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**“But I Want That One”: Consumer Citizenship and the
Politics of Exclusion, Public Space and Homelessness
In the Gay Ghetto**

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In this paper I will first describe how commodities are ‘promiscuously’ displayed by homeless queer youth in San Francisco in their attempts to pass as not only normal, but affluent. I will argue that when a youth successfully displays the signs of these commodities, they become part of a prosthetic shield that wraps around him or her. These shields protect homeless queer youth from the status degradation inherent in being classified as homeless. Thereby, homeless queer youth use the sign of the commodity to prevent being continually marked by spoiled identities. Their struggles reveal contradictions in the differential allocation of citizenship in which those who pass as ‘normal’ are granted the right to consume public space unmolested. I will conclude by suggesting that there has been a primarily unobserved convergence of neoliberal social policies within both San Francisco and gay politics detrimental to poor and otherwise marginal people.

Introduction

The text below is an extraction from my fieldnotes taken at a daytime drop-in center for homeless queer youth in San Francisco. It describes a verbal exchange between one such male youth and a non-homeless, middle aged member of an organization promoting generational interaction between older and younger gay men. To begin facilitating a pedagogical group discussion with the youth about the experience of older gay men, the man asked them the following question and received the subsequent reply:

‘Imagine older people walking around the Castro [Upper Middle Class gay neighborhood in San Francisco]. How do you think it feels for them?’

Orion, sitting to my right, said flatly but pointedly: ‘We’re like raw meat to them. Like pork chops.’

The facilitator gave a sidelong glance towards Orion without actually looking at him. He did not acknowledge Orion’s words. Rather, after pausing for a moment he asked the group, ‘What do you think it’s like to be old in the Castro?’

Orion’s quip has many meanings and potential interpretations, but its purpose here is to introduce the topic of this paper: consumption. Orion characterizes the relationship between older gay men and young queers as one of exchange by representing young queers as inanimate and material objects that are consumed (meat and pork chops). The implied relations are immediately consumeristic: men literally eat the youth. While not named as such in his comment, Orion’s words connote class relations based on a power differential between consumers and producers.

Theorists of neoliberalism (Comaroff & Comaroff 2001, Katz 1990, D’emilio 1988) have argued that late modernity is marked by a change in capitalistic forms in which people, citizens and families were transformed from producers into consumers. While Orion’s comment certainly casts the older gay men as consumers, he casts the youth not as producer but as product. He thus articulates a collapse of producer into product: as their labor is the product, there is little

distinction between the two. For Marx (1867), fetishism – the idea that things have soul and spirit – occurs when the “social relation between men ... assumes ... the fantastic form of relation between things” (72). Orion reverses Marx’s notion of the incorporation of spirit into commodity – his implied exchange involves not the animation and gifting of life to material objects, but the taking of life from animate and living persons. Note that Orion’s statement differs from Marx’s ideas on alienation. Not only are youth alienated from their labor: they are also alienated from themselves. His simile thus implies either: a) that in the process of consumption, the life of the youth is taken away; or, b) their life has already been extracted and they already are walking commodities, or even, walking dead meat. This one interpretation of Orion’s multivalent words introduces the theoretical question explored by this paper: How does consumption and its display help structure public space and relations of labor, status and class?

San Francisco: Economy on Steroids

San Francisco has long served as an American symbol of prosperity and new-found opportunity. The luck and fortunes of innovative, determined, and plucky citizens are thought to turn on a dime in this land of milk and honey. This image was first crafted in the 19th century when ‘the golden gate’ was used as a symbol to attract settlers and workers to California and the Bay Area. A recent national fascination with San Francisco’s skyrocketing rental and housing prices is just one incarnation of an enduring national love-affair with emergent forms of capital accumulation in its metropolitan area. The city’s history of boom economies – gold, agriculture, real estate, computer, information, dot-com and now biotech – suggests a metropolitan area endlessly innovative in reformulating itself so as to avoid any enduring bust. While the image is national, city officials cultivate associations between this *economic* symbolism and the virtues of its citizenry. The sole paragraph on the municipality’s portal webpage demonstrates this point:

San Francisco was incorporated as a City on April 15th, 1850 by act of the Legislature. Although City Government has played a key role in San Francisco's development, the true wealth of this City resides with the creative and entrepreneurial spirit of its pioneering Citizens. The City today is governed by the Mayor and the Board of Supervisors.¹

The municipality characterizes the city's wealth as embodied in the creativity and entrepreneurial spirit of its citizens. The discordance between the virtues the city extols in its model citizenry and those commonly ascribed to 'the homeless' may help explain why homelessness has taken on such a prominent role in the city's recent politics.

If any phenomenon in the last two decades has posed a symbolic threat to San Francisco's hyper-muscular economic image, it would be the growing visibility of homeless people on its streets. The increasing salience of homelessness in public, election, and government discourse can in part be explained by the city's largest hotel lobbying group dubbing the homeless a major threat to the city's tourism industry. However, if homelessness had increased – a claim not contested by any side until recently – there was a conspicuous absence in the public discourse concerning one of its most obvious explanations: that the continuous lack of a ceiling to its housing prices might well explain the rising number of people in San Francisco unable to sleep under one. The absence of this explanation for the rise of homelessness – as well as a dearth of discourse about economic oppression and inequality – represents just one of many potent contradictions in the politics of homelessness in San Francisco and the nation.

In 2004 Gavin Newsom won the mayoral race by running on a tough-love homelessness platform. Having cut his teeth on reducing services to homeless people, Newsom would move on to become the city's media-darling mayor. When he defied the state by having City Hall issue marriage certificates to same-sex couples, the ensuing media and legal frenzy would make him a national, and even international, figure. Newsom's actions, statements and policies reveal his penchant for neoliberal governance which made him – a Democrat – not terribly different from the Republican gubernatorial candidate who won in the same year. Like Arnold

Schwarzenegger, Newsom declared himself economically conservative but socially liberal: his policies towards the poor are demonstrative of the former while his pro-gay policies are demonstrative of the later.

Scat, You Homeless People!

(H)orrified passers-by encountered Dinovo, a one-legged drug addict, lying in his own vomit at high noon last summer on the sidewalk near 16th Street and South Van Ness Avenue. He was naked from the waist down. ...

By the city's last count, there were some 2,000 people living on the streets like Dinovo - acting out, sleeping, eating, doing drugs, begging, performing all bodily functions, often in the paths of those who would shop, do business, dine or be entertained in San Francisco. ...

"I was disturbed by it for a week," said Embarcadero resident Julie Patterson, 24, recalling the day she saw a man defecating in the street near Fisherman's Wharf. ...

Awakened, Dinovo cursed bystanders, ate from a trash can, then urinated and gushed diarrhea into the street. ...

There is an untabulated cost, too - lost business revenues and tax money because people like Dave and Karen Myers would rather skip a night of entertainment in San Francisco than have to encounter some of the[se] scenes.

San Francisco Chronicle
 'Squalor in the Street'
 Patrick Hodge
 Nov 4, 2001

The notion of the 'public good' is often central to discussions about homelessness. In San Francisco, much of the public and government discourse constructs homeless people as a threat to the collective good of the social body. Since the World Trade Center bombings the predominant discourses about the homeless in San Francisco's mass media have exuded little sympathy for homeless people's suffering or condition. Instead, homelessness has been successfully framed by the powerful economic interests behind two punitive ballot measures and Newsom's mayoral candidacy as the result not of poverty, but of choice and drug abuse. Members of the media reserved their sympathy instead for the other members of the polis who the homeless were thought to disgust, distress, burden and endanger: tourists, shop keepers, children and women, to name but a few.

The tone of media discourse was especially negative in the months before the vote on two ballot measures directed at disciplining homeless people and panhandlers (Proposition N in 2002 called the ‘Care, Not Cash Initiative’ and Proposition M in 2003 called the ‘Aggressive Panhandling Ordinance’). Newspaper articles and TV news broadcasts described in graphic detail the purported smell and appearance of the homeless, with a special focus – or one might say a fixation – on urine, feces, vomit, and diarrhea. Since this short paper cannot do justice to the frequency and salaciousness of these articles, a statistical analysis will have to suffice. A search for columns and articles on the *San Francisco Chronicle’s* website from 1998 onwards (performed 4/17/2006) containing the following combinations of words had the corresponding results: ‘homeless’ and ‘defecate’ (113 articles); ‘homeless’ and ‘feces’ (90 articles); and, ‘homeless’ and ‘urination’ (338 articles).ⁱⁱ For comparison, a search for the words ‘businessman’ and ‘feces’ found 2 articles.

Similar characterizations of homeless people were employed by the well-funded media campaigns for Propositions N (2002) and M (2003). Prominently displayed on billboards, in bus stops, and train and subway stations, each ad depicted the head and torso of a person looking out towards the viewer wearing a concerned or exasperated expression. The person – of varying genders, ages and skin colors – invariably held up a piece of cardboard displaying a handwritten message in black marker, thereby inverting the iconic mode of address used by some homeless people to deliver their messages of need. Two of the messages written on the signs read: “*I don’t want to hold my breath past every alley,*” and “*We’re all sick of stepping over garbage and waste, averting our eyes to people shooting up on doorsteps ...*”

At times the public good is tacit or taken for granted, such as in the common presupposition that crime is always bad for the social body, and thus that policing crime must be good for it. At other times, the social good is specifically posited. As the excerpt of the

newspaper article opening this section demonstrates, one common frame is that the costs of homelessness also include the psychic damage experienced by nonhomeless pedestrians when merely witnessing homeless people and the purported negative effects on businesses that result. In this construction, unencumbered, mass leisure consumption is posited as the highest social good for San Francisco and homeless people are dubbed deficient in both citizenship and consumption. They not only fail to consume (at least in ways the journalists would like), but threaten the consumption of others through the negative spectacle of their mere presence.

Despite all the media focus on bodily fluids in public space, calls for more public restrooms to reduce them did not emerge. Within a quarter mile of the heart of the Castro I counted less than a dozen public bathrooms.ⁱⁱⁱ Given the density of the Castro area and its lack of public restrooms, it is remarkable that there is not more feces and urine on the street and sidewalks. While many newspaper accounts made it sound as if public defecation was a regular occurrence, I never observed nor was made aware of any homeless young queers doing so. The only times that I did observe any of them urinating in public was when it was late at night, no public restrooms were available and the area was vacant of pedestrians. The lack of concern for the availability of public restrooms amidst media coverage dominated by reporting on bodily fluids represents yet another potent contradiction in the discourse and experience of homelessness.

Urban Space and Theory

This paper draws upon academic literature that addresses the ways that public and urban space are performed. Urban sociologists made the city a valid object of sociological study (Castells 1976a, 1976b): their work contributed to a retheorization of space as more variegated and flexible than posited by other modernist theories. Urban anthropology has linked concepts from this scholarly work with dramaturgical theories of the rituals of ‘primitive’ societies (e.g.,

Turner 1964) to study the performances and practices of public space. The study of cultures that are mobile and/or dispersed – diasporas, refugees, foreign nationals, or migrant workers (e.g., Ong 1999, Patton and Sanchez 2001, Appadurai 1997) – has similarly contributed to a useful reworking of the relation between culture and fixed spaces. Both lines of work have focused upon space and location as practiced and performed rather than given and static (Ferguson 1997). Queer scholarship on the performance of *public* space has also theorized how people are interpolated (e.g., Bultler 1993, Silvermann 1992)^{iv} into and excluded from social worlds; how men use non-verbal communication in the theater of sexual cruising and negotiation; how proximate outsiders are often kept unaware of even the existence of these social worlds; and, how multiple social worlds coexist and interpenetrate within the same public space (e.g., Warner 2002, 1999; Dowsett 2000; Henriksson and Mansson 1995; Taylor and Lourea 1992; Chauncey 1994; Humphries 1975). These theorizations of public and private space can inform our understanding of the various worlds that homeless queer youth leave, create, traverse, and are excluded from.

Care, Not Cash

While the bills that passed into law in 2002 and 2003 did not legally codify the symbolic and cultural representations of homelessness used to promote them, their sponsors nonetheless achieved an astounding reshuffling of terms, objects and actors that – unconnected to the literal purpose of the proposition – created a very new moral economy of homelessness. The following ad demonstrates this:



Here, giving change to panhandlers – what would have more typically been seen as a small act of individual charity – is recast as a naïve and even hedonistic act. The unwitting giver of change thereby is cast as not only causing harm to its recipient – the ostensibly drug using panhandler – but to the public good as well. Other ads in the campaign were even more explicit about the damage caused to the public good by the people who give money to panhandlers. The text of two other ads read:

*Today I adopted a cat,
gave some change
and shut down my corner grocer.*

*Today I did Tai Chi,
donated some change
and helped spread STDs.*

These ads implicate people who give change to panhandlers as complicit in the moral bankruptcy they assign to the latter: change givers can be blamed for the closing of businesses and the growth of social problems like STDs and drug abuse. Given that public criticism of the campaign's representations of homeless people and panhandlers was minimal, the campaigners appear to have successfully posited a specifically new relationship between panhandlers, people who give change to panhandlers and drug abuse.

This inversion startlingly recasts the position of the campaigners – sight unseen the hotel lobby – as the true protectors of public good. A remarkable inversion happens in this and similar campaigns: the equation of 'giving,' and thereby of 'charity,' to hurting the collective body. Here, 'giving hurts,' and thus 'not giving' or 'taking away' helps. Perhaps not giving is even a

sign of love and charity: certainly a tough love at that. The contradiction remained primarily unacknowledged in the larger media circuits. While this lack of recognition could be partly attributed to the local media's attention to another act of tough love – U.S. plans to invade Iraq – there is a striking parallel between the symbolic transformations made by the 'Care Not Cash' campaign and those made by the executive branch. In San Francisco, a primarily unobserved and symbolically unresolved equation was made between helping and hurting, while at the national level an equation was made between war and peace.^v

There is another unexpected parallel with the citywide 'Care Not Cash' campaign, but this time at the neighborhood level. The rhetoric of the campaign parallels rhetoric employed two years earlier by the Merchants of Upper Market and Castro Association (MUMC). The MUMC is a nonprofit business association of primarily gay-owned and/or gay-themed businesses in and around the Castro area of San Francisco. The organization describes its purpose on its website as follows:

MUMC is involved in civic efforts and small business issues. It lobbies The City for the well-being of its merchants and strives to maintain harmony within the neighborhood. MUMC has been successful in its efforts to maintain diversity, dissuade panhandling, preserve historic architecture, direct beautification projects and produce events and activities that reflect the community's appreciation of a good time for all.^{vi}

In 2001 the MUMC launched a campaign to discourage panhandling; they called it their 'Make Change' campaign. It entailed advertisements on placards and posters that were displayed in the windows of many businesses in the area. The campaign's tagline was: 'Make Change: Don't Give it Out.' Most of the space of the poster was taken up by a graphic of the face-side of a U.S. quarter (coin) surrounded and overlaid by the iconic symbol that has come to mean 'banned': a red circle with a line through it. The text of this ad told people not to give spare change to panhandlers and suggested they instead give their money to service agencies. The ad even suggested giving money directly to the MUMC, which would in turn make such donations on the

giver's behalf. No contributions to any form of service have been made in the 4 years since the launch of the campaign.

As in the 'Care, Not Cash' campaign, in the MUMC campaign we see a politicization of individual behavior by ascribing moral significance to individual acts and their effects on the collective body. These two cases provide an example of what Lauren Berlant (1997) calls the simultaneously politicization of the private while shortening the horizon of the public. This emphasis on the political importance of individual, private acts – sexual, procreative, economic, consumeristic, patriotic – diverts attention from the role of the state, structural factors and institutional actors on any number of political issues and social problems.^{vii} It seems likely that the private media firm that produced the 'Care, Not Cash' campaign was inspired by the MUMC campaign. In the least, its designers were aware of it. Towards the end of the paper I will return to this issue to consider what it might mean that a gay business association was ahead of the curve and even trailblazing in the symbolic and economic neoliberalisation of homelessness.

How Can You Tell Someone Is Homeless?

While there are certainly symbols the media uses to characterize homeless people, government bureaucrats and scientific researchers have developed their own taxonomies to identify them. The instructions that were given to 250^{viii} volunteers who one drizzly night in January of 2005 fanned out through the streets of San Francisco to count homeless people provides an example of this relevant to San Francisco government. The checklist reads:

WHOM TO COUNT

- *Walking or standing “with no purpose” (loitering)*
- *Panhandling (with or without cup/sign)*
- *Carrying bags/backpacks/garbage bags/suitcases/blankets/bedrolls*
- *With shopping cart containing personal belongings*
- *Recycling, especially large numbers of items*
- *Sleeping on the street*
- *Vehicles with windows covered (see below)*
- *Tents (see below)*
- *Makeshift lean-tos (see below)*
- *Boxes (see below)*
- *Disheveled*
- *Inebriated/passed out on sidewalk*

DO NOT (AUTOMATICALLY) COUNT

- *People engaged in illegal activities (drug activity, prostitution)*
- *People leaving bars/other establishments*
- *People waiting for busses*

The volunteers’ task was to subject all people in all public spaces in San Francisco to this checklist, and when categorizing someone as homeless according to these criteria, to record observed (but not solicited) information about their number, gender, location, race and age. While the idea was that it was a count of homeless people in the city during one day – or 24 hours – in practice the counting took place in an eight-hour window between 10 PM and 6 AM. The tally of the count, 6,248, was more than 2,000 less than that of another count conducted by 300 volunteers on an unseasonably warm October night in 2002. In his first annual ‘State of

Homelessness in the City’ address, Mayor Newsom deployed these numbers to argue that his punitive homeless policies – combined with fewer than 100 new rooms in a supportive housing project – had reduced by 2000 the number of homeless people on the city’s streets.

The count was not conducted for this purpose. While it was sponsored by the city government, the count was mandated by the Department of Housing and Urban Development: in order to receive federal funding each city was required to perform a count every other year. The number from this count became, more or less, what Bruno Latour (1987) would call an immutable mobile – an object bequeathed with ‘factness’ which crosses boundaries and moves to other domains beyond the contexts of its own production. By excerpting the instructions used in the methodology of the count, I attempt to lift the veil and make the ‘black box’^{ix} of the fact transparent so that it will no longer seem so.

The volunteer instructions make apparent the modernist presupposition that external observers – in this case lay observers – are able to perceive the ontological status of others in the urban polis simply by looking at them. The city instructed its enumerators to subject everyone they saw to a taxonomic checklist of homelessness. The ‘sign,’ a preoccupation of modernist and postmodernist thought, is believed to convey or demonstrate the internal being of the object that displays it. This construction of relationship between viewer and object relates to both sides of the social process Foucault (1995) saw embedded in Jeremy Bentham’s prison design for the panopticon. I will show below that homeless queer youth act reflexively to evade the social judgment of others who would characterize them as homeless, poor, sex workers or drug users. While their actions are demonstrative of the disciplining function that Foucault argues the panopticon produces in practices of individual ‘self-surveillance’ and ‘self-care,’ the classificatory list of characteristics is demonstrative of the direct and immediate desire of the state to see, surveil, and know its population – and particularly those parts it deems a problem.

During the count, the observers were considered capable of scanning a field and appropriately recognizing, classifying and counting all the relevant objects within it.^x Their observations, discriminations, and classifications were then tallied, aggregated, and interpolated into the fantasy of an all-seeing eye of the state. However, as the next section will show, homeless queer youth in San Francisco adopt a strategy of subverting signs to defend themselves from the status degradation (Garfinkel 1956) they experience when they are recognized and classified as homeless. While homeless people are commonly represented as displaying private behavior in public (such as sleeping, urinating, defecating and doing drugs), some homeless do not, so to speak, wear their homelessness on their sleeve. Indeed, if homeless people do not look homeless, how can statisticians, lay enumerators, or even service providers even identify them in the first place?

Counting Homeless Youth in the Castro

The Castro neighborhood is widely considered both the center of the city's gay community and an international gay 'Mecca.' I learned from the director of a public youth services program about a count of homeless gay youth conducted in the Castro by a large private youth services agency in the city. The agency reported authoritatively to the city supervisors that there were only 12 homeless youth in the Castro.^{xi xii} It was immediately apparent to both me and the director that their estimate was absurdly low. The experience from which we each garnered our differential knowledge related to our different professional work and experiences with exactly this group. The director felt the agency's foray into the Castro was both symbolic and territorial, basing his conclusion on three factors: 1) he had not been consulted or even informed about the survey even though he worked with exactly the group the agency was counting; 2) the agency at the time provided no services in that neighborhood; 3) they may have been threatened by newly allocated funding for an upstart agency to provide services to homeless queer youth.

While their count appears to have served the agency's interests by minimizing the apparent need for a competitor, the surveyors also shared similar presumptions with the purveyors of the city's official homeless count. In both counts homeless people were presumed to be immediately transparent to the gaze of outside observers.

Foucault (1978) wrote about how the modernist conception of homosexuality inverted attention away from the outward direction of sexual acts and towards a kind of interior androgyny. He argued that this shift reflected a science and medicine that became obsessed with internal revelations, desires, fantasies, and dreams which could stand in opposition to outward appearances. In the case of homelessness, both its popular and scientific classification rests upon an extremely transparent relationship between outward manifestation and interior being. Thereby, if the homosexual's problematic interiority was thought to be concealed by outward appearances, the visual classification of the homeless would seem to have a quite different relationship between interior and exterior. Similar to the representation of the homeless in the media descriptions and campaign ads discussed earlier, the survey design reduces the homeless to surface appearances only. Put simply, in all three mediums they are caricatures. They lack any secret identities, desires and psyches to be coaxed into revelation, or any acknowledged subjectivity whatsoever.^{xiii} I argue below that homeless queer youth experience embodied tensions resulting from the symbolic contradictions between two of the categories they straddle: a sexuality characterized by an untransparent interiority and a state of homelessness characterized by an entirely transparent exteriority.^{xiv}

Homeless Queer Youth Eluding the Gaze

The purpose of this paper is not to deconstruct the statistical, methodological, or cultural practices of counting homeless or queer people. Rather, it uses the checklist of 'signs' of homelessness as a foil from which to articulate the phenomenon of homeless queer youth doing

their damndest to appear anything but homeless. A modernist checklist of signs of homelessness may seem naïve, dated or theoretically bankrupt. It nonetheless serves as a reasonable measure of the gross ‘signs’ that have come to be symbolically associated with homelessness: shopping carts, carrying many bags, panhandling, sleeping on the street or in public places, and ‘standing with no purpose.’

Attiring One’s Body: Keeping Up Appearances

Living on the street is not only hard on one’s body and psyche; it is hard on one’s belongings. Clothing, bodies, and bags dirty rapidly when their owners sit, sleep and spend most of their time on sidewalks, in parks and in squats. The attention homeless queer youth placed on being clean was brought home to me when I bumped into Aquarius one night on the street in the Castro. He took me to the apartment of a burned out apartment building that was his squat for many weeks. As it had been raining for many days and the roof three stories above us was burned out, water cascaded down the walls and from the ceilings. Aquarius was excited to show me and his long-term trans-girlfriend the belongings of the former tenants that remained in other parts of the building. To my great surprise he gave each of us a pair of latex gloves to help us keep our hands and clothing clean while we riffled through the piles of wet, charred and creepy belongings. This experience made it clear to me how important passing as a pedestrian above suspicion was for Aquarius. While he lived in poverty with at best a duffle bag of belongings, Aquarius had managed to acquire and save latex gloves for just such excursions. Keeping oneself groomed, bathed, dressed in clean clothes and continuously able to get to a bathroom is a nearly full-time job for many homeless people. For those of us with homes, jobs, stored clean clothes, showers, and bathrooms easily at hand, it is hard to imagine what a heroic endeavor keeping up appearances can be.^{xv}

With the exception of those regularly staying at a shelter, it is extremely difficult for homeless people to find places to bathe in San Francisco. Nearly all the city's shelters evicted their clients during the day – sometimes as early as 6AM – and did not allow their return until after 9 or 10 PM. The narrow window before lights-out produced a bottleneck for clients to use the limited shower facilities. At the facility to which I walked Speedy, Mia and a friend of hers one night around 11PM, clients slept on blue gym mats on the floor of a public gymnasium where there was no shower. But for many, the point was moot: more than half of my informants were loath to use shelters. Many of the homeless people I got to know – queer and non-queer alike – told me that they would never stay in a city shelter again. Most explained this decision as the result of experiencing an intense sense of personal discomfort and often danger when staying in shelters. I was told story after story of homeless queer youth being threatened, physically assaulted, sexually harassed, sexually assaulted or witnessing violence while staying in shelters. Eric, for example, described the night he vowed to never stay in a shelter again after lying awake all night while the man next to him thrashed about and screamed. Rachel, under 18 for most of my fieldwork, told me about pulling back the shower curtain when taking a shower at a shelter to find, as she put it, 'a little Mexican whacking-off while trying to peek in at me.'

While complaints abound in San Francisco about homeless people bathing in public libraries and bus station bathrooms, the association of homeless people to public bathrooms is not specific to the city. The association circulates so widely as to provide plot lines and references for national syndicated television shows. Homeless people and public bathrooms enter the storylines or one-off jokes for reality police shows ('Cops'), crime drama shows ('CSI' and 'Law & Order'), and sitcoms ('The Family Guy' and 'The Simpsons'). When such associations are made, the unasked question that should be posed is: "If not in these spaces, then where are homeless people supposed to bathe?" There is only one public facility in San

Francisco that had open access to showers for homeless people on weekends: 4 hours on Saturdays for men and 4 hours on Sundays for women. Considering the dearth of outdoor access public bathrooms across the city, homeless people attempt as well as possible to make use of the bathrooms available in public facilities, private businesses and nonprofit organizations.

While public facilities like libraries cannot legally justify excluding homeless patrons from the use of their bathrooms, and nonprofit community centers also have some difficulty doing so, private businesses have no such inhibitions. Those of us who otherwise pass as middle class pedestrians may find ourselves out and about in the polis with the need – perhaps urgent – to use a bathroom. Readers should be quite familiar with the signs posted ubiquitously in businesses: ‘restrooms are for customers only.’ Yet most readers will also have used the bathrooms of any number of businesses while not being customers: rather, we passed *as if* we were customers, and were thereby granted access to them (Mitchell 2001). Many homeless people do not have this luxury. Even if they are able to go through the remarkable effort to appear clean, coordinated and presentable, their relentless need to continually use such facilities makes them quickly stand out to a business’s employees.

Access to the bathrooms at the San Francisco LGBT Center provides a perfect example. While I never had anything but courteous or indifferent interactions with the front desk staff when getting the bathroom key, I witnessed many times homeless young queers being given the key begrudgingly, reluctantly and accompanied with an unambiguously suspicious look. Indeed, the bathrooms were originally intended to be open access – as it was, after all, a community center. Shortly after opening in 2003, the center decided to have its staff function as bathroom gatekeepers: this decision was clearly a direct response to the presence of my homeless informants. In its first year the center temporarily housed a queer youth drop-in center

frequented by homeless youth: those bathrooms were unlocked once the program had moved back into its renovated building.

Even faced with such practical difficulties, many homeless young queers went to considerable effort to keep themselves clean and to wear both fashionable and clean clothes. Common activities among the youth while spending time at this drop-in center included shaving, hair washing, hair dying, teeth brushing and hair cutting. The skill with which many did their hair astounded me. Two examples include Speedy's blondish hair that was shaved crew-cut short except for his bangs, which were dyed black, and Joseph's two tone dye job which he told me he had somehow achieved with a box of jell-o. To my eye these haircuts and hair-dyes looked extremely professional; they were far more skillfully done, complex and stylish than the cheap haircuts I purchased for myself.

Are You a Bag Person?

Because homeless people often need to secure their belongings while moving around public spaces, they sometimes use shopping carts, large backpacks, duffle bags, or suitcases to carry their belongings with them. The vast majority of young homeless queers would not have been caught dead pushing a shopping cart, even though many of their local, proximate, and primarily non-queer identified homeless 'peers' did so in the same public spaces. My homeless informants tried their best to carry as few items as possible and often invested considerable time and energy in hiding their belongings in public and private spaces. Because this created a risk that their belongings would be pilfered, ruined, or thrown out, Troy and Dusty stashed their prolific, expensive, and illegally procured clothing items far and wide across the city. The sheer number of hiding places helped to ensure that not all of their belongings would simultaneously meet an unfortunate end.^{xvi}

When carrying items on their body, many homeless queer youth used small, stylish, new looking backpacks or shoulder bags. Given that many of them were trying to pass as younger than they actually were, carrying a backpack allowed them to look like students. Styled shoulder bags are a mark of distinction and fashion in San Francisco generally and the gay community particularly. Those higher on the social ladder tried to hide their homelessness by carrying smaller backpacks and shoulder bags. This effort indicated their awareness that a loaded or stuffed ‘school-style’ backpack might attract potential disapprobation or at least suspicion from various and sundry members of the polis. I found one indicator of how bags became a ‘mark of distinction’ in the gay community within the banner ad of a popular gay internet site used by many homeless young queers to arrange sexual, and sometimes drug, connections and exchanges. The banner ads were designed by an online, harm-reduction and HIV-prevention intervention that included a series of advice tips for picking up tricks (gay lingo for casual sexual partners). One ad features a photo of a male torso in tee-shirt with a school-style backpack accompanied by text which reads: ‘[B]e careful of men with backpacks, they might borrow stuff. . . .’ The ad suggests to the viewer that the presence of a backpack on a (young) trick increases the likelihood that he might steal from you. While the ad does not directly state that such men could be homeless, its intentionally vague allusions and its use of euphemism to imply men with backpacks steal suggests a social disapprobation to saying directly: ‘don’t have sex with homeless and/or poor men.’ The ad intends to enable its readers to discriminate various forms of difference from surface appearances, educating them in a semiotics of a style to identify untrustworthy, or less trustworthy, people. Agamben (2005) argues that euphemism – etymologically meaning ‘to worship in silence’ – grants what is not said all the more charmed power. Under his logic, this message’s use of euphemism would suggest the power of the unspoken injunction and the overdetermined symbolism associated with homeless and poor

people. The ad also demonstrates that the signs of homelessness are historically situated and space and time specific rather than universal and unchanging. Signs of a homelessness in the 1980s in San Francisco included the donning of backpacking-style backpack and a beatnik aesthetic: today it has become the donning of a school style backpack and an emphasis on appearing clean, fashionable and affluent. My prediction would be that as suspicion of people carrying bulkier bags increases, homeless young queers will move to even smaller shoulder bags. While smaller bags are often more fashionable and expensive, they hold fewer belongings, are harder to carry and are harder on one's back.^{xvii}

Commodities on Parade

Fieldnote Extract, May 2005

I spent the afternoon with Shane and a friend of his he had wanted me to meet named Miraculous. Shane had confided in me that he was concerned that Miraculous would or could be the first person close to him to die of AIDS: his health was seriously deteriorating, he was not on HIV medications, and his situation was not stable enough for him to negotiate the complex bureaucratic system between him and treatment. Miraculous's plight was especially charged for Shane because he too had AIDS. It was because he was under 25 and had an AIDS diagnosis that Shane had – for the time being – secured the apartment where he and Miraculous were staying. We ate at a cheap burrito place in the Tenderloin and Shane bought Miraculous an enormous burrito that he could only eat a small portion of. After dinner, I walked leisurely with them as they noisily shuffled their flip flops along the pavement and enjoyed the sunny afternoon light. We passed numerous brightly lit store windows crammed full of electronics and tucked in between the adult theaters and bookstores. Miraculous and Shane stopped at one window to look at a display of CD players for sale and comment on the relative coolness and cuteness of the various models. Shane mentioned that he wanted to spend the money from a check he had just cashed to buy a shiny, metallic-blue Sony CD player listed at over a \$100. His desire surprised me, partly because I had assumed that his fixed income check could not be a lot of money and partly because he already held in his hand a new, modern, and functional portable CD player. In fact, he had been listening to dance music from it all afternoon with one headphone removed so that he could simultaneously talk with us while we walked. The flow of our conversation was punctuated occasionally with expressions like 'Oh, wait, I love this song,' as Shane reacted to music that neither Miraculous nor I could hear. When I said 'but you already have one ...' he answered with a laugh and a bit of irony 'But I want *that* one.'

Consumer items circulate fast and furious on the street. A few specific examples include a black leather jacket on Stripe one day and Marlina the next, a lime green plastic belt on Tommy one day and Stephen another, or a yellow Sony CD player in Dan's hands one hour and Bling's the next. Brand name electronics, clothing, shoes, bags, and other accessories carry

meaning and are recognizable to those with distinction. The importance to homeless young queers of recognizing and displaying branded commodities became apparent in a casual conversation I was having with Ted. I had complimented Ted on his shoes, which I knew cost more than 200 dollars and were popular with fashionable twenty- and thirty-something San Franciscans. He described to me the Movado™ watch he had picked-up in the street economy: he proudly said that he had gone into a store to price and discovered its retail cost was 800 dollars. I asked him delicately why homeless young people in the Castro invested so much time, energy, and resources in obtaining such items while, at least according to researchers (Auerswald and Eyre 2002), those only a quarter of a mile away in the Haight-Ashbury did not. With a sneer and a slight shake of his head he answered: “I don’t know. I don’t know what’s wrong with them. I don’t know why anyone’d want to look homeless when they don’t have to.” At that moment Ted and I were operating in different epistemological worlds. The desirability and importance of appearing fashionable and affluent was so self-evident to Ted that he was not at that moment able to register the implicit moral economy of my question. Its moral subtext had been anthropological: “What’s wrong in the social body that homeless youth feel the need to spend their extremely limited resources on expensive consumer items while they go hungry and sleep on the street?”

Electronics

Electronic commodities are prominently on display in San Francisco’s public spaces. Because pedestrians often actively use them, these commodities not only absorb the user’s attention but also that of the pedestrians who observe them. Pedestrians are often made aware of such electronics when other pedestrians use cell phones, blue tooth headsets, laptops, electronic games, PDAs and CD or digital audio players. The use of these products in public represents a

particular act of consumption focused not on their actual points of purchase but their use in public. While the domestic space has been rightly identified as a focal point of consumption in the 20th century (e.g., Cohen 2003), the mobility of electronics has moved the consumption of many products out of the home and into public view (e.g., Mitchell 2005, Jain 2002).

I often felt that the name of the game on the street was musical cell phones, as I could never predict in whose hands I would see them next. Attention would be drawn to the phone when they would look up someone's number or ask for someone's phone number so that they could enter it into their phone. When I tried to get their phone numbers the gig would often be up: it would become quickly apparent that the phone was inactivated and there was thus no number to reach them at. When Aquarius was once entering my number into his phone, I asked him if it was likely to be activated. He joked: 'Yeah, if I can get it together.' He then laughed and said rhetorically: 'Yeah, like that's gonna happen.'^{xviii} A number of times when I did receive a number for an activated phone, when calling it just a few hours later the phone had already been deactivated or had changed hands. I was unable to keep up with deleting these numbers from my phone, and by the end of my fieldwork my cell phone was filled with dozens of defunct cell phone numbers.

Performing Consumption: The World of Appearances

[P]roperty now becomes the most easily recognised evidence of a reputable degree of success as distinguished from heroic or signal achievement. It therefore becomes the conventional basis of esteem. Its possession in some amount becomes necessary in order to have any reputable standing in the community. It becomes indispensable to accumulate, to acquire property, in order to retain one's good name.

' Rudolph Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, 1899

That the display of consumer items by homeless young queers was in part based on the *appearance* of their consumption was clear when I investigated some of their actual functionalities. Many of the signal commodities they carried did not function in a traditional sense. For example, Matt had a small, silver electronic item that had the appearance of an

expensive portable digital audio player but was actually a malfunctioning and inexpensive AM/FM receiver from a Walgreen's drug store. Matt nonetheless carried it around religiously for weeks and wore the headphones whether or not he had any batteries. Maverick sometimes wore a pair of the iconic white earbuds that are sold with Apple's Ipod™ (a portable digital audio player) even when he had nothing to plug them into. The jack simply went into one of his empty pockets. While I saw Maverick with actual Ipods on numerous occasions, he always quickly traded them for a combination of money and speed. Likewise, Aquarius carried for a time a new, slick camera cell phone that he was unable to activate due to his lack of credit. He clipped this phone to his belt so that it dangled next to his keys. However, when actually receiving or making a call, he fished out from his pockets a standard less snazzy Metro PCS™ phone. For Aquarius, the higher status but nonfunctional consumer item was used for display, while the functional but lower status item was tucked away from view.

My informants tried to pass at being consumers of high-end products by displaying not only those products, but their branded packaging. This most frequently involved displaying shopping bags empty of the items they signified. While they shunned shopping bags from supermarkets or drug stores, they were interested in bags from places like Abercrombie and Fitch™, The Gap™, Diesel™ or Rolo™ (an upper middle class, gay oriented boutique store). Sometimes the bags connoted high-end consumption, such as when Stephen carried with him for a few days a dainty Carolina blue Tiffany™ shopping bag with the company's trademark black lettering and rope handles. Its functional utility was more than questionable since the bag was small and could hold nothing larger than a loaf of bread. What surprised me more was the cycling of the bag, somewhat like the consumer items I outlined above. Once Stephen was finished, I then spotted the bag in Greta's hands another day, and on still another day, in Stripe's hands.

The circulation of a material item such as a cell phone can easily be interpreted as the accumulation of items that have exchange and cash values. The explanation of the circulation of items which have no cash value, and thereby whose value resides more clearly in the symbolic, is not so readily interpretable through a materialist economics. The interest and meanings homeless queer youth infused into these symbolic items and their display signifies the importance of maintaining an appearance of consumption that for many of them is simply axiomatic. The utility and value of the Tiffany bag was demonstrated by the care with which it was handled by multiple hands, and the sheer amount of time that this paper shopping bag survived ‘pristine’ among homeless informants who struggle to keep themselves clean. While these status bags often served the utilitarian purpose of transporting the belongings of their carriers, they were almost always less convenient and cost effective than other readily available options. Nonetheless, in the symbolic economy of the streets, the value of the bags resided, literally, in their status as labels.^{xix}

Shopping Bags of Citizenship

During my first year of fieldwork the Mayor’s Office and City Hall launched a campaign that bore its own relationship to the symbolics of shopping bags. The campaign originated with an unemployed San Francisco graphic designer who created a poster as a civic response to the bombing of the World Trade Center in New York. After September 11, 2001, many sale indicators were down and there were pervasive fears of an economic depression. In October of 2001, the office of incumbent Mayor Willie Brown distributed 15,000 of the posters to businesses across the city. The following is an image of it:



This and other campaigns were aimed at getting Americans to consume by mobilizing their patriotism and directing it towards the economy, thereby linking civic duty and consumption for American citizens. While this was a home-grown poster, it was not produced in a vacuum: President Bush said famously during a press conference: ‘Americans, go shopping.’^{xx} Nor did this poster stay local. In the ensuing months, the posters were reprinted multiple times, the city sold hundreds of thousands to other cities, and Willie Brown’s office ‘donated’ 20,000 of them to the city of New York. It is noteworthy that more than half of the storefront businesses in the Castro, Market Street, Mission, and Civic Center neighborhoods displayed the posters in their windows. In the spring of 2006, faded versions of the posters could still be found in many store windows.

This ad campaign exemplifies – rather crassly – some of the symbolic and cultural convergences of consumption, patriotism, and citizenship that have been occurring in battles over public space in the United States in general and in San Francisco in particular. In the poster, the flag – the sign of patriotism and citizenship – is transformed into a shopping bag. Its explicit message is that good, patriotic Americans should be out consuming. Less obvious but more relevant to my analysis is a more insidious message: if *displaying* consumption is a sign of patriotism, then all good Americans should also be *displaying* their consumption. The ad achieves this symbolic transformation by collapsing two emblems – a shopping bag and a flag. Its transitive logic follows the path of: one displays one’s patriotism → one displays a flag to

demonstrate one's patriotism → the shopping bag is the flag, so one displays the shopping bag to demonstrate one's patriotism. A tertiary interpretation of the ad is that America is a (perpetually) empty shopping bag needing to be filled: this meaning fits with the slogan that could be seen on bumper stickers and refrigerator magnets in the 1980s and 1990s: 'I shop therefore I am!' This interpretation would then suggest that it is not the commodities in the bag/flag that defines America, but rather a need to fill it with them. The cultural values that link consumption, patriotism and collective good – as evidenced in these local and national symbols – would seem to provide compelling motivation for homeless young queers to carry bags empty of the merchandize of which they are emblematic.

Appearing Young and/or Queer in Interactions with the Police

The experiences of homeless young queers with the police, that I witnessed and that I heard about, differed dramatically from those of other homeless people I got to know. Anthropologist Philippe Bourgois works with homeless middle-aged men who are intravenous drug users in San Francisco, and his rich descriptions of their experiences with police also contrast strongly with those of my informants.^{xxi} Unlike the experiences of Bourgois' informants, the police's treatment of many of my informants was almost gentle. This is not to suggest that my informants did not have regular and punitive interactions with the police or the criminal justice system. The majority of my informants were arrested at least once during my second year of fieldwork and many spent weeks or months in jail. Nor does it mean that I did not hear stories of police violence and maltreatment. However, the stories I heard almost never involved harassment in public spaces located in the 'gay' areas of the city. In fact, my informants' trouble with police rarely ever took place in public spaces at all. When harassment did take place it was usually in a distant part of the city, in a police station, or in jail.

The experience of Greta demonstrates some of the treatment the Castro area police afforded young homeless queers. I had heard through the grapevine that Greta, a white male-to-female transsexual woman in her early twenties, had been disciplined by the privately contracted police of a non-profit community center she frequented. Greta had been going through heroine withdrawal and was struggling to come up with the money she needed for her next fix. I had seen her go through withdrawal many times. While there were usually clients, front desk staff, privately contracted police, and customers present in the center lobby, Greta unexpectedly found herself alone. Reportedly, she punched a hole through a prominently displayed Plexiglas donation box, grabbed a handful of cash (but not all of it), and ran. While no one saw Greta do it, everybody suspected she had done it, in part because of her behavior before the event: when going through withdrawal Greta became extremely agitated and frenetic. As a result, the center's police viewed her as the likely culprit. When Greta returned, the officer on duty did not search her or her belongings, give her a citation, arrest her, handle her brusquely, or even interrogate her in an attempt to get a confession. Rather, the officer simply "86'ed" her from the center – an insider term that means the person has official notice of exclusion from a space and can be arrested for trespassing if he or she returns.

The next time I saw Greta I asked her about the incident. She first said indignantly: 'Nobody saw me, they didn't have any proof.' However, she did not complain about how the officer treated her and did not harbor any specific resentment towards the officer personally. Another time, I saw Mike get 86'ed by the same officer in the public space of the center's lobby. The process had a strong element of Garfinkel's (1956) description of a status degradation ceremony in which the identity of a person as a normal member of a group is removed and replaced by an inferior, deficient, and outside one. I was told that Mike had engaged in inappropriate sexual behavior in a public space of the building and had repeatedly taken small

food items from an onsite business without paying. The officer made Mike stand in the lobby to pose for a Polaroid photo. She then explained the situation to Mike calmly and almost reluctantly. While I felt a great sense of vicarious humiliation for Mike, he was glassy eyed and incoherent and quite possibly did not feel any such emotion. Many of the young, homeless queers described the officers who worked at that center as ‘alright’ and ‘cool,’ and some were even on a first name basis with them.

The interactions between police and my young homeless queer informants contrasted sharply from the stories I heard from the homeless people I encountered while volunteering with a homeless advocacy group, a clinic for sex workers, and a food program. Numerous homeless people told me that police had verbally insulted them and violated their civil rights. I heard stories about false arrests, improper searches, and violent and aggressive police. Many of these ‘adult’ – or least those who could not pass as younger – homeless people told stories of being illegally searched and arrested for possession of drugs and/or paraphernalia found on them during the search. In contrast, my young informants told me that they were often *not* penalized for drug use by police in the wider Castro-Civic Center area even when police officers actually witnessed them in the act of shooting up. Rather than arresting them, the officers gave them admonishments to properly dispose of dirty needles. One informant, Speedy, told me that one officer prefaced her scolding by telling him: “I know you’re a good kid.”

The different police treatment of my informants from other homeless people suggests another potential motivation for their attempts to pass as not homeless. Doing so enabled them to better evade negative police attention, and when they failed to do so, to garner a ‘kinder and gentler’ police interaction. Were they treated different and better because they were, or appeared, young? If so, it helps to explain why so many of the homeless queer people I spent time with wanted to pass as younger than they actually were and why so many of them identified

as or with ‘youth’ well into their 30s. But passing as younger than they actually are is particularly difficult for homeless people because living on the street and the drug addiction that sometimes accompanies this experience take a considerable toll on a person’s body, teeth and skin. While it is noteworthy that youth was a commodity and a sign that most of my informants wanted to possess and display, such a desire does not exist in a vacuum. The value of the appearance of youth in both the local gay community and the wider American culture is also highly valued and commoditized.

One example that supports the claim that the better police treatment afforded to younger queer homeless people was due to their youth (rather than specifically their status as *queer* youth) involves Maggie, a white, 16-year-old heterosexual female. She had been arrested by police for shoplifting in a part of the city not specifically associated with gay people (i.e., not the Castro or the Polk districts). While she had previously led the police and court to believe she was a legal adult, she did not succeed in using her false identity this time. The revelation of her true identity and legal age meant that the officers had to place her within the California juvenile justice system as a ward of the state rather than in jail. Before the officers delivered her for processing, they took her to lunch at a diner and bought her two packs of cigarettes.

While her youth helped explain some of this better treatment, arguably other characteristics may have influenced the officers as well. Were some gay youth treated better because they were white? Because they were queer? Because many of the police in the Castro are gay or lesbian and/or have gone through sensitivity trainings? Because the model of community policing was perhaps more active in the Castro area than in other parts of the city? While it is beyond the purview of this research to answer all these questions adequately, I suspect that their status as ‘young’ and ‘queer’ created a kind of ‘victim status’ rooted in the notion that many queer youth are fleeing bad childhoods. This status served as a protective charm to hold police at a more

respectful distance and afford them better police treatment than that of many other groups of homeless people in the city.

Prosthetic Extensions

While I have focused on the acquisition of status items among homeless, gay youth, the desire to own signs of commodities, labels, and even youth is also quite common among the non-homeless members of the polis. I attended the International AIDS Conference in Bangkok in 2004 as part of my effort to research the researchers, and was amused when – on a mission to get fashionable clothing on the cheap for myself – I saw hundreds of Western conference attendees madly buying Louis Vuitton™, Prada™, Gucci™, Channel™, and Paul Frank™ knockoffs. At any street fair in San Francisco you will see multiple vendors selling knockoffs of upscale brands of watches and sunglasses. If you look around at the other passengers on the city's public buses or subways, you can spot people sporting sunglasses and purses displaying the Christian Dior™, D & G™, Channel™, and Gucci™ labels. Are these items real, or are they knockoffs passing as the originals? While a study of the knockoff phenomena is different from my work, it is relevant that many consumers buy knockoffs to 'pass' as high-end consumers.

Yet while I lacked the knowledge to distinguish knock-off from authentic, many homeless young queers were extremely skilled in making such distinctions. One day in the drop-in center the director mentioned in passing to one of his clients the Gucci™ glasses that appeared on his desk (which he incidentally did not think were real). Greta, who was sitting nearby and not engaged in the conversation, immediately perked up. She hastily grabbed them while saying 'Let me see those.' Within seconds she had turned them around multiple times in her hands, looked at the inside of the ear pieces, and tossed them across the desk while saying dramatically 'They're crap.' What distinguishes my informants from other pedestrians is not their effort to acquire status labels, but that they so often fail in their efforts to pass as legitimate consumers of

them. Unlike many other members of the polis, they do not succeed in appearing as the kind of people who could legitimately buy or own such things.

Bourdieu (1977,1984) argues the successful performance of self requires that one's behavior appear not self-interested, but natural and given. To act successfully a person needs to have the other people in the field (i.e., social context) recognize him within the position he occupies and tacitly grant him the authority to act in that position. While some homeless young queers succeed in 'passing' as the consumers they aspire to be, many of their performances of consumption fall flat.^{xxii}

Some of the preliminary research reported by consumer theorist Michael Katz (2005) could be interpreted as evidence that the display of commodities enables even people who are not poor or homeless to occupy public space. He reportedly is finding the practice of faking cell phone calls to be surprisingly high among his college students. Katz, quoted in the *New York Times*, describes the significance of this phenomenon: "People are turning the technology on its head. They are taking a device that was designed to talk to people who are far away and using it to communicate with people who are directly around them."^{xxiii} Katz's interpretation is useful for understanding the role played by commodities in the lives of both my homeless informants and much broader constituencies of the public: the purchase or possession of commodities is a relationship one holds towards others. His findings and the behavior of homeless young queers offer interesting challenges to the flat neoclassical construction of commodity consumption based only on the atomistic utility functions of individual consumers. Thereby, the attempts of homeless queer youth to appear to be the consumers of cellphone service and the attempts of upper middle class college students to appear to be making calls to important people can be seen as part of similar phenomenon.

Recently I watched an apparently middle class, fashionable woman walking from the subway station in front of me carrying a slightly tattered Saks Fifth Avenue™ bag. The next day I saw a young woman, likely a student at my university, on the bus carrying perhaps her lunch to campus in a Victoria's Secret™ bag. We return to the bag issue – homeless people at their most visible carry their belongings in plastic garbage bags and shopping carts. A bag is just a bag, or is it? Apparently a bag person is not a bag person because they carry a bag or bags with them in public space: a bag person is a bag person due to which kinds of commoditized bags they possess, their number and in what formations they are arranged ... Hefty™, backpacking backpacks and shopping carts, not Gucci™ purses, trendy shoulder bags or Tiffany™ shopping bags. It would seem that there are high brow and low brow 'disposable' bags, and that there are hierarchies of 'disposable' bags that not only my homeless youth, but middle class people too carefully save, preserve and covet.

Conclusion – Consumer Citizenship and the Keys to the City

Certain activities can be seen as connecting individual citizen/subjects to the collective body. These historically have included things like voting, joining or being drafted into the military, paying taxes and giving blood (e.g., Rabinow 2002). Recently members of the academy have argued that the terms of citizenship are active beyond those articulated by Marshall (1965): political, legal and civil citizenship. A litany of academics are arguing that the forms and terms of citizenship are on the move (e.g., Ong 1998).

Building on these arguments I contend that forms of citizenship are shifting in relation to commodity consumption and display, suggesting a kind of consumer citizenship through which one is recognized and constituted as part of a collective body and granted full rights to occupy public space. This form of citizenship does not necessarily require any particular explicit act such as verbal communication, contribution or service, but instead requires a largely unknown

and anonymous audience of people who, when recognizing the sign and self-presentation of consumption in the commodity display of another, grant that person the status of – ironically enough – the unmarked body. What is perhaps most novel about this theory of citizenship is that it requires no specific speech act or explicit relationship to other citizens aside from the contemporaneous occupation of public space. This form of citizenship requires only that others witness one's acts of consumption.

Nonetheless, as with any self-presentation, one can succeed or fail in the attempt to pass at possessing certain forms of distinction. While consumer citizenship thus requires that one demonstrate the possession of consumer products, it also requires the maintenance of an image of properly consuming them. Lauren Berlant (1997) argues that in order for people from marginalized groups – women, people of color, queers, the poor – to exist in the public sphere, they must take on what she calls unmarked, prosthetic bodies. People with marked bodies must unmark themselves: in order to do so they produce a prosthetic body that mimics the unmarked body. While in the U.S. this unmarked body would be marked as white, as male, as heterosexual, and as middle class. These specific marks hold a special magic: when possessed they allow the body to fade away as if into background noise, and thereby, project oneself into the public sphere as an average or generic citizen.

Berlant writes:

Sometimes the commodity becomes a prosthetic body, and apotropaic shield against penetration and further delegitimation; sometimes the body itself becomes the object of public consumption, protected by the distance between the image, performance, and actual form (1997, p. 201).

The relationship of lifestyle politics and liberalism to capitalism and globalism are currently being investigated as means to reinforce neoliberal economic policies in the dismantling of the welfare state. Berlant (1997) argues that within its continued dismantling, the contemporary success of minority movements has become contingent on *not* contesting relationships of class and even helping to enforce them. Wendy Brown (1995) has argued that such is the trade off

these movements have made for partial inclusions into the political body: in exchange for the embrace of and silence about current forms of economic exclusion, gays and other groups get the promise of political inclusion. Michael Warner has more explicitly critical words to say about contemporary gay culture:

Post-Stonewall urban gay men reek of the commodity. We give off the smell of capitalism in rut, and therefore demand of theory a more dialectical view of capitalism than many people have imagination for. (Warner 1993, p. 183)

Events in San Francisco offer some compelling evidence to support these claims of the relationships between capitalism and contemporary gay politics.

The contrast between the two most publicly visible and talked about actions of current San Francisco mayor Gavin Newsom seem contradictory from a conventional definition of 'liberal' that collapses its economic and social meanings. What could it mean that the man who sponsored two propositions designed to punish the homeless not only won the mayoral election, and, once in office, defied the state by issuing same-sex marriage licenses? As articulated earlier, Mayor Newsom advertised himself as fiscally conservative but socially liberal.

The comments of a CNN commentator during the 2006 midterm elections (11/07/2006) is demonstrative for how muddled and overdetermined the symbolic association is between San Francisco and so-called liberal politics. When speaking about how the politics of the likely-to-be Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi might fit with that of average Democrats, the commentator said of Representative Pelosi, 'Well, she's from San Francisco. And we all know what that means. I'll leave it at that.' In some political contexts, emphasizing that a person's home or destination is San Francisco implies that there are a lot of gay people there and that the city is supportive of gay rights, or a more diffuse or abstract 'gayness.' The commentator's succeeding comments, which described Pelosi as left-of-center, suggest his implication was that San Francisco is liberal. But do we know what liberal means anymore?

His comment ‘we all know what that means’ is performative of my point: it implies a shared understanding that people recognize as shared (in Butlerian terms, the audience is interpolated into the collectivity). But the cultural power of his claim lies within its ability to elide the meaning that is its exact opposite: we do not know what it means at all. I would suggest that the descriptor ‘liberal’ has become highly overdetermined as to lack any precision: most Americans, San Franciscans and the commentator himself do not know what ‘liberal’ means anymore. The word has become lost in translation, obscuring the fact that so-called liberal politicians are highly engaged in neoliberal government reforms, and in Newsom’s case, even instrumental in the restriction of civil rights.^{xxiv}

Various political actors and pundits might mean one or many things when they imply San Francisco’s nature: a city of ‘tax and spend liberals,’ a city of sodomites and sinners, a city tolerant of gays, a city with a history of many civil rights movements, a city that welcomed the sexual revolution, a city that contributed to many identity-based social movements, and a city with a diffuse and generic aura of political liberalness. What seems to be lacking in many invocations of San Francisco’s liberal nature are the city’s common economic associations discussed at the opening of this paper: San Francisco is also a city of the gold rush, a city of profit and new forms of capital accumulation, a city where the rent of an average two-bedroom apartment costs \$2500 a month, and a city with one of the most educated populaces in the country. Why, when we talk about politics and San Francisco, does it retain so much of its social, and so little of its economic, implications? Where is that entrepreneurial spirit about which the city brags?

Gay™ San Francisco™

The convergence of symbols in a *New York Times*' photograph is suggestive about contemporary relationships between citizenship, branding, consumerism, nationalism and patriotism in contemporary mainstream gay politics.



Image on coverpage of New York Times' online version (11/06/05). www.nytimes.com

The image was part of the papers' coverage of Britain's legalization of same-sex unions the day before.

This image ran on the cover page of the online version of the *New York Times* on the day after Britain legalized same-sex civil unions. While this image is not American, the combination of symbols resonates with the relationships between commodity, citizenship and gay culture this paper attempts to track. That the image comes from Britain also suggests that these relationships may not only be local and national, but global as well. The photo is of the icon most representative of British government, and thereby the nation and citizenship: the Parliament

Building and the Big Ben clock tower. It is nighttime and therefore dark, and digitally projected onto the parliament building is an image of two figurines set close together. Each is a variation of a groomsman that more iconically sits atop wedding cakes next to the figurine of a bride. In this context the two groomsman ascribe to same-sex unions the positive associations of marriage, family and kinship ascribed to heterosexual marriages. The third element of the image is the corporate logo of gay.com™, the world's largest gay and lesbian commercial website. The simple text of the "I do" is multivalent. To those unfamiliar with gay.com™ it seems a transparent celebration that same-sex couples can marry, i.e., that LGBT people will be able to say 'I do' to one another in a wedding ceremony. But less evident was that the phrase was also gay.com's new corporate campaign slogan: in the Fall of 2006 it continued to run in advertisements on billboards, on websites and in newspaper and magazine ads. The various ads are variations of a simple theme: each parenthetically asks the viewer 'Do you gay.com?' Each ad features an unusually attractive man smiling out at the viewer: the additional text of the "I do" is presented as his answer to the same question.

With approval ratings above 80% from 2004-2006, Gavin Newsom has also enjoyed strong approval ratings from San Francisco gay constituencies. The gay community, while not monolithic (Peacock, Eyre, Crouse and Kegeles 2001), appears to be sailing the course described by Wendy Brown – exchanging a submission or allegiance or normative class relations for legal and political inclusion. The collapsing of the commodity icon into symbols of the nation, patriotism and citizenship is certainly not restricted to gay cultural representations. Nonetheless its emergent cultural form is indicative of political and social changes vexing to those on the gay community's own margins. Its form also remains primarily unobserved by gay and nongay publics that are accustomed to ascribing a nebulous and multivalent category of 'liberal' to both San Francisco and gay communities. Many who deploy the term 'liberal' – wittingly or not –

obfuscate the differential effects of neoliberal social policies on economic liberalism versus civil liberties. This obfuscation constitutes much of the political work that the word ‘liberal’ achieves in contemporary American politics: its common day usage helps to submerge the politically relevant aspects of neoliberal policy reforms. The contradictory and vexing experiences literally embodied by homeless young queers in San Francisco provide powerful testimonial for Brown’s argument. Their experience demonstrates the consequences of a primarily unobserved neoliberalization of San Francisco and gay civil society for those on the margins of both.

Paul Rabinow (1995) writes in “French Modern” that ‘if the sign of civilization was the busy road, the sign of modernity was hygiene.’ It would seem we might be viewing the transformation of public space around the convergence of these two signs – into the construction of the ‘busy and hygienic road.’ Homeless people are classified as unhygienic on the one hand and as *not* the busy people who produce capital and value on the other. This paper has attempted to argue that many of the displays of the signs of commodities by young homeless queers in San Francisco are attempts to produce prosthetic shields to counter their degradation into spoiled identities. The sheer energy invested in and the performative complexity required for these attempts implies considerable negative consequences when they fail to produce those shields. These bodies – and the spoiled and unspoiled identities displayed by or imposed upon them – seem also marked by signs. But in the case of these bodies the hope is to be marked by cell phones, designer clothes and Ipods™ rather than scat, vomit, urine and shopping carts.

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Endnotes

i Sfgov webpage: http://www.sfgov.org/site/government_index.asp March 19, 2006.

ii Note here that these searches are for the specific words, such as defecating, urination and feces, and thereby, do not include articles that contain the word homeless and other derivatives of these words, like defecating, urine, let alone other words like piss, shit and so on.

iii Survey conducted in January 2004.

iv Interpolation here is an idea borrowed from the theories of the critical Marxist Louis Althusser. His basic idea is that in response to the voice of authority, analogized as the policeman who calls out 'Hey you!' to someone else, all the witnessing subjects internalize and surveil their own membership as citizen. In some sense, speech act turn us into citizens, or we are claimed as citizen, and thereby adjust our behavior accordingly. Althusser's ideas help to theorize how homeless youth may be 'hailed' into (and not simply 'choose') membership in various forms of community and social groups – such as gay, queer, homeless, American, White, African-American, male, prostitute, addict.

v Later in this paper I will attend to other moments where the local impinges on the national or the national impinges on the local so as to be sure I am not considering San Francisco in a vacuum. This will assist in not only mapping some of the circuits that interlink neoliberal government reforms in the city and nationally, but also those of gay politics, homelessness and queerness.

vi <http://www.sanfrancisco merchants.com/associations/mumc/1.htm>

vii Berlant talks about, for example, how a focus on individual responsibility for acts of saving or flexible reskilling diverts attention from what happens in the boardroom or on the shop room floor. An example from public health includes a focus on individual responsibility for tobacco smoking that diverts attention from industrial pollution and lack of government regulation. In all three examples, the realm of the political becomes foreshortened to individual, private acts which are constructed as reliant upon individual choices.

viii The city's official report says 'roughly' about this number, curiously enough lacking precision in the methodology of a study that purported to report the exact number of homeless people in San Francisco.

ix Bruno Latour analogizes the scientific fact as the black box represented by a mechanical device, such as a thermometer or scale whose contingent history, variations, and constructions disappear and whose measures or results come to seem transparent and are thereby uncontested. Similarly, facts less materialized than pieces of machinery also have their contingent histories, but their acceptance by various parties demonstrates precisely the power of facts. A few social facts that are less material and bear relation to the production of statistics and the homeless count include GDP, the unemployment rate, and the results of the Census. People come to accept these numbers as true without actually knowing how they are derived or the contingent scientific decisions and political interests that influence their designs and methodologies.

x I must not pretend that scientific – or in this case technocratic – practitioners are entirely unaware of the epistemological and classificatory difficulty of their practices. The list of 'give away' signs of homelessness for volunteers was immediately preceded by the following statement: 'Counting requires subjective judgments as to who is homeless. The following factors, alone and in combination, should be considered when deciding when to count an individual (p. xx).' But the question of the subjectivity of the count, and even its method, was lacking in public discourse. The actual report issued by the city did raise the question, though only in a methodological appendix: were a citizen to even bother getting the report, the chances are low that they would both to look into such technocratic specificity as to the operationalization of the count. The momentary forefronting of this subjectivity disappears into the methodology appendix of the final and official report (indeed, where I obtained the

methodology). No traces of this subjectivity appeared when the mayor and the major media venues circulated the number: for them, as is common in such context, the number is treated as fact, and thereby, as simply accurate and transparently valid.

xi One of the many methodological details of these counts is how their variables are ‘operationalized,’ e.g., how various categories of behavior and people are defined and measured. How categories of ‘sexual minority,’ ‘youth,’ ‘intravenous drug users,’ and ‘men who have sex with men’ are operationalized varies from study to study, place to place, and time to time. The differences in these methodological and processional details – the details of the conditions of the numbers’ production – are stripped away when they circulate to other domains. Bruno Latour (1987) would refer to this as the fact having become an immutable mobile, a fact that is able to travel from one domain to another while its conditions of production become black boxed. Each of these categories, scientifically defined, are moving and changing categories. Even for the highly educated public, the specifics of these conditions of production tend to be occluded, misrecognized, and not understood, if such citizens thought to even investigate them in the first place.

xii The shelter was sabotaged for far more insidious reasons than this, relating to bad faith actions in a planning and mediation process on the part of the Upper Market Merchant’s Association, a primarily gay business association whose area encompasses the Castro neighborhood.

xiii This creates an interesting symbolic tension or contradiction. While historically homosexuals were thought of scientifically in terms of gender inversion evident through external appearance and behavioral display, the internal turn of psychology separated – at least theoretically and analytically – the relation between “homosexuals” outward expressions and their internal states. Homeless people, on the other hand, seem only defined by their outward expressions. Thus, being a homeless queer places the person occupying this space, or thought to occupy it, in a strange dilemma, as for example one defining or totalizing trait is reduced to all appearance, while the other is reduced or totalized to all internal substance.

xiv Bowker and Star (2000) describe the tension that people experience between the way they are categorized (and categorize themselves) and their lived realities as ‘torque,’ a useful concept from which to start in terms of thinking of how homeless young queers struggle with their embodied experiences of occupying these categories.

xv All in all, living on the street puts a kind of stress on one’s clothing and belongings that I personally have only experienced when traveling through impoverished nonwestern countries with all my belongings in a backpack.

xvi This ‘hording’ and ‘saving’ behavior, I commented at the time, reminded me a bit of the representation of the behavior of squirrels burying acorns before the winter, as an ostensibly rational and risk-averse strategy of ‘waiting for a rainy day.’

xvii Note here also the link between people carrying bags, bundles or packages that cause suspicion, for counters of homeless people, for presumably not homeless gay men when meeting potential sex partners, or homeland security in airports and public transportation.

xviii Sometimes a few of my informants had put down a \$150 deposit with MetroPCS to guarantee payment of their bill on top of either buying or having already secured a phone (because the phone companies will not grant them unsecured credit), when these phones were deactivated it was possible they would be reactivated if the person were to pay their bill and the hefty late fees.

xix It also demonstrates a Marxist distinction between an item’s use value and its exchange value – in these cases while many of these items have very low or nonexistence exchange values, they none the less hold use values for the individual – as evidenced by the energy and care they take to acquire, preserve and display them. But use value is often considered a relationship between the object and the owner, and thus outside the purview of political economy, which is focused on the relations between people. But here, we have an example of items that lack exchange value whose use value is entirely related to their symbolic positioning within a social milieu – perhaps indicating here we have something on the order of a quasi-commodity.

xx As prosthetic shields, the display of the American Flag, and even the poster listed above, this author noted, was particularly predominant on the cars of people of color who might be considered or confused as of potentially Middle Eastern decent. In the city of Berkeley upon my visits, I noted that it was particularly the Indian and Pakistani restaurants, as well as convenience and liquor stores, that ubiquitously displayed not only American flags, but extremely large ones to boot.

xxi While my informants were ‘young,’ they were often in their 30s trying to pass as younger: Bourgois’s were middle aged. In a certain form of structuralist sociology there is the concept of ‘life trajectories’ and life ‘careers,’ meaning that in life there are in essence developmental stages. These models are used to indicate when to intervene in preventing or changing whether a person deviates from the ‘normal’ path. Its relevance here is that perhaps some of my informants will become like his informants: if they remain homeless and survive to such ages, they may not be able to continue to pass themselves off as not homeless. Though this was not a main focus of my study, I did observe people ‘aging out,’ that is, I did see some informants appear to move towards the kind of person who could not hide his or her homelessness.

xxii Elsewhere, I examine instances when homeless young queers fail in their performances as legitimate middle class consumers – by virtue of their styles of voice, grammar, bodily comportment, or somatic states, teeth and behavior.

xxiii I have Paul Rabinow to thank for making me aware of this article.

xxiv The 2003 Proposition M that passed, the ‘Aggressive Panhandling’ ordinance, sought to restrict the places that people can panhandle and increase the punishment for violations. The proposition specified the distance that panhandlers must maintain from ATM machines while panhandling and created a municipal infraction category for so-called aggressive panhandling for police to enforce. It also increased both the financial and legal penalty for standing in medians while panhandling from a misdemeanor to an infraction, and defined rules about the type of social engagement a panhandler can have with a pedestrian.



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