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Invisible homelessness: anonymity, exposure, and the right to the city

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ABSTRACT

The city of Denver, Colorado recently outlawed camping in all open space. Part of a broad effort to accelerate the profit potential of prime urban land through real estate speculation and commerce, the camping ban has dislocated homeless people from the city's marginal spaces. Based on ethnographic fieldwork and archival research in Denver, this article develops a tripartite approach to public space—prime, everyday, and marginal—to analyze challenging ways in which people who are homeless in Denver must now manage their exposure to others in everyday public spaces. In addition to eliminating places of hard-won safety and security, this singular new code disrupts hygiene, mobility, and sociability routines, thus throwing already precarious lives into further disarray by rendering housing status visible. To demonstrate how everyday social justice springs from interaction between different people co-present in public space, we foreground the voices of Denver's homeless people, those most impacted by quality of life laws. Evicting individuals from marginal spaces and rendering them visibly homeless in everyday and prime spaces, the ban deprives them of a fundamental right to the city: anonymity.

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See, I usually have a camp. You guys would be sitting in my tent and I'd be making you coffee!

—Roxanne (first interview)

In May 2012 Denver's city council passed a camping ban, section 38–86.2 of the city's revised municipal code. This bylaw outlaws dwelling in any open space within the city limits. Section 38–86.2 defines “dwelling” as sleeping, resting, preparing food, eating or storing personal belongings in any publicly or privately owned open space with the aid of shelter. The ordinance goes on to define “shelter” as any protection from the elements aside from clothing. Since they must carry their possessions (which often include items the city defines as shelter) with them throughout the day, people living on the street necessarily spend much of their day dwelling in publicly accessible space. Soon after the ban was passed, Denver police began evicting people like Roxanne from their campsites and issuing warnings to people unrolling sleeping bags in alleys or on vacant lots. Before the camping ban, it was not illegal for a person to set up a tent under

an overpass near a day labor site or bivouac in an alley near a homeless day shelter to take advantage of its showers, phones, and computers. This essay foregrounds a variety of disruptions to everyday routines that were specifically triggered by the camping ban, and traces theoretical links between everyday hygiene routines and the presentation of self in public space, to theories of exposure, contact and everyday social justice. The stigmata of visible homelessness—dirty bodies and clothing, ungroomed appearances, shopping carts full of belongings, even small items like backpacks and bedrolls—have long marked people without homes as social pariahs (Kusmer, 2002). In Denver, these stigmata also now mark the visibly poor as potential lawbreakers. Visible homelessness increases the likelihood of contact with police officers and other managers of public space, and thereby also contributes to the cultural reproduction of negative stereotypes of homeless people as being criminally deviant. It renders impossible the enjoyment of what we feel is a right to the city that the domiciled more readily possess, namely the right to anonymity in public. Sociologists long considered urban anonymity both as an unfortunate byproduct of the modern metropolis and as benefit to individuals who could choose their own careers and pursue lifestyles free of the conscripts socially regulating tightly knit rural communities (Simmel, 2006; Tönnies, 1964). During the rapid urbanization of the nineteenth century, rural migrants lost provincial connections as they gained freedom to craft lives based on talents, interest, passions. Indeed cities remain places wherein marginalized individuals, such as gay or lesbian people, can choose to maintain separate personal and professional lives (Castells, 2002). Our extension of the “right to the city” lies along trajectories sketched by Lefebvre (1996), who claims that these rights include the right to rest and the right to health. In line with Walzer (1983), Williams (1985), and Young (1990) we see the right to the city as a form of social justice that emerges from social interaction. We focus on the possibility for unscripted interaction between two specific groups—people who are homeless and those who are not.

We argue that the enforcement of the camping ban disrupts personal routines—routines which the domiciled take for granted like showering, shaving, teeth brushing, and doing laundry. Consequently this single ordinance works in concert with social norms orbiting the presentation of self in public, effectively serving to deprive people without homes of anonymous membership in the urban community as it gathers together, ebbing and flowing in public space. Consequently it counteracts the primary social levelling force inherent in urban places. Now increasingly unable to maintain anonymous public identities, Denver’s undomiciled residents are more often compelled to engage with others as obviously homeless people. In this way, the ban steepens the climb to what we term *invisible homelessness*—the relative anonymity in public space often enjoyed by people living in public space. We bracket our inquiry within a typology of public spaces—prime, everyday, and marginal—and theories of contact (Allport, 1979) and exposure (Lee, Link, & Farrell, 2004; Wessel, 2009). In so doing, we advance a more nuanced understanding of the impacts of quality of life laws—municipal ordinances that are typically intended to enhance the appearance, cleanliness, and perceived safety of public areas—on the dispossessed. After a description of our methods and a more thorough discussion of the ban, we flesh out our conceptual framework, then show how the camping ban, while written to protect prime public spaces from the threat of visible homelessness, directly impacts marginal public spaces—spaces where the undomiciled often find shelter—and everyday public spaces—nondescript places like

sidewalks, community parks, corporate plazas, and businesses open to the general public. From this premise we argue that the indirect impacts of the ban—the issues that people without homes in Denver now face navigating public spaces as anonymous individuals—may exacerbate the problem the ban was crafted to solve—namely visible homelessness.

This exploratory essay grows from ongoing ethnographic fieldwork and archival research in Denver, Colorado. On any given night there are an estimated 1,000 residents sleeping without formal shelter—now, according to the camping ban, legally defined as camping—in the Denver Metro Area, approximately half within the City of Denver (Robinson, 2013). A regional hub marked by significant gentrification of low-income communities (Langegger, 2015b), the City of Denver's inventory of affordable housing units has been declining for 20 years while the city has experienced a 600% increase in the number of people without homes (Robinson, 2013). We use observations of public space and recordings of the voices of people living on Denver's streets to propel this essay's logical development. We began our research by analyzing news media reportage, legal archives, and blogs as the ban was being debated in city council at the end of 2011. After the ban took effect, we interviewed city officials, including city council members, police officers, and employees in the departments of parks and recreation, transportation, public works, and code enforcement.

The perspective we foregrounded however was from the street—the voices of homeless residents marginalized by the city's economic restructuring. During the summer of 2013 and for one month in early 2014, we conducted fieldwork and open-ended interviews with 20 of Denver's homeless residents, several of whom we interviewed multiple times. Using an intensive case sampling plan (Trotter, 2012) we recruited our participants through the Harm Reduction Action Center, a community-based organization that offers services to Denver's drug using population; the overwhelming majority of the agency's clientele are homeless. Harm reduction is a configuration of care and control aimed at removing rather than exacerbating stigma (Evans, 2012). Working with this population we followed up with individuals who were key informants in our previous work with the agency and its clients. The sample was ethnically diverse and included both men and women. Ages of participants ranged from 20–57. We conducted most interviews as a team—an approach that enabled us to integrate the complementary but disciplinary-specific perspectives of geography and anthropology. Unobtrusive observation included attending city council meetings and land use committee meetings as well as simply spending time in public space in Downtown Denver, particularly Civic Center Park and along the pedestrianized 16th Street Mall. Participant observation included walking tours led by homeless informants detailing the microgeographies (patterns of movement *within* home spaces) and macrogeographies (patterns of movement *between* home and other places) of their daily lives, as well as visits to extant and evicted homeless camps.

This is not a stand-alone study; instead, it nests within the authors' work deconstructing the impact of quality of life laws on the publicness of public space. We have described in greater detail the splintered governmentality of the ban (Langegger & Koester, *in press*), as well as ways in which the ban destroys not only homes but anarchic property rights (Langegger, 2015a), and compels the undomiciled to lives of perpetual motion (Langegger & Koester, *in press*). This essay is part of ongoing

research: we continue to conduct informal conversations with people living on Denver's streets.

Research context and conceptual framework

Homelessness has been part of the North American urban fabric since at least the American Civil War (Kusmer, 2002); nonetheless it remains widely perceived as a sudden rupture of the order of the city. Homelessness has straightforward economic causes; however, once it is visibly present it tends to be combated by myriad and mostly misguided regulatory solutions (Hopper, 2003; Wasserman & Clair, 2009; Wolch & Dear, 1993). Denver is no exception to these economic and regulatory trends. The city's homeless problem has deep roots in a hyperactive real estate market compounded by a patent lack of rent controls or zoning ordinances mandating the construction of affordable housing (Robinson, 2013). Homeless regulation has long been punitive in the city. As Denver recovered from the 1980s recession, it instituted many codes police now use to remove visible homelessness from public space. These include loitering and disorderly conduct ordinances, a geographically and temporally specific sit & lie ordinance, sponsored by the Downtown Denver Partnership¹ and enforced along the 16th Street Mall between 6:00 AM and 9:00 PM, and city-wide park curfews forbidding entry into or presence within all city parks between 11:00 PM and 5:00 AM. Yet prior to the 2012 ban there were still an ample number of places to dwell; it was not a crime to unroll a sleeping bag in an alley adjacent to or along 16th Street Mall for the night, to set up a tent under a freeway interchange, or to camp along a waterway or in a vacant lot. After the ban, apart from shelters, motels, or private residences, there remains no place a homeless person can legally pause to rest in Denver.

The wording of Denver's *unauthorized camping ban* maintains a tactical distance from actually criminalizing homeless people, since it ostensibly targets only a person's behavior and not his or her social status. The ban states that it is "equally applicable to any person who engages in the behavior of camping, regardless of motivation for doing so." It also ostensibly represents any violation of the code as easy to remedy. Since it is a *move-on* violation, a person ceases to be in violation of the ban as soon (s)he ceases camping by moving away. The ordinance defines camping as:

Residing or dwelling "in any place with shelter, and conduct[ing] activities of daily living such as eating, sleeping or the storage of personal possessions in such place. The term "shelter" includes without limitation, any tent, tarpaulin, lean-to, sleeping bag, bed roll, blankets, or any form of cover or protection from the elements other than clothing.

In that the ban equates the status of homelessness with recreational choice, its wording serves as an example of *semantic smoothing* (Blomley, 2007) whereby homeless survival is rhetorically morphed into a simple matter of recreational preference.

Denver's camping ban was crafted in late 2011 in a city struggling to make sense of the Occupy Denver Movement. It became part of Denver's municipal codebook in April in 2012. The ban dramatically impacts the lives of Denver's undomiciled residents; yet it was Occupy's appropriation of prime space that gave the city council pretext and momentum to pass it. Between late autumn 2011 and early spring 2012, Occupy Denver activists appropriated an archetypal prime space, Denver's Civic Center Park

—sited between the State Building and the City and County Building at the southeast end of Denver's 16th Street Mall, symbolically linking the postmodern architecture of the museum district and the neoclassical city, county, and state government buildings to the modernist skyline formed by Denver's Central Business District. Because of Denver's park curfew, protesters could not camp in Civic Center Park; instead they lined its perimeter sidewalks with placards, sleeping bags, and tents. Since sleeping on sidewalks and along other public rights-of-way was not against the law at this time, the city possessed no legal means of stopping the protest.

The business interests supporting the camping ban used the visibility of the Occupy Movement's form of protest to confront all forms of urban camping. In winning public support for the ban, the Denver Downtown Partnership and the Civic Center Conservancy² strategically conflated housing status with Occupy Denver's form of protest. In other words, they combined all people sleeping in public in Denver, whether as part of a protest movement or as a matter of everyday urban survival, into the same *folk devil* (Cohen, 2002). Targeting all people who sleep outdoors proved an effective strategy. The ban's supporters repeated visibility tropes in their arguments. For example, during a public hearing on the ban, Tammy Door, president of the Downtown Denver Partnership, frequently associated Occupy Denver's appropriation of Civic Center Park with people without homes sleeping in the relative safety along the 16th Street Mall, which, before the ban, was not illegal between 9:01 PM and 5:59 AM. During a land use committee meeting debating the legality of the ban, Lindy Dent from the Civic Center Conservancy echoed Door's association, saying, "There's no distinction between protesters, homeless or boy scouts. They're all camping."

In November 2011, as Occupy Denver wore on, public opinion began to shift from acceptance of camping as a form of protest to annoyance over the visibility of camping in public. After several months of the negative press orbiting Occupy Denver, including reports of open drug use and a scabies outbreak, the ban easily passed city council. The ban was designed to remove a visible threat from prime spaces, places of symbolic, political, and economic significance. However, because of its broad language, it is now illegal to camp in marginal and everyday spaces, be they public or private. It is just as illegal to sleep in a consenting person's backyard as it is to unroll a sleeping bag under a freeway overpass. Whereas Mitchell, Attoh, and Staeheli (2015) discuss how people living on the streets use camping as a form of publicly visible protest against a similar ordinance in Boulder Colorado, our argument pivots on how some people affected by quality of life legislation strive for the exact opposite of confrontational direct action. We found that people without homes usually wish to be considered as anonymous urbanites; in other words, they want to be able to move through everyday spaces without making a political statement.

Like city codes, the spatial patterns of service provision significantly shape the mobile geographies of homelessness in the city (Takahashi, 1998). Central to our argument is that the everyday spaces of home, personal hygiene, and work also give form to the urban geographies of the unhoused. These geographies locate predominantly in publicly accessible space, in places where the City of Denver now disallows not only sleeping and preparing food but also the storage of personal possessions. When we asked if the camping ban has made life on the street more difficult, we were often shot looks of

abject incredulity. One participant sardonically asked us, “How far did you have to walk to the shower this morning?” Sheri helps us understand what is obvious to people living on the streets: location matters. She describes how lacking quick access to things that housed people rarely consider as challenging turns a job interview into a harrowing adventure for people living on the street.

If you get an interview, then you have to find a place to store your stuff, for it to be safe at the end of the day. And they have to find clean clothes, find a way to take a shower, find a way to get to the interview. Then you have to make sure your phone is charged, in case they call you back. Then, if you get the job, you’ve got to make sure you show up, cleaned up and on time every day. All this, just to get a paycheck to get back on your feet.

The challenges Sheri describes often consume much of the day for people lacking stable private microgeographies of personal hygiene. Importantly, Denver’s camping ban forces people without homes to more often navigate widening macrogeographies in order to attend to what many may consider trivial, such as personal grooming and laundry. Furthermore, because the enforcement of the ban targets established campsites, compelling people to pack up and move on, it continually incapacitates their efforts to establish new regimes of personal hygiene. Thus the space between homeless people and their means to craft anonymous identities is widened.

Our categorical concept of public space is based on Snow and Mulcahy’s (2001) tripartite of prime, marginal, and transitional space. Snow and Mulcahy extend Harvey and Moloch’s (Logan & Molotch, 2007) articulation of the economic terms *use value* and *exchange value* by adding *political value*, by which they mean the development potential of privately owned property. We focus on the spaces in between developable parcels of private property, on the web of public space constituting the public right of way, public parks, and other publicly accessible places. Furthermore, we modify their spatial schematic of prime, marginal, and transitional space, using *publicness* instead of political and economic valuation as conceptual scaffolding. We define publicness in terms of placed diversity, specific places where dissimilar people come to know one another (Lefebvre, 2003)—places of eroticism, encounter, and (dis)enchantment (Watson, 2006); places of people watching and playfulness (Lofland, 1998); places marked by myriad informal *eyes on the street* (Jacobs, 1993); and places that lack overt and obvious spatial control and policing (Nemeth & Hollander, 2010). Importantly most spaces through which our participants move are public property (compare Staeheli & Mitchell, 2008). That is, the sidewalks, alleyways, city parks, the slivers of land underneath freeways and flyover ramps, and the riparian areas along the city’s creeks and rivers—places often inhabited by people without homes—are all places owned and controlled by the City of Denver or the State of Colorado.

Though we modify Snow and Mulcahy’s definitions, we keep two of their terms: prime and marginal. Like Snow and Mulcahy, we recognize that economic development drives the neoliberal city. Therefore, we define prime space as showcase public spaces used by entrepreneurs and politicians for commercial and symbolic purposes.

By this definition, both the 16th Street Mall and Civic Center Park are prime spaces. It is important to consider that not all commerce and symbolism are vehicles for the

creative city. Warehouses, public utilities, and distribution centers are interspersed with networks and pockets of publicly accessible space. Although these marginal publicly accessible spaces lie on the periphery of a city's symbolic order, people without homes navigate various microgeographies and macrogeographies within them to meet their daily needs of shelter, work, and sociability. Snow and Mulcahy left undeveloped their middle category of transitional space, noting that it is propelled by real estate market dynamics, and can become either prime or marginal space, or act as a buffer between the two. Fleshing out this middle ground, we substitute *everyday space* for their transitional space. The term *everyday* captures the majority of public spaces people move through and pause within. They comprise the myriad sidewalks, side streets, back alleys, sidewalk cafes, neighborhood parks, and plazas of everyday urban life. As such, they are the spaces of quotidian encounter and eroticism (Watson, 2006), of everyday urbanism (Crawford, 2008), and of unremarkable yet vital social tension (Sennett, 1990).

In our scheme, everyday space has the greatest potential for unfettered public discourse. Unconcealed control diminishes publicness (Nemeth, 2010). Often sites of visible spatial discipline, prime spaces are nexuses of intense economic and symbolic meaning, and consequently reduced publicness. Marginal spaces also exhibit a reduced publicness, but for different reasons than prime spaces. Marginal spaces comprise the public rights of way and slivers of *dead zones* (Doron, 2008) and *cracks in the city* (Loukaitou-Sideris, 1996) interspersed within and between industrial buildings, warehousing structures, and high capacity transportation infrastructure such as railroads and freeways. These areas exhibit a profound and planned temporality: active and noisy during the day and empty during the evening. Cities use industrial zoning codes to concentrate noxious land uses like recycling centers, power plants, factories, and warehouses away from residential, commercial, and green spaces. Consequently marginal spaces are not only marked by the noise and danger of trains and trucks, by heavy and light rail, and by belching smokestacks, but they are also geographically separate from prime and everyday spaces. Because of their isolation, because they generally depopulated at the end of the day, and because the vast majority of urban residents avoid them, marginal spaces include many places that people without homes rely on to set up temporary and semi-permanent shelter.

Increasingly, marginal spaces along riverbanks (Walby & Lippert, 2011), under freeways (Bourgeois & Schonberg, 2009) and in industrial areas (Wasserman & Clair, 2009), anywhere homeless people seek refuge, are targeted in cleanup campaigns. Marginal spaces are rarely proximal to prime or everyday spaces. Few homeless people we met relished the idea of locating their camps so far afield, so disconnected from spaces of work, sociability, and personal hygiene. Overcoming this spatial mismatch, Ronnie, a homeless vet trained in camouflage, is currently able to use marginal spaces and everyday spaces to maintain his invisibility. He rides his bike from an expertly hidden camp along Bear Creek to work in Downtown Denver. Commuting, he is just another Denverite riding a bike. Working, he is just another day laborer wearing a hard hat. In other words, his unique skillset allows him to remain invisible as a homeless person in all spaces, marginal, everyday, and prime.

Invisible homelessness

Discussing nineteenth century Berlin, Georg Simmel (2006) wrote of the blasé attitude of city residents—the casual acceptance of difference and anonymity within cauldrons of unfamiliar diversity. As multicultural centers, cities have long been places free from the strict moral orders of rural areas (Jacobs, 1969; Mumford, 1989). Cities also proffer freedom to associate with and disassociate from others on one's own terms. In rural areas identity is often fixed, a matter of craft and kin. In cities, identity is flexible; people can choose how and when to present themselves to an anonymous public. If a person wants to stand out she can; or she may simply blend into the anonymity of the urban multitude, thus becoming invisible as an individual.

This choice leads us to our notion *invisible homelessness*. In using the adjective *invisible* we mean unnoticed as a *person without a home*, rather than invisible as a *person*. In this sense, anonymity is a form of invisibility. Maintaining an anonymous identity necessitates reliable routines. The climb toward this type of anonymity steepens as opportunities for maintaining hygiene routines erode. Lack of consistently reliable access to shower facilities and laundromats necessarily produces the discernible stig-mata often associated with homelessness, such as unwashed clothing and hair, dirty hands and unshaven faces, and body odor. When a person is able to blend into the human background, a background to which urban residents and even tourists have a right, they articulate what we understand as a right to the city—the right to engage with others on public, noncommittal terms within realms of anonymity that public spaces proffer (Jacobs, 1993; Lofland, 1998; Sennett, 2001; Watson, 2006). Denver's camping ban, by disrupting personal hygiene, mobility, and sociability routines, renders the maintenance of everyday anonymity increasingly difficult. Nevertheless, as we found, some of our participants were still able to maintain their invisibility.

Dressed fashionably, strolling confidently down Santa Fe Avenue towards us for our first interview, Ernie did not remotely appear to be a person living out-of-doors. When we mentioned this, he said, "Well I don't know what a homeless person is *supposed* to look like. For me it's about attitude, how you carry yourself." Then he explained that he always tries to look his best. Presenting himself with confidence and poise works to advertise one of his street hustles, exchanging haircuts and shaves for cash. Not only does he have a beauty school degree, he has also been able to secure a safe place to store his razors and scissors. Looking fit and wearing spotless clothing, Ronnie shared that he rides his bike to truck stops on the city's periphery, where he can take a shower, shave, and do laundry. Two other participants, Dizzy and Raven, were also dressed stylishly when we met them. Raven explained the geographies involved in crafting his hip identity, "Yeah, we work hard, we store our things at her family's house, shower at friend's. Dude it's hard, we work hard to look this good." Dizzy interjected, "You don't have to look homeless just cuz you are homeless." Dizzy then shared the following vignette, which exemplifies this essay's central point: personal grooming factors into interpersonal discourse in public space.

Yeah we usually look pretty middleclass. I had a lady stop me one time. She's like "Look at these homeless people!" I turned around, looked right at her and said "Got a dollar? I'm homeless too." She had nothing to say to me, you know what I mean? She was insulting these homeless people and trying to get me to go along with it. It was really ridiculous. Just

because I wasn't dressed like them, she just automatically assumed that I wasn't one of them.

Appearance matters. Mason says, "it depends on my attitude and how I look, if I've got a bunch of bags or not makes a big difference in how people treat me."

The ideal of public space, in circulation since the Enlightenment, has centered on open discourse, on tolerance of difference, on disengaged civility, and on shared notions of public etiquette (Valentine, 2008). Without the unexpected, the disorderly, even the unwanted, cities lose their capacity to facilitate personal growth and promote social change (Sennett, 1970). Nevertheless, the modern city can be understood as a project of ordering the disorderly. Managing the city as an aesthetic landscape delimits diversity by maintaining clean surfaces at the expense of the depth of lived social relations (Mitchell, 2000). Efforts directed toward people who are homeless are often directed at removing them and their possessions from public view. Such attempts to purify space are tightly intertwined with middle-class ideals of legitimate citizenship and compassionate, or paternalistically punitive, views on social justice (MacLeod, 2002). Part and parcel to restoring urban order is a growing list of by-laws that proscribe action within public space (Stallybrass & White, 1986; Valverde, 2003, 2005). If designed, managed, and policed as an accessible place, everyday space has potential to facilitate positive exposure between people whose economic status and religious and cultural practices are widely divergent. Everyday diversity not only leads to tolerant attitudes but also contributes to ongoing collaborative efforts toward achieving an open and just city. Instead of opening the city, Denver's camping ban closes it: bolstered by fears that visible homelessness threatens profit and capital accumulation, the ban erects a barrier and generates a *fantasy of threat* (Sibley, 2001, p. 245). Threat, whether real or illusory, disables positive exposure to others.

Contact and exposure

Otherness finds its clearest expression in physical appearance. Hence, obvious physical and mental disabilities have been used to mark and banish unsightliness from public view. Schweik's (2009) exploration of nineteenth century "ugly laws" highlights this phenomenon in North American cities in the 1800s. In constructing urban idylls, difference matters. Whatever difference is noted, it is often simply removed from sight. Such "regimes of placement" (Valentine, 2010) nest in a manifest contrast between socioeconomic status. Othering processes can be self-perpetuating. Legitimated by laws, codes and policies, social prejudices become embedded in social mechanisms such as ethnicity, race, practice, language, and place (Dovidio, Glick, & Rudman, 2005). Jim Crow laws legitimated racism; laws forbidding gay and lesbian marriage legitimated "gay bullying." We argue that laws criminalizing homelessness legitimate prejudice against people living on the street (Langegger & Koester, *in press*). What makes the prejudice against the visibly homeless different from other types of prejudgment is that homeless people, lacking cultural, linguistic, religious, or historical cohesion, rarely achieve class-consciousness and agitate for their collective rights to contravene socially accepted

bias. The homeless population is not a community in this vernacular sense of the word; rather it comprises individuals who have lost their housing status for a variety of interconnected structural, social, and economic reasons. They are nonetheless collectively treated as unsightly human trash and systematically removed from public view (Kusmer, 2002; Walby & Lippert, 2011). What is more, appearing unkempt, carrying one's belongings, and sleeping on park benches have long been considered lifestyle choices, rather than survival strategies. Throughout US history homelessness has been portrayed as pathological, unethical, even criminal. This dynamic frames the history of the stigma against homelessness and the language applied to it, which ranges from *criminal tramps* riding America's expanding railroads in the decades following the Civil War, to the *work-shy bums* in the progressive age, to the current dehumanizing discourse of pathology, dereliction, and infringement on public quality of life (Hopper, 2003; Kusmer, 2002; Wasserman & Clair, 2009). People living out-of-doors remain mysterious and their lifestyle remains open to varying interpretations because there is very little meaningful contact between them and the domiciled (Lee et al., 2004; Wessel, 2009). Thus, the homeless have long been considered, and remain, social pariahs.

Scholars have long claimed that opening social discourse to more voices levels the field of interaction and works to achieve social justice (Walzer, 1983; Williams, 1985; Young, 1990). Allport's (1979) contact theory posits that interaction with unfamiliar groups is a way to initiate social learning, allowing people differently situated in economic, ethnic, or racial categories to move beyond prejudicial stereotypes. Following 50 years of positivist research in social psychology (Dovidio et al., 2005) it is generally accepted that contact with strangers has great potential for altering perceptions of out-groups. However, positivist research designs erase social contexts while disregarding historical patterns (Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009; Burke, Joseph, Pasick, & Barker, 2009; Rhodes, Singer, Bourgois, Friedman, & Strathdee, 2005). For example, most scholars testing the contact hypothesis used laboratory instead of field settings, exploring optimal conditions rather than everyday encounters. This perfect scenario approach elides urban realities, overlooking the possibility that public contexts may enhance or constrain contact and thus indirectly contribute to shaping attitudes (Lee et al., 2004).

Contact theory has a geographical blind spot; it has limited traction in the real world of public interaction because it relies on minimalistic conceptions of space, and rarely focuses on cultural, political, and temporal contexts. In multidimensional spaces, physical proximity between groups tends to have a minor effect on contact (Wessel, 2009). Moreover, information, either directly or indirectly obtained, often suffices to confirm stereotypical attitudes that trump interactional contact. Anticipating this dynamic is crucial to the behavioral choices confronting people dwelling in public. They must proactively manage their contact with others in the real world of diversity, difference, acceptance, and intolerance (compare Perry, 2012). What is more, Lee et al. (2004) found that favorable views toward a stigmatized out-group can quickly mutate into antagonistic opposition when the out-group becomes threatening in a concrete or proximate way. Significantly, such threats need not be physical or extreme. Recall that the camping ban was crafted to protect Denver's prime spaces from a vaguely articulated threat of urban camping throughout the city. Following Wessel and Lee et al., we

construct a parallel notion of contact theory, privileging improvised everyday exposure over strictly controlled contact.

Arguing that positive exposure reduces prejudice toward out-groups, Lee and colleagues (2004) insist that there are four different types of exposure: information, observation, interaction, and actual membership in an outgroup. Exposure need be neither firsthand nor familiar. Information from third parties, such as media coverage, lectures, and informal conversations, influences impressions of an out-group. Those who advocated for the passage of Denver's camping ban articulated this type of negative exposure. Second, direct observation of the out-group in the course of everyday life provides sufficient exposure to out-groups for a person to form either positive or negative opinions about an out-group. Rene shares that after "[people] see me with bags and I look kinda dirty" they tend to give her a wide berth. These effects tend to be self-perpetuating since obvious segregation in everyday space can itself become a homeless stigma. Lee and colleagues' category of interaction closely approximates the conventional face-to-face meaning of contact, as Allport develops it.

After the ban disrupted her hygiene routine, Rene has had people openly insult her with claims like "I'm calling the police because you're harassing me with your smell!" Rendering homeless identities like Rene's harder to conceal, Denver's camping ban fortifies perceptual boundaries between domiciled people and homeless individuals. According to many of our participants, they are more often treated or referred to as pathetically unsightly, undoubtedly lazy, or immorally derelict persons. Being invisible as a homeless person is key to breaking through these boundaries. Homeless people have the tenacity to cope (Ruddick, 1990, 1996), not only to survive but ingeniously and anonymously to become part of the urban flow. In order to be a part of and not outside of this flow, people without homes must carefully manage the impressions they make on others. Sometimes this is as simple as rolling one's possessions down the street in a wheeled suitcase instead of a shopping cart (compare—Jones & Foust, 2008). Because different exposure strategies are required in prime, everyday, or marginal public spaces people must alter their impression management strategies to fit the different spatial dynamics of these spaces. Cloke and colleagues call this identity work the geographies of performativity (Cloke, May, & Johnsen, 2008). Some geographies of performativity are invisible to domiciled people co-present in public space. Our participants go to the movies, hang out in Starbucks, and read books while riding city buses. Other geographies of performativity, like time spent waiting near institutional spaces are necessarily visible. Avoiding shelters can therefore be understood as a step toward anonymity.

Managing exposure to others begins with the micropolitics of everyday encounters—performative acts such as holding doors, giving way, and sharing seats, themselves all examples of "doing togetherness" (Valentine, 2008) and "small achievements in the good city" (Amin, 2008, 2012). To maintain invisibility in public spaces homeless people make concerted efforts to do togetherness. Peter says he'll just ask people for the time, compelling them to look him in the eye instead of through him. Mason finds that sitting in a park reading a book allows him space to be thought of as a "thinking and feeling person." Max, homeless for many years and well informed on Denver politics initiates conversations with strangers to manage his exposure on his terms. Chloe and Laine, a young married couple, manage their exposure in everyday space with technology.

We have laptops. When we go to Starbucks, one of us will go to the restroom [to attend to personal hygiene] while the other sets up the computer. That way, they're like "Oh well, they're obviously not homeless drug addicts." We fit in with the customers for a long time, even if we don't buy anything at all.

The presentation of self in public (Goffman, 1959) can be managed, secreted, or exposed. Without manageable microgeographies which include a stable hygiene routine and an urban *savoir faire* regarding public identity, it would be impossible for anyone, whatever their housing status, either to manage or to secret their presentation of self in public.

Visible homelessness in everyday space

Without exception, our participants insist that the ban disrupts daily routines of mobility, hygiene, and sociability. Ernie, homeless in the city for many years and knowledgeable about multiple places to camp, must nonetheless dedicate additional hours every day to moving between these places. Soon after John's eviction, in which he lost most of his belongings, his backpack with clothing and toiletries was stolen from a temporary cache near a day shelter. Roxanne shares what life was like before the ban:

We used to have a camp right by Father Woody's [a day shelter]. We were under the 6th Avenue Bridge. We had five tents. We had a fireplace, we had dishes, and we had food. We had each other. Monday through Friday we'd wake up, take a shower at Father Woody's, one block away. We had Standby [a day temporary personnel contractor]. So we'd walk there. We could go work for eight hours. Sometimes, I'd work for the nut company, the Colorado Nut Company. I'd be at work at 7:30 and I'd get paid that day, \$55. Alright! Beautiful day, you know! I'd take my money and go to the movies.

The camping ban profoundly changed Roxanne's life. Albeit slowly, almost imperceptibly at first, its barbs became apparent. She continues:

After the ban, I tried to find a spot near the Sixth Avenue Bridge where I could at least put up a tent. They left me a note. The cops left me a note saying you've got to move. So I moved up the bridge, closer to Father Woody's. I stay close to coffee and a shower. They left me another note. It said, "you must move." I'm like, where the fuck do you want me to move? Where do you want me to go? I'm out of your way. I'm out of the sight of people. I don't leave syringes. What is your complaint? I want to know! Where do you want me to go? It's not like I was trespassing or that I snuck into someone's house. I didn't cross any fence. It's all bullshit! What they want us to do is get out of the neighborhoods so the people can't see us. Okay! Under the bridge, people can't see me. Kids can't see me from their backyard. I'm not your eyesore. Where do they want us to go? I don't get it. And it sucks that I can't have a tent, because it was some type of accommodation.

Comparing Roxanne's two extended quotes we notice a semantic switch from plural personal pronouns before the ban to singular personal pronouns after the ban. This indicates a manifest shift from the familiarity, sociability, and stability that was provided by the microgeographies of a stable home space to the widening macrogeographies she has had to learn to navigate. She also highlights a central theme of this essay: the fact that people without homes try not to be eyesores; in choosing a campsite and in attending to personal hygiene, they try to render their housing status invisible.

Proponents of the camping ban convinced the Denver city council it would effectively move homelessness from dangerous marginal spaces into the safety of shelters. Unsurprisingly, adults who have many years' experience managing the micro- and macrogeographies of their daily lives are averse to losing their independence. Homeless shelters are notoriously regimented and often demeaning forms of confinement (Hopper, 1990, 2003; Kusmer, 2002; Liebow, 1993; Wasserman & Clair, 2009). As several of our participants noted, shelters can be filthy, crowded places wherein theft is a major problem and personal privacy impossible to achieve. Furthermore, even after waiting long hours in line, visible all the while as homeless, not everyone is lucky enough to get a bed. For many of our participants, shelters are seen as a last resort in cases of severe weather or sickness. Thus, ironically, the ban may have had an effect diametrically opposed to its intent of housing the homeless. According to Robinson's study, conducted after the ban went into effect, 40% of Denver's homeless people now seek a shelter bed more frequently than in the past; 66% however now seek more hidden, further afield, and often more dangerous places to sleep (Robinson, 2013).

By uprooting homeless encampments and scattering their residents throughout the city, further from places to take a shower, to do laundry, to get a haircut, etc. Denver's camping ban turned many microgeographies of hygiene into ever widening macrogeographies than consumed increasing amounts of time to navigate. The ban also did much to reinforce the already significant social boundaries between the domiciled and the undomiciled. Coterminously these boundaries work to lend credence to the ban. This vicious circle is based on empirical errors. Roxanne explains how perceptions of the lives lived without stable microgeographies of daily life are often misperceptions:

Before I became homeless, I thought the homeless were lazy. I did! I didn't know they walked two miles for dinner; they walked forever to camp; they walked forever to get warm clothes; they walked forever to get to where they stashed their sleeping bag.

Commenting on the advantage of having a reliable campsite, she insists,

It does matter. It makes a huge difference, it does. You don't have to roll everything up, carry it around all day, looking destitute and shit.

Roxanne's insight underlines how perceptions of homelessness are formed and reformed, and again she highlights a central theme of our findings: that the difference between being invisible as a homeless person and being visibly homeless, looking "destitute and shit," impacts prejudgment which subsequently impacts public interaction.

Recall, that the City of Denver defines dwelling as using any form of protection from the elements. Therefore shouldering a sleeping bag, bedroll, or tarpaulin demonstrably marks a person as someone who *might* violate a city ordinance. Visibility initiates cascading consequences; because these consequences always make public a person's lack of reliable housing, they can be emotionally debilitating. A person who could store her belongings in a hidden camp in the marginal spaces of the city becomes instantly visible as homeless as soon as she tramps her belongings through the city's everyday and prime spaces. Our participants told us of being harassed, admonished, and advised of Denver's camping ordinance by police, city employees, or private security guards during the day

while simply walking down the street with a backpack or sitting on a park bench with a bedroll under their arm. Many shared that it was embarrassing to be admonished in such a way, especially while in the presence of other people. Surveillance can be extraordinary. One afternoon, observing in Lincoln Park—a neighborhood park south of Downtown Denver—we noticed a police cruiser driving across the lawn toward a group of people with backpacks, and overheard an officer advising them that it is illegal to camp in Denver. These people were sitting at a picnic table in a public park; they were not camping. Many of our participants confirmed that this disquieting practice is in fact common.

The sudden exposure of homeless identities can result in social conflict. While sitting on the curb of Speer Boulevard, Carl was “totally doused in motor oil,” by someone screaming “Get a job!” Forbes (2004) suggests that exposure to unknown others increases social discomfort, prejudice, and discrimination. Discomfiting interactional exposure with the disadvantaged is what Sennett might term the *anxiety of privilege* (Sennett, 2003). Sheri told us of being harassed by the police. She was not homeless at the time, but when the police witnessed her socializing with a visibly homeless man, they loudly accused her of being nothing but a “two-bit whore.” After the ban dislocated her camp and before she could find a shower, Lisa walked into a diner for breakfast and was immediately admonished to “Get out! You’re on drugs or something!” Conducting fieldwork and interviews, we often sensed a low level anxiety of privilege in passersby. For example, when we interacted with participants who were still able to manage their exposure, other people paid us no heed. However, when we spoke to people who were unwashed and disheveled, we were *openly noticed* by people, who stared, gestured, snickered, and thereby seemed to judge us by the company we kept.

Exposed to abnormality, dereliction, and pathos in others, people tend to form opinions ranging from sympathy to outright disgust or thinly veiled, spiteful pity (Foucault, 2003). This reduces, dilutes, and compresses their view of those on society’s margins. Encountering obvious abnormality leads to estrangement; spatial segregation follows. Clearly the type and tenor of contact matters. Individual qualities and circumstances vividly brought into sight by the accumulated experience of daily intercourse seldom appear when opportunities for intercourse are constricted or prohibited altogether (Bauman, 2000). George, one of our participants, understands that identity management matters, saying, “The more people we, the homeless, are personable with, I believe, the more people will be personable with us. That’s a big thing to me. It really is.” Ironically, Ernie manages his public identity by working with police officers charged with enforcing the camping ban. They know about his camps; however they rely on him for neighborhood surveillance. Presenting himself as an upstanding citizen, Ernie has been able maintain his camps and the routines they sustain. These stable microgeographies allow him to not only attend to his personal grooming; they also provide safe places to store his barber tools and thus help to sustain his street hustle.

A significant key to public anonymity is not appearing unsightly, lazy, or derelict. We learned from undomiciled people that they craft their everyday identities in ways identical to domiciled people, by taking showers, doing their laundry, brushing their teeth, or shaving. In these ways, they manage to remain invisible—unidentifiable as homeless people when in public. They also avoid places where homeless people congregate, like shelters with lines of homeless people extending

down the block. They present themselves as informed citizens by articulating their knowledge of national news and local sports in places such as parks and coffee shops, making sure that they will be overheard (for a detailed description of this type of identity work see Perry, 2012). By presenting themselves as anonymous urbanites, often by simply using a mobile phone, they are able to blend in with others in everyday public space. However, currently without campsites and the microgeographies they anchor, most of our participants find it increasingly difficult to do such identity work and present themselves as ordinary people. They report that with their daily routines upended, they are more frequently faced with naked prejudice.

Just possibilities and unjust realities

By crafting an ordinance designed to protect prime spaces from the threat of visible homelessness, Denver may in fact be dehumanizing its homeless residents. John is all too aware of this terrifying process: “They don’t care about the homeless out here anyway, especially when they find out we have drinking problems, or mental problems, drug problems, health problems. They don’t give a fuck.” Complaining about how difficult his life had become since he was evicted from a longtime camp under Interstate 25 in Frog Hollow Park, and had all his personal belongings destroyed, he looked us in the eye and asked, “What are you going to do with me, throw me away?” John is more unkempt. And because he has no stable camp, he is more often visibly disheveled as he moves through Denver’s everyday spaces.

Quality of life ordinances, the camping ban in particular, have affected the microgeographies along with the macrogeographies Denver’s undomiciled residents must navigate daily. The shift from relatively stable existences to lives of constant motion has had dramatic consequences. Before the ban, most of our participants were able to routinely move between camps, friends’ houses, day shelters, and workplaces. After the ban, especially subsequent move-on enforcement protocols, the distances between these spaces increased. Moreover, because enforcement of the ban necessitates that people must frequently find new locations in which to dwell, daily routines become unstable, often unpredictable. Spatiotemporal irregularity affects the cohesion of their social networks. Decoupling from larger groups, something many individuals now do out of necessity to avoid detection as a homeless person, they lose the chance to cultivate and articulate social capital in the protection of person and of property. The loss of a safe place to store their belongings has compounding consequences for people living on the street. Unable to safely stash bedrolls and clothing they are admonished for lugging personal belongings. Because they are disabled from routinely managing their public identities, they are deprived of an unremarkable, yet, we insist, crucial right to the city: the right to anonymity.

Exposure does not work toward reducing prejudice toward homelessness when stigmas are manifest. We have shown how the camping ban indirectly renders homelessness visible. Like other quality of life laws, it has the effect of legitimating social prejudice against homeless people (compare Valentine, 2010). A pernicious irony is that while homelessness is produced in large part by labor market conditions and real estate market dynamics, quality of life legislation disciplines individuals without homes for capitalism’s underlying shortcomings. This injustice has perverse and far-reaching effects. Rather than mobilizing

society to attend to the causes of homelessness, such legislation punishes its victims. Casting light on the complexities undergirding exposure in everyday public space, this essay has presented a street level view of the results of this process. As Nicholas Blomley (2005, p. 293) claims, “Law does not just happen to the everyday; it is produced and reproduced in everyday encounters.” So too with social (in)justice: it does not just happen in public space, it is produced and reproduced in everyday encounters.

Urbanism breeds tolerance (Amin, 2012; Lefebvre, 2003; Simmel, 2006; Watson, 2006); tolerance develops in the context of public space. Arguing for the importance of everyday anonymity, this essay is a call to look beyond diversity and toward commonality in public space. The inclination of urban scholars to foreground difference distracts us from how the interests of widely divergent groups are often fundamentally aligned (compare Wasserman & Clair, 2010). In agreement with this stance, this paper points toward future research growing from similarities between the domiciled and the undomiciled rather than exploring differences between these groups. Assuming this perspective, urban scholars and policy makers would be better positioned to understand the actual complexities of movement through public rights-of-way as well as the unfolding of patterns of human agency in public space. Focusing on fundamental alignments between the housed and the unhoused would also have immediate traction in real world policy and praxis. To illustrate, Denver’s Road Home—a multi-stakeholder and multi-agency project with the goal to end homelessness in the Denver Metro Area in 10 years—promulgates a plan that balances the provision of housing, treatment services, and job training with expectations of personal responsibility and self-reliance. We have shown that quality of life laws like Denver’s camping ban actually disable the very regimes of self-reliance and personal responsibility the city’s human services sector hopes to rebuild. For many people living out-of-doors the cycles between sporadic police discipline and service agency paternalism prove a forced exercise in futility. Recognizing commonality between the domiciled and the undomiciled in efforts toward the management of anonymous public identities could very well counteract the pointlessness of these misaligned public policies, straightening the road toward permanent shelter for many people living on the streets.

Notes

1. Funded by private commercial property owners, this business improvement district concentrates on economic development, street beautification and cleaning efforts, and manages a highly visible security force along the 16th Street Mall.
2. A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, the Civic Center Conservancy, advocates for facility improvements, programs park events, raises funds for capital improvements to the park and oversees activities to revitalize the Civic Center Park

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