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Braving Homelessness on the Ethnographic Street with Irene Glasser and Rae Bridgman

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Abstract

Epistemological concerns about the construction and theorisation of 'the homeless' in relation to 'the street' form the basis of this extended review of Irene Glasser and Rae Bridgman's (1999) <u>Braving the Street: The Anthropology of Homelessness</u>. Glasser and Bridgman promote their brand of anthropology as an effective means of generating insight and policy on homelessness. Their interventions echo the contradictions of a liberal capitalist discourse that advocates the minimisation of state intervention and maximisation of individual autonomy for affluent citizens while extending a multiplicity of disciplinary means of state intervention into the lives of the impoverished. Glasser and Bridgman locate their "holistic", "ecological" approach within a dominant tradition of ethnography of poverty on one's doorstep from <u>Tally's corner</u> onwards. I argue that Glasser and Bridgman's work is in keeping with a tradition that serves to exoticise the poor with the authority of empirical science. They re-produce a temporally and culturally distanced version of 'the homeless' as highly modern yet primitivised objects of study that serves to flatter the anthropologist. The review takes seriously the idea that discourse is constitutive and has material effects for the self and 'the Other' and so is particularly critical of Glasser and Bridgman's foundationalist approach to research as a means to depict and explain a given 'reality' that re-constructs an untenable one-to-one relationship between reality and representation.

As Johannes Fabian (1983) notes, anthropology does not observe the "primitive" but observes "in terms" of the primitive (p18). For example, the linguistic anthropologist James Spradley (1970) first coined the term 'urban nomads' in his work with homeless

men on the streets of Skid Row in Seattle, Washington, thus bringing 'home' clear linguistic and other traces of his work with overseas 'natives'. Irene Glasser and Rae Bridgman (1999) locate their <u>Braving the Street: The Anthropology of Homelessness</u> in the tradition of anthropological work on subcultures of the poor in North America that includes Spradley's <u>You Owe Yourself a Drunk</u>, Elliot Liebow's <u>Tally's Corner</u>, and Carol Stack's <u>All Our Kin</u>. They boast of the great contribution to knowledge made by such anthropologists of [urban North American] homelessness:

> Perhaps anthropology's greatest contribution to our knowledge of homelessness has been a description and understanding of the methods of adaptation and survival in life on the streets and in the shelters…
> The thick, ethnographic descriptions of the daily rounds of the homeless have brought the concept of 'the street' to life in these studies (Glasser and Bridgman, 1999 pp 58, 81).

An anthropological focus on the adaptation and survival of homeless subjects therefore serves to animate the urban 'street' for the reader. Glasser and Bridgman claim that it is the particular "methodologies, theories, and modes of analysis" of this kind of anthropology that makes it "especially suited" to unearthing the subtleties and complexities of contemporary urban homelessness (px). Ethnographies of homelessness in particular are said to unearth "the subtleties of problems that arise as societies adapt to the complexities of contemporary life" (px).

While advocating some anthropological methodologies, theories, and modes of analysis, Glasser and Bridgman neglect a range of others. In particular, anthropology's significant contribution to problematising debates about the role of language in the representation of culture. Indeed, Saussure's (1974 [1916]) structuralist account of language first passed into the human sciences via literary criticism and anthropology (Lévi-Strauss 1970). Similarly, although they are concerned with "unearthing the subtleties of problems that arise as societies adapt to the complexities of contemporary life" (px), there is no mention of the abundance of critical work that connects these problems to the contradictions and

complexities of consumerist capitalism. Glasser and Bridgman's (1999) work seems as untroubled by methodologically relevant contemporary debates in critical anthropology (Fabian 1983; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Asad 1993; Fowler and Hardesty 1994), and the so-called 'turn to language' in the social sciences (Burman and Parker 1993 eds.) as it is by relevant contextualising work in urban theory (Davis 1990; Cross and Keith ed. 1993; Watson and Gibson 1995) and multi disciplinary work on the politics and problematics of representing 'the Other' (e.g. Foucault 1976; Said 1978; Sampson 1993; Goldberg 1993; Wilkinson and Kitzinger 1996).

A "Multiplicity of Means" of Governance

Cultural preoccupations about poverty are neither constant nor always coherent. They shift like most things in relation to social, political and economic changes, as do actual definitions of homelessness. 'The homeless' and 'the street' are constructed categories with culturally and historically specific meanings. Glasser and Bridgman's work is conducted during the 1990s after the Renaissance of liberal New Right capitalism. A shift to a neo-liberal mode of government of poverty advocated the minimising of state intervention and maximisation of individual autonomy through a series of preventative measures. Discourses of poverty therefore emphasised the danger of state dependency and the desirability of self-sufficiency.

In his discussion of visible poverty in the United States, Joel Blau (1992) notes that in the early 1980s the Reagan administration justified its cutbacks of social programmes as an attack on the bureaucracy of the welfare state. Dismantling the welfare state, a hard work ethic, free trade, encouraging entrepreneurship and celebrating the traditional family were all part of the New Right formula. When Britain followed the American model of welfare reform/withdrawal, it too produced an exponential rise in street homelessness (Madden 2001). Blau (1992 p5) argues that at first, in North America visible street homelessness provoked a kind of sympathy that had not been available to welfare recipients:

> The public knew they [the street homeless] were poor, not because a bureaucracy
> certified them poor, but because it saw them on the street. This personal

knowledge contributed to the re-emergence of the gift relationship…the giver is benevolent, the receiver is grateful and the position of both is confirmed…[This] meshed nicely with the concept of public welfare that President Reagan urged.

However, after a while the discordant effect of too many 'gift' encounters and the discomfiting problematics of witnessing a visible poverty that undermines the rules governing the use of public space led to a decline in sympathy. Homelessness was seen instead as "a disfigurement of the landscape, and begging as a personal assault" (Blau, 1992 p4).

The visible poverty created by New Right policy was reconfigured as a threat to respectable middle class society. As the public conditions of capitalism became increasingly harsh, so grew a desire for a private enclave safe from conflict and competition. The property market thrived on selling 'Home' as part of a publicly wielded package of private security. Capitalism was selling back individually the idea of a 'place' many had reason to believe it was destroying socially. In Britain Mrs. Thatcher (1993 pp603-4) warned:

> Crowds of drunken, dirty, often abusive and sometimes violent men must not be allowed to turn central areas of the capital into no go zones for ordinary citizens. The police must disperse them and prevent them coming back once it was clear that accommodation was available. Unfortunately, there has been a persistent tendency in polite circles to consider all the 'roofless' as victims of middle class society, rather than middle class society as victims of the 'roofless'.

In 'impolite circles' the criminalisation of an impoverished 'underclass'[1] was constructed as a threat to an idealised family. This was one approach to distracting from the problems created by patriarchal capitalism.

Discursive shifts in coverage of street homelessness played an important part in contributing to the construction of street homelessness as a disciplinary problem in need

of rational analysis and management. As Mitchell Dean (1991 p210) points out, for all its focus on individual freedom, the discourse of liberal governance has long resulted in much greater intervention into the lives of the poor:

> The quest for prevention, nevertheless, calls forth not only the quasi-private monitoring of the poor by philanthropy but, more importantly, the massive extension of those means of state administration which bear upon the lives of the poor…Liberal government does not simply withdraw from poor relief to give free reign to the natural laws of domestic and individual life…but specifies and promotes a specific, patriarchal conduct of life by a multiplicity of means.

Social investigators are inevitably implicated in Dean's "multiplicity of means", whether they acknowledge it or not. Glasser and Bridgman are no exception. As Reagan/Thatcherite economics brought about its increase in visible homelessness, social investigators were setting out again to re-discover the "the undiscovered country of the poor" on their doorsteps (Henry Mayhew in Peter Keating 1976 p14). Fellow North American social explorers, David A. Snow and Leon Anderson (1993) explain the background reasons why they decided to carry out their own ethnographic project on homelessness:

> 'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness…it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.' So begins Dickens's A Tale of Two Cities. A tale of perpetual relevance, it is also of particular relevance to specific historical moments. Clearly one such moment in American life was the decade of the 1980s. Not only was [the 1980s] the best of times for some Americans, especially those at the top of the social hierarchy who prospered further during the Reagan presidency, but it was the worst of times for others, particularly the hundreds of thousands of homeless living on the streets of urban America. During the 1980s few domestic issues generated as much public concern and debate as this scourge of homelessness. As we move into the 1990s

the problem remains unabated and the debate continues…we focus our attention primarily on life on the streets as it is experienced by the homeless, that is, on their strategies and struggles to subsist from one moment to the next, materially, socially, and psychologically (pp ix-x).

Although Snow and Anderson's research is clearly set in the context of Reagan's presidency, the invocation of a Dickensian "best of times, worst of times" has a trans-historicising effect. 'Shocked' narratives of homelessness often conjure up a dark, remote, yet familiar past through a focus on what is simultaneously seen as a brand new modern urban 'crisis.' The effect is to conflate the contemporary production of homelessness with the idea that poverty is inevitable: "For ye have the poor always with you" (The Bible Matthew 26:11).

Like Glasser and Bridgman, Snow and Anderson focus their attention on learning about "the survival routines of the homeless" (p19). The decision to once again train an ethnographic spotlight on the 'survivors' rather than perpetrators of "this scourge of homelessness" is in itself a significant one.

Ethnographic Invasion

Glasser and Bridgman's approach is in keeping with Malinowski's (1922) description of ethnography as a means to "grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realise his vision of the world". This positions the normalised viewing 'I' as gazing on and attempting to understand the Other. Their work uncritically reproduces aspects of the colonial encounter inherent in the history of ethnography.

Glasser and Bridgman claim that, "in order to enter the world of the homeless it is necessary to develop various approaches to the challenging task of invading the private space of a person whose life is conducted in public view" (p60). This assumes: that the "invasion" of the private space of a homeless person is a desirable albeit challenging task for the investigator; the existence of a discrete "world of the homeless" and an assumption that homeless people inevitably conduct their lives in public view. All of these assumptions are open to challenge.

Here Glasser and Bridgman explain why they decided to employ an ethnographic approach for their "invasion":

> Ethnography is a way of entering a culture, learning about it, and, as much as possible, communication of a 'native' point of view to a wider public…we enter the communities of the homeless, and learn about the knowledge that the homeless have acquired and how this knowledge relates to their survival…The insider's approach attempts to avoid the a priori categories of other disciplines, and therefore enables us to see the world through the eyes of the homeless themselves… (p6-7)

This mind-melding case for the ethnographic method as a means "to see the world through the eyes of the homeless themselves" is reminiscent of the Victorian urban investigators whom Walcowitz (1992) claims, "not only distanced themselves from their objects of study; they also felt compelled to possess a comprehensive knowledge of the Other, even to the point of cultural immersion, social masquerade, and intrapsychic incorporation" (p20). Unfortunately, as Adrian Rifkin (1995 p6) points out, there is "no place to sidestep, no ideal, separate or unmoving master-viewpoint", just as there is no separable 'Other' world to enter. There is no mechanism for stepping outside of meaning-producing cultural frameworks. Ethnography is not a technology that enables a vision of the world as the Other sees it, as Glasser and Bridgman claim, but instead serves as a means to legitimise observation as evidence. In clear contrast to Glasser and Bridgman's uncritical deployment, Patricia Ticieneto Clough (1992) identifies ethnography as a powerful and far from transparent or innocent discourse. Instead she labels it, "the productive icon of empirical scientific authority" (Clough 1992 p2). Like Snow and Anderson, Glasser and Bridgman 'braved' the street as a concerned response to the growth of visible homelessness in North American cities. Part of the justification for this mission is to produce knowledge to help manage, if not 'solve' the homelessness problem. This knowledge is garnered by observing how the homeless survive destitution.

Disciplinary Commitment

Glasser and Bridgman are committed to the discipline of anthropology. This evident in their immodest claim that: "Whereas those working in other disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and public health have shared the tendency, at least initially, to view homelessness from the "personal pathology" perspective (i.e. explanations that centre on issues of an individual's mental illness, alcoholism, and drug addiction), many anthropologists have framed the condition of homelessness within broad social and cultural contexts. The most successful studies have looked at every possible factor that contributes to the state of homelessness, whether it is internally (personally) or (structurally) induced" (pp10-11). No doubt critical practitioners of social psychology, sociology and public health can also make the same broad claim for their own disciplines.

Glasser and Bridgman are clearly building a professional case for the 'fix it' efficacy of their version of the anthropology homelessness: "Why do the general public and policymakers of North America not look to [their style of] anthropology for a leadership role?" (p113). In Foucauldian terms, the human sciences do not simply constitute a site from which to comment or act on the operations of the state but form a crucial and integral part of its functioning. Therefore Glasser and Bridgman's work has disciplinary power in another unacknowledged sense. It is part of the process of the formation of the homeless subject as Other and as David Theo Goldberg (1993 p150) notes, "[t]he Other as object of study, may be employed but only as informant, as representative translator of culture". Glasser and Bridgman's work contains an implicit presumption that the homeless subject needs anthropology to speak on its behalf. Seeing "the world through the eyes of the homeless" while a burden for those with nowhere to live, becomes a commodity for the researcher.

Employing their "holistic", "ecological model", Glasser and Bridgman make some clumsy claims for the efficacy of speaking on behalf of others as a means of generating insight and useful policy:

The careful ethnographic study of the homeless in New York by Ellen Baxter and Kim Hopper (1981) demonstrated that many of the people living on the streets were not deranged, but were in fact making rational decisions about where to sleep based on their own safety…Cohen and Sokolovsky (1989) showed that the men were chronically short of cash, and that their life in the Bowery offered very inexpensive survival (pp 14, 65).

Homeless people's "adaptation and survival" is represented here through a re-statement of a crude "deranged" stereotype in order to 'disprove' it and a statement of the glaringly obvious; homeless people have to inhabit places where they can live cheaply. Similarly, geographer Jennifer Wolch and anthropologist Stacy Rowe's (1992) study of men and women living on the beaches and streets of Los Angeles is reduced to an illustration that homeless people utilise "the architecture of modern life for their survival out-of-doors" (p8). Don't we all?

Glasser and Bridgman construct the non-conformist, unconventional 'outdoor-type' homeless street dweller that they are attracted to as having a type of independence and possibly freedom with which the anthropologist can identify:

In studying the homeless out-of-doors, one can document the culture that is created by people living outside the conventional forms of shelter, as opposed to studying groups of people who are conforming to shelter life, a creation not of the homeless themselves, but of the religious, voluntary, or governmental body administering the shelter. Further, as a group, anthropologists, notoriously an independent lot, perhaps identify with the out-of-doors-homeless (p82).

The 'culture' of the street dweller is described in terms of its active production whereas the 'culture' of the conformist shelter dweller is presented as a passive construction. The shelter environment, a product of the desires of "the religious, voluntary, or governmental body administering the shelter" shapes the shelter dwellers' culture. Oddly, the anthropologist is not credited with the same power to influence whatever it is Glasser and

Bridgman regard as homeless culture. Wider historical and structural constructions of culture are quietened. The unconstrained ability of the anthropologist, "to see the world through the eyes of the homeless themselves" and to communicate the selected 'native' point of view to a wider public, is offered as the guarantor of an authentic and useful description of a culture credited as "a creation…of the homeless themselves."

The anthropologist's thick ethnographic description of the behaviour of the homeless serves to animate the concept of the street. The street is collapsed into the field and 'the nomad' conflated with both 'the homeless' and 'the anthropologist'. The "notoriously independent" anthropologist's identification with the "out-of-doors-homeless" bears, "…the uncanny resemblance [of] the stage actor's ideological scenario…to the intellectual scriptwriter's." Zygmunt Bauman (1992 p1) has identified a 'coincidence' in social scientific texts when:

> Whoever happened to be named as a sitter in a given portrait painting session, the product was invariably a thinly disguised likeness of the painter….the intellectuals painted their self portraits, though only rarely did they admit this to be the case.

Glasser and Bridgman seem to have a dose of what Dick Pels (1999) terms "nomadic narcissism"[2] as they summon 'the homeless' as a subject of historical transformation in order to refract desired images of the 'critical' researcher:

> The strengths offered especially by anthropology, which we have highlighted in this book, demonstrate our desire to grasp the world through a "native" point of view, our ability to view problems in a world perspective, our analytical skills for understanding the causes of homelessness, and our disciplinary commitment to long-term and in-depth research (p112).

The Street

Glasser and Bridgman state that, "[a]s a group, anthropologists see the street (in its full metaphoric sense) as one of the sites for the kinds of adaptations to contemporary life that some homeless people make" (p58); 'the street' is nevertheless given central importance in their work. Their title, <u>Braving the Street</u> comes with familiar modern and postmodern connotations of the street as a 'risky' place. The brochure for a 1994 exhibition on 'street style' at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London gives some indication of the "full [contemporary capitalist] metaphoric sense" and consumerist appeal of the 'street':

> The street is mythic; some low life is essential, and the threat of juvenile delinquency helps. This very desperado quality gives it a seductive appeal. The street becomes both a stage and a touchstone for Where It's At. This is the key to the street's appeal, and to street style's allure…Today, increasing numbers of people are using their style to assert *"I am authentic"*. This indicates a desire for genuine cultural experience, arguably a rare commodity in an age which often seems characterised by simulation and hype, pre-digested styles, laundered myths and cynical revivalism (my emphasis).

Here Glasser and Bridgman explain why they think anthropologists like to focus in particular on homeless street-life:

> …Whereas the majority of the research on homelessness in North America began in homeless shelters…many anthropologists have not focused their work on shelters, but have turned their attention more often to life on the streets… Life outside is perhaps closer to the classical anthropological studies of small-scale agricultural or pastoral societies than life in a shelter (pp 81-2).

In what ways can the study of life on the streets of an unspecified twentieth century city be "perhaps closer to the classical anthropological studies of small-scale agricultural or pastoral societies than life in a shelter"? Perhaps only in the imposed methodological terms of a Glasser and Bridgman style anthropologist with the conviction that 'homeless culture' is based on the survival of and "adaptation to contemporary life."

Although the street is only one of the sites where homeless people "adapt" to contemporary life, Glasser and Bridgman privilege it as the most important. It is as if Braving the Street promises a "genuine cultural experience" of homelessness. 'The street' is being re-erected as a site of authenticity. David Morgan (1981) notes a particular brand of machismo sometimes found in ethnography, "with its image of the male sociologist bringing back news from the fringes of society, the lower depths, the mean streets, areas traditionally 'off limits' to women investigators"(p86). Although Irene Glasser is a woman investigator, I think there is a certain ethnographic machismo retained in the notion of 'braving the [authentic field/] street' with 'the [authentically] homeless'.

"Adaptation" is perhaps towards a contemporary 1980s 'hard times' culture with its reduced life-chances, lack of money and authoritarian shifts in social life accompanied by new images of desire that complement 'the culture of excess' enjoyed by those benefiting from an economic boom. In the 1980s codes of male romanticism and individualism had begun to decorate magazines. For the first time, 'tough', street-wise, pretty but 'hard' boys adorned the hoardings, gazing in on themselves in melancholic narcissistic self-absorption (Sean Nixon 1997 p307). Drawing on familiar Darwinian connotations of "adaptation" and in terms of an ethnographic machismo, 'the street' can be seen as a microcosm of the urban 'jungle,' a site in which to develop 'street-smarts' because survival of the fittest is the aim of the free market game.

Representations of the gendered city and its mean streets have long been problematised in work that examines the interplay between historical and geographical imaginations of space (Walcowitz 1992, Wilson 1995). As William Sharpe and Leonard Wallock (1987 pp. 8-9) note, images of 'the city' and 'the street' (like images of homelessness) are never unmediated, "we must recognise that our view is coloured by certain preconceptions. It has been prepared for us by previous views of the urban field – artistic, social, and experiential. And the object scrutinised has itself been shaped by the actions and imaginations of earlier viewers, each having his own conception of the city. Whenever we see the city we regard it through a series of lenses, of which we are not always

aware." Glasser and Bridgman's view of the street, "in its full metaphoric sense" is one imbued with a whole host of unavoidable 19th and 20th century filmic, literary and sociological images. At the time of their research, North American theory mixed with images of Hollywood and T.V. cop shows to produce BladeRunnerian versions of THE CITY that "smelled" of an amalgam of Los Angeles and New York[3]. It comes with a Marlowesque macho veneer of gritty authenticity and truth. It is the terrain of hoods, 'hos,' drunken revellers, endless quantities of shoppers and commuters, urban cowboys, gangstas and urban nomads.

Glasser and Bridgman's work makes no direct reference to the pervasive academic discourse of the 'Los Angeles School' that rose to the forefront of theory on 'the city' in the 1980s. The influential work of this school focused on issues that are of contextualising relevance to any contemporary urban anthropology of homelessness:

> the dialectics of de- and re-industrialisation, the peripheralisation of labour and the internationalisation of capital, housing and homelessness, the environmental consequences of untrammelled development, and the discourse of growth (Davis 1990 p4).

The prevailing influence of this school was such that objection grew to a perceived 'globalising' Americanisation of the 'street' and 'the city' in academic urban theory. This led to some strong assertions of cultural and historical difference. For example, Ian Taylor, Karen Evans and Penny Fraser (1996 p309) said of Manchester, England:

> It may be, indeed, that Manchester already exhibited in the 1980s many of the features of the 'risky' post modern city, the site of legitimate and illegitimate pleasures and desire, in an intrinsically English form long before the explosion of Los Angeles into the American and international mediascape.

Although Glasser and Bridgman's work is firmly located in place, it employs a curiously timeless notion of 'the street' as homeless "patch." If their anthropological study aims to

"bring the street to life", it does so by perpetuating an endlessly recreated mise-en-scène of 'the [authentic] street' as the only place where 'real' poverty becomes truly recognisable.

Oddly this 'street', the punishing "patch" of homeless exile also signifies connection, or at least 'being in'. As Peter Hamilton (1997) says of the treatment of 'clochards' [homeless vagrant persons] by post-war French humanist photographers, "Clochards both define the limits of normality and are represented as an integral element of the City's populace. But even more remarkably, they are represented as a microcosmic community" (p139). Above all, Glasser and Bridgman are interested in documenting the 'culture' of homelessness. They note the enthusiasm of anthropologists at finding that "[r]ather than places of chaos [that for some reason they expected], there is a sense of community created in places like soup kitchens and homeless shelters"(p8). However, it is the less welfare implicated street homeless 'community' sited at a pole of exclusion at the furthest distance from 'home' that provides the most interesting social exploration. A journey to that pole tantalises with the promise of knowledge and 'culture' in extremity.

Wandering Tribes and Urban Nomads

Glasser and Bridgman's homeless subject is a product of urban [post]modernity yet has an out-of-time quality and is associated with the pre-modern. The interest in the authentic life of 'the homeless' and their conflation with the nomad fits McCandless [1976] observation that:

> The progress of modernity ['modernisation'] depends on its very sense of instability and inauthenticity. For moderns, reality and authenticity are thought to be elsewhere: in other cultures, in purer, simpler lifestyles. In other words, the concern of moderns for 'naturalness', their nostalgia and their search for authenticity are not merely casual and somewhat decadent, though harmless, attachments to the souvenirs of destroyed cultures and dead epochs. They are also components of the conquering spirit of modernity – the grounds of its unifying consciousness (quoted in Brett, 1996 p15).

The complex contemporary consumer culture factors that contribute to the construction of a so-called culture of homelessness are elided in Glasser and Bridgman's work as the homeless subject is linguistically associated with the a-historical agricultural or pastoral societies of the 'nomad' and their 'culture' produced as primitive adaptation to modernity. The anthropologically animated nomad-ridden street has become the means and site of civilisation.

In this sense, Glasser and Bridgman's anthropological discourse is reminiscent of Henry Mayhew's (1985) [1861] Victorian journalism. Mayhew linked his investigation of the street people of Victorian London to the ethnographic study of "wandering tribes in general". He describes two distinct 'races', "the wanderers and the civilised tribes." Peter Stallybrass and Allon White (1986 p129) read his vividly described nomads as a demonised version of what Bakhtin later defined as the grotesque: "As the nomads transgress all settled boundaries of 'home', they simultaneously map out the [repulsive but attractive] area which lies beyond cleanliness…[T]he very categories of [Mayhew's] work…foreground the connections between photography, physical appearance and morality." I am also reminded of Kim Hopper's (1993) critique of Jennifer Toth's (1993) fascination with charting the subterranean life of homeless "mole people." Hopper describes Toth's description of the netherworld life of, "mole people" living in the underground tunnels beneath New York City as a "preposterous concoction" that can be read "as part of an enduring theme in the history of homelessness in New York: an affirmation of the 'otherness' of the homeless poor, even to the point of casting them in the mould of the grotesque" (Hopper, 1993 p108). An invasion into the territory of a homeless person whose private life "is conducted in [this kind of quasi-] public view" (Glasser and Bridgman, 1999 p60) promises transgression, including a nomadic and even grotesque transgression beyond 'modern' settled life. That "notoriously independent lot", anthropologists identify with the transgression attributed by themselves to the "out-of-doors-homeless" (p82).

Separating Spheres

For Glasser and Bridgman the challenges facing the contemporary ethnographer of homelessness attempting to secure an inside view of homelessness include: being a member of the housed middle class from the same country as the population studied, the fact that 'they' might read what 'we' have written about them, and the problem of "transcending what we think we know about our own society in order to enter another culture within our midst" (p61). Study of the homeless is represented as an exercise in crossing cultural barriers (p11) resting on an "a priori" assumption of a complete separation of cultural spheres (p7):

> From this city of strange contrasts branch off two roads, leading to two points
> totally distinct the one from the other…
>> Along the roads two youths are journeying.
>> They have started from the same point; but one pursues the former
>> path, and the other the latter.
>> Both come from the city of fearful contrasts; and both follow the
>> wheels of fortune in different directions.
>> Where is that city of fearful contrasts?
>> Who are those youths that have thus entered upon paths so
>> opposite the one to the other?
> And to what destinies do those separate roads conduct them?
> (G.W.M. Reynolds [1844-56] 1996 pp4-5).

Complete separation is a pre-condition that enables the voyeur of contrasts to safely see into an Other's life. It equips the anthropologist with the degree of detachment necessary to cross over into a re-construction of the "undiscovered world of the poor" and gain access to the native's point of view without jeopardising the anthropologist's status as knower. Glasser and Bridgman seem to be strangers to ideas of liminality, hybridity and so on. Their supreme confidence at becoming (thoroughly separate) insiders only slips for a moment in the suggestion of the necessity of "triangulation", by which they mean checking up on their informants in order to ensure that they are telling the truth (p60).

Much conceptual baggage surrounds and moralises any discussion of contemporary homelessness and Glasser and Bridgman's holistic, ecological North American humanist model of homelessness fits well with the liberal zeitgeist of the early 1990s. Their kind of anthropologist could have made a very acceptable crew-member for 'the next generation' of assimilationist anthropological Star Trek exploration (see Anne Norton, 1993 and Steven F. Collins, 1996 pp137-156). However, as any 'alien' life form that has had a run-in with the USS Enterprise will testify, even though they may diligently follow protocol, explorers who 'boldly go' with good intentions are not guaranteed to bring ethical outcomes.

If language is constructive and constitutive of social life then it is important to attend to the material effects of the construction of objects, worlds, minds and social relations in the discourses produced and reproduced in the social sciences. I follow Philp (1979) and Foucault (1970, 1974, 1979) in breaking with 'exceptionalism', the idea that critical theory produced within a disciplinary discourse of the human sciences is to be applied elsewhere but not to the discipline itself. Empirical knowledge in the human sciences rationalises the order of things. Legitimised by 'expert' knowledge, supervisory and disciplinary power creates the idea of the 'normal' that acquires the moral force of 'truth'. Disciplinary power is therefore a process of the formation of the subject, which also legitimises governmental power. Anthropological discourse explains outsiders/objects to insiders/subjects. It also tests the boundaries of these binaries. In the academic mode of 'expert' production, the Other is a commodity. While it is possible and even desirable to argue against such Foucauldian critiques, it seems naive to let them go unacknowledged. Much ethnographic work has long moved beyond individualistic discussions of reflexivity to larger debates about commodification and "regimes of representation" (Hall, 1996 p443) because, as Michael Shapiro (2001) puts it:

> Insofar as 'social reality' emerges in various writing genres, investigations of how the world is apprehended require inquiries into various pre-texts of apprehension, for the meaning and value imposed on the world is structured not by one's

immediate consciousness but by the various reality making scripts one inherits or acquires from one's surrounding cultural/linguistic condition (p318).

The pre-texts of apprehension that enable associations of contemporary urban homelessness with the 'primitive' and a trans-historical idea of the poor always with us require some attention. Not least because of their potential use as distractions from the active construction of homelessness in the post/modern present. Arguably, a focus on 'adaptation' is a focus that is not fixed on 'resistance'.

Constructing a 'brave' textual research self on the abstracted streets of the (post)metropolis then, has significant implications for the represented Other. Whether it claims to be research on, for, or with the Other, and whatever the identity guise of the researcher, the main protagonist in the plots of 'radical' and 'regular' applied social scientists often, by implication, still turn out to be the all-seeing masculine subject of European landscape discourse. He, "whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess" (Pratt, 1992 p31). It is by now a truism that no observation can ever be neutral. There is no innocent gaze in the academic mode of production and as Henry A. Giroux (1994 p29) notes, there is more than deception at stake in cloaking research and politics in images of innocence:

> There is the issue of cultural power and how it influences public understandings of the past, national coherence, and popular memory as a site of injustice, criticism, and renewal…Innocence is not only a face of discursive domination, it is also a pedagogical device that locates people in particular historical narratives, representations, and cultural practices.

Nevertheless, 'braving the streets' in the interests of a more rational and just society and equipped with the appropriate methodology, the self-inscribing social researcher can still be found in pursuit of authentic adventure and attempting to write for him or herself the ability to transcend the environmental influences that the researched cannot.

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[1] Gunnar Myrdal first used 'underclass' in 1963 to describe the victims of the social exclusion that comes as a consequence of de-industrialisation (Bauman, 1998 p68). As Robert Humphreys notes in his work on responses to the 'roofless and 'rootless' in Britain, the term 'underclass' has been deployed more recently with a "pejorative slant by a group of social theorists serving a different political agenda" (1999, p163). In the late 1980s and into the 1990s Charles Murray (1990 p17) argued that the underclass is a product of growing unemployment and increased illegitimacy (particularly single parenthood) combined with a culture of criminality: 'The habitual criminal is the classic member of the underclass. He lives off mainstream society without participating in it'. Murray used metaphors of 'plague' and 'disease' to argue that the underclass will continue to grow because there is a generation of children being brought up in its values. Whereas, in the United States of America he associated the underclass with a construction of 'the black welfare mother', his British work focused on social class v. He claimed, 'the difference between the United States and Britain was that the United States reached the future first' (1990 p2).

[2] See Dick Pels (1999). Pels' argument is aimed at an ill defined group of postmodern intellectuals accused of appropriating powerfully suggestive but also misleading metaphors of identity as traveller, migrant, exile, stranger and nomad in a self-celebratory fashion. A nomadic life in pursuit of ideas (a flight of fancy) distracts from nomadic lives in flight from economic hardship and oppression while ironically, "[i]n our century, the intellectuals have collectively passed from a nomadic towards a more settled existence as a result of professionalisation, rationalisation and institutionalisation, and have turned into well-settled and well-salaried servants of the knowledge society," (p70). Pels' article makes a strong statement about intellectual appropriation and sloppy use of metaphor. However, his lumping together of disparate authors and their distinct subject matters combined with a lack of attention to their differing political and theoretical perspectives and failure to acknowledge their own self-criticism replicates a familiar frame in which he becomes the defender of the appropriated outsider against his unthinking colleagues. Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Edward Said and James Clifford are however credited with some effort to distinguish between "cosmopolitan exiles and mass immigrants or refugees" and Janet Wolff is quoted as acknowledging that, "we do not all have the same access to the road." Rosi Braidotti (1999) responds to Pels and defends her own work on 'nomadic subjects' in the same journal, (pp87-93).

[3] In an interview with Danny Peary (1984) Ridley Scott notes, "[o]riginally we were going to begin the film [Blade Runner] with a title that read 'San Angeles'. Our idea was that San Francisco and Los Angeles would become one city and cover the entire western seaboard"…What does your city smell like?… "New York" (p299).