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INVERT CITY:

designing for homeless women in Hillbrow

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The city of Johannesburg has battled with the condition of homelessness for years, identifying a problem even before our emancipation from the ruthless apartheid construct (Beavon, 2004). Political measures have subsequently been implemented in order to combat its harsh effects, introducing various short-term housing policies and theoretical solutions for the homeless in the city. The temporary housing institution as a body is therefore representative, for many people, of the first step in the process toward a legitimate and permanent housing solution. However, the institution as it exists today, does so in both a social and political vacuum. The great divide between the temporary solution and the initial rungs of the social housing ladder give the user little to no option for situational improvement (Olufemi, 1998). These collective spaces for the ostracised community, through their layered autonomous nature, divorce the user even further from the community aimed to be reunited with.

The institution as a typology requires investigation, interrogation and reintegration within existing and enforced political structures. The immediate accommodation answer needs to be seen both as an independent entity as well as only part of a greater strategy for a permanent, integrated and holistic housing solution. The contestation of the institution is not the argu-

ment, but rather a proposal for its deconstruction and ultimate innovative reconnection through a strategy of layered inversion. If we choose to view the city and many of its microcosmic constructs through a post-structuralist or deconstructivist lens, we begin to understand the prevalence of the disjointed other within the urban whole:

The homeless woman is the city's marginalised user.
The alleyway; the silent 'other' to the prominent street.
The vacant space is the forgotten site.

And if the physicality of structure is the prominent former, the network and connections existing between built forms must be the secondary within the realm of architecture.

If we connect the city's marginalised elements, through the vessel of temporary accommodation as the initial part of an integrated housing model, the role of the institution is inverted rather than its function or programme. Therefore, the 'exo-stution' is the folding out and reconnection of the existing 'in-stitution' is an answer to the city's detached collection of limited - where marginalised user, space and structure collectively connect street, suburb and city.

