financially viable. Social responsibility is subject to the market. This is exemplified by the many tiny-home, tiny village, shipping container, and aggregated housing and shelter projects: NAC Architecture’s “Hilda L Solis Care First Village” in Los Angeles, the Tiny Homes Foundation in Australia, JFD and Clear Architects “The Homeless Cabin”, “Dignity Village” in Portland, Oregon, “Opportunity Village” in Eugene, Oregon, “Second Wind Cottages” in Newfield, New York, “Quixote Village” in Olympia, Washington, “Occupy Madison Village” in Madison, Wisconsin, “Community First! Village” in Austin, Texas, Lehrer Architects “Whitsett West Tiny Home Village” in Los Angeles, for examples. These projects are generally marketed as alternative solutions which address housing price inflation, are quick and cheap to construct, negotiate land-use and property-ownership, are sometimes described as sustainable and environmentally responsible, or as a viable way to house people experiencing homelessness. These projects generally exemplify the practice of reduction and of minimum standards, of minimum

levels of floor area, of space, of thickness, and of materials, and propose that housing should or could be built as quickly and as cheaply as possible. When poor housing quality is associated with maladaptive behaviours, reduced quality of life, decreased global functioning, increased stress and depressive symptoms, and contributing to stigma and negative personal identity (Rollings and Bollo 2021, 3-4), we should ask why people experiencing homelessness deserve less. Why not, instead, make dwelling spacious, protected, insulated, comfortable, well-equipped, and rich in opportunities for privacy (Giancarlo De Carlo 2005).

What could be possible outside of the trappings of the professional architect-client relationship which ordinarily constitutes our framework for navigating the public? Rather than fighting for disciplinary and professional and institutional transformation (Segrest 1997, 79), is it possible to do good work which favours direct “action and processes” (Anderson 2014) under the noses of board-members, law makers, and colleagues?



Boxes with peepholes showing a miniature model of urban camping at Victoria Park, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Case Study: Halifax Mutual Aid

Halifax Mutual Aid is an anonymous group of people “taking action against houselessness” (Halifax Mutual Aid, n.d.; MutualAidHFX 2021; Woodford 2021a) in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Formed in late 2020 (Halifax Mutual Aid, n.d.; Woodford 2021c), Halifax Mutual Aid began cooperatively building and delivering crisis shelters for use by people experiencing homelessness to municipal land and parks.

Halifax Mutual Aid crisis shelters defy profit-based solutions to housing (Johnstone, Lee, and Connelly 2017, 1453; INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence 2017) and demonstrate that material circumstances can be changed using inexpensive, standard, and recycled building materials. Defying authority, violating the law and the National Building Code (Moore and Wilson 2013), and without building permits, Halifax Mutual Aid invites others to participate by



Halifax Mutual Aid Shelters and tents in front of the Halifax Memorial Library. Photograph by Zane Woodford. (Woodford 2021b)



Temporary and inappropriate solutions like “Cardborigami” (2007) in Los Angeles. Photograph by *CBC News*. (CBC News 2013)

accepting donations, publishing building plans, materials, and instructional videos on their website.

Unlike highly temporary and inappropriate stop-gap solutions like “Cardborigami” (2007) in Los Angeles (CBC News 2013), “ORIG-GAMI” (2017) in Brussels (Pasha-Robinson 2017), and ZO-loft architecture & design’s “WheelLY” (2009), Halifax Mutual Aid crisis shelters are constructed using conventional building materials, are insulated, and have doors and windows. They are more closely related to “Toronto Tiny Shelters” by carpenter Khaleel Seivwright (Halifax Mutual Aid, n.d.).

Their erection on parcels of highly-visible urban municipal land and public parks and their use by people experiencing homelessness made the crisis shelters the subject of controversy (CBC News 2021; Woodford 2021g; Woodford 2021c; Woodford 2021d; Woodford 2021f). Their visibility increased public interest (Woodford 2021b; 2022 PIT Count: The State of Homelessness in HRM) and political awareness of homelessness in Halifax and raise questions about the right to the city (Parson 2018), about welfare service and stop-gap provisions, authority and policing, and larger questions around private property ownership (Proudhon 1876; Turner 1976; Ward 1976; Ward 1985; Ward 2004, 4-5; Coates 2015).



Without providing safe and appropriate alternatives, the Mayor said: “Remember, we are providing options far better than to have human beings living in sheds like animals. Nobody should have to live in a shed” (Woodford 2021f). Photograph by Mark Crosby and *CBC News*. (Luck 2021; Ryan 2021)

Prior to their violent eviction on 18 August 2021 by the Municipality and Halifax Regional Police (Armstrong, Buckmaster, and Walton 2021; CBC News 2021; Luck 2021; MutualAidHFX 2021; Ryan 2021; Woodford 2021d; Woodford 2021e; Woodford 2021f; Woodford 2021g), Halifax Mutual Aid crisis shelter residents cultivated a sense of autonomy and “a place they can call home in the



Halifax Mutual Aid crisis shelter construction. Photograph by *The Coast*. (Walton 2021a)

community” (Johnstone, Lee, and Connelly 2017, 1453; Woodford 2021g).

Halifax Mutual Aid crisis shelters demonstrate that collective caring (Johnstone, Lee, and Connelly 2017, 1453) and cooperation (Kropotkin 1912; Kropotkin 2021; Sanders and Stappers 2008; Lahti et al. 2016) are preconditions for survival (Kropotkin 2015; Ward 2004, 5). They exemplify “social spontaneity” (Buber 1992) and “bold forms of grassroots placemaking on public land” (Douglas 2022) cultivated in other Canadian cities. The crisis shelters illustrate that coordination for social responsibility and action requires neither uniformity nor bureaucracy (Ward 2004, 87; Kropotkin 2015).



Boxes with peepholes showing a miniature model of urban camping at Victoria Park, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Chapter 3: Exegesis

Between November 2021 and November 2022, I volunteered as a builder and designer with a community association supporting people experiencing homelessness, housing insecurity, and barriers to housing at a low-barrier supported housing facility in Halifax and Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, Canada.

My interest in the present work developed after I attended the 18 August 2021 Halifax Memorial Library “shelter siege” (Walton 2021a; Woodford 2021e) and protest in support of people experiencing homelessness. I began my practice of volunteer work as a response to what I had witnessed. I had wandered into the protests and couldn’t turn away.

The following section presents a collection of architectural and creative projects completed during my time as volunteer with the community association. I have attempted to accurately describe and analyse what was built, not what should have been built (Ehn 1988, 52; Blomberg et al. 1993, 125-126). The projects were not designed in a studio using architectural drawing or model—though I had tried! Plan drawing may be a helpful resource for action (Suchman 1987), but I soon learned what other authors have demonstrated before me: that the best-laid plans are not the way a project will end up (Nygaard and Bergo 1975; Kensing and Greenbaum 2013, 25).

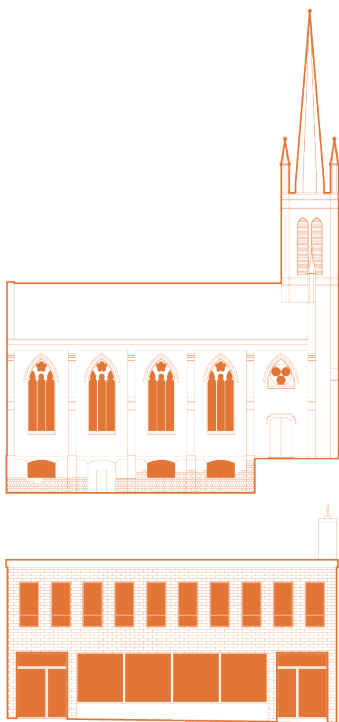


Boxes with peepholes showing a miniature model of the interior of a refrigerator.

Personal Reflection

We met in the locker-room-cum makeshift office of a decommissioned hockey arena. Recently acquired for temporary use as an indoor shelter for people experiencing homelessness (Walton 2021a; Walton 2021b), the out-of-the-way Gerald B. Gray Memorial Arena in Dartmouth was loud and bright and cold at the end of November 2021. During the locker room meeting we learned that the community association would be moving into two newly built housing facilities in Halifax and Dartmouth in the winter and spring of 2022. I extended an ambitious offer to design and build them something which might improve their service delivery all the while improving the lives of the people who access their services at their new locations. We agreed that even a coat of paint would do.

In the quiet first weeks of January 2022, I was in email correspondence with the community association, the Municipality, and the companies contracted to design and build the housing facilities. I visited the future sites—open



Drawing of past shelter locations, including St. Matthew's Church and 1221 Barrington Street.



Front door of the Halifax Warming Centre at St. Matthew's Church. The drop-in warming centre occupies the basement of the church for about 30 days a year, from November to April. Photograph by *The Coast*. (Walton 2022)



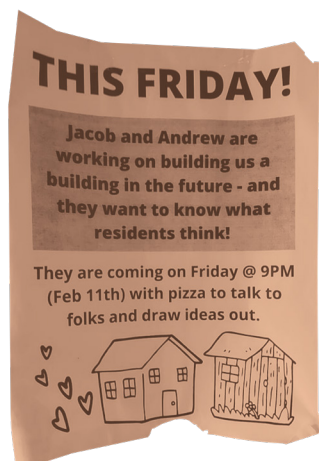
Dartmouth supported housing facility. Photograph by Ethan Lycan-Lang and Leslie Amminson. (Lycan-Lang and Amminson 2022)

surface parking lots as well as the sites of their past seasonal shelters, including a warming centre in the basement of St. Matthew's Church and 1221 Barrington Street.

Over the next several months, my role as a volunteer was in constant flux as I negotiated what I could do and who I could be in relation to changing needs and desires. Concerned with methods and processes and techniques, I decided it might be valuable to destabilize the process further by engaging with residents directly in a mock participatory or co-design process.

Dartmouth was the first supported housing facility to be completed and 24 residents moved in towards the end of January.

I met residents one evening in their shared common room and community space. On the advice of staff, we met residents on their schedule and terms to avoid interfering with other wrap-around services and meetings. We arrived



Staff made poster for the first engagement session.

Out of the Cold Community Space

Out of the Cold Community Association Website

Send us your ideas.

Name *

Email *

Message *

What values could the Out of the Cold Community Space represent and uphold? What kind of buildings and services do you think should be available at the Out of the Cold Community Space?

Send

Out of the Cold Community Space

Out of the Cold Community Association Website

The Out of the Cold Community Space will help us realize our vision of engaging and supporting the wider community with a permanent drop-in space in Halifax. This project will be an integral step in our transition from shelter to permanent supported housing by continuing to prioritize our unhoused neighbours with the highest barriers. We will continue to acknowledge and assert that shelters are a desperately inadequate solution to the barrier folks are experiencing out in the world and that everyone has a right to housing. The OTC Community Space will continue to provide low-barrier and harm-reduction focused programming. It will also value spatial flexibility, universal design principles, and embrace green-building practices.

If you didn't have a chance to meet with us in person, [use our contact form](#) or [send us your ideas](#).

What values could the Out of the Cold Community Space represent and uphold? What kind of buildings and services do you think should be available at the Out of the Cold Community Space?

[send us your ideas.](#)



Website created to solicit design ideas. The form asks: What values could the Out of the Cold Community Space represent and uphold? What kind of buildings and services do you think should be available at the Out of the Cold Community Space?

at 8:00PM with pizza and soda for an undetermined length of time.

On the first evening, we met with about 6 residents and a couple of support staff members. Along with sharpies and markers and clipboards and paper, I had prepared large laminated maps, drawings, pictures, and questions for the



Halifax housing facility near Gottingen Street and the Halifax Regional Police station.

residents. The evening turned out like a poorly conceived census.

We were strangers and outsiders during the first evening. The engagement activity was not interesting, and future meetings might have benefited from a shared and achievable goal or design activity.

On the second and third evenings, however, instead of maps, drawings, pictures, and questions, we ate pizza, talked casually, and read and performed poetry. During these evenings, I learned something of the stories and of the lives of the residents. And I learned a little bit about the experience of living in shelters. Previous shelter locations had outdoor spaces for music-making, smoking and relaxing, and places for barbecues and festivals. Among the dozens of design ideas generated during these meetings, designing and building a stage became an important idea.

After our engagement sessions, I went to work designing a stage with a few explicit and implicit goals. It should be round or circular and with a step or at a height to be used as seating along its perimeter. It should encourage conversation and lying down. It should understand and adhere to Building Code and by-law and zoning, (Moore and Wilson 2013) while not strictly applying for permitting. And it should be beautiful.

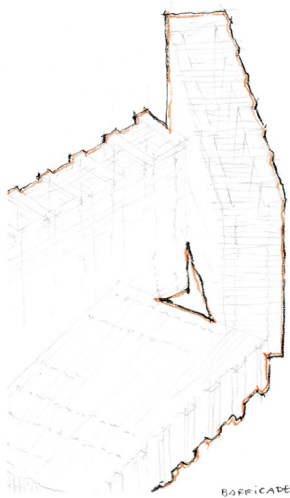
The late winter and early spring brought more opportunities to be on site at the supported housing facility at both Dartmouth and the newly completed Halifax site. Some of the first projects I worked on included outdoor benches and seating and raised-bed planters.

Making myself visible, being on site with tools and safety glasses meant I could be useful in more ways than intended. My work was often interrupted by moments of delight and mutual learning (Kensing and Greenbaum 2013, 21): conversations, meals and snacks, and requests for me to make small functional objects like doorstops, ashtrays, and shelves. I learned that doorstops have a privacy and a welcoming function in their ability to hold a door which closes too readily or opens too easily. I learned that cigarettes can be a form of social and material currency. I learned that other things can be used as currency when I was gifted a ratchet strap—possibly an appeal to my perceived role—in exchange for building shelves for a resident’s home in the housing facility.

My enrolment (Latour 1999; Latour and Yaneva 2008) in the sites and the lives of the people I met means that I became peripherally aware of violence and police presence and surveillance. I learned how to signal to staff members and residents when police might be in the area. I learned that the benches and planters I built would be overturned and stacked for use as a barricade, if and when the time comes.

I also became aware of the commodification of transportation and the importance of mobility. Bicycles appeared in the spring and kept appearing throughout the summer. As soon as residents learned that I had a set of Allen keys and a wrench, I repaired and adjusted bikes all year. I became aware of taxis and taxi chits. I became aware of the usefulness of bus-tickets and of bus passes and of opportunities to gain commodified public systems (Ayers 2022).

I became aware of eating, food security, food storage, and food preparation and cooking. Despite both sites



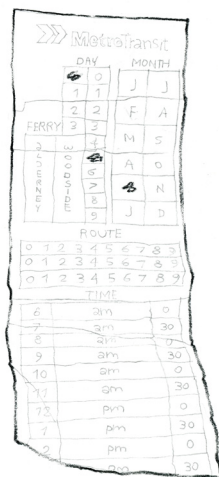
Drawing of the stage overturned for use as a barricade.



Two sides of a replica sheet of 10 over-sized bus-tickets.

being occupied with residents and staff members, the commercial kitchens designed to feed the 63 residents were not ready for many weeks and months after move-in. During this waiting period, I saw food donations of all levels austerity, absurdity, and abundance. I learned about how Halifax Regional Police and security guards attempt to prevent and penalize food theft. I learned about the culture of dumpster diving (Parson 2018) and of the necessity of stealing and community fridges (Community Fridge Halifax, n.d.). I learned about how and why milk gets stolen: in place of naloxone, milk is dangerously and incorrectly injected intravenously to counteract the effects of opioid overdose. Milk is also commonly used to flush the eyes and faces of people who have been pepper sprayed, as in a protest. Milk needs to be refrigerated; therefore it gets stolen.

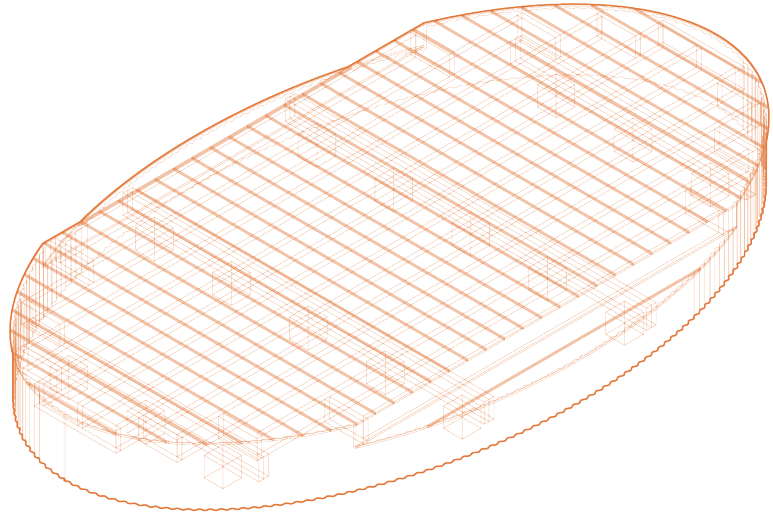
Plan, elevation, section, and perspective drawings of the stage design were not easily or fully understood by the



Drawing of a bus transfer.



Boxes with peepholes showing a miniature model of the interior of food in a garbage container.



Plan, elevation, section, and perspective drawings of the round stage design were not easily or fully understood by the staff members and residents of the community association.

staff members and residents of the community association. Despite my personal interest in alternative ways of working, I had returned to conventional drawing out of habit. I found myself doing something all bad drawings end up needing: gesticulating (Murphy 2005), sketching, paper folding, and impromptu modelling. Drawings didn't matter because nobody cared about them.



“SALT Festival Installations” in Norway. Photograph by “SALT Festival Installations / Rintala Eggertsson Architects”. (“SALT Festival Installations / Rintala Eggertsson Architects” 2014)

In time, we learned that the round stage design was far too costly and complicated and impractical to construct with limited tools and skilled help. New goals were added to the previous: the stage should be easy to assemble—and maybe easy to describe using words not drawings—, should use a limited number of tools, should encourage conversation and lying down, should be at a height to be used as seating along its perimeter, should understand Code, and the stage should be compact and easy to store and move.

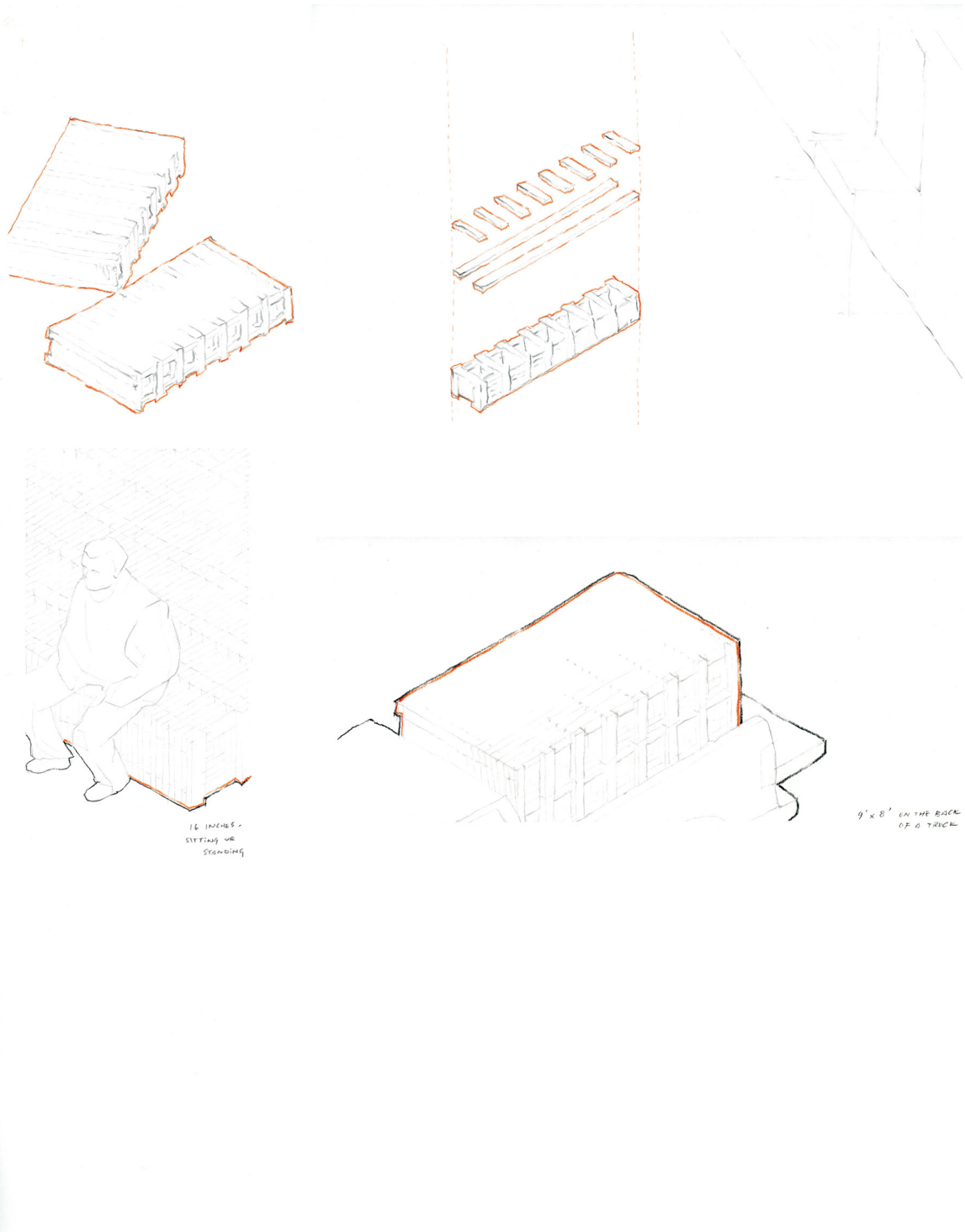
I made myself more known and visible during the summer by working in the open spaces between the houses. A skilled



Project by Brad Pickard, Devin McCarthy, and students. Photograph by Brad Pickard. (Pickard, n.d.)

carpenter and resident helped me to develop and construct the final design. The technique and design is similar to the “SALT Festival Installations” in Norway by Roger Mullin, Joar Nango, Håvard Arnhoff, Alberto Altés, Richard Dacosta Barriteau, and a group of architecture students (“SALT Festival Installations/Rintala Eggertsson Architects” 2014) and is also similar to a local Halifax project by Brad Pickard, Devin McCarthy, and students from the Dalhousie School of Architecture (Pickard, n.d.) . Our stage utilizes off-the shelf pressure-treated 2x4’s cut down to 16” and 72” pieces with a mitre saw. Like an extruded wide beam or truss, the stage was assembled on the ground or between two saw horses with two parallel long pieces forming cords and shorter bridging pieces forming the webs. To prevent accident from using an air-nailer, each intersection received two 2-1/2” deck screws to form moment connections. The total assembly was forgiving, requiring minimal skill, and wide tolerances, and errors were easily fixed.

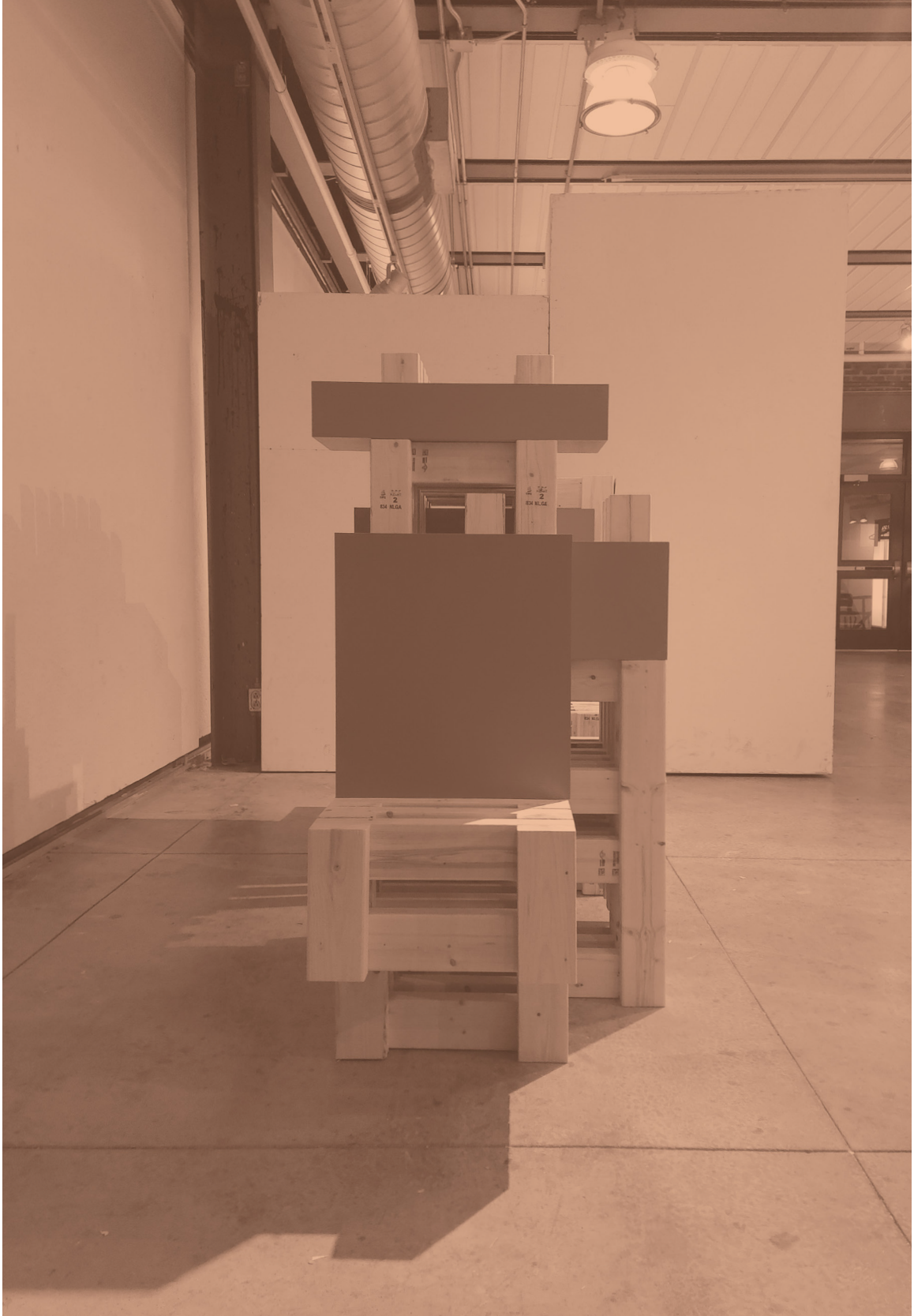
The stage can be separated into three units, which allow the stage to take a variety of simple configurations: to be stored and used vertically or horizontally, to be used as seating as well as for standing or lying down, to act as a barricade against police cars and unwelcome guests—a subversive example of defensive and hostile (Petty 2016; Bader 2020; Rosenberger 2020; Starolis 2020) architecture. The dimensions of each stage piece is such that they can be loaded onto the back of a pickup truck for use in other locations. The 16” height is both comfortable for sitting along the edge and for standing on without the need for stairs or a railing.



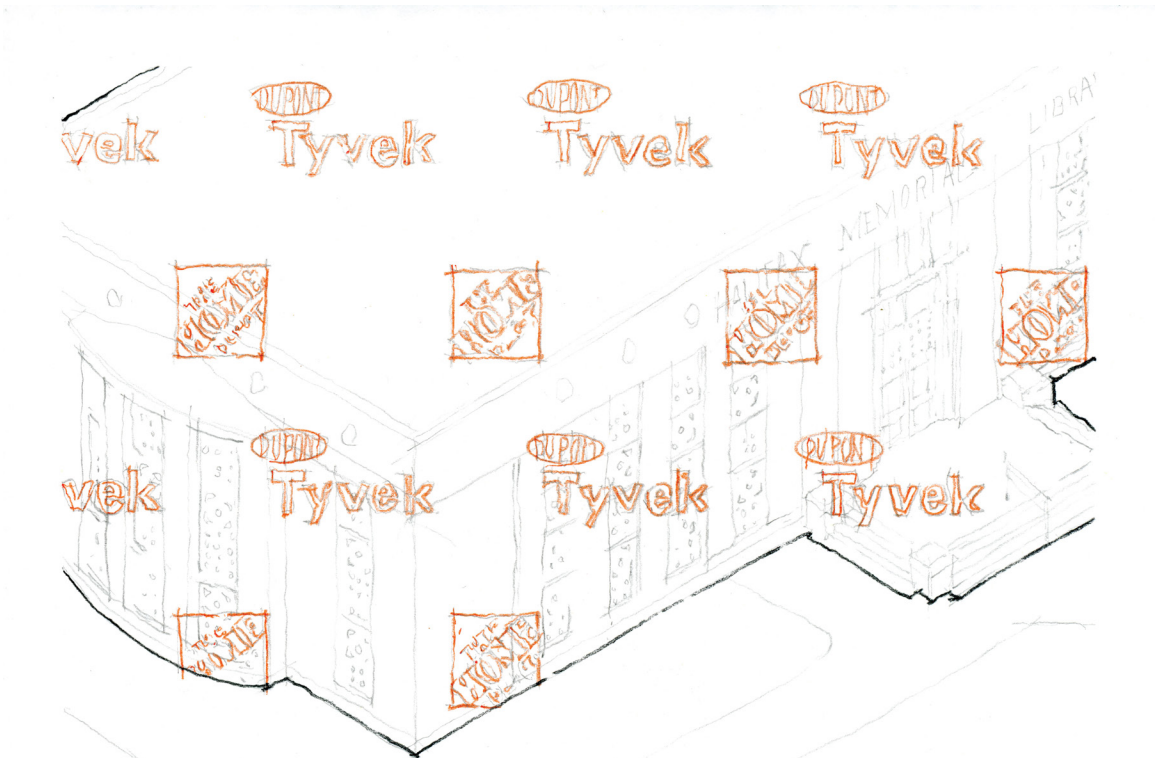
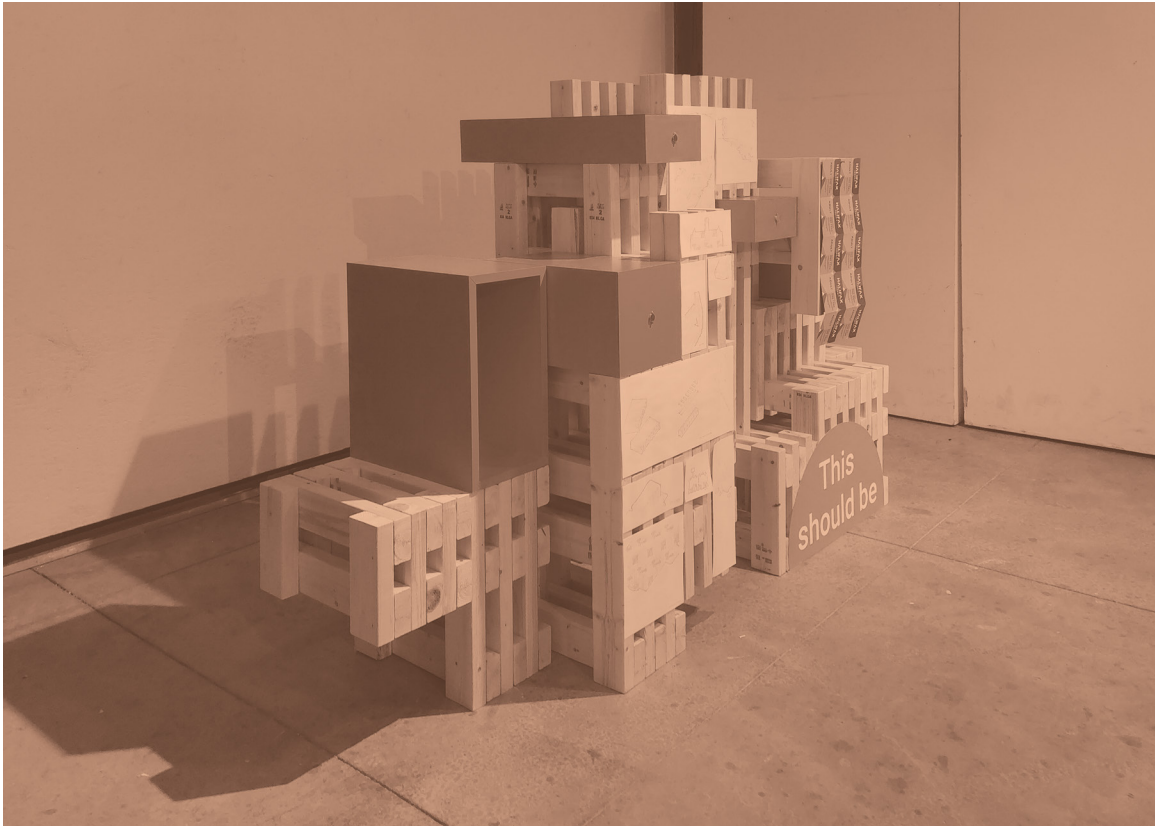
Drawing of the final stage assembly, showing its height and use as seating, its ability to break apart into three units, and its ability to be stacked and loaded onto the back of a pickup truck for use in other locations.



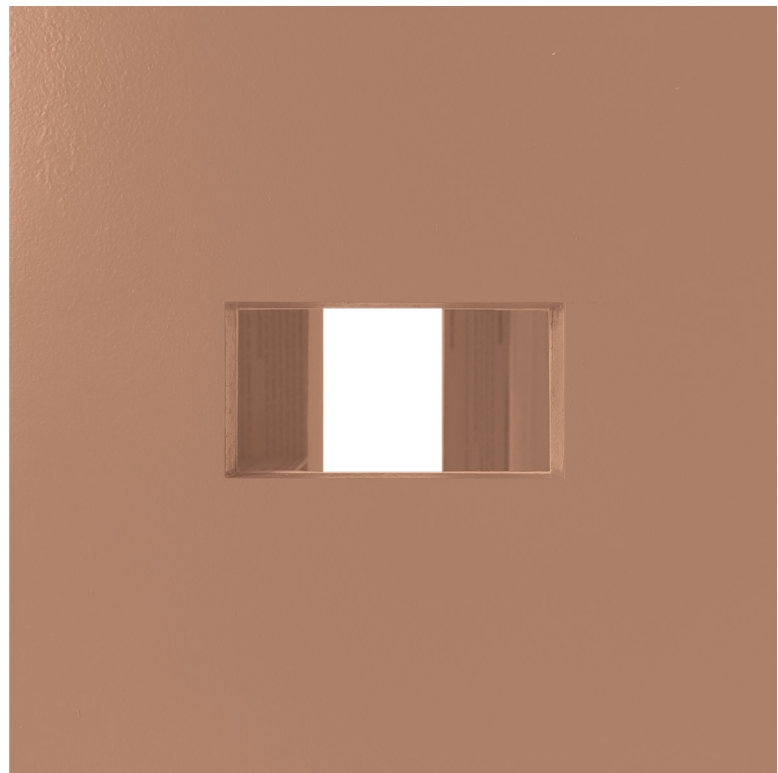
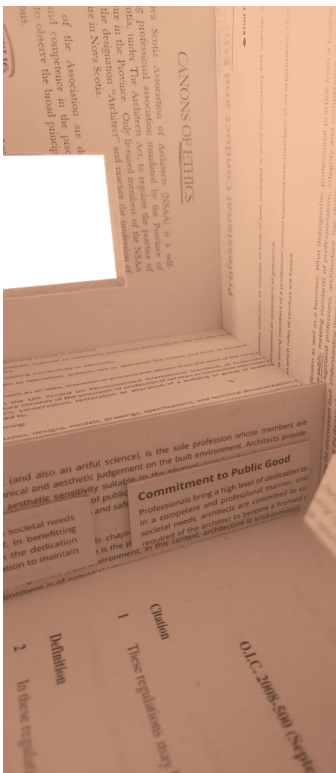
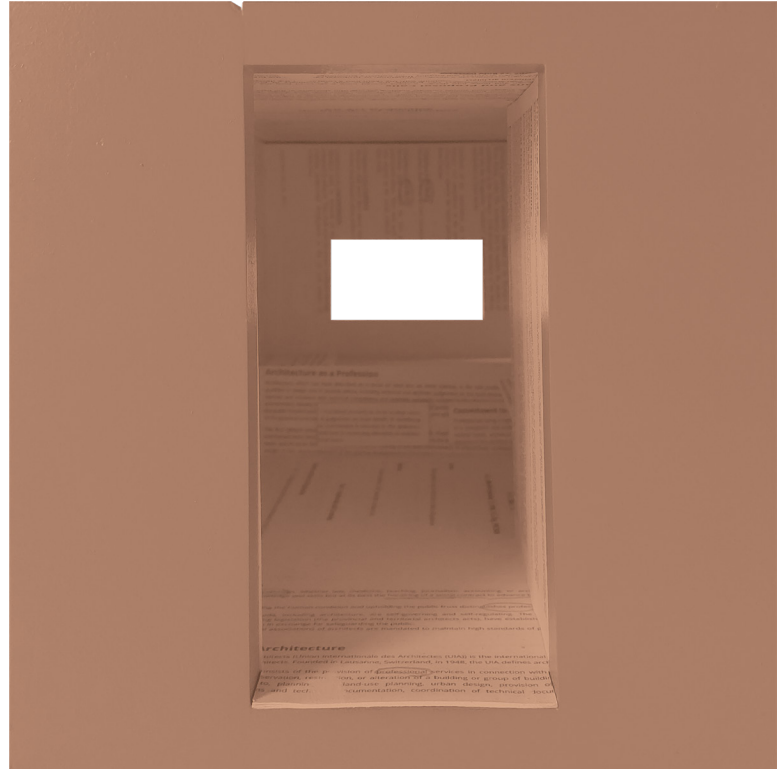
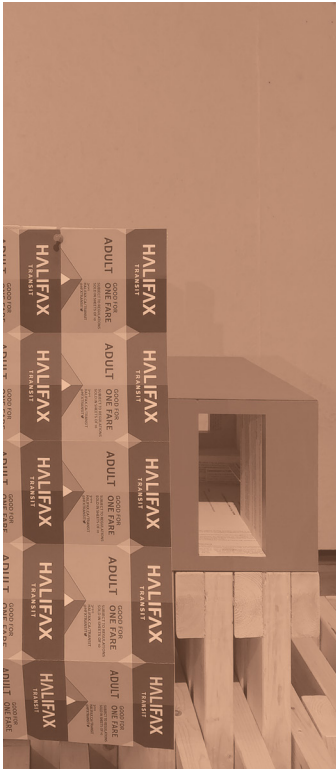
Photograph of the thesis defense installation and abstraction of the stage. And a drawing of Halifax City Hall wrapped in Tyvek.



Side photograph of the thesis defense installation showing double-sided boxes and models.



Photograph of the thesis defense installation and abstraction of the stage. And a drawing of the Halifax Memorial Library wrapped in Tyvek.



Photograph of the thesis defense structure showing the over-sized replica bus-tickets and a model of a single bedroom at the supported housing facility. Other detail photographs of the the model bedroom show its integrated furnishings and simple configuration.



Photograph of detail of thesis defense installation imbedded with boxes. Two sides of each box have a glass peepholes. The boxes reveal models and videos.



Each box have two peepholes. The boxes reveal videos. (Halifax Regional Municipality 2020; The Coast 2021a; The Coast 2021b; The Coast 2021c; CPAC 2022)



Each box have two peepholes. The boxes reveal double-sided miniature models of urban camping at Victoria Park, Halifax, Nova Scotia, and the interiors of a garbage container and a refrigerator.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

When I began this paper, I asked myself: Who does design benefit? And who does it hurt? Can design solve problems (Archea 1987)? Is design itself an absolving solution? Is homelessness a condition and experience that benefits some of us? Is homelessness antithetical to architecture?

Volunteering was an effective method of practice and study. Self-examination was the voiceless teacher of this project. Volunteering helped me to recognize and reflect on my own abilities and shortcomings. I learned to offer and promise only what I could actually do (Cross 1982; Archea 1987; Rapoport 1987; Foqué 2010; Cross 2011; Walton 2021a). I learned to speak to strangers. I learned to express care and concern beyond sympathy.

Volunteering was also an effective means of reflecting on the deficiencies of practice and education. I felt trapped between two poles: between what Rae Bridgman (1998) calls the “utopian vision” and “the pragmatic” when referring to architectural design (50). How would either come to bear on a project?

I learned that architecture is characterized (Schön 1983, 15-16) by intermediaries. And that practice (Hillier and Leaman 1976; Robinson and Piotrowski 2001) allows or disallows certain types of work. Many of the organizations I encountered exemplified alternatives: like shelters which maintain stability while refuting business-like organizing practices (Jensen 2018), and groups “taking action against houselessness” (Halifax Mutual Aid, n.d.; MutualAidHFX 2021; Woodford 2021a) through collective caring (Johnstone, Lee, and Connelly 2017, 1453) and cooperation (Kropotkin



Posters by the Architects' Revolutionary Council. (Bottoms 2007)

1912; Kropotkin 2021; Sanders and Stappers 2008; Lahti et al. 2016).

The practice-led work in the present thesis attempts to balance truthful and accurate description (Ehn 1988, 52; Blomberg et al. 1993, 125-126) with abstraction and partial representation. I chose to speak on behalf of myself and the profession, rather than on behalf of the people I met and worked with.

The present thesis is written for the profession—for my place in it—and to my colleagues and friends. It is an attempt to demonstrate practicable social responsibility, which favours action and process rather than products (Anderson 2014) and which encourage the development of new and extended methods and tools that build on ethics, deliberation (Robertson and Wagner 2013, 66), and support self-determination.

This thesis is an invitation to undertake radical care and volunteerism as practice. Should we step out of line to express a concern for human relations and abandon disciplinary and institutional obligations, even break the law, overtaking all other imperatives to act in the best interest and to do good?

Philip Larkin reminds us that we are responsible to each other, to our hidden neighbours and to those in plain sight: “We should be careful / Of each other, we should be kind...” (Larkin 2014, CXCV).

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