HOMELESS ABJECTION AND THE UNCANNY “PLACE” OF THE NATIONAL IMAGINATION

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Thesis Prepared for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

May 2014

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Sloss, Eric J. *Homeless Abjection and the Uncanny “Place” of the National Imagination.*

Master of Science (Communication Studies), May 2014, 139 pp., bibliography, 156 titles.

This project examines the effects of the homeless body and the threat of homelessness on constructing a national imaginary that relies on the trope of locatability for recognition as a citizen-subject. The thesis argues that homelessness, the oft-figured specter of public space, functions as bodies that are “pushed out” as citizen-subjects due to their inability maintain both discursive and material location. I argue that figures of “home” rely on the ever-present threat of dislocation to maintain a privileged position as the location of the consuming citizen-subject. That is, the presence of the dislocated homeless body haunts the discursive and material construction of home and its inhabitants. *Homeless* then becomes the uncanny inverse of home, functioning as an abjection that reifies home “place” as an arbiter of recognition in a neoliberal national imaginary. The chapters proceed to examine what some consider homeless “homes,” focusing on the reduction of the homeless condition to a place of inhabitance, or the lack thereof. This attempt to locate the homeless body becomes a symptom of the desire for recognition as a placed body. The thesis ends on a note of political possibility, figuring the uncanny as a rupture that evacuates language of signification and opens up space for a form of recognition without an over-determined identity.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Man being born, as has been proved, with a title to perfect freedom and uncontrolled enjoyment of all the rights and privileges of the law of Nature, equally with any other man, or number of men in the world, hath by nature a power not only to preserve his property—that is, his life, liberty and estate.

John Locke, Two Treatises on Government

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.

Declaration of Independence

The birth of the United States of America comes not by way of celebrated military victory or violent coup, but rather in its very declaration. The performative “We” at once declares. “We,” members of the United States of America, are bonded by the future to come. The imaginary union is signed into being as, “John Hancock,” the weight of his authority delivered only in retrospect. The John Hancock who is now (was already?) an American. However, who is this “we” and where do we come from? The Creator. The Creator and, of course, our creator. He has loaned us his words. Our rights, not so different from his, are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. We, Americans, cannot be reduced to our estate! We speak from states and proclaim, “Happiness!” or the pursuit thereof.

The Declaration of Independence (hereafter Declaration) was the first document produced by the United States of America, laying the foundation on which the architecture of our governing system rests. However, our founding fathers were hardly the original thinkers behind their own words, following in the footsteps of the Enlightenment thinker John Locke. In his Two Treatises on Government, Locke famously asserted the natural right for all men to have “life, liberty, and estate.” In their famous adjustment, the writers of the Declaration transform the
promise of property to the dream of happiness. This begs the questions: Where has the right to property gone and what of the assertion to the pursuit of happiness?

While in diction these two documents differ, their implications are aligned as iterations of the same device: collective participation in governmental action, a duty of the responsible citizen. These two excerpts work from within different aspects of language: the former relies on the sovereignty of the letter, as the latter relies on the imaginary promises. Locke’s promise is legitimized through the specific naming of location and structure, whereas the Declaration defers property for pursuit. The opening salvo of the Declaration frames the citizen as one who is always becoming through a commodity form of happiness, our founding fathers put material location in deferral. However, deferral certainly does not absolve the citizen of his or her home place, it merely shifts the promise toward market capitalism rather than “unalienable rights.” No doubt, the material aspects of citizenship lurk in the shadows of our founding document.

I offer these subtle allusions to locatability in American discourse as a foundation for the remainder of this text. In what follows, I engage the questions of “home” that our founding fathers so artfully avoided by examining what many consider to be its inverse, “home-less.” While the homeless citizen may seem to be only one without a house, to definitively collapse homelessness in this way only begins to scratch the surface of the homeless condition. Immediately, we run into problems when we collapse the terms “home” and “house.” While “home” seems to be a psychologically located term, referring to a sense of discursive placement, “house” inflects attention toward the cold materiality of architectural spaces. Alain de Botton, in his book entitled *The Architecture of Happiness*, sings high praise for these concepts, placing the terms “house” and “home” in intersection. He says, “The materials around us will speak to us of the highest hopes we have for ourselves. In this setting, we can come close to a state of mind
marked by integrity and vitality. We can feel inwardly liberated. We can, in a profound sense, return home.” Botton’s prose certainly invokes the myriad emotions associated with our places of dwelling, yet his words speak with the ego of locatability. The lives of those who live without permanent houses may certainly have feelings of integrity and vitality, but their inability to return “home” is all but ignored in de Botton. By now, there should be some hesitation as to placing homelessness in a binary relationship with the housed. To ignore the non-location of the homeless citizen is simultaneously to ignore the primacy of location for the normalized citizen. Without a validated place of residence, such as a mailing address, homeless persons cannot be fully active citizens in a democratic process.

Homelessness is both a material condition and a representational phenomenon that is pervasive and seemingly inevitable within capitalist logic. However, the function of the homeless body in relation to public discourse has an added function in relation to understandings of national belonging, exceeding only the lived conditions experienced by homeless persons. While there are certainly contractual functions of citizenship, to end with only this contract in our understanding of American identity would be incomplete. In referring back to the Declaration, the imaginary function of citizenship appears in full force. Benedict Anderson refers to national communities as imagined, claiming “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion.” Noting the commodified “pursuit of Happiness,” the Declaration’s imaginative claims help abstractly constitute the citizen in constant pursuit of happiness, defined around one’s ability to consume.

With the ability to consume being a primary marker of recognition in a capitalist system, recognition under this logic become exclusionary in several different ways, particularly
highlighting the homeless condition. These exclusions become more apparent when reading discourses of the home and the accompanying anxieties of its dispossession. However, it must be noted that to be unhomed should not be conflated with homelessness. Unhomed is based on anxieties that present the home as a symbolically constituted utterance. This utterance is presented back to the subject, producing what Homi Bhabha calls “the shocking recognition of the world-in-the-home, the home-in-the-world.”5 Rather, homelessness refers to the complete deferral of location in both space and time. While homeless persons may be stationary, their location is not permanent, constantly being threatened by legal practices that uproot homeless encampments and the liminal stays in homeless shelters that disallow permanent dwelling. For the subject of capital, the homeless body presents the social aspects of the home back upon him or her, structuring a relationship with the homeless person around that tension. The homeless body becomes the abject body, “ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable,”6 that produces the subject of capital in his or her home place.7 This home place becomes the speaking point from which homeless persons are moved beyond a mere Other based upon their material conditions of existence.

Whereas a community of citizens is defined around their ability to consume and be located, the homeless body is marked as the excess to the logic imposed by capitalism. The inability to be located produces an uncanny relationship between the projected citizen of the American national imaginary and the homeless person who has no “place.” In this thesis, I argue that the specular image of the homeless body functions as the constitutive outside of the American national imaginary, constituting the citizen-subject in relation to his home place. This thesis will examine case studies of the homeless condition, which, I argue produce the American “specular imaginary,” defined around the nodal point of home. Lacan explains the “specular
imaginary” as a concept-image that produces for the subject “the experience of seeing himself, reflecting on himself and conceiving of himself as other than he is.” By detailing the rhetorical effects and affect of homeless box city fundraisers, the exclusionary tactics of urban community building, and a particular abject encounter for entrepreneurial capitalists, I hope to situate homelessness in the mirror of normalized American citizen. I aim to explicate the link between home and homeless, drawing upon a motivating question asked by Botton: “Why are we so vulnerable, so inconveniently vulnerable, to what the spaces we inhabit are saying?”

Whither Homelessness?

Homelessness is a difficult issue to nail down in American discourse, as its effects are often made invisible by the discourses that support its public understanding. The differences in living situations and causes of homelessness are as different as the people to which it effects, making a single, unified intervention in the structural causes of homelessness almost impossible (though certainly warranted). Rather, I will engage with the effects of homelessness in figuring the image of the American citizen.

While homelessness is a prevalent experience, affecting more 630,000 people in the United States at any given time, rhetorical scholarship focusing on this condition is few and far between. While rare, these articles provide a healthy foundation for further research on the topic. Homelessness is a largely undefined term, often calling upon conceptions based around mental illness, poverty, and the unruly body. However, the consensus among scholars seem to highlight that the confrontational stigma of the homeless person is the very body he or she presents. In an analysis of the film, Reversal of Fortune, Melanie Loehwing offers a central trope of homelessness as located around passions of the body, centered on unfettered desires of the now. Centrally, she claims homelessness is offered to the public as a “present-centered condition,
rendering those who suffer it incapable and unsuited for the future-oriented collective life of a democratic citizenry.”11 While the normalized citizen is depicted as deferring his or her own desires for their democratic duties, “in the case of the homeless, citizens are betrayed by their bodies.”12

Similarly, Kurt Lindemann points toward the effect of unruly bodies made visible to normalized citizen-subject. In a case study similar to the fourth chapter of this thesis, Lindemann examines the practices of street newspaper vendors in San Francisco as a possible locus social change. While these practices are often portrayed to be helping those who participate in the program, Lindemann claims that this is hardly a “business deal between equals.”13 The primary audience of these papers was not the native San Franciscan, but rather the tourist, “[framing] the paper not as a tool for advocacy, but as a souvenir.”14 Like any souvenir, authenticity of experience is important, eliciting the necessity for “authentic” performances from these homeless sales persons. Importantly, Lindemann claims, “the homeless person remains the dissociated Other, and the Street Sheet becomes a souvenir upon which the tourist may look back fondly, remembering the time he or she made a ‘difference’ in the life of someone less privileged.”15

While homelessness is relatively under examined within rhetorical studies, there are numerous readings of the effects of poverty on the American national imaginary. However, a distinction between an understanding of homelessness and poverty is important, as the questions that motivate these studies is often quite different. Studies of poverty have occupied several different positions, ranging from the assumed subjects of policy drafting to the ideal images of poverty and the America spirit. Robert Asen argues for a relationship between policy discourse on poverty and the U.S. national imaginary, examining the force of national policy in the creation of the normalized citizen of discourse. Through a careful examination of policy
animating the welfare debates that took place in the 1980s and 1990s, Asen argues the discourse often “brought recipients into the debates through disabling images” through a politics of representation. Additionally, Cara Finnegan examines the Farm Security Administration (FSA) images taken during the Great Depression, arguing that the “FSA photographs operated as…circulating images that made some poverty stories more rhetorically available than others.” Although there are numerous examination of the politics of representation within studies of poverty, but none of these inquiries specifically engage with the function of “home” and “homelessness” in U.S. public culture. While there are several accounts of homelessness that center around representation and the inability for assimilation within normalized, mainstream culture, an account of the common links between discourse about home and homelessness is still needed. By linking discourses about home and homeless, scholars in rhetorical studies will better be able to account for discursive and material causes that cast homeless persons as invisible in public discourse. To explicate this link, I turn to scholarship on psychoanalysis and the rhetorics of space and place to create a more robust understanding of the public bodies of homelessness and their effect on imagined and material spaces of belonging. This relationship highlights the problematic ways in which communities engage discourse about homelessness, often only stitching their identity back to a hegemonically validated home place.

(Dis)Locating the Subject

To engage with the production of community that rallies around the “home,” I want to first explicate the process of subjectivity that informs my criticism throughout this thesis. Starting with an account of the subject is important because the following work situates itself between the constitutive intersection of subjectivity, notions of home, and the rhetorics of U.S. national imaginaries. In recent years, scholars in rhetorical studies have offered a multitude of
perspectives that inform our understanding of rhetorical subjectivity, drawing on an array of Continental scholars.\textsuperscript{18} When I refer to rhetorical subjectivity, I am not saying that rhetoric and subjectivity are coterminous, nor am I claiming that rhetoric is purely epistemological. Rather, I am arguing that rhetoric and language must be an active component in defining how we understand both subjectivity and agency. For this, I turn to the work of Jacques Lacan, the French psychoanalyst made famous for his “return to Freud,”\textsuperscript{19} whose work was recently hailed by Christian Lundberg as an essential supplement to rhetorical theory.\textsuperscript{20} With this turn to the Lacanian subject, I hope to develop a more robust understanding of the Symbolic as it pertains to rhetorical scholarship and the rhetorics of home, defining the home through a practice of community driven by anxieties of wholeness and completion.

Scholars in rhetorical studies often offer theories of the subject in relation to rhetorical agency, or the subject’s ability to act according to will and determination. In recent years, research engaged with questions of agency has centered on the humanist/post-humanist debates, a conversation summed up nicely by Christian Lundberg and Joshua Gunn in their cleverly titled article, “Ouiji Board, Are There Any Communications?” Lundberg and Gunn make a twofold argument: first, the relationship between subjectivity and agency should not be collapsed, and second, postmodernism theories of the subject and discourse help develop an analytical distinction between the agent and agency.\textsuperscript{21} With this re-figuration, the subject is not a sovereign actor or agency, but rather agency is always partial and not necessarily completely conscious or intentional. In doing this, the scholars provide an overview of theorists whom they claim provide representative samples of postmodern theories of the subject: Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Lacan.
While each of these three French theorists offer different accounts of subjectivity, their works mark a break from the subjects of 20th century humanism and existentialism. Generally, Lundberg and Gunn define these thinkers around “accounts of the human subject that specify its radical contingency, its fragmentary qualities, and/or its dependence on generative systems beyond the seat of an insular individual consciousness.”22 In short, while the humanist subject looks inward for a consciousness driven subjectivity, the postmodern subject is defined by exteriority, an account of agency that acknowledges that the subject does not posses, nor completely control language, but is animated and recognized through an exterior symbol system.

The Lacanian subject is one of Lundberg and Gunn’s most pointed (and quite possibly radical for rhetorical studies) explications of subjectivity and agent status. For Lacan, the term subject is an ironic presentation, as the subject is constantly under erasure by the very mechanism that produces his or her consciousness: language. The Lacanian subject develops in several stages, the first of which Lacan calls the “mirror stage.” The mirror stage is the birth of the I/eye, creating a specular image of the body for the baby who is situated around the perspective of the eye, a position from which the baby starts to parse out the world. The mirror stage also hurls the baby into socialization, producing both an “individual I” and a “social I.” Later, the specular relation to the body of self and other is what Lacan calls the “ imaginary.”23

Moving to language acquisition, or the entry into the “Symbolic,” forces the subject to divide the world up into a system of signifiers, or metonymic units, that hail the subject into differentiation and contradiction. The subjects relationship to language differs from his or her specular relationship, as distinct objects no longer retain essentialized and localized meaning, but are turned into signifiers and allow for an absence of the object all together. At this point, the Other, or the function of language, sets limits on the subject’s ability to speak intelligibly. Thus,
the subject is simultaneously defined through its entry into language and alienated due to his or her reliance on an exterior and social logical economy.

While the Lacanian subject is a subject of language, this language is not defined through the closed system of signification offered by Ferdinand de Saussure that implicitly works through agency as predetermined through identifiable signification. While language still yields ontic-clout for Lacan, its nature is contingent and tenable for change that allows for creative intervention. Thus, agency revolves around a re-configuration of the symbolic, placing prime importance on the signifier rather the indistinguishable separation between signifier and signified (hereafter “S” = signifier and “s” = signified). Saussure offers the “sign” as a cohesive unit, encompassing the signifier (sound-image) and signified (concept) both connected in algorithmic relation by a circle signifying their unity. The familiar graph looks like this, the whole of which would be called a “sign” in Saussurian linguistics:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{signified} \\
\text{signifier}
\end{array}
\]

However, Lacan claims that language cannot possible function as such, flipping the Saussurian graph on its head and removes the unbreakable bond between the two. Rather than giving precedence to the sign, or the interminable connection between acoustic-image and the concept, Lacan claims that signification as such is not possible. To modify this original formula, he provides the following:

\[
\frac{S}{s_{26}}
\]

This algorithm represents the changes Lacan makes to Saussure’s graph to introduce the relationship between the S and s. The signifier (S) is separated by a bar, unable to reach
signification (s) (the bar is a character unfortunately un-typeable). This relationship is an aspect of linguistics that Lacan claims is fundamental understanding the subject as one that is barred from his or her unconscious. Instead of having a one-to-one relationship, the signifier is able to slide, acting as part of the contents of many different combinations. The signifier’s status is defined in two ways, both vertically and horizontally. In its horizontal relationship the signifier exists as a function of difference in relation to other signifiers around it. For example, the term “cat” can be used to signify an animal (though not one specific animal-object), can refer to a person (“He was a cool cat”), or refer to a piece of construction equipment (Caterpillar Construction equipment). While this example is trivial, this constitutes the signifier’s horizontal relationship with other signifiers, relying on the period to close the chain of signifiers. The signifier also constitutes itself in a vertical relationship, acting as a unit of language that is, as Bruce Fink explains, “stuffed with meaning.”27 Thus, the signifier inherits a history of use that far exceeds its finite interpretation. The signifiers constitute the subject in relation to language while disarticulating language from its referents or stable, unidirectional signification.

While Lacan critiques the Saussurian assumption of stable meaning, he certainly is not one to claim that there is no meaning. Rather, says Lacan, this meaning is contingent upon the speaking subject’s use of trope, locating agency in language as specifically rhetorical. He terms this process “significance,” and separates it from signification due to its inherently unstable (yet often productive) nature. According to Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, “Significance operates…at the edge of signification, that is to say…significance crosses the bar, and significance only slides along the bar.”28 This seemingly paradoxical statement draws attention to the beginnings of a Lacanian understanding of rhetoric, as both the contingent production of meaning for the subject, yet heeding awareness of the structural relationship
between subject and Other. Significance, for Lacan, is made up of the play of metaphor and metonymy that construct meaning in an individual utterance. Metonymy refers the multiple signifiers in relation to one another producing the effect of significance (sails may help signify boat, but certainly do not mean boat). Metaphor works along the logic of replacement. Metaphor refers to the replacement of one signifier for another, possessing the possibility of bringing something new into the symbolic (“‘stink contest’ for ‘election’ in a political allegory”29). This play between metaphor and metonymy offers language as a function of rhetoric rather than a strict science of meaning, relying on contingency and placing importance on invention. This explication of “significance” leads Lacan to claim that, “the universe is a flower of rhetoric…”30

A turn toward the Lacanian subject informs rhetorical studies by turning attention to language in a relatively novel fashion. Lacanian accounts of language allow the rhetorician to highlight and detail the often over-determined role of the signifier in defining subject positions, while locating agency and the ability to intervene at the level of the trope and rhetorical invention. Taking this function of language into account allows for a conceptual map that locates homelessness in the production of an American community and helps detail a more nuanced account of the possible conditions for social change.

“Wringing the Neck,” or, Attention to the Other

This foray into the complexities of Lacan’s theory of language and subjectivity form the basis that the subject is able to gain agency that is specifically located within the contingent production of rhetoric. Lundberg and Gunn argue, “This agency possesses the subject, thereby bringing the fantasy of the agent to life.”31 In other words, agency rests in what Friedrich Nietzsche calls, “A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms—in short, a sum of human relations that have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, translated, and
embellished.” What Nietzsche termed “truth,” Lacan calls the symbolic. Whereas I have established the subject as the subject animated through language, specifically highlighting its rhetorical function, a detailed relationship to language is still needed. This relationship is defined in no other terms than the subject’s ability to speak and be spoken about, referring both to specific objects or others, as well as referring to the signifying subjects of the Other of language.

The subject and his or her relationship to speech is defined by Lacan in several works with an explication of L Schema that accounts for specific functions of presence and absence in the speaking situation. Christian Lundberg utilizes Lacan’s L schema to call for a “disarticulation between the idea of rhetoric and communication,” critiquing what many have termed the fantasy of communication. Lacan, as well as Lundberg, refers to the large-scale adoption of a transmission model model of communication as an imaginary function, insofar as information cannot be directly transferred to another. For Lundberg, as long as rhetoricians maintain fidelity to communication, wed to the fantasy of an uninterrupted representation and transfer of concepts, the discipline remains impotent to the function of the “agency of the letter,” as referred to in the previous discussion of metaphor and metonymy. Lundberg calls to “’wring the neck’ of a version of rhetoric that locates it chiefly in the imaginary order.” His critical intervention comes by way of the Lacanian graph referred to as L Schema, a diagram meant to illustrate the subject’s relationship to both the small other (as object) and the big Other (as language and symbolic law).

Lundberg’s engagement with L Schema reworks a theory of rhetoric that is mindful to language as both an imaginary (and contextual) relationship between things, and the symbolic effects of the signifier that divides up the world into bits and pieces (letters, phonemes, and graphemes) that only have relations to one another. Using this schema encourages an
intervention into a rhetorical understanding of homelessness that allows for a more robust understanding of the symbolic weight associated with inability to possess a locatable home place.

While Lundberg and several other scholars have made significant theoretical contributions to the understandings of rhetoric and speech, a specific application of a Lacanian conception of space and place has yet to be broached in the field of rhetorical studies. In a rarely cited lecture entitled “Zeitlich-Entwicklungsgeschichte,” Lacan ambiguously referenced the possibilities of the role of space and place in psychoanalysis:

It was Alain who pointed out that no one counts the number of columns on his mental image of the Pantheon. To which I would have liked to have answered him – except the architect of the Pantheon. So here we are, ushered through the gateway, into the relations between the real, the imaginary and the symbolic.

By linking architecture, and by relation space, with the psychoanalytic subject, Lacan provides an inroad for exploration of the function of libidinal economies in the discourses of space. For the Lacanian subject, locatability has a particular relationship to the affective encounters and discursive spaces that he or she inhabits. In this configuration, “locatability” is offered as an effect of the structuration of the subject, relying on both the (small) other and the (big) Other to produce a location from which a subject can speak. The home place is thus an utterance by the subject, displayed as a speaking into being his relationship to problematic cultural/structural investments and the baggage this produces. This repressed baggage if often presented to the subject in an uncanny way, producing the home as a locus of anxiety. In the words of Anthony Vidler, “the house haunted or not… pretends to afford the utmost security while opening itself to the secret intrusion of terror.” Specifically, using vocabulary provided by Lacan and his critics, I will examine the spoken and material aspects of home and homelessness in relation to imagined conception of American identity and its not so savory counterparts.
Locating Home

The role and function of language in the production of the “home” is particularly important, as attention to symbolic function of home place and space locates the home as not only private and individual, but also in its relationship to social processes and community practices. In this sense, in addition to material space, the home is tenuously and subtly produced by speaking it into existence. The process of producing a “home” carves up a material space cultural signifiers of locatability. Detailing the subject’s relationship to speech provides a framework for understanding the complexities of these utterances. These spaces and places are not necessarily communicating, but have rhetorical effects nonetheless.

Scholars of space and cultural geography have long been concerned with spatial logics of capitalist production, viewing this as the architecture of economic relations. Among the most prominent is Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space*. Lefebvre intimately connects the constitution of social groups and forces to the very spaces they produce. Indicting the tendency to fetishize what is *in* different spaces, he calls for a notion of the production of space as a social practice, that is representative and constitutive of systems of power and knowledge, claiming these discourses and investments become “inscribed in space.” Of special importance to Lefebvre is what he calls “representational space,” or, “space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of ‘inhabitants’ and ‘users.’” Further, he says, “This is the dominated – and hence passively experienced – space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of it.” Thus, representational spaces are recognizable spaces, which are painted over with significance and standing in for abstract representations of ideological norms. While Lefebvre ascribes ontological capacities to space, an engagement of spatial logic and experience as *rhetorical*
requires an understanding of the subject. Specifically, the role of the symbolic and imaginary functions of language offer a wonderful starting point in understanding the cultural presence that helps constitute the home.

While the home is spliced with ideological assumptions, the term’s material makeup of a home need not be uniform with all other spaces of this ilk. Their specular façades constitute their uniqueness only insofar as the subject imagines them as a different space than all others, yet they are bound by symbolic injunctions as to their function. I use the term “imagined” in the sense of the Lacanian “imaginary,” or the specular field that produces a unified version of “reality.” He claims the specular field is, “a fanning-out of all the imaginary equations which allow the human being to be the only animal to have at his disposition an almost infinite number of objects – objects marked with the value of a Gestalt, objects isolated in their forms.” This understanding of the space is not sustainable because these spaces cannot function without language dissecting and displacing their insides. As language divides up reality into individual signifiers, our pure vision is thus tainted with prohibition of what certain objects can and cannot be. However, the signifier also provides the possibility for transcendence, or a connection of this space with others. The space only gains significance insofar as its metonymic signifiers are able to float to other spaces, thus producing what Lefebvre has tokened a “representational space.”

The representational space of the “home” often functions in this way for the American citizen-subject. The suburban home is often criticized for its lack of individual character, producing material qualities that mimic all those around them. Suburban homes are commonly seen to lack “culture,” submitting to the drone mentality of an assumed homogeneity of their communities. James Howard Kunstler emphatically claims suburban spaces “represent monoculture tract developments of cookie-cutter bunkers on half-acre lots in far-flung
suburbs.” This commentary far outreaches the grip of academia, finding an ironic home in popular culture as well. For example, the television show *Weeds* made the Malvina Reynolds song “Little Boxes” popular by featuring its lyrics during the introduction to every episode. The first verse reads:

```
Little boxes on the hillside,
Little boxes made of ticky-tacky,
Little boxes on the hillside,
Little boxes all the same.
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This commentary is clearly meant to be ironic, as indie band and individual artists eventually take their turn in covering this song for the show’s introduction. Regardless, the commentary remains unified in the assumption that the suburban house is ubiquitous, as are the families that inhabit them. Figured in this sense, the house is hailed as a representational space. Its imaginary function comes from the perception of individualism and private space assumed by every inhabitant. “While there are many homes like it, this home is mine.” The subject populates his or her home with uniqueness, placing objects of significance throughout, viewing his or her Salvador Dali print as if it is the thing itself. These objects create a specular field that is unified with a fantasy of individualism. However, the symbolic cuts through this space, tincturing its social practices with normative ideological functions. The signifier creates division where a fantasy of (self-)unicity attempts to assert itself. The signifier divides up spaces according to use, producing rooms like the “man cave,” the “family room,” and most importantly the “master bedroom.” The master bedroom is the ideological constituted space of copulation, reducing sexuality to a “hidden” erogenous zone. Joan Faber McAlister argues, “[the master bedroom] offers a spatial solution to the problem of marital relations that have died down by creating an intimate place in which to rekindle passions.” Further, McAlister links this to Lefebvre’s social space, claiming “the field and basis for the subjectivity and acts of the married couple is
the social space of the ‘private’ home, particularly the intimate zones within it designed explicitly for marital relations.”50 Thus, the “home,” and the objects therein offer an imaginary individuality, while simultaneously carrying the weight of ideology. Important here is that this t(r)opology of the home is not seen as distinct processes from one another, but as laid over one another, functioning simultaneously.

While I seem to have ventured far from the starting point, connecting the “pursuit of Happiness,” to Locke’s notion of “property,” I will make that connection more clear. As the “pursuit of Happiness” produces a citizen-subject that bows to capital, its ideological functions, in turn, produce spaces that normalized dwelling habits. As capital must have an explicitly material function, the house/home becomes the space/place by which the citizen-subject orients him or herself to the world. This space provides the illusion of privacy that inflects his or her public recognition as a subject of capitalist relations. To reiterate, the privacy is only an illusion, as the home is under constant supervision of capitalist consumption. Illustrating this, McAlister locates the home as a place of citizenship production in a post-9/11 world. Using *Extreme Home Makeover: Home Edition* as a prime example, she argues “that American citizenship is being housebroken by a politics that paradoxically combines the economic and governmental imperatives of neoliberalism with the moral and social norms of neoconservativism.”51 McAlister effectively connects both free market capitalism and a neoconservative moral imperative within the *topos* of home. By long and circuitous route we are now back with Locke. Through the politics and tropes of home, the American collective imaginary is defined and redefined according to the political and economic climate. Within the topos of the hegemonic home, the citizen-subject defines “life, liberty, and estate.” With the possession of a home place, the subject of capital implicates its uncanny inverse as the possibility of being “ unhomed.”
Dislocating Home

This thesis is built around three distinct case studies that will broadly examine the relationships between home, homeless, and community. To address these relationships, chapter Two begins with the function of homelessness in creating an imagined community of citizens through the reification of what many see as the homeless “home”: the cardboard box. Specifically I read press releases from the popular “box city” philanthropy events that have become ubiquitous fundraising and awareness events at college campuses, high schools, and church organizations. By using the cardboard box as the synecdoche for the homeless experience, these events effectively reduce the homeless condition to an object of shelter. Further, I demonstrate that these “awareness” events and fundraisers assimilate the cardboard box into “homely” American representations, rendering the dislocated homeless body abject in relation to imagined American consumer. The production of these “box cities” is one that works to quilt a community to a specific place, constituting an imagined community around the primacy of their own home.

Working within the framework of the homeless imaginary that establishes homeless body the abject outside of the American national imaginary, chapter Three revolves around the following question: How does the aesthetic imperative of home-making inform the homeless shelter in public discourse? Recently, the historic Brooklyn neighborhood of Carroll Gardens has seen the idealized “restored character” planned for its urban revitalization project threatened by the introduction of some unplanned bodies. In 2012, a proposal for a “chic” loft-style homeless shelter was released, prompting concerns from current residents. Calling the proposed homeless housing project a “numskull idea,” community planners filed a zoning injunction to halt its opening. Although the shelter conformed to the neighborhood’s highly regulated
aesthetics, the prospect of homeless bodies posed a threat to the imagined stability of “home” in the Brooklyn community. In this chapter, I argue that despite the aesthetics of the homeless shelter, homeless bodies are fundamentally unlocatable, existing in the porous borders between space and place. For this reason, such bodies stand in abject relation to the home-making projects of urban revitalization, which seek to make normalized (and affluent) bodies at home in newly (re)colonized urban space.

Turning from questions dealing with the imaginary and symbolic locations of homelessness, I turn in the final case study to the question: What are the critical possibilities for recognition of abject homeless bodies? In 2012, Austin, Texas hosted the South by Southwest (SXSW) Conference and Festival, an event that provides a platform for startup projects and businesses such as Twitter and Foursquare. During the festival, homeless men and women were equipped with mobile “MiFi” devices, providing them the entrepreneurial opportunity to earn money as a “Homeless Hotspot.” News reports demonstrated an uneasiness and anxiety in their editorial reaction to the hotspots. Already, the homeless body has presented problems for the ongoing aesthetic imperative of urban spaces, functioning as a reminder of capitalist excess. Sometimes functioning as the uncanny, or unhomely neighbor, the homeless body presents a spectral presence in public space. Further, homeless individuals are often rendered abject, literally embodying and displaying the grotesque excess of capitalist production in relation to their locatable consuming counterparts.

Reading media depictions following the event, this chapter locates the limits of subjectivity for the homeless body as a symptom of late capitalism. Of course, every symptom must have its cause. I argue that the neo-liberal entrepreneur creates abjection for its own reproduction; the national imaginary necessitates the dislocation of a grotesque other to feel right
at home. However, this event simultaneously opens up the conditions of possibility for intervention. I claim the encounter between “Homeless Hotspot” and those attending SXSW works through the logic of the Lacanian “full speech,” emptying the signifier of the need to produce signification, in exchange for a demand for recognition. Lacan explains, “Even if [full speech] communicates nothing, the discourse represents the existence of communication; even if it denies the evidence, it affirms that speech constitutes truth, even if it is intended to deceive, the discourse speculates on faith in testimony.”54 In and through the function of speech, the body proclaims, “I am here.” This performative full speech act from the homeless body situates an uncanny and disturbing operation of capital meeting its own remainder. Famously, Freud explains the uncanny as, “that class of frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar.”55 What Freud calls the “frightening,” we shall call a kernel of the Real.

If the politics of home and homelessness is the tropological and topological locus that defines the imagined function of the citizen-subject, then the homeless body provides an uncanny mirror image. The homeless body is the excess to his capitalist production and the specular inversion to his collective self worth. To be without a home is to be unlocatable by the logics that govern modern capital. As the citizen-subject of modern capital is defined around his or her permanent ability to inhabit a home place (or the illusion thereof), then their homeless counterpart becomes the undissolvable trace of capital in public space.
CHAPTER 2

“THERE’S NO PLACE LIKE HOME”: HOMELESS BOX CITIES AND THE COMMUNITY CONSTRUCTION OF HOME

On June 14, 1989, John Spencer, a 36 year old homeless man living in Long Island, New York was crushed to death in the parking lot of a Toys ‘R’ Us loading bay. Spencer had been sleeping with his dog after celebrating another man’s 30th birthday when he was hit by the truck at 6:30 am, his body being crushed making a sound caused his friends and dog to escape without harm. There were no charges filed against the driver, as this terrifying event went down without the intention of harm. When a spokesperson for Toys ‘R’ Us was interviewed about the devastating event, she said, “Here at Toys ‘R’ Us we were are extremely saddened…Many people who are homeless don’t realize the dangers.” A line following this brief statement from a local social worker exclaimed, “These are invisible people…these are the people we don’t want to know about.” What is most striking about this event is its banality, happening as what seems to be an inevitability of the homeless condition: the vulnerability of public bodies. This line of thought is expressed succinctly in the Toys ‘R’ Us response, offering condolences, while displacing responsibility to an “unknown” effect of homelessness. As this example shows, homelessness is precarious insofar as those experiencing it do not reap the benefits of public life, but inherit the dangers of public living.

While the ignorant response of the company representative is enough to ignite frustration and disgust, the claim that the homeless are “invisible” is one that demands attention toward its implications. After all, how can someone whose domestic life is on display, both in policy and in the visual field, be considered “invisible”? The claim to invisibility, while not inherently evil, begs attention to the modes of representation and structuration that force the homeless condition
to hide in plain sight. The primary question then becomes: what are the conditions that make someone “visible” or legible in public discourse? This chapter attempts to provide one such understanding of public visibility through an examination of the symbolic effects of place, and its subsequent exclusion, the “placeless.” I will take an unlikely route, not starting with the ideological presumption of the home and its effects on displacement, but rather the symbolic efficacy of “homeless” and its reifying effect on locatability. For this, I’ve chosen one of the ubiquitously assumed “homes” of homeless persons: the cardboard box. This study is not, however, animated by a cross-historical survey of the representations of homeless box cities in media and popular discourse, as this condition is far too ubiquitous to make a substantial claim about an imagined home for homelessness. Rather, I want to turn attention to a recent trend in philanthropy events that attempts to draw awareness to homelessness through the re-creation of homeless “box cities,” providing an acute experience of homeless living for those who consider themselves unlikely to experience homelessness.

By turning to these “awareness” raising events, it becomes possible to read homelessness not only as an effect of the circumstances of modern capital, but also one that rendered as placeless, becoming the looming presence that helps reproduce the rhetorical posturing of “home” as the place of the neoliberal citizen-subject. These box city fundraisers, while trying to highlight the uncomfortable aspects of living on the streets, work more closely to disengage with homelessness by reproducing “home” on and within their purposely temporary box shelters. Home within the box city campground is then constructed in both a symbolic and material sense, etching identifying marks on each box to turn them into locatable, individual place markers. In accordance with Joan Faber McAlister, I agree that home is an ideological product, bent to house the normalized citizen-subject, often through the display of neo-conservative family values.2
McAlister rightly places family at the center of the American home, locating the patriarchal structure within this place that must be protected from external threat. While these conditions are necessary for the hegemonic “stability” of the normalized home, this overlooks the process through which home becomes the ideological place par excellence in public and political discourse. Thus, I want to turn attention not to the contents of the “home,” but the process of producing this intimate place, or stitching the home into discourses that animate subjectivity and citizenship. That is, rather than attempting to locate homelessness as a marginal position of “invisibility,” this essay highlights what is at stake when an event tries place homelessness at the center of discourses about home. Quickly, even the idea of homelessness (sans homeless persons) becomes an invisible presence that haunts the location of normalized subjectivity, calling for protections against this placeless threat. If, as Althusser suggests, the only goal of ideology “is to reproduce the conditions of production,” then homelessness becomes the impossible Real, the antagonism that reproduces location as an ideological assumption of subjectivity. Visions of the American home place only become possible through the invisible (yet quite provoking) symbolic threat of homelessness, calling for a need to repair this “hole” in a hegemonic order.

In this figuration, “home” then becomes the image of a symbolic placing or interpolation of the locatable neoliberal citizen-subject. However, homelessness is figured in an incongruous relationship, whose symbolic position is unlocatable by definition and its imaginary representations become dependent upon a place of dwelling. Homelessness is displaced as an impossibility of legal and social discourse, writing place as the defining characteristic of their recognition. For this reason, I want to turn attention to the imaginary representations of homelessness that attempt symbolic placement, examining the effect of the homeless box city as
one representation of place that stands in for the individual persons experiencing homelessness. In this chapter, I will examine images and media discourse about homeless box city fundraisers and awareness events to propose that the “box city” functions as what Althusser calls “the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.” That is, the box city becomes a visual synecdoche that stands in for homelessness, offering homelessness only as a place without a face. The box city fundraisers, while proposing awareness of the lived conditions of homeless experience do not represent the homeless as abjection, but work to offer a tamed and locatable representation of homeless life. I take seriously many of the host organization’s claims that this becomes an event bent on producing a “homeless experience,” making a particular note of whose experience is allowed agency by and through this philanthropic effort.

In what follows, I provide an overview of the discussion involving the rhetorical effects of place in public discourse, noting that place becomes a materialized signifier that pins the subject to a certain location in a material-discursive environment. Then, using the box city fundraisers as a case in point, I argue that because place has become such an important, yet often overlooked, aspect of the production of our publicly recognized selves, participation in these philanthropy events acts to “place” the self under the threat of displacement. As these fundraisers are not governed by a single organization, but rather function as style of philanthropy, I examine a variety of media coverage that highlights the general form of these events. Most of these media accounts are from local sources, noting the particularly homely implications of the participation of experiencing homelessness for a night. Ironically, the participants are never too far from home. Finally, taking Christian Lundberg’s call to “wring the neck of rhetoric” of only its imaginary implications, I conclude with the symbolic effects of
these events on an understanding of placelessness in rhetorical studies.

This Must be the Place

The homeless box city events, at their most basic level, represent the inextricable link between homelessness and the ideological function of home in U.S. political and social discourse. Most studies of homelessness in rhetorical studies have focused on homeless persons and the stigmas associated with this condition. However, when looking at discourses about homelessness, one cannot help but notice the lack of attention to the condition’s canny counterpart, home place. This shift in focus becomes especially important with the box cities, as homeless persons are rarely (if ever) a party to the conversation. Thus, for this chapter I shift focus away from homelessness as stigma to locate the production of home as the condition that creates the aforementioned “ invisibility,” looking at this fundraiser as primarily concerned with protecting this boundary. That is, the enunciation of location during these events is the underlying tension driving the homeless box city fundraisers.

The importance of “place” in rhetorical studies has somewhat recently been garnered as an important agent in the production of both individual and group identity. Danielle Endres and Samantha Senda-Cook put it simply when they say, “location matters,” arguing that rhetoric not only invokes “place-based arguments,” but specifically can also turn to “place-as-rhetoric.” Generally speaking, place is often defined as a specific locale, created and bordered through material, imaginary, and discursive identification. Place is not free from space, but is dependent upon it as a material instantiation of located signifiers and objects. Greg Dickinson, Carole Blair, and Brian Ott offer space and place as a mutual contradiction:

From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place.
Further, places act to invoke an external identification, either object or symbol, to help constitute those who inhabit this place as an “imagined community.”11 This external identification helps form a constitutive outside, or an “Other than” group that does not exist within a given community. In this way, the cultural discourse of place often works as a “container”12 of sorts that assumes the character of the community that claims it.

Rhetoricians have commonly turned to narrative and speech for understanding of place, lifting place from the cold, empty feelings of spatial inhabitance.13 Michel de Certeau compares space to a blank sheet of paper, “delimit[ing] a place of production for the subject” (emphasis mine).14 Here, a place becomes spoken into being, an utterance that becomes recognizable through site-specific production of a certain location.15 Taking place as a site of speech, scholars have been quick to note the ideological functions that places inherit, whether they be places of public memory that aggrandize sanctioned narratives or bathrooms that refuse to recognize gendered bodies beyond binary assumptions.16 The assertion to speech has made the study of place a ripe site for rhetorical inquiry, helping to constitute localized identities through the practice of speaking and identification.

This turn to place in rhetorical studies mimics a simultaneous turn to the concept of “home,” at once an intimate private place, yet radically public in its ideological assumptions. The home often functions as a locale for specific, “private” business, sheltering the familial and personal actions from the frenetic world of the social. Feminist scholars have long problematized this distinction between the “public” and “private,”17 but unfortunately this does not correct popular discourse from assuming a rigid and important distinction. That is, the American home, while laden with ideological citation, is still often assumed to be the product of individualism. Many studies of home focus on the “suburbanization” of the quintessential
American place, creating a trope of the “homeowner.” Jessie Stewart and Greg Dickinson write, “Homeowners then turn to furnishing those homes, clothing themselves, dressing their yards and gardens, and buying the vehicles suburbia demands.” Similar to the narrativization of place, Stewart and Dickinson argue that location is an enunciative practice, creating the place through what and who are its assumed inhabitants. Of course, these enunciations are always incomplete, but attempt to find a nodal point as a “locale” to what many consider the “placelessness” of postmodern space. Here, specifically suburban space is a co-constitutive process between actors and their space, making a “place” through identification with consumer culture.

In a similar concern, Andrew Wood and Anne Marie Todd claim that not only is the suburb an effect of concerns over placelessness, but that the postmodern American home is designed in a similar fashion, functioning as an omnitopia or a “totalizing, ubiquitous environment” creating seamless connections between the spaces and places of globalized contemporary culture. One need not travel to Italy to experience an Italian aesthetic and cuisine, as the local mall brings “cultural difference” into a food court of global ubiquity. While these assertions to the aesthetic ubiquity of contemporary architecture and home call attention to what Frederic Jameson calls “postmodern pastiche,” the term “placeless” invokes concerning implications. Where these scholars claim to be “placeless” in the American popular imaginary still retains the materiality of location. Many of these arguments investigate the “fullness” of the signifier of “home” and “place,” looking for content rather than the symbolic valences of “place.”

McAlister’s more recent work on the rhetorics of the suburban home counters many of these problems faced with a rhetorical obsession with the “contents” of U.S. cultural places, focusing rather on the effects of identification. Across several articles, she argues for a form of
materialism that engages with both the material and symbolic effects of identification and figuration of the burgeoning suburban space. Thus, her work is not only focused on how subjects “make” home, she also argues that home helps to constitute those very subjects. This act of construction of the American home often comes as a response to national or local crises or threats to current political stability, inscribing the home as the center of the “renovated” citizen-subject. The home then functions to constitute and “figure” normalized roles that support a hegemonic standard of participation, a process that is literally built into the architecture of homes themselves. The home is further placed under a disciplinary gaze through the signing of neighborhood covenants, or a binding contract of neighborhood aesthetics, creating identification to produce a community “feel” in the wake of the “placeless” aesthetic of suburban design. This focus on aesthetic identification and figural/symbolic re-make of both the American home and role of the middle-class citizen-subject casts a net to respond to what McAlister calls the threat of “rootlessness.” Succinctly, she argues, “The problem of roots is one of foundations, origins, and histories. Efforts to uncover the roots of a subject, institution, or practice are attempts to locate it diachronically in space and time…roots require continuity in both space and time.” That is, the producing of the “American” home becomes another instantiation of U.S. cultural identity under threat of displacement, responding by nailing down just what it is “we” think is normal.

What is still needed for a theorization of place in rhetorical studies is an account of not what is made when we produce home, but rather how it is made. While rhetorical scholars often claim that the home is a place we fill up with ideological objects and symbols, an account of the process of ideological subjectification through “place-making” is still needed. Now, I will explore how the place often become stitched onto the speaking subject, attempting to cover up
the very antagonism at the center of creating the identity crisis of place for America’s concerned residents that hold up home in its hegemonic posture. In what follows, I offer an understanding of “place” that does not supplant, but rather supplements these previous renderings of place in rhetorical studies. By offering place as an empty symbolic position, rhetorical studies can begin to examine the material effects of symbolic negations that reduce homeless persons to an unlocatable, and therefore unrecognizable (non)position. This move does not mean that homelessness falls into an imaginary trap of “utopia” (no place), but rather is an effect the “no place” of a hegemonic economy of symbols: placelessness.

From Where do We Speak?

If we are to offer home as an effect of hegemonic and ideological structures that animate conditions of subjectivity, production, and community, we must first start with the modes of representation that offer it as such. The term hegemony was most famously offered by Antonio Gramsci as a response to the frightening failures of the Marxist revolution in 19th and early 20th century Europe, contributing to what he called a “philosophy of praxis.” Gramsci offered a critique of the superstructural elements of Marxist ideology as not ones of pure, elevated abstraction, instead claiming that ideology persists in the everyday complicity of social relationships. Specifically, Gramsci claims that this new understanding of ideological structure, hegemony, reproduces itself through the “techniques” (techne) of everyday action, becoming a semi-autonomous system that animates subjective recognition and its subsequent invisibility. Following this move toward the concrete inscription of everyday action, Louis Althusser offered a theory of ideology in which we are “always already” subjects, scripted into symbolic recognition through interpolation or a “hail.” In his famous example, the “hey you” of a police officer is an act of recognition that subjects an individual to the (symbolic) law. Through this
“hail” the subject is recognized as a subject only through his or her identification within a symbol system. This not only constitutes the subject, but works to create a set of relationships between subjects, constituting an imagined whole of community association.29

More recently, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe bring together these sometimes-convergent arguments, claiming that hegemony is often considered as an “absent totality,” only reproducing itself through the “response to a crisis.”30 Important for Laclau and Mouffe is that hegemonic structures constantly work to totalize a system of subjectification, but are always incomplete, structured around a central antagonism, or lack within a hegemonic system that always fails to cover a systematic order of appearances. Because of this, the politics of difference disallows a hegemonic structure from complete totalization, functioning as a threat to this normalizing logic. To account for the impossible totality of hegemonic structures, Laclau and Mouffe claim there must be an empty place in the symbolic to “nail down” the subject in a chain of hegemonic discourse. This signifier does not “represent” an object necessarily, but only functions as an external point of identification. That is, a community is created through the recognition of a nodal point that creates a common concern and (fantasy) script of action.31 Additionally, the signifier is not a static place, but rather an action or continuous process that constitutes subjectivity in a place; this process is what Althusser had previously termed interpolation.

Drawing heavily upon the work of Jacques Lacan, Laclau and Mouffe claim that the creation of this signifier is what sutures this lack in a hegemonic system, working to place the speaking subject around an “empty” signifier. More specifically, the subject is placed through the act of speech, relying on a signifier to localize a field of meaning. Lacan terms this signifier the point de capiton or “quilting point” that is meant to render a subject visible under the
auspices of material and discursive location. Lacan is famous for claiming that the signifier is only a dumb unit constituted in a series of economic relationships, a proposal that has certainly cast concern as to the possibilities of “meaning” for a Lacanian theory of discourse. The quilting point is one such way to remedy this concern, functioning as a place in speech where the signifier is “stuck” to the signified, quilting an utterance into a localized plane of signification. The term “meaning” is not enough here, as the signifier always exceeds its contextual assertions; but rather the quilting point acts as a point of symbolic identification that fixes an utterance as iterable. Importantly, this does not isolate a single signifier for its absolute spot of signification, but only sutures discourse at a point of speech to a chain of signifiers. Lacan explicitly refers to this suture as tied to a place, rather than absolute meaning itself:

Allow me to represent the function of the signifier by a spatializing device, which we have no reason to deprive ourself of. This point around which all concrete analysis of discourse must operate I shall call a quilting point.

The quilting point is not the wedding of an utterance to a specific object, but rather a nail in the rug of signifiers that holds stable as a place of the utterance. Importantly, place here is not a specific location, but merely a conceptual location from whence to speak; the quilting point nails down the subject through the act of speech in the moment of the utterance as placed. In short, as the Lacanian subject is born into language, displaced from a local scene for a economy of signifiers, the suture nails the subject to his or her place of speech.

Slavoj Žižek further connects the quilting point as an effect of ideological identification that defines, sometimes implicitly, the position which makes an utterance iterable in a chain of floating signifiers. He states, “the ‘quilting point’ performs the totalization by means of which this free floating of ideological elements is halted, fixed – that is to say, by means of which they become parts of the structured network of meaning.” Žižek uses the example of “freedom” as a
quilting point of liberal democracy: for belief in liberal democracy, there must be some
assumption that the decisions are of political free will. Additionally, the quilting point acts to
mark a foreclosure of the Real into a system of signifiers, covering up the lack in language
through an empty signifier that nails the ideological quilt in a concrete chain of signifiers. The
identification of a quilting point allows for a logic that flows from this place of identification,
hailing in an act of recognition as the work of an ideologically loaded signifier. Bringing this
back to our current concern with homelessness, home functions as a quilting point for
recognition as a speaking subject, a subject that speaks with the comfort and safety of a
symbolically (law, language, citizenship) recognized place.35 Judith Butler argues that this is also
the point of materialization: “[This is] a return to the notion of matter, not as a site or a surface,
but as a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary,
fixity, and surface we call matter.”36 Here, the materiality of the signifier takes hold through this
quilting point as a locus of identification, hailing home as a concrete location of ideological
processes. To figure home as an ideological quilting point also calls an imaginary instantiation
into play as a hegemonic assumption par excellence. This is demonstrated in striking fashion if
you ask a group of students to describe, in detail, how they picture the “American home.” Their
responses render anesthetized versions of home that may even tame depictions on “Leave it to
Beaver.”37 What the home is imagined to be is constrained by its symbolic quilting to a certain
kind of material space, overflowing the signifier with naturalized ideological weight. This brief
example demonstrates the processural aspects of producing home as empty, yet identifying nodal
point that is reproduced as a system of recognition.

The box city fundraisers work in a similar fashion, but with a more concrete referent,
producing home under fear of threat to a normalized hegemonic place. These fundraisers work as
a double movement, both creating community around the nodal point of “home” and recuperating homelessness through the posturing of the imagined homeless dwelling place. The effects of this, however, beg the question: what then happens to the visibility of the bodies that threaten this already unstable notion of home? It is through the construction of the home as signifier that homeless persons become invisible within discursive structures, only to maintain visibility as stigmatized bodies that live in public space. These box cities reproduce one example of this exclusion, attempting to recuperate homelessness through the cardboard box, in turn continuing to stitch “home” at the center of the participant’s concerns.

Profusion of the Homeless Experience

To frame the remainder of this chapter, I want to pose again what is of primary concern when speaking of the relationship between home and homeless, place and placeless. We must ask, what are the conditions that make homelessness simultaneously visible and invisible? This seemingly contradictory condition is premised upon hegemonic assumptions that often structure community practices around “home” as a signifier that places, or takes root to produce visibility. To demonstrate this process, I turn to the homeless box city fundraisers that are meant to engage with the issues of homelessness, but instead function to recreate home as quilting point for community, one which is premised on important symbolic exclusions.

The homeless cardboard box city is a fundraiser that has become an extremely common practice among philanthropy groups across the United States. The events often have a two-fold purpose, working to both raise money to donate to other homeless advocacy organizations as well as produce a realistic experience of life in the elements. As the titles of these fundraisers presume, the cardboard box has become one of the ubiquitous objective experiences of homelessness, becoming a makeshift homeless home in the public imaginary. Homeless persons
inherit a condition that exists in a precarious relationship to the law, often becoming the victims of the regulation of public space.\textsuperscript{38} As public space is commonly imagined as the location for capitalist consumption, the homeless box is a stain on the manicured image of urban and suburban environments. Homeless persons’ visibility in this environment becomes the very motivation that calls for their eradication from the field of public images. In short, homeless persons are not viewed as participants in capitalist exchange, but ejected objects that constantly threaten the pristine environment of consumption.

The image of homelessness becomes abject (unnamable excess) in the sense that its nominal value becomes impossible, in excess to a tamed inscription from the signifier. The homeless person begging on the street corner often creates discomfort for passing persons, many of whom refuse to even acknowledge his or her presence. His or her presence becomes a threat of the Real, in the Lacanian sense, as a nameless return of the excluded bodies of public participation. As this act of exclusion is symbolic effect, homelessness becomes the grotesque excess of capitalist citizenship, presented as those who cannot possess a certifiable location. It is the threat of the homeless that becomes the catalyst for the box city fundraisers, functioning as an attempt to locate a condition that is, by definition, specifically un-locatable in space and time. To locate, in this sense, works to capture homelessness in the symbolic as placed subjectivity through the production of “experience” in a philanthropic key. However, this experience becomes one of taming, making homeless living palatable by attempting to place homelessness through the box cities and the community practice created by the philanthropy event. To get at the production of this experience I turn to both documents from representative events as well as media releases from local organizations hosting the events, highlighting how they stress the importance of local communities as a part of this experience. As box city fundraisers do not have
a single unifying national affiliate, existing rather as a form that repeats itself through different local projects, place and community is extremely important in the reading of these events.

One of the primary tropes associated with the box cities is an emphasis on the actual dwelling or “home” as a point of identification for the participants. One group in Chattanooga, Tennessee titled their event the “Box City Campout,” encouraging attendees to “show their support by making a [Family Promise] Camp Out team.”39 To frame the event as a campout significantly lessens the symbolic threat of homelessness, taking attention away from conceptions of the “placeless” framing homelessness as a recreational activity. More striking is the event run by Family Promise of Orange County, a social work organization based in California, who has organized a box city event in April of 2014 as a fundraising event in conjunction with the California State – Fullerton School of Social Work.40 The box city event is to be held on the university campus, with the promise of a community resource fair that will collect clothing and other items for those in need. While describing the event, the website explicitly states the issue at the center of this chapter: “Participants will create a city of cardboard box shelters, which will become their ‘home’ for the evening.” Home then becomes the primary locus to orient participation and exigence, highlighting the central point of danger with the homeless condition. What is particularly interesting about this framing is not only the reference to home, but the inclusion of quotation marks in an attempt to render this term queer in this context. If we take home as an ideological quilting point for a hegemonic understanding of the speaking citizen-subject, then the use of the word home here operates in a two-fold register. First, by referencing home as a point of orientation, the event discourse offers the home as the primary locus for understanding homelessness. Making this connection with those who experience homelessness, the discourse reifies home as the point of contention for homeless
persons. With explicit reference to home, the homeless person’s condition *only* involves not having shelter and has no relationship to other ailments that may act as either causes or effects of their homelessness (substance addiction, unstable or dangerous family conditions, loss of job, etc.). Home is the primary concern for the participants of these box city fundraisers, rendering these excess effects and stigmas of homelessness invisible within their community discourse.

The second move is the emphasis on asserting this as an ironic home, as it has all of the characteristics of a home place, yet stands without legally mandated recognition. Through a turn to irony, this home becomes simultaneously distanced and marginalized, giving the box the symbolic value of a place, but one that does not match the hegemonic rendering of what a home should be. This irony becomes tragic, suspending a relationship between homeless persons and the reference point of home. Without the ability to legitimately identify with home, homeless persons cannot possibly be a part of this community.

Another common trope associated with these events is the role that experience and imagination play as a part of the nightly activities offered by event organizers. The previously referenced Family Promise of Orange County event starts with the line, “Can you imagine having to sleep in a box or in a park each night?” Because it is phrased as a question, this line calls for not only the “as if” of imagination, but provides its own response in the form of a box city event. This question is answered several lines later with a claim to “experience,” offering sleeping outdoors as an active metonymy for the homeless experience. In this sense, we get a first rendering of what we may call the “homeless imaginary,” premised on the deferral to an inhabited space as the visible component of recognition. The imaginary, for Lacan, functions as a specular association that renders an object with the illusion of “wholeness.” The imaginary parses out ego identity in a metaphorical mirror through an act of deferral, claiming, “That,
therefore I am.” In this sense, by creating an (other) object, the perception of the self becomes psychically whole: a reflection in the mirror by which I create myself. However, the problem with this normalized process when applied to the homeless box city events is the particular relationship of homelessness to the popular imaginary.

“Homeless” becomes a position figured as “placeless,” its relationship to the imaginary becomes not an object, but rather abject. As Julia Kristeva describes, the abject is “ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated…a ‘something’ I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me.”41 In this sense, there cannot be an abject object, but rather abject is the condition of the unnamable in relation to the imaginary object. Kristeva describes this experience using the analogy of a glass of turned milk:

Food loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection. When the eyes see or the lips touch the surface of milk—harmless, thin as a sheet of cigarette paper, pitiful as a nail paring—I experience a gagging feeling, and still further down, spasms in the stomach, the belly…”I” want none of that element…”I” am in the process of becoming an other at the expense of my own death.42

What is at stake here is the recognition of the subject as a speaking position in language, locatable and hidden through an imaginary identification of the ego. The abject shatters the ego’s “wholeness,” bearing witness to “death” in the sense of the momentary death of autonomy and rational subjectivity; this rationality relies on an ideological quilting point to “place” him or herself. Claire Sisco King asserts that the abject “reveal[s] that all humans have murky, inchoate origins within the body of another—uncertain origins (or ‘the ‘beginning’ preceeding the word’) that must be denied in the individual’s establishment and assertion of his/her subjectivity.”43

Needless to say, the grotesque homeless body, certainly one that often comes as an effect of
protean living conditions, does not generally have a proper place in the “feel good” philanthropy event that promises to include “fun activities designed to raise awareness about the needs of the homeless population.”

To respond to this problem, the homeless box city events create an amenable object for assimilation back into the symbolic, featuring the box as the object that stands in to “place” the placeless condition of homelessness. The claim to invisibility expressed at the beginning of this chapter returns here in a somewhat ambiguous form. The practice of the box city fundraisers is one example in this process, as its participants produce a synecdochal object, the cardboard box, that comes to stand in for homelessness as a part of the philanthropy events. When event organizers claim participants will be “spending the night in an ‘urban campground,’ setting and eating at a soup kitchen,” they encourage participants to fetishize the homeless experience through the identification with recognizable cardboard box. Rather than focusing on the inability to possess a location and the dangers this entails, the box city tames homelessness into the narrative of a camping trip at a local high school or college campus.

One doesn’t have to carry this logic too far to find the assertion to an identity that collapses homeless persons into their precarious dwellings. Peggy Phelan, mobilizing the Lacanian indictment, “visibility is a trap,” offers this fetish of pure visibility as the logic of identity politics. Her critique moves by way of essentialization, claiming that political emancipation conceived through the logic of specular identity fails to take into account the symbolic injunctions that charge subject with both recognition and alterity. That is to say, by relying on a politics of the “visible,” the other is reduced to an object with the essential characteristics of all other objects that look similar. As Phelan highlights, to use visibility as the only premise of political criticism remains dangerous for all those it implicates, offering the
subject as essentially located rather than a subject of difference. The box city fundraisers function in this regard, rendering visible certain aspects of homelessness as if it is the thing itself.

Imagining Home in a Box

Thus far, I have argued that one of the fundamental problematics in the homeless box city fundraisers is the incessant attempt to recuperate the Real, non-position of homelessness into recognizable spot, “placing” homelessness through the production of the box as an object of identification. This highlights a particular attempt to read homeless places as full of content, rendering an object of affection, rather than looking at the continuous placelessness of the homeless condition. By isolating the box as a homeless home, homeless inhabitants yet again remain “invisible.” What is important is that homeless persons are surprisingly absent from these conversations, directing attention away from the differing experiences and lives of homeless persons, instead creating a community event meant to collectively celebrate and construct miniature versions of familiarized home. It is the construction of the box city event space itself that helps to (re)place home at the center of the community identity, a process which actively attempts to suture a hegemonic process in a locatable place. While long lasting ethnographic research would be preferable for making extended claims about these fundraisers, for the purposes of this thesis I will use several pictures to demonstrate the process of identification and exclusion during the homeless box cities.

As the cardboard box becomes the favorable image of homelessness that does not offend the sensibilities of normalized citizens, it quickly becomes the locus point for these fundraisers. This attempt to “place” homelessness goes further, however, through the individual production of the boxes in which participants will be sleeping. Not only do participants sleep in a box, but they are driven to decorate their temporary shelter, customizing their boxes with a personalized
tone. Above, I read the assertion to an ironic “home” of homelessness as an attempt to recuperate and differentiate between the homeless home and hegemonic identification with home. However, this is only half correct, as the participants quickly assimilate this previously queered term into one that represents them in appearance through this act of customization.

These two images work to stand as representative examples of a slew of images that display ornately decorated boxes inside of which participants will rough it through the elements to spend a night as “homeless.” I am not trying to make an argument here about the rhetoricity of the images themselves, but have selected these images to demonstrate larger trends during these events. Furthering my thesis of home as quilting point, it does not matter how these boxes are decorated, but it is the act of decoration itself that becomes so important when reading the box city fundraisers for their symbolic effects. The image on the left shows several boxes connected together to create more livable space for the participants stay overnight. The photo shows the proud “owner” in front, a familiar scene after purchasing a new house in the suburban landscape. While only one box is fully visible in the photograph, it is clear that at least two of the boxes have been decorated, moving this person’s overnight escapade from the functional to the aesthetic. The image on the right shows a similar turn to the aesthetic, boasting a well thought-out design-plan requiring a community effort for it to come together. This image shows a fully
formed transformation from the functionality of the homeless cardboard box to one that fits in through customization of a residence for a night.

The two images portray different examples with the same effect, working to capture the imagined home of the homeless through the act of naming. The image on the left is clearly marked “college dorm room,” likely reflecting the current place of many of the participants. While a dorm room is not permanent in the same sense as the hegemonically assumed homes offered when you ask a student to “describe the ‘American’ home,” it does exert a place insofar as its claim to discursive value. Although temporary and certainly liminal, the college dorm room is far from the dangers of homeless living conditions highlighted by the story of John Spencer that introduced this essay. Additionally, the boxes here are connected, mimicking the claim to different rooms of a permanent structure.

What is most striking about the image on the right is not its explicit use of language to mark it discursive location (as there is none clearly visible), but rather the attention to the detailed decoration of the box. Much like a new home in suburbia, the box comes equipped with its own look-alike vinyl siding (What every homeless person is sure to need!), holes cut for windows, a sheet to ensure nighttime privacy, and surf boards to add kitschy lawn decoration. Putting the silliness of this box city box aside, what is important here is the attempt to fill up the empty space of the box with objects that connote home. The boxes become more than overnight shelters, but become a home filled up with “content.”

Effectually, in decorating their own boxes, the participants end up reproducing the logic of home on a box that is considered far from the hegemonic imagery of “home.” As Philippe Julien argues, “such is the creative power of speech, which makes the thing exist in time, and generates identity within difference.” While identity through difference is the common logic
associated with articulation theory, what is of importance here is whose identity is being claimed and placed, as well as the participatory process through which the construction of home is centered within these philanthropy projects. The act of recreating a home on and through the box city becomes an assertion to the identity of the participants, not that of the persons actually experiencing homelessness. Difference, here, becomes impotent insofar as its recognition relies not on homelessness, but rather on the parameters of the box city philanthropy event itself. By asserting the boxes as an act of individualism through speech, the box city participants are not speaking about homeless persons, making this event about asserting difference among the other participants.

However, the individual domiciles created as a product of placement also come to structure a community around the act of construction itself. These events, as religious or secular community organizations often host them, mark a location through which community can come to be formed. Much like Benedict Anderson’s rendering of the “imaged community” connected through identification with certain places of memory, the box city participants come to reproduce home as a nodal point for their community event meant to raise awareness about those who cannot inhabit one. To again mobilize Lacan’s metaphor of the quilting point, what this highlights is action of quilting, producing a fixed position to solidify a unified identity under the hegemonic threat of homelessness. That is, these events respond to the placeless threat of homelessness through “philanthropic” acts, a move that tames the condition and suture their own positions as tied to the home. By decorating the boxes, participants actively reproduce the quilting point that helps to constitute their own community recognition and stability. It is in this action that the quilting point becomes simultaneously “full” and “empty,” reproduced in discourse as a place in the symbolic that is a “knot” of possible significance. Participants
decorate their boxes with partial objects that come to designate their affectionate connections with their own homes, all of which are “different,” yet simultaneously still function to actively “place” through an collectively empty signifier of home. Put simply, individual boxes represent a demand for recognition from community members as hegemonically validated places of dwelling that allows them participation in the community itself.\(^{52}\) In this production of the self through the practices of community, actual homeless people are nowhere to be seen, yet again rendered invisible by events attempting to help this very condition.

Not only do participants decorate the boxes as a demand for recognition through the constitutive act of stitching identity, or a position in the symbolic, onto their individual boxes, but the event is further “placed” through choice of location for the event. These events are not held on the street, but often take place on private property, generally owned by a school or church organization, to ensure a localized community with clearly demarcated boundaries. As safety is always a concern of parents allowing their children to participate (understandably so),\(^{53}\) organizers go to great lengths to make the event friendly to those who wish to participate. The most notable of these precautions is the use of a fence that denotes strict borders around the event location. D. Robert DeChaine argues that borders have a dual purpose of protection and alienation, derived from “an affective impulse motivated by fear of losing control.”\(^{54}\) Thus, the threat of the placeless condition of homelessness is tamed through the creation of a bordered box city, one that mimics a gated community with no access from unwanted bodies. In conjunction with creating aesthetically pleasing objects, the participants are free from the fears and dangers of public space through the symbolized logic of the fence. Home\(less\) becomes home through the lynchpin of location, protecting participants from the dangerous beyond the border, existing in the safety of their individual home boxes.
The effects of this bordering and the action of the community construction of the boxes works not only to render a tight knit community around the home, but also functions as a mechanism to avoid confronting the possibly threatening excess associated with homelessness.\textsuperscript{55}

As home becomes the quilted location of the normalized citizen-subject, those who cannot be placed suffer the fate of frenetic symbolic recognition. That is, the homeless or placeless persons do not speak from a position, but are forced to be spoken \textit{about} as a non-position, whose inability to inhabit a stable place becomes the only condition of his or her recognition.\textsuperscript{56} This non-position escapes the symbolic, and is figured as an impossible position in the Real, in this case outside the closely guarded borders meant to protect the friendly community event. The effects of the symbolic and material prohibition of the fence come not as a negation, but as an exclusion to a binary system of “place” versus “no place” (utopia).\textsuperscript{57} That is, homelessness acts as the seedy, yet necessary, underbelly of utopia, placeless yet present in both the structuration of home and the structuration of the box cities. Further, homelessness becomes the excluded impossibility of nominal recognition, becoming both an effect of the symbolic quilting of home, while simultaneously exceeding that quilting point as a lack in the structure of the law (no mailing address means no participation as a citizen). This same effect is reproduced through box city construction, stabilizing a hegemonic community under threat of homeless abjection. By focusing on the box as an imagined shelter where homelessness seems to “take place” (reside), homeless persons are once again rendered invisible through the participants symbolic claims to philanthropy for the purposes of enjoyment and education.

Through a phantasmatic identification with a set boundary of home as a stable place of identity, the possibilities of being homeless are ejected and repressed from the scene of the enunciation of home place. Kristeva would describe the effects of this process as abject, “ejected
beyond the scope of the possible, the thinkable,"⁵⁸ ejected out of the scope of “meaning” (as symbolic), yet lying quite close as familiar unfamiliarity. The abject is “imaginary uncanniness and real threat,”⁵⁹ citing the impossible as a mere effect of the bar instilled by language. Thus, by circulating a placeless threat as the purpose of box city events, organizations are able to instill a controlled protection of community through the construction of home. Put simply, the homeless person, having no symbolically mandated place from which to speak in a majority of these events, becomes invisible as an effect of symbolic exclusion. Thus, homeless invisibility comes as effect of the symbolic placing of home, but still maintains an essentialized visibility through their imaginary presence in public space and popular discourse.

Conclusion

As I hope to have demonstrated, the politics of the U.S. home almost certainly exceed the intimate boundaries of the hegemonically perfect American house. Over the course of this chapter, I argued that studies in the rhetorics of place should turn attention from the objects with which we fill our intimate spaces toward the symbolic valences of place as a discursive and material location. Specifically, through understanding “home” as a signifier that is “knot” in the symbolic that quilts or stitches a community around a place, we can better argue for the production of home place as one that is often only stabilized under symbolic threat. Using this understanding of place as a supplement to traditional rhetorical understandings of context allows scholars of place and space a more robust and nuanced visitation of what places “mean,” only in relation to other places. Not only does this attend to difference as asserted through a post-structuralist call for articulation, but takes seriously the psychoanalytic call that everything cannot be collapsed to textuality. With place functioning as a symbolic quilting point, locating the utterance to a place of enunciation, scholars can attend to the impossible position of the Real
as an effect of ideological structuration. This is particularly relevant when engaging an understanding of homelessness, as articulation fails all together to capture that which does not exist within the symbolic.

The process of these exclusions from the symbolic place of “home,” one that constitutes a community through its construction, is clearly demonstrated during the box city philanthropy events. In all of the public literature, I reviewed there is not one claim that homeless persons will actually be at any of these events. Instead, homelessness is seen merely as a condition to be understood rather than persons who experience the dangers of “public living.” It may be more appropriate to strip “homeless” from the title of the box city fundraisers all together, as the events do little to call attention to the myriad dangers faced by homeless persons on a daily basis. In an ironic turn of fate, the homeless box cities do not call attention to lived conditions of homeless, but rather have the opposite effect, reproducing the same exclusions that prohibit the homeless person of legally and symbolically sanction subjectivity. The attempt to direct youth attention toward homeless living does not cause fear of and empathy for the possibilities of becoming homeless, but rather is an effect of the fear of this displacement. This claim to represent homeless experience and identity certainly reproduces the harmful effects already at work in public discourse. To mimic the concerns addressed by Phelan, activist discourse should not produce mere representations of marginalized populations, but rather acknowledge that representation is always partial, incomplete, and non-essentialized. To move in this direction makes a claim to symbolic relationships that is always a failure in the absolute sense, but a failure that instantiates both difference and exclusion. Looking in the face of this failure of representation, we are left with no choice but to be hospitable. In Phelan’s words, “Certain of failure, I inscribe, again, my hope for blind (and forgiving) eyes.”60
When you operate in an overbuilt metropolis, you have to hack your way with a meat ax. I’m just going to keep right on building. You do the best you can to stop it.

Maxims of Robert Moses

The above epigraph from Robert Moses, the urban planner who was responsible for much of the urban infrastructure in New York City, demonstrates a vision of modernism that puts urban development at odds with a city’s own historical contingencies, favoring above all else a march of material progress. One of Moses’ many famed projects is the development and oversight of the construction of the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel, an underground toll road that to this day, connects lower Manhattan to the southwestern Brooklyn neighborhoods of Red Hook, Gowanus, and Carroll Gardens. While Moses has long since passed away and his grandiose visions for New York’s urban landscape are relegated to the archives, the material effects of his influence on New York City’s infrastructure continue to exert a dominating presence on those living in the “Big Apple.” The effects of this tunnel, which connects to the “Gowanus Expressway,” are still very much in tact, as its placement forms the southern border for the recently gentrified neighborhood of Carroll Gardens (hereafter CG), a small Brooklyn locale that will be at the center of this chapter. This highway materially separates CG from their neighbors to the south, Gowanus and Red Hook, whose real estate prices and population demographics mirror the material chasm created by the construction of this freeway.

In 2012, CG’s gentrified neighborhood residents took up arms against a possible threat to their new-found safe haven for historical Brooklyn living: the proposal of a 170-person homeless shelter that was to be placed near CG’s southern neighborhood border. Local residents described
the proposed shelter as a “numbskull” idea, one that was certain to threaten the safety of those residing in the high-end brownstones touted as part of the neighborhood’s historical charm. The responses to this threatening imposition will be the general topic of this essay, examining the published concerns from neighborly citizens to an external threat that may infiltrate their gentrified community. The threatening placement of the homeless shelter in this historic Brooklyn neighborhood caused outcry among residents for what they considered an undue burden on their already active efforts to improve living standards in the neighborhood. In contrast to many homeless shelters in urban spaces, the shelter’s architectural façade actually mimics of the surrounding neighborhood. The community members’ concern is not one of aesthetic fit, but rather of its contaminated inhabitants whose bodies perform the stigmas of the homeless condition. The threat, I argue, manifests itself with such vigor due to the proposed placement of a homeless shelter within a normal, pre-existing structure in the neighborhood. No longer were the homeless persons to be placed at the margins, outside of white, affluent residential neighborhoods, but located directly in the center of one teeming with a developing family culture.

This re-placement in the center of this neighborhood highlighted a dual invasion of urban space, as the dislocated bodies contested the gentrifier-residents of Carroll Gardens. With no revolting difference in the façade of the homeless shelter and the façade of the surrounding structures, there was no outstanding aesthetic differentiation between homed citizens and their displaced counterparts. Indeed, the intimate, interiority of the home is implicated with this homeless shelter, turned inside out for exterior speculation. This highlights that gentrification not only changes the socially lived space of the exterior, but also assumes a gentrification of the private, intimate spaces of the home. When these homes are threatened by the placement of
abject homeless bodies, revulsion arises as the inside becomes outside and the intimate is vulnerable to the on looking public eye. The CG residents were displaced when faced with the possible recognition of the types of (Other) bodies their gentrifying actions had previously displaced.

What is at stake by the placement of this homeless shelter is not just a concern for neighborhood overcrowding, as many residents are quick to note, but rather the moral and subjective homogeneity of the neighborhood. This homogeneity is linked through an imaginary identification that rallies its residents around a certain image of its collective participants, a community process upheld with little to no necessary engagement between individuals of the neighborhood. Dean MacCannel claims, “Neighborhoods as such are experienced from the outside. You can live next door to people for years, never cross their threshold or know their name, and still recognize them as being ‘from the neighborhood.’”5 With this in mind, we can see the neighborhood constituted as a result of its imaginared and lived instantiations, where bodies and image meet to form associations in the urban environment. CG performs as a community without an essential face, deferring instead to the assumed classed and raced make-up it takes to be recognized as “from the neighborhood.”

If CG’s imaginary neighborhood connection is only formed through abstract identifications with a collective unit, its component materials and bodies are the products of volatility, continually in process as an effect of contestation. Thus, the imagined neighborhood of CG is not “whole” or complete, but built around spatial contestations, historical contingencies, and a protective anxiety that commonly marches under the banner of gentrification. Daniel Makagon succinctly defines gentrification as “the transformation of poor, working class urban neighborhoods into middle-class or upper class areas.”6 Gentrification is not a rehabilitation of a
neighborhood, but a class re-make premised on the expulsion of less-than, Otherized bodies. However, this process of expulsion reproduces itself through rhetorical efforts to continually exclude the once displaced former residents. Gentrification aesthetically remakes the exterior architecture and public space, while leaving the interior of home as an assumption that matches the neighborhood’s attitude. This relationship between interior and exterior is the constitutive relationship that builds the home in its ideological structure, mimicking the common assumptions of an interior self with its exterior social relationships. MacCannell describes these relationships between members of a neighborhood as ambivalent: “On the one hand there [is] the assumption that the people living next to one another ought to be deeply like one another, and on the other hand there [is] an agreement not to test the assumption of propinquitous moral homogeneity.” While the interior life of the home is refused open display, the assumption still remains as to the likeness of one’s neighbors. This assumption leads to ethical relationships of a dangerous kind that is certainly highlighted when 170 homeless men were scheduled to be the new neighbors of CG residents. Jacques-Alain Miller argues the role of the neighbor is not one of love, as it is offered in Biblical interpretation, but rather one of threat: “For it is a simple matter of love one’s neighbor when he is distant, but it is a different matter in proximity.”

Indeed, the “politics of propinquity” at play in CG threatens intimate places in their most vulnerable aspects: the assumption of the self. While the individual is at home in its own ego, the Other, one that is raced and classed, threatens the self-contained actions of domestic practice. The normalized bodies of Carroll Gardens are put on display as a result of a threat to their assumed intimate spaces. The community attention to the homeless shelter becomes a primary mode of community practice, reforming the neighborhood makeup around the expulsion of these unplanned bodies. Functioning as a return of the repressed, the raced and classed bodies that
once inhabited CG return to the center of attention in neighborhood politics, yet again calling for wealthy, white residents to save this historic neighborhood from its unsavory captors.

Gentrification and the Urban Frontier

In order to evaluate the homeless threat that was to be placed at the center of CG, the neighborhood should first be understood not as an imaging of completion and community, but rather one built on the cuts and scrapes of gentrification and displacement. Community, here, is not the cause of the neighborhood’s gentrification narrative, but rather an effect of a threat as to who has a “right to the city”; more particularly, who has a right to this city. Put differently, community comes as an effect, becoming insular through both its identifications with objects or persons of affection and disaffection, as well as the repulsion of the Other than who are being displaced. Joan Faber McAlister offers the creation of neighborhood communities as a process reliant on the practice of making “roots,” turning to a “material aesthetics” of the suburban neighborhood that produce objects and materials of identification to create a sense of “place.” This specular materialization of identity and community-building often ignores the social processes needed to create a functioning community, resulting in a homogenous community under threat of difference.

This process of community building is further expanded through the instantiation of community governing devices, often called covenants, which work to designate appropriate behaviors and performances by those involved in the community. Thus, place-making becomes a rhetorical practice, a techne, which works to constitute an operative community with a tenuous sense of belonging and a continuous process of exclusion. Much like Michael Calvin McGee’s claim that “the people” become visible as an imaginary effect of material practices or processes, communities are created through identification with documents, practices,
landmarks, and locales that quilt identities to a certain sense of place, an image that, at best renders those who do not belong out of resolution, and at worst, excluded from discourse all together.

While McAlister reads the problem of displacement and threat within production of suburbia, urban space presents a different set of problematics as its neighborhoods are squeezed together, proximately closer yet often distanced through the sheer density of the population and materiality of urban living. While neighborhoods are certainly an effect of community building in urban “zones,” urban residents are met with a plethora of differing identities more often, coming as a result of compacted living. The city is smaller and more intimate than life in the suburbs, and simultaneously overwhelmingly large, producing an even greater need to create a place, or in McAlister’s terms, “roots,” in an urban jungle.14 While this process of making “roots” looks different within the particularities of community cultures, one specifically aggressive form is termed “gentrification,” which implies a (somewhat hostile) takeover of land and property by middle- or upper-class persons who are seeking lower rent with a safe community feel.

Gentrification is not a natural process that implies the continuous rehabilitation or revitalization of an area, but is a re-making of the makeup of neighborhoods and their inhabitants. Makagon argues that gentrification is not an accident, but is a strategy that “relies on a partnership between city governments and developers whereby a neighborhood is deemed to be blighted and then is actively refashioned via public funds and tax credits offered to the developers.”15 This strategy is not just a sponsored locus of production, but it also acts as the consumption of a certain attitude that is projected as art and culture. Specifically, Makagon argues that the Chicago neighborhood of Wicker Park was transformed through an “artist-led”
narrative that turned the once-dangerous streets into a site for artistic and cultural consumption. Importantly, gentrification not only changes the “rent-gap” in the neighborhood, but also recreates the aesthetic faces and exteriors of the buildings, promoting a cultural enclave that protects the habits of its new community members.17

Gentrification has long been studied under the auspices of sociology, centering urban development around a central theme of re-development, remaking the cityscape to better match its hegemonically valid inhabitants. While this process is usually relegated to sociological studies, gentrification is actually an organizing logic with a rhetorical component. This turn comes by way of gentrification narratives and processes that are commonly matched with those of the frontier: the untamed wilderness that needs a civilized corrective. As Neil Smith describes, “During the 20th century the image of wilderness and frontier has been applied less to the plains, mountains and forests of the West, and more to the cities of the whole country, but especially of the East.”18 Thus, the relation between “in here” and “out there” becomes reapplied, not as a sense of national belonging and expansion, but rather placed the epicenter of urban life and the re-possession of misused or abused property. While re-possession becomes the operative term of the validated public discourses of gentrification, applied by banks to defaulted home loans, dispossession becomes its undercurrent. This process, as a generic frontier expansion, is not one that is cold and distanced, but is distinctly tied to community practices of enjoyment and consumption through cultural production.19 That is, the community must constantly produce its own boundaries through protections from danger and instability. Gentrification quite literally takes a village, in a double sense, both taking over previously untamed space and reproducing itself only through collective efforts aimed at protecting this newly “saved” territory.

The process of gentrification is never truly complete, but is constantly threatened by
markers of past inhabitants and practices. Aspects of former cultures and lifestyles can never be completely expunged, but exist as traces present in the transformation of the material and symbolic style of a “new” neighborhood. The new urban neighborhood is built on the remnants of the previous, offering gentrification as always already incomplete, its purifying practices always thwarted. Michel de Certeau describes what is left behind as a “trace”:

The trace left behind is substituted for the practice. It exhibits the (voracious) property that the geographical system has of being able to transform action into legibility, but in doing so it causes a way of being in the world to be forgotten.20

The trace, here, becomes partial remnants of past activity and space. Legibility comes to stand in for hegemonically legible, and may even slip into the metaphor of “livable” in the parlance of urban renewal. The space’s original function is repurposed and repressed, only to return as a threat to the stability of a newly formed neighborhood. Jacques Lacan would call the return of these traces a symptom, stating, “The symptom initially appears to us as a trace, which will only ever be a trace, one which will continue not to be understood until the analysis has got quite a long way, and until we have discovered its meaning.”21 To make a slight terminological shift, the “meaning” I am concerned with here is not necessarily absolute in the sense of stable signification, but rather a function of identification and exclusion.22 In other words, throughout the process of gentrification, the neighborhood is re-made through the creation of new identifiers, excluding certain bodies and cultures as an effect. Thus, in this scenario, the trace might be considered the residual effect of the repressed exclusions of gentrification, finding its threatening return in the marks left behind on the walls of contentious spaces. Within lived experience, this may look like past writing on walls that have since been covered up by new sheet rock or unkempt alleys that were overlooked during the material makeover of a neighborhood. Anthony Vidler would call this “architectural uncanny,” noting the moments of
estrangement in the homely that dislodge ownership of self and space. In this sense, the material remake of the urban neighborhood is intimately linked with a reproduction of the subject. Gentrification comes as an appetite of subjectivity, finding pleasure in expansion and place making, with place functioning to place-within, interior to the “good” city, the “good” self. Conversely, a threat to the stability of the neighborhood is simultaneously a threat to the subject who is an invested member the community that works to keep the neighborhood “safe.” The neighborhood and the subject, the outside and the inside, public expressions and intimate feelings are all repurposed to protect a nucleus defined by the exclusion of difference from its hegemonic core. A community comes alive here in its most coherent sense, reproducing itself only under constant threat. Gentrification, in this sense, is one that attempts to totalize a culture, but is met with constant antagonisms that warrant responses from community collectives that re-stitch their affiliation through a reference to place.

Thus far, I have shown that gentrification is a process that rings in a rhetorical key, bent on the production of a community through the nodal point of place. Often, this is figured as a frontier narrative that is meant to tame a wild urban scene by expelling former residents and their respective cultural practices. The gentrifier community is supported in this process through the identification of threat, forcing community members to constantly protect their newly claimed territory. An organized response to these threats becomes the active participation that constitutes an imaginary collective, and quilts community identity to a particular location. In what follows, I will demonstrate how the CG community functions in this similarly, creating a more coherent community identity in response to the proposal to place a homeless shelter within the white-washed borders of their gentrified neighborhood.
Carroll Gardens: The Neighborhood “Feel”

Carroll Gardens is a small neighborhood in New York’s Brooklyn borough located just across the East River from famed Governor’s Island. Located just south of Williamsburg, what many consider to be a teeming cultural center, CG presents a more humble image of the New York lifestyle. According to the CG neighborhood association, the neighborhood was born out of aesthetic desire, originally named for its setback gardens and land injunctions meant to create space that “shall be used for courtyards only.”27 Further, the neighborhood association openly describes the personality of the neighborhood, defining both the historic and current demographic. I can do no better than to quote them directly:

The heart of the neighborhood is Carroll Park, Brooklyn’s third oldest park, which is bustling with activity with its play areas and bocce ball courts. The neighborhood is famous for its eclectic mix of restaurants, food, and pastry shops, which is a combination of food of the local Italians, who immigrated to the area in the earlier part of the twentieth century, with the taste of the newly settled young urban professionals for a wide range of international gourmet food along Smith Street’s “restaurant row.”28

This quotation demonstrates an attempt to characterize the neighborhood’s “feel,” claiming diversity and touting difference as the unique factors of CG that allow for cultural engagement (read: Culinary). However, this diversity is a rather contentious matter, as Brooklyn has long been the site of gentrification projects.29 While more recently CG has been subject to re-zoning as a part of Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s sustainability agenda for all five boroughs,30 the neighborhood has been steeped in a gentrifying class remake since the late 1980s. Since this time, CG’s low-income renters have been pushed out to clear the way for “white flight” from nearby Manhattan.31 The effects of these actions have driven up property prices, with the average listing price of the homes as of February of 2013 at $1,758,857 (55% higher than the Brooklyn average).32

As the neighborhood is a social community, it is often defined through identifications
with its architecture, stores, entertainment, sounds, and smells that provide distinction from other urban locales. Some scholars call this “place-branding,” or perhaps even more totalizing, urban “designscapes,” meant to create architectural identifications as a mechanism of inclusion. The Carroll Gardens landscape is no exception to this, boasting its cozy feel through references to its external skin. Brownstones line the street, making the façade both newly minted in its restoration and historically based with its architecture. CG’s property is designed to provide a bit of extra lawn space, taking a trope of suburban luxury and placing it in the center of an urban neighborhood. This property has proven to be valuable and worthy of protection, spurring mayor Bloomberg to place CG on a list to “protect the character of the community.” While plenty of attention is paid to the historic character of the neighborhood, there seems to be no mention of the minority and low-income renters who no longer exist within the confines of the neighborhood. Rather, CG’s act of restoration works to contribute to the overall character of the neighborhood and its current community.

Testaments to the neighborhood’s newly found character are written into the archives of its media correspondence, coming alive through its cultural offerings as an intersection of beauty and charm. Not only has the rent gap increased significantly due to gentrification, but the culture of the neighborhood has also seen significant changes. One reporter describes the aforementioned “restaurant row” as an effect of this change: “Bar crawls take residents from Irish pubs to tiki huts serving fishbowls of liquor, making the area a prime destination for locals and even out-of-area drinkers, who can take a quick train ride to the area with ease.” New York Magazine offers CG in a similar fashion: “Carroll Garden’s charms are well catalogued…tree-lined streets, beautiful brownstones with front and back gardens, a diverse array of restaurants and bars, good local delis and Italian markets.” I cite these differing cultural texts to highlight
that the neighborhood is never just a location that only finds symbolic resonance for cartographers, but rather a character in the production of identification and its subsequent exclusion. However, this assumed character is not ontic, but an effect of a contentious history that marks this South Brooklyn neighborhood as the result of a previous untamed frontier in “need” of gentrification.

This “frontier” imagination is one that is reflected by at least one of the community organizations in CG. While the neighborhood revolves around placement as a historic locale, the creation of a community around this process is extremely important, both for this reading and the functioning of the character of the neighborhood in general. This process is stitched at the center of community identity through several community organizations, including a homeowner’s association. One of the most prominent is the Carroll Gardens Association, a “strong grassroots neighborhood organization…chartered to assist the disadvantaged and to create a spirit of community participation and comradeship by making the interests of one the interests of all.”

Local residents created this organization in the 1960s in an effort to offer renovated “affordable” housing to a “moderate income group,” a juxtaposition that seems close to contradiction when read outside of local parlance. This association’s vision includes several organizing principles that link them particularly to CG as a place. Their visions are for CG to become: “A place of opportunity,” “[a] place to live, work, and do business,” and “an integrated community.” The association plans to pursue these goals through the creation of a real estate management company, meant to serve the needs of residents of all incomes living within CG. This organization also hosts community meetings and organizes fundraisers, including health fairs and workshops for first time homebuyers. Through organizations such as this, Carroll Gardens as a “place” is reified through acts that invoke communal culture by asserting particular investments
in the image of CG’s locale. By offering the neighborhood as an imaginary collective, the participants become units of a whole that is premised on the exclusion of certain persons, most explicitly through income disparities, but implicitly highlighting the proximity of racial tension.

This act of invoking history as a method of exclusion functions as what Thomas Nakayama and Robert Krizek have called strategic whiteness, which “is not itself a place, but it functions to rescue the center, the place, for whites.”40 Within a narrative of gentrification, this phrase can be adjusted a bit. Carroll Gardens is perhaps not a place of absolute whiteness, but its materiality comes alive in the aesthetic remake of a once dangerous neighborhood into one that is deemed fit for white, wealthy inhabitants. Here, strategic whiteness is based upon material acquisition, speaking quite literally in an attempt to place and insulate neighborhood borders. However, within Carroll Gardens, whiteness becomes an invisible reference, structuring neighborhood politics around the rehabilitation of culture, space, and important objects instead. The CG neighborhood association labels these objects and spaces, “points of interest,” offering a laundry list of unique locations that boast a history that hails back to the neighborhood’s origin: the purchase of the land from the Mohawk “Indians” in 1636.41 Several of these sites include the Carroll Gardens Historic District, a refurbished park, and an old church that has recently been converted to apartments. The historic character of this neighborhood becomes a selective memory, which “restores” the neighborhood to its white, affluent roots.

This community that is built on exclusion represses the violent implications of their own inhabitation, making ripe an opportunity for this repression to return as a threat. While the neighborhood is premised on the exclusion through the process of gentrification, its proximity to still un-revitalized neighborhoods puts CG under a constant threat. A recent *New York Times* reporter described the neighborhood as “a magnet for nannies and their charges, the site of
outdoor Shakespeare productions and a resting spot for visitors to the Carroll Gardens Greenmarket.” In the same article, the reporter describes what happens when an unexpected shooting hit the “leafiest, most coddled of neighborhoods.” This surprise was sure to remind members of the community and New Yorkers alike that the “city can still show its rougher edges.” Noticing the “edges” of the city has become quite important in efforts to distinguish CG from the surrounding neighborhoods. CG is located just north of the Gowanus Expressway, a highway that divides this neighborhood from the assumed danger of Red Hook and Gowanus, two low-income neighborhoods located on the other side of the highway. Demonstrating this tension, the article explains, “Rubbing up against the brownstones and cafes of Carroll Gardens are the Red Hook and Gowanus housing projects.” While there have been no convictions for this shooting, the article mentions, “Speculation grew that a gang from nearby Red Hook, Brooklyn, was responsible for the shooting and the fight.” Through this immediate speculation, the danger associated with this crime was placed as Other, distanced from the internal makeup of the neighborhood through the fear of proximity.

In another residential violation, 70-year-old Anthony Coiro and his family were recently evicted due to the noise level coming from their apartment, with the landlord confidently exclaiming, “The only place they belong is in the street.” The landlord claims she petitioned for years in an attempt to remove the Coiro family from their residence, citing numerous instances of clearly audible profanity (“Get the F--- out of my house!”), even calling on other tenants in the building to testify at the court hearing for the eviction. Regardless of the legitimacy of the landlord’s claims, it seems Mr. Coiro and his family did not meet the assumed conduct of a CG resident, violating not only family standards, but also the very aural and sensory aspects of neighborhood culture. Here, the carrying of loud family voices acts as a reminder that
bodies inhabit these spaces, their audible sounds affecting and connecting neighbors in intimate contexts. We see here that the imagined culture of neighborhood communities and expectations of etiquette permeates even the walls and windows of interior spaces. R. Murray Schafer calls this a “soundscape,” connecting sound intimately to community identification. He says, “Hearing is a way of touching at a distance and the intimacy of the first sense is fused with sociability whenever people gather together…the sense of hearing cannot be closed off at will. There are no earlids.”

Further connecting the auditory to community practice, McLuhan describes the aural as one that invokes a fear: “Terror is the normal state of any oral society for in it everything affects everything all the time.” As this longtime CG family demonstrates, the neighborhood is not only structured by asserting an Other in location, but also by Otherizing everyday performances that may violate the very sensuous assumptions of the safety and homogeneity of CG’s domestic dwellings.

The threat of proximity, both interior and exterior in CG, functions as a primary structuring mechanism that helps produce what residents would assume to be the imagined character of the neighborhood. The several examples above demonstrate the effects of a gentrified neighborhood’s expunged character returning to haunt the (white) “stability” of the neighborhood. The highway creates a material border that acts as a resource to insulate the neighborhood organism from the possibility of external threat. The creation of these privileged spaces and places is organized by what D. Robert DeChaine describes as, “an affective impulse motivated by fear of losing control.” Through the citation of danger ‘out there’ beyond the imaginary cultural boundaries of CG, as well as the disciplining of violations from within the normalized etiquette of CG, the neighborhood constantly works to maintain itself through the production of exclusive communities. Members of CG preach the distinction of their own space
and place through reference to their relationship and concern with internal and external dangers.

The relation to danger and the creation of an “inside” of the abstract conceptions and material spaces of the Carroll Gardens neighborhood highlight what is perhaps a primary motivation to react to the building of a homeless shelter in the middle of the neighborhood. In September of 2012, a non-profit organization bought a former apartment building that had been refitted as a 10-unit condominium to function as a 170-bed shelter for homeless men. This building sits in the southern portion of CG near the aforementioned Gowanus Highway. Rather than turning this shelter into a rental property of homes to be sold to match the standard for the neighborhood, its renovated interior was to become the liminal home for some of Brooklyn’s homeless men. Buddy Scotto, head of the Carroll Gardens Association, responded to the proposal in passionate form: “To jam 170 homeless men into this neighborhood is a numbskull idea…I didn’t spend my whole life helping make Carroll Gardens a decent place to let somebody do a dumb idea like this.”

Although residents boast about the creation of social service accommodations in the neighborhood, hosting a battered women’s shelter and two methadone clinics, the addition of a homeless shelter simply does not fit within the CG community. Scotto’s sound-bite response, along with legal action and a petition, halted the attempt to open this new homeless facility. What is of specific concern is not the legitimacy of the shelter nor is it the character of those involved, but rather how this controversy works to animate a community around a violation to the cultural make-up of a particular place. The recently gentrified and re-established neighborhood plants its foot at the possibility of these potentially dangerous bodies infiltrating the intimate interiors of its highly regulated space.
Carroll Garden’s Distracting Activism

One of the most recent events that called the CG community into question is the proposed placement of the aforementioned homeless shelter with a renovated structure located in the middle of residential place. The *New York Times* succinctly summed up a plethora of expressions from vocal residents, claiming, “Many residents said they believed the shelter would set the now-thriving neighborhood back to its ragged and treacherous days.”\(^{50}\) This sweeping generalization lacks nuance, but highlights an important reference to a pre-gentrifried CG, one whose class and race makeup was quite different than its current iteration. Community is at the center of this outcry from residents, mobilized to protect CG from the possible dangers of providing shelter for 170 men into neighborhood space. Citing alleged dangers of bringing homeless men into the neighborhood space, residents expressed that “they worry about troublesome, possibly violent men wandering their streets. Shelter residents can include sex offenders and former convicts.”\(^{51}\) This statement shows fears that align with a common stigma of the homeless population, that they cannot defer their (sexual) desires and needs due, to a condition that makes them unfit for participation in communal life.\(^{52}\)

These stigmas that disallow homeless persons the capacity to become an active member of a community quickly became the rallying cry for community organizing, giving birth to a response organization in CG called, “Coalition for Carroll Gardens.” In a response to the concerns summarized by the *New York Times*, this community action group defines themselves as “a coalition of residents who are organizing to ensure that full community input is part of the process in the development of the proposal for the 165 W. 9th St.”\(^{53}\) With this statement, the Coalition carefully excluded any mention of the homeless shelter or homeless persons, opting instead to reference merely the location of the planned shelter. The carefully crafted discourse on
their website centers their issues not with the homeless persons, but rather with the zoning approval that did not involve community participation. Residents are quick to cite their efforts to help persons in need, referencing their methadone clinics and a domestic violence shelter. The concern over actually housing the homeless is quickly moved away from the center of focus, directing attention to the possibly corrupt process of developing a shelter in their neighborhood.

One of the most vocal aspects of this new organization is a Change.org petition started to speak for residents’ “opposition to an overcrowded and sub-standard homeless shelter in Carroll Gardens.” Change.org is the world’s largest online petition platform meant to help mobilize communities around common concerns. By turning to a petition platform aimed at promoting the democratic process and giving power to popular opinion, CG residents become more than individuals, a community tied around concern for a specific place.

This petition clearly lays out exactly what is of concern for CG residents, quilting specific concerns with the proposal that helps to locate CG around a specific place. The petition highlights the already existing city services, the aforementioned methadone clinics, claiming they have done their “fair share” to host the burden of those in need of help. Additionally, the petition moves quickly back to the zoning and renovation concerns associated with the project, claiming the proposed plan “vastly exceeds the city’s own limits for overcrowding (a maximum of six people in a three-bedroom apartment).” Further, the petition also cites a history that has become so familiar in gentrification projects:

The South Carroll Gardens community has historically experienced high rates of crime, drug dealing, prostitution and other crime. It has recently begun to stabilize with an influx of families with young children, followed by childcare facilities, a new school two blocks away, and tax-generating businesses. An overcrowded shelter would be a detriment to a growing community.

This petition highlights the real concern as not just a public safety, but one that is inherently
interior, threatening community standards of living. Through the citation of code that pertains to residential space, the residents draw comparisons between the function of the homeless shelter and purposes of their own homes. This comparison speaks to claim a standard of comparison: If they want to live here, we all must follow the same rules.

The organized community discourse again attempts to offer themselves as compassionate members of the community, offering a revised plan for the proposal of the shelter. The petition ends with a proposal that community members would support, one that “welcomes community input and values the existing social fabric of the emerging South Carroll Gardens neighborhood.” Further, they feel the shelter should house a significantly decreased number of men, for the more preferable option of housing homeless families. Finally, the proposal needs to include “increased police presence 24 hours per day, especially in the evening.” Regardless of the citation to the letter of the law, this problem highlights exactly what is at stake with the addition of the homeless shelter: the threat of the interior make-up of the residential spaces in Carroll Gardens. The activism at stake is one that works for protection against the “dangerous” public bodies of homeless men, opting to tame this distinction with the possible introduction of homeless families that is far more palatable to the sensibility of neighborhood space. To recall a citation from above, Jacques-Alain Miller reminds us that, “it is simple to love one’s neighbor when he is distant, but it is a different matter in proximity.” By trying to place so many possibly dangerous men inside of CG’s residential space, ones who may be sex offenders and former convicts, interior and intimate spaces of Carroll Gardens residents are implicated through an infraction that threatens the neighborhood’s cultural home. The caring and compassionate community of CG becomes threatened by the very people to whom they claim to already be helping (i.e. their “fair share” of the burden). Here, the exterior condition of homelessness
becomes a threat to the interior of the home, coming too close to the normalized existence of domestic dwelling in CG.

The placement of this homeless shelter and the subsequent reaction from the residents demonstrate the totalizing process of gentrification and community processes, one that always implies the interior spaces of urban remake. This total remake of CG leads us right up to the production of certain subjects that inhabit these spaces. Not only are the residents of the neighborhood assumed to live in historicized spaces, but must match the self with that identification. Victor Burgin argues, “The body is not simply that which is to be contained by a building, the body contains the very generating principle of the building.”60 This premise is enforced with campaigns to keep the neighborhood safe, providing individualized attention to residents to be vigilant. During a recent campaign called “Lights on Campaign,” officers in charge of the CG precinct went door-to-door to encourage residents to keep their internal and external lights on from “dawn-to-dusk” to decrease the potential for dangerous spaces. Similarly, these same officers ran events to teach residents the importance of keeping the homes of the neighborhood safe. The president of the neighborhood association describes the imperative for interior safety:

Safety officers from the Precinct also attend [neighborhood association meetings] and report neighborhood crime statistics, warn us about anything that could be come a public safety problem, and advise us how to make our homes safer. We take pride in the neighborhood’s accomplishments and are a testament to the fact that a small group of people can indeed make a real difference.61

Thus, safety is not just a public concern, but becomes an imperative to protect the private spaces of neighborhood residents. The message clearly articulates that to promote a safe neighborhood, residents must start with their private domiciles. Neighborhood meetings bring people together with the expressed goal of safety, creating a social contract among neighborhood residents.
premised on the expulsion of danger and threat. In this way, public concerns become intimately linked with the private existence and the bodies that inhabit them. The interior of the home becomes the operative mode of amelioration of public woes, woes that pose threats to privatized existence and investments.

This threat is further animated by the aesthetic similarity of the proposed shelter and the surrounding neighborhood residences. The placement of this shelter is not at the margins of “livable” space, but rather at the center, keeping consistent with the designated aesthetic of the neighborhood. Placed right next to residential homes and right down the street from the Gowanus Expressway, the new shelter works not to distinguish those that would inside, but rather to make a homogenous claim to the neighborhood space. The seven-floor building for the proposed shelter literally touches the houses surrounding it, putting the proximity of homeless bodies too close to the normalized space of the landscape. With the change of interior inhabitants, whose bodies often exhibit the marginalizing effects of living in exterior conditions, the interior space of Carroll Gardens is turned inside out, and its private places become victim of public inspection. The interior of the normalized residents homes become “uncanny” or “ unhomely,” revealing a past that was not their own, returning from its repressed state. Bodies that were once constantly present within the neighborhood space prove more than a trace of past existence, but the return of unplanned persons of the “new” history of Carroll Gardens. In short, the violent “placing” activities of the CG neighborhood were met with the excess to their own project. Those that are displaced return to find a home where they once may have lived, implicating the current affluent residents of CG in their own participation in gentrification.

What is excluded in this process, however, is specific references to racial tensions animated by the proximity of the majority black and poor Red Hook and Gowanus just south of
CG and the proposed homeless shelter. The community organizes itself around concerns for the interior, citing the problematic zoning and lack of community discussion before this plan was put into play. This action works to tame, or at least temper the project, addressing the problems of the proposal process itself rather than addressing head on the fearful implications implying that homeless bodies might inhabit a space that could be better used to house more productive members of the community. By focusing on this project as a point of identification that enacts a form of collective agency, community members create a distraction from the racial politics that threaten the southern border of the neighborhood. That is, the homeless shelter proposal threatens to give ground back to unwanted bodies expelled in the gentrification process, making the boundary of the neighborhood porous and marring any kind of buffer space between the CG residents and the dangers to the south. In short, the discourse surrounding the homeless shelter works as what Nakayama and Krizek define as strategic whiteness, creating a palatable strategy that actively excludes discussion about the racial politics that have largely driven the re-development of the Brooklyn borough. CG makes protection of the interior home a primary point of investment, rendering homeless persons as marginal and black bodies invisible within this discourse.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to trace the development of the Brooklyn neighborhood of Carroll Gardens, highlighting the community responses to a proposed homeless shelter within the confines of their newly re-designed neighborhood aesthetic and culture. The anxieties of placing this homeless shelter at the center of the neighborhood, rather than the margins, I argue is an effect of the often overlooked remaking of the interior spaces of gentrification narratives. By placing the homeless shelter “within” an interior space of CG, the neighborhoods domestic
places become flipped inside out, making private life very unhomely indeed. This re-placement of displaced bodies reinvigorates the contentious history of the Carroll Gardens neighborhood, reminding residents of the cuts and scrapes caused through their ritual cleansing of a once dangerous, poor, and minority neighborhood. In a sense, the residents become “unhomed” through a threat to their pristine imagined space of a (white, affluent) neighborhood.  

Not only does gentrification remake the culture and sites of consumption of a once “dangerous” neighborhood, its processes always imply the intimate spaces that are gutted of the “stains” of their previous inhabitants to restore a future by reviving its archaic past. By calling upon certain strains of history at certain moments, gentrifiers and their followers ascribe to a selective re-telling of their story, writing a history in a way that requires the wealthy, white resident to return as a savior to the historic space. By creating material and symbolic boundaries between Carroll Gardens and the dangerous neighborhoods to the south, the neighborhood becomes an imagined community with symbolic and material boundaries that are based on the exclusion of different bodies.

However, this abstraction of the imaginary border creates a unified version of neighborhood space that can never be quite so homogenous. As Victor Burgin so aptly reminds, the city is always in pieces, only put together in its completed fashion by sustaining imaginary places. Creating this unified space and citing a unified history is always a post hoc activity that cannot sustain its own magnitude. Rather, the city is built from scraps, whose cuts and scrapes mark up the faces and bodies of those who inhabit them. Thus, living in a city is living within haunted space, whose very materiality, both interior and exterior, shows makers of contradiction and difference. When a gentrified neighborhood, or any neighborhood for that matter, asserts abstract references to cultural makeup and invokes a particularized history of what seems a
unified “we,” the mindful critic must always be suspect as to whose history is being invoked. Put differently, the imagined relationships of CG cannot possibly produce a whole image of the “place” that CG claims to be through its own promotions: the imagined neighborhood works to wisp away the micro implications of difference with and of the self for a marginalization and exclusion of differences of the exterior Other. Within the context of CG, that Other is not only the potentially dangerous homeless bodies that threaten the neighborhoods intimate spaces, but also the actively excluded racial dangers that animate the attempt to solidify and shore up neighborhood boundaries. The implications of an assumed imaginary coherence for neighborhood communities in the process of urban “renewal” become explicitly clear with the return of these repressed exclusions of gentrification. In this case, the potentially dangerous presence of the homeless men recall the marks of difference and Otherness that permeate even the most intimate spaces of urban living, and highlight a communal attempt to remove these Other-than bodies.
CHAPTER 4

SOUTH BY SOUTHWEST AND THE ABJECT ENTREPRENEUR

Every year, South by Southwest (SXSW) draws throngs of young people to Austin, Texas to participate in a two-week festival celebrating music, film, and the arts, as well as providing a platform for a new generation of entrepreneurs to market their new businesses. These new entrepreneurs are at the forefront of a “start-up” revolution that rewards ingenuity in both technology and social media. The festival has a history of launching famous startups, including social media giants such as Twitter and Foursquare. However, 2012 marked the emergence of a new entrepreneur, that is, the abject entrepreneur. Marketing company BBH Labs organized an opportunity for several homeless people who live in Austin to market themselves and make some money during the festival in a project called “Homeless Hotspots.” BBH provided local homeless persons with what they called a “MiFi” device, or a mobile WiFi hotspot that provided Internet to the throngs of tech obsessed young entrepreneurs throughout the festival. This surface act of philanthropy follows BBH Labs positive mission statement: “Our overall ambition is to find ways in which marketing innovation can be a powerful force for good.”

The marketing company could not have predicted the ways their “innovation” would excite displeasure during and after the festival.

This event immediately met resistance from those who encountered the homeless entrepreneurs, as bloggers and journalists took to the web to indict BBH for their problematic marketing experiment. While criticism rang in from all directions, concern over the project came in a univocal tone: exploitation. A contributor for Forbes magazine matter-of-factly claimed, “…if they spent more than three hours at it, they were being exploited,” further drawing apt comparison to the unreliable lifestyle of working for tips. The thought of exploiting a person
for a marketing experiment proved too much to handle for the young, progressive attendees of
the festival. The responses over the course of the two-week festival ranged from ambivalence to
pure indictment over the activity. The most commonly cited disgust voiced for the hotspot
experiment referenced the clothing each participant was wearing. The shirts the participants
wore read, “I’m [name], a 4G Hotspot.” Not surprisingly, there was outcry over the
objectification caused by both the event and the word choice for the t-shirts.

These responses, while warranted, are certainly ironic as this comes from the crowd of
entrepreneurs who are attending the festival in the first place. After all, the homeless hotspots
experiment was somewhat entrepreneurial itself, allowing the participants to become the locus of
their own monetary gain. The thought that the homeless persons did not act as their own boss
becomes an essentially “abusive” practice for many commentators, with this differentiation
operating as the absent driver behind much of their public commentary that called for a defense
of the less fortunate through an indictment of the “man behind the curtain.” However, this
defense could not possibly repair the promiscuous relationship drawn between the homeless
entrepreneur and his or her validated counterpart. The progressive start-up entrepreneurs were
met with their double, presented back to them as the unsavory image of homelessness. Through
this figuration, the tendency to make value judgments becomes symptomatic rather than
progressive. On one hand, the homeless persons are objectified by this experiment as they are
made to be the commodity of their own labor. They are, indeed, on display as an attraction
during the festival. On the other hand, the homeless persons participating in this program are
offered an opportunity to make plenty of money during the festival. Although this wireless
access did not explicitly cost the user anything, a suggested donation of $2 for every 15 minutes
used (made payable in cash or Pay-Pal) provided compensation for the workers. On top of the
suggested donation, BBH paid each participant $20 initially with the promise of a minimum of $50 for every six hours worked. This compensation worked out to be above the national and local minimum wage of $7.25 per hour. To assume the inherent evil or goodness on either side always runs into a tangled knot of problems that has no easy solution. This is astute criticism, no doubt, but there is a surprisingly tense feeling of ambivalence offered by many of the opinion editors and blog entries that attempt to make sense of the hotspots. This begs the question: “What do we make of this iteration of homeless objectification?” This question animates the remainder of this essay, looking for the possibilities of linguistic agency in a marketing experiment that was deemed too provocative for success by media sources.

Undoubtedly, the unjust and dangerous figurations of homelessness during this marketing experiment deserve substantial and sustained criticism and public action; however, this essay attempts to pick up homeless scholarship in a different key. That is, the Homeless Hotspots experiment does not just render the homeless participants as the status quo object of public space, but rather highlights a possibility for linguistic agency. Rather than indict this marketing experiment by casting cynical value judgments of public discourse, I would like to turn attention to possibly productive valences of the homeless hotspots by reading the experiment as a performative utterance that calls for a radical recognition of a typically abject condition. My reading, then, is an attempt to mobilize the term “abject” as a lever for rhetorical agency in an effort to understand a plea for recognition from the crowd attending the festival. Taking the responses from online news outlets as a cue for critical attention, this chapter looks for a new possibility for social amelioration. I intend to take seriously the commentary offered in response to events at SXSW for what they may tell us about the perceived threat of the homeless condition. These responses can be read as a symptom of the uncanny reaction to this
performative speech, highlighting the anxiety causing practices of uncomfortable confrontation through language. Lacan notes the importance of the symptom, claiming, “The symptom initially appears to us as a trace, which will only ever be a trace, one which will continue not to be understood until the analysis has gone quite a long way, and until we have discovered its meaning.”

By reading these media statements back to the staged encounters of the Homeless Hotspots, this paper will engage with what Lacan would call the Real of the symptom. Slavoj Žižek calls this a kernel of the Real, “The real, that which resists symbolization: the traumatic point which is always missed but which nonetheless always returns, although we try—through a set of strategies—to neutralize it, to integrate it into the symbolic order.”

Reading these concerned posts as “symptoms” makes any attempt to reinsert this encounter or its intents as logically “good” or “evil” undercuts its productive capacities to empty identity positions of their positive symbolic content. Rather, I am interested in exploring the effects and possibilities of agency that does not slip into the dangers of concrete signification.

These effects are what I would call “uncanny,” acting as what Sigmund Freud describes as “that class of frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar …something one does not know one’s way about in.”

I argue that the “uncanny” can be a productive displacement caused by a performative utterance. Because homeless persons are often figured as the object of public space, the participants in the homeless hotspots experiment speak from a scandalous position of authority, undermining the assumed potency of a performative utterance. Following Barbara Biesecker’s work on “evental rhetoric,” I read this performative act as a call for recognition with perlocutionary force without a fixed position. This call works through the (un)logic of the uncanny, displacing those who are being addressed in the same vein as the homeless persons who are speaking. Through an understanding of the uncanny
as a concept-metaphor that dislocates or dis-“places” the subject, this anxiety-causing moment opens up space for political change and ethical commitment to the abject condition of homelessness. Joan Copjec notes the possibilities of this rupture, explaining in terms of an “erasure” of the historically determined subject:

Erasure is intended precisely to foreground historical contingency, to demonstrate that the accretion of particular features by this or that subject, that the cumulate deposits of ego identifications, are the result of historical circumstances that could have been otherwise and that these particular features are therefore inessential.6

Put differently, this erasure evacuates the any positive valences of the symbolic force of history, operating as what Biesecker terms “a disruptive jouissance that de-totalizes the surface order of appearances.”7 This rupture causes the subject a kind of warrantable pain, as he or she is ripped out of a concrete historical trajectory of the “I/eye,” to recognize contingency that is cast in tenuous relationship to Others. The uneasy feelings expressed by many of the writers covering the homeless hotspots comes by way of the symptom of the uncanny experience, recognizing the excess of their own participation in a capitalist system.

Homeless Abject

The uneasy opinions expressed about this marketing experiment likely comes as no surprise considering the uneasy relationship between homeless persons and those who speak from the comfort of a sanctioned and locatable “place.” The homeless body often works only as a faceless instantiation of a much more frightening condition; that is, the threat of being without a place to call home. This anxiety comes primarily out of the public display of what is typically considered private activity.8 Public space is repurposed for private existence, with no guarantee of permanent location. The homeless body becomes the invisible presence of public space, participating in domestic practices within the oft-assumed “space” of the social.
A portion of this anxiety over public space comes as an effect of an aesthetic imperative for *public* space to be coterminous with *consumer* space. Important here is the governing locus of recognition that is neoliberalism, bent to converge democratic tensions through market solutions. Prophetically, Carl Schmitt warned against the woes of continuing the project of liberalism in 1932, asserting, “[Liberalism] has attempted only to tie the political and the ethical and subjugate it to economics.” Jodi Dean has cogently continued to highlight this concern, claiming “neoliberal language…makes the state just another market actor.” Dean offers this as an effect of what she terms “communicative capitalism,” giving birth to the “consumer as producer” whose turn to digital media helps him or her become the “star of their own show”: the spectacular becomes a mode of both production and consumption of the self.

In this figuration, as the neoliberal subject turns to the market for recognition and the amelioration of social issues, so follows public space and the triumph of moderate aesthetic sensibility. According to Don Mitchell, public space is the location in which the effects of capitalism are made manifest, arguing:

> Ideology…allows local officials, along with local business owners, to argue that they have no choice but to prostrate themselves before the god Capital, offering…extravagant convention centers, downtown tourist amusements, up market gentrified restaurant and bar districts, [and] new baseball and football stadiums.

According to Mitchell, this marks an overwhelming move toward the aesthetic, claiming that “image is everything,” representing the globalized capitalist market. The effects of globalization cause capitalism to become “placeless,” allowing sites for cultural consumption to become a mash-up of cultures easily imported from around the world. Due to this turn to aesthetic capitalism, policy makers and civil servants are forced to tend to the streets, providing an amiable environment for their citizens to consume. This imperative of public space often leads to policies that, according to Mitchell, are “clearly an effort to regulate public space so as to
eliminate homeless people, not homelessness.”14 In this way, the festival environment like the one built at SXSW comes as a hypertrophy of aestheticized public space, set to offer visibility for the consuming attendee. Austin, Texas has become a mecca for tamed liberal politics, highlighting a neoliberal attitude of social awareness under the project of capitalism. This same growth of an aesthetic public space puts the homeless body in a strange relation to capital, one in which Melanie Loehwing argues “become the scapegoats for the insecurity of public space.”15 The strange relationship is what Kathleen Arnold calls, “the uncanniness of late modernity.”16 Further, in the case of homelessness, “The Other goes far beyond the reality that is poverty and indeed, ascribes the qualities of an individual or group’s situation to the person or people themselves.”17 To set the stage for this festival, the homeless body is already figured as a threat to public spatial imaginaries.

Not only is homelessness a looming presence in public space, but it is also figured as antagonistic to democratic citizenship. As already noted, in the age of neoliberalism, the citizen who cannot consume is the (non)citizen who threatens the stability of a political economy of responsibility, a condition only rendered possible through the ability to be located. That is, without a home address and the luxury of living a future-oriented telos, “civic responsibility” is difficult, if not near impossible. These factors have led Arnold to claim, “[W]hen one can no longer inhabit public space, have one’s possessions and shanty towns (home, by some definitions) burned or bulldozed, be arrested for one’s status rather than a crime (hence signaling a loss of civil rights), and only exercise political power with extreme difficulty, one cannot be said to be a citizen.”18 In this sense, homelessness is figured as an abjection to neoliberal citizenship. Here, “the abject designates…precisely those ‘unlivable’ and ‘uninhabitable’ zones of social life,” functioning as a constitutive outside to the placed identity of American
citizenship. Loehwing expands on this concern in her analysis of the film *Reversal of Fortune*, arguing that a central trope of homelessness is one that highlights passions of the body that are centered on unfettered desires of the “now.” Loehwing argues that homelessness is offered to the public as a “present-centered condition, rendering those who suffer it incapable and unsuited for the future-oriented life of a democratic citizenry.” While the normalized citizen is depicted as deferring his or her desires for their democratic duties, “In the case of the homeless, citizens are betrayed by their bodies.” These stigmas of homeless bodies act as the defining characteristic that caused some of the tension expressed by bloggers responding to the call for recognition from the homeless persons participating in the Hotspots experiment.

Because of this body-centered condition, when a homeless person does become a locus of public attention, he or she is rendered in a precarious relationship to the norms of both social life and domestic life. In a case study that resembles conditions of the homeless hotspots, Kurt Lindemann points toward the effect of unruly bodies made visible to the normalized citizen-subject. Lindemann examines the practices of street newspaper vendors in San Francisco as a possible source of social change. While these practices certainly seem to be economically helping those who participate in the program, this is hardly a “business deal between equals.” However, the primary audience of these papers was not the native San Franciscan, but rather the tourist, “[framing] the paper not as a tool for advocacy, but as a souvenir.” Like any souvenir, Lindemann argues, authenticity of experience is important, eliciting the necessity for “authentic” performances from these homeless sales persons. Importantly, “the homeless person remains the dissociated Other, and the Street Sheet becomes a souvenir upon which the tourist may look back fondly, remembering the time he or she made a ‘difference’ in the life of someone less privileged.” Lindemann’s reading of the street newspapers in San Francisco points out the need
to make sense of the abject, non-position of homelessness through some act of recuperation that transforms the homeless person into an object for consumer enjoyment rather than a point of public disgust and anxiety. If a homeless person can only survive as a productive citizen by offering an “authentic” token of his or her experience such as the *Street Sheet* newspaper, that object becomes the palatable representation that stands in for homelessness as a condition rather than a call for help from an individual. To offer only a recuperated view of homelessness runs a serious risk of founding identity on moments of perception, a way of seeing that collapses difference in favor of an essentialized self and Other. To get out of this possible trap, homeless speech must be at the center of projects for recognition; the focus here is on the Austinian “performative” and the effects of what this kind of speech can really “do” with words.

Who’s Doing What With Words?

In 1955, during a set of lectures delivered to Harvard University, J.L. Austin offered an initial rendering of a kind of speech that does not aim at description, but rather produces a change in the state of the world. Austin termed these acts “performatives,” stating simply, “the uttering of a sentence is, or is part of, the doing of an action.” Austin’s most cited examples are the christening of a ship or the “I do” of a marriage ceremony. While Austin initially offered the performative as a means for changing the objective state of relationships, he continued to delineate his theory by adding nuanced categories of understanding: locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary. Locutionary acts are taken as an utterance in their “full normal sense,” and function as descriptor of an idea or object. In this sense, the locutionary utterance is the most basic unit of speech act theory. Illocutionary acts are a form of intention or promise from the speaker and introduce a performative action through the utterance itself. Shoshana Felman describes the illocutionary act as “the speech performance examined with reference to context of
the interlocution.” That is, rather than figuring the speech act as an act of description of the objective state of the world, the illocutionary act becomes a symbolic promise to an Other of discourse. In this sense, the illocutionary utterance does not obey the logic of “true” or “false,” but defers to being either “happy” or “unhappy.” The “happy” performative is a performative being recognized as such, whose promise is validated through the act of symbolically sanctioned recognition. For example, when a baseball umpire says, “You’re out!” the legitimacy of the utterance is reliant upon his or her position within the context of a baseball game. The utterance is felicitous only insofar as its promise “to do” is recognized by those involved in the speaking event (this becomes extremely clear if you’ve ever seen a blown call during a baseball game). Finally, perlocutionary acts denote how the message is received by an Other, denoting symbolic “force” necessary to change the state of the world, some of which may be unintentional. One would think that the performative utterance presents a productive vocabulary for rhetorical studies, freeing speech from the shackles of description to engage with the possibilities to constitute a new state of the world.

The initial reception of speech act theory in rhetorical studies came by way of pragmatist linguistics, primarily through the work of John Searle. Early debates in rhetorical studies came by way of Austin’s student John Searle and his attempt to couple speech act theory with a reference theory, arguing, “[The] utterance serves to pick out or identify one ‘object’ or ‘entity’ or ‘particular’ apart from other objects, about which to the speaker then goes on to say something or ask a question.” Scholars in rhetorical studies take up this debate, expressing ambivalence as to the referentialiaty of the speech act, opting rather for the operative force of the promise as a symbolic movement. While this conversation indicts Searle for problematic theory of meaning, these scholars do follow a theoretical trajectory that assumes a rational, sovereign subject who is
fully aware of his or her use of language. Searle later maps the speech act onto a theory of mind, stating, “beliefs and desires and other Intentional states are not, as such, syntactical objects…and their representational capacities are not imposed, but are intrinsic.”32 While the term “intentionality” is deceiving, Searle’s intrinsic “intentions” seem to map onto semantic categories that can be either conscious or unconscious.33 However, James Benjamin reads this as a proposal for speech acts that “[involve] the full personality of the persons involved.”34 The discussion over intentionality makes a two-fold mistake that can certainly use a post-structuralist upgrade, acknowledging the subject as barred or unable to know itself entirely and divorcing intentionality from an internal state, which allows for an understanding of language as a symbolic economy.

While American analytic philosophy turned to questions of referent and authority, post-structuralist theorists criticize the stable relationship between word and meaning within the performative utterance.35 Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler remain the two theorists most commonly cited to participate in this discussion, offering contextual and contingent understandings of self, Other, and body.36 However, French literary theorist Shoshana Felman, while not commonly cited in rhetorical studies, was among the first to identify the problems with inheriting a sovereign speaking subject in her book The Scandal of the Speaking Body. Felman turns the conversation in a different direction, noting that a first misrecognition or missed opportunity within current discussions of speech act can be seen in the connected but protean relationship between speech and body. Referencing the Lacanian claim, “A body is speech arising as such,”37 Felman works to establish a promiscuous relationship between words and objects. The goal is “not so much the reintroduction of the referent into the performative,” Felman claims, “but rather the change of status of the referent as such.”38 Just as a signifier
carries with it an excess of meaning, so does the speaking body, always exceeding identifications
with its contextual, nonverbal significance. In the words of Butler, “Not only [do] bodies tend to
indicate a world beyond themselves, but this movement beyond their own boundaries, a
movement of boundary itself, appear[s] to be quite central to what bodies ‘are.’”39 The ability for
bodies to both cite a normalized performative act while simultaneously exceeding the
“boundaries” of their own citations runs parallel to Felman’s central claim that the relationship
between speech and body is always a scandal, “a relation consisting at once of incongruity and of
inseparability…the scandal consists in the fact that the act cannot know what it is doing.”40 In
this sense, the body cannot contradict itself, but falls into contradiction only through its symbolic
dissection and performative action. To say that the speech act is always a “failure,” is not to say
that the speech act does not still have force or effect, but acknowledges that the speech act is
marred by both recognition and misrecognition of the speaking subject. The relationship between
speech and body is bound, yet “incongruous,” failing to produce meaning in what Austin terms, a
“full normal sense.”41 The speech act always operates through a performative failure, but is
written over by a fantasy that reconstructs a coherent speech situation as a communion between
self and Other.42

Starting from the scandalous relationship between speech and body, Butler turns to
speech act theory as a possibility for linguistic agency for those who have been deemed abject or
precarious subjects. Responding to critics who claim she “offer[s] both a faulty version of
speech-act theory and an oversimplified version of political agency,”43 Butler offers an extended
meditation on what it means to speak from a precarious position in Excitable Speech. Aptly,
Butler immediately makes the connection between speech acts and interpolation, noting that
“being called a name is also one of the conditions by which a subject is constituted in
language." That is, the performathe simultaneously constitutes the subject under symbolic
injunction, while simultaneously producing its own exclusion or impossibility beyond a world of
the text. This “beyond,” the text is merely a reference point, as subjective recognition of
something figured outside the text becomes impossible through language. This limit of language
is what Lacan would call the Real, a psychic realm that becomes nothing more than a bar that
blocks “knowledge” from a strictly external relationship to culture. Biesecker describes the
subject’s relationship to language and the Real at length:

> The subject is nothing more or less than a position adopted with respect to the Other as
> language or law and, hence, a “manque-à-etre or want-to-be”: “the subject fails to come
> forth as someone, as a particular being; in the most radical sense, he or she is not, he or
> she has no being. The subject exists-insofar as the word has wrought him or her from
> nothingness, and he or she can be spoken of, talked about, and discoursed upon.”

Because the Real is figured as nothingness through the impossibility of recognition, speaking
from this position becomes impossible, summing up a primary locus of concern for Butler.
Butler’s theoretical call for agency becomes a moment of speech from a precarious position of
recognition from an Other(s), proposing a certain disruption of the often-passive assumptions of
the sovereign subject (or the fantasy thereof). In short, “agency begins where sovereignty
wanes.”

Scandalous Speech

In what follows, I offer an extension of Butler’s work on agency in *Excitable Speech*,
relying heavily on Biesecker’s theorization of “evental rhetoric.” Unfortunately, space
constraints requires an abbreviated discussion of a rather lengthy proposition, so I will only be
focusing on two of the four conditions offered by Biesecker: the production of “full speech” and
the effects of the “uncanny.” My contribution comes as a proposition for the possibilities of
figuring the “uncanny” as a locus of agency that “displaces” the sovereign subject without re-
inscribing an essentialized identity. I will then demonstrate these possibilities by returning to the homeless hotspots as an act of radical recognition of the oft-figured impossible position of abject homelessness, and the agency afforded by the uncanny that dislocates the normalized neo-liberal subject.

Furthering Butler’s own concerns with agency, speech acts, and interpolation, Biesecker’s rendering of “full speech” as a speech “event” provides a nuanced addition to an understanding of ideological recognition without inscribing a fixed identity position. First offered by Lacan, “Full speech is speech which aims at, which forms, the truth such as it becomes established in the recognition of one person by another. Full speech is speech which performs.”

Furthering this statement, Biesecker argues full speech “is a rhetoric that clears the way for its perlocutionary effect,” functioning as an extension of the Austinian notion of “perlocution” that is evacuated of content so that “force” is all that remains. Unlike common understandings of speech act in rhetorical studies, “full speech” does not rely on a “representational illusion…but is the speech in which one gives one’s word, one’s fealty.”

Full speech is the “I do” of marriage or perhaps the more ontic claim of “I am” without a following phallic signifier of definition; “I am” in relation to an Other. That is, full speech comes by way of “exorbitant demand,” where “I” only exists through the possibility of “you.”

Biesecker’s initial theorization focuses primarily on full speech and its perlocutionary effect through the demand for recognition, laying out what she considers four tenants of “evental rhetoric.” In addition to full speech and the demand for recognition, Biesecker also claims that evental rhetoric works though the logic of sublimation and “does not abide by binary logics of the timely and the untimely, the impossible or the impossible; it forces their displacement that, with Freud and Lacan, I would call the uncanny.” While Biesecker has already expanded on
the first three conditions for “eventual rhetoric,” an extended reading for the possibilities for the
uncanny is still needed. Thus, my contribution to this conversation comes by way of the uncanny
as an often frightening, but productive “force” of agency in the perlocutionary effects of a full
speech act.

The uncanny was originally theorized by Freud as one of his initial forays into a
psychoanalytic contribution to aesthetics. Originally in German, Freud’s uncanny is written as
das unheimlich, or the “unhomely,” and is seen as a counterpart to the homely as a familiar,
located, and comforting sensibility. Rather than a focus on the beautiful or the true, Freud turns
attention to what he calls “certain things that lie within the field of the frightening.” Further,
the uncanny for Freud a rupturing effect, quoting Friedrich Schelling, “Unheimlich that ought to
have remained…secret and hidden but has come to light.” The uncanny becomes frightening
through the exposure of the automation and repetition of the normal, breaking up the assumption
of sovereign subject through an unsavory identification. Perhaps the most common rendering of
the uncanny is the phenomenon of the “double,” often figured as déjà vu, where the subject is
presented back to him or herself in an uncanny fashion. Importantly, Freud describes the
uncanny as a force of repression: “For this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but
something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated
from it only through the process of repression,” mirroring the Lacanian statement, “Whatever
does not come to light in the symbolic appears in the Real.”

Reading Lacan and Freud, Copjec defines the uncanny in succinct terms: “the experience
of encountering one’s own origins.” The uncanny does not function as ahistorical, but emerges
in resistance to linear temporality and logical progression, “emerg[ing]…from the adamant
insistence of a refusal of the ahistorical, of essences.” Through this disjunctive process, the
uncanny evacuates the signifier, leaving only a “place” without an essence, an identity without a specific object. By calling attention to the signifier’s certain “empty” capacities as a “dumb” unit of symbolic exchange, the uncanny dislodges the subject from his or her homely place or locatable identity: the subject becomes “placeless” or “homeless.” Jean-Claude Milner offers the uncanny as a parasite: “the unheimlich is not the inverse of the familiar, but the familiar parasitized by an anxiety that disperses it.”58 In this way, the uncanny becomes an effect of an encounter with the Real, or the limit of knowledge, that shows the subject as not essential and placed, but rather in a tenuous relationship to an Other. Lacan sums this up, saying “It’s the ego that enters the state of you, its the ego that thinks it is in the state of the double, that is, expelled from the house, while the you remains the possessor of things.”59 By and through the uncanny, the placed sovereign subject is displaced, unhomed, and “dispossessed,”60 of any essentialized location, opening up possibilities for agency and ethical intervention. The uncanny is the return of the repressed insofar as the Real, abject, constitutive outside of the symbolic (law as prohibition) is presented as the invisible constant of subjectivity without a whole. The neoliberal subject is presented with the necessary excess of capitalism, homelessness, as a constitutive threat to him or herself.

Homeless Hotspots

There is no better case study to demonstrate the uncanny as the displacement of perlocutionary force than one that examines the incitement to speech from homeless persons. These newly hailed participants in capitalist society produce these effects as a function of their own participation in the festivities of SXSW, causing outcry during and after the festivals from numerous people who interacted with these salesmen and women. While the festival-goers traveled from far and wide to attend the festival, their abject other obliquely finds a home in
Austin, Texas. In an ironic twist of circumstances, the homeless person finds a placed identity in relation to many of those visiting the city for the festivities and events. The homeless hotspots experiment placed the normally marginalized homeless persons as a locus of attention, whereby they became a hub capital for those who are displaced by the city’s overwhelming crowds demanding WiFi access.

Some of the participating homeless persons were interviewed during and after the 2012 SXSW, expressing their full endorsement for the project, claiming the hotspots were a unique opportunity to make money and interact with the crowds during the festival. Through a YouTube channel called “Invisible People,” several of the homeless participants were not only able to promote the project, but had a chance to briefly tell a portion of their life story. The rare opportunity for airtime gave a brief moment of visibility to individuals who often get lost within the ubiquitous and abstract referent of homelessness in public discourse. These interviews allowed many of the participants a chance to offer their name and provide a selective history to be broadcast online. Through these interviews, an amorphous and threatening condition is placed through the act of naming. This is crucial for the marketing experiment insofar as naming provides a “place” for the subject in the symbolic order, functioning as a signifier that speaks and can be spoken about. Philippe Julien notes the importance of naming, calling it, “[a] repetition [that is] an appeal for nomination…such is the power of speech, which makes the thing exist in time, [and] generates identity within difference.” Thus, the name becomes the place marker that allows for recognizable speech itself.

Regardless of the opinions expressed by the participants or even the lack of circulation of these videos, the experiment consistently produced uneasy feelings among those who felt compelled to speak or write about this event. These media reactions act here as a symptom,
pointing to the uneasy hail offered by the homeless hotspot’s eventual linguistic action. While the act of naming is a necessary condition for the performative hailing from the homeless hotspots, it is not sufficient to understanding the precarious call for recognition causing these anxious responses. The name becomes only a component of the act of linguistic agency, culling the ambiguous marker of homelessness from invisibility, providing a position for a subject with the ability to speak.

The primary locus of concern expressed by media outlets over these hotspots is not coincidentally what I would call the performative call offered by the homeless street vendors. As I noted above, each homeless participant was provided with a T-shirt that reads, “I am [name], a WiFi hotspot,” so they could be located by consumers in desperate need of a WiFi connection. This controversial statement becomes the ironic hail that cannot be ignored, functioning as a contractual relationship with the Other subject attending the festival. Rather than auditory speech, the writing on the t-shirt becomes an operative force that places these words on the very bodies whose normal presence causes a rift in the seamless aesthetics of public spaces dominated by consumer demands. Much like Butler’s claim that bodies always exist in excess to their symbolic and imaginary context, the body of the hotspots becomes a place for political action, causing a disjuncture between perception and action. These bodies do not do what they should be doing. Their statements are scandalous in the sense that the words on their shirts and the bodies that carry them are incongruous, yet inextricably linked through the term “homeless.” Through an initial read, the incongruous relationship between body and speech causes what Felman describes as a “fear that is here not attached to the ‘doing,’ to the act, but to the linguistic consequences of the act—to the juncture of ‘act’ and ‘words.’”\footnote{64} The anxious effect of this situation is not merely due to the presence of the homeless body, but the homeless body that is
placed in a desiring relationship to the absolute Other—capital. The homeless hotspots speak through its demand to be recognized an Other, mobilizing this demand for recognition by touting a WiFi device. By offering a service that the tech-hungry festivalgoers “need,” the homeless hotspots call for recognition through the logic of capitalism. Mirroring the logic of capital, the homeless hotspots experiment highlight the slip between the labeling of subjects and the objects of their labor, rendering the subject as the object of his or her labor. Further, this experiment breaches the taboo of making eye contact with a homeless person panhandling in the street, a performance which commonly reproduces the invisibility of homelessness in public space. The normalized fear of the homeless person is “dressed-up” as a productive member of a neo-liberal society, demanding recognition.

While the incongruous relationship between imaginary (specular) and symbolic (language) speaks as a subject of capital, how it speaks is still more important. The words “I am,” become a performative contract, speaking from a position in relation to Others. While “I am” is a loaded term in philosophical discourse, Lacan reads this not as the pre-given ontological status of Decartes, but rather as an indicator of the subject that is recognized through his or her entry into language. To use the “I” lexicalizes the subject in relation to an Other. Thus, to claim, “I am” can be read as a hail in its inverted form of “you are.” This moment of intersubjectivity comes as a relationship without the representation, what Lacan would call “full speech.” He explains, “Even if it communicates nothing, the discourse represents the existence of communication; even if it desires the evidence, it affirms that speech constitutes truth; even if it is intended to deceive, the discourse speculates on faith in testimony.” This is not truth as an epistemological absolute, but rather language as the installation of a bar to an unknowable Real
“beyond” the word. The utterance of “I am” by the homeless hotspots figures the subject into a symbolic position in relation to an Other.

Because “full speech” is only concerned with a call for recognition, this speech act cannot be reduced to what scholars have termed “constitutive rhetoric,” or one that creates an imaginary “identity” for a group of people; full speech is not concerned with the relationship between illocutionary acts act and the rhetorical production of meaning. Rather, full speech is concerned with the perlocutionary consequences of the performative utterance. In the words of Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, “Full, true speech, in this sense, says nothing other than what empty, lying speech says. But it says that it says (it).” Full speech is not concerned with content, per se, but rather the effect speech; full speech looks for movement over meaning. Thus, the uncanny comes into full play as a perlocutionary effect, demonstrated by the concerned responses from media outlets.

Should You Be Offended? Probably

If full speech is ignited through the symbolic hail of “I am,” the uncanny was the motivating force that caused bloggers and news anchors to respond with discomfort. Tim Carmody, writer for WIRED Magazine, succinctly expresses this sentiment in a piece titled “The Damning Backstory Behind Homeless Hotspots at SXSW.” Carmody’s opens with, “It sounds like something out of a darkly satirical science-fiction dystopia—but it’s absolutely real.” This condemnation is especially telling as Carmody likens this event to something that haunts the imagination; a plot that could only be true in fiction. The Huffington Post shared a video clip that gave a brief explanation with extended commentary on the hotspots. While testimonials from a participant mention the benefits of the opportunity to work, the commentator responds as such:
So, I wanted to criticize this story because it seems weird. Right? But then I thought about it…and everybody kinda wins. The homeless guy gets some money, and, uh, a guy gets his hotspot…there is actually nothing wrong with it. BUT, it feels off, right?71

In a similar fashion, a *New York Times* writer explained that the event “hit a nerve,” further calling attention to the these “*human* hot spots” (emphasis mine).72 Others have called this event “digital colonialism,” arguing that the hotspots should be considered “managers of these [hotspot] devices.”73 These statements offer a brief snapshot of the uncomfortable reactions to this event, demonstrating what Freud explains as, “that class of frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar;”74 that is, the alienation of the individual through labor.

The homeless hotspots mobilize this unease through the demand for recognition and the offering of an object the festival-goer “needs.” As homelessness is normally an abject, or worse, invisible body that haunts public space, their presence is not needed, and is certainly not demanded. Rather, homelessness functions as a stain on a picturesque vision of public commerce. While many notice the presence of homeless persons, but is often ignored as vehicles pass by the homeless person begging for change without so much as a nod of recognition. If you recognize, you become implicated in these Other conditions of living. However, during the hotspots experiment, homeless persons are figured in a different relationship to public space: as tech-wielding hubs of a capitalist enterprise.

The homeless hotspots experiments operate as a form of role-reversal, inverting the normalized relationship between homelessness and the neoliberal subject. Whereas the “I am [name],” functions to interpolate the Others visiting the festival, grammatically structuring a response of “you are,” providing WiFi as a service reverses the normalized relationship between capital and homelessness. In this scenario, the displaced festival-goers *need* a service the homeless hotspot participants are offering. Importantly, the homeless persons do not *have* a
WiFi hotspot, they are a WiFi hotspot. As this is written on their bodies, their relationship to capital is one of fundamental alienation, leveraging the body as an object for possible exploitation. The homeless participants, much like the modern entrepreneur, do not market a product, but rather markets the self as a product. What becomes uncanny, then, is the displacement caused by a mirroring relationship, working to ‘reflect me, back to myself, where I am not.’ This relationship is cast in mutual dependence with one another, syntactically read as “I am what you need.” Not only does the homeless hotspot provide a needed service in the festival environment, but the homeless person asserts him or herself as a necessity within the structuration of the normalized neoliberal subject. The homeless abject asserts him or herself in public space in mirror form to the capitalist, acting as just another entrepreneur taking advantage of the festival environment. The uncanny provides a mirror reflection that displaces the subject from its assumed interiority and origin; the subjects sovereign place is annihilated, calling attention to the symbolic and its identity-producing effect through difference.

Further, the uncanny causes an act of displacement by functioning as a psychological role-reversal, becoming what Lacan describes in certain terms as “expelled from the house, while the you remains the possessor of things.” That is, the ego, which has retained the narcissistic “I,” is cast out of equilibrium, displacing the subject as a fundamental aspect of subjectivity. This subject is one that does not “possess” his or her own language, but only becomes recognizable in and through language. The subject is recognized through language, but as an act of inheritance that can never originate with the self. The “you” for Lacan is the marker of a relationship cast in the symbolic: I am because you see me as such. In this sense, the rhetorical assertion of place is premised on its impossible to recognize inversion of placeless. The subject does motivate capitalism, but rather capitalism structures a mode of ideological recognition. At
SXSW, subjectivity is threatened with its own contingency of self through a “feeling of foreignness…and strangeness;” the ego is displaced from its home. The antinomy between the homeless body and his or her assertion to speech as a capitalist subject is incongruous, causing distrust and displacement for those involved.

This passive displacement can be read through many of the media responses as an attempt to rationalize and place just what is so uncomfortable about the homeless hotspot’s demand for recognition. Carmody, who started his article with a fantastic comparison to science fiction, goes on in rather lengthy terms to explain what he not going to do:

“I’m going to resist the urge to rant about how turning Austin’s homeless into Wi-Fi hotspots symbolizes everything that’s awful about both South by Southwest and living in America in the 21st century. I will resist the urge to rail against commenters at BBH Labs’ blog who complain that Homeless Hotspots hasn’t fully thought its own implications through.”

Through paralepsis, Carmody expresses his interpretive angst while still attempting to maintain some distance from his comments. Later, Carmody shifts his criticism not toward the Hotspots experiment itself, but rather directs attention toward BBH Labs for their practices, attributing this event to “a company that is looking for new marketing opportunities.” Rather than acknowledging the hail from the homeless persons participating in the marketing experiment, he attempts to demoralize its backing by locating agency with their ill-motivated intentions.

Another writer for a popular technology blog wrote, “The doubt and disbelief expressed on Twitter and by other attendees would never have happened if this had been a well-designed effort to help.” Again, this response displaces the event as exploitive rather than coming to terms with an attempt for recognition in a publically shared space. One of the most poignant and telling lines comes from Jon Mitchell, from the popular blog Readwrite. “Is this for real?”
Michtell asks, qualifying that “Pitch perfect satire often strikes the exact same agonizing chord as the real, terrible truth.”

The rush to humanize the event becomes a thread that attempts to rescue the human participants from exploitation as the object of their own labor. Many of these media responses vary in nuance, but all of them express ambivalence, hesitating to indict the project writ large. That is, these responses come forward as a symptom, a return of the repressed that has returned as the Real of capitalist subjectivity, homeless abjection. The ambivalence that many of these writers expressed marks this symptom well, attempting to cast a value judgment onto this event, while ignoring why their encounter with the homeless hotspots was so bothersome in the first place.

Conclusion

Speak then! What are you asking for? What do you want from me? Speak, speak, for I am listening to you.

My reading of the homeless hotspots is an attempt to supplement existing scholarship on speech act theory that ties itself to the politics of representation and meaning, while noting the potential problems of making value claims that adhere to the binary logic of “good” or “bad.” To say this experiment is good or bad would both be correct, insofar as representational politics of a homeless person written as an exploited object of capital does not compel savory opinions of the public discourses about marginalized subjects. To read this experiment as inherently “good” notes the necessity for a relation to capital without engaging implications of the specific call for recognition. To reinsert this into this good/bad dialectic missed the ambiguities associated with recognition through neoliberalism, only to reproduce homelessness as a condition without subjects; again, the homeless person becomes a body without a voice. This essay was rather an
attempt to highlight the possibilities presented by the homeless hotspots experiment by and through the perlocutionary force of a performative utterance.

Specifically, I have argued that Biesecker’s formulation of “evental rhetoric” makes a significant contribution to conversations on linguistic and rhetorical agency by attending to the incongruous relationship between speech and language. Working to extend Biesecker’s initial claims, I offer a reading of the “full” speech act that accounts for the perlocutionary force of the uncanny that displaces the fantasy of sovereign subjectivity with a subject that recognizes his or her own social consciousness as reliant upon the Others of discourse. This moment of uncanniness is the rupture that dislocates the subject as “master” of his or her own subjectivity, calling attention to the big Other (in this case, Capital) as Master without affirming its “truth” as a positive value. This moment disposes of a rigid self and Other, creating a “We,” one Biesecker describes as, “poised to assume and prepared to execute the responsibility of being in common, its collective desire.” That is, the desire to master is evacuated of possibility, and replaced with what Biesecker terms “a disruptive jouissance that de-totalizes the surface order of appearances:” recognition without an over-determined identity. Through the uncanny, the fantasy of the sovereign subject wisps away and opens up space to a re-subjectification that is hospitable to his or her Other.

However, theory is of no importance without its political implications. What is most important about this event is the incitement to public recognition of the homeless condition, an incessant yet invisible presence in public space. Rather than writing about the discourses that marginalize homelessness as a condition without a face, I wanted to read speech by homeless persons that places them with the particulars associated with subjectivity. This shift in orientation allows for an act of criticism that refuses to partake in a discourse that speaks for or
about an Other, in ways that only reinscribe a continuous cycle of marginalization and exclusion. By reading the speech act from the homeless participants themselves, my aim is to highlight the possibilities of rhetorical agency for commonly excluded peoples.

The effects of the homeless speech act can be read in many of the media accounts and commentary that attempt to rescue this act of capitalist objectification though an indictment of the marketing company or organized the event. The primary tendency of these articles and interviews is not necessarily their unabashed assertions, but rather their use of questions that attempt to place this experiment after the hail from the homeless persons. This reading would not be complete if I did not highlight a positive, and nuanced response to arise out of the numerous media accounts responding to the Hotspots experiment. If my argument is premised on a hesitancy to immediately pass judgment in favor of mapping out the necessary conditions for the possibility of radical politics, it is necessary to highlight a glimmer of beauty in a sea of anxious media commentary. While many of the articles I examine in this chapter express similar sentiments, “damning” the experiment for its problematic “intentions,” one article stands out of the pack as their inversion. Laura June, writer for The Verge, wrote a short piece entitled “Homeless Hotspots: the best, worst, smartest, dumbest part of SXSW,” responding in part to the plethora of indictments that had arisen only one day after the hotspots went live. In contradistinction to many of the other articles, June’s article is premised on neither condemnation nor endorsement, but rather possibilities. Put differently, her response is premised on recognition:

The real marketing gimmick itself requires something else: recognition of another human being, one who is suffering. Whereas plenty of people seemed to think that was dehumanizing, it’s actually kind of the opposite: it’s literally humanizing. Thinking about and looking at the homeless is hard.
This article simultaneously validates the criticism of other articles, yet dismisses their potency in one fell swoop through a divergence of attention. June directs attention away the marketing company and towards those that are made visible by the experiment. There is no deferral to talks about donation or objectification, but instead the call to speak about the moments of discomfort. Here, the referenced discomfort is the rupture that should not be written over through a value-laden response, but taken as the productive call for new conversations. She finishes the article in this way:

Did the creators make some mistakes? Yes. Should you be offended? Probably. Did it get us talk about the homeless, and thinking about their lives? Yes, definitely. And that’s valuable, despite the taste in your mouth.87

This article, and a vast number of user comments that responded to other articles on their respective websites, demonstrate exactly the political possibilities of the uncanny. The rupture that does not repair itself, but encourages people to live in and through the scar it leaves behind. This, indeed, is a moment of recognition and responsibility that disallows an imaginary face of subjectivity to be reduced to a static identity.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: HOME AND HOMELESSNESS, A PRECARIOUS RELATIONSHIP

At the end of a long term writing project, it seems only appropriate to engage with what I consider a central theme throughout the preceding text: What is the relationship between home and homeless? The title of this work, “Homelessness and the Uncanny ‘Place’ of National Imagination,” features homelessness as the central concept on which this the text may find a location. To start this thesis with word “homeless” creates a nodal point to understand all of the following text. Ironically, however, most of this text is not about homelessness. In the first two case studies, my investigation into these “homeless-centered” events, who is surprisingly absent are actual homeless persons. As it seems, many of the popular discussions about homelessness lack direct engagement with persons that experience homelessness. As I have worked to demonstrate throughout this text, many of these public engagements with homelessness are often not concerned with homelessness at all, but rather demonstrate the inextricable link between tropes of home and those that dwell within them, and those that suffer from the lack of home: the placeless bodies of homelessness. If I had to reduce down what this thesis works to highlight, it would be this: The ideological construction of home makes homeless an impossible position. Without a sanctioned “place” from which to speak (speak, both literally and figuratively), recognition under neo-liberal governance limits homeless representation to a condition without an individual identity.¹

The lack of place becomes the defining marker of a lump sum of individuals experiencing the similar woes, only ever to be recognized through essentialized stereotypes such as madness or drug addiction. Michel Foucault might call these public renderings “unreason,” making certain abnormal conditions visible in spectacular fashion that helps only to support a more insulated
view of normal. In this regard, the homeless person becomes the structuring abjection that is recuperated only through reference to his or her condition without providing a recognizable name. This phenomenon is especially prevalent with the homeless box cities, as the philanthropy events work to stitch together a community to an engagement with a homeless synecdoche. This link between ideological homes and homelessness is what causes the reproduction of homeless invisibility. However, to just house the homeless becomes an impossible task, as public shelters do not solve the necessity for a permanent address to become legible as a participating citizen. In a similar-fashion, we cannot reject the understanding of home, because without location, rhetoric becomes at best dissociative and at worst completely mute. Thus, to begin to make changes in this relationship between home and homeless requires a two-fold move, premised on both a reimaging of home as always already “uncanny” and the creation of new possibilities for homeless speech. In what follows, I will briefly engage with possibilities for both of these projects. I want to make a specific note that both of these examples are partial, always inheriting problems of representation and circulation. Nonetheless, without searching for new possibilities, criticism is only a distant act of cynicism and the scholar is only a brain speaking from a hill.

Re-Figuring Home

One can only show how one came to hold whatever opinion one does hold. One can only give one’s audience the chance of drawing their own conclusions as they observe the limitations the prejudices, the idiosyncrasies of the speaker. Fiction here is likely to contain more truth than fact.

Virginia Woolf, “A Room of One’s Own

To refigure home, what we first must do is ask simply, what is a home and how is it located? I have written myself into and out of contemporary conceptions of home, attempting to explicate a nuanced criticism of how (social) location provides a significant, yet often under recognized, nodal point for understanding not necessarily how the subject speaks, but perhaps
from where the subject speaks. While this location is certainly tenuous and contextual, to claim iterability requires a place in both space and time, something that must be taken seriously when considering the ephemerality of homeless living. What I have offered throughout this text is an introductory explication between several central themes: Home, homeless, and location. These themes have been textured throughout the entirety of this thesis, demonstrating their play in both popular and academic discourse. Their function is simultaneously symbolic, imaginary, and material, slipping in and out of images, symbols, and contexts. In this way, the production of home is not just a material construction, but is more importantly an assertion born through speech, materialized in action, and stabilized in the imagination. Thus, the symbolic and material implication of place and location become a central theme when trying to place the neo-liberal citizen-subject. Through the act and continuous re-affirmation of place, homelessness is indeed an unrecognizable position with no agency: He or she has no place to speak. When read in this way, the homeless box cities marks an attempt to place homelessness, a condition precariously located by definition, by reducing this homeless persons to what I have argued is the imagined “home” of public living: the cardboard box. Inversely, the responses heard from Carroll Gardens’ residents attempt to displace homelessness when the very interior of their homes are turned inside out, a panoply of privileged private life on public display, through an external threat. In the last chapter, the homeless hotspots marketing experiment at South by Southwest acts to displace the normalized persons at the festival, drawing attention to their own relationship to capital and excess.

Another way to view this thesis is one that does not search for a cause, an origin of concepts to produce a linear trajectory, but rather focuses on the directed attention of anxiety surrounding the home. This type of scholarship is certainly not new to rhetorical studies, but
often gets placed within the lump category of effectivity,\textsuperscript{5} a move meant to dislodge the speaker from “his” intended rhetorical purpose. Ronald Greene, in summation of larger conversations on the subject, claims rhetorical effectivity shifts the direction of rhetorical studies towards identification rather than persuasion.\textsuperscript{6} To clarify the distinction between rhetorical effectivity and the symptom, the rhetoric of the symptom comes as a response to anxiety and/or threat, symbolized as what Freud termed a “reaction formation.”\textsuperscript{7} Claire Sisco King might explain this in terms of abject hegemony, as the normalized subject attempts to constantly recuperate its own, grotesque excess\textsuperscript{8}: within our current discussion, it is homelessness. Through this lens, these three case studies work to highlight the anxious responses of those that are threatened with the trembling fear of dislocation, or as Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou put it, “dispossession.”\textsuperscript{9} Here, the homeless box cities work to turn a threat into a feeling of enjoyment by reducing homelessness to the visual synecdoche of the cardboard box. The residents of Carroll Gardens work to dispel homeless bodies that threaten the very nooks and crannies of their domestic spaces. Finally, the entrepreneurial crowd who experienced the homeless hotspots worked feverishly to place blame after being implicated by the homeless persons participating in the marketing experiment.

Still another way to view this thesis is one that works to build a relationship between place and imagination, an imagination that works to totalize the home in a hegemonic fashion. Despite its commonly held ideological production, I do believe the imagination holds the most possibilities for re-formulating how the assumption of home takes place in public discourse. There is no better direction turn but to literature to address the relationship between home place and imagination. As Derrida (a la Freud) reminds us, literature is no less important than reality, as “there is no difference in the unconscious between reality and fiction loaded with affect.”\textsuperscript{10} I
want to return briefly to the original text that houses the epigraph that inaugurated these concluding thoughts: Virginia Woolf’s response when asked to speak about women and fiction. Her lengthy reply immediately locates, calling for a room of one’s own for the female writer. She says, “Women must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.”

Taken literally, this statement leads the to believe that the lack of material resources is the primary mode of censorship of the female writer. If the woman has a home in which to write, more specifically, designated rooms in which to produce fiction, she will most certainly do so. If we map this logic onto the current project on home and homeless, the major woe of the homeless body becomes the lack of a house or shelter in its material instantiation. In a similar rendering, home is reduced to the cold contours of a material space, only to lack character associated with home. Read in another way, Woolf could have been asserting the need for not only material spaces, but also a “room” in which to write within canonized discourse. Thus, space is reduced only to its metaphorical capacities, calling for visibility within a logocentric discourse often aimed at normalization. Here, recognition comes by way of essentialization, attempting to write woman into a discourse that has worked to actively exclude her for so many years. In the same vein, homelessness becomes purely the effect of invisibility within the law, ignoring the imagined and material factors that contribute to their often-assumed invisibility within public discourse. As only symbolic, home can only be a hegemonic category, rendering certain subjects incapable of obtaining home in its full capacity. Rather, we could read Woolf as asserting neither a place in the canon nor a room in which to write, but an imaginary space that allows for female fiction to assert an world of possibilities in the subjunctive mood; to re-imagine a space through which women can assert agency through the “might have been.” While this is certainly not an end point, imagination provides a catalyst for change of material circumstances.
Like Woolf, I do not want to reduce home to its material capacities or reify home as purely an act of linguistic privilege, but rather offer home as a production of fiction, a fantasy construction of home place. To call something a fiction is not to reduce it to just the things of immaterial thought, but instead works as a figuration without pure form. Here, home becomes one to be imagined, not confined purely to the utterance or material qualities that make up ideological places of dwelling. Although the imagination certainly produces ideological effects, many of which may be unconscious,\textsuperscript{14} it also offers a way to re-imagine a way out of a constrictive rendering of what home can be. In this regard, we may consider the chapter on box cities a function of the imaginary “fullness” of decorating the cardboard box, reproducing and quilting home as the ideological place \textit{par excellence}. The homeless bodies in Brooklyn then become ugly remnants of an imagined unification of Carroll Gardens, their presence staining the image of a safe neighborhood. These two case studies mark the imagined conceptions of home as reliant upon traditional visions of hegemonic location. Important here, is that in neither case study were homeless bodies ever present, only a threat that called for a return to imaginary stability: to return home to a stable sense of self and other. If the first two chapters protect the placed subject against external threat, then the final chapter marks a moment of paradox that ruptures the assumed smooth relationship between ego and language, between body and speech: words did not match the bodies that spoke them. The uncanny, then, marks the displacement of a bodily ego, rupturing an imaginary unity of many of those who experienced it, making the self a reflection of a once abject body.

Through this rupture comes a possibility for agency, one that does not “return home” to normalcy, but rather lives in a queer sense to the unhomely components of asserting a home place. A re-imagining of home requires us to think of home as not something of complete
familiarity, an interior space and self, but one that functions as a “haunted” by traces of difference in both time and space. To demonstrate the possibilities here I turn briefly to a photo blog titled “Dear Photograph,” a user generated site on which people post overlaid images of a context of present and past. As stated on their website, this website simply encourages their followers to, “Take a picture of a picture, from the past, in the present.” As these photographs are user generated, their attention to detail varies from image to image, some of which utilize different spatial mechanisms to “line up” past and present with varying levels of effectiveness. However, these photographs do present a gleam of hope, as the space within many of these photographs presented back to the viewer as a rupture both temporal and spatial continuity. For the purposes of space, I have selected a single photograph that I believe represents well the possibilities of uncanny space presented in this collection of photographs.

The image above, in its most simplistic form, is nothing but an image of an image, perfectly overlaid to match the architecture of the house in its differing contexts. However, to simply force this image into an economy of representation ignores its refusal to be absolutely represented. Through photographic technique, this becomes abstracted several times, acting not just an image of an image, but an image of images with conflicting temporal acuity. What is striking here is the
image’s refusal to become either a metaphor or metonymy. While the older photograph certainly slides over the top of the current house, it cannot fully envelop the present context. One image cannot stand for another, but the implications of “sameness” scream out nonetheless. Its metonymic presentation of partial objects denote the difference in context, becoming somewhat “uncanny” as the windows of the held photograph butt up against the windows of the contemporary photograph and the deck shows its submissiveness to wear. The “placement” or order of the objects in these photograph are the same, but they are clearly different objects showing the wear of time, simultaneously acting as metaphors and metonyms. The man in the image becomes a ghostly centerpiece, denoting not fullness, but a complete emptiness behind the image itself. His presence works as what Derrida would call the “supplement,” highlighting the inability for language to be fully present at the scene of an utterance. Derrida notes the effects of the supplement in a similar sense to how I have previously figured the uncanny: “We are dispossessed of the longed-for presence in the gesture of language by which we attempt to seize it.”16 Through the refusal of presence, the photograph is haunted by a trace of past life, displaced from a temporal and spatial continuity. The man in the photograph is the centerpiece, but his presence is almost completely based on his absence from the scene being captured.17

This disjunction of time and space superimposes a moment of the past onto the present, folding time back upon itself to experience these moments simultaneously for the viewer. In the photograph, the concept of temporal location is made impossible, as both time frames assert themselves as authentic, highlighted in their relationship to the other image. This is made quite clear with the disjointed feelings of time created through the shadows on the deck and the snow on the ground. Importantly, the shadows in the held photograph found on the deck are cast by an invisible sun, one that seems to bring the old photograph alive, prying it out of the overcast
colors of the contemporary scene. This shows a contradiction at the heart of this photograph, as
the held image of a time past ironically becomes a living version of the scene in the present
tense. This contradiction is further complicated, as the resolution of the held photograph distorts
the visual image, producing an unreal effect that feels more alive than its surrounding “reality.”
What is “in” the image becomes a fiction and it’s life-assuming components a fantasy, allowing
for an act of imagination that forces the viewer to feel at home in a space that one does not
possess by becoming a character in story that is not entirely one’s own.

The effects of this image are motived by its affects, causing disunion from the ego to find
comfort and belonging in the dissonance created by a haunted timeline. By recognizing the trace
of the Other, we see that we too are an Other. Here, then, we can act only through and for an
ethical relationship that is refused absolution through difference. Freud pointedly notes this
ability for the uncanny to provide a locus of agency. He says, “[W]e can feel at home in the
uncanny and can deal by psychical means without our senseless anxiety. We are still defenseless,
perhaps, but we are no long helplessly paralyzed; we can at least react.”¹⁸ In these terms, the
uncanny rescues the subject from a neurotic placement of the self only to be wisped away into a
defenseless relationship with the Other. Here, the Other is not one that threatens to attack or one
that can be consumed in an act of abstract philanthropy, but one that is also defenseless, leaving
nothing but the promise and necessity for love. When the home is featured as always already
uncanny, then the hubris of private possession is tempered with an obligation to others who do
not have the privilege of location. Homelessness, here, does not threaten the home, rather home
threatens the homeless, leading to an inverted relationship between home and homelessness that
will hopefully lead to acts of hospitality and responsibility.

¹⁰⁷
Can the Homeless Speak?

Although re-figuring home is a partial response to a necessary exigence to deal with the impossible position of homelessness, this work cannot stand without attention to the possibilities for homeless recognition. Over 25 years ago, Gayatri Spivak engaged a similar problem with the same motivation, posing the now famous rhetorical question, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Responding to western philosophical traditions reliant upon the politics of representation, Spivak argues that through an ideological mode of representation, those who do not have a position may “speak,” but we most certainly do not hear them. Even if we are to “represent” these persons, we end up “re-presenting” through our own eyes, only ever speaking for or about them. Thus, the subaltern becomes an invisible body without a voice, reliant upon a recognized subject to essentialize their position. In short, within the textual economies of ideology, the subaltern person disappears.

We encounter a similar problematic throughout this thesis, going almost about 80 pages without a reference to any speaking homeless persons. This begs the question, how can a document whose title starts with the word “homeless” have so few words from persons experiencing homelessness? The answer, of course, is what motivates this entire project. Within most public discourse, engagement and recognition of homelessness never actually engages homeless persons. Rather, these impotent efforts to “help” rely upon an imaginary abstraction to engage an issue rather than the persons that are affected. Within the first two chapters, what I was attempting to highlight is that while trying to engage with homelessness, ideologically validated subjects actually often end up stitching home as the epicenter of identity, leaving homeless persons invisible yet again.
However, simply inserting representations of homeless persons into public discourse always runs the risk of falling into what Peggy Phelan, following Lacan, has called the trap of visibility. What Phelan is highlighting here is the dangerous of identity politics that reduces all assumed members of an identity to the traits exhibited by the few that are “visible” to the public eye. In a similar call to Spivak, Phelan claims, “In framing more and more images of the hitherto under-represented other, contemporary culture finds a way to name, and thus to arrest and fix, the image of the other.” This problematic extends to homelessness as evidenced by the numerous photographers who take still photographs of homeless persons in attempts to represent homelessness for the world. Many of these photographs depict close-up, personalized images of homeless persons, featuring black and white coloring with a dramatic use of negative space. However, this act of visibility is not one that allows for homeless voices in their particularities, but one that privileges an act of safe looking for the viewer. Yet again, these professional photographs reduce the homeless person to a piece of art, only feeding the enjoyment of their audience. For lack of a more articulate expression, homeless people are not art!

Centering the troubling consequences of representation, it becomes difficult to find claims to speech by homeless persons rather than problematic discussion about homelessness as a social issue. This is the exact problem I try to take up in the previous chapter on homeless hotspots, centering performative utterances by homeless individuals that humanizes in a way that does not essentialize a subjective experience. In what remains, I want to briefly engage the possibility of homeless speech as demonstrated by another project sponsored by BBH Labs, the marking company that created the homeless hotspots experiment. This project was termed “Underheard in New York,” which featured four homeless men who were given cell phones to
“tweet” whatever they wanted to say. These cell phones were pre-paid by the company and the participants had no restrictions on what they needed to tweet.

What is most profound about this project is the banality of what these four individuals had to say. Daniel (@putodanny), one of the participants, tweeted a picture of a bright red sports car, a tweet that is surely familiar to anyone that uses social media. Albert (@albert814), another participant, expressed his excitement to be able to text his friends again, thankful to have a connection to people with whom he had lost contact. While these are only a two examples, the list goes on as these four men “live tweeted” their everyday lives. Unfortunately, this experiment only lasted a year, leaving those that followed these four men on Twitter in a jolt as their tweets and whereabouts abruptly came to an end. While this experiment was not without its problems, mainly the privileged assumption that charging a cell phone is easy to do while living on the street, its effects are positive insofar as it marks an unfettered attempt to listen to homeless persons.

Using this as a demonstrative example, we must ask, what are the possibilities of homeless speech? If there are any possibilities here, it comes by way of the banal, not the grandiose. This speech focuses on the particulars of everyday speaking and experience. This speech does not claim to represent a condition, but speaks from a (marginalized) symbolic position. This speech, much like the speech acts examined in the previous chapter, asks for nothing but a promise to listen. I want to conclude with a tweet from Daniel, which expresses in 140 characters what I have been trying to say in over 100 pages. He writes:

“Hi my people [it] is meputodanny, just to let u know that am still here, and that I love u.”

24
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NOTES

Chapter 1

18 The most prolifically used scholars tend to be Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Jacques Lacan, with many scholars utilizing feminist, queer, and postcolonial criticisms of these scholars.


22 Lundberg and Gunn, “Ouiji Board,” 86.


31 Lundberg and Gunn, “‘Ouiji Board,’” 97.


35 This quote comes from Lacan’s lecture entitled “The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud,” Écrits, 146-178. The importance of this here is to note the seat of agency, not in the conscious agent, but in the unconscious Other. This becomes infinitely clearer when engaged in the original French. The text in the original French, *instance*, is translated by Sharidan as “agency.” Bruce Fink keeps the term as “instance” in his translation, as well as his supplementary texts. Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe note that the use of *l’instance* in the text is meant to be a play in signifiers, calling upon notions of agency, authority, and insistence. Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, *The Title*, 21-23.


38 This translates to “temporal history of development,” implying the function of space and place as a historically loaded signifier.


42 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 39.

43 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 39.


47 Not just symbols, but the Lacanian symbolic.


50 McAlister, “Figural Materialism,” 291.


Chapter 2


The “container” metaphor is a direct reference to Heidegger’s concept of the vase, functioning as a symbolic object that is meant to contain. This is not a pure negative, but rather produces an effect, an empty place marker that becomes animated only through identification with this “spot” in the symbolic. Martin Hiedegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1971), 169.


19 Stewart and Dickinson, “Enunciating Locality,” 283.


27 Gramsci, Prison Notebooks, 137-138. Where this provides specific insight to the “rhetoricity” of subjectivity is the complicated relationship between interiority of the “self” and an exteriority of the subject.


32 The term “suture” is used in Lacan for both symbolic and imaginary identification. This is noted by Laclau and Mouffe, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, 88.


35 Having a home address becomes necessary for civic duties like voting and jury duty. That is, without a “home,” in the broad sense of the term, the ability to participate in civic responsibility quickly becomes difficult, if not impossible.


37 To be more explicit, the students often describe the American home through piecemeal signifiers of white, heterosexual affluence: white picket fence, shutters, dog, blonde parents, two children: a boy and a girl, *ad nauseam*. The rush to domesticate relies on home as a quilting point for the hegemonic status of American dwelling.


41 The use of me here makes implicit reference to the role of the Ego, or sense of identity as a whole or *gestalt* feeling. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 1.


44 “2014 Family Promise Box City.”

45 “Box City Camp Out.”


47 “2014 Family Promise Box City.”


49 There is something to be said about the rhetoricity of these images, as these images, and many others like them, are displayed on the front page of promotional websites and news coverage to represent participation in the box city events. However, that reading is outside of the purview of this project and likely would not reach pithy conclusions.


52 The concept of demand driving community practices around a *point de capiton* and the *objet petite a* is further explicated in Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (New York: Verso, 2005), 105-108.

55 The notion of homeless bodies as abject is featured strongly in Kathleen Arnold, Homelessness, Citizenship, and Identity: The Uncanniness of Late Modernity (New York: State University Press of New York, 2004), 76.
57 “Utopia” is translated from Latin as “no place.” This term was first used by Sir Thomas More in his book Utopia. See Oxford English Dictionary for full etymological usage.
59 Kristeva, Powers of Horror, 4
60 Phelan, Unmarked, 33.

Chapter 3

1 This acts as an epigraph in Marshall Berman, All That is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity (New York: Penguin Group, 1988), 290.
4 I want to be clear, here, that this is not about the intent of the homeless persons, but rather the contestatory practice of placing the displaced in the center of an established urban neighborhood.
7 Here, the capital “O” is in reference to an absolute Other through language.
8 MacCannell, “‘New Urbanism,’” 117.


22 I take this re-reading from Lacan, when he says, “This phenomenon represents the patient’s imaginary transference onto us of one or more or less archaic imagos…which has excluded a certain function or body part from the ego’s control by accident of repression, and which has given its from to this or that agency of personality through an act of identification.” Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006), 88.


24 “Good” here becomes a slippery signifier that comes to stand in for all things that reify hegemonically validated identities. Particularly, good is a value term that is not necessarily coterminous with, but in proximity to “white.”

25 This process of stitching, or quilting, is explored at length in the previous chapter. For a short read, see: Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (New York: Verso, 2005), 105-109.

26 This process is explored more fully in Maurice Charland, “Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the Peuple Québécois,” *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73, no. 2 (1987): 133-150.


28 “Carroll Gardens Neighborhood Association.”


35 “Gentrification has made,” *Business Insider*.


41 “Carroll Gardens Neighborhood Association”


45 This is directly quoted from the *NY Daily* article. Obviously profanity creates an added level of transgression to this already violating sensory assault.


Miller, “Extimite.”


My initial inquiry is, admittedly partial insofar as I have failed to recognize my own position in writing the effects of an urban frontier myth. I want to return to Neil Smith, who claims, “The term ‘urban pioneer’ is as arrogant as the original notion of the ‘pioneer’ in that it conveys the impression of a city that is not yet socially inhabited; like the Native Americans, the contemporary urban working class is seen as less than social, simply a part of the physical environment.” Neil Smith, “Gentrification, the frontier,” 16. Similar to the limits of my own argument, Smith’s reading of gentrification is partial the very problem that is at the center of his allegorical quotation: race. We see in this brief excerpt how quickly Native Americans, a raced position within the American frontier, slips into class when translated to the urban.

Unfortunately, due to time and space requirements, this text in its present form cannot possibly attempt to deal with the fear of race as a central theme to the (re)making of a “multicultural” Brooklyn. This fear is briefly highlighted throughout this chapter, enacting the homeless shelter to function as a distraction to render racial tensions invisible. However, the concern here is that these anxieties of race in Brooklyn are one’s that don’t often make it into published texts, but are somewhat invisible as to offer Brooklyn and its residents as a place of progressive politics and inclusive community practices. That said, a long-term ethnographic project is needed to engage with these politics of exclusion and invisibility, one that is logistically impossible to summarize in this text.

Burgin, In/Different Spaces, 139-161.

Chapter 4

6 Joan Copjec, Imagine There’s No Woman: Ethics and Sublimation (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2002), 93.
7 Barbara Biesecker, “Whither Ideology? Toward a Different Take on Enjoyment as a Political Factor,” Western Journal of Communication 75, no. 4 (2011): 448. doi:10.1080/10570314.2011.588904. This is not to that this erases subjectivity, but rather disallows the over-determination of the appearances of subjectivity. This works as a nuanced critique of identity politics.
11 Dean, Democracy and Other, 4.
14 Mitchell, The Right to the City, 167.
16 The original German used by Freud is “unheimlich” or unhomely, an important translation when used in reference to homelessness.
20 Loehwing, “Homelessness as,” 382.
27 Austin, How to, 94.
29 Austin, How to, 107.
30 John Searle, Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 26. This is not to say the object has no place in speech act theory, though this object comes as an effect of structural play and desire. For more on the object and sublimation, see: Biesecker, “Whither Ideology?” 445-450.
33 Searle, Intentionality, 1-36.
34 Benjamin, “Performatives as,” 86.
35 The debates between these two fields of thought is described by Felman as a “missed encounter,” as their concerns with speech act theory was to different ends. Felman, Scandal, 58-64.
38 Felman, The Scandal, 50.
39 Butler, Bodies That Matter, ix.
41 Austin, How To, 5.

44 Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 2. Specifically, Butler turns to the relationship between the Austinian rendering of a ritual or ceremonial speech acts and the Althusserian notion of the hailing as a ritualistic practice. Here, Butler claims, “Ritual is material to the extent that it is productive, that is, it produces the belief that appears to be ‘behind’ it” (25). When Althusser claims that ideology is “the imaginary relationships to individuals real condition of existence” the “real” is a “double constitution,” both defining the material reality of the subject, while simultaneously meaning Real in a Lacanian sense. Althusser writes, “What seems to take place outside of ideology, in reality takes place in ideology. What really takes place in ideology seems therefore to take place outside of it” *Lenin and Philosophy*, 162. In this way, ideology produces its own negation, figuring a beyond while simultaneously barring the subject from that “outside.” Through the act of prohibition of recognition with a “beyond” to this bar, ideology produces a (non)position in the Real. This exclusion functions as a structural effect, placed beyond as an impossible position, nonetheless acting to reconstitute (“reproduce” for Althusser) ideological recognition. Thus, the Real is none other than the bar that disallows recognition outside of the symbolic, yet simultaneously constitutes the existence a beyond to the symbolic (and ideology).


46 Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 16. Later, Butler explores a different possibility for interpolation, examining what a situation “in which the man on the street calls for the police rather than responding to the police’s call.” Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 113. That is, what are the possibilities for consciousness outside of the Law, or symbolic system, and how does the law create a demand for recognition? This re-reading of the interpolation reverse the role, as the pre-symbolic subject looks for subjection for a identity spot. Further, there are also critical possibilities of staying “unmarked,” to steal a term from Peggy Phelan, or not fixed through a chain of signifiers instantiated by symbolic recognition. Phelan, *Unmarked*, 167-180. Unfortunately, the possibility of working through this in whole is well outside the space allotted for this essay.


56 Copjec, Imagine, 103.
57 Copjec, Imagine, 96.
61 This is just one video of a number of these interviews. “A Homeless Hotspot Vendor: Meet Jonathon,” Invisible People, March 13, 2012.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BFaGY6e18WE
63 To use a strange example, ritual exorcism takes this practice to heart. Before the religious figure can cast out a demon, he or she must call it by its name. Without this name, the demon is beyond the bar of language.
64 Felman, The Scandal, 66.
65 Žižek makes the claim that Capitalism, as a system of symbolic exchange, functions as the big Other. For an initial reading, see: Slavoj Žižek, The Sublime Object of Ideology (New York: Verso, 1989), 21-22.
71 This video was filmed by the Young Turks, an online news show that boasts over 1 billion views, and was shared via the Huffington Post. “Homeless Hotspots,” The Young Turks, March 14, 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GbZ1XZfWguM.
72 The Use of Homeless Hotspots,” NY Times, March 12, 2012.
http://www.npr.org/2012/03/13/148528071/homeless-hotspots-exploitation-or-innovation.
75 This is much like Kant’s reading of the sublime that places the fear aroused by magnitude as an interior state of the subject cognitively coming to terms with his displacement. Immanuel Kant, “The Critique of Judgement,” in Art and Its Significance: An Anthology of Aesthetic Theory, ed. Stephen David Ross (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 113-120. I use “his” here intentionally to note the erotically masculine figuration Kant offers for the sublime as a sense of displacement and the pleasure of replacing himself as sovereign. For a


77 Thus, when Copjec argues that the uncanny is a subject that is presented with an origin, the origin is impossible, a function of eraser.


79 “The Damning Backstory,” *Wired*.


82 Don Giovanni, spoken directly to a statue in Mozart’s opera by the same name. Quoted in Felman, *The Scandal*, 137.


84 Barbara Biesecker, “Whither Ideology? Toward a Different Take on Enjoyment as a Political Factor,” *Western Journal of Communication* 75, no. 4 (2011): 448. doi: 10.1080/10570314.2011.588904. This is not to say that this erases subjectivity, but rather disallows the over-determination of the appearances of subjectivity. This works as a nuanced critique of identity politics.


86 “Homeless Hotspots,” *The Verge*.

87 “Homeless Hotspots,” *The Verge*.

Chapter 5


3 Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 1989), 4


12 For more on the dangers of retroactively writing women into the canon, see: Barbara Biesecker, “Coming to Terms with Recent Attempts to Write Women into the History of Rhetoric,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 25, no. 2 (1992): 140-161.
13 This point is well highlighted by Gayatri Spivak, laying out the importance for what she would call an “aesthetic education.” However, she warns against only imaginary politics, noting that a epistemological change is not a material revolution. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 1-35.
17 The caption underneath the photograph explains that the man in the past photograph is dead.
23 I purposely do not use the word gaze here; the use of gaze in rhetorical studies is often premised on a misappropriated reading done by Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975), 6-18. Here, Mulvey argues that the gaze is always one dominated by the masculine and driven by a “scopophilia” that reduces the feminine to an object of desire. However, I believe she misreads Lacan, as his reading of the gaze is quite the opposite: the gaze is rather a rupture, or a stain, when the observer is implicated in the very act of looking. In this way, the viewer is not in control of the gaze, but the gaze disrupts his or her sovereign position, a phenomenon Lacan calls “anamorphosis.” For more on this, see: Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed.
Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1998), 79-91; Joan Copjec, “The Orthoscopic Subject: Film Theory and the Reception of Lacan,” *October* 49 (1989): 53-71; Joan Copjec, “The Object-Gaze: Shame, *Hejab*, Cinema,” *Filozofski Vestnik* 2 (2007): 163-183. This said, some of these images of homelessness do have some potential to be refigured through the Lacanian gaze. Rather than just an object looking back, in the case of these homeless photographs these images portray a grotesque object that implicated the viewer. While I clearly do not have the space here to produce a complete argument, this turn is what I might call the “abject gaze.”