

Bodies Made Public: The Homeless Body in 1980s Los Angeles

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There is an unspoken danger surrounding homelessness. Most people avoid speaking to or even looking at homeless people they see on the street or from their cars; the presence of homeless people can evoke pity, disgust, or fear. The condition of homelessness eclipses personhood because homeless people are not seen as individuals but as the unwashed masses. Homelessness clearly affects the body because it is constantly exposed to the elements and lacks access to adequate facilities like restrooms and washing spaces. Throughout the 1980s, there was a rising rate of homelessness in the United States. The City of Los Angeles responded to large numbers of homeless people by attempting to eradicate homeless bodies, it did not, however, do much to eradicate homelessness. Homelessness forces bodies to be public yet homeless people are excluded from the concept of “the public” and are perceived as a threat to health and safety. Throughout the 1980s, the exclusion of homeless people from the public occurred physically—through space—and figuratively—through discourse.

Economic trends and political policies during the 1980s resulted in an increase in the rate of homelessness across the United States. When Ronald Reagan was inaugurated in 1981, both inflation and unemployment rates were high. In response to this situation, the Reagan administration initiated a series of policies that became known as “Reaganomics”. Reagan hoped to revive the economy by reducing government spending and introducing tax cuts (Blanchard, Branson, and Curie, 16). The plan for scaled back government spending slashed funds for social programs; Historian Howard Zinn cites \$140 billion worth of cuts in 1984 alone (578). He writes,

“Welfare became an object of attack: aid to single mothers with children through the AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) program, food stamps, health care for the poor through Medicaid. For most people on welfare (the benefits differed from state to state) this meant \$500 to \$700 a month in aid, leaving them well below the poverty line of about \$900 a month” (578).

Without the safety net of social programs like welfare, many people were living in or on the edge of severe poverty.

Economic trends within California and Los Angeles County also contributed to an increase in the rates of homelessness. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism resulted in the loss of jobs in manufacturing industries (Wolch and Dear, 3). In Los Angeles, the automobile manufacturing and the rubber industries lay off employees and shuttered factories. Geographer and Urban scholar Edward Soja writes, “Counting a few major ‘indefinite’ layoffs, over seventy-five thousand workers lost their jobs due to plant closings” from 1978-1982 (46). This contributed to high levels of unemployment in LA County, with the unemployment rate peaking at 10.5% at the end of 1982 (Eaton).

In addition to lost jobs because of deindustrialization, there was a crisis in available affordable housing in LA County. A shrinking middle class, declining numbers of home purchases, and an influx of immigrants meant that competition for the scarce amounts of affordable rental properties was stiff (Wolch and Dear, 70). Rent rates reflected this strain, in her article “From Global to Local: The Rise of Homelessness in Los Angeles during the 1980s”, Jennifer Wolch states, “Between 1980 and 1990, Los Angeles County rents (in constant 1980 dollars) rose over 50 percent” (401). Unable to find affordable housing, many individuals and families sought alternative shelter: they rented converted garages or lived in automobiles and out on the streets.

Deindustrialization and the lack of affordable housing meant that the number of people requesting welfare was growing. Despite this, the state of California followed the example set by the Reagan administration and reduced the amount of relief services available. Wolch writes, “In Los Angeles, a particular reactionary county government dealt with the swelling ranks of needy people by acting to restrict the level and availability of poor relief and other key social services” (394). During the 1980s, LA County closed fourteen

General Relief offices, five AFDC offices, and twelve health facilities (Wolch 378-379). Economic policies at the local and national levels meant that more people were living in extreme poverty and the shrinking “safety net” of social programs increased susceptibility for homelessness.

While contemporary commentators, social scientists, and historians have all agreed that the rate of homelessness increased throughout the 1980s, there has not been a consensus on the exact number of homeless people living in Los Angeles during this time. Part of the fluctuation over firm numbers is that there was not an agreed upon definition of homelessness across government agencies and non-profit organizations. As a result, certain homeless people (those sleeping in shelters, cars, or modified garages for example) could be completely overlooked in different surveys and census counts (Wolch and Dear, 31). In her article, “From Global to Local”, Wolch reports, “For most of the 1980s, the most commonly accepted ‘guesstimate’ of the numbers of the homeless in Los Angeles was 35,000” (407). This figure was an estimate of the amount of people seen sleeping on the streets of LA on an average night; it reflects the concept that the issue of homelessness is about visibility. Homelessness is only identified as a problem when there is obvious and visible poverty. People that live in alternative shelters, the homes of family or friends, and in automobiles are not always considered homeless.

Homelessness has obvious implications for the body and the body makes the condition of homelessness intelligible. Homeless bodies are bodies that exist for long periods of time in public spaces; they are almost constantly exposed to the elements. Additionally, lacking access to facilities such as restrooms, showers, and laundry rooms means that homeless people struggle to live up to common standards of personal hygiene. In her essay “The Homeless Body,” Samira Kawesh writes,

“...the particular contingencies that are typically read as marking one as homeless are not skin color or sex, but other attributes such as dirty or disheveled clothing, the possession of carts or bags of belongings, and

particular activities such as panhandling and scavenging. In public space, the homeless do not appear as individuals with distinctive identities. Under certain circumstances, homelessness effectively eclipses such socially defined particularities. Thus, as it is ideologically and materially constituted in relation to the public, the homeless body must be seen as a specific mode of embodiment, one that requires its own specifications” (324).

Being homeless takes a toll on the body and the body inevitably bears the markings and signs of homelessness. In 1992, Steven VanderStaay published *Street Lives: An Oral History of Homeless Americans*. This collection of interviews with individuals from across the nation gives insight into the bodily experiences of homeless people. VanderStaay describes a man named Batman,

“Batman’s face tells the story of his homelessness: deep scars from beatings; the rough, cracked skin of living outside; a mouth of broken, rotting teeth. Remarkably, he has earned these features in just eight years of homelessness” (9).

This introduction is an example of how homelessness is a condition of the body and how the body clearly and visibly marks a homeless person. In addition to VanderStaay’s commentary about the interviewee’s appearances, the homeless people themselves frequently share the concerns and conceptions of homeless bodies. A woman named Hell shares the a story about another homeless woman she knows:

“They call her Dirty Diane because, well, she really don’t take care of her monthly thing, just lets it dribble down her leg. Maybe she do that ‘cause then nobody’ll bother her. I don’t know” (15).

This anecdote shows that homelessness forces private bodily functions to be public. In Diane’s

case, her menstruating body presents an obstacle to hygiene and a potential protection against sexual assault. Furthermore, Diane is conceptualized as “dirty” by other homeless people, demonstrating that this community still maintains social standards of hygiene, despite the fact that these standards are not easy to meet due to lack of access to resources.

The body is vital to one’s self-conception and identity. Our society places a premium on the presentation of the body. Because homeless individuals do not have access to facilities to complete standards of hygiene, their self-conception can be severely impacted. In *Street Lives*, a man named Jaime shares, “...when I found out I had lice I felt low. That was the worst. You know, my mother had always said, ‘you’ll go, you can leave, but someday you’ll be so low you’ll regret it.’ And she was right” (76). The condition of the homeless body can affect one’s self-esteem and self-perceptions.

Likewise, constant rejection from society due to their bodies can take a great toll on homeless people’s personal identities. Cyril, a homeless person interviewed in Philadelphia said, “If you don’t have decent clothing, or you’re dirty and have no money, you’re looked down upon. People turn their heads, say ‘Get away from me, scum!’ So you don’t fit in. Society rejects you, doesn’t care for you, and you begin to lose hope” (VanderStaay, 119). The homeless body can be a barrier to acceptance and the cause of exclusion. Cyril’s words are evidence that homeless people are not oblivious to the state of the body. They are not unwashed and untidy out of personal choice but out of circumstance.

In 1987, Los Angeles mayor Tom Bradley mandated a temporary, sixty-day “urban campground” be set up for homeless people as an alternative shelter. This tent city was intended to be temporary relief and while the city investigated permanent housing solutions, The Salvation Army provided services like job searches and interview skills. Filmmaker Tom Seidman documented Tent City and the stories of the homeless people who lived in the film *Lost Angeles*. The film frequently shows Tent City residents cleaning their bodies: there are shots of them brushing their teeth,

showering with a hose, and washing their hair in buckets. This treatment gives the viewer an understanding of the difficulties of cleaning clothes and bodies without appropriate facilities. It also seems to serve as validating or humanizing these homeless people, as if to prove that they want to be clean.

The body can be a barrier for changing one’s state of homelessness. In *Lost Angeles*, a woman named Hope Sanchez explains,

“To go out and look for a job, you really have to look neat. There’s no way to iron out here so your clothes could look neat. There’s no curling iron or electricity for you to fix yourself up. If your clothes are all wrinkled and your hair is messed up, whose really going to think you want a job when you go out and look for a job?”

The implications of the homeless body extend beyond how people look and feel into whether or not they are realistically able to change their situation. Another resident of the campground, Mickey, was interviewed as the city began the process of shutting down the ad hoc campground and services. Mickey speaks about how ineffective the Tent City project was, “The inside of me is still dirty. How can you be saying that you helped me when you just took old shoes and put shoe polish on or throw them in the wash but the inside, the inside of me is still dirty.” For Mickey, the condition of his body is just a superficial reflection of the larger experience of being homeless; he internalized the conceptualization and treatment of his body as dirty.

Because homeless people exist without access to private space, namely, a home, they are forced to live in public for most if not all of the day. This means they are visible almost all the time and are thus highly susceptible to policing. In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault discusses social control and regulation. He states, “Visibility is a trap” (200). Being homeless means one’s actions and behaviors are under constant scrutiny. This is seen quite clearly in LA during the 1980s

where the rise of homelessness was met with a rise in the policing of homeless people.

Generally, individuals are punished for engaging in non-normative behaviors. What is unique about the policing of homelessness is that the behaviors that are policed are normal behaviors (i.e. sleeping or sitting) that are considered non-normative and disruptive when homeless people do them in public, visible spaces. Moreover, legislation has criminalized vital bodily functions such as urination and defecation that, because of their situation, homeless people are left with no choice but to perform outside. For all the legislation criminalizing homelessness, there were few actual citations and arrests. As Wolch writes, "...homeless people would simply be asked to 'move along,' or would be referred to shelters or services by city police or county sheriffs" (414). In the majority of cases, visibility is the main concern and cause for complaint. Homeless people are deemed unsightly, and obvious, extreme poverty makes people uncomfortable so removing homeless people from sight is the common course of action.

The removal of homeless people from public space as a form of punishment and control is not a new concept, however, in the 1980s this policing escalated from implied or encouraged displacement to legally codified banishment. In Katharine Beckett and Steve Herbert's study *Banished: The New Social Control in Urban America*, Los Angeles is listed along with other U.S. cities that engage in the seemingly archaic practice of banishment, whereby

"Increasing swaths of urban space are delimited as zones of exclusion from which the undesirable are banned. The uniformed police are marshaled to enforce and often delineate these boundaries; they use their powers to monitor and arrest in an attempt to clear the streets of those considered unsightly or 'disorderly'" (8).

In Los Angeles, the downtown corridor of Skid Row has long been the nexus of homelessness, a place where people are confined to but also policed within. Skid Row is a public space that the government and citizens of Los Angeles have

agreed that homelessness is allowed to be visible in. In the 1980s, as the homeless population grew and occupied visible sites around the city and outside of Skid Row, city officials tried to remove the homeless body from highly visible locations.

The homeless body has been framed as a deviant body; Homeless people are believed to be dangerous and criminal. The perception that homeless people contribute to and encourage crime was solidified in the much-discussed "Broken Windows Theory," famously written about by James Q. Wilson and George F. Kelling. The authors justify the strict policing of "Not violent people, nor necessarily, criminals, but disreputable or obstreperous or unpredictable people: panhandlers, drunks, addicts, rowdy teenagers, prostitutes, loiterers, the mentally disturbed" (28). The Broken Windows Theory argues that any sign of disorder will invite and foster more serious crime; in this model, homelessness is a threat to order, "The unchecked panhandler is, in effect, the first broken window" (29). Wilson and Kellings' article was published in 1982 and it set a standard for policing and control of urban streets throughout the nation.

Any discussion of homelessness in Los Angeles during the 1980s needs to address privatization. Because homeless people often occupy public buildings, parks, and plazas, the trend of privatization (moving the construction and management from the public to private sector) of public spaces in Los Angeles had a large effect on this population. Privatization received its fair share of criticism during and immediately following the 1980s. Historian Mike Davis' *City of Quartz* contains one of the most well known discussions of the privatization of public space. Published in 1990, this monograph explores the urban history of Los Angeles from a Marxist standpoint. According to Davis, class struggle was cemented into the built environment. He argues that wealthy interests manipulated the landscape of Downtown Los Angeles in order to exclude poor and undesirable people. Davis explores how the city contains homeless people into Skid Row, "systematically transforming the neighborhood into an outdoor poorhouse" and claims that "...the city is engaged in a merciless struggle to make public facilities and spaces as unlivable as possible for the homeless and the poor..." (232). Davis' study was heralded as a

new cornerstone in the urban history of Los Angeles.

The influence of *City of Quartz* expanded beyond the field of history; urban planners and scholars of architecture echoed Davis' interpretation of the privatization of public space. Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris' 1993 article "Privatisation of Public Open Space" compares the design and use of three privatized plazas in Downtown LA. Like Davis, she concludes that homeless people are both actively and passively excluded from these spaces. Moreover, through interviewing the businesspeople who do use the plazas, she found that the exclusionary nature of the spaces were a main part of their appeal. Loukaitou-Sideris' study does not attempt to further explore this desire for homeless people to be removed or separated from the rest of the public, but her findings are useful for beginning to understand how these spaces might encourage or foster anti-homeless sentiments. This article frames a major issue that arises from the privatization of public space: is a space truly public if not all members of the public are allowed in it?

Margaret Crawford takes this question to task in her 1995 article "Contesting the Public Realm: Struggles over Public Space in Los Angeles." She argues that the "narrative of loss" that has colored the study of privatization of public spaces is dependent upon a mythicized conception of public spaces as purely democratic (4). She points out that even in historic examples of public space, from the Greek agora to the town squares of New England, full democratic access and participation was never achieved. Crawford urges an expansion of our understanding of public spaces beyond the borders of public parks and plazas,

"Streets, sidewalks, vacant lots, parks, and other places of the city, reclaimed by immigrant groups, the poor, and the homeless, have become sites where public debates about the meaning of democracy, the nature of economic participation, and the public assertion of identity are acted out on a daily basis" (6).

Crawford's analysis builds upon the work of exclusion of homeless people from public space laid out by Davis and Loukaitou-Sideris.

Furthermore, this article argues that because "undesirable" people are pushed out of (or never allowed in) traditional public places, they create their own public spaces. Her work opens up the possibility for public spaces to be full of opportunity, not just oppression.

Government statements and policy throughout the 1980s reveals a marginalization of the homeless population. Although homeless people are physically public, they are excluded from the concept of "the public". Throughout his presidency, Ronald Reagan denied that his policies were responsible for the rising rate of homelessness and perpetuated the idea that homelessness is a choice. In 1984 he said, "...the people who are sleeping on the grates, the homeless who are homeless, you might say, by choice" (Reagan). By referring to the homeless population as simply "the homeless", the president was ignoring the personhood of these individuals and was insinuating that homelessness is not a condition someone can experience but an entire and complete identity. When asked about the issue again in a 1988 interview, he said, "They make it their own choice for staying out there. There are shelters in virtually every city, and shelters here, and those people still prefer out there on the grates or the lawn to going into one of those shelters" (Robert). The language of the president reveals a distaste or impatience for "those people", a population characterized as ungrateful for not utilizing shelters but choosing to sleep outdoors. Additionally, this language does not allow for nuance or difference in experience, it presents the concept that all homeless people choose their circumstances. Not only did these statements ignore the reality that Reaganomics cut funding to relief services, they contributed to stereotypes of homeless people as unmotivated and lazy. The rhetoric of "the homeless" and "those people" excludes homeless individuals from the grouping of "the public" and undervalues the personhood of homeless people.

A 1987 Los Angeles Times photograph by Ken Lubas and the accompanying photographer's note display these concepts. (Fig. 1) The photographer's note reads, "Pres. of city board of public works Maureen Kindell, rt., walks with entourage past target of city skid row clean up

sweep on 5th St. by Jack's Liquor. She said she found filth and the area was cleaned up after 7 were arrested after blocking crews from [text ends]" (Lubas). Here, the homeless man on the couch is not named. In fact, he is not even given personhood but is identified as a "target". The actions of the people in the group walking hint at the discomfort and disgust provoked by homelessness: they walk past the individual on the couch but give him and the encampment a wide berth and most of them avoid direct eye contact with this individual.

Another way homeless people are excluded from the public is through economic inequality. Because they are homeless, they are living in obvious extreme poverty and are not participating in the capitalist system. When the rhetoric of choice (as seen with Reagan's comments) colors the discussion, homeless people are perceived as consciously opting out of the economic system. Theoretical exclusion has real, physical implications as homeless people can be barred or removed from shopping centers and plazas. In *Banished: The New Social Control in Urban America*, Beckett and Herbert probe into the reasons why homeless people have been viewed as unworthy or undesirable parts of physical public spaces, "Their presence in downtown public spaces caused widespread concern about the effects of disorder. This concern was particularly acute for commercial establishments reliant on shoppers and tourists, many of whom abhor visible evidence of social disadvantage" (34). Control of people in public spaces is dependent on their class and ability to participate in so-called "legitimate" economic activities. Additionally, the presence of homeless people is perceived as a threat to business. Because they are obviously impoverished and are thought to be interrupting shopping, homeless people themselves are cast as deviants and threats to the system of capitalism. In Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris' work, *Sidewalks: Conflict and Negotiation over Public Space*, she notes, "Homelessness casts a pallor on recreational consumption because homeless people sometimes bother shoppers and discourage them from frequenting a given area" (165). As in Beckett's and Herbert's work, the argument is that homeless people are excluded from public spaces because they are not equal economic participants.

The homeless body is also excluded through what Sarah Jaquette Ray calls "the poetics of trash." In her exemplary study, *The Ecological Other*, she devotes a chapter to exploring "The Poetics of Trash: Immigrant Bodies in the Borderland Wilderness." The immigrant body is particularly relevant to the topic of homelessness: both of these populations are placeless or migratory, and they are both conceptualized as inferior, inherently dirty, and dangerous. Jaquette Ray writes, "The poetics of trash provoke alarmism about immigration by framing it as dirty, ecologically irresponsible, and morally impure..." (148). The discourse surrounding homelessness is similar in that it positions this population as unwell (diseased), unclean (dirty), and ultimately, unwelcome. Overwhelmingly, the discourse surrounding the homeless population is a discourse of the body. Homeless people are not discussed as individuals but as objects and as bodies. The othering of homelessness is part of the project of eradicating homeless people: excluding and removing homeless bodies. Rarely is the project to eradicate homelessness itself.

Throughout the 1980s, Los Angeles Times articles reveal how frequently the homeless body was associated with dirt and trash. In February 1987, Los Angeles Police Department officers raided and dismantled homeless encampments in Skid Row. A newspaper article on Mayor Tom Bradley's response to these raids reports, "Bradley said he had not authorized them, although they 'paralleled' a clean-up campaign for the area that he said he had called for several weeks ago" (Clifford and Clayton). The object of the "clean-up campaign" is not to clean up homeless bodies but to clean up the city by removing these bodies. In 1989, LAPD began aggressively policing homeless residents of Skid Row, enforcing a ban on sleeping on sidewalks during the night. In addition, the police "...ordered the city Department of Transportation and Public Works to post signs making all 50 blocks of Skid Row sidewalks off limits to allow for street cleaning Monday through Friday" (Muir). This five-day per week street cleaning was an increase from the three-day per week policy of the previous year. Not only was the rhetoric of "cleaning" used to describe removing homeless bodies from encampments, resources for cleaning the city (street sweepers) were used as a

tool for eradicating the presence of homeless people.

Moreover, city government often sent in sanitation workers when conducting raids on encampments. Sanitation workers are employed to dispose of waste and this action reveals the conception of homeless people as dirt or trash that needs to be cleared. Another photo from the Los Angeles Times Photography Archive shows a sanitation worker and police officer removing a homeless person from a sidewalk encampment. The homeless individual is barely visible inside the shelter, and the sanitation worker in the foreground is seen wearing gloves and a facemask in preparation for the work of clearing an encampment. (Fig. 2) This photograph, titled “Homeless man being ousted from camper shell on Skid Row in Los Angeles, Calif., 1987”, illustrates the literal manifestations of the poetics of trash.

Similarly, the photographer’s note on the Ken Lubas photo mentions “(Maureen Kindel) said she found filth and the area was cleaned up after 7 were arrested after blocking crews from [text ends].” This language follows the poetics of trash because it frames the homeless body as an obstacle to be removed (arrested) in order for an area can be cleaned.

In June of 1988, homeless people living in an encampment by City Hall lost almost all of their belongings when police officers and sanitation workers raided the site and “carted away two truckloads of the street people’s belonging to a dump” (“Raids”). After the event, an employee at the city’s Bureau of Sanitation said, ““We didn’t know if it was trash or what. Our people didn’t have any instructions where to save it or not so we assumed it was like other debris and would go to the dump”” (“Raids”). These words reveal the conceptualization that homeless bodies were surrounded by and lived in trash. A newspaper article from 1985 states,

“Even the glittering Restaurant Row in Beverly Hills does not escape. A pile of rubbish on a vacant lot on La Cienega Boulevard proves, on closer inspection, to be a cardboard shanty housing an old man who rambles

about his past with Gen. George Patton, the legendary World War II Army commander” (Roderick).

There is a clear contrast between “the glittering” street and the “rubbish” nearby. The clean and sparkling restaurant row “does not escape,” as through homeless bodies are actively encroaching upon pristine property, bringing trash and dirt with them.

When the city did successfully remove or “clear away” populations of homeless people, members of the public were reportedly very pleased with the results. The title of a 1987 *Los Angeles Times* article, “Sweep of Squatters Is Given Credit for Making Skid Row Safer, Quieter and Cleaner”, reveals the framing of homeless bodies as something dirty that needs to be cleaned: one sweeps up dirt and leaves behind a cleaner surface. The article includes a statement about pre-clearing conditions from a business owner named Dick Merry: ““You can’t imagine the day-to-day smell,” he said. ‘You couldn’t open the front door or turn on the air conditioning sometimes’” (Quintana). Body odor is a condition that is common in homeless bodies that was being framed as a threat to the well being of the general public. Here, homeless bodies are the unwashed masses.

Throughout the 1980s in Los Angeles, the homeless body was framed under the poetics of trash and was conceptualized as dirty. Homeless bodies were also characterized as a threat through the rhetoric of disease. These issues were commonly used as reasons and justifications for the policing of homeless people in Los Angeles in the 1980s. Government officials used the rhetoric of health and safety to justify aggressive policing and exclusion policies. When asked about the February 1987 raids on homeless encampments in Skid Row, Mayor Tom Bradley said,

“No one is seeking to dispossess the homeless. We are simply opposed to the dirt, the filth and the unhealthy conditions where the encampments are located. The lean-to shacks they are putting up, the couches on the sidewalk and the other hazards to

health and safety are being removed.
We're going to clean up that
neighborhood" (Clifford and
Clayton).

Bradley is directly connecting the presence of homeless people to "dirt", "filth", and "unhealthy conditions". Here, as in so many other cases, addressing the problem of homelessness becomes a project of eradicating homeless presence and homeless bodies. Lastly, the discourse of health and safety excludes the health and safety of the homeless population – homeless bodies are the threat to health and safety. Again, homeless people who are public and visible become a threat to "the public".

In the same article, Bradley speaks of "the unhealthy conditions" at encampments. The homeless body is not conceptualized as a healthy body; moreover, it is a threat to healthy bodies. A 1987 *Los Angeles Times* article on homeless people in Venice reports,

"On the beach and adjacent streets, tents, cardboard shelters, sleeping bags and sacks of clothing – the same sort of shantytown atmosphere that plagued downtown before Mayor Tom Bradley's June crackdown—have injected an scruffiness into a tourism-oriented beach district and fitfully gentrifying residential neighborhood" (Stein).

The language in this sentence is oriented around the body. "Plagued" insinuates a diseased, crowded, and infectious population while "scruffiness" implies an unwashed, untrimmed body. Lastly, "injected" has connotations of vaccinations or inserting something beneath the skin of the body. Thus, the homeless body was portrayed as a diseased and dirty threat to the residents of Venice.

As Kawesh writes, "The public view of the homeless as 'filth' marks the danger of this body as *body* to the homogeneity and wholeness of the public" (329). There is no denying that illness (both physical and mental) affects members of the homeless population, often sickness or wounds can arise due to being outside all day in the extreme heat or cold. Moreover, the symptoms of mental

illness can be exacerbated by the stress of living on the streets and fighting for survival. The conversation around illness in the homeless population, however, is overwhelmingly a discussion of the threat these bodies pose for the rest of the public. A 1987 *Los Angeles Times* article calls the urban campground Tent City "...at best... a Band-Aid on a festering sore that will do little to alleviate homelessness" (Cousineau). Here, the concentration of homeless bodies is conceptualized as a site of decay; homelessness is a wound that threatens to infect the city at large.

Throughout the 1980s, the City of Los Angeles was not sympathetic to the struggles of maintaining a hygienic body while homeless. Instead of providing aid, the most common course of action for city government was removing and excluding homeless bodies when they became too numerous or organized into encampments. In 1985, homeless advocate Ted Hayes announced his desire to set up "Centers for Self-Empowerment of Homeless People," he said "access to portable toilets, showers and a foot-washing area could help restore dignity to homeless people and help them find jobs" (Rae-Dupree). Hayes encountered many obstacles and needed to lobby "...city and county officials to grant variances on zoning and sanitation and health and safety codes..." (Rae-Dupree). These plans did not come to fruition until 1993 when Dome Village opened: four geodesic domes that provided temporary shelter and social services to homeless people (Doherty). This eight-year long battle demonstrates how slow the city was in providing long-term relief services. The majority of the city's efforts were focused on the removal of homeless people by breaking up camps. During most of 1985, Ted Hayes was living in Justiceville, a non-sanctioned ad hoc encampment of approximately sixty homeless people on 6th street in downtown LA. When interviewed about conditions in Justiceville, Hayes said "It is unsanitary, but we didn't create the problem. We ask the county, 'What can we do?' and their big answer is 'Just get off the property'" (Clayton). Rather than helping provide resources for homeless people to perform basic hygiene standards, the city focused their efforts into eradicating these bodies from visible spaces.

Throughout the 1980s, the city of Los Angeles battled with the large homeless population. The homeless body was framed as problematic and non-normative; it prompted anxiety and fear. The strict economic policies of the Reagan administration did not solve problems for all but increased the wealth disparity and contributed to the growing numbers of homeless people. Tenuous economic situations continued throughout the 1980s and homeless people were clearly not equal economic participants. In addition to being seen as a threat to capitalism, homeless individuals were a blatant and uncomfortable example of extreme poverty. Lastly, they were positioned as a danger to the public's health and safety. The problem of homelessness was a problem of the homeless body. The homeless body was framed as smelly, dirty, and diseased, and it was excluded from the public both physically and conceptually. Overall, the homeless body was unappealing at best and dangerous at worst.

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Figure 1:



Figure 2:



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