Experiential Design – Rethinking relations between people, objects and environments

• Paper / Proposal Title:
Stacks as Shelters: Library Lessons on Designing for Homelessness

• Author(s) Name:
Yelena McLane

• University or Company Affiliation:
Florida State University

• Abstract (300 words):
Homelessness is a personal hardship and societal plight, both difficult to resolve. Struggles are motivators, and economies benefit to varying extents from their homeless: programs proliferate, architects and contractors build facilities, charities marshal resources, volunteers, and other support. Do these bureaucratized services sectors offer real assistance to homeless persons, or are these just stakeholders in the “sheltering industrial complex”? From emergency shelters to nicer “transitional housing” to even more supportive “permanent housing,” the conventional Western approach of “earning your way to housing” reifies notions of the undeserving poor. The professional social worker imposes judgement on eligibility, the manager impels compliance or turns away the needy “until they come around and start making better decisions for themselves.” (Willse, 2015). Designs support only to a limited extent the person ability to cope with crisis and stress, privacy, or sense of dignity and self-worth. Facilities “built to purpose” often inadvertently promote the view of the homeless as a marginalized group that must be controlled, managed, and made to adhere to rules. This punitive scheme has resolved
neither hardship nor plight. Let us then look for norms vis-à-vis sheltering that reflect where the homeless person chooses to live. They may wake up in some temporary accommodation, but then spend their day in a park, at a clinic or jobs center, or, as is very often the case, in a public library. Why, in particular, the library? Through a combination of observational data and quantitative spatial analysis, this paper locates within three actual and model libraries eight key design and use elements rooted in Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomatic structure of individual agency. Through rigidly centralized and ordered, but geographically distributed units – book stacks, carrels, study rooms, and meeting spaces – the public library reinforces communal safety and cohesion while affording users personal domain, privacy, and uncoerced access to physical, educational, and social welfare services.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Yelena McLane is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Interior Architecture & Design. She is a researcher, educator, and practitioner with over fifteen years of experience in exhibition and museum design. Her research engages with complex spatial forms analysis and employs a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to explore relationships between interior configurations and users’ perceptions and experiences within educational, museum, and public housing spaces. She investigates institutional, social, and cultural influences and consequences of these relationships. Dr. McLane’s historical research ranges from the spatial analysis of historic structures to mid-twentieth-century modernism in the Soviet Union.