

ASSIGNMENT 2: METHOD EXPLORATION

Research Method 7: Bodystorming

In order to gain deeper understanding for the environment of Bowery between Prince & Rivington, I used Bodystorming to simulate the different groups that frequent the area. With the initial research for Assignment 1, I was able to understand the feeling of the passerby in the area. Usually people don't like to frequent too much around homeless people, so they tend to walk faster around them. I chose this research method in order to gain more insight in the struggle the homeless have to face in the winter; I decided to stand outside myself for as long as I could. I chose an area similar to the sight, an area that provides similar objects like wall-mount fire hydrants and small niches to find cover.





My initial thoughts during this Bodystorming exercise were that I want to go in again. But once this option is excluded, I was trying to look for the next best alternative: a warm drink for example, I was also not wearing any gloves so my hands were freezing. An extra layer of pants and a hat would not be bad either. I tried sitting on the fire hydrant/ floor over standing, and the fact that my body was crouched together made it a tiny little bit better for my upper body but the cold metal/ concrete froze my lower body even more. Walking around would consume too much energy, and distracting myself by talking to others also helped only very temporarily. Finding niches to protect from the wind was not easy and at around 9°F, I could not hold out any longer than 20 min.

All of the initiatives listed above were only temporary solutions (short-term) that did not resolve the problem, and I tried to figure out any long-term solutions. After visiting the Bowery Mission website again, I found out that they do provide shelter for the homeless during winter time, but the beds are limited to 150 men inside the mission (on a short term basis) and 177 people (157 men & 20 women) in their residential recovery program, that needs an application process etc. (so someone can not be admitted on a short-term basis).

Conclusion & Insights:

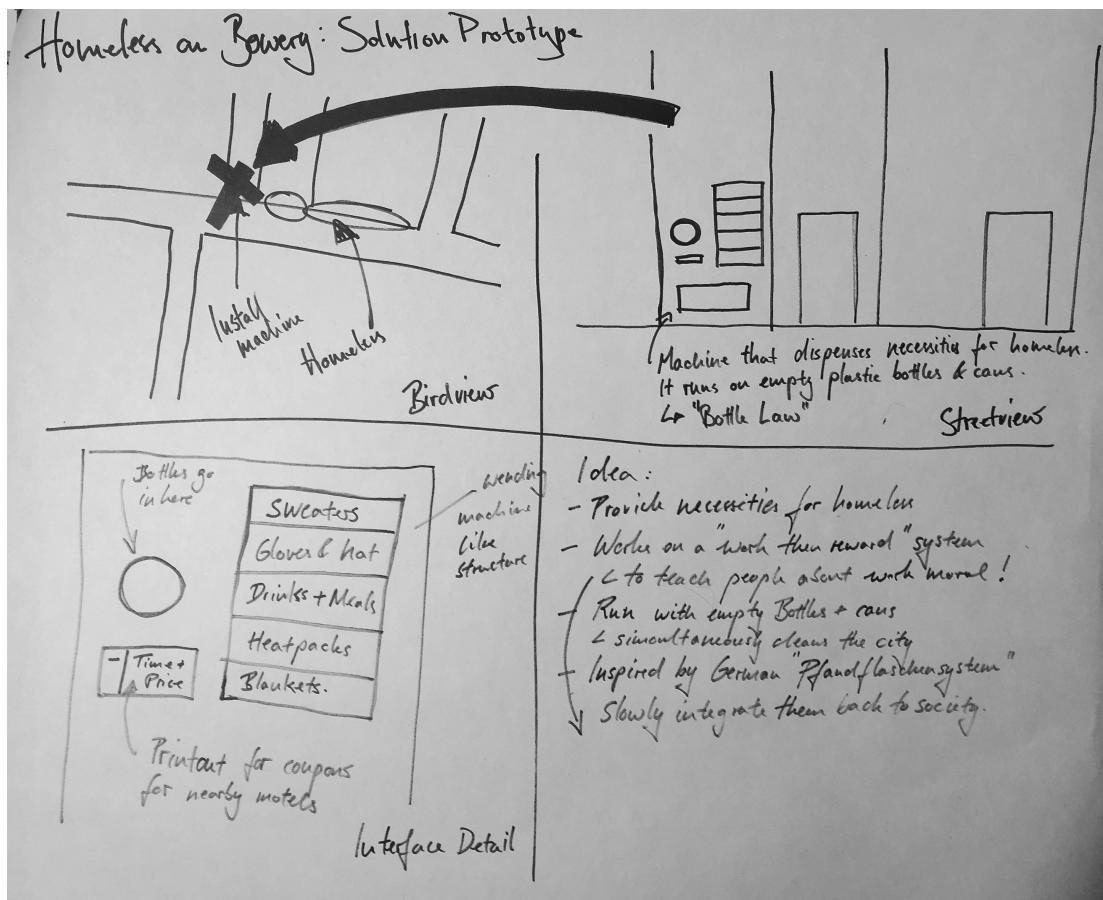
- Solutions like finding temporarily shelter & received meals + clothing etc., will only help on the short run.
- Long-term solutions need to be established to address the problem
 - Because of limited spaces for shelter
- Once there is no shelter to go to, there is no way to keep warm on the streets.
- Homeless people's outspokenness can come from pure desperation for survival, and frustration from the fact that they are not acknowledged

Ideas for alterations to the sight:

1. Increase size of the Bowery Mission for greater number of shelter
2. Install radiators for heat
3. Install benches, seats with heat warmers
4. Machine that dispenses necessities

Research Method 66: Prototyping

In order to prototype something, I first had to choose an idea. Since I mentioned before that the solution has to be long-term based, and increased number of shelter and heat-warmers/ radiators would only attract even more homeless people in a soon-to-be residential area, I thought a dispensing machine would be the best.



I sketched a "low fidelity version" of my prototype just to get the ideas going and came up with different features for the dispenser that would make it a long-term solution for homelessness in the area. It would be located on street level for the public to use. The machine would eliminate the need to wait for the Bowery Mission to open/ close, or for them to serve food, give out stuff etc. One can just go up directly and receive what they need, thus eliminating homeless lingering around on the street all day.

Features:

1. Runs with empty bottles and cans that can be collected as garbage on the streets
 - a. Encourages recycling in the city
 - b. Machine design + concept is inspired by the German “Pfandflaschensystem” where people can put their recyclable bottles & cans into a machine and will receive cash for compensation. In Germany, once you purchase a recyclable bottle you automatically pay “Pfand” which is pretty much like an extra charge of around 10-25 cents, and once you return the bottle to the recycling station you’ll receive your “Pfand” back. But some people do not care about the little extra charge and that’s when homeless people step in and take advantage of the opportunity to make some cash. American equivalent is “Bottle Law”.
2. It will operate on a “work-then-reward” system, where the machine displays the value of the collected bottles and gives certain options for the issuance of necessities like: Clothing, Gloves & hats, Drinks & meals, heatpacks, blankets etc. Furthermore there is the option of “buying time to stay” at a nearby motel. There will be no option to receive your bottle value in cash.
 - a. The prices are obviously set according to the real value of the necessities, with motel time being the most expensive. This will encourage the people’s work moral and teach them how to save up and the value of work.
 - b. The machine merchandise will run on donations from the community and the money earned by the collected bottles.
 - c. Real money will not be issued due to potential misuse of it. Instead necessities will be provided for short-term survival and the “work-then-reward” system will hopefully teach them their way back to society on the long run, by increasing their motivation and monetary awareness step by step.

Research Method 73: Scenarios

To explore future uses and potentials of the Homeless Dispensing machine, I chose the research method of writing scenarios to make design ideas concrete in order to create an actually “culturally meaningful artifact”. The story will be written from the perspective of a homeless man, who has been frequently coming back to the area, but recently the new Ace Hotel that was planned has finally opened and homeless people are actively being shooed away now.

Hi, my name is Jack and I have been a homeless man in New York City for about four years now. New York is definitely not the best place in the world to be homeless. The summers are burning and the winters are freezing, the people are busy and we practically don't exist in their peripheral vision. There are limited numbers of shelters and our numbers are growing and growing. But the worst thing above them all is that the good life is right in front of our eyes and there is no way for us to grab this dream. I mean, after four years of homelessness and even more years of unemployment, what ways are there for me to get back on track? None! Absolutely no chance at all!

I have been going to the Bowery Mission for about two years now. They have decent food and provide shelter in emergency during the cold winter. They have this one residential recovery program where they help people to get to the normal life again, but it is basically impossible to get into that program, and once you're in there is no guarantee that it'll help. Recently this new fancy boogie-woogie hotel opened next to the mission and now they don't allow us to wait out on the streets anymore to get our daily meal. Guess that once the people do acknowledge us, they just want us to disappear even more, huh. Actually, the entire Bowery is changing, one fancy ass building opening to the next one and nowhere for us to stay anymore. The Bowery is just not the same anymore...

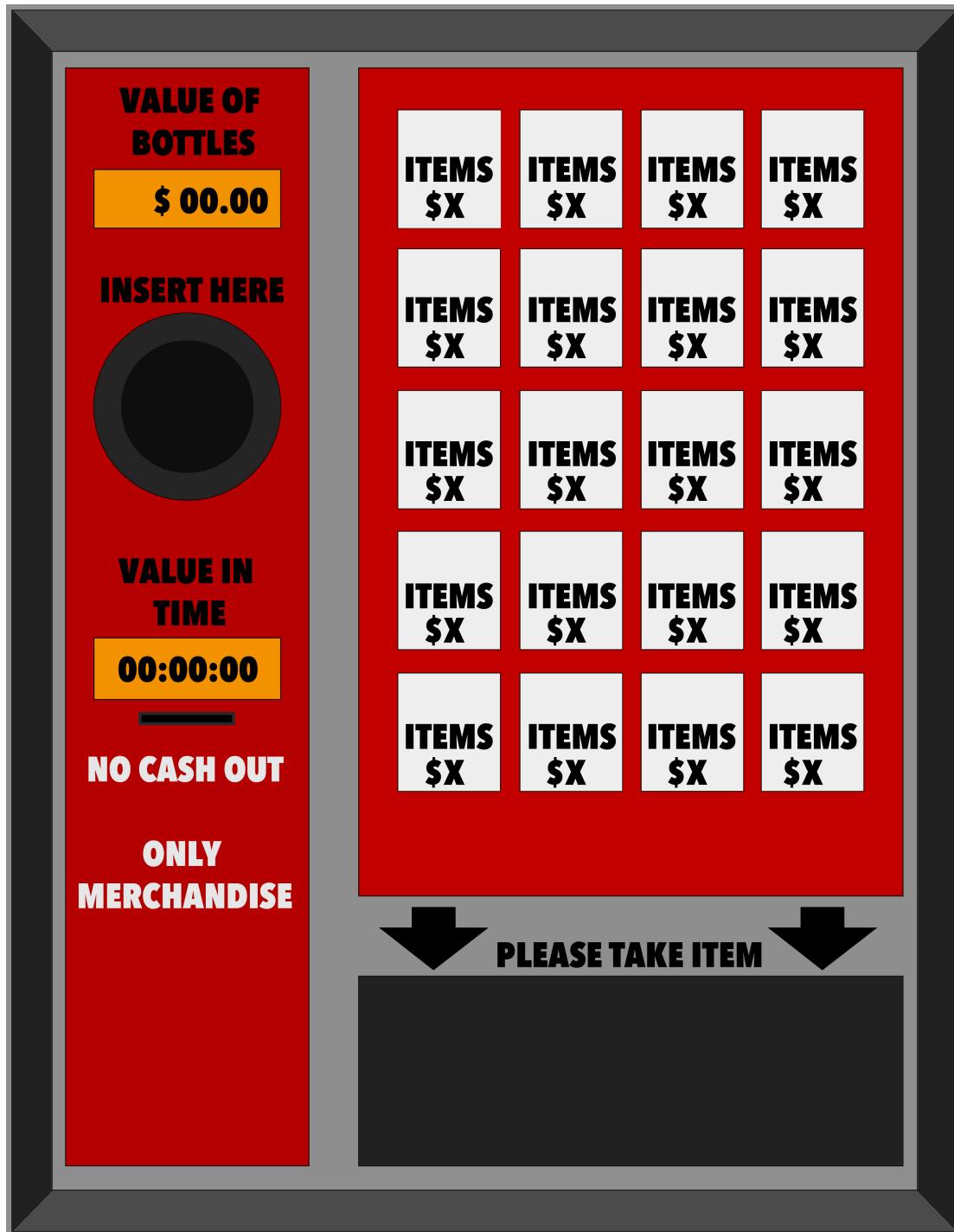
Not too long ago, they started to place all these weird machines around the Lower East Side. They say it's still in the test phase, but it can help us change our lives

again. I wasn't too fond of those in the beginning; just corporate imbecility is what I thought. But after some of my friends told me that they were able to get some food and clothes through the machines, although the Mission was closed, I started to pay more attention to them. One guy told me that he even stayed at a motel for a few days! "I have to see that!" is what I thought and headed over to the one next to the Bowery Mission. At first I thought they were kidding me, it just looked like a regular wending machine! Only one thing was different, the machine had this weird hole in the middle that said, "Place bottles/ cans here". I did have a bottle with me so I placed it in and it showed me that I have 15 cents. I looked to the wending machine part again and I slowly started to understand! I could collect bottles and convert them into money to buy stuff I need! The prices were much better than anywhere else: Blanket \$10, Sweater \$5, hot soup \$3, heatpack \$1 etc. And it says that once you saved up \$30, I would be able to stay at a motel for a night including breakfast. After I understood what the machines are for, I started to collect bottles like crazy. I literally made a plan on where to go to during what time on which day and in the evening I would come to the machine and buy myself something rewarding.

After a few weeks I was able to divide my time in a way that I could have a roof over my head every night and have at least one decent meal per day. Other people started to do the same thing and sometimes there were literally no empty bottles anywhere to collect! They started to set up more machines around the city too, so I could change my working areas from time to time. I actually started to feel motivated and it was really rewarding to be able to get something for myself through my hard work. My desperation and feeling of helplessness are almost gone, since I am able to keep myself busy during the day. Furthermore the people seem to have become more friendly towards us too, maybe because we now help to recycle and keep the city clean. I think if I continue like that, I would have a chance to be admitted into the Mission's residential recovery program and eventually get back on track again! It definitely feels nice not to having to sleep on the streets all the time anymore.

Proposal to a site alteration:

In order to win the fight against homelessness, one needs to implement a solution combining short run and long run strategies that provide shelter, warmth and food but also training and education in the sociological areas. My approach to this idea is to install following Machine on the sight:



The final design of the dispensing machine includes two displays that show the value of the collected bottles (budget of what one can buy at the machine) and the time one would be able to afford at a near motel. The hole on the left is where the collected bottles and cans get placed in, a scanner then scans the barcode to verify the bottle and its value and the bottle then gets transported into a recycling storage. Under the time display is a small slit that will print out a coupon for a motel if once decides to choose the shelter over merchandise. On the right are the displayed items that will be available by the time the machine is used. Since the system is ran by donations and the collected funds of the bottles, the list of merchandise can vary from day to day. Finally there is the output slot under the selection where one can take out the merchandise they bought. Of course that output slot with have a theft security in order to keep the same fair conditions for everyone.

The short-term benefit of this machine will be the provision of necessities for the homeless, even when the Mission is closed. That will prevent them from hanging out on the street all day, since they can receive what they need and because they need to work for it. This will also be beneficial for future residents of the area that might not like homeless people hanging out in front of their apartment.

The long-term benefit of the machine will be the education and motivation to work for your rewards. It will teach people that are not in touch with society how to do basic monetary management, but also how to overcome helplessness through initiative and work. Once they realize that they can start to help themselves, they hopefully will get back on the right path in life again and slowly integrate back into the community. Another benefit for the future when more of the machines are set-up across the city is that the recycling system of garbage will be improved and therefore the general environment.