



# Self dispossession in action

Nick Blomley (and many others)

‘poor people are always bumping into sharp legal things’ Wexler (1970,



(Self) winnowing |



Self  
winnowing:  
'living smaller'  
to become  
'housing ready'

## Self winnowing and 'housing readiness'

- When they go into shelters, they actually have to not bring all their stuff. The shelters don't accept their possessions. So the way we look at it is that ***we're assisting them, so that it makes it easier for them to transition to shelter***. Otherwise, it makes it very, very difficult for them to leave all their possessions and have to get rid of it at that point. So more from a do no harm standpoint, to be honest ... (Bylaw services manager)
- And the good news is with that process is, by having that conversation with people that "Hey, good news! You can have one shopping cart worth of stuff." And interestingly enough, the contents of a shopping cart is two blue bins, which is what you're allowed to take with you into transitional housing. **And so it starts to get people thinking about, what are my priorities? What do I value the most? And how do I take better care of the things I value the most? Because you can't take care of it all. So what can I let go of, and what do I need to hang on to?** (Interagency Care Team representative)

## Self winnowing and propriety

- What's most important to us is to have a **livable community**. Ideally, we should all be able to enjoy our neighbourhood - this includes those experiencing homelessness in our community .... ***So being a good neighbor is ensuring that your possessions are stored in a manner so as not to impact [others]*** ... . For the most part, those experiencing homelessness have been really good about supporting this principle. It helps to remove the stigma of homelessness, because you are now part of the community.
- What we say to people is, "Look you've got to be a good neighbor, we might get less complaints if you cleaned up, and then came back at 7 pm. We don't mind people staying in the parks, we just want to ensure that they understand it is a shared community space. (ByLaws)

# 1) Waste and the need for self-winnowing

- 'if it's a lamp that they have to plug in to use, that to me...that is not useful to you. And to be honest with you, we've had so many people ...who get anchored into lugging around...***crap***. And you would feel a weight off you, literally...physically and mentally, if you didn't need.... I mean, when you go into a shelter, you don't *need* 10 blankets' (APD)

## 2a) 'Entrenchment' and self-winnowing

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- 'When people become entrenched, they accumulate a lot of stuff. We were finding that it was becoming much more difficult for them to transport their property and therefore we worked with peer workers to help them **downsize** to a more manageable one cart that they can move around' .... Excessive possessions 'makes it very, very difficult for them to leave all their possessions and have to get rid of it at that point. And we try very hard to not have people entrenched.'



## 2b) Self winnowing and the 'next step'

- '... we are supporting and promoting a 'housing first' model, which means, we need people to access shelters as a first step with the hope of moving them along the housing continuum ... . We cannot support entrenchment and accumulation of property stored outside. I actually think it's a disservice and very inhumane to allow somebody to camp for years in one spot and then come in there to take it down. Because it has become their home. So to be honest, I find that ***it is much more humane for us to keep moving people until the time when they have the courage and feel that they can actually move to the next step***.' '

Bylaw

## 2c) Entrenchment and inappropriate property performances

- ‘You’re responsible with what you do with your property... You have the right to your property with you, and you’re responsible for it..... [But others are] unsuccessful in making life choices time and time again .... ***[they] disregard [their] own rights to that property - [they] fetter it to others*** ... by the choices you are making’ (APD)
- ‘... we help as much as we can. But there eventually comes a point where, okay, you don’t want to help [winnow], you want to do what you want to do. And that’s it. So your stuff is going to the dump’ (CP Police).

# Reflections

belongings matter

belongings are a marker of  
propertied personhood

belongings help people belong,  
but also makes them  
displaceable.

link to other sites of  
dispossession: 'a great waste of  
time, a great

waste of energy, and a great  
waste of substance'