

Vagrancy, Vice, and Victimhood: The Evolution of Homeless Persecution

In recent decades, the call to “clean up the streets”¹ has rarely escaped the political docket. Politicians from both sides of the aisle and academics alike have argued for projects of “urban renewal” that seek to restore a sense of “order and civility” to the modern city. Indeed, waves of development, commercialization, and privatization have resulted in the “noble goals” of “reinventing” the city space, although its manifestations differed across the United States. Conspicuously absent from these discussions is explicit mention of what—or who—is to be cleaned up and *why*. Projects instead utilize the abstract rhetoric of “restoration” and “renewal,” which serves to sidestep larger questions about the nature of the city and life within it. That is, what is the idyllic version of the city that has been sought after by so many? What is the “proper use” of the urban space, and who is entitled to it? Perhaps most importantly, what exactly has been swept away in the countless efforts aimed at “revitalization?”

While many of these questions have remained without adequate answer, they have given rise to a multitude of new questions at the intersection of history, identity, culture, and spatiality. Complicating notions of objectivity, rationalism, and citizenship—these concerns have called into question the possibility of knowing that which no longer exists. Questions of the life *in* and *of* the city have problematized the ways that knowledge ought to be conceived of, evaluated, and verified, as well as the role that subjective phenomena such as affect have in shaping both *what* and *how* events are thought of and remembered. Little work has been done, it seems, to elucidate the ways in which intimate, personal relationships with spaces and ideas have dictated memory, as well as remained enmeshed within broader notions of space, trauma, and history.

Homelessness and urban space provide important insight into the ways in which discourse, spatiality, and performance intersect in the co-production of knowledge. It is for this

reason that the city emerges as the backdrop upon which the chasms between personal experience and national identity's promises are projected. Engendering a myriad of concerns surrounding the complexity of urban space,² the subjects of economic devastation have what Paul Cloke and his colleagues termed "alternative cartographies" of how space ought to be used. This exposes the ways in which cities might be thought of as at once both *spatial*³ and *performative*⁴ sites, bringing into focus how meaning is subject to ritual processes of encoding⁵ and re-enactment⁶ in both literal and discursive ways. The homeless and their attendant relationships to space thus represent a means of mapping and re-mapping the geography of the city as it is traditionally understood, as well as the affective relationships that constitute it.

Through the examination of how urban space is constructed, one can see how the city testifies to the ways that history and memory—at once both literal and metaphysical—come to shape human experience *and* the vocabularies with which it is understood and remembered.⁷ Remaining attentive to the ways in which history is both conceived of and challenged across spatial and temporal scales, this paper will explore the tensions between hegemonic conceptions of the city and the lived experiences of its inhabitants.⁸ It will diverge from contemporary discussions of history and memory through an investigation of the roles of affect and social location have in shaping how the city is thought of and remembered differently. The questions posed by this discussion are the following: What forms of historical, social, and political erasure have shaped the public consciousness? What are the implications of these erasures, and how might they manifest themselves in discussions of homelessness and the city?

The first part of the paper will provide a review of recent scholarly literature both on homelessness and on the study of history and memory. It will then focus on their intersection, and compare historical constructions of city folk in an attempt to understand the role of

hegemonic social, economic, and political conditions in the construction of “history.” This following section draws on the work of affective communication theory, and analyzes how memory is impacted by homeless erasure through the lenses of discourse, spatiality, and performance. By juxtaposing the lived experience of homeless persons with these “collective memories” in the American city, this paper will conclude by using Jacques Derrida’s conception of *hauntology* to prove that affect comes to inform all parts of the memory-making process, and argue that remaining attune to the keenly-felt absences of historical memories often bequeaths entirely new counter-histories of their own.

Literature Review

While substantial scholarship exists on the subjects of both homelessness and history and memory, little conversation has occurred across disciplines. Scholarly accounts of homelessness and urban space, for instance, are roughly bifurcated. One half focuses largely on ethnographic and narrative accounts of life on the streets. Irene Glasser and Kathleen Hirsch, as well as Jennifer Hoolachan and Megan Ravenhill focus on animating and “giving life” to the often flat, unidimensional renderings of homelessness today.⁹ Their descriptions contrast and critique age-old tropes assigned to homeless individuals; that is, that their apparent poverty had been caused by their own immorality, laziness, or cultural and mental deficiencies. Instead, they serve to “personify” accounts of homelessness, and make intimate a topic that is so often avoided because of the anxiety and guilt associated with it.

The other half focuses on more structural accounts of homelessness, de-emphasizing the individual in favor of more holistic critiques of governmental and economic systems. Randall Amster and Stacey Murphy, for instance, use homelessness and dislocation as evidence of the failings of the neoliberal economic system.¹⁰ They denounce the logics of growth, productivity,

and capital, and argue that they are the cause of homelessness as well as the stigma attached to it within contemporary discourse. Michael Katz and Tony Sparks diverge in that they use homelessness as an example of governmental failings rather than strictly economic ones.¹¹ Their polemic against the state expands recent thought on biopolitics, as it serves to interrogate governmental obligations, as well as unpack politically-loaded notions of citizenship, and the concepts of a distinct public and private sphere.

In studies of history and memory, substantial work has been done to elucidate ties between individual and collective forms of historical truth. Renato Rosaldo and Dominick LaCapra outline the social and political processes that aggregate individual thoughts and experiences, transforming them into “social memories” that are shared among wider groups.¹² Marianne Hirsch, too, attempts to understand how personal, “organic” experiences converge and conflict with each other.¹³ Svetlana Boym provides interesting nuance to this conversation, and argues that conflicting narratives necessitate an expanded conception of “objectivity” beyond the simple binary of true and false.¹⁴

Linking these seemingly unrelated fields is recent literature on behavioral and communication theory. Scholars such as Frederic Jameson and Edward Soja study the ways that emotions carry communicative significance, and analyze the ways that spaces themselves might capture and reflect these emotions. Described as “postmodern political geographers,” their work attempts to bridge often discordant conversations at the intersection of history, ontology, and culture, in an attempt to understand what Gaston Bachelard has termed “the poetics of space.”¹⁵

These diverse academic interventions provide fertile ground for both material and discursive analyses of homeless life. Engendering a broader set of questions about the complex entanglements that homeless individuals have with place, movement, and memory, these

interventions explore the ways that meaning itself is inscribed, reproduced, and contested within particular spaces. However, each individually fails to answer the question of how memory—in both individual and collective terms—is continually iterated and reproduced, as well as into how different forms of “evidence” can either counter or corroborate “proper” and “true” historical testimonies.

More Money than Sense: Historical Constructions of the Home and Urban Space

Despite structuring current conversation surrounding “the homeless epidemic” and the “toll it has had on American cities,”¹⁶ analyses of economics, citizenship, and the family have often omitted *the home*’s centrality in forming some of the nation’s most deeply-respected cultural maxims. Fundamentally “American” values like privacy and autonomy, for example, have a crucial, yet often omitted, role in forming conceptions of *property* and *the public*, which are themselves enmeshed within centuries of various social and historical contexts.¹⁷ Instead, this omission has resulted in the silencing of discussions of those who remain in opposition to it: that is, the home-less have been largely ignored in discourses national identity across time and space, as they are often seen as antithetical to the “posterity” of the American Dream.

This oversight requires a holistic understanding of how the home and urban space have been historically constructed in the Western world, as well as their effects.¹⁸ Beginning in Europe in 1349, members of the social elite affixed culturally-laden notions of the home and the public to both legal and social definitions of what is perceived to be the problem of homelessness. It was because they were bereft of the steady supply of cheap labor upon which they had become reliant that nobles placed statutory restrictions on giving alms to any man physically capable of work. As the first instance of governmental moves to outlaw such a social category, the statute restricted both the offer and receipt of charity. Designed to “force laborers

(whether personally free or unfree) to accept employment at a low wage and to insure the land owner an adequate supply of labor at a price he could afford to pay,” the anti-vagrancy statute attempted to restrict one’s ability to freely move about space in an attempt to restore the feudal order.¹⁹ The law itself, as Foucault argues,²⁰ thus morphed alongside (and in accordance with) the lawmakers’ changing interests and desire for power as they adapted to new economic and political circumstances.²¹ The nobles sought, in vain, to reverse inevitable social transformations, and thus responded to instability using their existing juridical power to make criminal the only option that many had in obtaining their freedom.²²

Despite a period of dormancy, the vagrancy statutes remained unchanged until 1530, when they were revised to exchange the word “laborer” for “criminal.”²³ These changes defined several criteria for determining illegal behavior, and even made distinctions in punishment according to the supposed “severity” of the offense.²⁴ The law also enacted the category of felon for repeat offenders, and thus introduced the historical association of poverty with criminality, whose stigma would eventually come to eclipse legal doctrine and inform all aspects of social life.²⁵ While textually quite inconspicuous, these changes bore evidence of politico-legal power as well as its insidious manifestations.²⁶

The effect of these seemingly innocuous changes becomes more troubling when considered within their social and political context. Elites became less concerned by the status of laborers and more with the rise of crime amidst a commercial boom.²⁷ As such, what for merchants was a “general insecurity of the times” came to manifest itself in the law. Those who merely had the *ability* to prey on mercantile travelers suddenly found themselves incapacitated by new applications of existing anti-vagrancy legislation. Now legally known as “vagabonds” and “rogues,” individuals were criminalized for what they *did not* do, as “idling,” “wandering,”

and “loitering,” which became punishable acts.²⁸ What is more, police partake in “hot-spot” policing tactics that seek to increase the number of misdemeanor arrests, surveillance and social control mechanisms, and inter-agency partnerships to coordinate service and care. In doing so, they disproportionately target individuals who lack the privacy of their own home, and for that reason, they are drastically over-represented in the demographics of those facing criminalization.²⁹ In making illegal what was essentially the “undue occupation of public space,” anti-vagrancy laws thus laid the groundwork for future persecution of homelessness.

It is thus that the supposition of homeless life in the Western world forces us to rethink the completeness of what “history” and the archive might tell us. We are left to wonder, how such models account for the profound variability in the content of the events remembered, as well as how the very concept of homelessness has morphed over time. How, for example, do historians and archivists resolve discrepancies in creating a “truly objective historical record?” As Halbwachs argues, “the mind reconstructs its memories under the pressure of society,” and while often true, individuals invariably have different responses to those pressures.³⁰ It is in this way that one’s very recounting of an event is profoundly shaped by the demands of the social milieu. Thus, the model fails to adequately grasp the affective resonance that events and experiences carry, and the implications that visceral reactions have on our supposedly “neutral” remembrance of events. The history we are taught, as Derrida argues, is thus unable to capture the truly incommunicable nature of experience, and it obscures the histories of the spaces where we do not believe history (or at least life worth documenting) exists.³¹

This incomplete historical narrative leads us to question the ways that power and control are at once both epistemological and spatial. Reminiscent of Luise White’s conception of a “fractured history,” incomplete narratives of homelessness—and the life that constitutes it—

forces us to recognize the limits of present knowledge, as well as the degree to which the whole of our work—from ideation and the gathering of data to interpretation and publication—is shaped and constrained by our collective “social histories.”³² White’s work reminds readers of the immense agency individuals have in orchestrating how events and experiences are remembered. For those recording historical events, actions as simple as choosing particular forms and types of evidence over others have enormous ramifications on the “completeness” of the historical record. While certain affects and experiences will inevitably evade documentation, White brings our attention to how one might rethink the social forces at play in dictating those that do, as well as how this documentation takes place. In the case of homelessness, the discursive shifts surrounding poverty remind us that history is not “told by the winners” *per se*, but instead by those “with the means of writing and enforcing the best story.” Control is thus both perceived experientially as well as epistemologically, and hegemonic thought restricts both experiences, and how they are understood and situated within broader social frameworks.

Without Address: Spatial Sanitation in Contemporary America

Policies today, regardless of party origin, have continued this trend of spatial sanitation by criminalizing the undue occupation of public space. Conservatives throughout the United States, for example, have begun to mobilize the discourse of the “War on Poverty”³³ to galvanize efforts at “renewing the metropolis.”³⁴ In seeking to ward off urban city dwellers, they have begun to install “bum-proof” bus seats, deploy aggressively-active sprinkler systems to prevent sleeping in public, construct ornate enclosures to “protect” restaurant garbage, and close public restrooms and wash facilities to prevent potential “misuse.”³⁵ Cities in California have pursued even more sinister projects, often adding cyanide to garbage, “deporting” homeless populations via one-way bus tickets, transporting “vagrants” to desolate labor camps, and unabashedly

trapping them within the criminal justice system.³⁶ Robert McKonkey and Donald Baker argue that these processes essentially *being homeless* a crime in and of itself, as existing legislation attaches “certain conduct...to specific groups” and then “criminalizes that category.”³⁷

Even supposedly liberal cities such as Sacramento are no exception, as anti-homelessness policies represent active distortions of social and legal thought toward violent ends. Recent attempts at addressing Sacramento’s “tent-city,” the home of dozens of displaced individuals, are but one example.³⁸ Snaking alongside the riverbank parallel to Interstate 80, the rag-tag community operates as a space of conviviality, as it is where individuals share strategies and resources, as well as retire in the safety and comfort of others. However, these spaces have caused concern to rise, and have resulted in the legislation of increasingly harsh policy measures, such as Mayor Steinberg’s “landmark solution.” Involving the forced removal of the existing homeless community, Steinberg’s plan is to construct *micro-homes*: shacks leased to individuals with a partial government subsidy. While the plans for the homes are still being drafted and their funding remains unsecured, the demolition of the tent-city is already underway. Animal control services intervened, and countless homeless individuals reported their pets being taken from them, despite being microchipped and vaccinated service animals. Police units have already deployed to “clean up the site,” thereby “evicting” countless individuals and removing their belongings from the space.

With justifications ranging from drug use to increased risk of wildfire in the area’s chaparral, “cures” to the burgeoning “homeless epidemic” might more accurately be termed spatial and epistemological “vaccines” against deviance.³⁹ The “model homes,” for instance, are to be built on the exact same land that the homeless had once occupied, ultimately removing what had once been a “population of ruffians” marring the periphery of the city’s wealthiest

suburb. Strangely located between a freeway and a levee, the homes are an attempt at restoring the previous conceptions of the city as a sanitized space, as they seek to replace the visible markers of homeless life with more “acceptable” renditions of the contemporary home. The policy is thus a desperate attempt by the upper class to make urban life appear more palatable, as it is represented as an effort to provide “those who are most vulnerable” with a “viable segue to re-enter and contribute meaningfully to” society once again. It is thus that the rhetoric of economic and social “integration” of the homeless becomes a weapon of Disneyfication⁴⁰—that is, it posits the city as an idyllic space, free from dirt, disease, and danger and full of opportunity. It thus shifts the blame of economic dislocation from larger systemic failures to the homeless themselves, who are seen as the “necessary result” of one who lacks posterity, rationality, and productivity.⁴¹ In this way, the remnants of the tent city act as a commemoration of violence and lived experience, as well as testament to the elite’s ability to alter the operation of popular discourse, as what remains of the city is but a prosthetic vestige of stories rewritten.

Not all attempts at this form of spatial cleansing are as overt. Sacramento is one of countless cities nationwide that participates in the *de jure* criminalization of homelessness. For instance, the Sacramento City Council recently approved Ordinance No. 2017-0054, a two-part regulation that criminalized pan-handling, though it did so under the guise of public protection. Supported by Mayor Steinberg, the first part of the ordinance would make it illegal to pan-handle within specified “buffer zones” around ATM’s, public transit stops, and gas pumps.⁴² The second outlaws “aggressive” or “intrusive” pan-handling,⁴³ though neither of these are defined. While it was touted as a way to ensure the safety and respect of all, the result was a massive increase in ticketing for those who were *suspected* of pan-handling, as well as incarceration for some of those who were unable to pay.⁴⁴ Exposing the hypocrisy of liberalism, the implementation of

such ordinances calls into question the notion of citizenship and the public, as well as who the state has an obligation to protect, and at what costs.

These attempts cannot be viewed in isolation or as social anomalies. In the United States, this process is similarly enacted as a means of mobilizing and solidifying the middle-upper class identity against deviance. Images of the depraved poor have only further enabled elites to gain support for schemes aimed at eliminating their supposed threat.⁴⁵ Such cleansing has been both spatial and social, and elites have worked tirelessly to both redesign and recapitulate the urban topography, in addition to the public identities that make it up. Evidence of economic downturn and social dislocation have thus been rewritten throughout the centuries to exclude the narratives those with “spoiled identities.”⁴⁶ “Categorized, inspected, dissected, and rendered mute in the public discourse” by both social and legal systems, the homeless have faced systematic discrimination by those institutions which, “[had] the power to enforce categorical distinctions.”⁴⁷ The insidious economic, political, and legal challenges to the “homeless identity” have thus become clear in their manifestations in the law across time and space, as well as in their desire to wipe the collective historical memory of past trauma and economic hardship.

Street Smarts: On Homeless Survival Strategies

It is by exposing the gaps between the ideal city and how it is actually thought of, lived, and experienced that scholars have revealed the processes that script and rescript the meaning of the city space. For the homeless, the ability to find places to sleep, earn, and hang out come to represent both literal and discursive challenges to how spatial memory is asserted via violent power structures. Spatial meanings are at once *done* and *undone* by merely *existing* in an antagonistic world, ultimately creating fissures in dominant discursive renderings of space as well as conceptions of how it ought to be occupied.

For example, accounts of finding a place to sleep reveal the profound layering of performativity and affect inherent to notions of the *home* itself. For some, *home* is the brick-and-mortar of the shelter, where inhabitants often describe life as being governed by both formal and informal networks of power.⁴⁸ Regulatory schemas, enacted by both the shelter and its inhabitants, trade safety for autonomy, and often require strict acquiescence to standards of individual comportment. For some, the shelter is thus characterized by feelings of “despair, anger, frustration, and fear” due to the constant and careful techniques of “impression management” that they must employ.⁴⁹ For others, the hostel is a place of “safety,” “comfort,” and “potential transition” due to the support they receive from staff.⁵⁰ These complex relationships with space challenge the notion of “the home” as being defined solely by ideas of comfort, control, privacy, and autonomy, and situate it instead within a complex and often contradictory range of affects. Due to this enmeshment within overlapping and discordant networks of emotional geographies, homeless life in the hostel thus reconstitutes the normative markers of the home, as well as the criteria that dictate its social and political acceptance.

However, due to the confluence of shrinking government subsidies, increasingly stringent shelter regulations, and the termination of inexpensive single-room occupancies, many homeless have instead begun to “squat” as a means of finding shelter.⁵¹ Finding adequate lodging has left countless homeless individuals to “fend for themselves,” as they are forced to “get creative,” in the areas of the city commonly associated with crime, deviance, and profligacy. Thanks to these discursive representations, areas of frequent homeless occupation remain subject to disproportionate policing and government surveillance.⁵²

“Squats” are thus essential parts of the city’s geography, representative not only of refuge from the elements, but also from public scrutiny.⁵³ In their navigation of urban space, then, the

homeless re-appropriate and “privatize” space for their own use, often “shoring up” in locations from storefronts to public parks.⁵⁴ These spaces of residence thus challenge traditional conceptions of the home as a space of material comfort, and instead provide the homeless with their own renditions of space with, “relative privacy, autonomy, and control” in which “they can live according to their own rather than other people's rules; where friends are free to come and go; and where they can enjoy the same kinds of relationships that the housed population take for granted.”⁵⁵ These informal survival strategies constitute alternative, subversive knowledges that link individuals to particular sites, as well as inform how space is thought of and controlled.⁵⁶ In this way, these heterotopic⁵⁷ “home-spaces” threaten traditional conceptions of the city, privacy, and autonomy, as well as redefine the symbolism of the lived space. They are places that operate outside of, yet parallel to, traditional notions of the home, and they challenge the representational underbelly of lived space and experience. *Homelessness*, then, comes to reclassify the physicality of the space, as well as the social terms with which is it thought of, occupied, and remembered.

Similarly, homeless techniques for making financial ends meet might also be read as a counter-hegemonic mnemonic. Despite increased surveillance and efforts to restrict homeless attempts at “panhandling,” begging remains the most prominent strategy for earning in the city. For many, years on the street have offered knowledge of the city’s best locations for begging, as well as of how to best refine collection strategies.⁵⁸ Despite being an individual activity, “performances” were described by many homeless individuals as involving whole groups. These formal and informal networks of control constrained interactions with and amongst spaces, choreographing individual strategies in both practice and performance, and positioning begging as both an active site of becoming as well as an attempt at garnering public sympathy.⁵⁹ To this end, these practices represent distinctly spatial and geographic challenges to the ruse of

economic prosperity purported by neoliberalism and modernity; it is a reminder of both those sacrificed in the name of the capitalist machine, as well as a challenge to traditional notions of rationality and productivity required of “good workers.” In learning to traverse the complex affective economies of generosity, frustration, anger, and charity that comprise life in the city, the homeless thus embody the symbolic reconstitution of both space and value.⁶⁰ Thus, the financial tactics of the homeless represent forms of unique, subjugated knowledge of the city space, as well as how one might best use it.

Even the mere perception of homeless people as more proximate to crime and profligacy has ramifications on their social treatment. Because homeless people are seen as acquiring their possessions through theft and debauchery, the increasingly common sight of an unhomed person with a cellphone is bound to raise the ire of some.⁶¹ Their perception—rooted in the Protestant work ethic—assumes that homeless people are simply “lazy,” and do less out of their own volition.⁶² Undermining the creative, laissez-faire nature of the American Dream, the non-traditional means of making-ends-meet for the homeless complicates the idyllic imagery of the American society and individuals’ differential ability to operate within it.

From this jumbled mass of affective relationships emerges a tension between homeless individuals and society, as well as between what is experienced and what is recorded in a particular society’s “archival” knowledge. It is from this rupture that Svetlana Boym’s work on the spatial aspects of nostalgia becomes a useful analytical tool. In her study of Berlin, Boym relates the contested use of space to larger historical questions of power, trauma, and memory, and argues that different city sites occupy “ambivalent” positions within the broader historical memory for this very reason. Boym contends that the architecture of the city is defined by its duality, as it is simultaneously a “site of power” and a “place for the people.”⁶³ In this way,

buildings are not only “an emblem of lost political cause,” but also, “a warm space of everyday practices that [defy] the central narrative, even if only in very minor ways.”⁶⁴ Urban space thus often has contradictory meanings endowed within it, and it is at once “a collage, a mosaic, a palimpsest,” and “a puzzle.”⁶⁵ The discordant voices that accumulate within the landscape generate, according to Boym, a “prison house of memory” that “reflects the many possibilities for Berlin’s future that are linked to the confrontations of the present.”⁶⁶

However, it is from this renewed understanding of landscape that one might see space not only as a reflection of future possibilities, but also as a refraction of past histories. With Boym’s analysis in mind, urban space itself becomes metonymic of continual erasure and rescripting. It is only through the gradual process of un-layering, as Boym prescribes, that the dual meaning of history and memory are conveyed, and that each historical strata and sub-strata provides evidence of lives lived and lost. Homeless groupings, and the activities that take place within them, represent such strata, as they redefine the city as a place “...of companionship and sociability,” and thus personify accounts of homeless life.⁶⁷ In creating what some have termed a “more-than-homeless” identity,⁶⁸ the homeless threaten the “hegemonic meanings and mappings of the city” by reconfiguring spaces to become more accommodating.⁶⁹ Narratives of homeless life thus serve to complicate their frequent discursive *flattening*, adding nuance the standard association with criminality and victimization, and provide a point of departure from contemporary renderings of history and memory.

It is through a similar process of reclamation that homeless experience upends traditional understandings of kinship and the family. Members of homeless communities frequently form intense social bonds with each other, often eating, sleeping, and living in groups. The formation of these discrete social units represent networks of fictive kin, engendering feelings of trust,

friendship, and solidarity as individuals share a sense of intimacy, comfort, and safety. The existence of these *informal* families provides a point of departure from the safety of the nuclear family, as well as its attendant labor and gendered norms. Complicating the conceptual toolkit with which the collective consciousness thinks of the family, the homeless strike anxiety into the hearts of the white middle-upper class, challenging both the picturesque city and its model inhabitants.

Haunted Houses, Haunted Homes: Reflections on Society, Space, and Spectrality

In thinking of what these forced absences and presences in both physical space and its representation say about the nature of social thought, Rosaldo's analysis becomes most poignant. He instigates a set of methodological questions for evaluating oral histories, arguing that, "attending to the cultural form of the evidence matters as much as examining the goals and techniques of historical writing."⁷⁰ He argues that the role of historians is to recognize the story being told as a rhetorical artifact whose narrative conveys both the story itself as well as important details about the speaker.⁷¹ He imparts the idea of the memory's dualism to expose the inadequacy of current historical work, as well as call our attention to the ways in which conceptions about the very role of that work might be broadened. Rosaldo's work thus incites an inclusive turn within archival studies to incorporate organic, experiential forms of thought and knowledge, though he leaves unexplored the potential ramifications of past omissions.

It is here that one is reminded of the usefulness of Derrida's *hauntology*. Using "ghostliness" as a metaphor to extract social meaning, Derrida has informed many theoretical interpretations of social conflict, as he invokes the notion of spectrality to represent lapses in historical consciousness. Because he lived in the aftermath of several failed communist revolutions, Derrida wrote largely in extended conversation with Marx's proclamation that, "a

spectre [was] haunting Europe—the spectre of communism.”⁷² Amidst an era of undeniable political, economic, philosophical, ethical, and social change, Derrida called into question the ways that past events were inextricably bound up in the ways that people thought of the present. He theorized that societies could remain “haunted” by social forces, arguing that even “invisible” aspects of history were never truly absent, and that they often took upon “spectral” or “ghostly” aspects due to their transience.⁷³ In this way, events transcended single temporal frames, instilling a “vague sense of foreboding, a haunting sense that ... changes [were]...likely to result...”⁷⁴ Since the publication of this foundational work, many theorists have since returned to Derrida’s *hauntology* as a critique of the neglect of “forward-thinking,” as well as an analytic tool for understanding how trauma, violence, memory, and conflict are constellated by both apparent and covert discourses. Humanity is tasked, then, not only with “believing in ghosts,” but also with learning how to live with them and their ramifications on our collective historical consciousness.⁷⁵

If it is true that the defining feature of ghostliness is the sense of dual absence and presence that gave Derrida such a sense of foreboding, then it is also true that the erasure of homeless life transforms their presence into ghostly encounters. Using the analytic of hauntology, government policies too transform into an exorcism; be it eye contact at a stoplight or the drop of a quarter into an upturned hat, confrontations with the impoverished have often meant confrontations with poverty itself, and the recognition that one’s social position is made possible at the expense of others. While an individual’s affective response to the homeless may range from guilt or anxiety to even repulsion or disgust, avoidance is a commonplace practice that takes on deeply symbolic meaning, as it curates the public countenance to seem more “pure.” The landscape is robbed of the many of the lives, experiences, and histories that make it

up. Avoidance becomes both literal and metaphysical, as it is by focusing only on the spatial and temporal *present* that such efforts *make absent* the identities that stand in its opposition, as well as the profound apprehension that they carry with them into the public imaginary.

Encountering the figure of the homeless-as-ghost, then, can also be seen as a form of encounter with the traumatic memories that are housed within the landscape. An ardent reminder of those things rendered invisible out of fear, guilt, and anxiety, those that haunt force us to recognize the role of the past in shaping how space is thought of, occupied, and remembered.⁷⁶ It becomes clear that we as subjects, as well as the archive itself, are “constructed collectively, in relation to these ghosts and shadows.”⁷⁷ We are “shaped by their loss and by our own ambivalence about mourning them...as we look at them, they look back at us, constituting...the return of the repressed.”⁷⁸ With newfound attention to those lives, affects, and memories that are at once both present and absent, one is forced into a self-reflexive position that remains attune to the ramifications of our collective social amnesia, as well as our individual complicity in upholding violent power structures.

Hauntology exists, then, as Zemblyas argues, both as a metaphor and as a pedagogical method for deconstructing the “orthodoxies of academic history and thinking” by “evoking the figure of the ghost to trouble the hegemonic status of representational modes of knowledge in remembrance practice” and by “undermining their ontological frames and ideological histories.”⁷⁹ In this way, by involving ourselves with what was previously exorcised, we call into question the very fabric of social thought that organizes and disciplines deviant bodies, and thereby find ourselves capable of refiguring our obligation to a more complete rendering of historical memory. While it might cause discomfort to admit our complicity in violence, as is often true of the guilt surrounding economic security, this anxiety amounts to a necessary

“collateral damage” intrinsic to such a foundational challenge to our social, ethical, and political imaginaries.⁸⁰ By “being-with spectres,” as Derrida prescribes, we become radically open, ultimately forced to accept the dangerous, often unsettling affects that accompany “history, justice, and reconciliation.”⁸¹ Through hauntology’s ongoing conscientization of the homeless and what they represent, the once-sanitized public landscape thus transforms into a site of meaningful encounter, and suddenly becomes populated by a more holistic range of affects and relationships.⁸² It is with this renewed interpretation of time and space that we are able to look toward the future with the radical hope that it will become a space of potentiality, now uninhibited by the pitfalls of collective historical amnesia.

Perhaps just as permanent as the imprint of ghosts on the memory of the American city, then, is our collective responsibility to recognize their manifestations. Whether in the ephemera left on street corners or in the anxieties underlying an outstretched hand, homelessness, it seems, emerges at a crucial interstice between urbanization, neoliberalism, and citizenship. It is only by coming to understand homelessness and its affective resonance that one is able to understand the performative nature of the city space itself, as well as how it might be written and re-written by those within it.

Thus, in thinking of the modern city, we are, as Foucault argues, thinking of much more than its architectural design. We are thinking of spaces that are at once both “peopled and empty.”⁸³ We are listening to stories previously unheard. We are listening to tales told to us in “words without language.”⁸⁴ We are reconciling with that which is simultaneously “there” and “not there,” and that which has been swept away over time. In thinking of the modern city, we are thinking of the people whose lives and experiences constitute it.

ENDNOTES

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