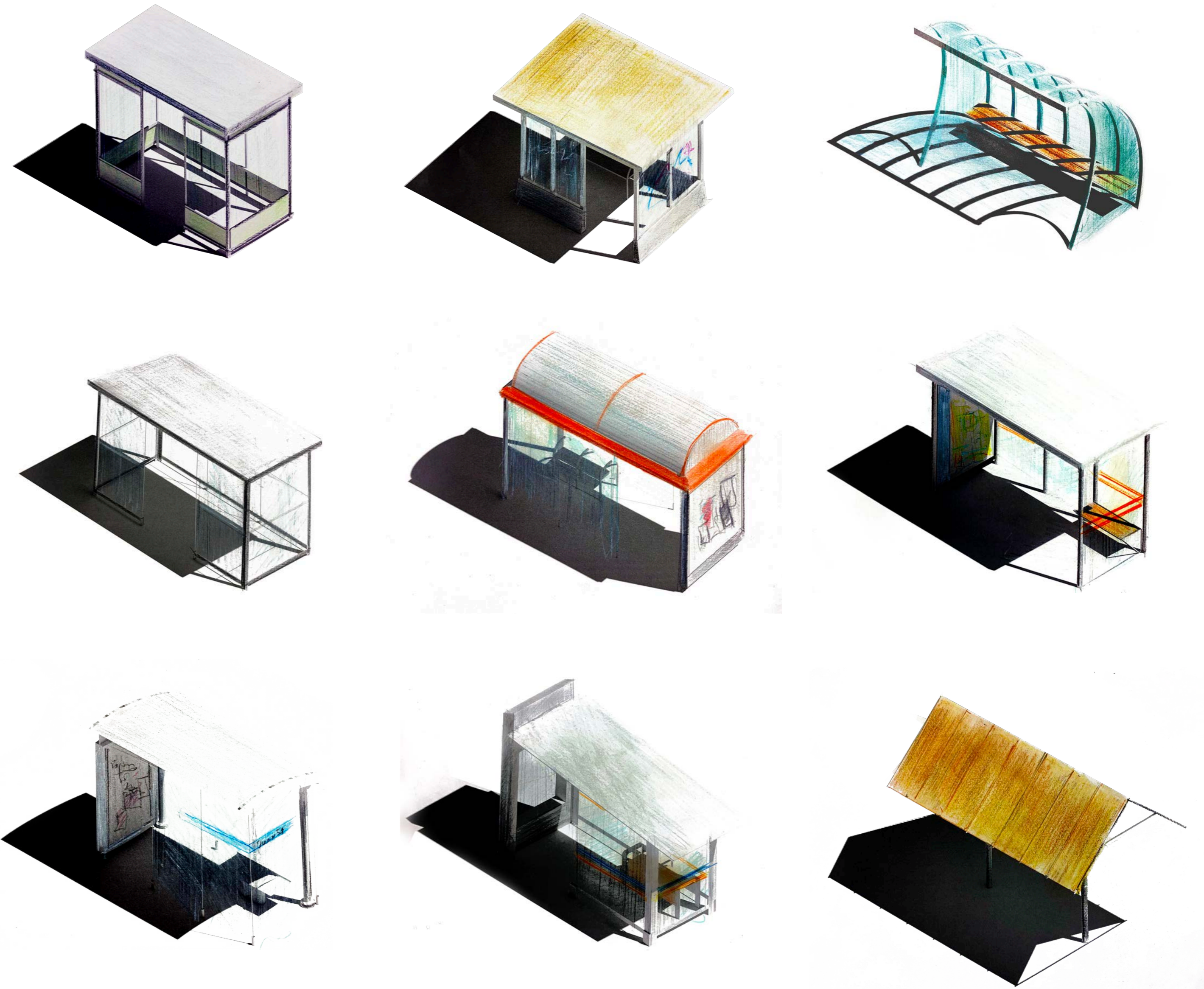


Life-in-Shelter

From Non-Place to Community Space

The following is a reflection on what bus shelters are as well as a provocation of what bus shelters could be. Most bus shelters provide no more than a minimal protection from the elements and a delivery mechanism for advertising, as can be seen in this general parallel of bus shelters in Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver and a small selection from other cities in similar climates. Empty, standardized vessels of waiting, their rote repetition detaches the bus shelter from its immediate urban context. Where are we when we are in a bus stop? Ethnologist Marc Augé has theorized that supermodernity has created transitional zones of non-places which are like "palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten." [1] It is an alien site of civic occupation, a space where the neighbourhood ends and the public grid begins. These seemingly neutral environments nonetheless participate in the "dynamic, relational and agentive," social construction of space. [2] As they are dynamic, you can never wait in the same bus shelter twice. Their relationality is fogged out when we catch our connections and made manifest when buses are late, and bus shelters only make it into the newspaper archives when they are smashed. Paraphrasing Vito Acconci, the bus shelter belongs to us all and we in turn belong to the state.

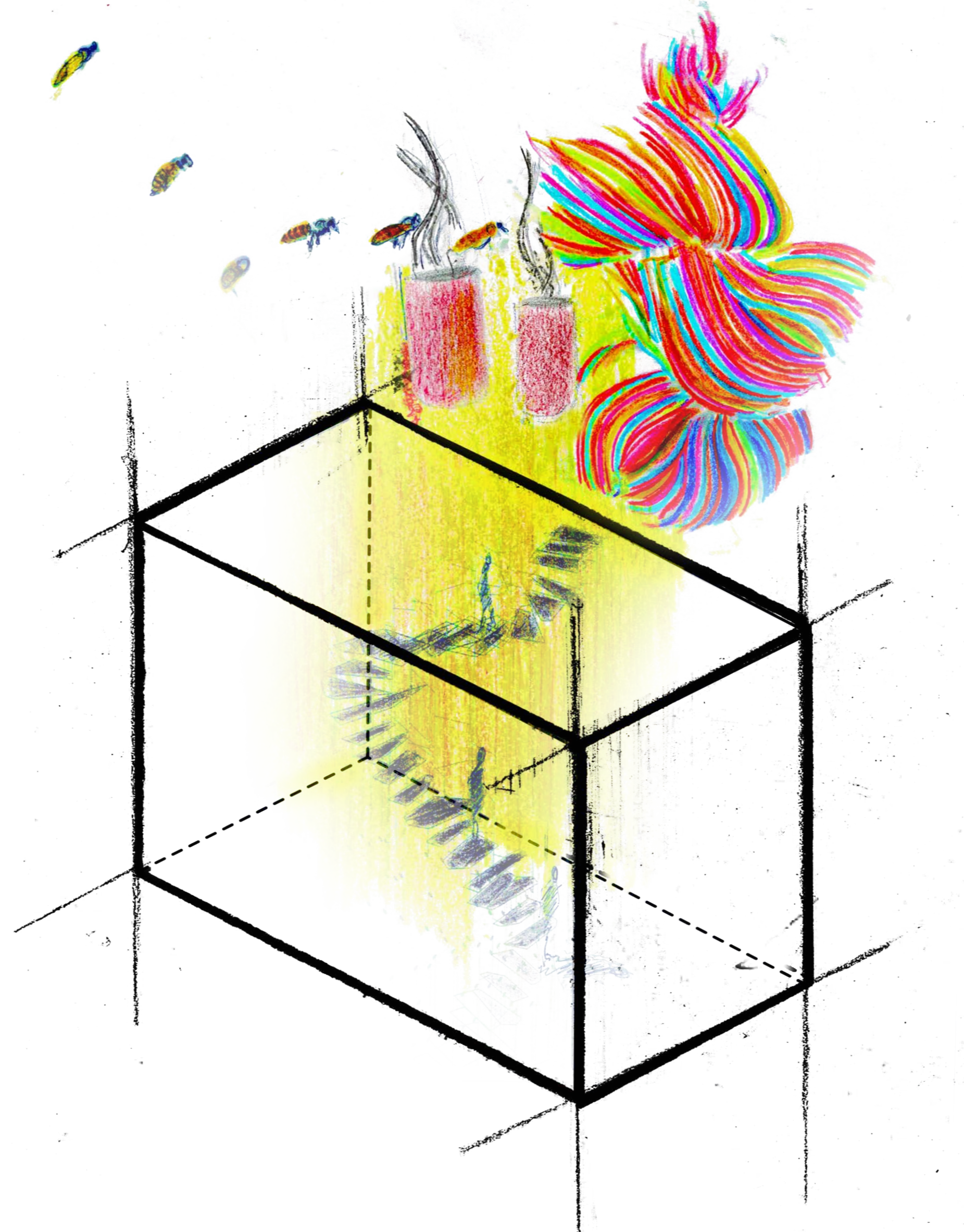
But what does a bus shelter want, and must they all want the same things? Employing an object-oriented ontology, we can imagine each bus shelter both as "quasi-object" and "quasi-subject," partly an inhabitable space with a function we have created and simultaneously a subject with its own life trajectory and perhaps even desires. [3] The life of the bus shelter "withdraw[s] in [its] complete reality from the thinking subject," is incomprehensible to us, it is too weird to describe. [4] The best we can do is to point towards the endless alternative programming possibilities, where the research of the imagined potential of bus shelters "in a world of autonomous things is a matter of writing in the gaps." [5] Every bus shelter is a site to develop relationships between people and the built environment, inhabiting bus shelters not as a transient space of wasted time but a real, occupiable space of human life. The needs, desires, technical capacities and budgets will vary from site to site, but in the following broad categories of verbs we chart out some of the trajectories that life-in-shelter might generate. Envisioning an emancipation of the bus shelter from the controlling grid of society and into the hands of the embodied reality of the neighbourhood it lives in is the scope of this provocation.



Clockwise from top left: Toronto c. 1978, Montreal c. 1980s, Moscow c. 2015, Berlin c. 2000s, Vancouver c. 1978, Montreal c. 2010, Toronto c. 2010s, Toronto c. 1983, Montreal c. 1990s

Can a bus shelter...?

be an anaerobic digester, animal therapy session, art gallery, bee garden, bicycle garage, café, community note board, ecological refuge, fish pedicure, food truck, glove store, greenhouse, hair salon, ice benches, knitting station, library, mirrored floor, mist station, mug wall, oral history/ storytelling station, observation deck, outdoor gym, Peter Eisenman, pinkhouse, playground, Sou Fujimoto, soup kitchen, take something / leave something, wildlife viewing deck, wind farm, yarn bombed.



CITATIONS

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3. Bruno Latour as seen in Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 28, no. 1 (2001): 12
4. Graham Harman, "Response to Nathan Combs," *Speculations I*, edited by Paul Ennis [2010]: 145
5. Kathleen Stewart, "The Point of Precision," *Representation*, 135 [Summer 2016]: 35