Sensing Place: House-Scale, Black Geographies, and a Humanly Workable City

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Abstract

In May of 2016 the University of Minnesota Law School Published a report titled “The Rise of White-Segregated Subsidized Housing.” Focusing specifically on Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, the report outlines how the market for federally subsidized housing led to the creation of white segregated housing via the invention of the artist loft, what they term Politically Opportune Subsidized Housing (POSH’s). As a non-white artist working at the intersection of cultural production, community-based practice, and urban planning, this article was not a surprise but rather provided valuable data sets that evidenced a social phenomenon that remains largely disavowed and sublimated beneath layers of passive conservatism known by the colloquium “Minnesota Nice. This project weaves together an interdisciplinary study that brings together practices of black feminism, geography, and architecture. Through the construction and attempt to locate an informal house, the epistemic, political, economic, and affective contexts of intersecting disparities in each of these areas became clear, particularly as problems that relate to living in cities. Using an interdisciplinary and mixed-methods approach, I focus on understanding the formation, production, erosion, and/or annihilation of, a black sense of place through zoning and housing policy that continues to negatively impact Black people and also the ways that Black women and women of color have and continue to work
against these policies by creating loopholes within these systems for themselves.

Using a tiny house built by me and my friends/collaborators, I explore the question how and for what purposes does housing policy affect the production of Black spaces and how might we understand and respond to the politics of gentrification, ownership, and cultural production as labor. Further, I ask how time affects the way we think about, create policy around, and therefore are allowed to inhabit our homes.
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Fiture 1. Timeline

October 2015
November 2015
Tabled with Larry W. Atwood, a public relations development manager, to assess
alternative approach to the question of funding.
Talking to friends about the idea of getting a
related networking speaking tour.

December 2015
Talked with Larry W. Atwood, a public relations development manager, to assess
alternative approaches to the question of funding. The talk didn’t lead to any new
approaches to the funding question, the funding challenge,
and the funding challenge.

January 2016
Tabled with Larry W. Atwood a public relations manager. The issue of funding
remained unresolved, and the future was uncertain.

February-April 2016
Counselor Larry W. Atwood and a public relations manager talked about the
funding
challenge, the funding challenge, and the funding challenge.

A Timeline of Sensing Place

July - August 2016

March 2016

May - June 2016

July 2016

Total was delivered some days after today.

September 2016

October 2016

December 2016

Rented space that housed this project 30
months after the project was completed.

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Introduction

Section I :: My Story

As an undergraduate I studied architecture before switching to visual art and art history. I quickly realized, being black, and a woman, and coming from a working-class family, that architecture, as I was being trained, could not respond to particular questions about race, gender, social inequality, and even space, for me. In approaching this dissertation, visual arts, and later, Black feminist geography, taken together, however started to open up a critical terrain of interdisciplinary work that allowed me to pull architecture back into a conversation with Black feminisms and geography. Interdisciplinary projects, however, are not easily made. 

Sensing Place is in all of its flaws and strengths a reflection of that difficulty. As a visual artist, not a social-scientist, or architect, or even a proper academic feminist at times, I have found it useful in my work to cautiously and respectfully borrow from other fields of knowledge, to collaborate with people who know things I do not know, and to try to leave space in all of these strivings to be wrong, to leave space for what cannot be known. In this dissertation therefore I take liberties, as a Black feminist and visual artists, because as the work of my forbearers like Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, Claudia Jones or Lorraine Hansberry attests, Black and women of color’s contributions to – understanding
the human, a more human world, humanisms, the humanities – in and out of the academy, may not always recognized in our all too brief lifetimes, if ever at all, and so the risks and foci of their work may not appear for some to live at the register of theory or scholarship. And yet, it absolutely is. I hold on to the possibility that theory, in the flesh, Cherrie Moraga, and Black feminist epistemologies, Patricia Hill Collins, perform a feminist praxis that is important in and outside of a hegemonic academic knowledge project.¹

_Sensing Place_ is then an assemblage of things, the labor of not only myself but of others, that I have translated and distilled here from the experiential to the textual. It is at once the culmination of a tiny house project, a body of theories, and interviews, placed together here as a way to understand something about two cities in the Upper Midwest, Minneapolis-St. Paul. At its core, though, it is a long mediation of one deceptively simple question: How does one house oneself in an U.S. city on $17,000 per year? Its complications arise in our acknowledgment that to answer this question requires we ask more questions: Which city, are you willing to live with others, what are your other expenses, how close to the cities’ centers do you need to be, what kind of housing are you hoping to live in, do you need accessible accommodations? These questions are political matters, which mean matters of place, scale, intimacy, gender, sexuality, economy, race, and ability. Consequently, the areas they touch on make them

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¹ Moraga and Anzaldúa, _This Bridge Called My Back_; Collins, _Black Feminist Thought_.
particularly interesting to consider through the intersecting disciplines of Black feminisms, architecture, and geography.

In 2016, I built a house, a tiny house. The project was intended to function as a mobile artist residency, but it is a tiny house nonetheless. I approached this work as a project that could give me access to affordable housing as a single, Black woman who is a doctoral student which affords me annual salary of around $15,000 to $18,000 per year. I am also a practicing artist and community educator, which in any given year can debit me upwards of $5,000 in materials and my own labor costs or earn me anywhere from $5,000 to $25,000 in income. This is through public or private grants, my teaching/programming work with a local arts organization(s), or through teaching work with other area colleges and universities. I work for Juxtaposition Arts, a Minneapolis-based not-for-profit organization that educates young people, ages 14-21, as apprentices in visual arts and design work. I also serve as a grant reviewer and mentor. And it should be noted that it was only through the nexus of these praxes, the merging of my intellectual work with an action-oriented art and design-problem that centers on housing need as a matter of justice, that I was able to secure funding for the project. I was able to get a grant from the Center for Urban and Regional affairs that I discuss in a later chapter that allowed me to pay for the materials for the project and pay people to help work as well. It would have been impossible for me to both pay rent and subsidize the project on the above stated income. This
project, which I called *Inhabitation*, was and is an engagement in what I term a Black feminist geographic praxis, where praxis means working with all the capacities of the self – mind, body, spirit, etc. It has allowed me to engage Katherine McKittrick’s concept of human workability, a theory of geography’s hardness toward the human that has historically embedded anti-blackness into its theories of place, space, gender, race and landscape. The house was/is a way of knowing that allowed me to see, experience what human workability could look like, or mean. I engage human workability here through Black feminisms, architecture, and urban geography.

*The House :: Black Geographies and Feminisms*

The *house* is an epistemic space that is foundational to much of US feminist and Black feminist thought as it exposes a range of racial-sexual violence across all scales of US society. The house, is also site from which we can read Black Geographies, Black feminisms and the paradoxes of space. Black geographies are taken here to mean spatial knowledge that exceeds and unsettles representational structures most commonly associated with geography and cartography proper such as the map, or the very idea that places are always knowable by a bound set of understood data sets such as longitudinal

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coordinates. The auction house, then, the ‘big house,’ and the courthouse are all sites from which we can and have seen Black life abused; and while they are certainly material, there is something else, something more sinister and ultimately unrepresentable about the geographic force that they conjure.

Katherine McKittrick writes “…the big house and the guard house – are understood together. They were both built upon ‘groan,’ spatially produced by black slave labor…inflected with black blood and death.”

Domestically, what happens in the private space of the house, the land that a house sits on, who labors for, in, or through the house are all spaces of political and ontological struggle and have socio-racial and spatial implications that secure these places to the Black geographies of slavery and settler colonialism.

In Minneapolis, the spatial disciplining produced by material structures such as the freeways that slice through neighborhoods and increasingly white-segregated pockets of wealth in the downtown metro, produce an unevenness of the city that can all be traced to a house. I am loathe to say housing, as opposed to thinking about the singular but reproducible site of the house, as housing, an issue of numbers – subtracted, or rather torn, razed, and scraped –

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3 McKittrick, Demonic Grounds, 21; McKittrick and Woods, Black Geographies and the Politics of Place; Woods, Development Arrested.
4 Hartman, Scenes of Subjection. Hartman talks about questions of representation and unrepresentability in her work.
5 McKittrick, Demonic Grounds, 23.
6 Smith, Uneven Development.
from the city’s landscape can, too easily allow the process of Black dis-placement to be all the more anti-human, housing may be at the register of biopolitics, the house the register of subjectivity. Housing, its racialized history in the U.S., cannot help but to signify political tallying, relevant, but also a different set of questions from those I want to address here. Again, Katherine McKittrick is useful. “The tolls,” she writes, “inevitably uncover...analyses of histories and narratives and stories and data that honor and repeat and cherish anti-black violence and black death.” Choosing the house rather than housing more broadly, then, to focus this study was a part of a Black feminist approach that allowed me to explore the physical, aesthetic, legal, and theoretical lessons that a house may teach us about life in cities. As another problem of Black geographies and feminisms, the house raises issues of liberal personhood. In her essay, “Intimate Publics: Race, Property, and Personhood,” Robyn Wiegman writes:

...the formation of social subjects within a modern state that recognizes and confers personhood on the basis of contractual relations – on the ability to enter into and stand as a responsible agent in a contract obligation to both the state (as a citizen) and to other citizens (as transactors of labor and property ownership on one hand and as recognized heteronormative married subjects on the other)...These domains of contract obligation -- of citizen, spouse, and laborer-owner -- have operated historically as powerful technologies for the production and excision of proper national subjects, mediating the relationship between the seemingly private world of personal affect, intimacy, and reproduction and the public realm of social exchange, itself evinced by the birth certificate, the voting card, the draft card, and the marriage license.”

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Drawing liberal personhood into a dialogue with Black geographies and architecture, I argue that the built environment and spatial planning co-produce a particular kind of subject, an architectural subject. Architect Mario Gooden writes: “Architecture spatializes political, social, and historical relationships as well as instrumentalizes subjectivities. It brackets place, time, and materiality to events in order to produce meanings and discourse.” My use of the phrase architectural subject is meant to define the person(s) for whom architecture and design are most commonly practiced, particularly in relation to the state’s interest in how and for whom a house should function. In *Sensing a Small Place*, I am interested to see the places where one’s architectural subjectivity fails, that is, the conflict between the Black subjects plan to house themselves and the governing of cities that obstruct or outright deny such a plan to occur.

Architectural subjectivity, or subjection, layered with geography are matters of spatial disciplining, race, and justice, matters of a feminist practice.

**The House :: Black Feminisms as Praxis**

Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.  

Paolo Freire

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9 Gooden, *Dark Space*.
What the radical Brazilian pedagogue Paolo Freire is describing above is praxis, a process of coming to knowledge through invention, trial, error, risk, irritation, and long-suffering. The house is a microcosm of praxes—aesthetic, structural, social, causal. In spite of its significance as an object of cultural production and a long history of praxes, though, it has only been taken up for interrogation by a few Black feminist intellectuals. One such intellectuals is bell hooks who writes, “Many narratives of resistance struggle from slavery to the present share an obsession with the politics of space, particularly the need to construct and build houses.”  

It is my personal and political desire that Sensing Place, like hooks, allows us to see the ways that house-making, the literal and socio-cultural construction of a house, can perform a significant challenge to (white) dominant discourses of architecture, geography, and feminist praxis. Drawing on the work of bell hooks, Nathalia Jaramillo and Peter McLaren write, “a feminist praxis cannot stand in isolation from what takes place outside institutional settings; it is fundamentally and inextricably linked to life histories and experiences that give rise to human subjectivities and social relationships.” Terrion Williamson writes, Black feminist practice is “a radical commitment to the significance of black female life and the humanities of all black peoples, regardless of whether the practitioner identifies with feminism as a formalized ideological commitment

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11 hooks, Art on My Mind, 147.
or holds some views that might be deemed antithetical to feminism itself.”

In her work on Black social life, Williamson draws a distinction between Black feminism and Black feminist practice, and though practice and praxis are also distinct, Williamson's definition of Black feminist practice aligns with the ways that Freire, hooks, Jaramillo, and McLaren are thinking about praxis, that it is not institutionally bound but best understood through human relationality and the social politics of race. In this way, I argue, the constructing and building of houses can be a part of a Black geographic imagination or a Black feminist architectural practice, or even a fugitivity, that allows us to live more justly, more humanly, with cities.

We know these words well. Audre Lorde writes:

*Those of us who stand outside the circle of this society’s definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference -- those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are Black, who are older -- know that survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow us to temporarily beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master’s house as their only source of support.*

My thinking about the house, the tiny house in particular, emerges from an interest in forms of architecture practiced by folks not trained as architects known as vernacular architecture. Vernacular architecture is often defined as

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“informal, usually domestic, architecture that is rooted in local traditions and is generally produced by craftsmen with little or no formal academic training, whose identity is unrecorded.”

My tiny house interests also emerged from a need to find more affordable space to live and work in a city with a growing economic disparity. I approached the intersectional injustices of unaffordable housing in urban spaces as a Black feminist problem. This project outlines the work of Black feminist theory as a practice that aims “to identify, articulate, and dismantle long-standing ‘setups’ that work to persistently and relentlessly deem Black women and girls wrong for merely existing and for our insisting on our continued existence.”

The small temporary hold the tiny house provides, I believe, a “loop-hole of retreat” from the Master’s House, or perhaps it is a loophole within the master’s house as the master, that is the manager of spaces, of labor, and policy, has in many ways, become the city itself.

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16 “Signs of a Widening Gap.”
17 Dotson, “Between Rocks and Hard Places,” 49. Though Dotson is a philosopher, her work, like the work of other Black feminist scholars is “outlaw” and misfit intentionally. She writes “We highlight and outline the ‘assumptions, stereotypes, customs and arrangements that supposedly make us seem ‘wrong’ for daring to be alive as ourselves. Wrong for laughing (apparently too loudly) with joy. Wrong for loving too hard. Wrong for insisting on good and full lives (when we dare to imagine such a thing). There are non-accidental, long-standing circumstances that construct as ‘wrong’ every attempt to assume that Black womenkind and gender non-conforming people are able to live long and well.”
18 In her autobiographical narrative of slavery, Harriet Jacobs uses the phrase “Loop Hole of Retreat” to describe her grandmother’s garret, the attic space in which she was temporarily marooned and concealed for seven year. Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (Norton Critical Editions) by Jacobs, Harriet Published by W. W. Norton & Company Paperback.
the tiny house through a Black feminist perspective, outside of the commercial, whitewashed adorability of reality-television and commercial branding, allows us to think about the mobility and smallness that tiny houses provide as a part of a larger struggle to imagine a wider range of architectural subjectivities, as discussed previously. Living smaller, I argue, may be a necessity for survival as it makes living in urban areas, where there is greater access to work, education, transportation, etc., possible. These stories are neither neat, nor always pleasurable, but they are indeed important. So how then do we, as black feminist scholars, geographers, architects, artists, and/or educators, create praxes that reflect the outlaw potentials that are the promise of our black feminist legacies?

Geographers Camille Hawthorne and Brittany Meché, writing collaboratively from the perspective afro-diasporic black geographies, state that “against the backdrop of both new modes of collective black organizing and daily assaults on black life...[we] assert through [our] work that centering, and indeed loving, the resilience of black life is itself a form of black feminist praxis.”¹⁹ They go on to say, “In striving to create a black feminist praxis within the field of geography, [we] think we have a responsibility to tell these stories, even when they are messy.”²⁰ Black feminisms have never comfortably fit, even within the field of

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¹⁹ Hawthorn and Meche, “Making Room for Black Feminist Praxis in Geography.”
⁻²⁰ Hawthorn and Meche.
academic and activist feminisms, so I too accept that further coupling Black feminisms with geography and then architecture and putting those into practice is a pedagogical process for myself, and the communities people I work with, not necessarily a linear path towards a clearly defined place in which I can fully claim to be a Geographer, or anything else for that matter. I recognize that doing the work that I believe in so deeply, will be difficult, scary, and messy. I recognize that studying the house this way may never merit recognition from official channels of award and so I have tried to do justice to this work by incorporating pathways to this knowledge that fit the work.

Section II :: Methods

In her second book, Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center (1984), bell hooks writes, “we resist hegemonic dominance of feminist thought by insisting that it is a theory in the making, that we must necessarily criticize, question, re-examine, and explore new possibilities.”21 In this project I have taken hooks words as a methodological challenge. I deploy a mix of methods that include the building of an object, interviews, autobiographical narrative writing, and discourse analysis. I chose these methods because they are used in feminist research as reflexive tools that allow for knowledge to be produced and circulate in many directions not solely from the one who is assumed to hold knowledge, the academic.

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21 Hooks, Feminist Theory, 10.
scholar with institutional affiliation, me. The object I built was collaborative and it instigated collaborations and institutional transparencies I could not have gleaned through theory, interviewing, or participant observation alone. The interviews I conducted were with Black and women of color who built or designed Tiny Homes in which they now live. Talking to them allowed me to hear the perspectives of people who are commonly absented from the images and popular imagination of the Tiny House Movement. They allowed me to make connections between the other forms of architecture such as Shotgun houses and articulated spatial relationships to cities and spaces of the home that geographers have yet to think about. As a result of this process I am also a tiny house designer and builder, so I have included, where possible, fragments of my own experiences into the text. Lastly, I have used discourse analysis to understand and to read the zoning and building code policy through a Black feminist lens. My attempt here is to understand the ways that zoning and building code reproduces hetero-nuclear familial normativity and anti-Blackness. My work on methods is furthered developed in Chapter 2 of Sensing Place, “Black Feminisms Geography Architecture.”

Section III :: Chapter Summary

This dissertation is broken up into four chapters with an introduction and an epilogue. In each body of text presented here I try to walk the reader through why I have chosen to do this project, how it has been shaped by living in the
Twin Cities Metro, and by whom this project has been influenced, both intellectually and aesthetically. Chapter 1, “Black Feminisms Geography Architecture’” expands on the theoretical and methodological work I describe above locates Black feminist praxis in relation to geography and architecture, using the work of Katherine McKittrick and bell hooks I outline how I see these disciplines productively speaking back and forth to one another.

The interstitial chapter includes two interviews with Black women who built, and live-in the improvised dwellings, Tiny Houses. Their interviews inform my thinking around the social, economic, and physical problems of living in small, mobile spaces and living in cities. Their lives form my thinking around Black women and geographic praxis. That is, these women practice, activate, and theorize themselves into architecture by talking about their lives in relation to urban plans that were meant to exclude or leave one houseless. They talk about their struggles to be housed and their connections and critiques of the Tiny House Movement.

Chapter 2: “This Thing This Home: Small Things and Urban Places” is an interview conducted by artist and writer Stevie Ada Klaark. The chapter plays with the role of the knowledge producer. In lieu of me interviewing Stevie, she is interviewing me. The document was first a spoken, in-person conversation, a non-written thing that Stevie transcribed. In this chapter I annotate our conversation, adding back edited parts of the conversation that were cut for publication length. I also
add citational context to our conversation through the addition of post-interview thoughts and other intellectual voices, something that the slowness of writing and books allows that sometimes, improvised conversation does not. This push-pull, fast-to-slow process mimics the development of the dissertation, a slowly written iterative document that I have had to feel my way through by building relationships with people over time. It lays out major themes that continue to emerge across other chapters in the dissertation which include, mobility, improvisation, place and time. In my third chapter, “Building Small, Building Mobile,” I explore parts of process of building the house itself. Woven into this chapter is an alternate genealogy of the tiny house movement, one that acknowledges the problems of commercialism, wealth, and the disavowal of pre-existing forms of alternative or improvised small houses that plague the current movement while giving house building, through the work of bell hooks, a socio-political meaning. My fourth and final chapter, “On Housing and Time,” looks at the ways that the house is used as, what I term, a moral managerial problem, that is the ways that the structural, social, and phenomenological legitimacy of a house are called on for the moral righting of cities, that is, how cities use morality to make themselves appear on their surfaces as just spaces that want to affordably house their citizens. Cities present this moral managerial contradiction while disavowing the role that capitalist development plays in producing anti-black city space. This chapter brings particular attention to the
production of space and the production of disasters. Houseless and homelessness are examined here through the lens of formal and improvised architecture and time, quickly built housing, while thinking about which kinds of architecture are planned and enabled and which kinds are disallowed.

Throughout *Sensing Place*, I engage the creative and critical landscape under a pedagogy of praxis, that is, this space of research that is a constant exchange, a call and response, between a small set of actors: the city, a home space, my research and writing, and myself. I conclude with the idea that I hope rings true throughout this aspect of this project: that the writing of this work was, is, only one part of the labor to bring it into being and that both I and the object of the tiny house are only very small parts, one-part, singular respondents, among many to the questions I set forward here.
Chapter 1: Black Feminisms Architecture Geography

I learned to see freedom as always and intimately linked to the issue of transforming space.\(^\text{22}\) 

\textit{bell hooks}

\textit{Black Women’s geographies open up a meaningful way to approach both the power and possibilities of geographic inquiry. I am not suggesting that the connections between black women and geography are anything new – indeed, I assume a legacy of black women’s geographies and geographic knowledges. Rather, I am suggesting that the relationship between black women and geography opens up a conceptual arena through which more humanly workable geographies can be and are imagined.}\(^\text{23}\) 

\textit{Katherine McKittrick}

The physicality of a city reveals much about its socio-racial interests and the disciplines of architecture and geography are of critical importance to the production of material and discursive city space.\(^\text{24}\) Yet, the specificity of the experiences of the racialized-gendered body often escapes conceptualization within these discourses as a subject for whom cities are antagonistically planned.\(^\text{25}\) In this chapter I explore praxis as interdisciplinary Black feminist research. The building of a house that’s not-quite-houseness causes the city, its

\(^{22}\text{hooks, Art on My Mind, 159.}\)
\(^{23}\text{McKittrick, Demonic Grounds, xii.}\)
\(^{24}\text{Crysler, Cairns, and Heynen, The SAGE Handbook of Architectural Theory; Crysler, Writing Spaces; Massey, For Space; Lefebvre, The Production of Space.}\)
\(^{25}\text{Smith, Uneven Development; McKittrick, Demonic Grounds; Mckittrick, “Plantation Futures”; McKittrick and Woods, Black Geographies and the Politics of Place; Smith, The New Urban Frontier; Massey, Space, Place, and Gender; Massey, For Space; Lefebvre, The Production of Space. We can of course point to things writing on white flight, and gentrification, however seeing relationships between the built environment and the intentional planning of the cities is hard to account for in this literature, i.e. how the design of a house, how far it is set back from the street, from its neighbors, is also a part of an informal planning process that may be in some ways anti-black and still precede more formal planning strategies like racially restrictive covenant.}\)
administrators, its spaces, its densities and people, to make themselves known
often in ways that inconvenienced me or the people and things attached to the
house, not the daily operation of the city itself, dispensed knowledge to me in
ways that traditional forms of knowledge conveyance, such as textual analysis
alone or a more passive observational study, could not.
The tiny house was my method, as it allowed me to understand the city through
a different episteme, through the subject and object of my experiential
knowledge with the house. It is a flexible space in that its interiors can be
changed to accommodate a range of programs, so I think of it as an ongoing
engagement in a Black feminist geographic praxis, where praxis is to build, to
write, and to express the problems of Katherine McKittrick’s concept of human
workability, expressed in the opening epigraph to this chapter. By this term, I
take McKittrick to mean that historically, the relationship between Black women
and geography assumes a true and unquestioned connection between Black
womanhood and landscapes of death, trauma, and dislocation, so thickly anti-
human that it would appear they may be indissoluble. McKittrick, however, lays
out a poetic Black feminist geography that speaks to different critical theoretical
geographies that are highly imaginative and more habitable for Black life. I am
thinking about human workability here as praxis and praxis as human
workability, particularly as a generative, even at times fugitive, occupation of
space/place that emerges from an ongoing intersectional political struggle with
architecture and the geography of cities. I also see human workability, loosely, as a process of collaboration, of teaching and learning with others, and of teaching oneself. In this chapter, I bring together aspects of human geography and architecture, which I read here as the intentional design of life sustaining habitable space, through the writings of bell hooks, Katherine McKittrick and the personal narratives of myself and those of other Black and women of color tiny house dwellers. I discuss this work as methods, that through the building of this improvised house I attempt to theorize and place myself into architecture, as an architectural subject, which I will discuss later, to expand this field by interjecting Black feminist concerns with space through a dialogue with vernacular architecture and an intersectional lens, a lens that is grounded in praxis. I show how these fields participate in the spatio-architectural matters of inequity and engage Black feminisms as praxis of intervention. I rearticulate house-making, specifically the process of making informal and or improvised housing such as the tiny house as a form of vernacular architecture and is one method through which we can pursue more humanly workable lives in cities.

**Black Feminisms and the Praxis of Architecture**

The planning and paving of city streets, the placement of sidewalks, lampposts, and building design speak to multiple processes of valuation. When a city evaluates which areas are worth investment, or not, which districts and neighborhoods present revenue generating opportunities through development,
and which areas should be levelled, or obliterated, economic lines are drawn, and in the U.S. these borders historically and contemporarily follow an anti-Black geographic logic. Black space more often than not, is worth less and actively devalued. Minneapolis is not an exception, a drive from South to North or West to East, quickly reveals intentional patterns of uneven development, including redlining, restrictive covenants, and zoning restrictions, that strategically targeted or negatively affected the economies and infrastructures of Black communities. These are more than social choices, they are strategic patterns of state intervention, and the tiny house, I argue, allows us to see these workings of the state. It is a product of a vernacular architecture that emerges out of ordinary people’s lives to meet their needs and reflects their experiences.

I want to distinguish here between the lower case, tiny house, as a vernacular architectural project and the commercial spectacle of the upper-case Tiny House Movement, which I will describe more later. My interests here are in the vernacular and the Black social life that is lived at all scales, of the house,

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27 In the Twin Cities we have for example the Rondo neighborhood in St. Paul, a once predominantly black community that, like many black neighborhoods in the U.S., was ploughed through, in the name of urban progress and connecting the nation, in order to make room for the U.S. interstate system.

28 Vernacular architecture is often defined as “informal, usually domestic, architecture that is rooted in local traditions and is generally produced by craftsmen with little or no formal academic training, whose identity is unrecorded.” N. W. Alcock, “Vernacular Architecture.”
including a tiny one. bell hooks writes “home is not a place but a condition -- felt only when there is freedom of movement and expression.”

29 To be sure hooks is not wholly discounting the built space of the house or home, the entire focus of the essay of this excerpt is premised on the significance of relationship between the Black folks and architecture. So, we might read hooks’ statement in a number of ways, that home and Black social life are connected but are not bound to a, read one, place, no matter its scale. She continues, “My grandmother’s house was not unlike the small shacks that were the homes of many Southern black folks. Her place was just a bigger more elegant shack.”

30 The small or big, shack of her childhood nostalgia are spaces that gave her and her family life. They are not premised solely on scale but scale makes the lives that are lived in and through proximity to the house, or shack, to have a reliable, structurally sound roof over one’s head, whether we call it a small or tiny house, a small or big shack, whether it sits in a favela or a backyard, as my experiences and the experiences of the women I interview later attest, does not limit the Black living that can happen in a house but expands it, particularly in the face of being houseless or homeless. So, for some, the sheer fact of having a house, even a tiny one, reenables a circulation of sociality around them, though the

29 hooks, Art on My Mind, 71.
30 hooks, 149.
commercial Tiny House Movement obfuscates this sociality and may in a cursory view make it seem individualistic.

The commerciality and the hypervisibility that accompany the television shows, journals, blogs, and books of the Tiny House Movement made it more popular and brought it to my attention, and the attention of others. Yet, importantly, the thematic undercurrent that became clear as I interviewed Black and Women of color who have embraced this improvised architecture were not drawn to it as a spectacle problem. But rather for the affordability, the ways in which it could address the economic, spatial dilemmas that they faced as they faced lives with precarious financial lives and toxic materials that were poisoning their bodies and living environments.

Aside from the personal political economic concerns that drive my interest in this project, I am also interested in slightly more macro political problems, those that force us to see the house in relation to the state. That is, the smallness and the mobility of the structure, place it among forms of informal and improvised housing, housing not easily regulated by municipalities, making it a provoking site from which to see state power at work through a place that can be both placeless or siteless as well as an adaptive architectural form. Black feminisms as a critical social theory of how white supremacy intersects with a range of dominations and oppressions, including capitalism, heterosexism, and ableism to name only a few, expands the fields of architecture and geography by
interjecting their concerns with space through an intersectional lens. Black feminisms have always been grounded in praxis. This section outlines the connections I see between the praxis of Black feminism and architecture. I draw on two key pieces of writing from the cultural critic bell hooks, her essay “Black Vernacular: Architecture as Cultural Practice” and an accompanying interview “Architecture in Black Life: Talking Space with LaVerne Wells-Bowie,” which both appear in her book *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics* (1995). The brief writing hooks does here is important for a number of reasons but most significantly, she connects place, time, and the built environment to race, gender, and freedom.

In Minneapolis and St. Paul, patterns of displacement are co-constituted by ongoing spatial matters that seek to cultivate and/or dismantle, other ethnic enclaves including Native American, Hmong, Latin@ and Somali communities. A part of the violent injustices of the present involve the purge, or segregation, of non-white bodies from the city through the planning and designing of dwelling space. David Harvey writes “…those who command space can always control

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32 This is a longer study that I cannot give adequate space to in this project, but in Minnesota in general and Minneapolis and St. Paul in particular spatial segregation, de facto and de jure, have an ongoing impact on the lives of people from these groups. There are major barriers to wage earning and education that leave these communities vulnerable to city policy and development and there are numerous examples, from the uprooting of Hmong farmers in the May Township to the most recent example by the city of Minneapolis to close its last public housing complex, the Glendale Homes. “Dust-up over Hmong Gardens.”; Du, “The Fight over the Minneapolis Housing Project That Sits on Gold.”
33 Institute on Metropolitan Opportunity, “The Rise of White-Segregated Subsidized Housing.”
the politics of place.” Under these conditions, then, a house, particularly the small mobile house colloquially called a “tiny house,” can then tell us much about matters of justice and injustice in a city. I investigate this site of power through an intersectional feminism that embraces the creative imagination of living small and the problem/potentiality relationship of improvised and informal housing, under which tiny houses fall, for and in Black places.  

As a matter of method, how or whether to narrate the house has been a site of tension for me. The building of the house and the embodied experience, as praxis, or active theory, is one project while this writing, for me, is another. When I theorize, I am not interested necessarily in the “gaps in the literature” of my antecedents. I am saying yes to them. I have tried to think cautiously around the problem of narration and the personal narrative, or biographical, in this research as well as the ecology of this work. In Telling Stories: The Use of Personal Narratives in Social Science and History, Mary Jo Maynes et al. define a personal narrative, or a life story, as “retrospective first-person account of the

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34 Harvey, The Condition of Postmodernity.
35 In the next chapter I talk more thoroughly about the history of Tiny Houses and the modern Tiny House Movement. Here, I am marking my language around the use of the phrase Tiny House because it is a deceptively thick discursive frame that immediately veils something more serious, something more viscous about how difficult housing is. That is diminutive tiny marks the already houses-ness of the structure in a gentle littleness, making it difficult for some to read it as a site of political antagonism that can be taken up by working class, working poor, house unstable people. For example, were it called a “shack” as bell hooks does, or a shed, or a favela, the ability to read its subversion of space becomes slightly more legible. Using the phrasing improvised, or informal housing is useful to me here as it interjects political dimensions, power, around the house, making its mobility as a matter of scale, clearer.
evolution of an individual over time and in social context.” Personal narratives may take many forms including autobiographical writing, diaries, or forms of self-portraiture. Feminist approaches to social science and humanities often emphasize the importance of lived experience as a site of knowledge production, “that the process of telling reveals past oppressions that had been suppressed or unrecognized.” Personal narratives, ideally then, as an extension of feminist epistemology allow the “subjugated knowledge of subordinate groups” the chance to escape suppression. Thinking about the ways that life studies are edited and mediated over the course of writing-based research, the house and interviews presented ways to examine black feminist geographies through unwritten methods. I analyzed through my own experiences and those articulated to me by others, the ways that architecture, planning, and governance mediate our experiences of space and place. I was able to see, hear, and feel the insufficiencies of discursive methods alone and use the process of building objects, of speculation, to craft a more richly interdisciplinary practice for myself.

Architecture is an aesthetic practice that as a discipline has been largely made inaccessible to folks without formal architectural or building science training. The fraught spaces of tiny houses may yet allow us to unbind the discipline of

37 Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett, 6.
architecture from idealized subjects and bodies and reconnect it to matters of geography and justice. Fraught because contemporarily, the Tiny House phenomenon has become synonymous with young white yuppies, and aging white retirees, who are financially secure but want to be liberated from the burdens of consumption that this financial security has seemingly lured them into. Ultimately, I want to understand the systemic and theoretical problems that order the scale, the when, and the who, of inhabiting and dwelling a house, a tiny house. Central to this work is my treatment of the tiny house as a form of vernacular architecture, that is, a structure that may be designed and built without the aid of formal architectural training. With the intention of thinking about these small-footprint mobile structures as affordable and ecological spaces that contribute to housing affordability and urban density in cities like Minneapolis where economic and housing development is often a mechanism that displaces populations of color. To approach design and the space of the city through the production of a mobile structure as not only research but as

39 “Term used to describe informal, usually domestic, architecture that is rooted in local traditions and is generally produced by craftsmen with little or no formal academic training, whose identity is unrecorded. The vernacular architecture of any region may be characterized by the use of a particular material readily available in the area, by the prevalence of a particular building type related to the dominant local economic activities or by the use of a particular style, possibly derived from local materials and techniques. A comprehensive definition is impossible, however, since there is little agreement among scholars as to which is the essential quality by which an architectural work, technique, or feature can be characterized as vernacular.” N. W. Alcock, “Vernacular Architecture.”
habitable, usable space, is intended to contribute to traditions of Black feminist praxis in and out of the university. Carol Boyce Davies writes:

The kind of critical work I envisage moves to redefine our geography to recreate and remove the lines of impossibility in which we exist... In redefining the critical and creative landscape, it is necessary to foreground whether one’s work is for reconnection, invasion or exploitation.\(^{40}\)

The Black feminist imagination that Carol Boyce Davies relays above is deeply linked to space and critical invention as method. In drawing on this method for my own work, I connect Davies ideas to the sentiments gathered from hooks longer statement from the excerpted epigraph above. She writes, “Growing up in a world where black working-class and ‘po’ folks, as well as the black well-to-do, aesthetics of space, I learned to see freedom as always and intimately linked to the issue of transforming space.”\(^{41}\) Like hooks, I also grew up in the South, and like hooks grandmother I lived in a small, but not tiny, house. The materiality and scale of the landscape she describes is one dotted with self-built, small and tiny houses, yet they are not necessarily a part of the architectural or geographical imaginary conjured up by the words, tiny house or Tiny House Movement, which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 3. I draw on hooks writing here because she has provided a Black feminist cultural critique that speaks to both architecture and geography simultaneously through her articulation of matters of scale, economy, intimacy, place, and the familial. I connect her concern with

\(^{40}\) Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing, and Identity*, 17.

\(^{41}\) hooks, *Art on My Mind*, 147.
linking freedom and the transformation of space to Davies provocations and caution that we should “foreground whether one’s work is for reconnection, invasion or exploitation.” 42 This self-reflexivity also constitutes a Black feminist method. 43 Her words are instructive to the way I want to situate Tiny Houses into a conversation about cities, race, and spatial control. Not only is she thinking about how the black body is/can be situated into architecture, the problem of ones’ architectural subjectivity that I discuss below, but she is also thinking about scale. hooks is articulating a necessity of smallness, that grew out of socio-spatial and geo-political disenfranchisement that has its legacies in geographies and architectures of economic lack, which necessitated spatial invention, and of slavery.

In Chapter 2 of Demonic Grounds: Black Women and Cartographies of Struggle (2006), titled “The Last Place They Thought of: Black Women’s Geographies” Katherine McKittrick uses the narrative of Harriet Jacobs (Linda Brent) to theorize the garret. In 1861, Jacobs penned a harrowing account of the racial-sexual jeopardies of slavery as a quasi-Victorian autobiography titled, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (1861). Katherine McKittrick uses this text to rearticulate spatial precarity and degrees of freedom by expressing the garret as a

42 Boyce Davies, Black Women, Writing, and Identity, 17.
geographic site of knowledge. The garret, for Brent was a small hidden fragment of her grandmother’s house, an attic, adjacent to the plantation from which she fled and conceived of as “usable and paradoxical space.” The small hold of the garret was a tiny space. It allowed Brent to see the geographies slavery of from a different location of struggle in which she was both free and unfree, to see both the “possibilities and limitations of space” simultaneously as experienced through her racial-sexual body. I certainly do not want to conflate the conditions of my life or those of the women I interview throughout this text with those of Brent. I do however want to acknowledge that an aspect of building these informal shelters has been seeing the tiny house as somewhat of a garret, as Linda Brent would call it “a loop hole of retreat,” from an unaffordable housing market, from capitalism, from and/or within cities.44 One interviewee, Dominique Moody, told me that before she was able to get her tiny house built, she was paying approximately 80% of her income to try to keep up with costly rental market in Los Angeles, after having been priced out of New York, and San Francisco in previous years.45 Her house, her tiny house, was quite literally the last place she would think of, not an apartment, not a tent, but not quite a house either.

45 Gardner, Dominique Moody.
Garreting, the transformation of the contradictory surveilled, racially-sexually subjugated ‘not-quite’ spaces, such as the not-quite-house, or the not-quite room of the attic, into a Black feminist mode of resistance, is a method. As a form of a garreting then, the tiny house is also a paradoxical space, not an easy site to deal with, and must be understood, just as a house is understood, as a commodity object, one that for some wields economic, social, and cultural capital only marginally differently that a to-scale house. As a new niche market for people with unlimited housing choice, one BuzzFeed Culture writer puts it this way, the tiny house creates “new vocabulary to gentrify living in a small space.”

Said differently, the very language of Tiny Houses as opposed to mobile home or shed house or tent city, makes the idea of living in what bell hooks referred to above as a small or large shack, charming to a group of people, largely white, young, or retired middle-classed, who would otherwise spend their income on larger, more static dwellings. Throughout this project, the mobile small placeless house allowed me to see how and for whom movement and stasis could be easy acted on ideas, and for whom they would become sprawling political messes. Tiny Houses, their design, their economic and environmental costs, the building and zoning codes that support or restrict them, can work as liberatory spaces but can also expose the insidious intersections of capitalism, race, gender, mobility.

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46 Shafrir, “Who Benefits From The Tiny House Revolution?”
Both Davies and hooks pose a challenge to hegemonic feminist discourse and design thinking that are important for how we understand the potential of this not-so-new architectural schema. That is, that the experiential spaces that formal architecture provide us are spaces of power, that are designed around particular kinds of idealized subjects to the exclusion of others. Black feminist thought provides a critical lens to think about what kind of connectivity, invasiveness, or exploitation, we want to foster in this critical landscape including the spaces we live with, in or around in our everyday lives. Thinking about the political implications of architecture is then a matter for feminist theory and practice but also a matter of feminisms and justice.

**Black Feminisms and the Geographies of the House**

The house, to be sure, is an architectural and geographic site. It is a political space from which these two disciplines, architecture and geography together, coupled with other forms of power, racial, social, and economic, is a tool for the reproduction of value. It is “a major asset for homeowners, the most widespread form of personal wealth.”\(^47\) It is a set of geometries translated and transformed from a set of 2-dimensional drawings to a 3-dimensional structure, and the materiality of the house can and hold the affect of its occupants. “It is loaded with symbolic value, as a marker of status and an expression of style.”\(^48\) For


\(^{48}\) Schwartz, 2.
many, the house, and we must think broadly about this term, is a first geo-spatial engagement with the problem of architecture.

Designer Lois Weinthal writes:

The house as a container for our personal possessions is a type of architecture that we encounter on a daily basis. The possessions change over time reflecting our personal changes, yet the house often remains a static icon in its location and in our memory. It is within the house that we first understand the act of dwelling through public and private areas, along with an architectural scale that gives us a gauge by which we encounter all other architecture.

Weinthal is reiterating the important connection between architecture and place, vis-à-vis the very human connection between memory and location. So much of how we understand scale and dwelling come from the socio-cultural habitus of living in the house that contains us, and the materiality of that house matters. The house as container is one approach to architecture but there is another way to think about the house that gives the materiality of the house significant, agential life that does not negate its political-economic place. As many formal and informal architects have shown, thinking about locally sourced, inexpensive materials can lead to unique design potentials, rather than a design process that has a pre-determined schema that will simply be implanted onto any site.49 The mobility of the tiny house calls into question the house as a “static

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49 Think here about the adobe clay and straw dwellings of Benin and Burkina Faso in Western Africa or the projects of Auburn University’s Rural Studio programs which use similar materials as well recycled materials such as tires and hay-bales. Transpose the materiality and human and ecologically responsive design of these dwellings to the architecture of Frank Ghery, designer of the Guggenheim Bilbao and the Weisman Art Museum on the University of Minnesota’s campus for instance, works of architecture that are materially similar in their skins and are often commissioned precisely for the visual
icon,” as Weinthal presupposes. I would add to Weinthal’s proposition that the house is a social and phenomenological process. Again, hooks is useful here.

In her interview with architect, Laverne Wells-Bowie, Bowie offered this:

To relate space to intimate experience is crucial. And I do have the right to react to architecture as a phenomenological subject, not merely as a person who is able to make decisions. And I have a right to articulate how architecture feels and what makes it manifest. To be able to experience and relay architecture beyond the object of someone else’s examination and beyond a traditional academic perspective. To simply place my experience at the center and use that location for seeing and understanding affirms that I have much to offer architecture.

The two are talking about bringing experiential knowledge to bear on the fields of architecture and spatial thinking. Like hooks and the kinship networks she calls forward in her essay, I want to then think about architecture, specifically vernacular architecture, the creation of humanly habitable spaces by people without formal architectural training, and assert a historical link between resistance, socio-economy, and house building by informal architects to read the tiny house as a form of vernacular architecture. Architecture and geography are here treated as dialectic disciplines that inform the lives of people in intimate ways. Architecture and geography rendered and lived at the small scale of a tiny house brings the big saturated histories of displacement, containment, and divestment, called by another name “gentrification”, in the Twin Cities, down to an intimate, more humanly workable scale. Writing on urban geography, Neil spectacle they present within the landscape, less so for questions of accessibility, affordability, or design equity.
Smith states, “gentrification is no longer about a narrow quixotic oddity in the housing market but has become the leading residential edge of a much larger endeavor: the class remake of the central urban landscape.” Though Smith elsewhere speaks to race, his definition misses gentrification as a revitalization not only of what he terms *embourgeoisement*, but also social whitening.50 I see hooks and Wells-Bowie’s introduction of architecture into a cultural political geography of the experiential as an important assertion of the physical/metaphysical site of the house as a political assemblage of power steeped in histories of racial sexual subjugation. The house itself is a “matrix of domination” Feminist, Black feminist, feminist geographers alike have written about the space of the house as a space of many contestations.51 Having used the tiny house here as a method to experience, and observe the dynamics of this matrix, I attempt in this text to speak to a phenomena and materiality of this place called a house that touches on a feminist theory of space. This feminist theory, as praxis, understands both the abrasive histories of racial sexual domination that lie in individual rooms material and discursive realities of the house— the kitchen, the dining room, the bedroom, the attic – but also the

51 Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*; Massey, “Space-Time and the Politics of Location,” 53; Domosh, “Geography and Gender: Home, Again?,” 278.; Colomina, “Sexuality & Space”; Lupton and Miller, *Bathroom, the Kitchen, and the Aesthetics of Waste*. In her essay “Space-time and the politics of location” Doreen Massey cites Anjelika Bammer’s suggestion that for ‘home’ has always been ‘unhomely’ both in the sense that it can never be a safe retreat and in that it is also a space that actively protects the “dark secrets, of fear and danger.”
present struggle between the house and the nation space within which it sits. This struggle is one that resides in the zones of racial-sexual subjugation and state determined good and less-good citizen-subjects vis-à-vis programs and designations such as Low-Income Housing Tax Credit and Section 8 recipients, the evacuee, or the refugee. The tiny house, as an improvised shelter, can be thought of through a subversive architectural genealogy, a different methodology to see, an opposition to the material spatial legacy of the master’s House however it may manifest, the plantation power also known as “the big house” that has bound the Black body to oppressive socio-geographic relationships, to hegemonic ill-fit scales, and stasis. Outside of its aesthetic work, architecture is, or could be, a deeply human practice, but inequities in the design process, in the allocation of designers to city services that are at their core design problems, and in what physical places design thinking is afforded application, have created a fraught discursive and phenomenological tension between the house as a commodifiable object and the house as a habitable space that places people in intimate relations with one another as house dwellers, as neighbors, spatially regulated subjects. Again, as a problem of value production, the design, visual appeal, ability of a house to fit harmoniously with its surrounds, not solely a matter of personal desire, but when placed in the context of how cities manage and govern themselves, aesthetics quickly become racial matters, matters of geography, of location. The
tiny house as an epistemic object allows us to see how these tensions can be productively mobilized to challenge the managerial structures that have and continue to antagonistically link the house to everything else around it. Stated differently, the problems that this small space caused, allowed me to see the opposite of human workability and imagine human workability under the circumstances of living in this city.

Though I have mainly focused the body of this chapter on the house as a method of analysis, I have also used policy analysis and interviews in this work. These texts too are important sites of upon which the discourse of the house is created and can be reimagined. There are many discursive implications for a house that the discipline of architecture produces, for example, the distinction between a house and a shed, or a room and a closet, or a house and a tent or box for that matter, are products of architectural assumptions that we are taught to live with and in. The “elegant shack” of hooks architectural imaginary, and the tiny house of mine, allow us to see the flaw in the phenomenological and material restrictions that we have inherited. That is, that there are other habitable spaces of a range of sizes and materials that we might find more livable, yet our understanding of what a house is and how we are to be housed, which is codified by zoning laws and building codes, prevents us from finding these other ways of being. Discourse is cultural. It is our given, inherited way of articulating and relating to the world around us that transforms, in our minds, a
piece of plastic into a tent. A piece of metal into a car, a wooden box with a triangle on top into a place in which we can live. These, I would argue go to the heart of the “house” the ways that we know it and how it can be it. The epistemic and ontologic object created from purely formal architectural understandings of a house, are then not always legible or applicable to vernacular architectures. Any thing, and any scale, holds the potential to house us. The women I interviewed for this project articulated altogether different imaginaries for themselves that diverged for social, economic, and health reasons, from more “traditional” ideas about what constitutes a house. In their collaborative text, Drawn from African Dwellings (1996), Trinh T. Minh Ha and Jean Bourdier write:

Where the terms traditional and vernacular meet is when vernacular goes back to its Latin meaning to designate ‘things that are homemade, homespun, homegrown, not destined for the marketplace, but are for home use only’...what is often implied is a living relationship of participation with the world, rather than a relationship of mere utilization...In the vernacular context, dwelling and living are inseparable, if not interchangeable.52

While the places that we call home, in which we live and dwell are certainly utilitarian, they are not merely that. It was important to talk to the Black and Latinx women I interviewed in this project about their homes, as they allowed me to see a different logic around dwelling not illuminated by my research

52 Bourdier and Trinh, Drawn from African Dwellings, x.
alone. They articulated in various ways different relationships to the vernacular and vernacular architecture.

The vernacular architect has, as Minh Ha points out, a different relationship to the market than does the formally trained architect and the developer. The formally trained architect must engage a discourse and politics of client-based work. That is not to say that this is not important or cannot be an iterative, ethical, and productive process, but it is one wholly different that a discourse and politics of kinship intimacy, as vernacular architecture is always located within these kinds of networks of familial, spiritual, or ecological connectivity.

This is in line with the ways that bell hooks discussed her family’s home and an important aspect of why the house makes for a powerful site of knowledge production about the city. As cities are increasingly capable of the nearly wholesale prohibition of self-built homes, what does this mean for the potential of the house to present us with another, deeply embodied, “living relationship of participation with the world”? What does this mean for the potential of small, tiny, self-built homes on wheels that allow us to live in a different scale and impermanence with the city?

Minh Ha and Bourdier take this question a step further in stating “...building cannot be reduced to being merely a technique of construction or a means toward dwelling – in other words, to ‘having a roof over our head and a certain

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53 Bourdier and Trinh, x.
number of square meters at our disposal,’ – it also reminds us that to build is in itself already to dwell, not the reverse (one does not dwell because one has built).”

I would restate this by reiterating, as the many geographers and Black feminist I cite above state, that the house and dwelling are not solely the matters of taking up physical material space in the world, but takes on political and metaphysical meaning. The house is not simply a container, at least not in the way that a mason jar is a container. Being housed is a process and we must unpack this process into a number of dynamic metaprocesses that have to do with how we dwell and where we dwell, the dialectic of architecture and geography. I am concerned that thinking of it as a container too easily lends it to disposability, or things that are cheaply, easily acquired and readily available. Or that it is possessed, like a jar, by the one who will fill it, but this is not the case with the house, or being housed. As a space and a place that takes on all of the living that occurs in proximity to it, not just the physicality of its interiors and exteriors, the house must be thought of in relationship to design and political economy, particularly in relation to how cities seek to manage their economies through housing, i.e. historic districts, park placements, the placement of interstate expansions, high- and low-density development, etc.

In relation to this project, I see a convergence of Black feminist thought, architecture, and geography in order to think about the house, not Housing, but

54 Bourdier and Trinh, xi.
the house as a material more humanly workable antagonist to an anti-black urban plan. In the next chapter, I explore the building of my own house and the encounters I had with the city, both through individuals and through city policies. I discuss the question of the Tiny House as a white yuppie commodity and where, if, it fits into a project on Black feminist project on more just, humanly workable, geographies.
In this chapter, I interview two Black women who live in what we will call tiny houses. Their names are Domonique Moody and Jewel Pearson. Dominique and Jewel met each other through networks of other people, after they built their homes. Their homes are very unique both in design and material, drawing on their own Black aesthetic interests that stray in many ways from some of the more traditional Tiny House designs. Things like porches, and sleeping arrangements, furniture size even their windows, have all made their houses stand out amongst other more commercially standard houses. Dominique and Jewel are also founding collaborators on Tiny House Trailblazers, an online network of Black and people of color tiny house advocates. Their work with the Trailblazers has been to expand ideas of what it means to have a home, for Black and people of color to embrace different ways of being housed that would offer them temporary to permanent housing and financial relief.

I begin with Dominique Moody, a California-based artist and educator who I met while she was an artist in residence in New Orleans.

**Dominique Moody Interview 3 March, 2018, New Orleans, Louisiana**

I was able to sit down with Dominique Moody in her tiny house, the NOMAD, in New Orleans Louisiana. It was a special treat to get to do the interviews actually
inside her house as she was able to point out, as we talked, particular things about the house. The house was not a separated theoretical or purely imaginative space for either me or her, we were in it, sitting on its surfaces, looking through its windows, walking around it. She was in New Orleans as an artist in residence at Xavier University, and worked with students while there to create a small exhibition of both their work and hers. Her residency also corresponded with the Prospect New Orleans, a large, multi-institutional triennial art exhibition that began in the wake of Hurricane Katrina in 2007. Dominique’s house and Xavier became a Prospect extension, so she kept the house opened during the day and would give impromptu tours to visitors. Because of the house’s location on the campus, however, she didn’t sleep in the house during the exhibition, and I say sleep and not live because she really did do a lot of her living and working in the house in spite of its open hours. When I came to interview her she already had visitors that day, the mother and grandmother of a Xavier student who were visiting from New Jersey. They were of course very taken with the house and with Dominique. Our conversation picks up just after they left, and she is talking to me about how the visitors and semi-open house work:

**DM =** Dominique Moody

**TSG =** Tia-Simone Gardner
DM: It’s so nice, part of it too I have found, uh, staying here during the day really confirms with people that this is a living space. And that uh [pause] and what I'm going to do too is turn my sign around. Just so that it indicates closed for some of our traffic.

TSG: How many victors are you getting every day?

DM: Hmm...

TSG: Because, I've been twice and every time I come you have a stream.

DM: Yes, and sometimes its flow that tends to happen and there are these quiet times like with the, um, I'm sure that most of them are, are actually already in class. So, it ebbs and flows, and I think umm [inaudible]

[Dominique closes windows and lays out food then pauses]

TSG: I have so many questions, but let’s see, you were talking before about so many interesting things. But first to make sure I have my timeline so, how long did it take you to see the house from imagining it to living in it?

DM: Mmm... When I turned 50, I knew that I wanted to make this happen and have it unfold. And so, I, most of my ideas had been still in my head and I had some rough little sketches and drawings of houses from the 80s, um ‘cause I stopped this idea, uh once my eye sight was changing, uh. And so, bringing it back, you know, I think a couple of things had happened. I'd lost most of my teaching courses in 2007. And I was elementary, middle school, high school and UCLA extension. And they lost their grants, so they couldn't hire me. And then
UCLA extension, we had a drop-in school, in student, enrollment and so my courses were not filled to the minimum capacity.

**TSG:** Right

**DM:** And many of my private students also had to withdraw because their incomes shifted, so I knew in 2007 something was happening.

[We knowingly laugh. What she is referring to is the oncoming recession of 2007 which among all of the things that it took a toll on, jobs and housing are the issues that Dominique continues to rearticulate as generating problems/spaces for intervention from which she starts to conceptualize her house.]

**DM:** Something was coming down the pipe. And I knew I needed to make a shift. I also knew then it was having an impact on that 80% I was having to dull out for the last 20 years on my living expenses. My rent in particular.

**TSG:** 80% of your income?

**DM:** 80% of my income

**TSG:** was going towards living...

**DM:** rent.

**TSG:** And this is in the Bay area?

**DM:** No this is in Southern California.

**DM:** And I was paying it. Umm, and typically this is what I was doing for most of my adult life.

**TSG:** Mhm, mm.
DM: Umm because I was always in a fluctuating economy. Especially once I pursued the art more. And that is, I go in somebody might have a little in law house or something of that nature and basically, I say I can do some work in here, fix this up, I can help care take the main house, um, I can be a presence here if you are not. Umm, and they would offset the rent. And my whole thing was always you leave the place better than you found it. And you know since I could do so much of the work that they were then, they were getting their investment of their home. Um, addressed in a way that they typically couldn't afford. So, it was good it was mutually beneficial. But more and more people started to hand over the responsibilities of their rentals to management companies. And I remember, New York having done it, which is why I had to leave New York. San Francisco did it and why I had to leave San Francisco. Oakland did it, having to leave Oakland, going back to D.C. and then D.C. doing it and then getting to Los Angles. And the minute that took place this is how the management deals with the rentals, is its if you. If your rent exceeds 30% of your income you're not even eligible to apply. And then when you apply you have to give them the details on your mama. It's just absurd. I mean 10 years tax records and all kinds of stuff but I knew I could provide everything but the fact that the discrepancy of the percentage of my income. It would have been impossible 'cause what, at 30% of my income the maximum I could afford to pay would be $400 dollars. Now I knew there is nothing out there other than these kind of
these mutual one on one arrangements and that's what I was paying my first 10 years in Los Angeles. $400 and my sweat equity. But it couldn't continue. And then all the sudden I was trying to do $1200 and $1500 a month on an income that was barely, barely, with a whole lot of work, creeping up to $1100. And so, I knew I would be out of the market really soon. And once I hit that market there was no way for me to make up that difference. And that is how people fall through the cracks so um I knew I needed to create an artist in residency. Was the closest thing then to this kind of mutual benefit thing that I could do and so I went from St. Elmo village, which was this wonderful artist residency, but I couldn't stay there.

TSG: Why is that?

DM: Because they used a management company. And no amount of my sweat equity could keep me there. and it was, it is in the middle of Los Angeles' urban setting they were able to salvage this cluster of tiny houses that were common back when communities were migrating in. and one of the smaller houses that they had was 200 sq. ft. Perfect. It was wonderful. You know, and they had workshops and they had beautiful gardens. I got a long with them I did workshops. I did educational programs. And they offer these educational programs completely for free to the community. And they were at the time that I was there, and I turned 50 there, um I think they had turned 45, so they were a legacy there. But when I realized I can't even stay there so I looked for another
residency and that's when I did the installation piece for the California African American Museum and created a residency across the street from the Watts Towers.

[we thumb through her book]

And so, it is called NOMAD the installation.

TSG: And this is what year? What year is this?

DM: By this time, it was 2009, 2010.

TSG: Is this the same frame foundation that this house is built on?

DM: [shakes her head no]

TSG: No. This is a whole other...

DM: [she nods in agreement] And I did that even now realize I didn't have a studio that could accommodate that so it was never built in advance of the museum exhibit in its entirety. And the museum you know gave me this space, this wonderful space, and they wanted to know, you know, are you going to be able to put it in. Is it going to fit? Is it going to be...Well my house was plumb, their walls were not. And their walls were like...it was six inches off. [we laugh, plumb walls are perpendicular to the floor ninety degrees, being six inches off plumb could mean that walls are sitting at something like seventy or even sixty degrees depending on the wall height] Six inches, okay. So. You know I had been obsessed with replicating these tiny houses in my art as a way to get this expression out, cause I otherwise wasn't ready to build and so this was the
opening I'm looking for this is the residency. [As we are talking Dominique pulls out an artist book she has made for NOMAD so she can show me, visually the preceding stages of her work] So where you see this image [she points to a photograph in her book] with the Watts Tower, it is in the back of this house right across the street from the towers. That’s the garden I put in. I fixed up the house so that it could function as an artist residency and the garage which is detached became the studio. I did all of that work. I was in there 2 and a half years.

**TSG:** wow

**DM:** The owner of it hadn't had a person in that house for 10 years. and it was left empty.

**TSG:** And I can't imagine what it took to make this house look so good.

**DM:** Yes, and it was a historical house.

**TSG:** In two years?

**DM:** It turned a hundred years the year I left. and it's a true shotgun house that has not been you know radically changed which is why she couldn't really rent it on the market, there's no dedicated bedroom in these houses, its room, room, kitchen, back. And so, when I went to her and I said this is what I wanted to do she was both amazed about and delighted that I remembered this conversation she had years back where she wanted to do an artist in residency in Watts. The center needed it. And so, this was it. It ended with her feeling like I owed her.
TSG: Did you feel like you owed her?

DM: No. No.

TSG: No.

DM: And so what um after the two and a half years I did get my trailer and I got my truck, but I knew I probably wouldn't be able to...the grounds were so soft that it wouldn't be able to build on the grounds.

TSG: You got this trailer? [I am referring to the one on which the house we are sitting in sits on]

DM: I got the, no, THIS trailer. [pointing to the trailer in the image] This was installed and she wanted as a part of the artist in residency that every artist who came into the residency would contribute, it’s a quarter acre lot in the city. So, um, would contribute a work there was no way I could store that it was really going to be difficult to sell it so I wanted to give it a home. and it cost me to put it in, two grand to install it.

TSG: What was the cost, was it moving it, erecting it.

DM: Moving it. And actually, putting it in permanently attaching it to that garage wall and doing it well.

TSG: Yeah?

DM: And then the museum was willing to for their permanent collection artists to help communities that had their work to maintain them. they were willing to maintain it for free. To the owner of the property and she denied them. I don’t
'know what went wrong, this is a black woman and a black woman who had major stake in the community. But she had some certain kinds of perceptions and in the end, she told me I contributed nothing and that if I did not begin paying $1200 a month in rent that I had to be out.

**TSG:** So, she went from feeling like she owed you to saying that you hadn't contributed anything and that you had to get out of the house that you had rehabilitated

**DM:** I think because what had happened is it became so widely known and I always used her name of the place, she called it, titled it, art cloud, I wanted to make sure she always got credit. and that this was her residency. um and I was able to get the museums to come, the galleries to come, the curators to come, and I think she felt she should have been able to do that she saw me in a sense as her property. which is a strange thing to say in this day and age.

**TSG:** It is a deep thing to say also though.

**DM:** Yeah, but that is that area that I spoke about in terms of the way we operate socially it's based on this system of capitalism and, and art as a commodity including the artists. And to try be independent of that outside, of that capitalistic structure is really defying something major and it's a real challenge to do. So, uh its an affront. and I didn't realize that i was basically stepping into something so radical it just made sense to me. but in a way that's
really radical to do this. and i think that's why some people are acutally afraid of it.

**TSG:** to do this meaning to...build your own

**DM:** To build your own, to have a sense of wealth without the ties, um, to uh, to capital. and it you know we, this, this whole country is so tied to it. now what makes it even more is that even more radical is that as a person of color, particularly as a person of African descent where at one time we were the capital, and the product, that to shift from that is then tremendously different.

and it is, we get blow back for that, stepping out. And, some people have felt wow this is amazing you ought to duplicate this. and understand the need but i also know this number one cannot be the sole um, solution for homelessness. homelessness, it, part of what homelessness is is that we have this very demanding capitalist structure, and it means that people have to be without for others to be privileged. and as long as that exists that undergirding, we will not correct this situation. And and people don't want to look that. They don't want to go back and look at that carefully. Because it means you've got to go back and correct alot of that early stuff and maybe even completely change it. And so, um, you know. I can't sit comfortably in that space. And therefore I did not want to commodify this. So part of switching gears for the first time and saying this is about an art expression this about me living a way of life and the art of living that way of life. um without it becoming a pure commodity and so a lot of people said
to me you out to in orde to get enough money and get sponsorship, you oughta get somebody who can underwrite this whole thing yo uneed to go to home depot or you know, some place like that. but i said you know, if any company like that does it, they gonna want to put their name on it. and if this is my art i cant have that happen. um, and so yes it could probably get done, yes they would think it would be an interesting story but it would kill this idea of my story as an artist. and so i said i can't, i can't do it that way. so that's what those first few years after making that decision but when i got it out of my head. and this was a really wonderful experience. another artist assemblage artist, john otterbridge

TSG: [i laugh] yes!

DM: you know john?

TSG: i know his work, i know his work and i didn't expect to hear his name but of course...yeah

DM: so john otterbridge, i had known for years we would always uh talk and i loved the fact that our relationship was based on this kinship of being able to have a dialogue a really deep. and even though he is a generation ahead of me, we connected really beautifully and we understand, stood, each other both through each other's work and the respect of that but also just conversation. he's a beautiful storyteller and conversationalist. he has an incredible mind in terms of articulating the things that he see's and hsi life experience and he listens really well. and so he was the first person i told. and other than family
who at times thought it was the craziest idea they had ever heard, right. but he listened and said, 'you need to do this'

**TSG:** what did you tell him that you wanted to do?

**DM:** i said to john, i said john, i need to be nomadic. now the one thing i introduced into john's life was something he said was such an extraordinary thing and he never expected it, but when i was living in that tiny little back house in middle part of los angeles, was a blue bird. so her's this tiny little dwelling, it has a little efficiency kitchen and a three quarter bath and a single room surrounded in the backyard and next to an enormous hundred year old avocado tree the owner hated the backyard. she didn't like being in it. she didn't want to care for it. she didn't like the critters, she didn't like the avocados. so, i rented the entire yard and paved it around the house which extended the living space and once i paved it in a blue bird came to check me out. and kept getting closer and closer so i could see it and share in my peanuts.

**TSG:** [laugh]

**DM:** and i ended up calling her blue and for the 10 years i was there this blue bird visited me on the average of once a day and sometimes for peanuts and sometimes just to hang out. in my studio, on my artwork, flew into the house never once in 10 years messed anything in that house. ever. and what i learned from having this surreal experience with a blue bird that was a friend and not my pet was that this is a bird that migrates and comes and goes as she pleases. and
every spring she would go and i had no idea if i would ever see that blue bird again. and then she'd come back. and we would as if she had never gone. and i thought you know i've had a lot of animal experience sin my life very unusual ones everything from wild creatures, bears, lions, wolves, encountered in strange places. and but i never thought of an encounter in the middle of Los Angeles with a wild blue bird but all the symbolism that blue birds represent and blue is my favorite color and so one day john had dinner at my house and I told him we might get interrupted by blue and he is fascinated. he said really a blue bird. and blue sure enough, like this door is open. and she flew in and she'll land in the middle of the floor and she'll wait and she'll look around and when she settled and she never cared who else was in the room, she was never afraid of anyone else in the room. She'd fly up to the edge of the sofa or the chair. Then she'd jump to my knee, then'd she'd jump to my should, then she'd be on the top of my head, then every now and then she'd playfully [she motions to a soft pecking] and then you know after she had her fill of who is it in the house she'd fly away. and so i started thinking very deeply cause we would have these philosophical conversations, what is this? and to me it was a learning lesson, and learning lesson that i needed to really understand that the nature of freedom that this bird has, in order for it to be this magical experience, this out of the blue encounter, was that she had freedom. and and that she had freedom to come and go. and that i needed to find a way to do that and so umm even in that
book on every page is a little blue bird. [i flip through the book] on all the numbered pages. and then also lets see, that's one of the mosaics...that's an actual picture of blue

**TSG:** where was this

**DM:** in my studio, and she would fly into the garage. into the studio and she would hang out on whatever art piece i was working on. and one funny thing is cause this public piece ultimately went out into the public in Los Angeles in downtown. but you see its halo, its on a plexiglass disc and so that it almost as if its just a copper ring around its head well blue flew to the disc and because it had a center point and because its kind of off kilter it spun around like a record with her weight cause she flew to it. and it spun her off. but the thing is, she then flew to the wing and like ruffled her feathers, like that didn't happen, I'm cool. and, so you know when in our lives where we have these kinds of encounters they have great meaning and i feel um i have to take note of that. that these things that happen in my life and so john when i told and described to him this idea that then i brushed off the shelf, i said i had been wanting to do this for a long time and that is make my house on wheels. and i now want to do it and i had um see a very early one of the first version of Jay Shafer’s tumbleweed. and i found him in the back pages of a natural home magazine. and all that was this little by line at the bottom it showed his house on the road with him in front of it and it dawned on me that i, the idea of doing it on a trailer as opposed to the
way that i had wanted to do it which was a moving truck. a truck house. and i really liked the idea that it could be detachable from the vehicle and i called him up. i searched for his number through listings. and cause his number wasn't in there. and i called him up and the second ring i got jay and i said 'hello jay' and he said 'hello' and then we then spent the next two hours on the phone talking. didn't know each other from Adam but i wanted him to understand you know what it meant for me to see that. and what my idea had been and then you know the sharing that i had had with people like john. so john wanted to invite me to this dinner of these artists and and kind of art support and he had said to me in the car while we were going he said the one thing i do feel that you have to do next with sharing this idea with me and and uh, this idea, although it is yours and it is very personal to you, is so much bigger. and therefore what you are doing because you are doing it you're going to have to share it. and its infancy in order to have it happen. he said i know as an artist its a scary thing to do that. cause you're going to have to kind of release it. and you don't always know what's going ot happen with that idea as artists we tend to keep things close to the vest. our studio experience is sacred. its a sanctuary. and until that seed. is ready to bloom it doesn't come out of there. well it wasn't going to even be in there so he said in order to really do this to manifest this. you're going to have to extend a level of trust which is really hard to do in a world that does not often respect trust. And so the first place was this dinner that i was invited to
and it was very diverse and um a woman who's been kind of the arts community for a long time and alot of different artists many that john knew, but i was kind of new to. And I just kind of looked and listed for majority of the evening and enjoyed the heck out of it. She lived up in the Hollywood hills. It was beautiful. Beautiful space, wonderful dinner. Then we're all sitting around talking and so there are these two people, one who became the LA Arts Commision, the new commissioner for LA Arts. She was there. She had just come from New York and the New York Arts Commission. So she's talking about various programs and one of them was this transportation, the mural transportation so artists were commissioned to muralize the buses. Talked about how successfl it was and this whole idea of mobile art. And I'm just listening and then someone else chimed in about something going on somewhere else and you know how on the subways you know the graffiti, and what happens with that when its moving on the subway. And so there was a little lull, and I think we were having desert or something and I said, "I have a transportation story to share with you." And I shared with them what I shared with John, that I was building. [we were interrupted here. Domonique keeps her home open as a space for people to see what she has been working on. Our interview was the last week of her residency in New Orleans at Xavier University, a historically Black College in Louisiana, because of this she had a number of visitors come through as we were talking
which allowed me to see her gentle way of explaining her work and her house that she has been built.]

"I started this with zero capital," she tells them "and for people who this notion is you know even at $30,000, that to them is like I don't know life's worth of savings and for some it feels like its out of their range but when you start talking about a $350,000 house that you're elseaved to for the next 30 years and you do not own it, um then that is a whole 'nother conversation to have so it puts it into perspective and once you're done you're done."

**TSG:** Dominique you said that $30,000 was the figure, the figure but that does not include your labor.

**DM:** No, three years and when I was at the DMV registering this some of the questions that they had for me. And so they wanted a little bit of background, and I had put together a whole packet for them so that they saw the stats, the things written out. Uh, they saw the photograph of the construction build and we had this dialogue, and they examined everything you know. How tight, was anything loose you know were, um. And they, they said to me, you know how does the price break down and I had it printed out and ready. But I said this does not include me, and my three years and especially my three years as an artists creating this. And they said, we're glad and I showed them what it could possibly be and they said you know, you shouldn't add it, because if it included me, and the value and I looked and looked online and I spoke to a tax preparer and um,
uh a person in the art world of how to evaluate my life experience as an artist and put that into an equivalent, said then the value of this would be in the $250K to $350K range. Not that ever got that in my art which would be...But that would be the way the, the art market. Although I, I, if I can get $10K for a piece I'd be happy right now. So it doesn't necessarily, that means what you get. But that's how the market evaluates it and they said, "You do not want to register this at that value because do you realize what your registration fees would be?" And he, they said we do have people with those special cars and stuff like that and they come through here and they, vintage cars, or the customized cars, and they pay a fortune. But these are people who are collectors, these are people this is what they do, this is what they collect, this is where their money comes from. And, but for you it would not be a benefit. So we left that off. And that makes my registration fees very manageable. It did complicate it a little bit with the insurance. But basically they said the same thing. So...And it's insurance is brand new, because up until last year it just didn’t exist.

TSG: And when did you complete it?

DM: I completed this in 2015.

[Dominique's pauses to show a feature of her home to some visitors. The house is quite unique. Her chaise cane become her bed, which can also be rolled out onto her porch for sleeping because she lives in a hot climate and wants to be able to sleep out side to stay cool there. We continue talking but had to make a
visit with someone who had a foundation built house that was about 200sq. ft. Dominique invited me along to meet with them. He was a older white guy, a veteran, from New Jersey who purchased the property in at auction and renovated the small existing structure. I’m not sure how he and Dominique met exactly but knowing about her work, he invited her over to see the place and she, in turn, invited me. We continued our conversation in the car and on to our next engagement which was a lecture with the artist, developer Theaster Gates, as we were driving Dominique began to point out particular aspects of New Orleans architecture and vernacular architecture to me that she studied, and I asked her why the folks she encountered as a part of the Tiny House Movement didn’t see the connection between the architectural conventions they follow and these small, but immobile house types, created by African descended peoples. She responded by talking to me about racism and history embedded in house typology. She talks about trying to bring up these kinds of dialogues within the Tiny House Movement]

**DM:** "There's racism, really?" [She sarcastically mimics the surprised voices that greet her and others when they have tried in the past to educate people.] You know it’s one of those things, they know, they know. They’re stunned that you know. And they’re actually afraid to acknowledge, so it’s those three things. **TSG:** It is astonishing to me that, because that is the precise model that Tiny houses on wheels are replicating.
DM: Yes.

TSG: It is a shotgun house, its shorter, slightly more-narrow in some cases, but like you just pointed out, not always.

DM: Right.

TSG: But it’s a shotgun house.

DM: And I think that’s why they started doing the little bungalow style with the multi-layered roof, you know.

TSG: Mm-hmm.

DM: You know, that’s why they were doing that. They wanted to, and then they went modern with the asymmetric, because they otherwise would have had to go for that gable end and they also then did the side doors and, you know. It’s such a shame because if they had acknowledged that there is this precursor, I think it just would’ve opened it up more, it’s not that you know why be frightened or ashamed of a model that is so significant that its coming back and that’s where I then have to say to them it’s something else, there's something else that, um, you know, there's reluctance to celebrate something should be celebrated.

TSG: Mm hmm. Is there a difference for you between a tiny house on wheels and a mobile home?

DM: Ahh, the mobile home I feel is one the early precursors out of um, the shotgun house. And you know when I did the study on the shotgun house, I
always kind of quote around "shotgun" house, because I feel it is not its true name and the research that I found through the Schomburg.

TSG: Mmhmm, yeah, that it’s an African form.

DM: It’s an African form and when I started delving into, particular, vernacular housing. Vernacular housing is the predominate architecture of the globe. Architecture in its formal terms is something else. And it’s usually political and economic and one about privilege but the common dwelling is, it is, it’s truly the architecture of the globe and so this idea that any group of people, it is the single largest collective expression that any group of people can have and so it comes you know each group, tribe, uh culture, creates its own architecture in line to that collective thought, and aesthetic. None of it, there isn’t another culture on the planet that would name that expression off a weapon. You know. Nobody would and so when you dig deeper from the fact that it’s got this colloquial you know name, where does that come from? And number 1 where it has been researched that the physical structure came it came in the wake of the Haitian revolution. And Haiti had the highest form of it. And expression of what we know of as the shotgun house both in its early African form and its more cultivated with the Spanish and the French influence and then the African and indigenous form was expressed in Haiti before it ever got... And of course, with the Haitian revolution and the Haitians came, and opened up the way for the Louisiana Purchase and the influence culturally on New Orleans in particular that of freed
Africans out of the Caribbean. They built what they knew. And so that house got here that way and it didn’t have to get here on wheels it was small enough and it was in the minds deeply enough that it migrated through those venues. And they didn’t name a shotgun, so then where does it come from is after emancipation and the fact the freer movement of Black people put people in places that they had not been before certainly free and when that happened white folks had a particular way of addressing and that is if you see any evidence of those people and what is the evidence of those people? Those houses show. When you see those houses show up, you shoot into them to dissuade them from being there. And it’s the shooting into these houses as a threat that became the coinage for the name. It’s not a term we wanted it was a term put on it. And so, I was seeking out the what is the name and Rick Lowe has decided to name Project Row House because architecturally they are placed in a row, the rooms are in a row, and that way he could circumvent the negativity. Cause who would have embraced Project Shotgun...house? Do you think he would have gotten the MacArthur?

**TSG:** Absolutely not.

**DM:** Thank you. So, when I talk to people I always put it in quotes so that it is I know, you know, in the common language that’s how people, uh, see this house, but it’s not the way I see it.

Diach
**DM:** John Diach  He wrote ‘Flash of the Spirit’

**TSG:** Oh, Robert Farris Thompson

**DM:** No, no then it is another one, John, he’s another research he wrote a dissertation about the origins of the shotgun house.

**TSG:** I need to read that, I’ve read parts of it before and there’s a, this early example of that here in Louisiana that I want to visit, um, but I don’t know the um...

**DM:** And one of the things that came up was how names are distorted as part of the co-opting and colonializing culture. And so, for example uh, Mammy, was distorted from Mamé which meant great mother.

**DM:** Oh so, another...changing the word and the language and the naming of things, um, pickaninny. Pitney, is an endearment for a child. So, when you look at examples like that where a different element of the culture was twisted in it actually became very toxic to use. Umm, and they, that was intentional to create this estrangement in the ways that we associate relationships so, one greatest relationship builder is a house. So, to make that house toxic just like the relationship of a mother or that of a child, so to take these. That’s a tremendous amount of power to be able to shift that. And you don’t have to do anything else. You don’t have to put chains on it, you don’t have to whip it, you just distort those fundamental connections by the name. So that’s why I think some researchers got to find its true name, and he did say that there’s even probably
similar even in West Africa of a name in its. There not sure of the pronunciation of it but it almost sounds like Shugun which then once again is that redefinition is its somewhere in there but being twisted.
I interviewed Jewel Pearson by phone after being introduced to her by another geographer and tiny house owner, Lee Pera. Jewel had a different approach to her house, meaning although she talks about the financial precariousness of being a working single mom, after having worked for some time as a project manager, Jewel was able to pay for her own house to get started, through a package she received after being laid off from work, though the finishing of the house, she knew, would have to be done in stages to keep it affordable and accomplishable. She then used her smarts to be secure some sponsorships to move the project along which both allowed her to start her house build sooner than she expected and on a faster timeline.

Jewel Pearson Phone Interview 16 March, 2018

TSG: Maybe we can start there about where you live now, which is not...so, where are you now.

JP: So, I'm in Charlotte, in North Carolina.

TSG: Okay. And how long have you been there and how did you choose to put your house there?

JP: Um I've been here, this year like five years. I'll say this time. I kind of moved back, I moved between here Atlanta, um one time I decided to, kind of like decided to pick up and move to Ft. Lauderdale, but usually its between here and Atlanta. I went to [inaudible] here. That's just my familiar territory and I've got
really good friends here. So, I can move, then I'll miss my friends, then I'll come back and live for a little while then I'll realize I want to go somewhere. And I want to go somewhere else right now. But when I built my tiny house, living small, like I always thought it would be like living in an RV when my daughter was grown. And then you know all the RV's and stuff that I was interested in were the cost of a nice sized home and my [inaudible] to do that, to travel and to live a lot freer financially and so I quickly realized that that wasn't going to work with the RV's that I liked so then I started trying to rethink the plan. But then, kind of knowing that that was eventually what I wanted to do so I had started that thought process when my daughter was like six years old and I think it was like 2013 or so I stumbled on the Macy Miller, I don't know if you know Macy Miller's name?

TSG: Mm hmm

JP: Okay, so I stumbled on her story and her book and her tiny house and then decided that that's what I would do and started the research process, and you know. And I was here in Charlotte so that's just how I ended up building here because I was already living here.

TSG: So how long did it take you to go from a plan and conceptualizing the house to building and I'm also kind of curious because you changed, um from, what were the things about the RV that you really wanted that um, were sort of cost prohibitive that went into the tiny house, because your house is amazing.
[Jewel's tiny house is, like Dominique's unique to her life and personality. Jewel has features on her house like a large circular picture window and a Juliette Porch, that she really wanted incorporated into the design and had to do a bit more research because even her builder thought it wasn't possible].

**JP:** Oh, oh, thank you, okay. Um, so the first part of the question, oh I see research, almost two years and um because I'm like, I have project management background and so I kind of wanted to know everything about tiny houses, you know the build, design, everything. And I researched for a year and a half, two years and then um my sister is an interior designer and so I worked with her to sketch out the house because, um. I, at the time what I felt was kind at the beginning of the movement and everybody at that time was focused on minimalism and you don't spend this much money on your house and you know it's supposed to be kind of like bare bones kind of deal. And I wasn't interested in that [she laughs] I, I have lived in some very nice spaces and just, it wasn't...I wasn't in it for the hipster, um you know we-going-back-to-the-basics. It never was my deal. I wanted my house to give me home again for me. You know I'm down-sizing, but you know I don't necessarily feel like I'm giving up stuff, and so that was up part of um my, my plan. And so that's what my sister and I worked on. And then um, once I hired the contractor my actual build only took three months. Once I got to that point.
TSG: Did you know it was going to be that fast, that you would be able to, I mean not that two years of planning is fast but that you could go from the paper to, um being in your house in three months, did you expect that?

JP: Not really, um. What I had, because I didn't have all the money and stuff for it. My initial plan had been to get it to the point, like get it to a certain point knowing that I was going to get to finish. Um, but my thought was get it to the point where I could live in it then there was stuff that I would finish over time as my finances allowed and then somewhere along that line, um I had the, I saw um, an advertisement on HGTV and then I had the bright idea to apply for, to be on that show. And then we got picked and then I had to rethink my plans in that or rework my plans in it had to be finished at once. So, the other thing that pushed me was I had that thing me pull the go, for "Yeah I'm gonna build now," was that I had gotten laid off. And I was like okay so I'm giving, I got a nice package and it wasn't the first I had been laid off, but it was like okay every time I get laid off its kind of like reset and some has some more control over your future than you do. You know you have to...you feel that everything is impacted by being laid off and I didn't...I lived in a mid-rise apartment in an area here that's kind of like New Town so now you gotta rethink everything because now you've been impacted by corporate decisions. So, I was like, I don't want to be in this position again, where being laid off impacts me as much as it is now. And so that was, like, ultimately one of the reasons that I said okay I'm getting ready to
start building. And so, um. Like I said my intention being to get it to a certain build point that my finances allowed and then to live in it, then to finish it out. But, when I, my lease was ending, which was another catapult for me that you know, I wanna be in the house by the time my lease ends. And that was still gonna work with the plan because you know get it to the point where I could live in it, I could still end my lease and move into it and work on it. But once I had that bright idea to sign up for HGTV and we got on, then that meant it had to get to a point that it was show ready. And, and then, so that impacted some of the plans. And in the advertising for HGTV one of the things they were asking was, you know, why should we choose you, what makes your house different what makes your house different from some of the other Tiny Houses, you know, and I had a screened in porch was like on my wish list...

TSG: Yeah

JP: And so that sort of you know that's what I said I was gonna have and build and once you got selected you know now I gotta make that happen, so that was kind of like the um, add on to it. That wasn't necessarily in the official budget so I kind of had to work some magic with my sponsorships around that. Because HGTV didn't pay for the build and they you know they had their own sponsorships and so you're technically not supposed to have sponsorships when you're on the episode that I was on, but I was kind of my stuff behind the scenes on my own. But, I had no idea...and so then when I finally finished, and the show
aired there was still stuff that needed to be finished but the majority of the house was done.

**TSG:** Okay and so...

**JP:** I'm sorry

**TSG:** No, go ahead.

**JP:** And so, your other part of your question was.

**TSG:** Um...

**JP:** Did you forget?

**TSG:** Was it, what made you decide, what were the things that you wanted in the house when you were thinking about an RV that made it so expensive? And were you able to do those things in the house that you designed?

**JP:** Right okay. Not necessarily because like the RV, you know I was looking at the top of the line RV's where I with all the bells and whistles and um. You know, the ones that had everything. And so, for me so I would so no, you know as far as home and loving my house I got that out of my build but not the same...My thoughts when I was first looking at RVs was sort of like, when you ready to roll out you just go out and start it up and you gone. And so of course I can't have that. But I still love my house just as much and you know I think I would have been excited about an RV, I just don't have all of that same mobility. But one of the things that I said when people say that, well you kind of don't move your house as much, is that Tiny living can facilitate that live style so even if I'm not
moving my house I have more financial means because I'm not paying what I used to be paying to move about and travel.

**TSG:** Oh okay, and so part of it was being able to drive the house.

**JP:** Right, right. And then once, and when I first was building and because I'm not necessarily, I'm definitely better at it now that my house was built, but in the beginning, I was not very good at you know, measuring, 28ft didn't really resonate with me [Jewel's house is 28ft. long] And so I think that when I was first building I really felt like I would be able to move my house more and I could move it more. But now that it's built, and kind of baby it and I don't want that, you know, wear and tear, and I don't want to move it like that.

**TSG:** Yeah, um, I want to ask you more about moving the house, but I want to ask, so you were thinking about this RV when you daughter was still really young and what made you want or think about living so small? Like why did you decide even then that being small and being mobile was something you wanted to do?

**JP:** Um, one I love to travel, and then two I was a single parent and I would say, you know single parenting was hard. And financially it was just rough, and I was a young mom so all of that was part. And I always felt like I wanted to get to a point in life where I could be irresponsible. And I'm always saying being a single parent, being a young mom, I had to be very very responsible. And I just wanted to get to a point where I didn't have to make decisions based on finances or what was best for my child so...I wanted to be able to make decisions that just
felt good, you know even if it wasn't the, maybe the most logical. But if I decided I wanted to pick up and go to you know so and so and it wasn't the most logical think I didn't have to think about school or this bill had to be paid. I would be in a position where I could make those types of decisions and so that was...what was my driver at that point and just being able to travel, was my thought then. And I would tease my daughter I would say when you go to school I could just pull up and show up outside your dorm. [laughs] She never thought that was funny. But I did. So, it didn't happen in that time frame but that was kind of my thought. I just wanted to be freer versus being held down for responsibilities and owning a house and you know and that kind of stuff. And at that time, I really felt like from a financial perspective I just wanted to only have to have enough money to take care of you know the bare necessities. Not taking care of a house and maintenance and all of that stuff that ties you down to a job or a specific location.

**TSG:** Okay. Yeah that makes a whole whole lot of sense to me. But something that I get asked about, one, is the I guess also it depends on the South but the difference between a mobile and a tiny house and also like, racially, that you have mobile, or mobile home parks that are so tied to white people and whiteness and white poverty how do you think about that and what made you think about taking on a life like that? And do people ask you about that when they see your house?
JP: I guess in the beginning to me, really really, in the beginning I never even thought of the racial of the implication. I didn't think about that in the beginning. It wasn't until I had built my house and moved it to, when I first built my house I lived, I put it in an RV park while I was trying to find, you know, somewhere more permanent to put it.

And that was the first time that I had some problems with racism. And that was a time when it hit me like, shit, what did you just do? This is white territory. This is, I hadn't been, because I was so, in tune with more of like social media Tiny House groups, and I hadn't in the beginning and I'll come back to that too, it was all kind of like Tiny House love. Everybody loves Tiny Houses. And I wasn't even thinking of the racial implication. Um, and I guess the other thing of it was as I was I was building it and talking about tiny houses, I realized that it was mostly white people, but I've used to, from school, and I had been used to one of the only’s in dealing with white people. That didn't even impact me in the beginning.

But wasn't until I had some problems in the tiny house, in the RV park, then I had another problem in one of the Tiny House groups where, um. I don't know if you're familiar with the time when Steve Harvey went off on Tiny Houses and talking about how stupid they were... [we don't discuss it here, but the moment Jewel is referring to is an episode of comedian Steve Harvey's talk show in which he stated that anyone who would want a Tiny House needed to get a bigger dream].

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TSG: Yeah, yeah, I remember that.

JP: Okay, so everybody was upset about that. And in this particular Tiny House group, and I was upset about it too because it was so stupid for so many reasons, um but in this particular Tiny House group they were pissed off about it and they were referring to him as a nigger.

TSG: Oh.

JP: Right! And, so I was like "Whoa, you know, and so I said basically everybody is upset about what he's saying but you cannot refer to him as a nigger." And girl, it was like I had stepped into a damn Klan meeting. I think I sent this about 9:00/9:30 when I said this. When I tell you my, my whatever I was on my phone, my computer. The dings, the Facebook dings that you get when you have a meeting, it dinged all night long and it was people jumping on this post to tell me to put on my big girl panties. If I didn't like the way they talked in this group to get out, to all kinds of stuff. And I mean it was several commenters. I could probably, the commenters who jumped in said that wasn't appropriate, I could probably count them on two hands. And I was floored. And then that's when I started realizing that this, what this is, it is some of the people who are more progressive that are building the Tiny Houses, but it's also the I guess for lack of a better word, as society calls them, the poor white trash who do live in mobile home and don't like Black people. That's who's interested in Tiny Houses. But then there's the divide in the finances of the nicer Tiny Homes and people who
can afford, you know, who wouldn't live in mobile home park and then the other group who are interested in it as a means to a, you know a living means and their finances are different but because they're all white it all feels and looks the same to them. So, that was like kind of eye opening to me because in the beginning I didn't realize it was going to be so racial, as is the world. Um, and for me I always say shame on me for not even thinking past that to understand how that would impact me. And then [signs deeply], um. And so that was what led to Tiny House Trail Blazers. [Tiny House Trail Blazers is an online tiny house blog/group led by Dominique and Jewel, I discuss it a bit more later] and the shit when I call them out on their bull shit and they get so mad at me. Because, it’s just like okay this is something that everybody should be able to have a part in and you know a whole bunch of reasons why we can't. And, and we're inhibited, and I'm gonna, and because I'm likely one of the faces that everybody knows as a Black person in a tiny house. It’s kind of like my responsibility to call it out. I had no idea going in that it would morph into this.

TSG: I, umm, so I want to hear more about the Tiny House Trail Blazers and there was a um, I saw the most recent, well I don't even know if that was the most recent now because things happen so fast on social media, but when um, you and I saw when you and Lee [Pera] got in, not you two getting into it, but people were responding to you and Lee on Facebook about something and not being included, and it was really really ugly.
JP: Yeah, the Jamboree.

TSG: Yeah. Did you have mentors as you were sort of beginning um, because you started this a while ago, thinking about it, and things like the things that you are working on now, about where to place your home and talking about where and how to place your home as a Black person as a person of color weren't in place for you. And so, I was wondering if you did have mentors or um, models that helped you get started?

JP: I think I didn't because, the interesting thing, because there really were not at the time. In the beginning it was like everybody was trying to hold...and I still feel like this to a certain degree, people were holding information close to the vest because they were often times starting businesses. So, um, there really wasn't a, let me take that back, and I've said this in hindsight. There was some sharing, but there wasn't sharing with me.

TSG: I got you.

JP: And when I came back to look at it what I realized, how racially...because I've even pointed out that there's a person who lives here in Charlotte that is in the Tiny House Movement, he was one of the first people to build a Tiny House. And I reached out to him like two or three times to say hey I'm in your area. He puts on a Tiny House conference and I used to do event planning, did event planning for years. So, I reached out to him and I was like hey, you know I'm planning to build. Gathering information. I know you're putting on this conference, I follow
you, I'd love to...I gave him my background in event planning, you know, not asked him for any money just to be involved, and he never responded. But then I could see him responding, so that was when you could send somebody a message and you could see that they read it. So, I saw that he read it. So then umm, he never responded to me, but I could see him online talking to other people who were coming up in the area, but they weren't even established where I could say he already knew them. They were also planning to build in the area and I saw him engaging with those people. And so, it wasn't until after I had built my house and the episode had aired that he reached to connect with me and I guess and that point he felt like I was important enough for him to reach out and connect with me. And it wasn't until shit started to happen, excuse my language early this morning, um and I realized how racially drawn the community was that it hit me that that was something totally different. Of why he wasn't connecting with me. So, no I didn't have any mentors um, I paid for materials, googled, um, and did all of my research. I actually went to um, after I was...probably'd been researching for about a year or so I went to a Tumbleweed conference. [Tumbleweed is a Tiny House Company that makes prefabricated Tiny Houses on Wheels, started by Jay Shafer. It is a small business that has grown to represent 'the movement' by hosting workshops at a price tag of $299, though you could get them discounted to $179 if you do them virtually.] And I had planned to go to that early on but um, it was right when I had gotten
laid off and a friend was traveling to Europe and I decided I would do that and I rescheduled my Tumbleweed class. So, by the time I did go I had already been researching for like a year. And doing it that way made me realize how much a sales pitch their thing was and how much information that they omitted because I had been researching already. And that they were just kind of steering everybody towards having them build your house.

TSG: I see.

JP: But um, so everything that I have gotten was either through research or materials that I purchased which was one of the reasons that led me to sharing and doing the stuff that I do, more so for us. Because I knew the challenge that I had had in the fact that you know I’m kind of going to keep pushing and find a way and all that kind of stuff, but I know there so many people who can be diswayed early on when they start dealing with resistance.

TSG: Right.

JP: And so, that was like early on. Um in one of the Facebook groups, um, one of the ladies in the Facebook group was sharing that they had gotten together at some event. And she was sharing pictures and a whole bunch of white people in all of the pictures. No Black people and a Black lady commented, and she said you know, "Where are all of Black people?" And I just kind of watched and they all got bent out of shape because they felt like...She even said, "We were having a good time, why would you bring race into it?" [we laugh]. I was like, you know
white people always get offended when you ask something because they don't have to think any differently and so I kind of watched and waited. And so, I finally commented and said she wasn't commenting to be, to cause problems, it was just a fair question. Where are the Black people? Why is it all y'all just white? And so, um, some of the other white people who kind of get it, and I call them like, enlightened, commented and said, you know we've been wondering the same thing. And different people started talking about how you know what we've talked about, you know the RV parks and all that. So, they understood some of the impacts of racism. And so, I kind of said to the lady I was like hey I'm building. I haven't been sharing, but I'm going to start sharing but I'm going to start sharing because I realize how important representation is. And so that was actually when I really started my Facebook page and really started putting the information out there as much as I could. There was some stuff I couldn't share because of HGTV, but I did want people of color to be able to see another person of color.

TSG: Mmmhmm. So, did you have help building your house, and if so who, who were those people, even some of the help like uh, getting the kind of moral support you're talking about while you were building the house?

JP: So, my sister and one of her co-workers, Jaimie, both of them were interior designers so they were instrumental in helping me pull the actual plans together for the build and then I hired a general contractor, um, here locally and he was a
referral from some friends of mine that I've known for years, since I was younger, and he's related to them. And he was as a Black contractor and by that time we had, I had kind of figured out that HGTV was gonna pick us up and so I really wanted to, so Jaimie, who worked on my project who was my sister's co-worker is white. But I really wanted to be able to like I said represent and show some people of color and so one of the things I was talking to my builder about was the fact that you know here is an opportunity to show his skills and because I felt like my plans and my house would be popular because at that time nobody was building a tiny house that had any kind of style to it so I was like here is a business opportunity for you. And so, he and his team built my house. On the back side of it I wouldn't recommend him to build a dog house for anybody. The fortunate part for me is that his team he had some independent, sub-contractors working for him they were good, and I was able to build relationship with them and because I had researched so much, and it was my plans I kind of knew how stuff was supposed to go and then I was able to be onsite almost every day throughout my build. So that's how my house is okay. Because the team did most of the building but him personally, on the backside of it, once we were done with my house there was no working forward with him. But, you know, like I said the team that he hired built the house and so then there were some subcontractors. I hired my own electrician and plumber and I worked with the to build my screened in porch and deck so there were some other contractors and
then I hired an architect to review the plans and stuff to make sure they were sound.

**TSG:** Did he, he hadn't built a tiny house before, is that right? That was a first.

**JP:** That was the first one and it was kind of like you know contractors who say they can do anything and everybody believes they can. Which, it wasn't a problem in that, you know it was new for all of us. But the challenge came where I felt, I feel like, in looking back in it, he was out of his comfort zone and instead of being able to admit you know I'm out of my comfort zone and I'm not a hundred percent sure of what I'm doing. I guess it was pride, or whatever wouldn't allow him to admit that and the way it manifests itself was he was just really difficult to work with, almost nasty some days towards us. And so, it was very stressful. Instead of just saying, I'm out of my comfort zone, because we were all out of our comfort zones at that point. A house on a trailer, it was all new.

**TSG:** It sounds like a little bit like you then were acting also as the contractor but he's also...

**JP:** Absolutely.

**TSG:** I'm mean you said you hired your electrician and plumber, like...

**JP:** And I sourced all of the materials for my tiny house, he just built it.

**TSG:** Really? [for context, I was and wasn't surprised by this, most people who build their own homes do this but because Jewel is paying a contractor it is out
of the ordinary for her to step in to do this work. However, because she and
other Black and women of color home builders that I have talked to have
aesthetic principles that they want to follow they end up doing a lot of this work
themselves. Many builders and contractors want to use materials that they have
from other jobs or supply connects which saves them time and money. It is labor
these women do that will be ultimately uncompensated but will be a part of
what makes architecture of their homes so memorable, dynamic and unique.

JP: Yeah, I was my...I managed my build, every bit of it.

TSG: Yeah because your house has some really unique features, the porches but
then also like, do I remember you having like really specific set of stairs that
you...?

JP: Right, right, and I hired a company to build those.

TSG: That's a whole other thing, the number of people who learn, like you were
saying you did project management before, but learning to be a contractor that's
a whole other skill that you built. Getting things fabricated, finding materials,
working with electricians, plumbers, HVAC people, is a whole other...

JP: It is and that's why I was thankful that I had done the upfront research
because they start talking about stuff and you don't know what they're talking
about and with this being such a male dominated industry a lot of times they
want to talk to you like you're stupid or they don't want to respect that you
know what you're talking about so that research came in...it was instrumental so many times.

TSG: Yeah, and I witnessed that, but I've also heard other people talk about, you know, when you have to do it and you're doing it as a woman and you're doing it as a Black woman it can be really hard to negotiate. And the situation that you're describing sounds...I didn't have that happen, but I've heard it sounds so familiar. Like I've had had other people, even women who work in construction have told me things about what happened when they just show up onsite, and it's like, what are you doing here? Um, when you told your friends and family and your sister on you with the project which is amazing, um, about living in a tiny house, how did they respond?

JP: So, my immediate set of friends they didn't have a clue as to what I was talking about what I was doing, but it's not the first time and this won't be the last time that I do something like that. So, they just kind of, you know, we're all in it. She said she's doing something and we're all in it, we'll support her. Um I did have a couple of friends who were like, what I would consider the naysayers and um, they didn't get it until the very end.

TSG: After it was built?

JP: That it, yeah, you know the very end, that it was going to be okay. But my core set of friends were just like very supportive. And you know whatever. And as the build started happening, it was funny because I'll say that some of them
can sell a tiny house better than I can, because once it started coming to life...They were like, "Oh my God, okay so this is going to be really cool" and so they would be somewhere telling somebody about my house or bringing somebody by to see it. So, they kind of got on board with it. Um, I had people in the beginning when I started saying I was building a tiny house asking me if I was having financial troubles. Do you need a place to stay? And that kind of stuff. People just didn't get it, but those people even today say that makes sense or that was smart. Some people just have to...they can't conceptualize stuff so you just kind of have to show them. You know, I don't need approval or you all to cosign what I'm getting ready to do and um, you'll see on the back end.

**TSG:** And so, your house is mostly now um, in Charlotte, do you move it around um for like demonstrations or do you move it around because you want to live somewhere else.

**JP:** So, I have moved it within the city to different locations, like living locations, but I haven't moved it outside of the city and I definitely, there is no way I would take my house to a demonstration. I don't know how Domonique does it. I can't imagine, and I told her the same. I know she manages people come in and out of her house but the thought of a whole bunch of strangers...So I do tours, but within the tour it’s like three people max and I’m there the entire time. I couldn't imagine a whole bunch of people going through my house. So, no, I would not, I would like to have, I would like to build something, another, a model to be able
to take to stuff but no not my house. [I really loved that Jewel pointed this out. That is that the spectacle of the Tiny House, again, removes them from being a house to being 'house-like.' So, there is sometimes this automatic assumption that they should be and are always on display. Jewel's assertion, 'no, not my house' pulled her house back into her own personal sense of space. That her house is her zone of protection, not a show piece or a private space that is perpetually or compulsorily public.] This is home.

**TSG:** Yeah, because I think the curiosity about them is really alive and sometimes, this thing happened in Minneapolis that this, it's supposed to be, I thought, well...They call themselves the 'Tiny House and Small House Enthusiasts' it's one of those groups those like public groups that they can sign up for. So, my assumption was that it was people there who lived in tiny houses who were sharing information, that is not the case they. It's just people who are curious, it's just people, they call themselves "enthusiasts."

**JP:** [laughs] Okay.

**TSG:** Interestingly enough even getting information of them, the enthusiasts, has been a struggle. And so, I, but yet, when it’s time to go and look at somebody's house, they go they show they up they make these, they do these tours and so it seems like there's a lot of demand on people who live in tiny houses to do that. Sometimes. Especially when, like your house, Dominique's house, they're so unique. They're not just you know out of the box Tumbleweed builds. That
people really want to do that. They really want to be able to come and see it and touch and sit in it. Maybe sleep in it too, so people are using them as Air BNB’s.

**JP:** And I did that. There were a lot of opportunities to actually visit a Tiny House when I was building, so there was one um, a Tiny House in Nashville and I drove all the way to Nashville. They had an open house. They used to AIRNB the house. And they had an open house one Sunday and I drove all the way up there, so I could spend the day in the house. And that’s how I made my decision of what I was going to, uh, the size of my house because theirs was a 24ft and I realized I wanted a little more space. So that was key to me making my decision. Which is why I do offer tours. And in the beginning, I kind of was offering tours when people would reach out and I would say yes. And then that started getting really really weird. Um, and so then I started charging for tours because I ended up spending a lot of time sharing a lot of information and changing allowed me to weed out the weirdos. People that just wanted to be in a Tiny House but not planning to build. And so sometimes that can be a waste of your time to a point, so I felt like charging meant that they were more committed to it and it was compensating me for some you know my time...You know that's an energy drain too because people just don't have, I don't know what it is, common sense sometimes. It’s just like they want to ask you every single question that they can think of and its really just to be nosy.

**TSG:** Can you think of an example of one of those situations?
JP: Where it got weird?

TSG: Where it got weird.

JP: Oh yeah, I can tell you exactly where it got weird. [she laughs] Um [she laughs again] Um, this, so...I was used to people coming to my house, so it was...The first place where my house was located, you had to know it was down there in order to make it to see it. And so, when people would end up coming down there and looking at it I wasn't concerned because usually they had a purpose for being down there cause it was in an RV park. That other trailers were around there and then it was like a little community park. So, if people were there they had a purpose. I was sitting in my car, I was getting ready to leave and this lady pulled up. And she pulled up right at my house. And so, she um, got out and she was looking at the house and so I was kind of sitting there. I wasn't saying anything I was just gonna let her look at the house. And then she started going like all around and looking up under stuff and moving stuff. And then so I got out and I was like, "Hi, can I help you?" Um so she said, "Is this your house?" and I said yes, and so and I had my face all tight because you getting comfortable now I'm trying to figure out what you're doing and so then she started asking me questions about the house and about tiny houses and so then I was like okay Jewel, back down some, just, she's just a little over eager or whatever. And so, I was answering questions, we are standing there talking, then she said I've been looking for you ever since I saw your show on HGTV I was looking for you. She
said this is the 3rd, because there are like 3 RV parks in the city and I knew you had to be in one of these three. Now did you hear me tell you she asked me was that my house? She knew exactly what I looked like...And she told on herself. And so, the hair on the back on my neck stood up because it’s like, what are you looking for me for. And you've gone to three different parks to look for me. And she wasn't gone say anything until it...It was very very weird. And so, after that, when she said I've been to three RV parks looking for you, I realized because even though the show didn't say exactly where I was because it’s a smaller city there were only so many options. And so that was kind of after the racist incident and I just kind of really kind of put it into high gear to get out from down there, so I could be in a kind of more private location. And that's when I made the decision. Because other people had reached out to me just email me. Then I thought you gonna mess around and get yourself killed. Jewel tells me that she left there and went to the suburbs of Charlotte which was kind of secluded, but she really didn't like the suburbs. "But because it was in the suburbs I was about to die because I was away from the city and I'm a city girl. It was like woods and trees and it was just like Imma die up here. Like people would no longer say, hey I'm down the street, what you doing? It was like a planned visit to come visit me. And people weren't doing that any more. So, I was like I've got to get back to the city." Jewel moved back to Charlotte, to a walkable neighborhood. "The challenge is so I scoped out the neighborhood it’s a neighborhood with dead end
streets. It’s a couple ways in and I'm in the back of the neighborhood and so you again would really have to know I'm back here to come visit me...or for strangers to know I'm there, but apparently news about tiny houses travels fast so I've had way more traffic than I anticipated. Um, and so I still have the weirdos who will come knock on my door and ask if they can come look inside my house. One lady told me "I'm a Christian" because I told her no. [she laughs] "I'm a Christian," yeah, you still can't come in my house. Um so it more exposure but I'm back in the city. It used to be an all-Black neighborhood, but its slowly unfortunately, slash fortunately unfortunately being gentrified. Um, but one of the things I'm happy about being in my neighborhood, some of the houses in the back of the neighborhood are boarding homes so I get to interact like with single young moms and single people, you know Black women trying to get back on their feet and for them to, one of the ladies told me she just enjoys walking past my house because it gives her something to aspire to. Um, and that makes me feel good, for us to be able to see tiny houses, because most of us, even some white people, have only seen it on TV. But for us, you know seeing a person of color and seeing a tiny house in the neighborhood has been a big deal, so I like that.

**TSG:** So, can you say some more about how you would or could put your house?

[I ask her about the situation with the woman who stalked the RV parks of Charlotte to find her and how she factors that also into issues around the legal problems of where to place her house]
JP: So, I would basically say that I am under the radar, when I left the RV park I had found a lot that was in an area that was zoned for mobile homes and I had gone to the city here to get permission to be on that lot. For them to allow to connect to the city. And initially the city said that yeah, not that they would do it, but they would consider me as a prototype and run it past everybody and see if they could get approval. And then somewhere that got stopped and so they came back and just told me no that they couldn't do it and or that I couldn't do it. And so, that's when I went, I found the guy and was just in his back yard because it was kind of like off the. You know now one would have known I was back there and I was just connected to his utility. And so it’s the same type of situation where I am now, I'm in a guys back yard, um, And my risk is that I'm closer into the city and I kind of have put myself out there to you know if the city wanted to try to find me, they would know where to find me and code actually is down the street from where my house is now so there is the risk that one day somebody could come knock on the door and say I gotta leave, um but, I've been there May, will be a year that I’ve been there and knocking on wood it’s been okay. So, it’s just kind of like always that risk. Like I am under the, and the interesting thing is, I know I’m out here. I've corresponded with them via email several times and I've had people reach out to me who have told me that they went to the city to ask about a tiny house and the city told them to contact me because I know how to live in a tiny house. How weird is that? Um so I'm not
legal but you all are referring people to me. [we talk about the irony of this that
the city won't do any policy changing but is referring people to her for
information]. So, I email them stuff that's happening in other cities. They've got a
couple things coming up where they're actually going to be talking about zoning,
so I plan to attend that, just to kind of keep it in the forefront to their minds that
we'd like to make some changes. Even though I'm living here, and I can kind of
say I'm okay, I would like to try to make some changes for others then that
would kind of help me in the long run.

**TSG:** Do you have safety concerns now living in your house?

**JP:** Safety concerns in that I am in a Black neighborhood and you know I kind of
have to...And so my neighborhood is in transition. And so, I have to be careful
that nobody breaks in my house and all that kind of stuff which are concerns that
I didn't have before when I was in the guys backyard because I was kind of out of
sight...So I do have some of those kinds of concerns, but it would be the same
concern if I had a house in the neighborhood, not just because it’s a tiny house.
Chapter 2: This Thing This Home: Small Things and Urban Places

Stevie Ada Klaark and Tia-Simone Gardner

The conversation in this chapter was recorded by Stevie Ada Klaark, an artist and educator who lives and works in Minneapolis, MN. She holds an MFA from Cornell University, College of Architecture, Art, and Planning (AAP). Her work has been featured on the cover of the Chicago Review, in Bat City Review, Blue Mesa Review, and she has participated in residency programs at Norðanbál Gamli Skóli, Hrísey, Iceland and Gibraltar Point Centre for the Arts, Toronto, ON, Canada. Stevie is kind, intelligent, and asks hard questions that make sharp connections. I have reproduced the interview here mostly as it was originally transcribed by Stevie with some pronoun changes for clarity. I have also added additional annotations to the interview as a practice for myself to see what more I might add, subtract, or connect when I had a different pace of thought after our conversation. Stevie approached me about doing an interview for MN Artists, a web-based journal and artist resource that operates as a program of the Walker Art Center, after hearing a comment I made at an artist panel on space and race in the Minneapolis artist community. When we met initially I had not considered our conversation would find its way into this dissertation, however, Stevie’s questions where affecting and relevant and my answers were

55 “This Thing This Home: Stevie Ada Klaark In Conversation with Tia-Simone Gardner - Mn Artists.”
unmediated and unprepared. The process of constructing an improvised
dialogue is the process that I want to open the pages of this document with, as
improvisation ended up being a significant aspect of how I could think through
time, Black feminist praxis and its relationship to the temporalities of the house.

We came together with some interests in learning, each possessing some
knowledge that we could share with one another and honed-in on the ideas that
circulate throughout this body of writing: the politics of place, intimacy, time,
and city-making.

STEVIE ADA KLAARK (SAK) - We met on a Wednesday morning at a local café in
North East Minneapolis. The background noise of other conversations, children’s
squeals, and the muted shuffling of people just emerging from their homes to
get coffee or tea on a gray November day crept into my awareness. Karen
Dalton’s voice moved through the space for just one song off of her album, In My
Own Time. Dalton’s music is one of a drifting life and of mobility. This seemed
appropriate and timely for this place as the two of us discussed livability,
dwellings, and locality. From what it means to stay, to how there are different
kinds of staying and different kinds of leaving, we talked about Gardner’s current
work, The Inhabitation Project, a tiny home turned mobile residency that
Gardner has been working on as part of her PhD program at the University of
Minnesota. The Inhabitation Project insists upon the pull to wander, and also,
about the need for stability, what that suggests and also what it might take to stay.

TIA-SIMONE GARDNER (TSG) - The annotated interview below explores the major themes of this dissertation in a more holistic form, a collaborative dialogue between two people, about place. Our conversation helped illuminate an important aspect about this project that goes beyond the white paper of the written dissertation. The project, as it is addressed here, touches on a politics of proximity, that is, intimacy – of space, time, sociality, and power. This way of understanding the work only came to articulation through a gentle but rigorous dialogue between the two of us. The conversation became another of the important small sites of knowledge production that this little creative space, turned, house, turned text, brought into being. Thinking together, this conversation meditates on the ways that a house, tiny house, turned ontological problem, can instigate the best and worst that U.S. American cities have to offer their inhabitants and through iterative processes that involve seemingly small things – a short conversation, or more recently an argument, with two people, a design process of three people, a weekend build sprint of four, and quiet writing sessions of three colleagues. Within these small intimacies of relation, the larger systems of spatial control that we sense, but often lie dormant, just out of the
reach of our enunciation, can be incrementally made legible, and then spoken, and then, possibly, unsettled.\textsuperscript{56}

\textbf{SAK} - What initially interested me in your work were your thoughts on radical inclusivity as heard in the discussion at The White Page, after the panel event for \textit{Code Switch}, where we first met. What we wound up talking about in our previous conversations were your projects and we landed on your mobile residency or your tiny house project. Can you tell me a bit more about it, why you started to make it, what do you call it?

\textbf{TSG} - So right now I am calling the whole thing \textit{The Inhabitation Project}. But I need a name for the structure itself. Like, it needs to be named something, but I don’t know what to call it.

\textbf{SAK} - I like \textit{Inhabitation}. I like that it sounds, like...it sounds like a circle.

\textbf{TSG} - Mhm. Mhm.

\textbf{SAK} - Like the shape of. It just sounds circular.

\textbf{TSG} - Yeah. I mean I think the whole project is about how do we live and dwell in cities and not in cities. And how do we live not just statically but also as mobile people in something that is affordable. It started out with my needing a studio and a place to live and the cost of those things being more than I could afford.

And so, the tiny house movement has been an ongoing interest. But, I also have

\textsuperscript{56} Wynter, Sylvia, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation--An Argument.”
been thinking that it has always been there. People have lived in RVs, people have lived in mobile homes, and people have improvised housing since cities as ways to organize societies have existed. Building a tiny house on wheels is now really legible. I felt like I could prepare for it and get someone else to help me pay for it. I couldn’t pay for it on my own.

SAK - Right.

TSG - I was able to get support for The Center for Urban and Regional Affairs at the U. They helped me hire an architecture student to look at the plans for it. And I received a McKnight Visual Artist Fellowship, and all of those things coupled together helped get this built.

SAK - Great!

TSG - And then, working on my dissertation...I originally thought I was going to write about mobility and stasis as a part of thinking about race along the Upper Mississippi. But, all these other things just started to come together with my advisor suggested that I should just incorporate the house into the dissertation since you are going to do this research anyway. And so, I did. And so, I started researching housing and affordability in Minneapolis and St. Paul.

There are things that I wish I had the capacity for. For example, I think had there been more time and more resources, making it more ecological...Because the first question a lot of people ask: “Is it solar?” And, no it isn’t.

SAK - Why isn’t it solar?
TSG- Solar costs way more money, and for a mobile structure there is whole different system than a static structure. Having a collaborator on board who knows the technology, who I could pay for their time...things like that would have been really nice. And maybe in the future that would be a possibility.

SAK- Mhm. Totally.

TSG- But things like that didn’t happen this round. There are things like, having an on deck grey water recycling system. You know? Those things are awesome and great, but it just takes more resources to be able to get the technology that just weren’t there for this part.

SAK- Absolutely. But what is so exciting about the project is that you are living in it. And potentially like any other dwelling it is adapting to your needs at that point and time. And, you know, as things shift and change in that way, solar is feasible as part of a future plan. Like once the seed is sort of planted it takes time to grow and manifest. Who knows how it will evolve? I mean you know in part, but it’s also that how we live, and dwell is based on responding—or should be based on—responding to our basic needs at that time.

TSG- That’s so true. That’s so true. I’m glad that you said that. I think it’s nice to approach the space that you live in as adaptable. That’s important to me and how I’m thinking about this. It’s not a fixed structure. It’s supposed to change. It’s supposed to move. It’s nice to be able to think about it having other iterations, so it can become something else.
SAK- Which is exciting. I feel like many of the trends in a lot of compartmentalized, mobile making dwelling structures tend toward conversations that are similar to each other, and what I find really interesting about your project is that it acknowledges paradox. There is this desire for stability and yet having to have this fluidity and mobility is necessary in order to have that stability. It’s strange and also really poetic and pretty great.

TSG- There is that paradox there. I don’t want to generalize or over-romanticize the artist. But, we do have to have some life flexibility. As an artist, you are not a fixed spectator anymore. I mean there are fixed spectators.

SAK- Yeah. Absolutely.

TSG- There are fixed spectators. But I think more and more, getting resources, getting paid, our careers require travel.

SAK- And the needs of our work too. The work that we are making. But then it leads to the question, what is feeding the other? Is our work adapting to imposed structures or is it leading the discussion? Especially because where funds come from and how they are used—even if they are unrestricted—do set up a foundation for something to exist.

TSG- These are the things I struggle with. Wanting to have flexibility to make work at home. Home is Alabama. There are ways of working and working with people that I feel like I have a better understanding of because I grew up with it. I have time. I have depth, and kinship. I have those things that make it feel...I
don’t know if its somehow less of something and more of something else?

Working in that space, I know it in a way, whereas doing projects here I have questions about. You know, like is it okay to do this work in East St. Paul, to start a project in North Minneapolis? And it’s not that I don’t think one should always have those ethical questions at heart, but there is an intuitive knowing that I feel I can claim Alabama. Like, I know who to go ask questions of. There is some small personal claim that I don’t have here. There’s a push and pull. So, there’s a part of me thinks that, there is also work that I don’t know I would be able to do there because the resources aren’t there. How do you make things happen in the places that you think that they need to happen? How do you do that with care, caution, respect? How do you do that with compassion and with a humanist, feminist approach?

SAK- Yes. Through that lens. Because that lens is so important, and I think that is why I am very interested in this project. I think about traveling and being a part of communities, about what seems to be the inherent condition of being an artist. How do we approach residencies in a different way? There are times that

57 These are the things that this project brings into focus. Time, is a problem for intuition. At once I want the easy happiness of place, that I have an accumulated relationship with people, ideas, objects, land, in one place, that I lack in another place, and so I can claim to know it in a way that I do here. And Black Geographies wants to unsettle this. This is another paradox that the mobility of dwelling brings to the fore. It is a different kind of root shock to feel like even the things that keep you psychically located are unravelling.
just because of the way that a residency is set up you feel like an intruder on a place...

**TSG**- And you’re extracting something from that place...

**SAK**- Right, and the community, and the resources. At what point are we taking more than we are giving? Being able to acknowledge that and adjust accordingly is necessary. Finding a way to be more compassionate and understanding in order to be able to acknowledge when you are doing more harm than good in a community...even before you get there.\(^58\)

**TSG**- Even before you get there. Yes. That’s the thing that is important. I think a lot about temporary-ness. Temporary-ness can be something you need to think about more. Temporary-ness requires us to think ahead more. It does require us to think with the pace of our environment differently. It makes us think about how we educate ourselves in relationship to other people in the places we are in. It’s something I think about in the creating of residency and taking up residencies. Particularly when we don’t belong to a place. But even when you do

\(^{58}\) Stevie grew up in a military family and though she didn’t include it here, she talks about how that experience taught her to treat her own mobility as always relational. That is, that her presence, the temporariness of it, of entering and exiting a place, can be a kind of “disruption,” not negatively, but “it causes people to become aware of you and themselves in a different way.” It’s a give and take. She asks “when can that balance be where the reciprocity is almost on the same plane...I guess my question is at what point are we taking more than we are giving and being able to acknowledge that and adjust accordingly.”
belong to a place, what assumptions do we make? What things do we take for granted? Because it always is some sort of give and take.

SAK- Yes.

TSG- I think, you know, I had a professor who passed in 2014, Terry Adkins who was really important to me.

SAK- Adkins was amazing.

TSG- A lot of the work relied on ritual. The practice part of it relied on ritual. Absolutely. His work was a good example of this. How do we incorporate the ritual of learning and engagement without it becoming predatory? We really do have to be cautious about how we treat people, places, and how we treat our work.

SAK- Just this mindfulness about the reverberation of our actions. There is so much work that gets made and there are a lot of mentors and professors in higher education where work gets funded and that work is not self-aware or not aware of the communities it is brought into. It’s about time. That does bring me to something we have discussed previously. In documentation that I have seen of yours, there seems to be a dealing with time. This simultaneity that is found in thinking of your present experience and times past. I think that building this house that is mobile has to do with time. In a very different way than we think about building a structure in a neighborhood. How do we think about the future when we think about temporary-ness and temporality? And it’s not about
creating a binary. When mobile you can pick up and leave at any time. (Which also effects the way you think about it...)

TSG- That’s a really important question. I can answer the question with a question. How do we start to think about the future as non-accumulation? We can think about non-economic accumulation, so you live in a place long enough and you get equity, so that when you move you have more money.\(^5^9\) I don’t think it has to be either or, I think there will always be some mix of static things and non-static things. I think that is always naturally occurring. With things like a house and housing, how do we think more strategically about using temporary-ness to our benefit? That we can allow in planning things that are temporary. Because I think sometimes in planning, plans only allow for things that are meant to be cumulative. **It’s not “planned” that something will be there for only five years, it’s supposed to be 20, 30, 50, 100-year plans. Mortgages.**\(^6^0\)

\(^5^9\) I want to think also about social equity or community equity that the idea that being statically in place over time always equals knowing or connectedness. Time is assumed to create this, however, it the human relationality of space/time that actually does this and that can be brief or extended. Miranda Joseph states, “To invoke community is immediately to raise questions of belonging and of power.” Joseph is here talking about a relationship to capital that follows identitarian politics. I think this allows us to ask how cities use zoning laws, which dictates what and who belongs, and how many will be allowed to belong and for how long, as a problem of housing, as the production of an assumed relationship between commodity (our dwelling place) and community.

bell hooks writes “Ultimately, I wanted to return to the place where I had felt myself to be part of a culture of belonging – to a place where I could feel at home, a landscape of memory, thought, and imagination.” bell hooks Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community*, xxiii; hooks, *Belonging*, 468.

\(^6^0\) Because planning is anticipatory and premeditated, it is a taken for granted good to have more time to plan. Temporality need not be negatively associated with the improvisation, though it often is (i.e. the favelas in brazil). Is there a method for cities to allow for space time, temporality of housing or is such a concept completely abject.
SAK- Exactly. And also thinking about our ecology. We have more and more disasters happening because of global warming. I think that is also considering people’s awareness for their environment. I don’t think it is even wise for people to think about accumulation that people did in the 1950s. That is a polarized comparison, but it leads to a colonial mindset of what accumulation means. Going into a place, accumulating more and more abundance and wealth, so that your offspring can inherit that. I suppose my question is are we beginning to question what we are inheriting? Do we want to inherit it and is there something else we could be passing on and what does that look like?

TSG- That’s a really good question and I think that’s true. I was passing by Augsburg this weekend and they made this small dwelling that can be put up really quickly and is essentially crisis housing. And so, it is temporary housing, but I wish that the temporary didn’t always have to come into effect in a crisis. We can preemptively think before and outside of crisis modes.

SAK- Right.

TSG- We can stop and think about what comes after us ecologically and it can be something more than the monetary.

SAK-Because the monetary system we have right now is a fiction, it was devised by a person and can be reformed and reshaped. It is going to take a lot of work.

TSG- It’s just done so much damage. We can look at what has happened in this country to indigenous people, to black people, to poor people. It’s just done so
much damage to try to beat people out of being property owners. Property owning in itself is a huge game-win or die. It has done so much more damage than good. And so there must be other ways, there must be some other means. We can’t get out of it completely, but there are other ways to assess the way that we live right now. There are other ways to live in and manage our lives and cities. That’s where jobs are, that’s where better education is, that’s where it’s easiest to get around.\(^{61}\)

**SAK**- *The Inhabitation Project* suggests that.

**TSG**- Yes.

**SAK**- The things that we are talking around remind me of the recent (October 30, 2017) *New York Times* article that was a feature written by Kate Bolick on Andrea Zittel’s, A-Z West out in Joshua Tree. The response that Zittel gives in response to her work being compared to male predecessors who make sculptural monolithic land art pieces in the middle of nowhere ... and then leave. I think with Zittel it also is about her return to California since she was born there. But, Zittel’s response is that she is living with her work...A-Z West is about livability over time. I have been thinking about her response regarding her living with it. And there’s a difference in that in where a colonial mindset is about conquer,
destroy, and leave. Within a colonialist framework, there is an eventual leaving in which the structure that has been put in place is supposed to hold. Which is absurd. To think about projects, such as *The Inhabitation Project*, that are about livability is also to think about an undoing. Undoing is an incredibly vulnerable process and makes me think about the differences of what people from the outside might say narratives about people wandering making work and leaving are similar. This is a different kind of leaving and this is a different kind of staying.

**TSG**- That’s really good. I am thinking when you said that about where I want it to go. When you build these things. We shouldn’t be making random choices. Just because space seems free, like “here’s a giant salt flat, so I’m going to carve something into because I can.”

**SAK**- And we make the pilgrimages. You go to these sites.

**TSG**- There is something important about not thinking about space like that because I want to take *The Inhabitation Project* home-home. There’s a vacant lot next to my Mom’s house because her neighbor’s house burned down. She moved into a condo for the livability. I hope to enable myself for a very short time to go home and be next door to my mother in my own space. So, it’s not just like I am going to go the “vast out West”. I hope folks that will start to begin to think about space and place that way.

**SAK**-This cycle of manifest destiny essentially.
TSG - That I can just “mine” anything because you can’t.

SAK - How many people have gone out “on the road” with their Neil Young mix tape and refurbished van. But how much of that is indicated by your social standing and your ability to travel through places that are unwelcoming. Going out into the world as a woman have I encountered peril or felt uncomfortable because my body is not welcome in certain space. It is about who you are and what you have in order to attain that sort of lifestyle.62

TSG - I hope that having someone let you borrow a place to park is understood as an intimacy. I can’t think of a scenario of feeling safe in an unknown less populated place. I mean, I’m from Alabama, I grew up in Alabama, and there are certain parts of Alabama and Minnesota that I’m not going to live in alone. Under any circumstances. Not even under the best circumstances in the full light of there are cautions that you have to take.63

There is an intimate relationship that you have to work on, work up, work through and do to initiate these mobilities together.

SAK - That is what is interesting about this project.

TSG - A friend in Wisconsin has a CSA farm and is going to let me park the house on the farm. I am parking my house right next to her house. And that feels okay
in a way. She’s not a stranger, if anything happens in the middle of the night, you know, she can hear me. I don’t think women or people of color approach living or livability in the same way as others. We haven’t been able to do that.

SAK- Yes. The intimacy part of the project is what is missing from the dialogue around these other narratives in art and design that we have to talked about. I think it is a radical way of rethinking how artists move through communities and make work.\footnote{She stated “But what I find interesting is almost like, when you use the intimacy part is something that now that you bring it up and we’ve arrived at that is really sort of jogging my mind now. Because I think that that is sort of what becomes missing from a lot of the dialogue around mobile or tiny house living or thinking about you knowing people and going and figuring out places to live based on who you know and thinking about the encounters and exchanges that you can have with them. It creates an alternative way of being in a world that seems to have ways for you to connect with people but we become more distance, modular, and compartmentalized. Maybe it brings us into this space where we can begin to, despite our now, estranged way of living from each other, just because of the necessity of modern times, because of what the world is demanding from us. I think that it a really sort of radical way of reinventing.”}

TSG- This thing, this home. I really want to take it home. We'll see.\footnote{We talk a bit about discomfort and comfort and how to think about the temporariness of the discomfort and what might be gained from that. That this project won’t always feel good. I talked about being terrified at particular turns of the project. That there have been days when my body couldn’t discern between me being terrified and being excited about it. Stevie notes though that the uncertain is what can be exciting about it. I tell her a part of my excitement about it is also that it is different from other work that I have made which is less relational somehow. That because housing and architecture are ways of knowing space that everyone has a relationship with, its exciting to take the project ‘home’ to my community in Alabama. It’s something that doesn’t require them to enter the space of a gallery to understand or see what I am doing but rather to walk into my dwelling. Experiences a problem in a different way, in a different medium and material than other work from my practice allows them to engage.}

And we did see. As I will discuss later in the dissertation, there has indeed been a lot of intimate jostling that has happened since this very short time between December of 2017 when Stevie and I had this conversation and now, May of...
2018. The house has moved three times, I have moved five times and am still not living in or with it. What I discuss in the next chapter are the theoretical foundations for the Black feminist praxis that continue to guide this work. I frame this process below as the transformative potential of the Black feminist spatial imagination, particularly in the contexts of urban spaces like Minneapolis, Minnesota.
Chapter 3: Building Small, Building Mobile

Carol Boyce Davies writes, “The autobiographical subjectivity of Black women is one of the ways in which speech is articulated and geography redefined.”\(^{66}\)

Though Davies is not herself a geographer, as a literary critic and Black feminist theorist, she thinks about the demands of time, space, race and gender in ways that inform the interests of this project. In this chapter, I contend, like Davies, that home is an important locus for this geographic articulation of an autobiographical self as it makes a dense complex and interwoven movement between community, nation, and family. As with the previous chapter, I am interested in not the home itself as home lends itself to different locations of psychic nostalgic, but in expanding the potentials of the house, as a material problematic for the spaces of the city.\(^{67}\) Through parts of my own autobiographical writing, I explore the ways that the tiny house specifically presents challenges to issues of spatial control such as zoning and regulatory building practices that contribute to the forms of deep space that we live in, under, and through.\(^ {68}\) In this chapter I describe the material and theoretical


\(^{67}\) “The Idea of a Home,” 288–89. Mary Douglas writes, her essay on the writing of philosopher Suzanne Langer, “We start very positivistically by thinking of home as a kind of space. Home is "here," or it is "not here." The question is not "How?" nor "Who?" nor "When?" but "Where is your home?" It is always a localizable idea. Home is located in space, but it is not necessarily a fixed space. It does not need bricks and mortar, it can be a wagon, a caravan, a boat, or a tent. It need not be a large space, but space there must be, for home starts by bringing some space under control. Having shelter is not having a home, nor is having a house, nor is home the same as household.

\(^{68}\) Smith, *Uneven Development*. 

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processes of conceptualizing and building an improvised, aka tiny, house. I explore why, how, and with whom I was able to begin this project as well as the many ways that the inner workings of the city became legible and palpable to me. I weave together brief Black feminist histories of house-making with of my own stories and the stories of others, through the practice of Black feminist geographies. I am interested in the epistemic and ontologic problems that arise when the life problems that are taken up by researchers, become experiential problems for the researcher herself, myself, and then inform the re-animate the research process and project. I look again to the work of bell hooks, in addition to the writing of the late Edward Soja and Katherine McKittrick. I weave these texts together with theories gleaned from interviews with Black women and a woman of color tiny house dwellers to craft a biographical sketch of how these houses may take shape and take on a range of purposes and meanings across different places, times, and needs.

**Black Feminisms and The Modern Tiny House Movement**

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, garreting, the transformation of the contradictory racially-sexually subjugated ‘not-quite’ spaces, such as the not-quite-house, or the not-quite room of the attic, into a Black feminist mode of resistance, is a method. bell hooks, writing in 1995, points to the need to think intersectionally about human ecologies, scale, and architecture. She writes, “...acknowledging that the world we are living in is one where space is becoming smaller and smaller really calls for a rethinking of architectural cultural
practices.” Understanding the tiny house through a Black feminist perspective allows us to think about the mobility and smallness that tiny houses provide as a part of a larger struggle to imagine a wider range of architectural subjectivities, as discussed previously. Living smaller, I argue, may be a necessity for survival as it makes living in urban areas, where there is greater access to work, education, transportation, etc., possible.

While smallness is a livable scale that has been in many ways made available in cities for some time through studio, efficiency units, garage apartments and the like, tininess, as I am positioning it here, carries with it a connotation of not just scale but space-time. Tiny houses, tent-city tents, improvised container houses, and mobile housing, can be not only quickly built but also quickly rebuilt and/or reset in another place should it become necessary. This cultural phenomenon in housing has steadily grown in the US and Canada over the last three years, but has a longer legacy that is at times eclipsed by the novelty of the new popular movement. In her essay, “Black Vernacular: Architecture as

69 hooks, Art on My Mind, 159.
70 No longer is the shotgun house the most contested house in America, things like tents and tent cities are causing municipalities to rethink their housing laws and practices using health and safety as legitimating forces to stage wholesale removals of families from the only housing they may be able to afford. A recent lawsuit filed in Akron, Ohio states that the tent homes are functioning like “a campground.” We could ask discursively what is the difference between a campground and a neighborhood other than time. Activists see these as contentious sites where the fight for more just urban housing plans may emerge. In Cities like São Paulo, planners have had to find ways to try to incorporate the space-time of favela builders and dwellers into the cities infrastructure because the quickness with which these informal architects could move and rebuild their homes and neighborhoods continued to frustrate the cities attempts to eliminate them. “Linking the Formal and Informal: Favela Urbanisation and Social Housing in São Paulo - Serapião - 2016 - Architectural Design - Wiley Online Library”; EDWARDS, “Shotgun”; Tent City...Home of the Brave; Maharidge and Maharidge, Someplace like America; TEGNA, “Tent City in Akron Faces Lawsuit, Uncertain Future.”
Cultural Practice” bell hooks calls on her memory of the spaces of her childhood as a means to theorize herself into architecture and she does so by thinking particularly about matters crucial to Black geographies and spatial justice: small scale and space:

…the joy of thinking imaginatively about one’s dwelling. I can recall my disappointment when I finally saw the small square brick house that he built. In my childhood imagination this space seemed so utterly closed and tight. Had I understood the interconnected politics of race, gender, and class in the white supremacist South, I would have looked upon this house with the same awe as I did my favorite house.

She continues later with this architectural memory:

My grandmother’s house was not unlike the small shacks that were the homes of many Southern black folks. Her place was just a bigger, more elegant shack. Wood-frame dwellings that were fragile or sturdy shaped my sense of meaningful vernacular architecture.\(^{71}\)

So, in this genealogy, I want to contextualize the impetus to think and live small within the historical inaccessibility of housing. The Tiny House on wheels is in many ways a smaller, more custom finished mobile home, however, as hooks points out the way we make meaning of architecture is shaped by our material experiences of space. The way we make meaning, and a history, of Tiny Houses is also shaped by socio-geographic conceptions of the house. Specifically, what differentiates a Tiny House, from a mobile home, from a RV. Likewise what differentiates a neighborhood, from a trailer park, from

\(^{71}\) hooks, *Art on My Mind*, 148–49.
a backyard. Matters of scale and matters of space. These geographic and architectural
discourses provoked people to design and think small as both matters of necessity and
radical spatial imagination. These matters predate and even nullify some interests of the
contemporary Tiny House Movement which may still rely on having access to capital,
the skilled labor of others, and above all, infinite choice, about where and how to build a
home. The desire, and perhaps the necessity, to live tiny and not just small has garnered
enough willful advocates that it is now called a movement.

The timeline is not neat or clean, but what we might call the contemporaneous
Tiny House Movement, is often credited to the work of Jay Shafer, who in 1999
built himself a 110 sq. ft. small, mobile house on a trailer that he then lived in for
the next five years.\(^72\) Tiny house by tiny house, the proponents of this genealogy
argue, the movement has grown. Currently there are a number of television
shows, web series, and blogs devoted specifically to tiny house adoration. There
are also a growing number of websites and blogs, like “The Tiny House
Community,” “The Tiny Life,” and the “Small House Society” devoted to
advocacy, sharing information in order to help individuals new to tiny living
navigate design, construction, home-organization, and zoning laws. There is
however another history, and present, that can and should be considered when
thinking about living small. That is, that people with limited incomes and

\(^72\) Shafer, now married with a child, did not abandon his tiny house dwelling after his first
house, he has since built two more tiny houses and is currently residing in California.

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resources have lived small as a part of strategies to carve out livable space in cities for as long as there has been a need to do so. Locating the time history of the Tiny House Movement with individuals like Jay Shafer negates this important material function of this kind of house and its history. That is, Tiny Houses on wheels are indeed mobile homes, these kinds of houses carry particular class and geographic codes. Until they became associated with a particular kind of white desirability, freedom of choice, and liberal affluence through the Tiny House Movement, however, this kind of living was unremarkable and also unappealing as it was thought of as a “house” for those without choices of other “houses” or “homes”. Buzzfeed Culture Writer, Doree Shafrir, states it this way:

Going tiny’ implies that the person who is moving into a tiny house is doing so to escape their previous life of excess: They are coming from one place and going to another. This has made it, by definition, a middle-class movement, one that eschews identification with people who have lived in "tiny" homes for decades — whether that "tiny" home is a mobile home, an RV, or just a really small apartment. And so, the tiny house movement has an inherent privilege built in: Going tiny is a choice. If you’re coming from a more abundant place, in which you could live in a 2,000-square-foot house but you choose to live in 200 square feet, then you can be part of the community. If not, well, you're just poor.73

73 Shafrir, “Who Benefits From The Tiny House Revolution?”
An alternate genealogy for the contemporary Tiny House Movement, however, allows my project to participate in a push for spatial justice with a Black feminist intention. That is, it important to think about the necessity of living small as something that predates the heightened visibility, and new marketability of these small dwellings called Tiny Houses. Living small is a mode of spatial improvisation that Black and people of color the world over, including shacks and shed houses found throughout the US, favelas in Brazil, tin houses in townships across South Africa, have and continue to engage, for a number of reasons, including affordable housing alternatives to expensive city life and the problem of houseless and poverty.

While Jay Shafer and those that have followed the model of 100-300 sq. ft. houses on wheels that he advocates for are certainly one model of tiny living, framing an alternate genealogy in to the “Tiny House” particularly within vernacular architecture, as self-built and or improvised dwellings, creates a different history and potentially subvert future readings for this approach to architecture. This modern Tiny House Movement in the US and Canada should be understood within the political and temporal context from which it emerged, that is through the desires of young, largely white often financially unburdened men with time and resources. Though increasingly there are young couples, even couples with children and retirees who are embracing these alternate housing models, the issues of where and how we live in relation to other people shift
depending on how one is marked by race, class, ability, and age. Where living in
a mobile home or a recreational vehicle (RV) as a primary dwelling would have
immediate markers of class, social location, and geographic location, Tiny Houses
rely on a different aesthetic mode to distance themselves from the categories of
mobile homes and RV’s even though most municipalities classify them as RV’s for
licensing and vehicle registration. Mobile homes are similar to Tiny Houses in
that they are meant to be mobile, but it is a different kind, or perhaps degree, of
mobility that is at work. The mobility of mobile homes can be thought about in
relation to semi-permanent time, in which the house makes only a few slow
moves. As an oversized load, it is permitted to only travel so quickly and only, in
some places, at certain times along the interstate. The average life of the mobile
home will take it from the factory, sometimes called a manufactured home
because of this, being pulled by a semi-trailer, perhaps to a sale lot, but
sometimes bypassing this phase altogether and going directly on to its parking
space, in a Mobile Home Park, sometimes called a Trailer Park. People who buy
mobile homes often live in them for decades, even generations and they’re have
a cost burden that is significantly less than buying a site-built home which may
mean that living in Mobile Home Parks is an affordability or necessity issue
rather than having housing choice which can also contribute to keeping people
more statically in place.
In contrast, the mobility of Tiny Homes however, is projected to be a kind of hypermobility and their inhabitants are then cast as hypermobile people. In contrast to mobile homes, TH’s are fabricated in such a way that they are lighter than mobile homes and smaller, small enough that they can be towed by pick-up trucks, some even by cars. Tiny Home shows utilize this hypermobility in their advertising by showing the houses hitched to vehicles whizzing down the road. Also, unlike mobile homes, where mobile homes often are factory pre-fabricated with low-flat roof pitches, Tiny Houses, mimic more traditional cottage style houses usually with small to steep roof pitches and gables, some even with chimney’s. Where mobile homes are usually fabricated in single-wide and double-wide widths, TH’s often maintain a 8’6” width, the widest legal width allowable for a vehicle to travel the interstate without a permit, again the assumption is that interstate trips will be frequent enough that permitting will be an encumbrance. Lastly, mobile homes tend to keep all living spaces, including sleeping and storage spaces to one level, both for ease of access and simplifying their manufacture. Tiny Houses use lofted living spaces for sleeping which for many means climbing steps or a ladder, which also means if one has accessibility issues, there needs to be a different design intervention made to live in one. This feature also adds to the overall height of the structures making them seem more traditionally “house-like” while also keeping them at a height legally allowable
for interstates. There isn’t an overall good or overall bad when it comes to the potentials of the Tiny House.

Though I ultimately want to think about these spaces in relationship to garrets and garreting as in the work of Hortense Spillers and Katherine McKittrick as mentioned in the previous chapter, the temporary space of freedom these spaces provide is contingent and connected to another “loophole of retreat” that is created by this phenomenon, its potential connection to gentrification and the obfuscation of the responsibility of the state to provide housing to its citizens. One writer writes that as a new niche market for people unlimited housing choice, the Tiny House creates “new vocabulary to gentrify living in a small space.” Said differently, the very language of Tiny Houses as opposed to mobile home or shed house or tent city makes the idea of living in what would bell hooks referred to above as a small or large shack charming to a group of people who would otherwise spend their income on larger, more static dwellings, namely young white folks and aging white retirees. To be clear, the garret, or to garret is a live mode only in conditions of unfreedom, and I am using it here to think about Black folks who live financially more precarious lives, who need temporary to permanent reprieves to regain their financial footing, like Domonique who was nearly priced into houselessness in the Los Angeles housing market. To be sure there are still questions to be asked about who benefits from

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74 Shafrir.
the new intense marketing interests in Tiny Houses, but another important part of these structures that make them productive political sites to work with is that in cities with dense populations that often struggle to meet housing needs, these small dwellings are often still illegal.

**Phase I: The Dialectic Relationship Between Research and Living**

I began thinking tiny, as many do, as a way to make life not just more manageable but more livable. In Minneapolis, I paid nearly $800 a month for rent. Why, you may ask, would you live alone then? Well, roommates are not a constant, before I lived in this place, I was paying about $425 to live with two other folks but when they decided to move I had to find a place, quickly, and I didn’t want to be at the mercy of the decisions of others again. I am single, and I also like living alone, but near other people, as in I don’t want to live out in the woods alone. These are also all social markers that create economic burdens for me and other city dwellers like me.

“Black matters are spatial matters,” Katherine McKittrick writers in the often-quoted verses of *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (2006). And as mentioned in the previous chapter, the house is an ontological and epistemic problem that allowed the humanly unworkable geographies of the city to animate themselves in a number of ways, certainly through racialized-gender. Stated differently, the house let me see what the humanly unworkable geographies of a house, of the city, looked and felt like.
Being an unpartnered black woman who lives alone, usually with one source of income means that my housing options are constrained not only to what I can afford but also where I would be most safe, in all its measures and meanings. A Black body like mine is less likely to feel physically and psychically safe in a majority white neighborhoods near the university, for example, where there is an increased police presence, or where a sense of audible and visual ownership is given over to white-male fraternal orders.75 Where and how might I situate myself in a non-white neighborhood with this odd little house and not be, or appear to be, an artist-gentrifier, how might I build trust and intimacy in a neighborhood with people who look like me, who are around or in most cases above my income level, and for whom I share a sense of time and place in spite of being a recent migrant to the city.

Safety has a number of meanings, just like I need to think about who might perpetrate violence against me in the city and have to make strategic choices about where I live, work, and socialize accordingly, I have the privilege to have a car and drive, so this opens up living options for me to live outside of the city. A possibility to live in rural area with less regulations on housing types came up but I still have to think just as strategically, if not more so, about where I place myself, who my neighbors are, and what how I will time my comings and goings

75 “Will Black People Ever Feel Safe around Police? I Doubt It | Jamilah Lemieux | Opinion | The Guardian”; “5 Things That Make It Hard To Be A Black Student At A Mostly White College – ThinkProgress.”
for my safety. So, like many Americans, I live in a city, and I rent. According to statistics from a 2015 study from the National Multifamily Housing Council, 63% of Americans live in Owner-Occupied Households, while 37% live in Renter-Occupied households. In a 2012 article, Forbes ranked Minneapolis the second worst rental market in the US. Morgan Breenan writes, “With a tight vacancy rate of 2.5%, the average rent in the metro area is $965 per month, up 2.3% from this time last year. With home prices down more than 30% since 2006, it’s actually cheaper to buy: The average monthly mortgage payment on a home bought now would be $122 less than the average rent. That put Minneapolis in second place on Forbes' annual list of the worst cities for renters this year.” At the writing of this in the Fall of 2017, my rent falls under the average for the metro area but it is important to keep mind that this is an average where rents can range from around $500 on the low end to $2000 on the high end. It is also important to think about this renting-buying paradigm through the problem of anti-black financial markets that make it harder, even if one has the resources to maintain housing security either as a problem of paying higher interest rates or other fraught lending processes.

My interest in tiny housing is not tied to the idea of participating in going tiny or sizing-down, as I had nothing to size-down from. Likewise, I was not invested in dreaming of the “the American Dream.” Being a landowner, which historically is

76 “Quick Facts.” (Brennan, “The Best and Worst Cities for Renters”)
tied to matters of personhood, race, and being accounted for in the nation, has never been a path to American citizenship for Black women. My interest in this approach to house-making is an improvised architecture that offers a critique of the colonial logic of land possession, and in settler colonial cities like Minneapolis, where it is cheaper to have a mortgage than to rent, those who lack the resources, or interest, in buying homes are placed at a political, economic and social and geo-spatial disadvantage.\textsuperscript{77} This temporary move is rather a praxis of being more intentional about how one operates in a political awareness of one’s location, of attempting to build what Edward Soja terms, spatial justice. Soja writes, “...justice, however it might be defined, has a consequential geography, a spatial expression that is more than just a background reflection or set of physical attributes to be descriptively mapped....the geography or ‘spatiality,’ of justice...is an integral formative component of justice itself, a vital part of how justice and injustice a socially constructed and evolve over time.”\textsuperscript{78} The small mobile house that I imagined was neither an American Dream nor a Tiny “DIY” Dream, but rather a way to question the problem of inhuman and unjustness of cities. To find a human workability, as discussed in Chapter 2, within the historical and present problems that linger in our built environments. One journalist states, “...living tiny is literally about as

\textsuperscript{77} Brennan, “The Best And Worst Cities For Renters.”
\textsuperscript{78} Soja, \textit{Seeking Spatial Justice}, 1.
close to a grassroots movement as one can get, and proponents are actively engaged in advocacy with local governments to realize their vision of decentralizing materialism.”

These are the tiny house dwellers that this project is in dialogue with, not the consumer market of the tiny house as spectacle. As this project moved/moves forward it is increasingly important to acknowledge that entering into even this quasi-oppositional market still poses particular risks. As I discuss later, I found that non-white residents of urban and urbanizing places who lack access to capital remain challenged by a lack of access to the space that capital entitles. Kathryn Schenk writes, “Tiny houses provide a solution to a number of growing issues including sustainability, urban density, affordable housing and wastefulness, but the stigma associated with the movement results in a missed opportunity in the US.”

The stigma that Schenk mentions seems, on the one hand, to come from the house dwelling population but in fact comes from a collage of agents across time. That is, the house and the process of housing people has always been a site from which to produce socio-political, spatial, and economic inequalities. The very authority to name what is and is not, what can and cannot be, a house, that cities have been invested with over time is an epistemic problem that ripples into the matter of our architectural lives. This authority of the city, as a spatially governing body, is a

79 Carberry, “HGTV Loves a Tiny House; You Do Too, but in the Communities That Need Them Most They’re Outlawed.”
form of what philosopher Kristie Dotson terms epistemic oppression and this epistemic power to name, to codify into law, continues to create a barrier for this project, for me, for many would be home owners. The iterative process of putting an object into the world and seeing in real time the positive and negative forces that acted on the object and myself alike, made place sentient in ways I could not have anticipated and produced a rich interdisciplinary challenge for how we might know and more importantly unknow Black geographies.

**Phase II: Building on Uneven Geographies**

I started the project from an intuitive place. I work in North Minneapolis, which as mentioned above, has disproportionately more vacant lots than the

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81 Dotson, “Between Rocks and Hard Places.”
rest of Minneapolis. Above is an image of the lot I attempted to purchase through the City of Minneapolis Community Planning and Economic Development. Its address is 3504 James Avenue North and it lives in the Folwell Neighborhood. The asking price from the city as $3800, but that price is contingent on proving to the city that one can raise a house presumably out of the ground and it is a process that, I discuss later, heavily favors developers.

The vacant lots in Minneapolis are the result of a few specific factors – historical, “natural,” and imposed land traumas. Histories of white flight, urban redevelopment, predatory lending, a tornado that flattened a line of city blocks in a matter of minutes, as well as the City of Minneapolis’ own policies regarding procedures for razing vacant houses. Simple everyday movement to and from this part of the city is a lesson in Black geographies and in the course of this research it became increasingly clear how Minneapolis and St. Paul’s histories of racialization in city planning and housing continue to cut through the cities blocks. In a section of her book in which she tackles Neil Smith’s conception of deep space, titled “Deep Space and the Poetics of Landscape” McKittrick writes, “Black geographies produce unsettling questions about how knowledge and ideas about race and difference are incorporated into social, political, and economic patterns.”

The landscape in and around North Minneapolis is racially affected through deep space as it is in other parts of the city that have over the

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last 50 years been populated by majority non-white groups. The River, the
interstate, and railroad tracks mark the entrance and exits to these parts of the
cities that one has to pass over and, yet not fully be aware of, in order to do so.
In North Minneapolis, the city has actively bulldozed more housing than any
other part of Minneapolis, leaving more vacant lots to be redeveloped in this
area. There were approximately, 246 vacant lots in North Minneapolis, during
the time of the writing of this dissertation, while the city as a whole had
approximately 459 lots, meaning more than half of the vacant lots for the entire
city of Minneapolis can be found in this small area. North Minneapolis is also
home to the not-for-profit arts organization Juxtaposition Arts, where I teach in
the Contemporary Arts Lab. At this nexus, working in a neighborhood that is
economically and racially similar to the one that I grew up in, as an artist, I
started to think about interventions. And I say interventions rather than
solutions because I want to recognize the limitations of solving a problem so
rooted in white supremacist settler colonialism. I wanted to think of an
affordable way to live closer to my work both literally as in my work at JXTA, but
also the work of living and understanding more humanly workable geographies.
Housing types are limited in North Minneapolis. While apartments and multi-
family housing is cheaper over North, it is rare to find studio- or one-bedroom
apartment housing options. I also thought about the problem of owning land.
This is not a problem of affordability, as I stated, North Minneapolis has the
largest number of vacant lots in the city of Minneapolis which makes the land itself less expensive. However, thinking about housing, rather, from an intersectional feminist perspective, dictates I think about the politics of land in the US, and in Minneapolis specifically, with its particular violent settler colonial past of land dispossession and population replacement. As a matter of spatial justice and human workability, the praxis of the project demanded that questions of land be considered differently, in relation to a justice-oriented feminism. It was necessary to think about land more than something that just is, or as a set of financial transactions alone, but as an ongoing struggle over space to which I may be contributing or becoming complicit actor. I had to consider, as Carol Boyce Davis states, whether my work would be for “reconnection, invasion or exploitation.”

The tiny, because of its mobility, smallness, and relative affordability, provided a way to at least in concept, think differently with the problem of land owning and the lack of housing diversity. These are also, as I will discuss later, the problems that hinder putting this project into motion as they also carried deeper meanings about the temporalities, or overdetermined stasis, of architecture and the threatening idea of flight that is connect to a mobile house.

In contrast to many tiny home enthusiasts, I was not/am not making enough money to set aside savings that would allow me to finance a house, even a tiny

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one. As a project about justice and equity however, I felt I could put my writing
and creative skills to work in order to find funding to get the house built. This
was an integral part of the project as well because it reveals something about
institutions and their investments. As an art work, asking an arts institution to
fund a body of work such as a series of abstract paintings, portraits, or prints, is a
different process of making oneself an intelligible cause than doing research
driven community or site-based work. As I began seeking funding for the project,
I constantly had to understand how and for whom I was framing the project. I
asked two arts foundations if there were funding opportunities that I could apply
to in order to build capital for the project. As expected one said no, the project
wasn’t quite visual arts, so did not fit into the scope of their funding interests.
So, before I approached the next organization, I spoke with a grants writer and
got some guidance. I reframed the project to a) focus on why this was a problem
for the visual arts community, even though it in itself was not a static artwork,
and b) I framed it as a geographic problem for the Upper Midwest, that carried
particularly harmful futures for people of color. Same project framed with
different language made it worth investing in. A re-articulation of the project
changed, some, people’s perceptions of it, partly I think, because of the
publication of the Minneapolis Creative Vitality Index.

The Creative Vitality Index is a report published by the City of
Minneapolis, describing where public and private dollars are being earned,
spent, and saved. The report details economic and demographic data and compares areas of growth and areas of need from the Metro Area to other cities like New York and Chicago. In 2016, though the report revealed a number of opportunities and short comings, one of the most disturbing was that of the $4.5 billion-dollar arts economy in Minneapolis, only 9% is reaching artists of color. Stated differently, 91% of the creative economy is supporting white artists and majority white arts organizations. This means that there are a number of artists of color who are wholly cut off from the creative economy and its social and cultural capital. It also meant, I believed, that the city understood itself in relation to creative capitalism, that this capitalism is inherently good, and that it, the city, has some shame around the undeniable dominance of white-supported artists, laborers, and organizations within the metro area. Speaking then to forms of inequity within this creatively vital city was one way to begin to conceptualize the project but to be would not dismantle a $4.5 billion-dollar segment of the city’s economy so I understood the limitation of the kind of dissidence I might be able to invoke.

As a geographic theorist-practitioner, I thought articulating this as a problem of space would be instructive. The opportunity came to apply for a small grant from the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA), through their Artists in Neighborhood Partnerships (ANPI) program. In my proposal I outlined the ways that space acts as an economic barrier. “Space,” I stated “is both a
financial and geographic inhibitor to stability for artists and non-artists alike. For artists, I continued “having first a consistent and affordable home, and second a studio or work space can make or break the career of cultural practitioners. And the risks and economic burdens that are incurred over the struggle for space, such as attempting to get a mortgage, may be even more risky and burdensome for artists of color.”

The live-work space or “artist-loft” is one housing plan that I will discussed that has gained traction under creative capitalism so I borrowed the language of neoliberalism to make the project legible to potential funders. I proposed to develop a prototype for a mobile “live-work space” using the tiny house as a model. This unit would be small, and movable, and hopefully be something that artists and arts organizations could utilize as a means to house and even employ artists. It was also my hope to find ways to resolve housing artists that would not seed gentrification. The least expensive land and structures are often in neighborhoods with fewer economic assets and wealth that coincide with neighborhoods populated with people of color. I felt that the affordability, mobility, and the smallness of the proposed structure would offset this problem. That is that the small scale of these units would not require the wholesale flattening of existing housing or city blocks, they could be parked and lived-in in small un- or underutilized back yards, vacant lots, or in some cases roof tops. I was encouraged by the work of organizations like Project Row House

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84 Gardner, “The InHabitation Project.”
(PRH) in Houston, TX, who have worked overtime to find solutions to housing artists without displacing communities. In lieu of bulldozing a historic, predominately Black, community of shot-gun houses, long homes where each room lines up behind the next, a team of artists at PRH, including Rick Lowe, now a MacArthur Genius Award winner, saw how the houses could work as artist residences, providing artists both studio space and housing.

To my surprise, but also my relief, I was awarded the ANPI grant. I meant that I could pursue the project, both in researching and in building it. But it also meant that I couldn’t turn away from doing this, so in June, with the advising of a co-worker and CURA staffer, I was able to bring a graduate architecture student, Kathleen Zimmerman (Kate), on board and get the project started. Around the same time, *The Atlantic*, published an article that touched the very heart of this project and why the Upper Midwest, Minneapolis in particular, continues to be a crucial site to our understanding uneven geographies and the politics of housing.

**The Politically Opportune Subsidized Housing (POSH) Market**

A recently published report from the University of Minnesota Law School, “The Rise of White-Segregated Subsidized Housing” outlines the housing problem in Minneapolis and gained some traction in May of 2016 with the subsequent publication of an article in *The Atlantic*, “The Artist Loft: Subsidized
Housing for White People,” by journalist Alana Samuels.”85 Focusing specifically on Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, the report details how the market for federally subsidized housing contributes to urban economic and housing segregation, particularly white-segregated housing, via the invention of below market rate artist lofts, housing units that can also be used as workspace that are restricted to renters who can prove through credentials, portfolios, etc., that they are artists. ArtSpace, a Minneapolis developer that focuses specifically on these kinds of mixed income multi-family buildings, has done a number of prominent renovations in the Twin Cities, four projects alone exceeding costs of $460 million. This was possible because of an exemption, lobbied for by ArtSpace, in the IRS Low Income Housing Tax Credit (HTC) program. Until 2008, there were no exceptions for artists under the HTC program.

Prior to 2008, tax credit eligible properties in Minnesota, and the U.S. broadly, were subject to Section 5.08 of the Minnesota Housing Finance – Housing Tax Credit Compliance Manual which emerged as a part of the Civil Rights Act and the Fair Housing Act, civil rights legislation that were enacted to give stronger equal protections to historically discriminated against groups including, African-Americans, women, the disabled, and minors. It states “Housing tax credit properties are subject to Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of

1968, also known as the Fair Housing Act. The Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination in the sale, rental and financing of dwellings based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, familial status, and disability.” It also states that, “Minnesota law additionally prohibits discrimination based on marital status, disability, public assistance status, family status, cred and sexual orientation.”

These statutes are known together as the General Public Use Requirement. However, in July of 2008, ArtSpace, working with members of Congress, the Local Initiatives Support Corporation, the National Equity Fund, and others, worked to “add clarifying language” to the Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008, H.R. 3221. The language that was ultimately added to the bill stated that:

A project does not fail to meet the general public use requirement solely because of occupancy restrictions or preferences that favor tenants –

(A) with special needs,’

(B) who are members of a specified group under a Federal program or State program or policy that supports housing for such a specified group, or

(C) who are involved in artistic or literary activities.87

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87 “26 U.S. Code § 42 - Low-Income Housing Credit.”
In this way we can see a direct relationship between the economic crisis of 2008 and the opening up of what some might call a loophole in the Fair Housing Act, it is being used as an occupational loophole to give increased access to equity and financial assistance to privilege while simultaneously foreclosing the very housing options for marginal groups it was intended to open in the first place. Like other civil rights legislative measures, is being used to undermine equity measures in favor of de jure inequality.88

The report terms these units Politically Opportune Subsidized Housing (POSH’s). The writers of the report chose the acronym because to describe this housing phenomenon because the term “simultaneously conveys their appeal to developers and local politicians, their comparative luxury, and their origins as a productive unusual political incentives.”89 Often located in former industrial buildings or zones where there may have been a population drop or no zoned-residential properties, these housing types are also politically opportune because, without the use of racially or economically discriminatory language, the application procedures and screening measures required for potential artist residents produces white-segregated housing and builds the coveted façade of creatively vital zones in cities. As a non-white artist and scholar working at the

88 In 2013 parts of the Voting Rights Act were overturned that held states with histories of voter supression accountable to federal oversight. In 2016 the Supreme Court heard, but ultimately upheld, an affirmative action case brought on by the denial of admittance of a white student, Abigail Fisher, to the University of Texas, Austin.

intersection of cultural production, community-based practice, and urban planning, the article was not a surprise but rather provided valuable data sets that evidenced a social phenomenon that remains largely disavowed and sublimated beneath layers of passive conservatism known by the colloquial phrase “Minnesota Nice.” Again, the authors:

In the Twin Cities, POSH projects have made winners of developers, politicians, and neighborhoods. It has harmed only one group: very low-income families of color. These families have seen hundreds of millions of dollars of public subsidy, intended to provide stable, integrated housing for their benefit, diverted instead to the production of rent-restricted luxury lodging for a favored class of residents. Instead of helping the struggling urban poor escape poverty and segregation, the region’s most celebrated housing projects appear aimed at helping white, moderate-income ‘creatives’ live comfortably in Minneapolis and St. Paul’s most exclusive urban quarters.”

Where you place people in metropolitan areas become just as important as the types of housing you make available. POSH’s are an example of a housing problem that highlights and produces a spatial justice problem for this region and with the help of law amendments, this model is being reproduced nationally.

Tiny House Legality and the City

In this market of POSH’s I was able to articulate why something small, like a tiny house was preferable to more of the same inequity-building artist-lofts.
But as mentioned previously, tiny houses are prohibited in many urban areas as they do not conform to most municipal building code due to their small size, which creates an issue about ceiling heights and minimum square footage, as well as them being on wheels, they are mobile. As point of entry into understanding why tiny houses are prohibited in many urban areas, let’s consider again Audre Lorde’s famous quote

Those of us who stand outside the circle of this society’s definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference -- those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are Black, who are older -- know that survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow us to temporarily beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.  

In order for the small temporary hold of the tiny house, offers, I believe, a loophole of retreat from the master’s house, or perhaps it is a loophole within the master’s house as the master, that is the manager of spaces, of labor, and policy, has in many ways, become the city itself. In the Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, it is illegal to have a tiny house as a residence. As a Black feminist theorist, I would also argue that a part of the illegality, that is, creating errant, criminal,
improper subjects of individuals who make use of improvised housing, housing that would afford them the possibility of greater determination of where, when, and how they live, is also tied to how cities build and plan around Blackness and (im)mobility. Consider tiny house illegality in Minneapolis in relationship to the historical economically beneficial relationship between, whiteness property, anti-blackness and the law. “Even though the law,” writes Cheryl Harris, “is neither uniform nor explicit in all instances, in protecting settled expectations based on white privilege, American law has recognized a property interest in whiteness that, although unacknowledged, now forms the background against which legal disputes are framed, argued, and adjudicated.” I use this provocation around whiteness and property to think about the spatial-temporal problems that now form not only white property relations but an anti-black sense of place. In Metropolitan made POSH’s and racial-wealth segregation possible in cities like Minneapolis. This fix between problems arise for both myself and for other landless women and Black women. Tiny house illegality, I would argue, is then largely due to first, the city not being able to regulate these structures in the same way that they are able to regulate “normal” single and multi-family housing that is designed and constructed to house white nuclear families. Second, the code of ordinances is a legal document, deciphering what is legal and illegal in the building and maintenance of structures within the

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boundaries of the city’s limits. As outlined above law, and by extension
criminality, is always constructed to protect the propertied interests of
whiteness, producing normative beliefs about human behavior that are
grounded in white supremacy, negatively affecting bodies and practices that
exist outside of these normativities. The city outlines the purpose of zoning code
in section 535.10 of the Code of Ordinances, which is continually updated to
reflect shifts in city policy. It states, “This chapter is established to provide
regulations of general applicability for property throughout the city to promote
the orderly development and use of land, to protect and conserve the natural
environment, to minimize conflicts among land uses, and to protect the public
health, safety and welfare.”92 While yes, the zoning code exists to prevent
episodes of building unsafe and unsanitary structures, like the unregulated
tenement housing of the early 20th century, idea of “orderly development and
use of land” and even “public health, safety, and welfare” are not politically
neutral ideas that can be evenly implemented or be buffered from manipulation
by money, institutional and/or political power. The production of a normative
architectural subject collides with the production of law in ways that reproduce
spatial inequality and injustice.93 In the 19th century as well as during and after

93 The “Cubic Air Acts” for example which dictated that each person have living in a
dwelling needed five hundred cubic ft. of air around them, was enacted under the guise
of preventing the spread of disease, however, it was also tied to racial stigma around
Chinese communities and became codified in laws like the above mentioned ordinance.
Molina, Fit to Be Citizens: Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939; Chapin,
World War II for examples, cities like Los Angeles and Minneapolis, used federal dollars to enact “slum clearance” and “urban revitalization” projects that created new building and safety codes. In and of themselves the laws seem protective; however, the paternalistic racism of the laws is tied to a history of targeted exclusion and expulsion of particular racial groups from urban areas.

In Minneapolis, city zoning ordinances dictate the following:

The minimum gross floor area of a dwelling unit, except efficiency units and accessory dwelling units, shall be five hundred (500) square feet. The minimum gross floor area of efficiency units shall be three hundred fifty (350) square feet. The minimum gross floor area of accessory dwelling units shall be three hundred (300) square feet.94

Tiny houses fail to meet either of these requirements. As detached homes, on wheels, that can be as small as 100 square feet, they do not even fall into the zoning requirements for efficiencies or accessory dwelling units. As far as I have been able to find in my research to date, 500 square feet is an arbitrary number.

Using the city’s own floor area requirement for a two-occupant dwelling, it seems one only needs to have 310 square feet to be a legal habitable structure. And yet, tiny houses are illegal.

“The Effects of Slum Clearance and Rehousing on Family and Community Relationships in Minneapolis”; Collins and Shester, “Slum Clearance and Urban Renewal in the United States.”

The tiny house has allowed me to see and understand a range of power negotiations in urban settings. Having more space, such as the fixed space of a large immobile house, is connected to accessing power. In the Post WWII housing development boom, developer William Levitt famously said, “No man who own his own house and lot can be a communist. He has too much to do.”

This pernicious idea is still at work today, that political ontologies are connected to how we literally and metaphorically bind people to things. The detached single-family dwelling is a political site that continues to fix people to capitalism and to city formations that work against more humane, more workable, modes of life. More and more, those living under the conditions of capitalism in the US are seeking and building ways out. Embracing smallness and temporariness, may be yet one way that will be aestheticized differently as it is taken up across space and across time. In this terrain, then, the small mobile house colloquially called a “tiny house,” does not have to be thought of as a shrinkage of political viable space, a smaller, lesser site of political power. Neither does it full represent a liberation of one’s architectural or geographic suppression. It is a paradoxical space, saturated with the largely white commercial value of the Tiny House Movement AND a possibility to house oneself outside of a predatory unaffordable housing market.

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95 Levitt quoted in Beauregard, *When America Became Suburban*.
96 Tiny Houses is a broad term that describes a house that, usually, falls between 100-300 square feet.
In the previous interstitial chapter, I interviewed Jewel Pearson and Dominique Moody, two Black women who co-founded Tiny House Trailblazers. They have an altogether different logic and genealogy for why and how they built their tiny houses. They shared that in spite of all of the work that they have done over the last ten plus years to intervene in the whitewashed history of the Tiny House Movement, they still continue to combat open racism and passive antagonism in their work. This antagonism is one reason why these houses are productive political sites to examine in relation to race and cities. It shows the ongoing ways that even when one finds loopholes within the unaffordable housing market, one is still subject to criticisms about how and where one lives as a Black woman in a city and what that must mean about one’s ability to be a good citizen or member of a community.

In the summer of 2016 I decided to apply to purchase a parcel of land in North Minneapolis, on James Avenue. There were a number of ways to do this which included going through a realtor to purchase a privately-owned property, going through a not-for-profit developer, or land trust, or going through the City of Minneapolis or Hennepin County. As a part of learning about the development process I decided to pursue two avenues, working with a land trust and also attempting to acquire a property through the city. The department of Community Planning and Economic Development, or CPED, is the department within the governing body of the City of Minneapolis that more or less explicitly
manages vacant housing and lots through acquisitions and sales. The program is called the Vacant Housing Recycling Program and includes vacant lots and the city of Minneapolis has a vacant lot list of around 202 properties in the Vacant Housing Recycling Program, all of which are currently in North Minneapolis.\textsuperscript{97} In February the city listed more than 246 vacant lots in North Minneapolis alone with a total of 459 lots listed as “infill eligible properties” city wide.\textsuperscript{98} Many US cities like Minneapolis experienced dramatic demographic shifts between the late 1970s and the early 1990s, with whole neighborhoods going from middle-class predominantly white to predominantly working-class ethnic and racial minorities. For many white families this meant moving away from urban centers into suburbs, if they could afford it, those who could not, or would not move remained. These migration patterns became known as white flight.\textsuperscript{99} Living in a place, and witness the shifts that are made, can make one nostalgic, fiercely loyal, and skeptical of new comers or outsiders. All of these thoughts flowed through my mind as I sat in front of this white woman who, for all I knew,
was a lifelong North Minneapolis resident, who so easily and quickly told me to shut up.

After this experience, I decided to focus on the structure itself, to get the project built, rather than focus on where it would go. Yes, this is a big decision to make, because of course, what use is having a space to live in if you cannot live in it. However, given the hundreds of examples of tiny house dwellers, I reasoned that whatever happened, I would be able to find a piece of land, be it a back yard or a farm, to live in the house. I did not however officially withdraw my application for the land on James, I decided to continue the process until the city asked me to withdraw my offer, which they did, I never formally completed this step however and the application never moved forward. I faced this work with a lot of difficulty and strife but see it as a part of a larger project of working at a Black feminist geographic practice.

As a part of trying to understand what a Black feminist geographic practice might do within the Tiny House Movement, I interviewed Dominique Moody and Jewel Pearson, two African-American, women who both built and live in tiny houses. Together they began the online community of tiny house dwellers called “Tiny House Trailblazers” whose mission is to tell “stories of tiny house living and the movement from the lens of people of color. Our purpose,” they continue, “is

\[100\] Last June, the possibility of living on a farm in Wisconsin, an hour away from Minneapolis, came up but I was resistant to this because it would mean giving up on the necessity for making this work for cities, urban spaces.
never to be exclusive, instead our purpose is to ensure we’re always included...“Dominique is an artist residing mainly on West Coast, but I caught up with her in New Orleans while she was an artist in residence at Xavier University. Jewel is East Coast/South East and worked the majority of her life in the financial sector. They were introduced to each other by geographer Lee Pera, who also built and lives in a tiny house, as they were all seeing and experiencing different forms of passive alienation, exclusion, or outright racism within the Tiny House Movement. I also interviewed the Latina feminist writer/poet/intellectual Aurora Levins Morales, about her project Vehicle for Change, what she terms a “non-toxic, chemically accessible,” 272 sq. ft. mobile home she completed in the months preceding the 2016 U.S. election. Their work, performs the problem of human workability, where the body of the black, non-white, limited economic resources, physically and chemically injured subject is a misfit – untaxable, unsurveillable, uncontrollable – a problem body for an architecture that may rely on body normativity to dictate rigid of size, layout, design and materiality and yet the state continues to attempt to manage this...”

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101 “Tiny House Trailblazers.”

102 Building materials of all kinds can be toxic to the human body. As with any ecosystem, not all bodies will experience chemical injury, and Aurora is insistent to use the idea of chemical injury as using ideas and words like chemical sensitivity place the site of harm within the body itself rather than on the entity producing the toxic product or environment. In Aurora’s case, she was living in apartments and houses with drywall, which are susceptible to mold, and in being harmed by the unneutralized electromagnetic field. These are concerns that all of us live with daily but many of us do not think about as matters of housing justice, or matters that we could resolve through a different architectural arrangements, like Tiny Houses.
body through the built environment. bell hooks, writing in 1995, points to the
need to think intersectionally about human ecologies, scale, and architecture.
Cited earlier in a different context bell hooks writes, “...acknowledging that the
world we are living in is one where space is becoming smaller and smaller really
calls for a rethinking of architectural cultural practices.” Understanding the
tiny house through a Black feminist perspective allows us to think about the
mobility and smallness that tiny houses provide as a part of a larger struggle to
imagine a wider range of architectural subjectivities. I am thinking about
architectural subjectivity as a way of being that thoroughly comprehends the
power and necessity of shaping space for and around the needs of a particular,
rather than a generalizable, body. This isn’t an ontology restricted to humans, or
even the living for that matter, however it is a matter of power, where the
commanding of space in such a way as to interfere the being of another is a
common state practice.

It is within framing an alternate genealogy to the “tiny house” that I now draw
on my own experience in building my house as well as the interviews with
Dominique Moody and Aurora Levins Morales to understand the Tiny House as a
form of vernacular architecture. I interrogate how self-built or improvised
dwellings, creates a different history and potentially a different future for
reading this traditional approach to architecture. It is within this context in the

103 hooks, *Art on My Mind*, 159.
tiny house Movement that a new architectural subject emerges working to build more humanly workable geographies.

In April of 2017 the city of Minneapolis launched a new program for these lots that will target North Minneapolis. A Star Tribune article states that the city has somewhere near 400 vacant lots, however, at the time of this writing, 190 some odd lots have been disappeared in the city’s listings. The article begins provocatively stating, “Want to build a new house in Minneapolis? Choose a vacant lot on the North Side, and the city will help make it happen.” The article presents the perspective of the City of Minneapolis as one that wants to encourage homeownership opportunities, particularly for low-income homebuyers, but as my experience of attempting to submit an offer to the city for the purchase of a vacant lot may show, the process itself heavily favors developers. The city itself launched the Green Homes North initiative, which since 2012 has provided more than $5 million dollars in funding to 19 developers. Why couldn’t this city infrastructure support vernacular architectures in North Minneapolis?

I submitted my offer to the city to purchase a lot at 3504 James Avenue North in July of 2016. This property lives in the Folwell Neighborhood of North Minneapolis. It is important to know that the submission and approval process

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104 Nelson, “Want to Build a New House on the North Side?”
105 Nelson.
consists of a number of stages, and that you must include a site plan and financial statement in the submission in order for it to be complete. Ultimately an offer will go to city council for review but prior to this happening it must be considered by the neighborhood association in which the property exists, so for this property it would be the Folwell Neighborhood Association (FNA). Because I had been made aware of this process by the city listing agent for the city, I thought it prudent to meet with the Neighborhood Association ahead of them receiving and reviewing my offer. So, a week prior to sending the paperwork to the city, I called the FNA to set up a time to meet with their executive director, Roberta Englund. The receptionist was very pleasant, going so far as to even offer to put me on the meeting agenda for August, I missed their July meeting as they schedule them for the first Monday of each month.
By this time Kate, the architecture student I was working with on the project created a 3-D rendering for the project that would come in around 500 sq. ft. conforming, mostly, to the city’s building and zoning code for this lot.
I’d also looked up tax data and found information of the house that had previously been on this site. To my surprise, and relief, the house that was previously on this site was only 547 sq. ft., not much larger than what we were proposing which made me feel more confident to have a conversation with Folwell. These feelings were, however, deflated after meeting with the Neighborhood Association’s director.

When I introduced myself, I told her that I called a few days prior and talked to the receptionist who said she would place me on the August meeting agenda, I thought maybe she had gotten wind of this, so she might have known who I was and that I was coming by. She not so politely informed me that the receptionist on the phone “didn’t have the authority” to put me on the meeting agenda for August but that she would be willing to sit and talk to me about what I was doing. When I began explaining my wish to build an artist home on the lot, she asked me if I were with Green Homes North. I told her no, that I was not a developer and that I would be building my own home. I showed her the drawings that Kate did to help her visualize the things I was saying to which she responded that “they,” meaning she could speak for the interests of the neighborhood, wanted to see 1200sq. ft. 2br, 2ba homes going up in Folwell. When I told her that home that was torn down on that site was 547sq. ft., she interrupted me and asked me to stop talking.
I honestly don’t remember much of what she had to say after this as I was busy trying to process what had just happened. Not that I had forgotten this, but I was reminded that in spite of this being a predominantly African-American neighborhood, in a predominantly African-American section of the city, the decision-making power was still tangled in a white power vacuum. The executive director was an older white woman, I was a young(er) Black woman. The collective “they” or “we” that she spoke of was not one that she wanted me to see myself reflected in. I had the feeling that she felt that she was earnestly protecting her neighborhood from something.

The improvisational space of the tiny house, if it can be thought of through an architectural genealogy that subverts the white-washed Tiny House Movement as we know it, is for inhabitors like Moody, Pearson, and Morales, an opposition to the material spatial legacy of the Master’s House, the plantation power also known as “the big house” that has bound the Black body to an oppressive socio-geographic relationship to scale and stasis. “When I visit huge mansions,” writes Sterling Plumpp, “I run around to the back, looking for the house behind the house behind the big House where my origins begin in this republic.”106 This relationship to architecture and geography is an altogether different relationship with landscape and is often, unfortunately, obscured by the nomenclature tiny house or Tiny House Movement. The geographies and architectures of the past,

106 Woods, Development Arrested, vi.
of the big house, live alongside us in our cities, in our urban plans. Thinking
habitable space differently, with this history in mind, the “big house” plans,
around which our cities, streets, and family relationships are being imaged can
be understood as unjust forms of social control. Building more humanly
workable geographies is a process that grows out of a Black feminist praxis. For
me and the women that I have interviewed in this project it is not in the building
of the tiny houses themselves, but a process of collaborating, thinking, working
with others, teaching oneself. Tiny houses are fraught, and cannot alone address
the centuries of injustice that have deeply wronged Black folks and people of
color who inhabit cities across the U.S. It is not my goal to pose them as a radical
political object that can eradicate poverty, homelessness, or houselessness. They
can however, allow us to begin to revisit the small and or mobile architectural
models that we once knew but have abandoned. They can allow us to revisit
those alternate scales, densities, a smallness, as a way to live more humanly, as
one possible praxis of many that we might use to engage the city.
Chapter 4: On Housing and Time

“...those who command space can always control the politics of place.”

David Harvey

As a material thing, the house lives in a complex matrix with time. It ages and depending on where it is and what it is made of, it can either accrue value, equity, or it can lose value. The house is also a non-material thing, a site of history and memory played out over time that makes it either worthy of preservation, or worthless/worth-less. As examined previously the house is at times imagined as a shell, filled and emptied with the human nostalgia of its occupants over time. Elsewhere the house, literally and metaphorically lives, outside of and against the market, “in participation with the world, rather than a relationship of mere utilization.”108 In these matrixes, the house is a part of an active network of stories that are rooted in problems of both commodity and community. In Minneapolis, there is a department devoted specifically to forging this connection, Community Planning and Economic Development (CPED). In this chapter I explore these interconnected discourses in relationship to time. Architecture and urban planning, at the hands of the professional architects and

107 Harvey, The Condition of Postmodernity.
108 Bourdier and Trinh, Drawn from African Dwellings, x.
planners are governing technologies of the state;\textsuperscript{109} housing does not only provide shelter but becomes mechanism of control, surveillance, and taxation of the population, specifically targeting the non-white and the poor.\textsuperscript{110} Because both commodity and community narrate our understanding of the ways that our human political relationships are tangled with emotion, with economy, and with place, time lends a different significance to the importance that a house may play in this matrix.

Time is one important, and often overlooked site from which the idea that community and commodity establish a relationship with one another. I explore time, here, as an important phenomenon that stitches together the house, houses, and the city. The tiny house, I argue, makes legible the ways that time becomes a moral-managerial problem in the production of place because it allows us to see the almost-undetectable figures who command city space. I use this chapter to think about connections between the financialization of time and time accrual through equity. Here I mean equity in the financial, not social, sense, and anti-black mobility. That is, how do cities hold Black people in place through the creation of financial mechanisms such as zoning law and home-


buying programs, through which time can make land more economically, socially, and perhaps phenomenologically valuable while simultaneously using the same mechanisms to displace populations deemed non-financially productive. These systems economize time accumulation against Black space, catching non-white folks in a mobility/stasis problem, making it not only impossible for non-white folks to stay in place, but also punishing their movement in easily discernable patterns of urban development. How, I ask, can we, or, should we, unbind Blackness, from ideas of being immobile, in static place over time, in still productive, humanly workable ways?

The problem I pursue here is the temporariness of small mobile housing. As I worked in the planning stages of figuring out where to place the house, the problem I consistently ran into was the issue of it being mobile. In the Twin Cities, although we have a number of affordable housing agencies, none have yet to adopt tiny houses on wheels (THOW’s) as an affordable housing option. Moreover, the developers who have interest in building small or tiny houses do so by building them on foundations, permanent foundations, at a cost that far exceeds the affordability range for below-median-income-residents of the Twin Cities. So, there is a temporality and an affordability gap that is determining housing options, not just in the Twin Cities but across the country because the wheels that provide the mobility to these dwellings-- aside from all of the other building code issues-- are yet another hurdle for zoning and placing your home.
That you could, potentially, pick up and go, becomes a problem for the city. In this chapter I look at two temporary housing examples in which the city opens or forecloses itself to temporary housing: tent cities and disaster housing.

SOME HEADING HERE FOR TRANSITION

The actors that are permitted participation in these debates are certainly important to city making as we understand it now, however their distraction with the formal city, that is the city that is legible through building codes, zoning laws, and commercial development, lends potential another, informal city to emerge. The informal – the undisciplined architects, houseless, homeless, spatial thinkers who daily and nightly work out the matters of the city – embraces and experiments with an impermanence that is often forced on those things that are outside of the city’s plans. To be sure the tiny house is but one site that has brought this potential to the surface, and it is a part of a longer, ironically larger, fraught relationship between architecture, consumption, spectacle and the built city. I am interested, however, in the ways that the not-quite-a-house-ness that these structures elicit through their scale alone can be utilized for and against the temporality and anti-Black commodity-making of city space. I examine below the ways that settler colonial logic and anti-blackness reproduce themselves through fixity, that is, that city-time and city-space refuse to be reorganized for precarious, non-consuming populations like the homeless who improvise their small temporary shelters. Yet, when formally trained architects approach a
likewise unsheltered population, through well-designed, small homes that are still temporary, but un-improvised, the city can find the time and space reorganized itself, usually through the language of humanitarian design, and or disaster housing.

Zones of the House and Time

“...the design of the built environment has been increasingly engulfed in a made subservient to the goals of the capitalist economy, more specifically the luring of consumers for the purpose of gaining their money. Design is more than ever a means to an extrinsic end rather than an end in itself.”


As both positive and negative possibility, the affect that circulates around tiny houses is a matter of their scale and the mobility that this scale enables. That is, in cities that see their major concerns of growth and sustainability being deeply connected to forms of permanency that can be built into the landscape, things that are small (read marginally noticeable) and movable (read easily extractable) become undesirable because they can easily, and quickly become unwieldy, (read ungovernable). Said differently, small movable things can be just that, small and movable, undetectable even, and therefore untaxable, unsurveillable, uncontrollable. All of these problems, in urban spaces and in the built

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environment, are inextricably tied to Blackness. Only in the most restricted (and usually dire) of circumstances does the state support small, inexpensive movable housing for communities of color, such as in disaster housing. More often, small, inexpensive, movable houses are manufactured by non-white economically disadvantaged populations when they are pushed to house themselves in improvised shelters, like boxes or tents.

[I’m confused by the transition here—do you mean that when small houses are allowed beyond emergencies, there has to be the “spectacle?”]

These circumstances often involve a certain amount of spectacle architecture, “design that is intended to seduce consumers.” For small houses, which may fall outside of conventions of temporal fixedness, size, and appearance of the house, consumers here are not necessarily ones who live in a house, small or otherwise, but rather, those who command space – the state, developers, consumers, architects – good design is then compensation for these structures failure to be permanent, right-scaled spaces, and in some cases the compensatory design is used to remind the financing consuming public of its need to act as a moral agent in these events of crisis. [Error! Reference source not found.]

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112 Fred Moten and Stefano Harney write that “blackness operates as the modality of life’s constant escape and takes the form, the held and errant pattern, of flight.” Harney and Moten, The Undercommons, 51.

113 “Disaster Relief Housing.”
Writing on the relationship between spectacle and architecture William Saunders writes: “Spectacle is the primary manifestation of the commodification or commercialization of design: design that is intended to seduce consumers will likely be more or less spectacular, more or less a matter of flashy, stimulating, quickly experienced gratification, more or less essentially like a television ad”.114

The tiny house, in the architecture that Saunders is outlining, follows this spectacular consumption, almost literally. Today, the audiences for journals like the Ladies’ Home Journal, or more contemporarily Better Homes and Gardens or O Magazine, that we saw utilized in post-war architectural expansion projects in Chapter 1, are the audiences of Home and Garden Television (HGTV) and the DIY Network, which both have a number of series devoted to Tiny Houses and the dwellers and act as evangelists for the exhibitionist arm of the New Tiny House Movement. Across their screens, the consumption, joy, flashy, and gratification are quite literally distilled into television ads. In the architectural and geographic landscape of temporariness, however, we can see how different desires to treat the house as a consumer object begin to break across different kinds of consumption and/or spectatorship. The managerial spectator – the governing order that controls population through system of containment vis-à-vis cities, houses, prisons; the aesthetic consuming spectator – who will experience the house mostly as an exterior thing, placed in the landscape, so the aesthete sees

114 Saunders, Commodity and Spectacle in Architecture, viii.
it in relation to what is around it and wants it to cohere with those surroundings. Aesthetics are certainly racialized, classed and spatialized. “everything which might affront the eye and the nerves of the bourgeoisie” has to be neatly ordered or wholly removed – graffiti, certain kinds of color/material pairing, and of course people.\textsuperscript{115} The aesthete may be anyone including neighbors, the house occupant themselves, or designers, but there is a layer of surveillance at work that the citizens who will see, pass by, or live next to a structure, have the right to disagree with the way that it looks. Lastly, there is the occupant spectator consumer – who understands the house as a utilitarian space, inside and out.

There are, of course, more of these roles that could be outlined here, and these roles can and do overlap, but by beginning to name them we can perhaps start to see the socio-economic and racial space that are sometimes deployed for and sometimes against certain formations of the house. What appears to be happening to the lives of economically vulnerable people under capitalism is that the relationship between the consumer and the house occupant are being more and more untethered in increasingly creative and unequal ways. By this I mean that development can be a rather generic and impersonal process that gives priority to accumulating value rather than life and quality of life, but, importantly, it doesn’t obfuscate this completely. Space is commanded

\textsuperscript{115} Triece, \textit{Urban Renewal and Resistance}, 3; Squires, “Review of Urban Renewal and Resistance: Race, Space, and the City in the Late 20th to the Early 21st Century, by Mary Triece.” Engels quoted in Triece and Squires.
differently by each of these forms of consumption. The managerial consumer and the aesthete consumer are given more power, more time to determine the design logic and city placement that the economically-vulnerable house occupant will have to live by. The temporal problem, of temporary housing brings this into hyper-relief. Time and anti-blackness co-conspire to produce both a non-architectural subject and a non-consumer.

It is not the goal or interest of this project to write these black lives back into US American architecture or into consumption culture, but rather to think about how, in spite of their discursive absence they nevertheless continue to imagine and build space. I think here about the possibilities that lie in their absence from these conversations, like Harriet Jacobs saw her garret, as a loophole of retreat, to work with this unknowability on the register of temporality. Again, Saunders writes, “The central debate among writers about the commodification of architecture and other environmental arts is whether and to what extent it is possible for designers to resist, escape or offer substantial alternatives to the dominant commercial culture.” Of course it is possible but the scale and visibility of such alternatives will affect their viability, and it is interesting to think less about making permanent or long term changes to our built environment than to think about temporary things or plans that we can live with altogether abandoning should we need to let them go and begin again.

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The Tent House

“...space and place intertwine with and normalize exploitative capitalist
incursions that reify and reinforce racial inequality, with their own life and death
consequences.”

Catherine D. Squires

One case that recently made headlines in the Midwest region is in Akron, Ohio.
There, time, the discourses of the city and scale were all violently and
simultaneously deployed against a precarious population of people. The
deceptively simple headline of the newspaper read, “Akron’s Homeless
Encampment Drops Its Tiny-Home Bid” in a WOSU online publication.117 Behind
this text was the United States’ unsettled history of land, development, anti-
Blackness, and anti-poverty that has determined when, where, and how,
populations will exist.

In January of 2010, Sage Lewis, an Akron resident, business-owner, and self-
described activist for the homeless, purchased a modest brick building to house
his auction business and lease space to other small businesses. Lewis’s red brick
building at 15 Broad Street became the Second Chance Village, a donation site
that provides clothing and material donations for families in need of these
goods. It also provides them use of internet and computer services. That the site

and building was actively drawing in a consumptive population made it a visible but not an altogether problem space. Lewis, however, began to allow the exterior lawns, previously unutilized space of the building, the backyard and side yards, to become habitable. Second Chance Village became what has been termed a “tent city” for 35 to 40 of Akron’s homeless residents. Lewis opened the space in January of 2017, shortly after city officials forcibly removed people from another site closer to downtown Akron. A recent lawsuit, filed by Lewis’s former neighbor states that the site is like “a campground” with tent homes dotting the backyard. In news reporting and journalist interviews the site has been termed “a shelter,” a “camp,” and a “homeless encampment.” The discourse being generated around the site here is important and is moving against an affective investment of time. After all, what is the difference between a “campground” and a “neighborhood” other than time? That is, the white settler colonialism of the U.S. — facilitated and administered by the early sculptors of U.S. governance through the imposition of Jefferson’s yeoman’s republic ideal, the Louisiana purchase, or Jackson’s removals of indigenous people— could all be described as various iterations of camps of white settlers, that over time became homesteads, that became organized enclaves called

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118 Livingston, “Neighbor Sues to Shut down Akron’s Largest Tent City for the Homeless.”
119 TEGNA, “Tent City in Akron Faces Lawsuit, Uncertain Future.”
cities, towns, neighborhoods. As stated in the previous chapter, the difference between an “encampment” and a “neighborhood” are matters of zoning laws, which operate on historically manufactured ideas that work to exclude non-white bodies from cities. The Akron case hinges on the enforcement of residential zoning law against residents who reside in the improvised housing of tents.

As with removal projects of the past, the legal managerial logic needed to make this maneuver is not sound because it required the city to produce a zoning code infraction that didn’t previously exist. The city publicly struggled to craft even craft language to make the code violation legible by coding the site a campground. A spokesperson for the city stated that they are intervening on the site as a campground because this is “the closest description of how the property is currently being used.” It is not exactly how the property is being used, but the managerial right of the city is to create the discursive frames to create problem people and problem spaces that then require the city to act in some way. The city argues that the property is currently zoned as residential, and campgrounds require a different zoning ordinance. The city has effectively—though technically ineffectively since they are struggling to enforce their policy

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120 Kulikoff, “The Transition to Capitalism in Rural America”; Johnson, River of Dark Dreams.
121 The site has been termed a shelter, a homeless encampment, a camp.
122 TEGNA, “Tent City in Akron Faces Lawsuit, Uncertain Future.”
position-- formed a coherent relationship between the materiality of small housing composed of tarps, plastic sheeting, and factory manufactured tents, and the practice of camping, which does not necessarily adhere to any material rules; i.e. you can camp outdoors without cover, or you can camp in a 40[missing word here? 40-foot?] luxury “camper” towed by a motor-vehicle. The campsite follows certain aesthetic, scalar, and temporal measures, it looks and functions a certain way, and the city wants to use these measures to dissolve the site and its occupants which on closer inspection is non-sense. Camping follows a certain logic of time and geography of the personal.

“Camping is an outdoor activity involving overnight stays away from home in a shelter, such as a tent, a caravan, or a motorhome. Generally, participants leave developed areas to spend time outdoors in more natural ones in pursuit of activities providing them enjoyment. To be regarded as ‘camping’ a minimum of one night is spent outdoors, distinguishing it from day-tripping, picnicking, and other similarly short-term recreational activities.”

According to this definition of camping, camping is a temporary leisure activity that is meant to take place away from one’s established formal residence. The fraught history of the United States National Park Service has been well

123 “Camping.”
documented by geographers, historians and environmentalists.\textsuperscript{124} Camping, according to National Parks Service founder, president Theodore Roosevelt, was an activity for the “ever-increasing numbers of men and women who have learned to find rest, health, and recreation in the splendid forests and flower-clad meadows of our mountains.”\textsuperscript{125} Camping was, and is, for those who have overly productive lives from which they might require temporary leave. The campground is the site, discursively, psychically, and lawfully within US American land policy, that has been legally designated for their restorative comings and goings. All of this is a part of the Akron problem. All of this has contributed to a deep and historical connection between land, desirable forms of citizenship, and time. The backyard, like the back yard that Lewis has converted to shelter space, functions in the city the way that the campsite functions in park land. That is, it is leisure space, intended to give the homeowner something to do, to keep them productive citizens, to busy their time.\textsuperscript{126} For bodies deemed unproductive, 

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\textsuperscript{125} “Theodore Roosevelt: First Annual Message.”

\textsuperscript{126} In her book, Margaret Hayden quotes Joseph Levitt, founder of Levittown New York/PA/FL, as saying that a man that owns his own home has no time to be a communist because he has too much to do. Levitt said this a way to understand the architectural plan of the new tract housing system which expanded the footprint that a single family home would take up, adding things like side yards, front yards, and back yards and making these elements a part of local urban planning policy in the form of Setback Laws. Hayden, \textit{Redesining the American Dream}.
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taking extended, less temporary stays on land that has been deemed as hobby space, is an affront.

For now, Lewis is treading lightly with what he does with the property as the city continues to use the power of its legal recourse and planning offices against him, as “establishing rules might subject him to targeted enforcement.”

The Disaster House

As previously stated, the house, as an object, exists in a nexus of consumerisms – moral, spectral, and experiential. All of these modes of consumption give

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Livingston, “Akron Planner Gives Ultimatum on Tent City for the Homeless.”

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degrees of administrative power to consumers to determine how the built environment will be constructed, how it will look and who will be allowed inside of it. Disaster relief housing [Figure 1] can be thought of as moral managerial housing. Moral managerial housing – the production of space and place in relation to an urgent moral need, is not a new phenomenon. For example, public housing in the United States was founded on the idea that there was a moral imperative to act on behalf of another so that the other would not be an economic burden but rather be made into a productive, stable, consumer capitalist for the state. Zaire Z. Dinzey-Flores writes that, in parts of the US and Puerto Rico, Temporary Public Housing was utilized as a (failed) strategy for slum clearance. Ideally it allowed families to transition through 'honorable homes' from slums to private single-family homes. The goal was/is always that the productive and properly sheltered American should live in and own single-family, detached homes. With temporary disaster or crisis housing, mobility and flight become affectively linked in ways that make temporariness a threat. For the managerial and aesthetic spectators, it is therefore difficult to locate political potential in the temporariness of mobile housing because temporary housing is so culturally and legally tied to panic, crisis event, and disposability.

In Minnesota, and across the country, aging itself is becoming a crisis event, and it is being mobilized for the argument of the temporary houses. To serve the

\[128\] Dinzey-Flores, “Temporary Housing, Permanent Communities.”
large, aging population of baby boomers, Tiny Houses have been suggested as a panacea. Appealing to elders who do not want (or cannot afford) to keep their large single-family homes, framing tiny homes as a solution for aging is seen by some as a way to sell what would otherwise be seen as unattractive little property additions and assuage the fears of neighbors and municipalities worried about the value of their properties. Temporariness in this case, they believed, makes the aesthetic problem okay, and appeases both the aesthetic spectators and the moral managerial spectators in the sense that their ability to regulate the value of their communities are only being briefly interrupted, not wholly taken away. After all, the aging eventually die.

As mentioned in an earlier chapter, the City of Minneapolis and parts of the city of St. Paul passed an Accessory Dwelling Unit Ordinance that allows homeowners to build live-in structures as small as 300 sq. ft. on their property. In 2016, the Drop Home came to Minnesota through this statewide legislation. A proponent of this ordinance change was Minnesota State Senator-R Torrey Westrom, whose reasons for advancing the legislation were directly related to the moral state’s administrative needs, namely, privatizing the housing needs of the elderly as a cost saving measure. He stated, “Not only does this provide an opportunity for families to have a hands-on role in the care of a parent, spouse, or loved one, but it also allows for a dramatic reduction in health care costs.” Westrom additionally stated, “The state spends a significant part of our budget
to help pay for the care of senior citizens, so anything we can do that provides for more cost-effective independent living options is a good thing.”

Importantly, however, these were to be temporary structures with a limit of one-year tenure. A number of cities opted-out of this legislation, citing moral and managerial concerns in their decision making. The mayor of Burnsville, Elizabeth Kautz, stated that the city did not need these small temporary dwellings because they already had temporary housing in the form of “spare bedrooms, apartments, assisted living facilities, short-term health care facilities, hotels and group homes.” More to the administrative point, Kautz stated, “We want control of what happens here in Burnsville.” Temporariness, here, was a means to make [opting out of] the measure more palatable to the public, and it was effectively tied to care for the elderly, a moral good. In Crystal, the City Council also opted-out but wanted to be clear that the moral tact of their judgment would not be questioned, stating, “There was a concern that it would be perceived that by opting out, we were saying we don’t want this kind of thing around here, that it was kind of a cold-hearted decision…The reality is it’s not that at all.” This kind of thing that the councilman and mayor are hinting at are problems of aesthetic, scale, temporality and space. For those cities, the

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129 Alex, ria, and at 320-763-3133, “Westrom Supports ‘tiny Houses’ for Elderly.”
130 “Suburbs Opt to Go Their Own Way on State’s ‘drop Home’ Law.”
131 Kautz quoted in “Suburbs Opt to Go Their Own Way on State’s ‘drop Home’ Law.”
132 Crystal City Councilman Jeff Kolb quoted in “Suburbs Opt to Go Their Own Way on State’s ‘drop Home’ Law.”
temporary small house was the wrong kind of spectacle. It did not fit within a predetermined set of size-appearance values, and these cities were uninterested in, but not incapable of, becoming consumers for this kind of transitory architectural thing.

As a part of this project, I met with number of affordable housing organizations and land banks in Minneapolis and St. Paul, and the tiny house is a housing type that they are certainly considering. However, negotiating a place to put the house always fell apart around its mobility. The size of the house, surprisingly, was more workable than its movability. The concern over mobility was consistent across all the conversations. It had to do with the bureaucratic maneuvering with the city that would be needed and who would take on the labor of the policy push needed to make something like this work. Again, the managerial issue is an impediment. Additionally, however, the aesthetic is at work as well. Beneath the trouble with the city is the association of mobility with non-commitment to a static community. Within the city’s limits, the commodity of the house is literally invested with meaning about one’s intentions to stay and contribute to a real or perceived community. Beyond the city, however, there is allocated space for mobile housing, where it can be aggregated with other mobile housing mobile home parks, where other mobile houses, temporary people, are thought to be properly located.
The mobility of the house is always located—pushed really—beyond the borders of the city. “Why don’t you live in a mobile home park?” was a question that came up a number of times in these conversations. To date, there are no mobile home parks in Minneapolis or St. Paul Metro areas. As the map in Figure 2 indicates, mobile home parks are located well outside of city limits. In practical terms, the Hilltop Community is approximately a 20-minute drive, and the Sun Valley Park is around 11 minutes. Using public transportation to access the city, however, means a 45-minute to an hour trip to or from either park. This transportation problem is one, it seems, that the city would rather manage than the space-time problems of small houses.
As a small moving thing, the tiny house exposes the flaws of social and housing policy that over determine the ways that we can live life in cities. “Geography’s discursive attachment to stasis and physicality,” McKittrick writes, “the idea that space ‘just is,’ and that space and place are merely containers for human complexities and social relations, is terribly seductive: that which ‘just is’ not only anchors our selfhood and feet to the ground, it seemingly calibrates and normalizes where, and therefore who, we are.”\(^{133}\) In an attempt to create coherent citizenship identities around architecture and place, cities have and continue to produce inconsistent anti-black managerial problems for themselves. Mobility and flight are modes of control, afforded to Whiteness and imposed on non-whiteness as mechanisms of value production. In the Post WWII housing development boom, developer William Levitt famously said, “No man who owns his own house and lot can be a communist. He has too much to do.”\(^{134}\) This pernicious idea is still at work today. The detached single-family dwelling is a political site that continues to fix people to capitalism and to city formations that work against more humane, more workable, modes of life. More and more, those living under the conditions of capitalism in the US are seeking and building ways out. Embracing smallness and temporariness, may be yet one way that will be aestheticized differently as it is taken up across space and across time.

\(^{133}\) McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xi.
\(^{134}\) Levitt quoted in Beauregard, *When America Became Suburban.*
Having been brought to light and into their own new vision, planners will become participants. And participants will be taught to reject essence for contingency, as if planning and improvisation, flexibility and fixity, and complexity and simplicity, were opposed within an imposition there is no choice but to inhabit, as some exilic home where policy sequesters its own imagination, so they can be safe from one another.

Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, *The Undercommons*
Epilogue

There is something to be said here about the intimacy. About proximity. I return to some modes of thinking I began to talk through with Stevie some months ago. The intimate and the proximal have always been at the forefront of this project as ways to think about when and how a body enters/exits a place. In this case the body is both a corporeal flesh, my body but also a timber and metal frame, a house. Trying to place both myself and my house/residence have proven to be the most challenging aspects of this work to date. As scholar, as someone who is always thinking about systems, always trying to better understand for whom do systems work and form whom are they designed to only work so much, this has been an extremely generative time. But there comes a point at which you are tired of learning the lessons and you simply want to live. There were two overarching ideas that I vehemently argue for in this work that remain unresolved to date, and probably productively, if not frustratingly so: mobility and intimacy.

On intimacy. After a year of pausing, of working at other jobs, writing, trying to figure out land and zoning, and a failed attempt to move the house into a friend’s back yard, the house was finally placed on a farm in Wisconsin. The different forms that my requests to friends, to friends of friends, to strangers from craigslist, to institutions took, taught me something about intimacy and proximity. While intimacy and proximity connote ideas of closeness, of depth, of
a propensity towards protection or the amorous even, it can also be conditional.
The conditions of intimacy certainly surfaced as I was working out the problems
around housing and time, however this idea came into a sharper relief as I
approached the end of my dissertation. An intersectional analysis might allow
me to explain it this way, a matrix of institutional power was meeting the
personal politics of my house, and by extension me. My house ended up on a
farm, an hour outside of the city, because I couldn’t find a space within the city
that was workable. That is, a space that was either “legal” and I use that word
skeptically, for all the reasons laid out in the chapters above, and therefore
wouldn’t bring a range of harmful forms of surveillance on the land holders or a
space that would literally fit without requiring some expensive terraforming or
machining to maneuver the house into place. The farm was one form of safe
space for the house but presented a different set of problems for me, as a
human. I was the only non-white person in residence and it was winter in the
Upper Midwest which meant there were literal days when I could not leave due
to snow-ins. The rural, unsurveilled space of the farm, made it possible for me to
place my house without worry of anything happening to it, or more importantly
anything happening to the people providing it/me this parcel of space. But these
proximities, away from the city, away from familiar people, sites, street names,
were buffered by whiteness. The socio-racial cocoon was so dense that that in
the end, I couldn’t manage. My house was placed in February, I arrived in late
March and I left at the beginning of April. I felt it best that I leave the farm, leave my house, still unfinished. This abrupt change of course drew me into a fresh state of improvising my life. Into figuring out being addressless, trying yet again to find an affordable place to live in an unaffordable city, and pulling on my intimate friendships to help me to get housed. The house is still at the farm, I am not, another set of problems to figure out.

On mobility. The mobility of the house, and its intersection with my own mobility, has, from the beginning been the issue that most interested me. There are a number of assumptions that accompany the social life of both artists and graduate students, one is the thinness of your grounding in place, a geographic question of do you/or do you want to belong and what are the grounds and measures of that belonging. The mobility of the house and the mobility of myself have created an odd problem, we have been cast as flight risks, which creates a paradoxical problem when you want the possibility of being mobile, but you need a place to be housed. Because, as I have tried to articulate throughout this project, there are both historical and contemporary modes of governance that unceasingly seek to control Black movement, I am still myself curious about this small mobile thing that frustrates the city’s economic and planning objectives. But one has to live. I began this project thinking about it, as I discussed above, as a form of garretting, a way of transforming the small, cast off spaces of cities into usable if still contradictory geographies that could support the needs of my Black
life. But garreting has to be understood as a space of deep discomfort, even in its temporariness and as a not-yet-fully-realized-idea, it is a hard space to dwell. The arts allow me a lot of room to test different loopholes, to test different roles, architect, geographer, photographer, writer, but there are of course consequences to working these loopholes when you are economically and spatially insecure. That is, when you lack the capital to own things at or beyond a certain scale, like land, homes, yards, and are then therefore always at the mercy of the generosity of others, of the city, one starts to feel the “usable and paradoxical space” of the thing not as joy, but as yet another frustrating hurdle to life.\textsuperscript{135} Mobility and intimacy are contingent upon one another, mobility is indeed facility by a certain amount of intimacy, generosity, rather than purely arbitrary movement alone. However, drawing our intimate relations into our mobility is also not without risk. As I think about what happens to this project next, I think about who can be a part of the network of caretakers that I can ask or who will offer themselves up as a place to land this project. I have to consider how when and how the illegality of this project is true, when and how this illegality will be penalized, when and how my caretakers will then be surveilled. I try to remember that this was never going to be an easy project because as I began, the house is a site of epistemic, ontologic, phenomenologic, struggle. In the building of the structure, the interviews I conducted, and the policy, zoning, 

\textsuperscript{135} McKittrick, \textit{Demonic Grounds}, xxviii.
and popular culture discourse I analyzed, the improvised, aka tiny house, even as a proposition, proved to be a productive site from which to experience the inner workings of cities. It allowed me to improvise a space, and theorize myself into architecture as a Black feminist, grounded in the work of praxis. McKittrick writes “Black women’s geographies still rest on those ‘not-quite’ spaces and the ‘different stories’ of displacement – but this [is] a workable and ‘insurgent’ geography, which is produced in tandem with practices of domination.”¹³⁶

Spillers and McKittrick remind us that garret is not a place, a final destination, but a verb, a set of loaded potentials, a wish even.

¹³⁶ McKittrick, 62.
Bibliography


Squires, Catherine. “Review of Urban Renewal and Resistance: Race, Space, and the City in the Late 20th to the Early 21st Century, by Mary Triece,” n.d.


Ohio Administrative Code
Chapter 3701-26-01-N
Campgrounds
Definitions

13701-26-01 Definitions.
(A) "ASSE" means the American society of sanitary engineering.
(B) "Backflow" has the same meaning as set forth in rule 4101:3-2-01 of the Administrative Code.
(C) Campground" collectively means a combined park-camp, recreation camp, recreational vehicle park and temporary campground unless otherwise specifically identified.
(D) "Combined park-camp" means any tract of land upon which a combination of five or more self-contained recreational vehicles or portable camping units are placed and includes any roadway, building, structure, vehicle or enclosure used or intended for use as part of the park facilities. A tract of land that is subdivided for lease or other contract of the individual sites is a combined park-camp if a combination of five or more recreational vehicles or portable camping units are placed on it for recreation, vacation or business purposes. "Combined park-camp" does not include any tract of land used solely for the storage or display for sale of self-contained recreational vehicles or portable camping units or solely as a temporary park-camp.
(E) "Dependent recreational vehicle" means a recreational vehicle other than a self-contained recreational vehicle and does not include a manufactured home or a mobile home.

137 Ohio Department of Health, “Ohio Administrative Code, Chapter 3701-26-01-N Campgrounds, Definitions.”
(F) "Director" means the director of health or the director's authorized representative.
(G) "Domestic septage" has the same meaning as set forth in section 3718.01 of the Revised Code.
(H) "Dump station" means a facility designed to receive the contents from sewage holding tanks or self-contained recreational vehicles and may include both of the following:
   (1) The components necessary for collecting and holding the sewage wastes; and
   (2) The water service used for flushing vehicle sewage holding tanks and adjacent dump station areas.
(I) "Electrical system" means the wiring and utility service site connection from each recreational vehicle or portable camping unit, any other service connections, any service building and all parts of a distribution system connected to the service line entering the park or camp.
(J) "Gray water recycling systems" has the meaning set forth in section 3718.01 of the Revised Code.
(K) "Human consumption" means ingestion or absorption of water or water vapor as the result of drinking, cooking, dishwashing, handwashing, bathing, showering or oral hygiene or other domestic uses such as flushing toilets or doing laundry.
(L) "Licensed contractor" means an individual licensed under section 4740.06 of the Revised Code and is certified to perform electrical work.
(M) "Licensee" means the person specified on the application for a license to operate or maintain a campground and to whom a currently valid license has been issued by the licensor.
(N) "Licensor" means either the board of health of a city or general health district or the authority having the duties of a board of health in any city as authorized by section.3709.05 of the Revised Code or the director when required under division (B) of section 3729.06 of the Revised Code. "Licensor" also means an authorized representative of any of those entities.
(O) "Manufactured home" has the meaning set forth in section 3781.06 of the Revised Code.
(P) "Mobile home" has the meaning set forth in section 4501.01 of the Revised Code.
(Q) "One hundred year flood" means a flood having a one percent chance of being equaled or exceeded in any given year.
(R) "One hundred year flood plain" means that area adjoining any river, stream, watercourse or lake that has been or may be inundated by a one hundred year flood.
(S) "Person" has the same meaning as in section 1.59 of the Revised Code and also includes this state, any political subdivision of this state and any other state or local body of this state.

(T) "Potable water" means water which is satisfactory for all drinking, culinary and domestic purposes, including flushing toilets and doing laundry.

(U) "Portable camping units" means dependent recreational vehicles, tents, portable sleeping equipment and similar camping equipment used for travel, recreation, vacation or business purposes and does not include a manufactured home or a mobile home.

(V) "Portable toilet" means a waterless toilet with a tank that typically contains a chemical to limit decomposition of non-water-carried human excreta during storage prior to pumping.

(W) "Private water system" has the same meaning as in section 3701.344 of the Revised Code.

(X) "Privy" means a self-contained waterless toilet used for disposal of non water-carried human excreta that consists of a shelter built above an approved tank installed in the ground into which human excreta is deposited.

(Y) "Public water supply system" has the same meaning as in section 6109.01 of the Revised Code.

(Z) "Recreation camp" means any tract of land upon which five or more portable camping units are placed and includes any roadway, building, structure, vehicle or enclosure used or intended for use as part of the facilities of such camp. A tract of land that is subdivided for lease or other contract of the individual sites is a recreation camp if five or more portable camping units are placed on it for recreation, vacation or business purposes. "Recreation camp" does not include any tract of land used solely for the storage or display for sale of dependent recreational vehicles or used solely as a temporary park-camp.

(AA) "Recreational vehicle" has the meaning set forth in section 4501.01 of the Revised Code and does not include a manufactured home or mobile home.

(BB) "Recreational vehicle park" means any tract of land used for parking five or more self-contained recreational vehicles and includes any roadway, building, structure, vehicle or enclosure used or intended for use as part of the park facilities and any tract of land that is subdivided for lease or other contract of the individual sites for the express or implied purpose of placing self-contained recreational vehicles for recreation, vacation or business. "Recreational vehicle park" does not include any tract of land used solely for the storage or display for sale of self-contained recreational vehicles or solely as a temporary park-camp.

(CC) "Self-contained recreational vehicle" means a recreational vehicle which can operate independent of connections to sewer and water and has plumbing fixtures or appliances all of which are connected to sewage holding tanks located within the vehicle and does not include a manufactured home or a mobile home as defined in section 3781.06 or 4501.01 of the Revised Code.
(DD) "Septage hauler" has the same meaning as in section 3718.01 of the Revised Code and is registered by the local health district.

(EE) "Sewage" means liquid waste containing animal or vegetable matter in suspension or solution that originates from humans and human activities. Sewage includes liquids containing household chemicals in solution commonly discharged from a residence or from commercial, institutional, or other similar facilities.

(FF) "Sewerage system" has the same meaning as set forth in section 6111.01 of the Revised Code.

(GG) "Site" means a location within a campground where self-contained recreational vehicles or portable camping units are placed.

(HH) "Solid wastes" has the same meaning as set forth in rule 3745-27-01 of the Administrative Code.

(II) "Substantially alter" means a change in the layout or design of a recreational vehicle park, recreation camp, combined park-camp, or temporary park-camp, including, without limitation, the movement of utilities or changes in established streets, lots, sites or in other facilities.

(JJ) "Temporary campground" means any tract of land used for a period not to exceed a total of twenty-one days per calendar year for the purpose of parking five or more recreational vehicles, dependent recreational vehicles or portable camping units or any combination thereof, for one or more periods of time that do not exceed seven consecutive days or parts thereof.

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01/14/2016

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