Spatial Status
The Homeless and Urban Space

Masters of Landscape Architecture
Elizabeth Milne 121995
Spatial Status

How might a study of homelessness influence the way we design urban space?
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Abstract

This project investigates how the design of urban space might be influenced by the social phenomenon of homelessness. In central Auckland there are on average 150 homeless sleeping rough within a one kilometre radius of the Sky Tower. Homeless are drawn to the urban realm to receive social service support and to become absorbed within the public life of the city. Observations into what spaces homeless occupy and how they occupy them reveals a set of features including; alcoves, stairs, retail walls and bus shelters. These features form a basis for design that engages with the homeless. The underlying premise of this project is that Auckland’s homeless are worthy of attention in the design process. The aim of the project is to develop a set of design techniques that will assist with the design of public space to help achieve inclusiveness and greater social equity.
Introduction

The lifestyle of the homeless, lived out in the urban landscape, is of significance to designers because of the influence it has on the domiciled public and urban public space. Urban design presents the opportunity of generating public spaces where the homeless are a part of the urban community for which the space is designed. As Goulding states:

“The recent interest in public space as a key neighborhood and community resource is partly the result of the perception that we live in an increasingly divided society where public facilities are no longer automatically accessible… Public space where people from all walks of life can meet and interact is arguably more important that ever.” (as cited in Hodgetts, et al., 2008b, p. 935).

Homelessness presents a conundrum for designers working in the public realm, and opinions are polarised. Sean Godsell states boldly that “the measure of a sophisticated society is how well it treats its underprivileged” (Godsell, 2002) while others openly or silently endorse a journalist’s opinion that the displacement of the homeless is necessary because “not everyone wants to sympathise with homeless people, much less share a public space.” (Hodgetts, et al., 2008b, p. 948). This polarity can result in a fraught design process. There are many stakeholders in public space and there is reluctance to compromise on this issue. The negativity towards the homeless is further reinforced by the media which features images of homeless people sleeping and drinking in public spaces.

As a ‘research by design’ project, this work provided the opportunity of examining the relationships between the homeless, urban space, the public and design, with the aim of developing a more intimate view of the spatial composition of these relationships in Auckland CBD. The method was one of action: going to the city, observing, doing drawings, making models and developing an affiliation with homeless through Lifewise and Auckland City Mission. The objective was to ensure that the findings are grounded and relevant to Auckland City. The process provided the opportunity of dispelling the many assumptions surrounding the homeless and at the same time coming to terms with the expectations that the domiciled public have of the homeless. There is a code of conduct underlying urban space that “is a set of middle-class expectations about how someone should be and behave in public.” (as cited in Hodgetts, et al., 2008b, p. 941).
The Condition

Homelessness can be defined as someone living in an unsafe or insecure situation (Council, 2009) and includes the following:

- Rough sleepers who have no shelter and live in public places
- Those who have no permanent shelter and sleep on the floor or couch of a relative or friend
- People who are living in sheltered accommodation, or crisis accommodation

Homelessness for these people can be understood in the context of it being a person's last or best, perceived option rather than their ultimate choice of lifestyle. Michelle Kennedy expresses this sentiment as she relates her personal experience:

“Making the leap from given-every-opportunity, spoiled-in-every-way middle-class child to boring, middle-class housewife and eventually to homeless single mother should be harder than it really is. In reality, it doesn’t take much more than a series of bad judgment calls and wrong decisions that, at the time, appear to be perfectly reasonable and in most cases for the better.” (Kennedy, 2006, p. 2).

Homelessness is an urban issue that is anticipated to increase in conjunction with the growth of Auckland City. “Across all developed nations, the highest concentrations of homeless people tend to be found in the largest urban settings and they tend to be segregated to some of the poorest areas.” (as cited in Groot, et al., 2008). The homeless are drawn to the urban realm to receive social support and to become absorbed within the public life of the city.

To live in the suburbs as a homeless person is difficult because suburban communities are more likely to consider a homeless person as a threat. Suburbia is also boring for the homeless who have very little to engage themselves with. City life in comparison offers entertainment, ranging from civic events to passive people watching.

This project focuses on the homeless who sleep rough in Auckland CBD. On any one night, parks, alcoves, and derelict buildings are examples of ‘home’ for up to 150 of these people. It is acknowledged however that this is a transitory group of people whose introduction to the street is often related to prior insecure living conditions and that their exit from it is dependent on support and stability returning to their lives.
Figure 1: The Golden Triangle of Auckland CBD
On the Streets

THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE

The points of the ‘golden triangle’ (figure 1) that encloses the concentration of homeless rough sleeping persons in Auckland CBD are Victoria Park, upper Queen Street and the Britomart. Resources and places of refuge for the homeless are located at: Auckland City Mission, Lifewise, The Salvation Army, WINZ, and the Central City Library. “As the duration of homelessness increases, daily routines develop and adaptation to street life progresses” (as cited in Groot, et al., 2008). These routines are influenced by the services that organisations provide; food, showers, relaxation and secure sleeping.

THE STREETS

To understand the movement of homeless through the city is to understand what the streets afford them. The streets are the framework in which the homeless live out their life of daily survival. Homeless deploy various strategies for survival, one of which is begging. The following extract describes this strategy in practice:

“Peter is strategic in his placement of self in the street in terms of locale and time so as to maximize his income. His work on the street is planned in detail and based on considerable thought and insight into the behavior and patterns of the public. This requires a detailed knowledge of the routines, pathways and patterns of the public in and through the city and although Peter begs alone, there are other homeless people all along Queen Street, who keep an eye out for each other.” (as cited in Groot, et al., 2008).

Queen Street is where homeless beg for money. Elliot Street is where they sit and watch the bustle of city workers on their lunch break. The corners of Hobson and Victoria Streets are where car window washing can earn them an income of loose coins (figure 2). The issue of homelessness for landscape architecture is not so much about where these people sleep, but how they spend all day, every day, on the city’s streets and the ways in which this street life imprints on the minds of the domiciled and influences their perception of the urban landscape.
The Site

In 2007 Auckland City Mission held a design competition; “The vision is to creatively blend the provision of social services with commercial opportunities on a prime inner site and build a sense of neighbourhood.” (“Soul in the City,” 2007). The winning scheme by Rewi Thomson Architects in collaboration with Stevens Lawsons Architects features a multipurpose apartment block including; offices, community services, tenant space on the ground floor, and accommodation for eighty homeless as well as fifteen solo mothers. This competition positively affirmed the important role that designers can play in addressing the issue of homelessness in Auckland City.

The proposed design (figure 5) also features a public landscape space between the City Mission building and St Matthew-in-the-City. This landscape space is the site for this project. The site is the spatial and relational confluence of the City Mission; a crucible of diverse people groups. The presence on this site of the public, homeless included, provides an ideal urban space for modeling the design concepts required to create a sense of neighbourhood and community within the city.

Figure 5
Design Precedents

KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO, ARTIST

Wodiczko designed the Homeless Vehicle that gave New York’s single homeless men shelter and storage, while also supporting their bottle recycling efforts. In doing so his ‘machine-offensive’ on the streets demanded a response to the question it provoked: “If not this, then what do you suggest?” (Wodiczko, 1992, p. 59) The vehicles were confiscated soon after their introduction due to the attention they brought to the issue.

The influence of Krzysztof’s work in this project has been to question whether design should diminish, or retain, the invisibility that the majority of homeless people have on the streets. The visibility of a design such as his in Auckland would be disproportionate to the scale and culture of Auckland’s homeless. Also it is important that designs which engage with this issue in public space have a greater permanence.

SEAN GODSELL, ARCHITECT

“Infrastructure should be designed to accommodate rather than shun the homeless.” (Godsell, 2002). The advantages of this approach are the active management and maintenance of the designs and their systemic, city-wide integration. For example, if Godsell’s bus shelter house design were to be replicated throughout Auckland CBD, then all of the rough sleeping homeless would have access to a permanent, more comfortable nights rest.

The bus shelter house and Homeless Vehicle were designed to accommodate a subculture of the homeless; individual, and often older men. However, this group is a stereotypical subset of the homeless and design should also encompass the spectrum of rough sleepers which includes teenagers and women.

Godsell’s dignified rubbish bin has a drawer in which cafes and restaurants can leave their leftover food for consumption by the homeless. In the drawing (figure 6) of the ‘dignified’ bin an upright figure opens the bin lid for food. This is contrasted against the drawing of an ‘undignified’ standard street bin into which a bent figure scavenges for food. The stance of the figures in the drawings emphasises that posture is a reflection of a person’s status in society. It is unlikely that the dignified bin would retain its classification if the design was to cause people to bend down while accessing the food.

FRANCESCO DRAISCI, GIOVANNI BONFANTI, FEDRECO GRAZZINE, ARCHITECTS

These three architects designed: “A centrally heated temporary shelter made out of cardboard, scaffolding and recycled shopping bags, which connects to the hot air vents of the London underground.” (Domeij, 2005). The article documenting this design includes strongly opposing viewpoints. The objections are: it doesn’t address the reasons for homelessness, it encourages sleeping out, that temporary shelters are not a solution, and its legality is questionable.

It may be that much of the opposition to this design is due to its blatant use of impermanent materials associated with homelessness: cardboard and shopping bags. These every day, easily accessible materials, when transformed into a makeshift shelter, advertise homelessness as a tangible reality in the public realm. This project identifies other materials that contribute to a homeless aesthetic: black plastic, beer cans, old clothing, piles of fallen leaves, and newspaper. It is concluded that designs that rely on these materials will inherently appear temporary and therefore subject to criticism.

Figure 6: (Godsell, 2002)
Spatial Context

THE PIGEON METAPHOR

The grey street pigeon is usually encountered in the city on its low flying course past pedestrians from window ledge to crumbs on the ground. This same pigeon however is transformed in the pond scene at Auckland Domain. Here the pigeons preen their feathers in the boughs of an overhanging tree as the sunlight plays off the water below.

This example shows that an observer’s perception of their subject is influenced by its spatial context. In this project the focus is on empowering the designer to change the public’s perception of homeless people for the better by transforming the spatial context in which homeless are observed. As a guide to this transformation process Wilf Holt of Auckland City Mission states that: “The greater the level of marginalisation, the higher the quality of the design required.”
Spatial Status

“When you’re sitting on a sidewalk, you’re at eye level with babies and kids. It’s a different world down there. As toddlers stumble past holding their parent’s hand, they lock you in their unashamed gazes or they peek curiously out from their strollers. They haven’t yet learned to ignore what they see, so they actually take in the world as it is. While kids might pretend people who don’t exist do, it’s the parents who pretend that unwanted people who do exist don’t.” (Yankoski, 2005, p. 27).

The drawings (figures 9 & 10) form a study that abstracts the postural stance of the homeless.

On reflection, the series of images suggest that posture is influenced by the attributes of the space which a person occupies. This can be understood through the diagram entitled Status in Space (figure 11). It determines that the way people sit, where people sit, what they sit on, and the passive nature of sitting itself all influence the perceived status a person has in the hierarchy of society. A poor spatial status therefore will only reinforce the “often fundamental humiliation of being a homeless person, particularly a man in a society where men are judged by their social standing and economic success.” (as cited in Groot, et al., 2008).

What also became clear from examining the spatial attributes of the drawings is that homeless people passively occupy space that is to the side of an active space. In the context of the urban streetscape the active space is the footpath. The homeless tend to occupy the retail wall space to the side of the footpath as opposed to the road edge. However, most of the public seating in the CBD is along the road edge away from the retailers’ space. Homeless therefore sit on a step, a window ledge, an empty bread basket, something that is not a purpose made seat. Sitting in this position, the homeless are not only plunged below the eye level of those walking past but they do not even share the eye level of those sitting on the road-side seats. The most marginalised people occupy the most marginalising space.
Figure 11
Recreational Space

DURING THE DAY

In Victoria, Albert and Myers parks homeless sit on the seats and look out at the view or lie down for a sleep in the sun (figure 12). The tables in the shade of Victoria Park’s London Plane trees are routinely used by a group of homeless men for their drinking sessions (figure 13). At lunchtime business people in their suits and sports shoes walk the path that passes by this gathering of the homeless. These parks maintain a relaxed recreational atmosphere across the social divides and perhaps for this reason exhibit a stronger sense of equality than the streets.

DURING THE NIGHT

Mature specimens of *Ficus macrophylla* feature amongst Albert Park’s botanical collection of trees. A homeless person was observed sleeping on the ground underneath the canopy of one of these *Ficus*, their body wedged in between the buttressing roots (figure 14). When lying down, one’s eye level is very low to the ground and therefore concealment and containment can be achieved by a low wall or the equivalent, such as the buttressing roots of the *Ficus*.

Pallasmaa states that “understanding architectural space implies the unconscious measuring of the object or the building with one’s body, and of projecting one’s body scheme into the space in question. We feel pleasure and protection when the body discovers its resonance in space.” (Pallasmaa, 1996, p. 47). The *Ficus* example demonstrates that this resonance exists between the body and landscape space as well and particularly for the homeless who sleep rough.
Invisibility

“I’ve realised something lately – that invisibility of street people blinds both ways. Those with houses and cars, DVD players and ThinkPads, don’t really see us. To them we are all one person with a yellow beard, a torn blue coat and gin blossoms. Our name is Homeless Dave. But when you’re on the street, when you’ve got no car or ThinkPad, those who do are faceless too. When you walk down Queen St you see Igor and Heartattack, Friday, Sugar Sunny and Dan. You see a guy you know and give him the nod, maybe even a solid – knocking fists like he’s your brother, just for the hell to it. But you don’t see the money people, the pretty ones. They’re all the same person. And their name is Tom Cruise” (Bishop-Stall, 2004, pp. 132-133).

The main objective of this drawing was to observe the domiciled public watching a group of homeless people as they made their way past (figure 16). The observation concluded that most people who walked past didn’t look at the group, but those people who were walking alone and therefore more vulnerable, were more inclined to look and to hold their gaze for longer. Visibility therefore increases with the vulnerability of individuals in a public setting.
Design: The Spatial Status Concept

SPATIAL STATUS, RECREATIONAL SPACE & INVISIBILITY

The Spatial Status plan pushes out across the length and breadth of the project site. The three main paths down the site are elevated ridge structures with comb-like valleys in-between. The lower two thirds of these paths are more like terraces than stairs. Terraces as topography afford numerous level changes on the site and in this design each terrace is only 70mm high. The effect of the extremely shallow terraces is to mitigate spatial marginalisation by making it more difficult to establish at what level people are sitting or standing in the space.

Movement is also a part of the terraced landscape with some of the terraces pivoting down slightly underfoot. The design works like a sea saw and the movement stops when the lower terrace hits the underside of the one above it. The first effect of this movement is the unexpected and involuntary lowering of a person’s spatial status. This is almost simultaneously followed by the clanking sound of the plate metal terraces colliding with each other.

The aural component of these terraces enriches the spatial context of pedestrians. Triggered by the weight of a person, the playful and rhythmic qualities of the sound publicly trace their progress across the site. At busy periods during the day the movement through the space would resound with the clanking sound of metal, rapidly asserting the site’s identity as the ‘clapping terraces’ in the public realm.

The seat design (figure 17) uses movement to compromise the level of the body and its hierarchy in space. Surface aesthetics also reflect quality and contribute to a person’s spatial status. The high quality polished wood end of the seat lowers the sitter below the level of the adjacent roughly finished low quality concrete end of the seat.

Figure 17
Alcoves and Bus Shelters

The identification of alcoves and bus shelters as spaces occupied by the homeless was reached through the observational drawing process. The characteristics of alcoves in the city are; dim, semi-enclosed spaces usually located within a wall to the side of a footpath.

Bus shelters are located at regular intervals along the city’s transport routes and provide sheltered seats for homeless by day and sleeping by night. The following alcove and bus shelter drawings and their respective models are used to investigate their spatial quality.

ALCOVE ON ELLIOT STREET (figure 20)

The staircase is a fire escape exit that rises up and away from the footpath with a locked and untouched door in the wall at the top. The stairs appear functionless in leading up to the wall. However they provide an alternative function for a homeless person as a sleeping place at the top of the stairs; and this is how they are used. Two men were observed sitting on steps at the bottom, one of whom had placed his hat out on the pavement to beg. The use of the stair as a seat by homeless is of significance because it spatially separates them from the general public. Elliot Street is a popular eating destination and it is unlikely that employees on their lunch break would choose a rather grimy city stair as a seat especially when seats are available. This alcove space is solely occupied by homeless people.

ALCOVE ON AIREDALE STREET (figure 21)

The alcove is a relatively open space without walls to the side to enclose the awning above. It is used recreationally by three to four homeless men who sit on the ledge and share a drink in the evenings before entering the night shelter across the road. Prior to this example I had observed recreational drinking during the day only within park space, routinely at tables in Victoria Park under the huge canopy of London Plane trees. The Airedale street observation changed this understanding and implies that the parameters of recreational space change from day to night.

These studies show that although the alcoves fit the same spatial category, their use and the extent to which they function inclusively or exclusively for people, differs according to their specific spatial context and time of day.
ALCOVE & BUS SHELTER ON VICTORIA STREET (figure 22)

This long, narrow alcove underneath the TVNZ building functions as a bus stop. Bus passengers and homeless alike are in transition when they use the space. The western end affords a clear view of buses approaching in the oncoming traffic and bus passengers stand or sit here to watch as they wait. Homeless people hover in seclusion from the oncoming traffic at the eastern end, a welcome pause in their traverse up to Hobson Street from Victoria Park. Although the alcove is shared by the two groups, their polarised occupation suggests that a spatial division exists in the form of the empty, central space that is possible because of the unusual length of the alcove.

BUS SHELTERS ON MAYORAL DRIVE (figure 23)

The Mayoral Drive case study is a series of three neighbouring bus stops that afford a group sleeping opportunity with one person sleeping in each of three bus shelters at night. It is likely that of the three people observed sleeping there one or more was a woman. The use of bus shelters by the homeless began to feature increasingly in my observational drawings in conjunction with exposure to the work of Sean Godsell who has designed a bus shelter house specifically for sleeping.

In this project the most significant attribute of bus shelters is their reference to time because they are a place of waiting and transition. Whether sitting or standing as an individual or in the company of others, bus shelters immediately frame people as being in transition and are therefore indicative of how much time a person has. It is suggested that within this bus shelter scenario the public are more tolerant of homeless using the seats because the structure itself implies that they won’t be there for long.
A STUDY TRIP TO MELBOURNE

In October 2009 I conducted an interview with Jeff Nelson, a landscape architect for Melbourne City Council who is concerned about the inclusion of the homeless in the design of the urban realm. His own introduction to homelessness was via Urban Seed: a Christian based organisation that prioritises and assists marginalised people while developing broader, supportive communities in the city of Melbourne and throughout Victoria. Jeff spoke of urbanness as a diverse mix of people groups but claimed that the homeless are neglected when it comes to the design of urban space. His challenge was; “if designers added the homeless to the mix of people they design for, maybe it would solve some of the other urban problems.”

On almost every block in Melbourne CBD the magazine ‘The Big Issue!’ (figure 26) is sold by vendors who are experiencing homelessness and/or unemployment. Vendors make a profit of half the cover price (Australian $5) for every copy they sell. What is interesting about this magazine and the way it is sold is that it formally identifies the vendor as a marginalised person. The vendors appear to embrace this public identity and enjoy the increased visibility it gives them on the street. It also appeals to the public expectation that a homeless person should be doing something for themselves, not sitting or lying around in the public realm. There is no opportunity like this for homeless in Auckland City.

Urban Seed operate Credo café where the homeless and the domiciled public can come and share a free lunch together. The no payment policy is to reduce the establishment of ‘have’ or ‘have not’ identities in the room. Everyone becomes equal partakers of the shared meal. It is a humbling experience as a domiciled person to receive and accept a free meal at a table with a family of strangers who are obviously poor and less able to provide their own food.
DRAWING AS AN OBSERVATIONAL TOOL

In Melbourne, a series of drawings of homeless people in their daily street context were completed. In the process of drawing one man (figure 28) I became aware of an uneasy, out of place feeling. This experience was curious considering observational drawing had become an established method of investigation for the project. By comparing this sketch to the other sketches completed in Auckland and Melbourne it became apparent that on this particular occasion the drawing was undertaken within the subject space. This was the first time that a drawing had been done from within a homeless space: up against a retail wall, to the side of the footpath.

In this instance, the act of drawing was the trigger to an intense experience of social division in space. The homeless man in his tight, stagnant space seemed pressed down onto the step and slotted back into the wall by the breadth and energy of movement on the footpath. Drawing requires careful observation, the occupation of a space for a period of time, and consideration of body position and location to gain perspective. Drawing to observe is a technique that contributes information to landscape analysis and is especially useful to landscape architects engaging with homelessness.

Figure 29: Melbourne CBD Map
Design: The Alcove Concept

ALCOVES, BUS SHELTERS & WALLS

The design of this plan is derived from; the Elliot, Victoria and Airedale Street alcove case studies (figures 20, 22 & 21), the seating layout on Queen Street (figure 16), and a retail wall study in Melbourne (figures 27 & 28). The relationship between components of the design and the case studies that informed them are explained in the following:

A RECREATIONAL ALCOVE

The Airedale Street alcove differs from the Elliot and Victoria examples because it is not part of a wall. Rather it is used as a gathering point in the twilight hours, and its outlook is across a quiet side street.

In the project plan the alcove's orientation is the no exit, dead-end of Federal Street. The alcove stands in isolation on the street edge but the spatial arrangement stretches back into the site creating a tunnel-like passageway leading down to the end specifically to encourage recreational gatherings.

THE PHONEY BUS SHELTER

In this design the response to the bus shelter scenario is to set up an elongated bus stop resembling shelter on dead-end Federal Street. The shelter offers both group and singular occupation opportunities with the added seclusion of shade under the pohutukawa trees.

THE CITY MISSION’S WALL

The case studies for this wall were from Melbourne and Queen Street, Auckland. As exemplified by the Melbourne drawing study, the body sized space up against a retail wall is a homeless space. The wall acts as a supporting structure to lean or sit against as there are no seats in this space. On Queen Street in Auckland the seating is found along the roadside edge of the footpath. Situated in this position the seats are out of reach of the retail awnings leaving them wet and unusable after a shower of rain.

In contrast to Queen Street, the seats in this design are set up against the wall of the City Mission building. They act as a mechanism to bring about shared occupation of the otherwise ‘homeless only’ retail wall space. These seats elevate and frame the sitter in the tenants' windows and provide an outlook across the pedestrian thoroughfare and road-like access way.

ST MATTHEWS-IN-THE-CITY WALL

The case studies for this wall were Elliot Street alcove and the grandstand benches in Victoria Park. (figure 30) The top bench of the grandstand is a sleeping spot and pieces of clothing and or rubbish are the traces of homelessness left behind there.

The intention for the church wall is to create alcove-like spaces for singular occupation. The grandstand benches are collaged onto the site and push up into the recesses of the church wall. The lowest benches spread across uninterrupted but the highest bench is framed between the structural supports of the church. The benches exhibit a gradient of privacy that increases as they ascend to the uppermost semi-enclosed bench.

The Elliot Street stairs are collaged up to the side of the church. Their presence implies that a side entry to the church exists where in fact there isn’t one. This concept makes the ‘functionless’ part of the functional design. Stairs become landscape for a new kind of inhabitation of space.
Alcove Sections
Twilight

Twilight is the turning away from day when detail, texture and colour are lost due to the fading light. This leaves form exaggerated and articulated because of the loss of the light that usually renders it. The altered visibility that twilight offers in this project is intuitively linked to the context of St Matthew’s garden space and the change in the perception of the place.

The portrait drawings (figures 33 & 34) are of the garden path at back of St Matthew’s church. It is a well-used shortcut by many people during the day but it is also reputed to be an unsafe place at other times. The first attempt to translate the form of the scene from the pencil drawings was by using black ink on trace paper (see chapter dividers). The result soaked the space in shadow but to such an extent that the form, though exaggerated, was no longer articulate.

Returning to the site and drawing in pencil, the ‘dark spot’ (figure 35) has emerged as an influential place. It is where the garden path rounds the side of the church and squeezes in between the stone wall and the wire fence of the car park. For most of the day this narrow area is deeply shaded and the karaka tree that brushes up against the wire further shades the space underneath it. To the side of the path, under the karaka tree, in the darkest depth of the space, is a low ledge that is the floor level of the car park. This ledge is a sitting spot for homeless usually in twos or threes.

The ‘dark spot’ reinforces the kind of space used by homeless and their spatial status; the occupation of space off to the side of an access way, up against a wall, at a low level. However, the significance of this example is that despite the intense use of the space and depth of shade, it is a well used route by the public during the day and therefore contradicts the assumption that darker spaces and rougher characters will ultimately exclude the domiciled public from using a space.

Routes generate high concentrations of foot traffic between destinations and include; pavements along the street, footpaths between buildings, paths through parks and car parks. People often relate their experiences of the
homeless to scenes that they routinely encounter on their way to or from work in the city.

The function of the ‘dark spot’ as a route in the example is important to the co-existence of the homeless and domiciled in the space. Other contributing factors are the site’s proximity to the City Mission and its appeal as a short cut through to Wellesley Street West and on down to the civic attractions of Queens Street. Routes that are shared by the domiciled and the homeless alike may be the best spaces in which to start the introduction of design for social equity because they already draw the public together by virtue of being a route.
Suburban Gardens

Suburban residential living is as popular in Auckland as it is in cities throughout the western world. Architect Sam Davis draws on this aspect of suburbia in his book ‘Designing for the homeless’ when he writes; “Smaller shelters lend themselves more easily to an architectural style that feels residential and welcoming.” (Davis, 2004, p. 104) and that “Although the existing building and urban setting didn’t lend themselves to a design based on residential architecture, I nevertheless began by thinking about how a large family might live together.” (Davis, 2004, p. 117).

If design for homeless in the city is to foster a residential and community feel then the inclusion of concepts from suburban gardens complements this objective. Flowering plants are typically established in suburban planting schemes in contrast to the prevalence of shrubs and trees in urban plant selection. In this project the imagery of flowers is used to explore the notion of dwelling in suburbia. This more abstract style of investigation found its source in the ink images from the twilight work.

The ink work series presents flowers from a suburban garden dipped in ink and then immediately pressed onto paper. The imprint collection was then refined and the final selections pressed onto fabric. Ink on fabric spreads slightly as it is absorbed which is desirable in comparison to ink on trace paper which ran uncontrollably across the surface in the earlier twilight work. In this series the process achieved the effect of slightly exaggerated images that still maintained their clarity.

Fabric 1: Fabric pressed with flowers and leaves dipped in black ink.

Fabric 2: The imprint selection is refined to camellias. White camellia flowers were of particular interest as they can still be perceived in the dimness of twilight.

Fabric 3 (figure 36): It was learned from the initial ink on trace paper study at St Matthew’s that; the background of the image should be dyed within the same spectrum as the flowers so as to integrate the foreground with the background. This piece experiments with four different intensities of ink in the background.

Fabric 4: In this final fabric work the entire background was dyed first then camellia flowers and leaves imprinted overtop. The translucency of the fabric introduced the concept of invisibility at twilight; something can be seen but it is difficult to work out exactly what it is. (see chapter dividers for fabrics 1, 2 & 4)

This method produced a series of images that promote a sensory recall experience of twilight in the landscape. The concept of a sensory recall of suburbia could be further developed as an urban design technique but was not progressed further in this project. However the point of reference with suburbia and residential living was instead achieved by the inclusion of other elements as referred to in the site design in the next section.
Design: The Twilight Concept

TWILIGHT & SUBURBAN GARDENS

AN ENTRY

The objective of the first design element on the plan is to give a residential-like entry pathway to every doorway on the ground floor of the proposed building. This is reinforced by a porch that steps down to a lawn. A low hedge encloses the entry elements of pathway, porch, and lawn.

THE FENCE

Fencing implies territory, ownership and protection of the land that it bounds. Homeless have neither houses nor land so construction of a fence is not relevant. However in the context of the City Mission apartments and landscape it is suggested that the inclusion of suburban scale fencing may nourish the development of a sense of ownership amongst residents. In this design the fence at the edge of the lawn is made up of rows of tall pickets. Each row runs perpendicular to the edge of the lawn. This fence pattern creates a permeable boundary that contradicts the traditional purpose of fencing for property enclosure. The depth of the rows however gives the structure a forceful, blockade-like appearance. The irony of this design is the placement of a privatising structure in a public space and the irony of a permeable blockade.

LIGHTING, A ROOF & SAFETY

Two common practices in landscape architecture for creating safety in public space are: lighting up space and opening space up. Lighting public space usually entails; street scale lamps that create a large pool of light and smaller lighting fixtures to guide foot placement. At night, visibility on the City Mission site exceeds that of suburban settings due to the concentration of city lights. The haze of these lights dilutes the internal glow of the stained glass windows of St Matthew’s. In this design eight stained glass windows are spotlighted from the City Mission building. The beams, two layers of four, give the impression of a roof over the landscape space below.

The intention of creating an outdoor ‘roof’ is to facilitate a sense of security at night in the landscape space. A roof is a structure designed for protection from the elements. To have protection is to increase safety. It is suggested that homeless have a more acute sense of spatial protection because of their constant need for shelter and safety in the city. This thought was reinforced by Robert Herman who reasons that “Changes in light, colour, and climate are important because they represent the passage of time and its relationship to places – sensibilities more developed among seniors than among younger people” (as cited in Davis, 2004, p. 81).

The use of light, the form of a roof, and safety in public space are woven together in this design in a way that more strongly resonates with homeless persons’ sense of space. It is the arrangement of the spotlights that provide an alternative way of achieving the perception of safety: To the general public the presence of the spotlights gives the impression of safety in the space even though they do not light up the space itself. To the homeless the roof of spotlight beams appeal to their sensibilities of shelter, protection and safety in the city.

NEIGHBOURS

St Matthew’s and the City Mission are neighbours not only as physical buildings but as two people groups in relationship. To increase the spatial legibility of the neighbours the church is given more space so that it is equally bounded on both sides. Without changing the legal boundary, a very low wall along this new edge shifts the perceived boundary out. The land is grassed on the church side of this wall in keeping with the English landscape style of the grounds and framed by a wide lime chipped path on the other.
During the day
In Victoria, Albert and Myers parks homeless sit on the seats and look out at the view or lie down for a sleep in the sun. The tables in the shade of Victoria Park's London Plane trees are routinely used for drinking by a group of homeless men. Business people in their suits and sports shoes walk the path that passes by this gathering on their lunch break. These parks maintain a relaxed recreational atmosphere across the social divides and perhaps for this reason exhibit a stronger sense of equality than the streets.

During the night
Mature specimens of *Ficus macrophylla* feature amongst Albert Park's botanical collection of trees. A homeless person was observed sleeping on the ground underneath the canopy of one of these ficus, their body wedged in between the buttressing roots. When lying down, one's eye level is very low to the ground and therefore concealment and containment can be achieved by a similarly low wall that in this example are the buttressing roots.

Pallasmaa states that "understanding architectural space implies the unconscious measuring of the object or the building with one's body, and of projecting one's body scheme into the space in question. We feel pleasure and protection when the body discovers its resonance in space." The ficus example demonstrates that this resonance exists between the body and landscape space as well and particularly for the homeless who sleep rough.


Twilight Sections

Figure 37
Design: The Hybrid

The next plan in the design continuum is a hybrid of all of the plans. The process of hybridisation was guided by the work of Walter Hood who in designing Lafayette Park in Oakland, California, received the following comment from one of the design jury:

“I would have said this space needed to be simplified, not made more complex, that there really needs to be a central feature that everyone uses. However, the designer said, the only way this park is going to work for the most marginal people, is to create something that’s not central, the little hillock area; and then allow all these different and maybe incompatible activities to happen along the street edges” (Bressi & Salvadori, 2001, p. 13).

This concept of canceling out or preventing the formation of a central ground was applied to the City Mission site. The three plans were layered on top of each other and segments of their designs traced through. This method produced a diverse set of spaces that interplayed across the site and between which no hierarchy was apparent.

At a basic level the hybrid plan fulfilled the aim of the guiding principle; to generate a proposal that is inclusive of homeless and domiciled alike through a diversity of spaces of which none hold a dominant, central position on the site. However, it did not develop the design ideas contained within the earlier plans any further and as a result the overall concept felt weak and reductive. From this exercise it was concluded that the generation of a single plan required a process of integration in keeping with the integrity of the Alcove, Spatial Status and Twilight ideas.
The Final Combination

The case study drawings of homeless in the urban landscape and the analysis of them led to the development of the Alcove, Spatial Status and Twilight design concepts. For the most part, the locations of these case studies were on the streets of Auckland CBD with a few exceptions in Victoria and Albert Parks. In the approach to this final plan it became clear that the integration of the concepts with the City Mission site was best realised by thinking about the site as a street, a pedestrian street.

The site is currently used by homeless and public pedestrians alike as a shortcut between Hobson and Federal Streets, facilitating movement through the city. The co-existence of homeless and the general public on the site is intrinsic of the function of the thoroughfare and its proximity to both the City Mission and the CBD's most densely populated area of apartments. Understanding the site as a street lends itself to Olmstead’s belief in landscape as an instrument of class reconciliation and social equity.

To achieve a pedestrian street design the site is divided into three zones; one active and two passive. The active zone is the pedestrian street that dominates the space stretching from Hobson Street edge down to Federal Street. This is flanked on either side by the passive zones for waiting, watching and resting against the walls of the City Mission building and St Matthews. The design of the pedestrian street is guided by the Spatial Status concept that (as per the original plan) has a strong sense of thoroughfare and the Twilight and Alcove concepts which influence the design of the passive spaces to the side of the street.

The site as a street naturally emphasises the ground plane. The design of the ground plane is seen as integral to the recognition of the site as a thoroughfare and therefore the co-existence of people groups in the space. This design emphasis also conforms to the Spatial Status concept in which shallow terraces are used to mitigate spatial marginalisation. In this plan, the opportunity to change the public’s perception of the homeless for the better requires a strong and highly detailed, ground plane design to transform the spatial context.

SPATIAL STATUS

Public space is people-watching space and in this street scene the pedestrians particularly are watched by people sitting to the side of the space in the passive zones. The design intention is to enrich these observers’ perception of the pedestrians by enlivening the spatial context of the pedestrians. To do this the pedestrian street zone is divided up into five wide pathways each of which engage pedestrians in a specific kind of movement pattern: clamber, stroll, clap, flap and wander. When a pedestrian enters the site they are defined by the particular pathway that they choose and inherit the passage of movement along it.

The ‘flap and wander’ routes were developed to engage with the City Mission building which was bypassed in the original Spatial Status plan. In manipulating the angles of the terraces a new diamond terrace form emerged. The most interesting feature of this new shape and its patterning within the terrace landscape is that the centre of the path shifts with the centre of the diamond creating a wandering route.

The ‘clap (clapping terraces) and flap’ (flapping terraces) pathways are intricately designed to imprint a high level of detail into the ground plane. The flapping terraces, like the clapping terraces, are mechanical but their movement requires the weight of several bodies due to their extreme length. The central area of the diamond lowers when triggered pushing away the rolling pipe underneath that causes the hinged ‘wings’ to fold upwards. The flapping terraces are fun, humorous and memorable. Friends and strangers alike would find themselves moving together in space.

At the site scale, the cacophony of clattering and clunking of the two terrace designs would rise and fall over the course of the day, measuring the passage of time by the passage of people. At the human scale, the resonance of the pedestrian’s body in space is heightened by the movement of the terraces, activated by the weight of their bodies.
TWILIGHT

Federal Street has a somewhat suburban feel: it is a dead end street which is unusual in an urban context, it runs north south and the road has a spacious suburban width that only one multistorey building overshadows. The proposition is to close off the Wellesley Street end of Federal Street and instead open up onto Mayoral Drive. Only two business car parks are lost by this change and most of the street's traffic is from the apartment at the Mayoral Street end. In the design half of the original road is covered with grass to create a back lawn below the City Mission and St Matthew's Church.

The fencing delineates the space between the church and the City Mission. However the design reads through its permeable boundary, recognising that they are neighbours with their own space as well as in a supportive co-existence relationship.

ALCOVE

The grandstand benches and stairs up to the church wall from the original Alcove plan are connected by a pathway in this plan. This design works because of the way that the homeless currently relate to the St Matthew's exterior. On the Wellesley street side of the church the seats, stairs and entry to the church are frequented by the homeless. It was from this observation that the idea of a clambering pathway around the church's exterior arose. It is considered a unique opportunity to work with this relationship as compared to other major churches in the city: St Patrick's Cathedral is partially fenced off and St Paul’s grounds exhibit such a level change that it is difficult and arduous to walk around.

The phoney bus shelter concept has been moved down to Mayoral Drive where it fits into the bus stop context; Mayoral Drive has a whole lane set aside for bus parking. It is foreseeable therefore that a larger bus shelter waiting area, just slightly further off to the side than normal, could function successfully as an alcove.

Figure 41: The Clapping Terraces:
The Final Combination Plan

Federal Street

St. Matthews

Wellesley Street West

Hobson Street

Ground Floor Plan

Figure 40

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Bus station 12.30 p.m. Carlton Gore rd.
In this project, the site’s location in central Auckland and its proximity to homeless services and residential apartments, all contribute to its function as a route within the greater framework of pedestrian movement through Auckland central and as a node in the ‘golden triangle’ of homelessness. Its location and function are therefore inter-dependent. The design of the site as a pedestrian street accentuates the importance of route as one of the primary factors contributing to the co-existence of the homeless and domiciled. Therefore it generates the opportunity to influence the perception each group has of the other.

The pathways through the space are designed to clearly advertise the route to pedestrians in order to entice more people through the space. Once in the space however the outworking of the concepts of spatial context and status prioritise the inclusion of the homeless. A musical, humorous, and playful atmosphere exists within the site as pedestrians and observers alike engage with the space. The pedestrians appear to take on the characteristics of the pathways that in the case of the ‘flapping and clapping’ terraces are triggered by their movement through the site. The design engages those who enter the space because it involves them in the most basic human positions of walking and sitting.

The fun and humour of this design was developed to alleviate the fundamental humiliation that is often associated with being a homeless person. The emphasis on this humorous aspect arises from the experience of the homeless community as in the following example:

Peter: My signs are a wee bit different. They’re things like, ‘Ninjas abducted family, need money for kung fu lessons,’ and uh what else is it… I’m on e-bay for them apparently; quite a few people recognise me… another one is, ‘I’m starving and...’

In order to be successful at begging, Peter employed a number of strategies so as to appeal to the public’s expectations of what a deserving homeless person should look like. This involves appealing to the public’s sympathy in a way that is both humorous and unique.

Conclusion

Homelessness is the issue that this project focuses on to generate urban design for social equity in public space. The desire for this kind of space is a response to the statement made by Wodiczko: “the sense of shame most of us experience when confronted by the spectacle of homeless shantytowns and cardboard cities must stem in part not simply from the affront they represent to any sense of achieved social justice but also from the ragged edges they impose around our most cherished fantasies, from the cracks they open up in our fundamental sense of what and who we are as human beings.” (Wodiczko, 1992, p. 63). Throughout the project the process has provoked questions, which have in turn shaped the design concepts: concepts which are as yet on the periphery of established urban landscape design.

This project has differentiated three scales of relationship between the homeless and urban space; streets, specific spaces and levels. At the largest scale is the street framework that affords the homeless various opportunities in the routines of their daily life on the streets. At the medium scale are alcoves, retail walls and bus shelters; spaces where they pass the time of day or rest en route to a service provider. The smallest scale is the body scale in which the level of the body spatially reflects the social marginalisation of the homeless and reveals their use of stairs and low walls as seating in the streetscape. These three scales of relationship should enable designers to identify urban sites where the inclusion of the homeless is more contestable and therefore their inclusion is to be given more weight.

Further research into specific routes used by the homeless in relation to service providers and where these routes intersect with main pedestrian arterials may be useful. This would help identify other city public spaces that exhibit coexistence, similar to the City Mission site. It is acknowledged however that to establish a map of set routes used by the homeless in central Auckland is a difficult task. An attempt was made in this project but was complicated because the homeless community is transitional and comprises isolated individuals, so route patterns are not necessarily representative of the community. This dilemma highlights the difficulty of undertaking a project that advocates for the inclusion of the homeless.
so is the idiot holding me,' um ‘Aliens abducted family, need money to build spaceship,' and things like this… it’s all money-makers. Well it is for me.

Interviewer: Why do you put that spin on it?

Peter: Because they’re different, they’re different, and people actually come past and see them and it gives them a giggle. You know, instead of just the normal homeless bullshit that everyone’s used to. (as cited in Groot, et al., 2008)

It is intended that the ‘flapping and clapping’ terraces will provide entertainment particularly for the homeless who may enjoy watching the domiciled public move through the space while they sit in the passive areas. The design generates an unexpected reversal of ‘roles’; usually the homeless laugh at themselves, but this design provokes a laugh at the domiciled public, who are also expected to laugh at themselves. The nature of the humour is friendly because it is not related to who the person is but initiated by their movement and this friendliness becomes a quality of the space. The expression of humour in the landscape is a research area that may have much more to contribute to the function and cohesion of public space.

The spatial context and spatial status concepts examine space through the lens of marginalisation. The spatial status concept brought into focus the levels that homeless occupy in the streetscape scene; ledges and stairs at levels that diminish their presence and suppress the possibility of catching the eye of passers by. Understanding where homeless tend to position themselves in space, ensures that these niches can be targeted to receive a deliberate quality of design, so as to elevate the spatial status of the homeless.

The concept of spatial context identifies the larger spaces in the city streets that frame the homeless due to their frequent occupation of these spaces; alcoves, retail walls and bus shelters. It is empowering to understand that the perception of domiciled people towards the homeless can be influenced for the better by carefully detailing the design of these spatial context frames in which the homeless are observed. By raising the perception of the homeless, the urban landscape is liberated to be a space for the public as a whole.

Improving the public face of homelessness through the combination of status and context design, improves the nature of urban space. The likelihood of co-existence and the potential for interaction between the domiciled and the homeless also improves. Interaction raises the opportunity for encouraging and stimulating homeless people to transition back into society successfully. Underlying this approach is the assertion that for all people including the homeless “There is an important link between inhabiting a physical space and the development of a person.” (Davis, 2004, p. 54).

The suburbia and twilight concepts are helpful as a design tool particularly when considering complex housing developments for the homeless. These concepts recognise that the notion of dwelling and residence can be supported through the landscape by asking: How does the experience of the landscape space affect the individual’s ability to persist with permanent housing? The concepts contribute to design that reads more legibly in the landscape; reinforcing domesticity and instilling a sense of ‘home’.

Throughout this project, the Status and Context and Twilight concepts have generated a continuous stream of design ideas for the City Mission landscape space. The organic development of these concepts, produced through the research process, contributes to a design skill set for the inclusion of the homeless. The potential implication for the public realm as a result of the direction of this project may be the genesis of design for equity in the streets and public spaces of Auckland City.

As the growth of the urban concentration continues, the importance of urban space as a place of inclusion will become increasingly critical. This project argues that the best co-existence in urban space may be achieved when the homeless are validated by designs that enhance their status, dignity and sense of self worth.
References


