House Broken: The Functions and Contradictions of "Housing First"

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Abstract: “Housing first” is the new orthodoxy for homelessness policy in the United States, a program design expected to end homelessness once and for all. Unlike the traditional “treatment first” model, housing first places the most expensively homeless individuals immediately into an apartment (with treatment following). Although certainly different from the treatment first model due to its prioritization of housing, housing first remains a product of neoliberal poverty governance. By examining program operations in greater Phoenix, Arizona, it is clear that housing first proceeds as a stigma-reproducing rehabilitation program of socioeconomic discipline that works in tandem with anti-homeless laws and service dependent ghettos to move homeless populations away from gentrifying urban geographies. The potential of housing first to rehabilitate and create “self-sufficient” individuals, however, is severely limited by the broader and older assault on welfare. Even still, housing first functions to cheaply hide the most visible victims of capitalist contradiction and neoliberal policy to facilitate capital accumulation across metropolitan Phoenix.
HOUSE BROKEN: THE FUNCTIONS AND CONTRADICTIONS OF “HOUSING FIRST”

by

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I’ve carried this thesis with me years now. In some ways, then, what’s below is a story of my life, or at least my life since I started work at the homeless drop-in center in fall 2009. The stories that I tell below – chapter by chapter – are like a slow-motion Tetris game in reverse; they are the result of arduously carving-off and sculpting fleshy blocks of amorphous thought and emotion into sculpted abstractions and linear narratives. As such, it would be impossible to thank all of those who have lived with me throughout this drawn-out process. Yet a list is in order, even it’s merely a superficial one. Most obviously, I’d like to thank my family and friends, especially those at Syracuse, for supporting me through ideas, energy, and love. A special thanks is in order for Kim Van Nimwegen, a dear friend and, most recently, my ally in “the research field.” On this note, appreciation is in order for all of those who assisted me in the field by participating through interviews and/or ethnography. Finally, a big thanks to my advisor, Don Mitchell, and my committee members, Jamie Winders and Tod Rutherford, as well as Jackie Orr, for their input and support with sloppy drafts and meandering ideas that eventually found their way into this big mess.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION, METHODS, AND TWILIGHT

Make no judgments where you have no compassion. – Anne McCaffrey

The real political task in a society such as ours is to criticize the working of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticize them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight them. – Michel Foucault (2006, 41)

**Slashing twilight: Housing first from a homeless drop-in center**

I stood facing a mess of small round wooden tables, masquerading as some sort of green marble, cramped in a large room with double glass doors in the front and a small kitchen counter toward the back. A TV was muted behind me but the procession of guests constantly showering maintained a decent soundtrack. Wooden and metal chairs cramped all spaces in between. These objects merely grazed my scene, though. I stared intently, affably into the eyes of 30 or so individuals, feigning knowledge and experience; a dubious mask undercut by inexcusable perspiration and flushed cheeks.

The people carried hard, tired eyes and several very small plastic bags and maybe one or two very large suitcases or backpacks. Most of them were (and likely still are) homeless. Presenting me to the group, my boss explained that I was there to help end their homelessness; I was the homeless drop-in center’s newly hired “Housing Advocate” in charge of generally “helping out” but specifically with connecting homeless individuals with housing and then mediating between housed individuals and landlords in case of conflict. “So, if you’d like to see about housing,” my boss concluded her speech, “see Brian.” A handful of eager hands shot up across the room, hands attached to faces that now carried bright eyes cradled by smiles.

It was my first day of a 10-month stint working for Urban Outreach, a non-proselytizing “ministry” of Tempe, Arizona’s First United Methodist Church. I was there as an Americorps
“national service” member, my labor purchased mostly by the federal government to, as the slogan went, “Get Things Done.” But, as I said, it was my first day, and I was straight out of undergrad with a degree in history – not social work or psychology, nor nursing or anything else that might help. In other words, I wasn’t yet expected to get things done. I was there, at least for a few weeks, to just figure things out, to be baptized into the harrowing waters of modern homelessness and toveled by the reassuring robes of social work ideology.

But that first day, and really those first weeks, stuck with me. I met with several individuals before I – and they – realized the hubris of my polished title, the accidental disingenuousness of my introduction. I never undertook, nor accomplished, anything resembling housing advocacy. Housing isn’t an option for homeless people on the streets of Tempe, or anywhere in the Valley\(^1\) (and beyond), for that matter. If it were, they wouldn’t be there – what a revelation! There are only sets of lesser, more immediate options. There are a few shelters, sure. There are also regular charitable meals. If you’re lucky you might receive a couple dozen dollars worth of food stamps, or maybe – just maybe – a $3.50 bus pass from a pedestrian to get to a doctor’s appointment. Maybe, instead, multiply that money by selling drugs and buy a bottle to chug so you can sleep at night. The next day, you might find a donated shirt that fits you, or maybe a librarian won’t call security on you for falling asleep. You might not be arrested for past warrants or given a ticket for sleeping, eating, or taking a pee outside. You might not be robbed when the police destroy your illegal river bottom shelter and everything in it. You might not be robbed, jumped, injured – or maybe killed – by thieves while you’re sleeping in your new spot…if you’re lucky.

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\(^1\) Metropolitan Phoenix, Greater Phoenix, or the “Valley of the Sun” (or “the Valley”) will be used to describe “Phoenix, Arizona Metropolitan Statistical Area,” a designation of the US Census Bureau covering the urbanized areas and municipalities of Maricopa and Pinal Counties (includes twenty-two large, incorporated municipalities and 1,000 square miles).
Service providers play a part in only a couple of these things, and usually the less important ones. What they cannot do, what I couldn’t do, was somehow find housing or the means to obtain housing – such as a well-paying job that would hire a person living on the street, without the means to sustain themselves. All we could do was try to help with the endless issues that homeless individuals confronted each day, to confront and attempt to manage everything that came with being homeless in the Valley. We worked to connect them with detoxification centers or free computer classes, apply for Medicaid and food stamps, or to deal with tickets and warrants. Most of the individuals counseled I saw again and again, and then again and again and we went though all of these processes with the end-goal of getting them into a house, to get them on their feet and out of the drop-in center, away from desiccated parks and deadly streets. In these endeavors I got to know them, at least at some level, through their good and bad luck. Even those with “good luck,” though, remained on the street, constantly playing a game of chance that turned each day and night into perpetual grim and nervous twilight because there was no housing, no reasonable means to obtain housing. There was no end in sight, no advocacy, no solution – just feculent “social work” and filthy, rotten management.

But then there came “housing first,” a new program design and policy focus that cannot be fully understood, nor rightly appreciated, without the social context I described so far. Housing first changes this grim equation; it slashes the perilous twilight with a horizon of sunrise. If this image doesn’t emerge on the street, it at least shines into the drop-in center.

2 “Housing first” remains un-capitalized throughout this discussion for several reasons. Most substantively, housing first remains a somewhat amorphous thing. It is neither an explicit policy nor a hard-and-fast program design (neither in theory nor practice). It is, so I hope to argue, but the newest form of managing the socioeconomic class we call “homeless people.” Just as “emergency shelters” and “anti-homeless laws” remain in lower-case, so does housing first. There is, then, a political and rhetorical rationale for keeping housing first lower-case. It both helps to keep housing first in its place (so to speak) by highlighting its mere “newness;” its way of just adding to and tweaking a long history of social technologies we’ve seen before. Finally, a lowercased housing first helps us avoid another acronym.
Before housing first “case managers” (or whatever) like myself could only help the truly desperate, maybe hopeless, homeless person by referring her or him to treatment centers for detoxification and Alcoholics Anonymous, the Motor Vehicle Department for an I.D., the local One Stop or Goodwill for employment assistance, or a shelter or transitional housing facility. All of these desperate acts are undertaken in order for the person to find “self-sufficiency,” to find independent housing.

Housing first appreciates the sordid “luck” of homeless individuals, especially those who have addictions and/or disabilities, those who cannot manage to get off the street, who remain homeless for months – even years (maybe decades) – at a time. Instead of case managers attempting to guide homeless individuals through almost insurmountable steps toward housing, such as employment, sobriety, or medical treatment (amidst such luck), housing first immediately – as the program’s name suggests – puts homeless individuals into housing.

Housing first is almost normal housing (usually a one-bedroom, studio, or efficiency apartment). Ex-homeless clients in housing first programs have a lease more or less like any other; there are no stipulations that clients have to engage or comply with case management services (NAEH 2013a). This means that they do not have to work toward or achieve employment, sobriety, medical treatment, or any other form of socialization and normalization to keep their housing (Tsemberis 2010). In other words, rent in housing first is either totally subsidized through special vouchers or partly subsidized if the client has an income, such as a job or Social Security support (in which case they pay 30 percent toward rent). Housing first programs can be either “fixed-site,” meaning there is a single complex overseen by a homeless services provider, or “scattered-site,” where service providers pay rent on behalf of the housing first client directly to a private apartment complex (NAEH 2006).
contracted, private property management company often manages the lease. In scattered-site programs, clients sign a lease that is specific to whichever apartment complex they find themselves, often choosing among pre-approved apartment complexes themselves. If the housing first program is state-funded, which they typically are, leases must live up to Section 8 requirements. Housing first apartments can be and usually are furnished and filled with the basic housing necessities by the housing first service provider.

After clients are in their furnished, filled-up apartment, they are supported by “wrap-around services.” Housing first services entail, more or less, general case management. Although housing first clients are expected (or required) to periodically meet with their case manager(s) (Tsemberis 2010; NAEH 2013a), they are never required to accomplish or even set goals toward “self-sufficiency,” a term meaning assisted stability or, in other cases, graduation from all governmental and charitable assistance. Generally, housing first programs subscribe to a “harm reduction” form of case management. Sam Tsemberis (the widely recognized “inventor” of housing first) and his colleagues explain harm reduction as “a pragmatic approach that aims to reduce the adverse consequences of drug abuse and psychiatric symptoms” (Tsemberis, Gulcur, and Nakae 2004, 651–2). This leniency means that clients can continue to drink alcohol in their apartment. Clients are also not drug tested, but they cannot use illegal substances within their apartment, which is regularly (weekly or monthly) inspected to ensure that the unit meets health and safety regulations. Additionally, clients typically do not have to leave their apartment to convene for scheduled case management meetings, presentations, or teachings, nor do they have to ask for referrals or even see their case manager more than once a week or even once a month (this last stipulation seems to vary, both in theory and practice). Nevertheless, clients can access an array of services through their case manager. Case managers for housing first clients typically

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act as conduits for other specialized needs, such as employment assistance, medical care/therapy, skills training, home economics, or simple recreation. For those less willing, case managers continually attempt to work with clients to lessen and, eventually, halt substance abuse or otherwise regressive behavior averting self-sufficiency.

In addition to this, of course, clients must abide by their lease agreement. If the client has some form of income, then their lease and support services can be maintained indefinitely. Special vouchers that cover the entirety of the client’s rent often have time limitations, such as 12-18 months. When the time is up, clients need to have obtained governmental or private income so they can pay a portion of their subsidized rent. The federal government, namely the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), generally subsidizes housing first rent, but private sources often play a part as well. Long-term stays in a housing first apartment sometimes rollover into regular Section 8\(^3\) government housing or other forms of federally supported “special needs housing.” No matter the route, housing first wrap-around services continually support the client. In the case of Arizona, these support services are completely funded and overseen by private charities, namely the Valley of the Sun United Way,\(^4\) which contracts agencies with behavioral health expertise to case manage housing first clientele. Research indicates that this is a fairly common – though incomplete – arrangement across the US (Poppe 2012; USICH 2012b)

\(^3\) Section 8, officially known as “Housing Choice Vouchers,” is currently the federal government’s main housing program for low-income households. In contrast to public housing, Section 8 operates through vouchers to private, participating apartment complexes. Section 8 recipients choose among participating apartment complexes (within a given locale) and thereafter have subsidized rent, generally the lesser of the payment standard minus 30 percent of the family's monthly adjusted income or the gross rent for the unit minus 30 percent of monthly adjusted income. We’ll revisit Section 8 more critically in chapter 5.

\(^4\) Hereafter also referred to as “the local United Way.”
Taking a step back: Neoliberalism, poverty Governance, and housing first

Housing first is like the scene of a photograph. Depending on time of day and where you stand, things can appear dramatically different. From my perspective as a case manager in a homeless drop-in center in Tempe, Arizona in 2009, housing first functioned to answer all of my – and many others – frustrations. It demanded the sort of reflection and appreciation that I project in the previous section. Under different lighting, from a different perspective, certain shadows highlight once imperceptible details, details that supplement rather than negate previous illustrations. If we take a big step back, with our eyes adjusted to the sudden break of sunlight, a new vision of housing first emerges, one more tempered and neutral but also more insightful.

This is a historical perspective that explains why housing first emerged and whom it serves. In other words, which homeless individuals are the really “lucky” ones and why? Like the previous one, this context must also be understood to fully appreciate housing first. Rather than beginning at the drop-in center and ending at the “Welcome” mat, this story starts at statistical analysis and ends with hard public policy. Although the setting appears less exciting, these shadows offer a much vaster image of housing first because these statistics represent human beings; they quantify the outcomes of complex social structures of seemingly cosmic proportions. Such proportions demand theory, a set ideas that structure our means of making sense of apparent chaos; theory functions to substantiate or undermine the stories we tell about ourselves, how and why such cosmic forces move this way and not that (i.e. how power works). In this section I tell the story of what birthed housing first and what population this genesis embraced. We then come to see what impact the new force of housing first has for theory, for how the social sciences make sense of the ways society confronts the issue of systemic poverty and oppression, of endemic want and misery.
As promised, this story starts with statistics, and one statistic demands precedence: currently approximately 3.5 million persons experience homelessness each year in the United States (WRAP 2010, 6), with a conservative estimate of 633,782 being homelessness on a single night in 2012 (NAEH 2013). Each year around 1.6 million people use homeless shelters across the US, leaving almost half on the streets (NAEH 2010a, 1), maybe just using drop-in centers like the one in Tempe. Meanwhile, an estimated $2 billion per year is spent upon infrastructure to manage this mass homelessness (NAEH 2013b). This is not a new phenomenon, not relatively at least. Massive homelessness emerged in the late 1970s. Research gives several causes for this emergence: the rapid deindustrialization of US cities (Hopper, Susser, and Conover 1985), the abandonment and gentrification of once affordable housing (Kasinitz 1986; N. Smith 1996), the breaking of unions and wage guarantees (Klein 2007), the defunding of public housing (WRAP 2010), the gutting of basic welfare entitlements (M. B. Katz 1996) and, relatedly, the deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill (Dear and Wolch 1987; Barr 2001). All of these factors varied across space and time but they combined to have one devastating effect: skyrocketing of homelessness, estimated at around 3 million annually throughout the 1980s (Kondratas 1986; WRAP 2010). These statistics are disappointingly stagnant.

But the processes that caused such stats generally reflect a shift, a movement known as neoliberalism. Neoliberalism, to put it simply, is an ideological and, eventually, political movement that reworks state policy in favor of capital, a favoring that generally deregulates markets, cuts and/or privatizes state institutions (especially for the poor), encourages financialization, weakens union and labor protections and increases income inequality. Neoliberal ideology generally permeated the US political arena in the 1970s and continuing, in
some formulation, into the present and mostly embraced by both Democrats and Republicans.\(^5\) It developed in response to a crisis of the capitalist system represented by high unemployment accompanied by inflation throughout the 1960s and ‘70s. Neoliberalism became, then, one of the answers to a crisis of accumulation, the inability of capital to find profitable investment under the existing political, economic, and social systems (Harvey 2005, 12; Harvey 2007, xxv).\(^6\)

All of these homeless individuals, and the millions of others steadily pushed into poverty through these restructurings (Harvey 2005; Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011; M. B. Katz 1996), were subjects to be managed by modes of poverty governance. “The most basic purpose of poverty governance,” argue Soss and colleagues (2011, 2), “is not to end poverty; it is to secure, in politically viable ways, the cooperation and contributions of weakly integrated populations.” Poverty governance, then, is not inherently neoliberal. Indeed, in their seminal work, *Regulating the Poor*, Francis Fox Piven and Richard Cloward (1993, 3) document how poor relief has, since the Great Depression onward, functioned to “absorb and control enough of the unemployed to restore order” and later “expelling those [from relief] who are needed to populate the labor market.” In other words, liberal, Fordist, or Keynesian policies (as opposed to neoliberal policies) operated as a central technology to appease popular protest and uphold the legitimacy of the state, even if it meant cutting into the profit margins of industrial and financial capital.

These same regulatory policies of financial capital and the massive poor relief of the New Deal, of course, were significantly weakened as they became the prime targets of neoliberal reforms (M. B. Katz 2008). But this does not spell the end for poverty governance in the

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\(^5\) This truncated definition is indeed too brief and too general. We revisit neoliberal ideas and the processes of neoliberalization in chapter 5.

\(^6\) Let me stress that this is not a tale of psychotic avarice, but rather an expected and rational outcome of “the coercive laws of competition” produced by a capitalist political economy (Marx 1967, 257, 300; see also Mills 1959, 168). The same holds true for the gentrification of Phoenix and other cities throughout the US (and their necessary associates: anti-homeless laws and homelessness shelters or “campuses”).
neoliberal era. In the wake of neoliberal cuts, the steady dismantling of the New Deal and the broken compromise between labor and capital, the state nevertheless had to maintain legitimacy, to manage, in some form, society’s insecure, surplus, and marginalized. Loïc Wacquant, in his book *Punishing the Poor* (2009), argues that the liberalization of the market is necessarily accompanied and supported (symbolically and materially) by the penalization of the dispossessed, a penalization typified by both the explosion of masculine prisons and the feminization of disciplinary, intrusive, and stigmatizing welfare provision, both undergirded by an impressive regime of state surveillance.

Keeping with the theme of poor-as-object yet disputing Wacquant’s overbearing attention of neoliberal penalty, *Disciplining the Poor* by Soss, Fording, and Schram instead calls for a theorization of contemporary poverty governance as “neoliberal paternalism.” At the large, institutional scale, neoliberal paternalism operates through a diffuse network of actors in quasi-market relations, competing through grant processes, heavily quantified output quotas, and performance benchmarks (Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011, 3; Solomon 2012). These diffuse, competitive actors (the neoliberal part), however, remain overbearingly normative (paternalistic) in their desire to essentially normalize the poor through ever-more disciplinary modes of regulation (Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011, 3; Gilliom 2001; see also Polsky 1993). At the scale of interpersonal case management, *neoliberal* paternalism as a mode of normalization is increasingly done by forcing the poor back into the “objective” and unforgiving realities of the neoliberalized marketplace (in private apartments or private employment) so the state can divest itself of responsibility for the poor and/or homeless person (see Hayek 2007, 151; Marx 1967, 689). Case management, then, is expected to rehabilitate clientele as self-governing entrepreneurs that must reinvest in their human capital or find themselves in the stigmatized
pauper class (Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011, 27–8; Foucault 2010, 226; see also Becker 1975) or, as Wacquant argues, in prison.

**Housing first’s lucky ones: The evaluation of “chronic homelessness”**

The management of homeless populations can, upon first glance, appear to be but an adjunct to broader poverty governance. Piven and Cloward (1993, 4), for instance, explain how the state, and its strategic doling-out of relief, largely regards the permanently unproductive classes as an annoying afterthought. Although the vast majority of homeless individuals are, and have historically been, able-bodied but unemployed individuals, a significant contingent (around 20 percent) deal with disabling conditions (NAEH 2013; Schneider 1986). In Cloward and Piven’s framing, this fractional group of individuals remain useful only as their presence fulfills, as Hopper (2003a, 27) put it, the “spectacle of the degraded pauper.” “Some of the aged, the disabled, the insane, and others who are of no use as workers,” Piven and Cloward (1993, 3), explain, “are left on the relief rolls, and their treatment is so degrading and punitive as to instill in the laboring masses a fear of the fate that awaits them should they relax into beggary and pauperism.” Certainly, making relief less desirable than the meanest of labor is axiomatic to poverty governance, especially in the neoliberal era of workfare (Peck 2002), yet the “spectacle” of extreme poverty, however functional for the labor market, remains, for most officials of a neoliberal city, an unbearable one.7

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7 Wacquant (2009, xiii) argues that the discussion of “law and order,” materially supported by occasional crackdowns on drug dealers, welfare fraudsters, and “aggressive panhandlers,” itself proceeds as a spectacle of stigma production and state legitimacy: “All in all, the new law-and-order *geste* transmutes the fight against crime into a *titillating bureaucratic-journalistic theater* that simultaneously appeases and feeds the fantasies of order of the electorate, reasserts the authority of the state through its virile language and mimics, and erects, the prison as the ultimate rampart against disorders which, erupting out of its underworld, are alleged to threaten the very foundations of society” (original emphasis). Judging from the news coverage of homelessness and extreme poverty (usually indistinguishable from charity bids and public relations photo shoots), it seems Wacquant is correct. Although the degraded pauper might be unbearable in certain spaces of the city due to face-to-face contact, the poor and homeless
As discussed in the following chapter, fiscally-squeezed municipalities become ensnared in inter-urban competition, constantly bidding against other cities (down the highway or across the globe) for footloose capital (Harvey 1987). Bidding is often done through direct public subsidies and tax abatements to entice capital (Theodore, Peck, and Brenner 2011; Hackworth 2007); it is also accomplished by hiding the spectacle of the degraded pauper, the modern-day homeless individual, from the public view at the behest of frightful consumers and careful retailers. They are, then, to be avoided and can be a deterrent for potential patrons. For this reason, property owners, whether residents or shopkeepers in central business districts or in the suburbs, equate the homeless person with negative value; he or she is the carrier of negative externalities (Mitchell and Staeheli 2005). The sequestration of these persons/negative values is accomplished through cooperation between anti-homeless laws that push homeless people out and service campuses/shelters that pull in and contain, a pull assisted by new police-social work collaboration along with the promise of housing first. The hustling and mentally ill homeless populations are also removed from the city by locking them in prisons (Barr 2001; Wacquant 2009).

The ascendance of housing first complicates the contemporary practice of homelessness management and how it is understood by critical academics (see Piven and Cloward 1993; Wacquant 2009; Katz 1996; Hopper 2003). It moves in a slightly different direction than purely ghettoized containment and criminalization (even though it works with those management models). This complication of homelessness comes from the heightened evaluation of the homeless population. The Oxford Dictionary defines “evaluate” as the act of “form[ing] an idea of the amount, number, or value of.” Rather than mere assessment, though, to “form an idea of” are exalted on television screens and newspaper columns. Rather than prison being the “ultimate rampart” against disorder, in these cases revered charity and state interventions are the symbols of social order and moral harmony.
entails the alien and alienating emplacement of value upon an object and, thereafter, supporting that value as accurate representation, a representation articulated by an “amount” or “number.” Housing first is a reaction to further evaluation of the homeless individual, a reaction to the further objectification of “the homeless,” an objectification that evaluates – that places value upon – the homeless object. As noted just above, the homeless person is vaguely taken to be a material detriment to business due to the social-symbolic stigma placed upon homeless class of people, hence the regular “street sweeping” for “quality of life” purposes. Yet, until recently, the exact value of the homeless individual enduring the street remained to be monetarily quantified, to be fully evaluated.

Dennis Culhane (collaborating with Kuhn) is largely credited with initiating the re-valuing of homeless people, of rendering them legible in quantified graphs and charts (see Figure 1 from NAEH (2010) below). Rather than being socially valued as a moral deterrent like the degraded pauper, however, the homeless object in Culhane’s research represents a collection of costs, costs to municipalities and social service providers in hard dollars (rather than costs to businesses and homeowners in vague property devaluations based upon a proximal social stigma). Drawing from administrative data from two homeless shelters in the late 1980s and into the 1990s, Culhane concluded with a homelessness typology: the transitional, the episodic, and the chronically homeless.\(^8\) The last of the group – the chronic – comprised about 10 percent of homeless shelter users who were generally less white, older, and with higher tendencies of substance abuse and mental/physical disability.\(^9\) Although only a fraction of the broader

\(^8\) The term “chronic homelessness” existed before Kuhn and Culhane’s 1998 publication, cropping up in HUD reports on homelessness as early as 1983 (see HUD 1986, 139).

\(^9\) “People experiencing chronic homelessness have the following characteristics: typically male (76-86 percent), and middle aged (60 percent are between 35 and 54); usually live on the streets or in places not meant for human habitation (63 percent unsheltered); near universal presence of disabilities (frequently multiple disabilities at once);
homeless population, the “chronically homeless,” the long-term, visible and viscous subgroup of homeless individuals, “consume half of the total shelter days” (Kuhn and Culhane 1998, 207).

Later research has expanded this initial foray, quantifying the cost of the chronic not only in shelter days but also in several aspects of social services: state mental hospitals, paramedic and hospital costs, Medicaid, Veterans Administration costs, and the costs to prisons and jails. Together and on average, these costs total around $40,500 per chronically homeless individual annually. Although only around 10-20 percent of the homeless population, the chronic “consume” approximately 50 percent of such services (Culhane et al. 2007, 6; NAEH 2007, 3). As noted earlier, at any point in time in January 2012, approximately (and conservatively) 633,782 people were experiencing homelessness across the US, a fairly steady number over the last several years. Of this group, almost 100,000 (16 percent) are considered “chronically homeless” (NAEH 2013) which equals-out to around $4.5 billion “consumed” by this incredibly dispossessed and neglected population each year.

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frequent use of emergency rooms, hospitals, mental health services, veterans’ services, substance abuse detoxification and treatment, and criminal justice resources” (NAEH 2010a, 1).
In this manner, the individuals endemically devalued and decommodified within the marketplace due to a “skills gap” or some other form of “disability” or “attitude problem” are suddenly revalued, a quantified bundle of anti-social and anti-urban consumptive activities typically practiced by long-term, sickly, and unsightly homeless individuals. This bundle, essentially, represents how much it costs to keep people alive but leave them on city streets; it is a biopolitical calculation of the purest form, and it permits the homeless object as quantified cost to be objectively input for market calculus (an anti-exchange-value). Rather than expanding the housing first client into the market, the chronic typology expands the market to include those left redundant during capitalism’s endemic and crisis-amplified market contractions. The chronic is the revaluation of the devalued. With such numbers and dollars presented so starkly at a time of sweeping governmental disinvestment for the poor and non-working, the chronically homeless...
simply had to be addressed. Understanding the creation of the “chronically homeless” subject is crucial to understanding housing first and why it came about.

In 2001 the Bush Administration started by adopting Culhane’s language of the chronically homeless individual (NAEH 2009c). The language, as well as the calculations that undergird it, starts to reveal the neoliberal genes of housing first. “The construction of a chronically homeless subject,” argue Del Casino and Jocoy (2008, 192), “is being deployed to minimize the provisions of services to those individuals who do not fit a very narrow definition of what it means to be homeless.” Indeed, there has been a particular slippage of late in homelessness policy, whereby “the homeless” are increasingly overcome by “the chronic” (Law 2007). Whereas the latter is posed as a long-term, hardcore subpopulation – the visible individuals that most picture when “homeless” or “bum” comes to mind – the former has no ready signifier. What does the non-chronically homeless individual look like? Where have we experienced that population before?

The answer is hard to come by because these individuals reflect Culhane’s typology. They are “transitional,” “episodic,” individuals and groups – entire families – that blend-in with the proper public and only need a meal or two, perhaps a few nights or weeks in a shelter. To put it bluntly, they are understood as just extremely poor people that can largely be accounted for through standard poverty governance interventions, what is in place already. In this manner, such a semantic rewording permits the chronically homeless to become the primary object of neoliberal homelessness management at the loss of the “just regular homeless,” Culhane and
Kuhn’s (1998) “transitional” and “episodic.” The construction of the chronically homeless object is an act of retrenchment and an innovative, strangely compassionate re-focusing.

**Housing first in US public policy**

Chronic homelessness is not merely a semantic shift. It has a policy, one that can operate upon the chronically homeless object to reduce the cost of homelessness for federal and local governments alike. Here enters “housing first.” Housing first was originally a psychiatric outreach program design in the 1990s that would find the most vulnerable and mentally ill homeless individuals and offer them an apartment to implement treatment (Tsemberis and Eisenberg 2001). After broader national tests in 2004, the model was quickly deemed replicable for the related subpopulation of the chronically homeless, with upwards of 80 percent of the chronically homeless individuals offered immediate housing remaining housed when tested (and off the expensive street) for at least a year (and oftentimes much higher) (Tsemberis, Gulcur, and Nakae 2004, 654; Sullivan 2007). In all cases, and with little variation geographically, this strategy was able to successfully house individuals with significant “housing barriers,” such as disability and addiction, while netting municipal savings on homelessness services – by keeping people out of the more costly emergency rooms, shelters, police stations (Kennedy 2009; Tsemberis 2010) and away from upper-class spaces of consumption (Willse 2010, 173).

Its popularity, then, comes with its potent cost-effectiveness, its ability to mesh with the neoliberal axioms of competitive efficiency through quantification and marketization. Speaking of a chronic homelessness study in Denver, Malcolm Gladwell, in *the* piece that popularized

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10 For this reason Kuhn and Culhane’s (1998) three-tiered typology is rarely employed in grant applications or homelessness policy mandates. Instead, there is just a broad bifurcation of homelessness: chronic or non-chronic.
Culhane’s findings, “Million-Dollar Murray,” notes the staggering commonsense that is housing first.¹¹

The cost of service comes to about ten thousand dollars per homeless client per year. An efficiency apartment in Denver averages $376 a month, or just over forty-five hundred a year, which means that you can house and care for a chronically homeless person for at most fifteen thousand dollars, or about a third of what he or she would cost on the street. The idea is that once the people in the [housing first] program stabilize they will find jobs, and start to pick up more and more of their own rent, which would bring someone’s annual cost to the program closer to six thousand dollars (Gladwell 2006).

The cost-benefits of housing first, of course, were realized with Culhane’s initial study; it did not take Gladwell’s rhetorical prowess to bring the program’s potential as a federal policy answer. Realizing these unique characteristics of the chronically homeless, the Department of Housing and Urban Development officially adopted a “chronic homeless” designation. HUD declares an individual chronically homeless if they are “either (1) an unaccompanied homeless individual with a disabling condition who has been continuously homeless for a year or more, or (2) an unaccompanied individual with a disabling condition who has had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years” (HUD 2007, 3).

In 2002, the chronically homeless, estimated at just over 110,000 persons nationally, became the main focus of the Bush Administration’s Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH). The Council explained that “innovative new strategies [will] eliminate chronic homelessness from the streets of American cities once and for all.” (quoted in Sparks 2011,

Later, housing first was recognized as the tool for eliminating chronic homelessness. With the potential to receive extra federal funding if adopted (Del Casino Jr and Jocoy 2008, 196), the housing first model promptly caught the attention of states and municipalities eager to sterilize postindustrial city streets and lighten welfare outlays (Willse 2008, 173). Starting in 2000, Congress has directed 30 percent of McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act spending be allocated to permanent housing, while “HUD has further required that one third of this set-aside be used for projects that serve a population that includes at least 70 percent of persons who are chronically homeless” (Culhane et al. 2007, 12–7). Since the federal government named housing first (often called “rapid re-housing” or “permanent supportive housing” by HUD) a “best practice” for addressing chronic homelessness, codified in national policy in 2008 and reiterated in the 2009 reauthorization of McKinney-Vento programs (the HEARTH Act) (NAEH 2009a), municipalities and states have been encouraged by the USICH to develop and implement “10-year Plans to End Homelessness” with housing first and its positive side effects understood as the chief driver (Sparks 2011, 1518; Culhane et al. 2007, 12–

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12 March 2012 witnessed the first national conference focused exclusively on the housing first approach. It was called the “Housing First Partners Conference” and took place over 2 ½ days in New Orleans. “Let not the significance of this event be missed,” the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness reported, “It marks the moment of Housing First’s acceptance and establishment as the central approach for helping vulnerable men and women experiencing chronic homelessness to permanently exit homelessness and regain health, hope, and dignity. This was Housing First’s ‘coming out’ party” (USICH 2012a).

13 In 1987 President Reagan signed the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act into law in response to mass homelessness and the pressure of advocacy organizations. The legislation, a watered-down version of earlier bills, was the first (and remains the only) significant act to explicitly target mass homelessness across the US, with funding originally focusing upon emergency shelters but implementing other interventions and reforms as well. It has been and continues to be regularly reauthorized by congress, although the funding priorities shift (NCH 2006a).

14 In distinction to previous McKinney-Vento reauthorizations, the HEARTH Act replaced the Emergency Shelter Grant with new Emergency Solutions Grant with forty-percent dedicated to rapid re-housing and homelessness prevention, such as housing first (NAEH 2009a).

15 Ten-year plans derive from a 2000 National Alliance to End Homelessness report that called for “a dramatic overhaul in the effort to combat homelessness.” The report, A Plan Not a Dream: How to End Homelessness in Ten Years, “outline[d] a community-based framework that moved from simply managing the problem to ending it in 10 years” (HRC/SAMSA 2013, 1).
The early 2000s also witnessed the report by the bipartisan Millennial Housing Commission and the President’s New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, which estimated that approximately 150,000 new units of supportive housing were needed to end chronic homelessness. “Since then, approximately 60,000 units have been created through HUD’s McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants” (NAEH 2010a, 3). As figure 2 below attests, the focus on chronic homelessness using housing first has been a relative success. Chronic homelessness has evidently decreased even as general homelessness rose in 2007 and has remained between 6-700,000 each night.

![Figure 2](image)

**Figure 2**, Sources: HUD (2013) HUD and OCDP (2007); NAEH (2010b)

**Housing first photo shoot: Research methods and thesis layout**

The social and economic success of housing first has inspired much excitement of late.

Currently, there is a national plan to end chronic (and veteran) homelessness by 2015 (Cauvin 2010). By 2010 more than 270 communities have completed Ten Year Plans to end homelessness, 83 percent of which focus on chronic homelessness. These plans came in “response to federal incentives to focus attention on chronic homelessness” (NAEH 2010a, 1–2).
2010; USICH 2010; HRC/SAMSA 2013), a national plan that mirrors metro Phoenix’s plan to eradicate chronic homelessness by the same year (through creating 1,000 housing first homes) (Náñez 2012; MAG 2006; Medina 2007). Excitement is supported by housing first’s image as a “radical” (Graves and Sayfan 2007) and “controversial” (Sullivan 2007) policy and philosophy; it is seen as the result and harbinger of philosophical “enlightenment” (McCarroll 2002). Indeed, acolytes often pose housing first as a philosophical (ideological) “social movement” (USICH 2012a) now being put into practice. Proponents see housing first as working “from the premise that housing is a human right” (DESC 2009; HRC/SAMSA 2008) and challenging, nay overcoming, all of the “punitive moralisms” of previous forms of managing homelessness (Graves and Sayfan 2007; see also Gowan 2010, 268).

The framing of housing first as the savior of homeless individuals and the re-sanctifying of homeless/poverty management – at least in the eyes of progressives – is an understandable one. Indeed, at the outset of this introduction I re-told my experience within a pre-housing first world and what housing first meant to people working within homelessness services. That experience might rightly be considered my first “research method.” If it could be described as anything in academic language it would be ethnography, living and working within a research site for an extended period of time. This ten-month foray, of course, was not intended to be research but rather work (or “national service”). These experiences, often captured in a journal – perhaps qualifying as “field notes” – became research only when I decided to investigate the operations of housing first in the context of metropolitan Phoenix.

The same holds true for my employment after housing first’s sunrise. Although I was always involved with the outreach activities throughout 2009-10 to determine which clients at the drop-in center were chronically homeless and likely to be “good candidates” for the City of
Tempe’s housing first program (the “Tempe Pilot Project”), I did not become an explicit part of housing first operations in Tempe until the late summer and early fall of 2010. At this point I was re-hired as an assistant case manager by Urban Outreach’s housing first case management program called “Home at Last,” or HAL. I did this job over a three-month period, undertaking the eclectic tasks of case management (discussed further in chapter 3) under the direction of two supervisors/full-time case managers. These experiences, like my work at the drop-in center, became after-the-fact ethnographies.

My “research field,” then, is a messy one. Feminist and critical studies of qualitative methods not only challenge the sharp subject-object dichotomy (interviewer/interviewee), they also challenge notions of the research field as something wholly distinct or subtracted from everyday life undergirded by structures of power. In this manner, critical epistemologies undercut the subject-object dichotomy and also the field-general-life dichotomy. Just as researcher and researched influence each other, so do their wider social contexts. In this sense, there can be no “field.” Or, if there is, one must admit, as Cindi Katz (1994, 72) did: “I am always, everywhere, in the field.” Otherwise, researchers will continue to function under the illusory pretense that their research is done within a sterilized social laboratory.

Rather than being a hindrance to my research, then, I think the messiness of my methods was fundamental to understanding housing first from different perspectives. Each of my research methods – ethnography, interviews, and archival – tilted the lighting on housing first in its own unique manner, making research findings and the arguments that came from them indistinguishable from my experiences with housing first. Epistemologically, it did not matter whether these experiences occurred after or before research proposal and institutional approval. Methodically, furthermore, these experiences could never have been subtracted from my
“official” research, they would have always, no matter what, colored my questions and interpretations. To pretend that they never existed would be both dishonest and, ultimately, a surrender of the truths I witnessed over a year working within the homelessness industry. This study represents a coalition of these truths, truths that emerged, angle by angle, from every new conversation with housing first.

I approached my pre-approval research with the same ethical standards as post-approval findings. Although my experiences were undoubtedly shaped by interactions (indistinguishable from my own reflections, my “field notes”) they are afforded a higher level of anonymity than my later interviews. Whenever possible, I drew upon institutionally mandated interviews to make my case. More often than not, my approved interview questions emerged from my intuitive ethnographic reflections not tied to specific events, institutions, or people.

Some conclusions that I drew from these ethnographies emerged not from a singular interaction with an institution, case manager, administrator, or client. Rather, they percolated unconsciously through occasional happenings, unexceptional occurrences without any readily identifiable protagonist. Thereafter, these experiences come to intuitively hail questions. The arguments I make in chapter 2 came from asking questions that arose after spending nearly a year in the drop-in center, a job that included doing outreach with social workers from the City of Tempe. Whereas speaking with clients at the drop-in center gave me insight into the social geography of Tempe homelessness, working with city outreach workers lifted me up so I could view the homeless archipelago across metropolitan Phoenix. I wondered why Tempe had no fixed homeless shelter, why few homeless individuals frequented Tempe’s downtown, why almost all services for the extremely poor and homeless were placed in South Phoenix.
I came to realize that homelessness could only be understood in Tempe (and other Phoenix suburbs) by appreciating the regional geography of homelessness, a geography that not only includes static emplacement of services – shelters and otherwise – but a geography of movement, of push and pull. As argued in chapter 2, metropolitan Phoenix spatially manages its homeless people by pushing them out of downtown spaces of upper-class consumption through anti-homeless laws while pulling them toward hidden spaces of care, to impoverished zones by offering shelters, services, and eventually housing first. But there is fuzziness between push and pull, between criminalization and compassion. A tour guide (yes, they have tours) of the Valley’s newly created Skid Row, the Human Services Campus, explained to me some novel approaches local police use to drag in homeless individuals by using the threat of arrest to make sure clients maintain rehabilitative services. This multifaceted managing of homeless geographies responds to the lobby of store owners and residents, two groups that – if wealthy and with political clout – can move homeless populations away to increase property value and sales. In other words, the current sociospatial management of homeless populations in the Valley of the Sun functions to aid capital accumulation for an elite segment of the population. Archival and secondary source research reveals that this is not solely a recent phenomenon, but that homelessness was both produced through policies to jumpstart capital accumulation and thereafter managed to uphold and increase accumulation in the Valley.

In the next chapter, chapter 3, I again draw from historical research to understand how society tends to understand unemployment, placeless-ness, and homelessness. Herein, I try to illustrate how various framings of homelessness (or whatever it was called before now) has influenced how the US sociospatially manages homeless populations: why push, pull, and drag, and why now housing first? To answer these questions, though, we first have to find out why
homeless populations need to be managed in the first place. From where does this fetish of containment and rehabilitation of the out-of-place and unproductive come? I argue that these policies and attitudes derive from stigma, a social marking or disgrace or shame that must be assuaged or hidden, and that stigma primarily derives from social attitudes required to uphold a capitalist political economy.

No matter how much housing first may appear as a “radical” “social movement” upending “punitive moralisms,” some research reveals how the treatment which comes after (and, really, before in shelters, drop-in centers, etc.) initial housing derives from and reflects ideological and practical management structures which locate the radical cause of homelessness – of unproductivity and placeless-ness – within the individual rather than broader social systems, most significantly a capitalist political economy. In this manner, housing first’s stress on rehabilitative case management (and the discourse that surrounds it) reproduces an ideology which asserts that a person’s homelessness is his/her own fault, a framing that deflects the culpability of broader public policy (labor protections, public housing, welfare, etc.) and the workings of a political economic system built upon class exploitation and the systematic devaluation of certain segments of the population. Homeless people, in this instance, are best recognized a particular class of the political economy rather than a conglomeration of isolated deviancies.

Questions remain of how housing first rehabilitates, of what housing first does once the hidden deviancies of “the homeless” are dragged out into the light. These questions are the heart of chapter 4, and they spring from a new ethnographic experience. After working in the constant twilight of the drop-in center the sunshine of housing first was invigorating. By the time Home at Last hired me, all 35 tenants had been moved into their apartments, provided with furniture and
other household supplies, and recently gotten into the routine of their case management “wrap-around services.” Hope was in the air; this felt like a social movement, like enlightenment. Although a part-time addendum to these ongoing services, I became involved in the minute details of housing first case management, sometimes taking the lead for particular clients with whom I had built a rapport throughout my time at the drop-in center. No matter the client, though, my case manager silhouette, myself consciously repositioned as a “professional” case manager, increasingly became an anxious and unstable one.

Housing first’s rays did not burn; it was not too much but too little. As my eyes adjusted, housing first appeared less as newfound light than newfangled twilight. Chapter 4 derived from the gradual appreciation that housing first case management is impressively paternalistic (c.f. Willse 2010; Gowan 2010); it is a case management regime that operates – like most other forms of case management – upon diagnosis, containment, instruction and surveillance, all of which are upheld through written and unwritten forms of discipline, of punishment and reward. In other words, it was not that different from what I did at the drop-in center and what people put themselves through at homeless shelters. This pivot in understanding emerged from my ethnographic work in Tempe, and I use these experiences to explain much of the unwritten forms of discipline present in housing first, disciplinary apparatuses that are overlooked by boosters and critical academics alike (see Gowan 2010; Willse 2008; Mitchell 2011; Klodawsky 2009).17

I supplement these experiences with interviews undertaken in the summer of 2012 to expand upon and formulate a timeline of how housing first and its case management operate in

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17 A slight exception here might be Sparks (2011) and, less explicitly, Murphy (2009).
the Valley. ¹⁸ I specifically draw upon interviews with a Central Arizona Shelter Services (CASS) lead case manager and housing first assessment leader, along with a leading official at the local United Way (the Valley of the Sun United Way, or VSUW) to understand housing first’s current, post-Tempe Pilot Project, intake operations. To comprehend how housing first works after clients are housed (its written forms of discipline), I interviewed the Supportive Housing Director of Arizona Housing Inc. (AHI), one of the larger housing first providers in Phoenix, as well as the Director of Home at Last. Interviews for these administrators accompanied conversations with the single HAL case manager and one of AHI’s case managers working at one of their fixed-site apartment complexes, Collins Court.¹⁹ To get the perspective of housing first clientele, I interviewed five clients living in Collins Court and three of HAL’s clients living in scattered units across Tempe,²⁰ once again highlighting the hidden nuances of case management. It became clear that housing first, though still quite paternalistic, necessarily deviated from earlier forms of rehabilitation due to the establishment of the independent housing lease. In some ways the lease empowers the housing first client. In other ways, and rather contradictorily, housing first (and the lease) functions to artificially force the ex-homeless individual into the disciplinary grooves of the “free market.”

¹⁸ Interview research included a total of 16 interviews: 9 clients, 2 case managers, 2 case management administrators, 1 United Way administrator, 1 city official, and 1 shelter case manager/housing first intake worker. I also attended one homelessness Continuum of Care meeting at the Maricopa Association of Governments and one meeting of homelessness stakeholders at the Valley of the Sun United Way.

¹⁹ I did not work with nor previously know the director or the case manager at HAL whom I interviewed in 2012.

²⁰ My best efforts to meet with clients (and administrators/case managers) outside of Tempe’s program (beyond AHI) largely failed. For instance, I was only able to interview one client of a housing first program in the southwestern suburb of Goodyear. After this initial interview, others in the program (8 in total) denied interview requests at the suggestion of the lawyer they recently hired to investigate alleged negligence and contract violation on behalf of their case management agency, a behavioral health organization contracted by the Valley of the Sun United Way. Upon this hurdle, I refocused efforts upon Tempe’s housing first program. Hurdles awaited me there as well. Because I had previously been the Tempe clients’ case manager and was associated with the new case manager, the interview responses are very questionable. The clients I interviewed answered questions and interacted with me as if I was still their case manager. For this reason, I often redirected questions away from critiques of their current case management and housing situation and toward their perceptions of homelessness in the Valley, to what housing first meant for them, and how they might still struggle. The voices of HAL clients, then, emerged less in chapter 4 than chapter 2 and 5. Their words undoubtedly whisper throughout the entire thesis.
In chapters 2–4, I outline how housing first fits within sociospatial management of homelessness, how it complicates various ideologies of homelessness, and how its case management functions on the ground. Chapter 5 investigates housing first in relation to federal and Arizona public policy. In this context, it is evident that housing first is the product of the neoliberal assault on welfare that helped produce massive, chronic homelessness. It is the cheapest means yet conceived to sterilize city streets of the most expensive homeless. These broader and older assaults on state welfare services and protections for the poor and working classes also, paradoxically, hinder housing first and all other anti-homelessness/anti-poverty policies. All of the excitement inspired by housing first—a “movement” that promises to “end” or “solve” mass homelessness (chronic or otherwise)—is sadly misplaced.

At first this may appear as a simple contradiction, the contradiction between a progressive program and a conservative political context. Yet research suggests that housing first must necessarily operate in its limited (and cheaper) manifestation. Such contradictions define housing first and are requisite to its existence. The program’s primarily function is not to end or solve homelessness because this is impossible; homelessness is a condition of a capitalist political economy, especially in its neoliberal shade. Rather, housing first functions to—ideologically—suggest that solving homelessness is possible without altering existing power structures. If religion is the “opium of the masses,” as Marx (1844) argued, then housing first is the opium of mass homelessness. Housing first is, “at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering” (original emphasis). But housing first also works to obfuscate the inner workings of capital; it also reproduces real suffering while “creating,” as Poppendieck (1998, 5) put it in her criticism of emergency food, “the illusion of effective action” to “reduce the discomfort of visible destitution.” Yet housing first certainly is
effective materially as well. It is the best tool discovered to hide away the most visible signs of capital’s contradictions, to force systematic dispossession back into the darkness, to distract us all – homeless or otherwise – from capitalism’s perilous twilight.
CHAPTER 2: THE SOCIOSPATIAL MANAGEMENT OF HOMELESSNESS IN THE VALLEY OF THE SUN

“Until now,” William Hermann (2005), columnist for The Arizona Republic writes, “the chronically homeless, many suffering from mental illness, have had to go to many different agencies to find help, [but] today they are all on one campus.” “The $24 million, 14-acre campus at 11th Avenue and Jackson Street,” he continues, “brings together five agencies that help the homeless, as well as therapists, counselors, and advisers from state, county, city, and private agencies.” The Human Services Campus, founded in 2005 by a broad conglomeration of homelessness service providers, set in southern Phoenix, is an innovative strategy to cut-down on individuals having to crisscross the Phoenician sprawl in search of meals, medical care, or a place to legally exist (Hermann 2011). The Campus streamlines how homeless populations can access expertise in addressing their personal issues, the issues that are often taken to have put them on the street in the first place: mental illness, disaffiliation, addiction, disability, profligacy, domestic violence, prison release, unemployability or, more likely, some combination thereof.

Homelessness is rarely understood as a political issue. Instead, most take it as a nagging problem, one needing to be addressed through technocratic poverty governance, by devising more informed and efficient means of population management and service delivery. The Human Services Campus is one example of this ideology. The Campus offers relief and targets the personal attributes, individual disabilities, and shortcomings of homeless individuals. In many senses, it is a compassionate response to homelessness; it is a “space of care,” to use Conradson’s (2003a) term. But the Campus is not alone in managing homelessness. Anti-homeless laws accompany the campus model. These laws represent a more punitive means of homeless management, of restricting life-sustaining activities in certain spaces of the city.
Finally, there is housing first, a newer, seemingly less punitive and less therapeutic/normalizing model of compassion that spatially manages homeless populations by offering them supportive housing. These three models – campuses, criminalization, and housing first – embody competing ideologies and practices for managing the homeless class. Analyzed against the broader social, political, and economic histories of the Valley of the Sun, however, these practices should be taken as different tools that work in tandem for socially and geographically managing homeless populations, a cooperation that reveals the confluence of their partially divergent practices.

Through an historical analysis of metro Phoenix, this chapter will explain why these models emerged and how they interact to manage homeless populations to aid capital accumulation, particularly in the redevelopment of Phoenix and the southeastern suburb of Tempe. In doing so, the chapter adds to the literature by bringing together what have emerged as different “camps” within the geographies of homelessness and poverty governance. The parsing of geographies of homelessness can largely be credited to Deverteuil, von Mahs, and May’s (2009) review of geographical research on homelessness. In the article, *Complexity not collapse: recasting the geographies of homelessness in a ‘punitive’ age*, the trio distinguishes (and periodizes) studies of homelessness as either working from a “punitive framework” or from the nascent and overlooked geographies *beyond* the punitive framework. The punitive framework, Deverteuil and colleagues argue, focuses too squarely upon the “collapsing” geographies of homeless populations, a collapse resulting from capital-induced anti-homeless architecture (Davis 2006), urban revanchism (Smith 1996), and the “post-justice” city of declining public space necessary for the survival of homeless people and democracy alike (Mitchell 2003). “Far from any collapse,” Deverteuil et al. (2009, 652) explain, “there has in fact been a remarkable proliferation of homeless spaces over recent years, including the considerable expansion of
abeyance, ambiguous and interstitial structures that accommodate and support homeless people.” As important as studies of the punitive framing are, and as much as they depict the real life punitive turn toward homeless people, Deverteuil et al. argue, geographies of homelessness must include “complexity,” looking not only at the eradication of homeless geographies but their transformation, how the punitive turn is accompanied by the proliferation of “spaces of care,” of places like the Human Services Campus.

While Deverteuil and colleagues’ (2009) article argues for greater complexity by augmenting the punitive framing, its “punitive” versus “caring” bifurcation seems to suggest continued divergence. Instead of simply adding to what they frame as poststructuralist “spaces of care” literature contra the Marxian “punitive framework,” geographies of homelessness should challenge the very distinction (and periodization) between (old school) punitive and (new school) compassionate policies and spaces. Rather than seeing spaces of care as the opposing side to revanchism (Johnsen, Cloke, and May 2005a, 788) we must understand how such compassionate zones evolve and work in tandem with the punitive turn toward homelessness within the totality of evolving capital and urban historical geographies. Complexity, in other words, must be dialectically understood with collapse.

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21 Devertueil and colleague’s (2009) seemingly odd use of the term “abeyance” is drawing from the work of Hopper and Baumohl (2004). Although Devertueil et al. fail to clarify the term’s meaning in relation to geographies of homelessness, Hopper and Baumohl’s (ibid., 1) text explains how “abeyances” is “a term borrowed from historical sociology, [which] refers to solutions to this long-standing problem of a mismatch between productive positions available in a society and numbers of potential claimants of those positions.” Perhaps, then, Devertueil and friends are referring to the “proliferation” of geographies of simply applying for jobs, such as One Stop centers, Goodwill Job Centers and so forth. They could also be referring to the expansion of contingent wage labor (day labor) auctioned on the sidewalks near home improvement stores (see Theodore 2007). Surely these places come to “accommodate and support homeless people.” I would argue, however, that such seemingly benign institutions cleanup after revanchist policies and work with anti-homeless laws and other punitive institutions that do anything but “support and accommodate” homeless persons. They also, obviously, are conduits of desperation and zones of extreme labor exploitation.
In this chapter, then, I both take-up Devertuil and colleagues’ call to track the “proliferation of [new] homeless spaces” – including spaces of care – while attempting to mold that with a Marxian look at redevelopment and the political-economic rationales behind punitive and caring policies. In doing so, I attempt to complicate and add to the sometimes hyperbolic claims of criminalization working to “annihilate homeless people” (Mitchell 1997) or “banishing” them from urban spaces (Beckett and Herbert 2010). I also want to explore the limitations of focusing squarely on “spaces of care,” a focus which detracts from a greater political-economic context and ignores the forces of annihilation and banishment (Conradson 2003b; Johnsen, Cloke, and May 2005b).

To do this, I examine the three modes of managing noted above – homeless campuses, criminalization, and housing first – arising with the (re)development of greater Phoenix. I argue that these three models can only be appreciated dialectically. This dialectical relationship finds structure through the pressures and limitations of metro Phoenix’s drive to attract new capital investment as business fled to cheaper suburban and offshore pastures. Eager to attract footloose capital and foster consumer spaces, these homeless management strategies work to create a city in which one can consume conspicuously without the reminder of abject poverty and systematic abandonment. Homeless campuses and compassionate models work to pull homeless people by offering a form of nominally caring space and services. Even working within the context of criminalized streets, however, campuses often fail to pull in homeless people. Instead, they are often feared institutional islands of last resort. Therefore, anti-homeless laws continue to influence the location of homelessness across the Phoenix metro landscape (and elsewhere). But these laws do not simply arrest; rather, they push homeless people toward segregated campuses. Anti-homeless laws, to put it pointedly, do not banish or annihilate (c.f. Mitchell 1997; Beckett
and Herbert 2010); they isolate and partition homeless people into particular regulated, caring spaces. “Spaces of care,” meanwhile, do not simply offer relief; they function to sterilize city streets by pulling-in and containing homeless populations (c.f. Conradson 2003b; DeVerteuil, May, and von Mahs 2009).

Compassion and criminalization, then, can only be understood in relation to one another. Indeed, in Phoenix these two models of sociospatial management are increasingly indistinguishable as the line between social worker and police officer, compassion and criminalization, is intentionally muddled. Rather than geographically distinct push versus pull, there is an explicitly hybrid model of “caring” intervention that *drags* recalcitrant homeless populations into spaces of care using the threats made available through anti-homeless laws. These hardcore homeless populations, the “chronically homeless,” generally remain impervious to dragging. Housing first, itself a novel geography of care, is the newest part of this sociospatial management. It is specifically tailored to reach out and attract the stubborn holdouts who refuse to have their geographies determined by the push, pull, and drag. Housing first, anti-homeless laws, and institutional segregations have different means and represent separate ideologies, but the ends are the same: to manage poor and homeless populations to shore-up capital projects and redevelopment in the Valley of the Sun.

**Managing mecca: The spatial organization of poverty and homelessness in the Valley**

Advanced telecommunications, structural adjustment programs, and trade agreements have eased the costly friction of geographical location, making distance and political divisions matter less and less for businesses, which encouraged broader, international competition – what we typically refer to as “globalization.” It would be misleading, however, to posit pre-1970s capital as wholly
anchored. Since before the Second World War, the industrial and demographic dominance of Midwestern and Northeastern United States was gradually losing ground as capital transplanted south and westward. Greater Phoenix promised light regulation, low taxes, antiunion labor laws, and cheap land and water, all of which were undergirded by federally subsidized defense industries and suburbanization (Ross 2011, 4). Phoenix consistently grew throughout the 1940s and 1950s, while coming to rise like its namesake in the ‘60s, becoming one of the largest cities in the southwest with a population of over 400,000 (Luckingham 1989, 153).22 The wartime population growth and the inheritance of erstwhile “Rust Belt” industry, though, settled unevenly across the Valley. Through the ‘50s, industries and white, affluent populations, natives and newcomers alike, abetted by federal home and highway subsidies, fled the urban core for the suburbs.

The great suburbanization of Phoenix had begun, and central city commerce quickly followed, leaving the simmering desert city with a cold, rotting heart. In 1966, Walter Meek, columnist for the city’s largest newspaper, The Arizona Republic, eulogized downtown Phoenix as a “mercantile graveyard, and in many ways a slum,” noting how recent statistics “indicated that, since 1958, the central business district (CBD) of Phoenix has suffered perhaps the worst decline in land use and commercial activity of any major American city” (quoted in Luckingham 1989, 197). In mid-twentieth century Phoenix, Andrew Ross (2011, 81) explains, “the hemorrhaging of commerce, the decamping of affluent populations, and the acute neglect of those left behind…differed from other cities only in its sheer rapidity.” Rapid disinvestment of the downtown occurred while the job market expanded in the suburban ring. Manufacturing,

22 By 1980, Phoenix had nearly doubled in size, with a population of 789,704 (Luckingham 1989, 195). In the 2000s it became one of the fastest growing and most populous cities (5th most populous) in the US, with over a million residents and over three million in the metropolitan region. Phoenix eventually lost its 5th place spot to Philadelphia in 2010, even with a population of 1.4 million (Ross 2011, 55).
coupled with significant labor in construction, mining, and agriculture, continued to expand into the 1980s (along with well-paid employment from an Air Force base on the city’s northwestern flank) (Luckingham 1989, 189). Yet these well-paying, middle-class jobs remained largely segregated in the suburban halo or contained in small, upper-class enclaves. Even so, and like most US cities since the 1970s and 1980s, the wage economy of greater Phoenix increasingly depended upon the labor-intensive, poorly paid service industry (mostly tourism-based) and construction as the city’s high tech industries, which were central to its growth, steadily relocated (Shermer 2013, 336).

Even with suburban affluence, city officials and residents remained concerned about the future of downtown Phoenix. By the late 1960s, the city seemed to have partly given-up on the idea of resuscitating the central business district in its original, retail-based form inhabited by nearby workers and residents. Instead, boosters and property owners excitedly envisioned downtown Phoenix as “the showplace of the Valley: a cultural, educational, and entertainment center by night and the business and professional hub by day. It could be a tourist mecca” (quoted in Luckingham 1989, 197). In an effort to draw people and capital back into downtown, to reignite the declining value of fixed capital investment and infrastructure developed in haste during the 1950s and 1960s, Phoenix, rapidly losing its tax base to suburban municipalities, began to compete for capital investment. Competition required the transformation of urban governance, a coerced pivot from managing existing capital investment toward actively luring investment. In this political-economic climate, Harvey (1987, 265) explains, “Urban governments have been forced into innovation and investments to make their cities more attractive as consumer and cultural centers.” In other words, cities were taken to not only be

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23 Tourism emerged as the second largest industry in the Valley between 1960 and 1980, stealing the second spot from agriculture but remaining smaller than manufacturing (Luckingham 1989, 188).
spaces of commodity production and consumption, but to be commodities themselves. The central urban spaces of Phoenix became less for production or inhabitation by the general public and more for private exchange, for subsidizing – and thus enticing – capital investment through raising adjacent property values with publically funded outlays (i.e. beautification projects) in an endeavor to create a cultural and entertainment oasis (Luckingham 1989).

Attempting to blend sunshine, deep horizons, and folksy tourism with cosmopolitan fare became – and still is – the central component of Phoenix’s redevelopment projects. But for a “tourist mecca” to emerge the hole in this “doughnut-shaped” city had to be addressed (Ross 2011, 75). Far from an empty abyss, central Phoenix was all too inhabited, albeit by populations left out of the postwar boom and subsequent growth: ethnic minorities, the extremely poor, and the disabled (Talton 2011; Ross 2011). Rather than just a patchwork of 1950s skyscrapers and empty lots, then, downtown and the surrounding zone of transition – where landowners massively disinvested in unfulfilled anticipation an expanding central business district – was a spatial centralization of the socially marginalized (N. Smith 1996). This sociospatial dynamic was epitomized by “the Deuce,” the Valley’s very own Skid Row. The Deuce and surrounding neighborhoods not only contained the extremely poor and small homeless population, but also housed migratory agricultural workers and ethnic groups systematically excluded from suburban affluence – Latinos, African Americans, and Native Americans, who were hedged into the central city through rampant redlining and other forms of de facto segregation (Ross 2011, 122). A federal inquiry of Phoenix’s inner-city poverty conducted in the 1960s, for instance, found that the Deuce and surrounding spaces hosted “some of the worst slums west of the Mississippi River” (quoted in Luckingham 1989, 214). “It might be fairly termed a human disaster area in an
affluent metropolis,” the inquiry concluded (ibid.). The doughnut city, spoiled by decades of disinvestment and discrimination, had a heart after all, but it was rotten to the core.

**Producing the Homeless Crisis: The Deuce and Redevelopment in Phoenix**

Downtown Phoenix was not a natural “human disaster area.” Skid Rows and inner-city ghettos were and are, of course, not unique to Phoenix; they are impressively common across the United States (Wacquant 2009). Skid Rows were first produced through landed property markets in the late-nineteenth-century (aided by rampant racial discrimination) (Schneider 1986). As noted above, these zones of despair emerged at the edge of central business districts in anticipation of flipping land for profit. The infrastructure and residents in this zone of transition suffered as landowners rationally disinvested so as to render greater margins upon sale, leaving buildings in disrepair and poor residents stuck in the inner city for want of private transportation and affordable rents elsewhere (N. Smith 1989).
Within this zone emerged the Deuce, likely named after its location along Second Street. Unlike most Skid Rows, which thrived in more established cities from the 1890s to 1920s (Schneider 1986, 169), the Deuce did not emerge in Phoenix in any truly recognizable form until the 1920s (Talton 2011), as the city itself was not incorporated until 1881 and was, at its outset, anything but a well-connected western boom town attracting transient labor (Luckingham 1989, 19). The history of Skid Row in Phoenix, then, differs significantly from older cities. It was only after the 1920s that the Deuce resembled Skid Rows elsewhere. Rather than strictly a “neighborhood in decline,” as Schneider (1986, 173) describes Skid Rows after 1920, the Deuce was simultaneously a place for migratory laborers and prosperity and “a place of lost souls: panhandlers, drunks, men passed out on sidewalks in recessed doorways after dark…a panorama of quiet human misery” (Talton 2011). Next to this despair were brothels, bars, prostitution, and

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24 In 1878, Phoenix had a population of approximately 1,700 (Luckingham 1989, 24).
cheap single-room occupancy (SRO) hotels, agricultural warehouses/markets, and one of the largest stockyards in the nation (DiPastino 2003; Talton 2011; Ross 2011, 80). The Deuce, unlike other Skid Rows, did not decline – as least not as quickly – as others, others that withered with the slowing of railroad construction, the wilting of agricultural labor demand with the onset of vast mechanization, and the concomitant devaluation of entire skill sets and segments of the labor force (Schneider 1986, 174). The Deuce in Phoenix, then, experienced the lifecycle of Skid Rows in older cities all at once: it was a place of work and productivity as well as place of despair and homelessness, of crime and beat-walking police officers (Luckingham 1989, 169).

As Phoenix’s central business district ceased to expand with the onset of the automobile and the postwar subsidies for white suburbanization, the Deuce’s property owners and municipal officials understood redevelopment as the best means to attract capital and restore tax revenue in downtown Phoenix. Across the country, there was what Kasinitz (1986, 341–3) calls a “value shift” throughout the 1970s and 1980s, a shift in favor of urban living and away from postwar suburbanization, a shift that necessitated the removal or transformation of “the nation’s least desirable housing stock: single-room occupancy hotels, rooming houses, and shelters.” Phoenix and the Deuce certainly reflected such a shift. “Starting in the late 1960s,” John Talton (2011) explains,

Phoenix got into the "urban renewal" disaster by tearing down several blocks of businesses and SROs to build the first building of the (old) convention center and Symphony Hall. Phoenix Civic Plaza…was meant to revive a dying downtown. The big department stores had mostly closed and the small, local retailers were struggling. The business motels of the railroad and agricultural interests were changing, too. Many of the produce sheds and warehouses closed, taking with them the seasonal work for the low-
skilled men who lived in the Deuce. Through the 1970s, most of the Deuce disappeared, replaced by the Hyatt, a new Greyhound terminal, new fire station No. 1, parking lots, etc.

The material manifestations of these new “values” expelled those who depended on the cheap lodging and proximal employment of the Deuce. The process of redevelopment and gentrification transformed cityscapes as global political-economic shifts reformed urban economies, namely the offshoring of reasonably well-paying manufacturing and public sector jobs and their replacement by low-paying, non-union service sector work (Hopper, Susser, and Conover 1985, 197–8). In Phoenix and elsewhere, this political-economic shift and the demolition of low-income housing (itself a reaction to deindustrialization) directly led to a rising homeless population in the 1970s and into the 1980s.25 “Phoenix leaders made no serious effort to address the problem of where the men would go as their flawed sanctuary was bulldozed,” Talton (2011) notes.

The death of the Deuce corresponded with the large-scale deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill from state hospitals. Community mental-health centers and shelters were discussed. But they never happened. So the lost souls of the Deuce migrated, hanging out in front of small businesses and retailers, driving away customers. It contributed to a death spiral of the once-vibrant central business district, essentially undoing any stimulative effect of the Civic Plaza. The street people slept on lawns in the neighborhoods near downtown… They took over the still-standing historic area between Seventh Avenue and the Capitol (Talton 2011).

25 A 1984 Newsweek exposé documented the drastic decrease in cheap SRO housing stock in the midst of gentrification: “The first buildings to be abandoned, converted into condominiums or destroyed are often the flophouses called single-room occupancy hotels where many of the poorest live. About 1 million rooms – nearly half the total – were converted or destroyed nationwide between 1970 and 1980” (emphasis added) (Alter et al. 1989, 7).
In total, at least 3,000 residents were displaced, refugees from the destruction of approximately 30 cheap hotels (Hermann 2011). They became but a local precursor to the rise in homelessness nationwide. As jobs left and housing was demolished, the state retrenchment of the Reagan Administration reduced the federal housing budget from $32 billion to $6.5 billion by 1989 (Frankel and Coleman 1989), reduced the power of labor and further cut other welfare entitlements (Mitchell 2011, 940; Ruffing 2013; Alter et al. 1989), with upwards of 3 million Americans living on the street at some point in a year by the mid-1980s (Kondratas 1986). As Talton notes above, the homeless population itself increased through gentrification, but it also came to hinder gentrification, dragging down property values as they turned to crime in to survive on the streets, deterring upper-class residents and hurting business. With redevelopment producing homelessness (an anti-gentrification force), and with footloose capital moving from place to place in search of greater return, postindustrial city centers became ever more vigilant against the visibility of the poor and homeless.

These circumstances birthed a new spatial ideology and order, one dedicated to eradicating the sight of production and poverty so as to make consumption and leisure activities unobstructed by the anti-aesthetics of homeless people and the facilities upon which they depend. In terms of social signifiers, homeless people are a deterrent force, a force that, if placed near a storefront, repels would-be customers (Mair 1986; Mair, Moon, and Burnett 1984). This power to repel is founded in the popular image and stigma of the homeless person (Kawash 1998). The homeless person’s body and image, often disheveled and unclean, is understood as the solid symbol of his or her internal uncleanliness, an internal, individual sickness that suggests a surrounding, social sickness (weakness, immorality). “The homeless,” Mair (1986, 351) goes on

26 See Mitchell and Staeheli (2005) for a detailed look at this ironic phenomenon.
to argue, “pose negative externalities to status seekers among post-industrial consumers because they threaten meaning systems.” As meaning systems based upon individual and social vigor are threatened, so are property values and the ability to accumulate capital. For these reasons, Phoenix and other urban centers adopted a more entrepreneurial stance toward governance. Politicians came to understand their cities less as a place for the reproduction of families and labor and more as places of exchange, as accommodating hubs for capital relocation and spectacular entertainment centers (Harvey 1987; Mitchell 2011; Davis 2006).

The entrepreneurial city, the attractions of the tourist mecca, was supported by legislation to expel the homeless population. As the Deuce was continually being gentrified and businesses moved abroad or further outward to the Valley’s suburbs, Phoenix, in an effort to expel homeless people from downtown, passed an ordinance in 1981 that made it a misdemeanor to lie down or sleep on public property (Sexton 1983, 83). That same year the city passed a new zoning law creating a “transient and inebriate zone” that outlawed soup kitchens and homeless relief agencies (including blood banks) from what remained of the Deuce, forcing the closure of the Lighthouse Rescue Mission, the Salvation Army and several other agencies and homeless shelters (Brinegar 2003, 67; Alter et al. 1984, 26). To deter homeless from relocating, a large city park to the south of the Deuce was (and still is) fenced to keep the homeless population from sleeping on grass and under its vast shade trees (Sexton 1983, 83) (see figure 4 below).
Whereas most US cities reacted to the ballooning of homelessness with a variety of relief services and compassion throughout the 1980s, a compassion reaching its apogee with the 1987 passage the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (Mitchell 2011, 941), Phoenix (and Tucson) wasted no time in finding more punitive means to expel the city’s visible homeless population. A 1984 *Newsweek* article, entitled “Arizona and Massachusetts Represent the Extremes,” describes the Grand Canyon State as the least compassionate member of the union in the face of mass homelessness. The opening of the article is worth quoting at length.

**Figure 4**, City of Phoenix Library Park, one block north of the Human Services Campus, maintains its ‘80s spiked fencing along with newer “bum proof” benches all around. Photo by author.
Hiking her designer slacks above her ankles, Sandy Cowen crouched, made a face and
gnarled her hands in imitation of a man she used to see from the window of her
advertising agency in downtown Phoenix, Ariz. This particular gentleman was a bit odd –
a street bum who carried around a bucket of soapy water and washed everything in sight,
from his feet to the sidewalks. But Cowen is the brains behind "Fight Back" -- a
campaign by Phoenix leaders to wipe out the "unacceptable behavior" of the area's 1,500
street people -- she knew how to handle the nuisance. Police were summoned, and the
bum was forced to move on (Alter et al. 1984, 26).27

As if the tone of the article, and the actions described of Cowen, do not make it clear enough, the
authors explicitly note how “The homeless are not welcome in Arizona.” It continues to contrast
the Arizonan restrictions noted above with the “ambitious effort to help the homeless” in
Massachusetts, which funded 13 emergency shelters and spent $196 million for low-income
housing. “It's more than the difference between Barry Goldwater and Ted Kennedy” the article
goes on. “Arizona isn't all conservative, and Massachusetts isn't all liberal. But the two states
represent the extremes of community attitudes toward the homeless” (Alter et al. 1984, 26).

The destruction of the Deuce and the anti-homeless legislation supported by
organizations like “Fight Back” may have significantly pushed the poor and homeless from the
city’s most central areas, but they were not wholly banished from the city. Instead, the recently
expelled turned to the popular, moralist language of bootstrap individualism and reworked it the
only way they could afford. Denied the vilified “handouts” of “big government” and evicted
through gentrification, the homeless citizens of Phoenix constructed makeshift yet permanent

27 In this excerpt the article (Alter et al. 1984) numbers Phoenix homeless, or “street people,” at 1,500. Elsewhere, in
the same article, the number given is 5,000-10,000. Other estimates from the early 1980s suggest 10,000 was the
approximate number of greater Phoenix’s homeless population (see Brinegar 2003, 64).
tent cities – campgrounds – amidst the arroyos and shrubbery of South Phoenix’s Rio Salado (or Salt River). Since before the Deuce through to today, tent cities continually grew, mushroom-like, in the dark interstitial spaces of the city (Mitchell 2012; Ruddick 1996; Wright 1997). The Rio Salado tent city, the best known of them all, composed of the Deuce’s expatriates, was like the “hobo jungles” of migrant laborers at the turn of the century and similar to homeless encampments across the US today. Such tent cities form a crucial social place for the dispossessed, a place for labor reproduction, for leisure and mutual protection, and as a potential launching pad for reintegration into the proper public (Rowe and Wolch 1990). Tent cities can be places detached from the dangers of service ghettos and outside the vision of social services and police oversight, away from infantilizing case management and the concomitant clientele posturing (Gowan 2010; Ruddick 1996).

There is little telling what the Rio Salado encampment promised for its residents. What we do know, however, is its eventual fate, what happened to the encampment over the Thanksgiving holiday in 1982. As campers were likely enjoying second helpings at nearby charities (the Rio Salado trickles through the poorest sections of Phoenix, which host most homeless relief services), the City of Phoenix bulldozed the large encampment, churning the structures’ brick and plywood in with the inhabitants’ possessions – perhaps dusty bedding and some small treasures – and slowly grinding this heap into the sandy riverbed. This further dispossession of the dispossessed arose because the encampment was seen to have negative impacts for adjacent properties, not to mention the potential catastrophe of flashfloods (the official justification for its destruction). The timing (for the city’s public relations at least), though, was less than optimal. The city’s actions, such wanton destruction at the outset of a national homelessness crisis and in the wake of broad gentrification, drew national attention and
became a watershed moment in the history of the city’s relationship with homelessness (Brinegar 2003, 64; Luckingham 1989, 253). Not only did this blemish the city’s image as a sunny paradise, it brought the capital city’s hidden rot into the light; it was a symbol of everything that Thanksgiving was not about. Homeless people were truly unwelcome in Arizona.

**Reacting to the Crisis: Creating a “magnet” for homeless people**

As went the Deuce so went the Rio Salado tent city. Confronted with public relations backlash and condemnation from local charities, the city changed tactics; it went from bulldozing to building. Or, to put it more accurately, the city added building to bulldozing. With the support of a galvanized public who largely recognized the demolishing as but a reiteration of the Deuce’s destruction, in 1983 Phoenix constructed its first large-scale homeless shelter.28 Within a year, however, it was closed due to poor funding. City officials and charitable organizations, though, were determined. In 1984, with the combination of public and private funding, officials were ready to break ground on another shelter, this one to be owned and operated by a nonprofit, Central Arizona Shelter Services (CASS) (Luckingham 1989, 253).

Since its outset Maricopa County faced the question of where to place CASS and the people that depended upon it. Unlike the Skid Rows of some US cities, areas that remained a space of homelessness and poverty relief services, the Deuce was thoroughly gentrified or simply leveled. There remained, however, a landscape with a long history of marginalization, a place in which the city’s poor and homeless could be most easily sequestered to keep them away from downtown Phoenix. In contrast to the area of what was the Deuce (now, by most standards, the prime areas of downtown Phoenix), Andrew Ross (2011, 120–3) explains how “South Phoenix

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28 The construction the emergency shelter in Phoenix coincided with others across the nation, with a funding boom through the establishment of the Federal Emergency Management Agency in 1983.
was relatively untouched [by redevelopment], because Anglos had shunned it from the beginning, and, to this day, most regard it as a no-go area.” South Phoenix, Ross continues, hosts the lowest-lying tracts of land in the Valley. It is a space historically at risk of flash floods (it is also the hottest). From its outset, and for these environmental reasons, the land has always been among the cheapest in the city. These environmental factors, though, always worked in tandem with Phoenix’s social geography, one that continuously devalued the land through housing segregation (redlining, steering, restrictive covenants, etc.) and municipal disinvestment. The banks of Rio Salado that scraped through South Phoenix came to contain dirty manufacturing, segregated minority neighborhoods and anything else not conducive for an entrepreneurial, postindustrial municipality banking on a vacation image. Indeed, South Phoenix is an ideal example of environmental racism (and classism) in that the landscape, which is overwhelmingly populated by poor Latinos, African Americans, and Native Americans, includes the nation’s most polluted zip code (Ross 2011, 5, 120–3). South Phoenix has and continues to be the destination for the unwanted or redundant, a human and material dumping ground for the leftovers of production, a near permanent reminder of the Valley’s racist history (and present) (Luckingham 1989, 11, 255; Ross 2011, chap. 4; Shermer 2013).
Figure 5, Metropolitan Phoenix, AZ. Source: Brinegar (2000, 503).

It comes of little surprise, then, that city officials chose South Phoenix to host the city’s next large homeless shelter. In addition to cheap land, sociologists and geographers account for the emplacement of homelessness and welfare services in depressed sections of cities by looking at the phenomenon of NIMBYism (not in my back yard-ism) in relation to social stigma and its economic impact. The invaluable work of Sarah Brinegar, one of the few geographers of metropolitan Phoenix, specifically investigates how NIMBY and social stigma influenced the placement of CASS in 1984. In addition to being valid for her Phoenix case study, Brinegar (2003, 61) finds that downtown redevelopment typically leads to the uprooting of poverty relief services and their forced migration to “the least desirable areas of the central city.” The more affluent neighborhoods, in addition to a vocal central business district, perceived the rising
homeless population as a threat to property values, an economic threat inextricable from threats to social meaning systems (see Takahashi 1996; Mair 1986; Kawash 1998). Maintaining greater political clout than the impoverished (and partly vacant) neighborhoods of South Phoenix (Luckingham 1989, 255), wealthier constituencies successfully pushed services into what was already the poorest and more crime-ridden segment of greater Phoenix.

Although CASS, with approximately 1,000 beds, was able to shelter only about a tenth of the Valley’s homeless, it was a big deal – too big, in fact, for local residents and businesses. For South Phoenix residents, CASS was a serious step down from the location’s previous, and also unwanted, tenant: the county morgue (Brinegar 2003; Hermann 2011). Set amidst a country jail, dog pound, recycling center, and rendering plant (NLCHP 2001, 95), the shelter was understood as just another spatial injustice forced upon South Phoenix. “Since its founding,” Brinegar (2003, 66) explains, “neighborhood residents and business owners opposed the shelter, citing problems with declining property values, overcrowding, and homeless deviancies.” In the late 1980s, organized opposition forced CASS to cut its services in half, sheltering only 400 to 500 individuals and agreeing to more stringent zoning ordinances that “prohibits charity facilities from disturbing surrounding areas” (ibid.). These restrictions were later compensated by the construction of a permanent “overflow shelter” in 1993 which later came to have an overflow “shelter” of its own: an old parking lot enclosed with barbed wire fencing and two portable toilets near the gate (locked each night) at the northwest corner of the intersection across from CASS proper. Although the gated concrete slab – regularly filled with 300 men and women each night – may cast this fact in doubt, throughout the 1990s, with homelessness nationwide
estimated at two-million in 1996 (Kusmer 2003, 239; Berry 2009). Phoenix and Maricopa County municipalities increased funding for homelessness services (even as low-income housing funding declined in Phoenix and across the country). Pressured by residential and business interests alike, 73 shelters had been established by 1998, bringing the number of available shelter beds in greater Phoenix up to around 1,500 (Brinegar 2003).

Like CASS’s placement, these shelters often found themselves within South Phoenix and the poorer segments of north-central Phoenix, as neighboring municipalities have and continue to successfully block shelters from locating within their borders, fearful that any services would attract homeless individuals from South Phoenix (and tacitly denying that their own cities contained, and produced, homelessness). Instead, the denser and more central suburbs of Scottsdale, Tempe, and Gilbert contribute funding to pay their “fair share” as they continue to refer/transport their homeless populations to South Phoenix and Mesa for services. Mesa, a large southeastern suburb, is currently the only suburban municipality with significant homeless shelters, as figure 6 illustrates (Brinegar 2003, 67–8).

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29 Two million refers to the number of individuals experiencing homelessness at some point in 1996. The average number of homeless individuals across the US on a single night was, according to counts, around 470,000. In 1984 the average number of homeless persons on a single night was 250,000. These numbers illustrate how the return to mass homelessness in the 1980s was (is) anything but a single-decade phenomenon (Kusmer 2003, 239).

30 Homelessness services increased even as funding for public housing halted (losing 150,000 units over the next 14 years, especially with the rise of HOPEVI in 1999) and HUD’s budget for low/moderate-income housing still lagged at a mere $19.2 billion, not even $2 billion more than its Reagan-era (1983) low of $17.6 billion. The $19.2 billion of 1996 marks a 75 percent decrease in low/moderate-income housing assistance since 1978. (WRAP 2010, 4).

31 Tempe has a small, mostly privately funded and operated shelter system that rotates among 30 local churches seven days a week, giving respite to about 30 to 40 homeless individuals who are chosen through a tense afternoon lottery in the parking lot of Tempe’s Salvation Army (Hermann 2008; Náñez 2009c) that sits between the Tempe First United Methodist Church and, just a couple more blocks west, the southernmost point of Mill Avenue.

32 Some domestic violence and family shelters are the exception here (Brinegar 2003, 67), with such small shelters also found in Peoria, AZ (HUD 2012).
The creation of the Human Services Campus in 2005 solidified South Phoenix as the place for the extremely poor and the (conservatively) estimated 8,000 to 10,000 homeless individuals in the Valley. Lack of homelessness services elsewhere promised that the Campus was a relatively unique place to find some modicum of relief. Even with such dauntingly stagnant homelessness statistics, it was hard to temper optimism about the new project. “It’s been ‘move-in’ week for the service providers who are making the new Human Services Campus in
downtown Phoenix one of the nation’s most-talked about centers for aiding the homeless,” an Arizona Republic column announced (Hermann 2005). The article goes on to explain how Randolph Townsend, one of the Bush Administration’s mental health and homelessness advisors, opined that the Campus “could be a national model.” The executive director of CASS, Mark Hollernan, further stressed the project’s ingenuity: “We’ve learned you need to offer a sort of ‘one-stop’ shopping approach. You provide a comfortable place to get off the streets, provide food, medical care, substance abuse treatment and mental-health counseling, housing advisers…everything and everybody in one place” (emphasis added) (ibid.). Since 2005, this superstore of services continually attracts 1,300 individuals each day (Arizona Republic 2010), with CASS currently sheltering 740 each night (up from 407 in 2005) (HUD 2012). The “resource is more than a haven [for homeless people],” the Republic column concludes, “it’s a magnet” (Hermann 2005).33

33 Later reports (Lee 2013) explicitly state what Hollerman’s earlier explanations only imply: that the Human Services Campus is primarily – rather than subsequently – a sacrificial geography manufactured to protect adjacent properties and “people,” including the nearby Capitol Mall (where such a juxtaposition of triumphant architecture and endured greeneries with rusty, ragged poverty is especially suggestive and embarrassing). “Our first outcome,” Hollerman explains, “is to get everybody [homeless people] there [to the night shelter] to tomorrow, nothing else, because if we know they’re there, that means they’re not somewhere else potentially causing problems to themselves, the people around them or properties” (quoted in Lee 2013).
Figure 7, Past the gates and into the Human Services Campus. Photo by author.

The limits of magnetism: the Push of the Valley’s anti-homeless laws

The magnetism of the Human Services Campus and, before that, central Phoenix’s shelters, has always had some limits, limitations built into the very reason for their existence, namely the containment and policing of the homeless and “dangerous” classes of the Valley. When the pull

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Some limitations to the magnet boil down to simple numbers. From personal experience, and as Holstege’s (2010) article supports, the Human Services Campus is not an underutilized place. As noted, throughout the day it serves around 1,300 people, but it was built for about only 420 (Lee 2012b). In other words, it is crowded, a DMV from hell. People can endure several bizarre hours in a chaotic and smelly waiting room before they receive services. As noted, CASS had 740 shelter beds in 2012, while on an average night in the same year, according to the often-contested and routinely conservative and incomplete annual “point-in-time” counts (Lee 2011; Newsom 2011), greater Phoenix had 6,485 homeless individuals. Although much of this slack can be taken up by other shelters (HUD counts the Valley as having 13,688 beds, but this number includes all HUD subsidies, including Section 8, senior living, etc., etc.), around 1,700 homeless individuals, mostly single-adult men, find themselves unable to
or magnetism of the Campus is insufficient, other social technologies have come to function – at various levels – to aid in its relative attractiveness. In this section, I explore the role of anti-homeless laws in the Valley, laws that come to push homeless populations toward the Campus (and other degraded spaces) as lifeline services pull them to South Phoenix. Anti-homeless laws, known otherwise as the “criminalization of homelessness,” are not novel phenomena. Indeed, Harry Simon (1991) traces the history of anti-vagrancy laws through the 1300s up to the present day, noting how they varied across space and time but continually functioned to control unsavory populations (Foucault 1994) and, with the onset of capitalism, regulate labor at the behest of the state and capital (Polanyi 2001; Marx 1967). Courts across the country struck down vagrancy and loitering laws following World War Two (due to their vague wording/uneven application) but “These decisions,” Simon (1991, 2) argues, “changed the form, but not the substance, of official efforts to control homeless people.”

Contemporary criminalization is a growing trend, especially in the United States but across the world over (von Mahs 2011; Mitchell 1997), as mass homelessness has become a permanent fixture of modern Western cities (May, Cloke, and Johnsen 2005; von Mahs 2011b; Zeneidi 2011; Aoki 2003; Johnsen and Fitzpatrick 2010; Song 2011; Thörn 2011). It takes several forms. Criminalization can outlaw basic life-sustaining activities, such as sleeping, sitting or lying down, or storing personal belongings, along with urinating/defecating, showering, so long as they are done in public (often with no public facilities available). Anti-homeless laws also punish begging and panhandling, or standing (“loafing,” “lingering,” etc.) in particular areas. Criminalization also includes the selective enforcement of loitering and vagrancy laws as well as bans against “homeless feeds” (charity-provided meal servings)(NLCHP 2011). To give receive a regular shelter space, instead opting for urban camping or claiming a rectangle of concrete in the overflow shelter.
some sense of the extent of criminalization, and how greater Phoenix stacks-up, let me quote at length from the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty’s latest (2011, 7–8) report on anti-homeless laws:

Of the 234 cities surveyed…40 percent prohibit “camping” in particular public places, while 16 percent prohibit “camping” citywide; 33 percent prohibit sitting/lying in particular public places; 56 percent prohibit loitering in particular public places, while 22 percent prohibit loitering citywide; and 53 percent prohibit begging in particular public places, while 53 percent prohibit “aggressive” panhandling and 24 percent prohibit begging citywide.

By looking to NLCHP’s previous report in 2009, there evidently has been a sizeable (7-10 percent) growth of laws across the country to regulate the use of public space to penalize begging, sleeping, and loitering (NLCHP 2011, 8). As we will see below, Phoenix and its southeastern suburb, Tempe, are national leaders in this wave of criminalization, with both enacting all of the above anti-homeless laws surveyed by the NLCHP (city-wide in all cases, state-wide when it comes to vagrancy).

The process of criminalization, adding a push to the Campus’s pull, is a regional one. The magnet’s situation in South Phoenix, and the city’s relationship to homelessness, can only be understood in relation to the historical geographies of Phoenix’s surrounding municipalities. Although the litany of anti-homeless laws cannot be examined for all of Maricopa County’s fourteen other major cities, some of its largest municipalities, including Scottsdale, Mesa,35 and, most recently (2003) Glendale, have enacted anti-“urban camping” ordinances, which do not

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35 Mesa itself is an impressively large city (the 38th largest in the nation), with a greater population than Pittsburgh (PA), Miami (FL), and Atlanta (GA), among many others.
illegalize sleep but instead outlaw the accouterments one needs to sleep: some form of shelter or even just a sleeping bag. Other sizeable (and more central) municipalities of greater Phoenix, including Chandler, Avondale, El Mirage, Peoria, and Tolleson, do not have any urban camping ordinances or restrictions against panhandling or sleeping in public space. Tolleson, however, does have a loitering restriction in its city code, and Peoria has an inspiring set of regulations on shopping carts. Vagrancy and loitering restrictions, which specifically outlaw “going to a place to beg,” meanwhile, remain statewide laws.36

The City of Tempe, a relatively concentrated city hedged in by small mountains and neighboring jurisdictions, and revolving around the Arizona State University campus, finds itself as the lone municipality to follow Phoenix headfirst toward criminalization. Unlike downtown Phoenix, though, Tempe’s concentrated urban form and “university town” layout meant that its downtown did not experience a rapid decline. Nevertheless, Tempe echoes Phoenix in its gentrification schemes,37 publically funded redevelopment plans that stroll hand-in-hand with anti-homeless laws (see Hackworth 2007 esp. ch.8; Ross 2011, 84).38 Eighteen years after Phoenix – a city truly ahead of its time – made national headlines for outlawing the act of lying down or sleeping on all public property, in 1999 the Tempe City Council passed a “sit-lie

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36 Arizona’s statewide ban on vagrancy and loitering is currently being used by the northern city of Flagstaff to “justify ‘Operation 40,’ a clampdown on loitering and panhandling in the downtown tourist district that began in 2008 and continues today,” Tim Hull (2013) reports. Several homeless individuals and the group Food Not Bombs are plaintiffs in the suit recently brought to federal court arguing that “Hundreds have been arrested for using their constitutionally protected right to ask persons for money in a non-aggressive manner, whether orally or by holding a sign. Defendants’ policy and arrest practices are well known, and have predictably chilled plaintiffs and others from exercising their constitutionally protected rights of speech.” In conversations with homeless individuals in the Valley, it seems that police invoke this state law to deter people from “flying a sign” near freeway exits and busy intersections. In other words, even when an individual is not panhandling “aggressively” (and even if silently begging through signage) they are still approached and often moved along by the police no matter their location in the city.

37 Redevelopment of downtown Tempe in the 1990s was rapid and capital-intensive. Independent shop owners were squeezed out for chain retailers, luxury skyscraper condos replaced old buildings, and, in 1998-9, the city constructed a $200 million lake – “Tempe Town Lake” (with a beach park) – by damming the Rio Salado dripping just blocks north of Mill Avenue.

ordinance” that bans the act of sitting or lying down on the central business district’s main thoroughfare and college bar/restaurant scene, Mill Avenue. Unlike the previous anti-homeless laws passed in Tempe, the urban camping and “aggressive panhandling” ordinances of 1996-7, the sit-lie ordinance confronted public protest, civil disobedience, and legal challenge, a confrontation that, once again, attracted headlines to Arizona’s punitive stance on homelessness.39 Tempe coupled these civil laws with changes in architecture. The sit-lie ordinance, for instance, arose in the wake of vast bench-removal and the spiking of planters in the central business district. Security cameras were also installed. Later, the city began leasing several blocks of sidewalk running along the busiest portions of downtown to Tempe’s commercial business district, space that was thereafter policed by a private security team (Amster 2008).

From my year working in a homeless drop-in center just blocks south of Mill Ave., it seems the sit-lie ordinance is sparingly enforced. Actual citations, which can only be given after a verbal warning, are even less likely. Nevertheless, Tempe and the area around the university now contains very few homeless individuals, although a couple requests for change are commonplace when walking on streets adjacent to the central business district. Judging from the vitriolic newspaper articles and statements by local politicians that complain – seemingly from pent-up annoyance – of the high number of homeless individuals (especially youth), however, Mill Ave. likely contained a greater presence of homeless individuals throughout the 1990s than it does today (Brinegar 2000; Amster 2008). Indeed, through working with the City of Tempe’s homeless outreach program – often referring and transporting (dragging) homeless individuals to

39 The next two biggest urban areas in Arizona, Tucson and Flagstaff, routinely outdo Phoenix and Tempe when it comes to anti-homeless legislation and rhetoric (see Alter et al. 1984). Whereas Phoenix ranks seventeenth on the “Top 20 Meanest Cities” list in the Coalition for the Homelessness’s report on criminalization, Flagstaff finds itself at number ten for its impressively strict and punitive anti-camping laws (NCH 2006b). Tempe, though not on the list, deserves greater recognition from the Coalition for the Homeless for its pioneering anti-homeless stance.
the Campus – it was evident that these anti-homeless laws, and the anti-homeless architecture, pushed out much of the homeless population to nearby city parks or to hidden encampments by the Rio Salado. These places, rather than the central business district, became the dominant geography of Tempe’s dispossessed. The drop-in center and the Salvation Army just to the southwest of Mill Ave. only operated periodically, offering some referrals, meals and showers a few days each week. Otherwise, Tempe’s homeless individuals remained largely hidden from public view in encampments or the unoccupied public parks (especially unoccupied in summer months and while children are in school). While the Campus was not able to completely attract Tempe’s homeless people, criminalization did the next best thing: sterilizing the gentrified central business district.

Although Phoenix had yet to privatize sidewalks, the big city still contains its own and impressive arsenal to keep homeless populations (or anyone who looks homeless) from gentrified spaces of a still-struggling downtown core. Indeed, downtown Phoenix is diffuse, sprinkled with dirt lots, a ghostly place redolent of the desert it was built upon. Although there may have been a significant population during the days of “Fight Back,” today one encounters very few “homeless-looking” individuals in downtown Phoenix, and homeless individuals encounter few shoppers from whom they can solicit spare change. There are, today, very few resource-driven reasons for homeless people to venture into downtown Phoenix. It seems that a combination of the Campus’s pull, the general urban form and state of downtown (itself a product of anti-homeless zoning), and criminalization work together to render downtown Phoenix a no-go zone for the city’s homeless population (or most residents, for that matter).

40 According to a 2000 study by the Brookings Institute, 43 percent of Phoenix is made of vacant lots. Much of this is in downtown Phoenix, an image which continually troubles developers and city officials alike (E. Scott 2012). To put this startling statistic in context, 40 percent of Phoenix land was vacant in 1980 (Luckingham 1989, 193).
Figure 8, A man eats a snack by a “no camping section” sign, one of several that line the fenced cemetery flanking the Human Services Campus. Photo by author.

Most of Phoenix’s anti-homeless laws emerged in tandem with the more compassionate means of the Human Services Campus and likeminded outreach efforts. In addition to the 1981 anti-sleeping and anti-lying-down ordinance, Phoenix boasts its own laws for urban camping, sitting/lying-down, public urination and indecent exposure, and aggressive panhandling, a line-up that prompted protest from local homeless organizations and Arizona’s American Civil Liberties Union to publish “Know Your Rights” fliers for Phoenix’s homeless population in 2010 (see AZACLU 2010). These protests coincided with previously filed legal challenges to Phoenix’s expansive definition of “aggressive panhandling,” which includes continuous solicitation within 10 feet of the person after they have asked you to stop, soliciting within 15
feet of an ATM, or within 10 feet of a bus or rail stop (among other stipulations). Until 2011, when an Arizona Appeals Court ruled it unconstitutional, panhandling was considered aggressive in Phoenix if done “after dark” (Hudson 2011).

**Figure 9**, Activists protest Phoenix’s anti-homeless laws during the city’s monthly art walk (2010). Photo by author.

**A drag for homeless people: The evolving limits of push and pull**

“Closing down and relocating soup kitchens in city after city – or the creation of service dependent ghettos in marginal parts of the city,” Mitchell (1997, 314) contends, “proved at best a temporary ‘solution’ as more and more homeless people came to colonize the streets of downtown business and commercial districts.” In Phoenix, we saw how isolating services in places like South Phoenix did too little to remove homeless populations from city streets. Other means have always been necessary to shore-up sociospatial management. It seems this has always been the case, as the compassionate response in the face of massive of the 1980s emerged
along with gentrification, restrictive zoning, and anti-homeless laws supported by groups like “Fight Back.” The Valley, like many other municipalities, fine-tuned punitive policies from the 1980s and into the 2000s, but this tweaking has always been accompanied by a compassionate response. In 2005, for instance, the Phoenix City Council passed the current anti-camping ordinance, coinciding with the opening of the Campus, a potential “national model” of compassionate response. In Tempe, meanwhile, the sit-lie law coincided – likely as legitimation – with the city hiring of a Homeless Coordinator and two homeless outreach social workers (Amster 2008, 19) that provide referrals, transportation, and basic needs assistance to the area’s significant homeless population. The Valley’s other cities with urban camping ordinances, meanwhile, are typically those that contain some amount homelessness services (especially Mesa).

There are a couple things going on here. Obviously, metro Phoenix reacted to large-scale homelessness in primarily two ways: (1) through therapeutic services/shelter, based on the medical understanding of homelessness, and (2) through anti-homeless laws, which combines a criminal understanding and a “for their own good,” “tough love” type of authoritarian paternalism (see Teir 1998). Each of them works together to push and pull homeless populations toward so-called “spaces of care.” So, why must criminalization continually push to compensate for the Campus’ insufficient pull (and vice-versa)?

It seems there are two reasons for the rise of this melding of penalty and compassion. First, homeless individuals maintain agency, no matter how oppressive the structure. As the case of tent cities above makes clear, homeless individuals are not mere pawns on the chessboard of the state and capital; they are, and must remain, mobile, often resisting the push and pull of grand masters. The mobility of homeless individuals, Wolch and colleagues (1993, 159) find, is “linked
to [the] degree of coping success.” Although the language of coping often connotes individual skills and emotional prowess, their article argues that coping is more related to what Hopper et al. (1985) term “economies of makeshift,” the irregular yet strategic survival techniques employed by homeless populations to survive. Key among these tactics is maintaining connections with housed friends and relatives, connections that often necessitate homeless individuals venturing out from spaces of care and traversing gentrified zones from which they have been all but banished (Rowe and Wolch 1990; Wolch, Rahimian, and Koegel 1993). Not only is the push of anti-homeless laws and pull of spaces of care subverted for friends or family connections, but also to access welfare benefits and human services, housing, shopping, or hustling in the illicit economy and avoiding contact with police – anything that will increase chances for safety and survival and cannot be accessed in such minute spaces of care.

So far I have been using the term “spaces of care” in describing places like the Human Services Campus to engage with the emerging literature focused on this concept. Yet this term is, as I noted above, seriously limited, if not misleading. Not only can it be misleading for the porous division between “care” and control (DeVerteuil, May, and von Mahs 2009, 652; see Piven and Cloward 1993), but also because the term too neatly separates care from fear (Johnsen, Cloke, and May 2005b) and penalty. For this section, it is more appropriate to employ what might be taken as an earlier signifier of spaces of care, Dear and Wolch’s (1987) notion of the “service dependent ghetto.” This term is much more appropriate to the Valley because it not only captures the services of the Human Services Campus but also the type of geography places like the Campus are found within: systematically marginalized places, ghettos.

By appreciating the geographical context of this space of care we are able to understand the second reason why the pull needs a push (and even a drag). Like the anti-homeless laws
blanketing the Valley of the Sun, the service dependent ghetto that is the Human Services Campus exudes its own powerful push. People tend to dislike ghettos – quite a lot, really. Although homeless people are repeatedly drawn toward the Campus for food, shelter, and services (including housing first, as will be discussed below) for their very survival, or maybe just to stay out of jail, these so-called spaces of care are just as likely spaces of fear and degradation, what we associate more with “bad” neighborhoods, not benevolent charities. Rather than a recent phenomenon, these associations have existed for decades in Phoenix. In 1987, for example, just a few year after CASS’s founding, Jay Mathews, columnist for The Washington Post, described the push of the shelter. “One night this winter Phoenix dipped to thirty degrees. Yet 300 people insisted on staying in the park” instead of the shelter, a place many deemed “too closed and confining” and with too large a surrounding police presence (1987, A3). Compare this with an article, “Crowded Maricopa Shelter Last Refuge for Homeless,” written over 20 years later by Arizona Republic columnist Sean Holstege:

A Route 1 bus pulls up at 12th Avenue and Jefferson Street and quickly drops off about 20 passengers. Most carry backpacks. Many have weathered skin. Some look utterly bewildered. They start the one-block walk to the gates of Maricopa County’s 12.5-acre Human Services Campus...The scene inside the fenced-off compound is dizzying, intimidating and scary. There, hundreds mill around, socializing or killing time while armed guards keep vigil (Holstege 2010, A3).

Side-by-side, these two scenes illustrate with poignancy the enduring sacrifice of South Phoenix for the city’s long-awaited pilgrimage to the tourist mecca. These scenes also suggest the limitations of service dependent ghettos to pull in and contain homeless people.
Figure 10, In “the Zone” and just outside the gates of the Human Services Campus as people line-up to get into the overflow shelter (2012). Photo by author.

The Human Services “magnet,” then, has a negative pole, one long-since established through the Valley’s social geography. This legacy is so deep that the unattractiveness of this South Phoenix neighborhood was codified through renaming. The Human Services Campus, CASS and the surrounding geography, have, in street lexicon, become known as “The Twilight Zone” (“the Zone” for short) in reference to its high crime rate, rampant drug use, and prostitution. Indeed, through my year as a case manager and outreach worker in Tempe, it was evident that the Zone obtained a somewhat mythical status; it was “the wrong side of the tracks” epitomized, a place of danger and heterotopic decay only to be ventured toward in cases of extreme duress. “A single man trying to get into shelter,” Theresa James, Homeless Coordinator for the City of Tempe explains, “has two choices: CASS and the men’s shelter in Mesa, which only permits the employed.” “Frankly,” she continues, “I wouldn’t want to go down to CASS
either,” and that is why Tempe contains such a significant homeless population (Interview James 2012). Sam, formerly homeless in Tempe, likewise explains the dangers of CASS. “I don’t go down around the tracks by [just south of] CASS or stuff because you’ll get killed, that’s just the way it is” (Interview, Sam 2012). These observations reveal how the Campus is, for many, a place of last resort. It also attests to why Tempe, a city with no real shelter and only a handful of services, contains more than its fair share of homeless individuals – estimated at around 500 (Hermann 2008) – even with substantial criminalization.41

Crackdowns on homeless people and their means of survival remained both significantly ineffective and, in the eyes of business improvement districts and policymakers, perpetually necessary. Even after the Valley became a leader in the compassionate management of homelessness with the Campus, it continually swept homeless people from parks (Poletta 2011), evicted and bulldozed riverbed encampments (Coe 2011), installed anti-homeless architecture (Walsh 2012), and stepped-up anti-panhandling campaigns (Smokey 2008). Tempe, for instance, undertook a four day “sting operation” on Mill Avenue, complete with undercover police officers, to crackdown on aggressive panhandling (Náñez 2009a).42 Although each of these cases deployed older laws, in each instance the journalist attached a compassionate framing to these punitive tactics. Upon arrest or eviction, the articles explain how homeless individuals were

41 As a southeastern suburb of Phoenix, Tempe and South Phoenix are much closer than typically appreciated (9.4 miles between the Human Services Campus and Mill Avenue, a three-hour walk) and well connected through buses and the light rail. This connectivity has not been lost on city officials (Gersema 2011a).
42 The operation, part of Tempe’s “Downtown Enforcement Campaign,” netted 30 arrests, “four for panhandling, 16 for public liquor-law violations, one for the sale of narcotics, a felony-burglary warrant and five for various city-code violations,” Arizona Republic columnist Dianna Náñez (2009b) reports. “It’s so much better,” exclaimed Nancy Hormann, president of Downtown Tempe Inc., Mill Ave.’s business lobby. “We weren’t targeting the homeless,” she continues, “We just wanted to stop people who were breaking the law” (quoted in Náñez 2009b).
compassionately counseled by regretful police officers about the resources offered by the Human Services Campus.\footnote{During Tempe’s crackdown, local police distributed cards containing both information about services (in Tempe and the Human Services Campus) and the specifics of the anti-panhandling law (Náñez 2009b). Criminalization and compassion were all on a single pocket-able card!}

There is, then, a blurring between the pull of services and the push of anti-homeless laws. A good example of this technique is captured by recent police actions in the Sunnyslope neighborhood of north-central Phoenix. A poorer area with a disproportionate number of homeless individuals (and far from the Zone), Phoenix police have continually targeted “homeless hangouts” through monthly sweeps as residents and businesses repeatedly report “transients drifting into commercial areas after stopping at nearby homeless shelters and soup kitchens” (emphasis added) (Ferraresi 2009b). Homeless populations in Sunnyslope are, as this example illustrates, posed as unintelligible objects aimlessly moving about the community, sleepwalking in a state of delirium. Somehow, through misdirection, they “drift” into foreign spaces. They are, so Ferraresi’s article implies, somehow lost in space. But their infraction is as much pitiful as it is deviant, and the actions of the police reflect this framing.\footnote{A similar story repeats itself in the western suburb of Avondale (see Madrid 2011).} “The first thing officers do on sweeps,” Ferraresi (2009a) explains, “is to provide transients with information on homeless shelters and human services,” while the second thing they do, the article states, “is push for maximum 180-day jail sentences for transients in violation of travel restrictions [trespassing stipulations].” One could argue that these officers first provided service referrals to skirt claims of cruelty, but it is also quite likely that the Phoenix Police Department comprehends the limitations of arrest campaigns to spatially manage homeless populations. Their job, nowadays, is that of a dual awakening. The police awaken homeless individuals by correcting their spatial errors, for not appreciating their consigned geography, their non-right to the city.
Police also guide homeless people toward therapeutic services; services which may further awaken homeless individuals to their hidden and internal unreason and disease.

The intertwined processes of push and pull are even more apparent around the Zone.

“They act like cops but think like social workers,” a column in The Arizona Republic begins.

“About seven years ago [2005],” columnist Michelle Lee (2012a) explains, “the Phoenix Police Department walking-beat squad that patrols the Human Services Campus in downtown Phoenix came up with a new strategy to deal with homeless people on their beat: help them connect with social services rather than arresting them for every minor misdemeanor.” “There was a philosophical change,” Lieutenant Sean Connolly of the Phoenix Police Department recalls. “All we would do is arrest our way to solutions. There was no sustainability in the process” (quoted in Lee 2012a). The “solutions” of Phoenix’s anti-homeless laws, in other words, significantly failed to erase homelessness while costing the city fortunes in booking and jailing (NLCHP 2011).

Disillusioned, in 2005 officers patrolling the South Mountain District, which contains the Zone, were given special training in crisis intervention and social work interviewing techniques to better manage the “chronically homeless” and mentally ill. Under this new strategy, immediate arrest is no longer the sole action used to clear homeless people from the street and into the Human Services Campus. Instead, officers “use the threat of arrest as leverage to keep them on track with their services, making arrests only if they have exhausted all other options,” a strategy that reduces punitive costs and helps push the otherwise-intractable homeless population into the Campus for shelter and rehabilitative services. But the mere threat of arrest does not always work to move homeless people along or toward services. Although these police officers have special training to bring out their inner social worker, Lieutenant Connolly stresses that arrests can be,
and often are, made on their homeless beat. “They make it clear,” Lee (2012) concludes, “‘Don’t take my kindness for weakness.’”

Even when these officers’ “kindness” is not mistaken for weakness, the Human Services Campus, along with police officers and businesses in the adjacent central business district, still finds it difficult to contain homeless people in the Campus and the depressed neighborhood that hosts this institutional enclave. In 2006, in an effort to rectify this apparent shortcoming, CASS developed a program whereby “a team of Phoenix police and CASS specialists began crisscrossing downtown Phoenix four nights a week to engage homeless people who have severed connections with service providers” (Collom, 2009). Night “outreach” is accompanied by daybreak patrols by similar teams, waking homeless individuals they find and then attempting to “persuade them to sign up for the services they need” (Lee, 2012). Compared to the push of anti-homeless laws and the pull of service provision, these police-social worker/social worker-police strategies are a drag for homeless people (in more ways than one). Rather than depending upon the pure and passive “magnetism” of the campus or the sharp push of anti-homeless laws, “drag” entails an interventionist act to bring-in homeless populations (through threatening arrest, offering referrals in addition to arrest, or doing street outreach and transporting individuals to the Campus). Even with such punitive and compassionate tenacity, the outreach team reports that 35 percent of those confronted are persuaded and enter into some sort of “treatment,” while only twenty-three percent “finish treatment” (Collom, 2009), which could mean anything from completing full drug rehab to continually meeting with a case manager. The pull of treatment/shelter and the push anti-homeless laws remains considerably ineffective, even when they are patently indistinguishable, becoming to act more as a drag than a clear push or pull.
Housing first: A cheaper, stronger magnet

Housing first, as I argue throughout this thesis, is often taken from a limiting context, from one particular point of view (usually a view from a drop-in center or shelter). In the context of the sociospatial management of homelessness in the Valley of the Sun, housing first needs to be understood as the latest reaction to push, pull, and drag, all of which clearly have serious limits. Among other historical developments, housing first emerged as a geographical answer to these failed management techniques, especially in regards to the “chronically homeless” and other recalcitrant homeless populations. Oftentimes, the chronically homeless must occupy spaces outside the shelter (as shelters have strict time limitations) including tent cities and other makeshift shelters. As testament to their very chronic-ness, their unwillingness to follow the paths through the Zone, these particularly hardcore homeless are only finally swayed by the promise of legitimate housing, a program that, like their tented communities, offers security and independence without having to trudge through those dangerous and uncertain paths of the Human Services Campus.

There is, evidently, a particular confluence between housing first as an anti-homelessness strategy and a tent city as a tactic of the homeless. They both often shelter similar fractions of the homeless population – the Campus’ discontents, the stubborn holdouts against push and pull. This tendency was particularly evident in the case of Tempe’s housing first program. The majority of the eventual participants had chosen to survive on the streets rather than migrate to South Phoenix for services. Congruently, housing first provides homeless people with a level of protection and independence distinct from shelter life and, at the other extreme, constant, rogue mobility. As described in chapter 3, the Human Services Campus remains the primary gate through which homeless individuals must travel to receive a housing first voucher. This often
includes establishing relationships with caseworkers long enough to receive an evaluation to
determine housing first eligibility and undergo background checks. Housing first, in this manner,
adds to the strength of the human services magnet, grasping the previously unreachable. By
adding to the pull of the Campus, housing first also functions as an indirect force to sterilize city
streets, easing the need for the push of anti-homeless laws and the drag of the social
worker/police beat.

Conclusion

The tourist mecca still eludes downtown Phoenix. Although the Deuce is long since destroyed,
the city remains a doughnut, defined more by the unique characteristics of its suburbs than any
recognizable downtown core. Yet the lost search for mecca is not for want of trying. Although
not as accomplished at gentrification and redevelopment as many large cities, when it comes to
spatially managing homeless and impoverished populations, the Valley is up there with the best.
Throughout the postwar era and into the 1970s, Phoenix endured an unprecedented
suburbanization and active disinvestment from the urban core. In a desperate attempt to forestall
this disinvestment and attract the right kind of residents back into downtown, in the 1980s
Phoenix demolished its Skid Row, the Deuce, and replaced it with publically subsidized mega-
projects of business and culture, establishing an enormous convention center, symphony hall,
and other developments meant to spur reinvestment. Destruction of the Deuce, and the cheap
lodging contained within, coincided with continued decamping of capital to cheaper suburbs or
abroad. The dire situation for the working class and contingent laborers only worsened with the
In the Valley and across the United States, the result was a massive rise in homelessness. Rather than primarily experiencing a surge of compassion throughout the 1980s, as some general histories of American homelessness suggest (see Mitchell 2011; Gowan 2010), from the beginning the Valley combined punitive forms of management – anti-homeless laws – to constrict the geographies of homeless people. Constriction entails compassionate forms of management – shelters and “spaces of care” – to redirect homeless people to sequester them in polluted spaces of historical disinvestment, crime, and racist marginalization far from gentrified places of upper-class work and leisure.

Push, pull, and drag did not come from some grand conspirator of sociospatial management. Rather, they arose gradually and continually assist where the others fail. Anti-homeless laws continually do too little to remove homeless people from public space because they overlook the presence of resources (personal or material) scattered throughout the city, resources that compel homeless individuals (as anyone else) to crisscross urban space. Criminalization also fails to fully annihilate homeless geographies because homeless-related spaces of care, although surely magnetic, are often placed within the “least desirable areas of the central city” (Brinegar 2003, 61). Shelters and “campuses” are surrounded by geographies of fear and despair. Inside the gates, meanwhile, they are places of therapeutic intervention but also infantilizing treatment and paternalistic control (Gowan 2010; Ruddick 1996). These forces push homeless populations away from service dependent ghettos even as criminalization works to shove them back in.

But change is constant. In the Valley, criminalization and compassion have evolved to a point where they are in fact indistinguishable, where “cops think like social workers” and social workers walk the beat. Using the threat (push) of arrest if services (pull) are not utilized, together
social worker-cops and cop-social workers drag homeless populations into their proper place: the Human Services Campus. Yet even this strategy has a low success rate, leaving hundreds of homeless people on the street, in tent cities or public parks for years at a time. This group of individuals, known as the “chronically homeless,” has, in the evolving dialectic of criminalization and compassion, become the defined frontier of sociospatial management. Housing first became a national strategy to appeal to this subpopulation, to pull them back into the Campus and then contain them in an apartment, subtracting them from the expensive and ineffective push, pull, and drag across the Valley of the Sun.

In the introduction I noted how divergent ideologies support criminalization and compassion, and that housing first tends to rework these ideologies. But I do not say much to support this claim, instead focusing more upon the practice of anti-homeless laws and the Human Services Campus. To stop the discussion of housing first’s emergence here, then, would be to ignore the deep history of homelessness and how it has been understood. It would also ignore why and how various framings of homelessness (or the homeless individual) come to birth and support certain means of managing “the homeless.” In other words, the push of criminalization and the pull of compassion each have their own historical geographies and ideologies. Whereas the former generally understands homelessness as some form of individual immoral deviancy, the latter primarily poses homelessness as a result of personal disability or ailment. Both of these ideologies work from and upon the stigmatization that homeless populations experience as they are categorized in an “unproductive” class in a capitalist society.

As housing first emerged from the dialectical evolution of anti-homeless laws and homeless campuses, so too does its ideological justification and framing of homelessness. Rather than a policy that just came to be through epiphany and then ran roughshod over antithetical
ideologies, housing first attracts popularity due to its adoption of the apolitical understandings of homelessness and poverty so intrinsic to the push of criminalization and the pull of compassion, as will become clear in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 3: MANAGING THE HOMELESS CLASS: PRODUCTION, STIGMA, AND THE EMERGENCE OF HOUSING FIRST

“We can solve homelessness,” explained Shaun Donovan, the Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in an interview on Comedy Central’s *The Daily Show with John Stuart*. Undeterred by Stuart’s incredulity, the comedian’s contention that homelessness is too complex a problem for quick solutions, Donovan giddily countered that welfare policy had, through stroke of innovation, inverted the “dead-wrong” approach that focused on transforming the recalcitrant homeless individual into a “housing ready” individual. “What we do now,” he proclaimed, “it’s called ‘housing first’ and it’s remarkable.” Not only is this approach, this answer to homelessness “better for people,” he continued, “but it’s actually cheaper!” *(Daily Show: Exclusive - Shaun Donovan Extended Interview Pt. 2 2012).*

Enthusiasm on the national scale is but a broader reflection of what is going on more locally. Cities across the United States, as well as in Canada, are excitedly appreciating the novelty that is housing first. On October 24th, 2012, Phoenix’s Mayor Greg Stanton unveiled a new municipal strategy to address the state capital’s formidable population of homeless people. “The comprehensive Phoenix Homeless Initiative, approved Tuesday by the City Council,” the mayor’s office press release stated, “efficiently redeploy existing homeless services and grant funding at no new cost. Through a ‘housing first’ strategy, 200 additional chronically homeless families and individuals will have access to permanent assisted housing over the next three years, starting in July 2013” *(City of Phoenix 2012)*. More than just taking an additional 200 individuals off the street, however, the mayor lauded housing first as “the new city strategy to
end homelessness in Phoenix” (ibid.). “Taking care of our chronically homeless,” he concludes, “isn’t just the right thing to do — it helps improve the safety and overall health of our entire community” (Benson 2012).

In the framings above, housing first is posed as a novel silver bullet for the problem of homelessness. Not only is it cheaper, it is also “better for people.” Yet this excitement is somewhat baseless. In this chapter, as with others, I want to move beyond the giddy and oftentimes superficial assessments of housing first and its emergence. I start by looking at homeless individuals outside neoliberal spaces of consumption. In this context it becomes evident that much disdain and stigma for “the homeless” emerges not from their presence infringing upon consumption (or property values) but rather from their categorization as an unproductive class. With this in mind, and looking at housing first in a deep historical context, examining the relationship between stigma, production, and geography, I argue that housing first, for all its progressive inversion of traditional approaches to homelessness, still contains significant ideological and practical holdovers from earlier models, models which locate the causes of homelessness not in the political economy or in political policy, nor in the lack of affordable housing, but rather within homeless individuals themselves. Housing first, in other words, reinscribes the deviant and stigma-producing ideology of homelessness. This framing justifies the cuts in social welfare supports for unproductive classes of society as well as the violent banishment of homeless individuals from most spaces of the city. Perhaps most importantly, housing first obstructs how a capitalist mode of production reproduces devalued individuals that are necessarily stigmatized so that capital can be reproduced with no questions asked.

45 Here we can see the semantic conflation between “chronic homelessness” and all homelessness.
Theorizing Stigma

In some ways, then, I am working from geographer Lois Takahashi’s (1996) theorization of stigma within a capitalist society.

To maintain and reproduce this system [capitalist political economy], productive individuals (participating in the labor force and production processes) are accorded privileged status in comparison to seemingly nonproductive persons such as homeless individuals. These nonproductive persons, because they are unacknowledged as being valuable by the wider society, are viewed as threats to collective consumption and communal life (Takahashi 1996, 300).

Takahashi understands productivity as one of three components determining social stigma. The other two are the “degree of dangerousness” and the “amount of personal culpability” associated with individuals or populations. All three continua intersect to form a “three-dimensional continuum of stigma” (Takahashi 1996, 302). Homeless persons and populations are, Takahashi (1996, 301) argues, heavily stigmatized because they are understood to be highly culpable, very dangerous, and unproductive. After this theoretical foray, Takahashi’s (mostly) literature review article calls for greater research on stigma and how homeless persons are represented (in media, academia, public policy, etc.) and for greater attention to the intersections of homelessness and race, gender, immigration, and the political agency of homeless people themselves.

Yet there are several things Takahashi fails to include in her long list of areas in need of further research. It is not that she failed to include, say, a call for research on sexuality and homelessness, or homelessness in a Native American context (as a complete list like that is impossible), but that she ignores several questions remaining of her “three-dimensional continuum of stigma” (Takahashi 1996, 302). Are “the homeless,” for example, always and
everywhere understood as culpable, dangerous, and unproductive? If not, what forces influence where they are placed on this continuum, and how do these forces change over time and space?

Sociologist Teresa Gowan has done much to explore these questions. Her book on homelessness in San Francisco, *Hobos, Hustlers, and Backsliders* (2010), essentially uses the three primary parts of Takahashi’s theorization of stigma – productivity, culpability, and danger – and re-conceptualizes and reworks them as “system talk,” “sick talk,” and “sin talk” (in this order). Answering – intentionally or not – Takahashi’s call for greater attention to representations of homeless people, and how representation influences stigma, Gowan traces the discursive roots and evolution of these three framings (and their geography). System talk is a framing of homelessness in terms of political and economic injustice. It understands unproductivity as compulsory, and the homeless person is thus less culpable, less dangerous. Sin-talk, meanwhile, defines homelessness as the price of moral deviancy; it is associated with high danger and culpability. Finally, there is sick talk, a discursive regime representing homelessness as a result of sickness or disability, with low to medium danger and low culpability.⁴⁶ Through this theorization Gowan (2010) goes beyond merely placing “homeless people” upon a particular spot within Takahashi’s (1996) three-dimensional continuum of stigma; she investigates how the historical jockeying of discursive forces influence where “the homeless” end up upon that continuum, and thus how homeless people are understood (in public perception and their own)⁴⁷ over time, in what ways they are stigmatized or not. In Gowan’s framing, homeless people exist in different places on the continuum depending on what sort of homelessness “talk” they subscribe (often correlating with particular spaces). And these are not static subscriptions, but

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⁴⁶ Each framing has a certain supporting group (homeless or not): system talk = leftist activists; sick talk = the medical/social work profession; sin talk = conservative politicians or “tough love” paternalists (Gowan 2010). ⁴⁷ This statement can unintentionally reinforce the idea that “homeless people” are a homogenous group with a single understanding of general or personal conditions of homelessness. Gowan’s (2010) book does much to complicate this oversimplified understanding.
continuous struggles always moving “the homeless” to and fro on the three-dimensional spectrum.

Even with Gowan’s crucial contribution to understanding homelessness and stigma, there are still questions about Takahashi’s model that need to be answered. Most importantly, how do culpability, productivity, and dangerousness interact, and are they purely correlative or might there, at certain times and places, be a dominant force influencing the other two? In *Madness and Civilization* (1988) Foucault argues that “madness” and the concept’s later discursive manifestations, insanity and mental illness, became – suddenly – a thing to be suppressed, confined, and cured after the Renaissance – in the “age of reason.” Rather than merely an epochal shift in sensibility, though, Foucault (1988, 47, 49) illustrates how the post-Renaissance “great confinement” of madmen “constituted one of the answers the seventeenth century gave” for the disorganization of labor caused “by new economic structures.” The sudden stigmatization of madness, then, emerged and diffused with capitalism. “In the classical age, for the first time,” Foucault (1988, 54, 58) notes, “madness was perceived through condemnation of idleness” and confinement functioned to hide the “visible social effects of unemployment” and control labor costs. Foucault, in this manner, starts to theorize stigma – madness as a negative concept in need of confinement, punishment, and rehabilitation through productive labor – as something functional to a capitalist political economy even as he continually deflects such an analysis by overemphasizing a Kantian understanding of morality and culture (“madness” as simply the result of a shift in post-Renaissance “reason”). “In fact,” Foucault (1988, 58) writes, “the relation between the practice of confinement and the insistence on work is not defined by

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48 In Takahashi’s block quote above, she gives us a hint at how these continua may interact. “These nonproductive persons, because they are unacknowledged as being valuable by the wider society,” she writes, “are viewed as threats to collective consumption and communal life” (emphasis added) (Takahashi 1996, 300). It seems she might be positing unproductivity as the cause of her other spectral category, dangerousness, but unfortunately she doesn’t expand in that direction.
economic conditions; far from it. A moral perception sustains and animates it.” Foucault goes on to explain how European society understood poverty as a sign of weak morals and a lack of discipline, but it is unclear whether he is posing this discovery as some sort of false consciousness used to stigmatize the unproductive at the behest of the bourgeoisie or whether he sees this ideological development as something in and of itself. He also neglects any discussion of actual “madness” or mental illness, of human extreme melancholy, anxiety, alienation, etc.

Foucault, like Gowan, fails to theorize any sort of causal relationship between productivity and stigma, ignoring the potential material and social function of stigma within a capitalist political economy. Further, if, as Takahashi argues, her continuum of stigma is applicable only to a capitalist political economy, how might a constantly revolutionizing force like capital necessitate an accordant tweaking of the model? Additionally, how might paying attention to geography and reproduction inform Foucault’s theory of madness and civilization?

Above I outlined how stigma (as homelessness management) has changed over time and the spaces of metropolitan Phoenix. Below I attempt to show how political economy impacts stigma and ideology in the context of a neoliberalizing political economy and the emergence of a new type of “talk”: housing first.

Following Takahashi, I look at stigma (as ideology) in relation to production and capital accumulation. Rather than merely noting its importance to stigmatization, I attempt to show how unproductivity has usually been the central component of stigma formation. Unproductivity has, in other words, largely guided and given cause for notions of culpability and dangerousness, for notions of madness and civilization. Therefore, even when Gowan’s “system talk” loses-out to sick and sin, even when Foucault’s “moral perception” “sustains and animates” (at some unspecified level), the system continually “talks” to stigmatization, influencing conceptions of
criminality and sickness (and practices like anti-homeless laws and homeless campuses). Just as importantly, discourses of sin and sick, idleness and madness, always speak back to the system, often functioning (but, at times, challenging) to shore-up capital accumulation, to keep the system of (neo)liberal capital working. Housing first talk does, as I argue below, both function to reinscribe a functional stigma while partially challenging Gowan’s sick and sin talk, Takahashi’s culpability and danger. I also theorize, however delicately, from where “mental illness” or “madness” emerged. I argue that the alienating forces of capital significantly give rise to personal discontent, a discontent that can indeed form into what we understand as mental or psychological illness.

(Neo)Liberalism, deviancy, and the right to the city

Don Mitchell (2003, 136) notes that the perpetual intractability of “the homeless problem” arises within a system of private individuals and private property. Mitchell’s analysis highlights how private property (under capitalism) is the crucial lever upon which homeless individuals are made to be out-of-place. The homeless class’s illegitimacy in public space emerges from their inability to abide by proper notions of the private versus public property (and private versus public sphere) because they have little or no access to private property/spaces (Mitchell 1995). The institution of private property – the set of social relations that it comes to justify – is not something static. Private property, rather, can only truly be appreciated within its social and political-economic context. In other words, private property, basely defined as the right to exclude, has a unique meaning under various economic systems and forms of governance (MacPherson 1999; Mitchell and Staeheli 2005). Under modern capitalism, particularly in its contemporary neoliberal condition, private property acts primarily as capital, as a commodity exchanged for greater returns. Most significantly, urban landscapes have increasingly but
incompletely become marketized spaces of consumption, a marketization heavily invested in and protected by cash-strapped municipalities desperate to attract footloose capital (Harvey 1987; Mitchell 1997) as we saw in the case of Phoenix and Tempe.

A neoliberal urbanism has exceptional consequences for homeless populations. As Mitchell (1995) and numerous others have illustrated, homeless individuals in cities across the United States (and abroad) have repeatedly been vilified as criminals and anti-social miscreants wantonly misusing public space (a spiking of “sin talk” and a “danger” framing) (MacDonald 1995; Simon 1991; Teir 1998). It seems likely that pushing this framing of homeless people is a means of legitimizing anti-homeless laws that, through inter-municipal efforts, attempt to force homeless individuals and the service upon which they depend from these commodified landscapes and toward urban interstices and ghettoized zones of nominal care and/or containment (such as shelters and prisons) (Wacquant 2009; Mitchell and Heynen 2009). In accordance with this deviant framing, many proponents of anti-homeless laws and related measures argue (perhaps rightly so) that stigmatized homeless individuals and sights of poverty deter would-be customers from these carefully sanitized urban marketplaces and entertainment centers (Mair 1986, 351; Takahashi 1998). Panhandling, sitting on benches, or simply – and involuntarily – being in these spaces is understood as an anti-social and anti-aesthetic blight out of sync with marketed ambience and conspicuous consumption necessary for capital accumulation (Amster 2008; Harvey 1987).

The presence of homeless individuals in such places, then, is a potential loss on investment for shop owners, developers, cities and consumers alike. Yet to solely understand homelessness and the stigma attached to it through analyzing their relationship to consumers and spaces of consumption is to fall into the limiting analytical grooves of neoliberal politicians and
liberal theory. Liberal political economists place the consumer as the natural starting point of economic (and social) analysis, equating the freedom to purchase and supply commodities as “freedom” itself (A. Smith 1976; Coase 1974). Thus, the presence of homeless individuals, or any other form of infringement upon such exchange, becomes tyrannical distortion (and even more so if the state permits such infringement) (Friedman 2002, 112). Commodified urban centers, meanwhile, have attempted to expel both signs of poverty and production to create wholly fetishized spheres for entertainment/consumption (Mair 1986). It is immediately apparent how anti-homeless laws reflect and reproduce this neoliberal understanding, and therefore how scholars critical of these market-driven banishments are led to fight back within this framing. However crucial such critiques are, it seems much is neglected if we fail to analyze homelessness in regards to production. Individual productivity is just as intrinsic to legitimate citizenship as is voluntary public interaction and uninhibited consumption, as abiding by the rules of private property. Before returning to this claim, however, we must first revisit the concept of stigma.

When investigating the terms of “legitimate” or “acceptable” behavior, the concept of stigma is paramount. As a social marking of disgrace or shame, stigma can emerge from countless characteristics or behaviors, although Takahashi’s (1996) triad seems most useful in the context of homelessness. Yet stigma, no matter the context, is not a thing in and of itself, but is rather socially produced, a negative deviation from an idealized and performed norm (Dear et al. 1997; Takahashi 1998). Although the idealized norm from which deviancy comes is, in some ways, arbitrary (Dear et al. 1997), the norms, and therefore stigma, are historically and geographically produced. In other words, norm/deviation/stigma has a function, a genealogy. Like most patently disempowered social groups, homeless individuals are often understood to have, in some form, chosen their status. Homelessness is framed as the result of deviances: anti-
sociality, mental or physical disability, criminality, or any manifestation of what could be considered a physical or psychological failing. Stigma, in this case, follows basic neoliberal and microeconomic framings of society as merely the conglomeration of individual or familial actions with scant regard to broader social systems that come to structure those actions (see Friedman 2002). Stigma functions to obfuscate the social causes, to discover failure within the individual (or group) and punish accordingly, to put people in their proper place to enable some idea of social or economic equilibrium.

Stigma, then, acts to deter particular behaviors, to encourage adherence to social norms and maintain certain power structures. So how and why does stigma work in relation to production and in relation to “the homeless”? Kawash (1998) argues that homeless people are understood as a coherent other that threatens propertied social norms: independent, affiliated, and productive. Schweik (2010, 60) expands upon Kawash’s connection between productivity and stigma, noting how “the notion of citizenship presumed an able body; partly because the culture understood disability as the literal opposite of liberty.” Exactly what composes this “culture” is left unexpanded upon by Schweik. Writing of anti-panhandling and “unsightly begging” laws in urban centers at the end of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, however, we can safely assume that Schweik’s “culture” is one of industrial capitalism, an epoch deeply defined by Kawash’s propertied social norms. Each one of these norms, independence, affiliation, and productivity, are of course deeply intertwined, and it is not difficult to appreciate why the concept of disability, defined significantly by an inability to labor, and thus dependence (perhaps forced affiliation), can become antithetical to legitimate citizenship and work to reinforce stigma.

Schweik’s opposition between freedom and disability stems not from some static stigmatization but rather a political-economic context that birthed these sets of stigmatized
behaviors. In liberal theory, and under the material conditions of capitalism, freedom is defined by the ability to voluntarily exchange commodities, to purchase and to sell without infringement as a means toward self- and, aggregately, social-development (see Smith 1976). Deviancy, to put it differently, does not just emerge; it is produced within a capitalist system that defines normal, ideal individuals through property relations, through forms of contract, ownership, and exchange. For most, this includes the ability to sell one’s own labor-power. Entering the sphere of exchange as a worker of course enables production, but this is just the initial step toward income. Income is followed by atomistic consumption and reproduction. Overcoming stigma – becoming normal – thus is not solely defined by expanding capital through production but also by expanding capital through consumption, by consuming and destroying the value of commodities (enabling further production and accumulation). For this continuous consumption and production to be possible, individuals also must have a private place to consume and reproduce themselves: a home. Labeling homelessness and disability as deviant thus serves a political-economic function and reflects a political-economic reality; it both stigmatizes and punishes unproductive activity and lets the unproductive fall by the wayside. Stigma justifies the exclusion of those unable to consume from spaces specifically produced for consumption. Those unable or unwilling to produce or reproduce, disposed of the commodity of their labor-power and unable to consume become economically devalued and therefore taken as socially suspect. Unable to fully engage in liberal notions of normalcy (i.e. to participate freely in the sphere of exchange) due to material deficiencies renders the unproductive and/or poor – including homeless and disabled people – stigmatized. They become outcasts from capitalism’s idealized norm, individuals playing by an alien set of rules; they are seen as dangerous and perpetually out of place.
Capital and the Unproductive Class

Confronting large unproductive classes in society – people without work and without a proper place to be – is not a novel phenomenon, at least not in modern capitalist society. From looking at such an unexceptional phenomenon throughout history, we can begin to see the inextricable relations between productivity, stigma, and geography, how the relationship poses a recurrent problematic for society and the state. Modern homelessness and policies of poverty governance, such as housing first, should therefore be understood as an additional cut into the “problem” of unproductive classes in society, including those who are forced into homelessness (the focus here). “Problem” is bracketed in quotations not to question the desirability of unemployment or homelessness, but rather to consider the symbiotic (and also parasitical) relationship between a capitalist economy and unproductive classes (Polanyi 2001, 101). Indeed, unproductive populations – the unemployed – could not exist without the advent of the free laborer able to sell his or her labor-power to the capitalist (the property holder and investor), and the advent of the free laborer could not exist without the alienation of people from their landed holdings, their ability to be self-sufficient on their individual or common property (Marx 1967, 686; Simon 1991, 2).

Without the traditional means by which they reproduced themselves, the rural peasantry – starting in England in the seventeenth century but quickly diffusing outward – turned into a proper working class, a collection of individuals free from the means of production and free to exchange their labor for wages. With this dual freedom, though, the peasantry became dependent on the dominant mode of production for their livelihood, a capitalist mode of production that continually reproduced “a relatively redundant population of laborers” to weigh down the power of labor, and therefore wages, as well as to absorb the incessantly expanding labor needs of
capital (Marx 1967, 396, 590–2). “Pauperism,” Marx (1967, 395) concludes, “forms a condition of capitalist production;” accumulation necessitates dispossession. In confronting the pauperized regiments of the industrial reserve army, Western Europe initiated what Marx termed a “bloody legislation against vagabondage,” treating the newly free but unemployed laborers as “‘voluntary’ criminals,” in some cases permitting the forced slavery of placeless and unemployed individuals. “If it happens that a vagabond has been idling about for three days,” one 1547 English statute reads, “he is to be taken to his birthplace, branded with a redhot iron with the letter V [for vagabond or vagrant] on the breast and be set to work, in chains, in the street” (quoted in Marx 1967, 687). In other cases, repeat infractions of visible, out-of-place vagrancy could be met as capital offense (Polanyi 2001, 91).

**Capital, Madness or Mental Illness**

In addition to such punishment, the state confronted vagabondage with strict geographical confinement. “Throughout Europe,” Foucault (1988, 49) writes, “confinement had the same meaning…It constituted one of the answers the seventeenth century gave to an economic crisis that affected the entire Western world: reduction of wages, unemployment, scarcity of coin.” Both punishment and confinement, usually operating together – not unlike modern compassion (confinement) and criminalization (punishment) – were justified through the categorization (and stigmatization) of the placeless/redundant as mentally and morally disordered – as “mad” or, as we phrase it today, “mentally ill.”

As noted earlier, the concept of madness and the institutions that came to manage it had a distinct correlation with the spread of capitalism. How might we think of this phenomenon as something greater than mere social stigma, as *actual* mental illness or madness? Foucault (1988,
found that institutions to confine the redundant and so-called mad “appear in England in the most industrialized parts of the country,” a phenomenon reflected in both Germany and France. Not surprisingly, political economic explanations were quick to theorize the proliferation of madness, as madness was “more frequent in England [the birthplace of capital] than anywhere else” (quoted in Foucault 1988, 213). Again, Foucault stops short of saying what this might indeed mean for modern society or disability theory (i.e. is this just a ideological shift, or also a material one?). Either way, he delicately suggests that the relations of industrial capital cause madness/mental illness (at least discursively).

This line of thought molds well with historical materialist interpretations of social and individual development within capitalist social relations. Of all Marxian theorists, perhaps Lukács (1968) most explicitly argues that capitalist social relations are inherently – and actually – maddening. He explains how being subjected to the nihilistic, exploitative, and atomistic structures of capital generates alienation, melancholy, guilt, anxiety, and so forth. “[W]e can see,” he writes, “a continuous trend towards greater rationalization, the progressive elimination of the qualitative, human and individual attributes of the worker.”

"[T]his rational mechanization,” Lukács (1968, 88) continues, “extends right into the worker’s ‘soul’: even his psychological attributes are separated from his total personality and placed in opposition to it…” (emphasis added). Lukács, following Marx, does not perceive such alienation as

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49 See Marx (1967, 398) for a similar argument about the rationalization of labor under capital.

50 Several others have criticized the dehumanization – indeed the sickening – of the laborer under capitalism. Marx (1967, 340), for one, laments how the capitalist factory “converts the laborer into a crippled monstrosity by forcing his detail of dexterity at the expense of a world of productive capabilities and instincts.” Capital’s “peculiar division” of the worker, he continues, “attacks the individual at the very roots of his life, it [labor] is the first to afford the materials for, and to give start to, industrial pathology.” In a footnote to this argument Marx explains the exploration of “industrial pathology” as a particular field of medical research that began as early as 1713 but continued into the nineteenth-century. Adam Smith, meanwhile, explained how people are formed by “their ordinary employments.” “The man whose whole life is spend in performing a few simply operations,” therefore, “generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become” (quoted in Marx 1967, 342).
something unique to monotonous factory work, but something much deeper and with a far
greater reach. Nobody, no matter their job and not even the capitalist classes, is free from the
soul-shattering compulsions of capital.

There is, evidently, a dual confluence of illness/madness (in whatever terms) and capital. In this framing, the labor processes and alienation inherent to a competitive capitalist society both produces sickness through alienating and desperate existence (labor or otherwise) while “sickness” works to obfuscate capital’s production of and necessity for a surplus population, to chastise and stigmatize the unproductive classes of society as inherently infirm or weak. To take it further, capitalist social relations create genuinely sick people while dividing the discontented yet productive classes (the depressed, the stressed, the functional substance abusers) from the disordered unproductive classes (the mentally ill, the homeless, the dysfunctionally addicted). So long as the former can continue to reproduce themselves (no matter the toll its takes on their well-being, their “soul”), such sickness remains rather unproblematic for capital and the state. The latter group, on the other hand, continually poses an issue for state legitimacy and social/moral cohesion, and for these reasons the sickness of the “disordered” must be framed as self-caused, worthy of social shaming, written-off through emplacing stigma and hidden.

**Managing an Industrial Surplus**

Since the outset of capitalist social relations relative poverty and surplus population have necessarily accompanied wealth and accumulation. The dark side of this dialectic has continually been managed through geographic regulations. Like many others, the anti-vagrancy statutes and houses of confinement reflect the Elizabethan Poor Laws’ contention that “vagrancy,” a combination of unemployment and out-of-place-ness, is the responsibility of the local
community, that the “vagrant” be invisible to the broader public. The need for invisibility accompanied, as the punishments and confinement suggest, the understanding of vagrancy as a moral infraction, an individual failure requiring an individual punishment (accompanied, justified by and reinforcing social stigma). Not surprisingly, vagrancy legislation in Colonial America continued such policy (M. B. Katz 1996, 14), or at least until local bonds were torn asunder by a rapidly globalizing form of capitalism during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, an industrial era of production typified by unprecedented urban migration.

From this point, and up until the New Deal, Michael Katz (1996, 3) explains, “the poorhouse dominated the structure of welfare,” an institution “which shut the old and sick away from their friends and relatives…to deter the working class from asking for poor relief.” With the onset of such urbanization, therefore, the Elizabethan ethic of local care became obsolete. Instead, the US came to contain the poor and the homeless within ostensibly reformatory institutions. “They [poorhouses] were,” Katz (1996, 3) surmises, “the ultimate defense against the erosion of the work ethic in early industrial America.” The poorhouse not only attempted to re-value the vagrant’s labor power, it also worked to keep them on the market ready to work for whatever wages by making the institution less desirable than the most exploitative and dirty labor. Meanwhile, municipalities across the United States continually attempted to manage the “dangerous” classes of capitalist relations through “street sweeps designed to rid city thoroughfares of vagrants, mendicants, Negroes, and ‘common prostitutes’” (Hopper 2003:28), the industrial prelude to postindustrial anti-homeless laws.

The geography of the homeless class and the statutes of surplus population changed, but the stigma attached to these unemployed and out-of-place individuals remained. The welfare of the poorhouse, as Katz (1996, 3) suggests, still ignored the structural causes of labor redundancy,
instead finding fault within the individual, “the erosion of work ethic,” as he put it, and attempting to inculcate a habit of productivity (Hopper 2003:28). The re-commodification of labor, therefore, became the primary technology for legitimizing and de-stigmatizing members of the polity. The ability to work essentially *rented* people a conditional right to the city, to the polity. Yet, even still, the numbers of the unemployed remained high (and visible) throughout the nineteenth-century, rising drastically during the 1873 economic crisis and placing an unbearable demand upon the decentralized poorhouse system (M. B. Katz 1996). Economic crisis became a notable culprit, but others also blamed the unscientific doles given to the nation’s poor and unproductive.

While the reiterated legislation against vagabondage attempted to sterilize the cityscape of the growing and transitory surplus population (“tramps”), a novel charity movement circuitously reinforced and justified street sweeping by expressing the deviancy of the poor through the language of discerning science. It is not a coincidence, then, that Charity Organization Societies (COS) and their theory, “scientific charity,” emerged stateside (from England) in 1873, becoming a significant semi-official institutional movement thereafter (their ideas very much still with us today, as argued below) (M. B. Katz 1996). These institutions adhered to a particular framing of the poor and unproductive. Paupers, tramps, and so forth were understood as morally deficient or somehow otherwise disorderly. According to the scientific charity theory, the poor and unproductive required discriminate interventions to “cure” pauperism rather than the “unscientific doles” that could do as much harm as good (Schweik 2010:40–2). Providing “scientific” support required understanding persons, or “cases,” and how said cases fell among the varied pathologies understood to have caused unproductivity. Not only did knowing permit “scientific” intervention, it also enabled caseworkers to divide the
potentially productive, able-bodied (undeserving) and disabled from the infirm, disabled, unproductive (deserving) on “scientific” and medical grounds. Once divided, the latter received measured, disciplinary uplift while the former was cast back into the cold winds of the market, bluntly reestablishing that capitalist connection between survival and employment (M. B. Katz 1996, 17, 34, 96; see Bentham 1999).

The New Deal and Beyond

Although the COS as an institution – unable to stem the tide of intractable unemployment – gradually lost legitimacy over the next forty years, its theories remain central to US welfare policy and practices of social work (M. B. Katz 1996: 83; Schweik 2010: 41). This is not to say, however, that the framing of the (post)industrial reserve army continued along a strictly individualist cast. Indeed the theories of scientific charity, even at their apogee, remained contested and oftentimes ignored in practical policy (M. B. Katz 1996, 84). But the clearest break with COS’s individualist framing came during the Great Depression. Massive political protest and the resulting New Deal policies, undergirded by a generally Keynesian economic theory, recast the issues of homelessness and labor redundancy within a context of competitive capitalism, posing these phenomena not as a sudden epidemic of laziness, but as yet another devaluation of labor during a crisis of accumulation (or “business cycle,” to use Ricardo’s bourgeois term) (Gowan 2010, 40; Blyth 2013). In other words, a structural imagination informed public opinion and policy, deepening the pool of the “deserving poor,” de-stigmatizing unproductive existence, and permitting the homeless class some right to the city.

If there is indeed a connection between massive unemployment and a structural imagination, the converse is also true. For instance, an individualized formulation of
homelessness, reminiscent of scientific charity, reemerged during the wartime boom characterized by nearly full employment and the established support of New Deal programs. Those remaining on the street were taken to be a species apart, individuals having lost their ability or desire to work through physical, mental, or social deficiency (Schneider 1986, 168). In the wartime economy the field of social work that emerged during the Great Depression – in response to structural unemployment – gradually transformed into a potently apolitical, therapeutic, and medical institution responding to individual deviancy. The means by which social policy came to rectify homelessness reflected such understandings. Policies focused not on the radical causes of extreme poverty and marginalization but solely the socio-psychological deficiencies of homeless individuals (Gowan 2010; Hopper, Susser, and Conover 1985).

If we fast-forward to the 1980s, a century after the COS opened its first US branch in Buffalo, NY, once again massive and seemingly sudden unemployment and homelessness is posed as a structural process (Mitchell 2011, 934). Advocates immediately targeted economic crisis and the Reagan Administration’s anti-poor policies for contributing to the ballooning homelessness across the country. The McKinney-Vento Act of 1987 and other policies to address homelessness were passed in response to these protests. Yet these political reforms, seriously underfunded from the beginning (M. B. Katz 2008, 133), failed to do much within a broader neoliberal context of state-subsidized gentrification, the razing of low-income housing (Kasinitz 1986), deindustrialization (unemployment), and the systematic dismantling of labor union and middle-class jobs (Hopper, Susser, and Conover 1985). Broadly speaking, across the US the structural imagination that de-stigmatized unproductive existence began to wane in the later ‘80s as it was overtaken by a more individual and stigmatized posturing of homelessness (Phoenix, though, had a much different history). This posturing was not, however, simply determined by a
reduction in surplus laborers through economic growth, but also through the increasingly professionalized ideology and practices of social work (Gowan 2010, 49). McKinney-Vento was a reaction to mass homelessness as articulated by advocates, advocates who often couched “the homeless problem” in terms of medicine (mental or physical disability, addiction, old age) to subvert the conservative association of homelessness and unemployment as moral failing or criminality (Lyon-Callo 2000). Such a framing envisioned public relief as the market rewarding irrational economic behavior inseparably from anti-social behavior. The structural (and political) imagination was largely pushed out, replaced by a medicalized ideology of homelessness, abjuring political-economic determinants to anatomically grasp and treat (perhaps cure) the specter of twentieth century pauperism. Meanwhile this framing worked to legitimize economic class distinctions at the heart of neoliberal and neoconservative rhetoric (Lyon-Callo 2000, 331; Schram 2000, 82).

Scientific charity, then, was resurrected, albeit in a more modern gown, perhaps a set of scrubs. Professional caseworkers once again acted paternalistically, probing their “cases” for, as Foucault (1977, 193) puts it, signs of “secret madness” through an incessant, disciplinary gaze. As a medicalized homelessness legitimated the class distinctions necessary to a capitalist political economy, unstable, sick, and medicated homeless individuals were seen as a class-less segment of society, a group apart that had little relation to general poverty, sexism, or racism (Gowan 2010, 50). Unlike the programs of the Great Depression, McKinney-Vento and its reiterations throughout the 1990s, into the 2000s and beyond focused on moving funding away from small-scale emergency shelters to a more robust, public-private operations that targeted endemic homelessness (Sparks 2011, 1516), the Human Services Campus being a prime example. These program-based operations looked to expand the array of services to meet the
buffet of pathologies thought to have caused an individual’s poverty and un-productivity (Lyon-Callo 2000, 330).

The Clinton Administration’s McKinney-Vento “Continuum of Care” (CoC) revision, passed in 1995, began redirecting federal funding away from emergency shelter and toward, as the revision reads, “a community plan to organize and deliver housing and services to meet the specific needs of people who are homeless as they move to stable housing and maximize self-sufficiency. It includes action steps to end homelessness and prevent a return to homelessness” (quoted in NAEH 2010c). 51 Central to these “action steps” is “outreach” and “assessment” to determine, as Gowan (2010, 49) puts it, a “client’s capacities in terms of mental health, substance abuse, life skills, parenting, budgeting, and overall ‘housing readiness.’” In other words, the CoC model, following the precedents of scientific charity, withholds services until genuine needs are determined (Schweik 2010:29) lest it reward the able-bodied individual. Once these facets of a homeless individual’s life were analyzed (made legible), individuals could become, in theory, eligible for transitional housing and, eventually, housing proper (US Dept. of Health and Human Services 1986).

This idea of transition harkens back to the Chicago sociologists’ thesis of the “shelterized man”: the Continuum is a structural means to repeatedly dislodge the homeless individual and dissuade chronic dependency (“sense of entitlement”) and demoralization (i.e. shelterization), a contagious social disease festering in the “stuporous regimen of the shelter and in the constant company of lost men” (Hopper 2003:49). Within all of these policies toward the homeless class or the otherwise redundant laborer, there is a common obfuscation of structural causes in favor of

51 “Despite Clinton’s call for a ‘full attack on homelessness,’” Michael Katz (2008, 125) explains, “funding for homeless programs reversed direction and declined after 1995. Between 1995 and 1997 HUD’s budget was slashed 25 percent, funding for public housing dropped 20 percent, and homeless funding decreased nearly as much.”
finding moral, medical, or social culprits. The wholesale medicalization and moralization of individuals functioned to overlook (justify) a structural lack of affordable housing or employment at the heart of extreme poverty and homelessness (Kaufman 1986:337; Hopper et al. 1985; WRAP 2010). Thereafter, homeless individuals are to find the causes of their degradation — their unproductiveness — within and through unearthing their internal seeds of deviancy, embark on a road to rehabilitation in search of an idealized norm (Lyon-Callo 2000; Mathieu 1993). Thus, the ideological framing of homelessness (and even extreme poverty) as a form of medical deficiency was reinforced by the practical treatment and “rehabilitation” of homeless people. It was through such rehabilitative activities that homeless individuals could become eligible for supported and/or subsidized housing.

**Housing First in Recent Context**

Although the 1990s and beyond witnessed a continued national focus on homelessness services (however inadequate), affordable housing remained the key bottleneck keeping people homeless (WRAP 2010). With little potential for adequately sweeping the streets and with a medical framing, along with the still common deviant discourse on homelessness, arose the phenomenon of “compassion fatigue,” a term used to denote the withering hope for solving the homeless problem (Mitchell 2011:943). Slowly, to speak broadly once again, compassion gave way to hostility, giving rise to a greater number of anti-homeless laws and legitimating literature (see Baum and Burnes 1993; Teir 1998; MacDonald 1995; Ellickson 1996). It became clear that the medical and therapeutic framing of homelessness was not totally depoliticizing after all. Rather, it depicted the steady homeless population as a group of people denying the subsidized beneficence — the compassion — of McKinney-Vento and all the selfless donors and volunteers trying to help homeless people. Homeless people, so the logic goes, are provided with a potential
escape, but through pride, laziness, or some sinister obstinacy, turned a cold shoulder on scientific, medical, and professionally delivered social services (see MacDonald 1995; Teir 1998; Ellickson 1996).

Such logic reworked homelessness once again. The homeless class was no longer a victim of conservative policies and an economy in crisis, but a collection of ungrateful individuals disturbing the sense of order in public spaces, threatening property values, and leeching off the productive classes. In other words, “tough love” was in order (Teir 1998, 260). This particular understanding helped spur “quality of life” initiatives, outlawing a certain collection of biological activities – such as eating, begging, sleeping, and resting – so long as they were performed in public spaces (Mitchell and Heynen 2009; Mitchell 2003; Amster 2008). Although drafted in neutral language, anti-homeless laws have the unproductive classes clearly in mind (Mitchell 1998a, 1998b). As discussed in chapter 2, these laws continuously push homeless individuals from places of leisure and consumption, out of public parks, toward ghettoized areas of care and containment (Dear and Wolch 1987). Homeless people are, in other words, made to be invisible to the general public (yet hyper-visible to case managers and the state).

Some homeless individuals, especially the mentally ill and disordered, caught in this frantic pinball game of punitive expulsion and infantilizing care, remain on the street and in city parks, repeatedly using shelters, soup kitchens, emergency rooms, getting arrested and, because of this, “consuming” a disproportionate amount of municipal welfare and private charity resources. Worse yet, they clog-up the mills of rehabilitation better suited to the more easily normalized and short-term homeless. These individuals are, importantly, often the most visible and visibly disturbing, they are the recognizably homeless, the epitomized other of endured
stigma and abandonment (see City of Phoenix 2012). This subpopulation is, of course, the “chronically homeless.” The medicalized and moralized framing of chronic homelessness is evident in the population’s naming. As the National Coalition for the Homeless asserts, “The term ‘chronic homeless’ treats homelessness with the same language and in the same fashion as a medical condition or disease, rather than an experience created fundamentally by poverty and lack of housing” (quoted in Willse 2010, 168). Housing first became the program of choice to address this particular sub-population of America’s long-term unproductive class.

Unlike traditional approaches, housing first, as HUD Secretary Donovan explained to John Stuart, puts chronically homeless individuals into an apartment first while attempting to rehabilitate clients with wrap-around services once they are settled into their subsidized apartment. Recognizing the lack of a home as the primary barrier to exiting the street rather than strictly a collection of pathologies or a lack of work ethic, housing first in many ways upends the “treatment first” model and challenges the ideology from which it sprang. In this manner, clientele are made to be innocent of their former homelessness and the social transgressions which it entailed. And while housing first does, in many important ways, stand in contrast to the more medicalized and moralized approaches of the poorhouse, scientific charity, and the Continuum of Care, it remains focused on managing and rehabilitating the chronic moral and medical deficiencies of individuals (c.f. Willse 2010, 168; Tsemberis 2010, 37). In other words, housing indeed comes first, but treatment is right there behind it. The model, however newfangled, remains a form of supportive housing, specifically a form of supportive housing operating under a “harm reduction” case management strategy whereby clientele are essentially pushed toward less deviant behavior (rather than normalizing cold turkey) (Tsemberis and Eisenberg 2001). So-called wrap-around services (i.e. supporting agencies and case managers)
are fundamental to the operation of housing first programs and they work to automatically inscribe people as somehow in need of scientific treatment, regulation, and supervision, an inscription that permits rehabilitative case management interventions that would never be tolerated in normal, independent housing (Murphy 2009, 216; c.f. Willse 2010). Stigma, in other words, continues to operate throughout housing first, no matter its seemingly progressive or libertarian stance. Although forgiven for past chronic homelessness, clientele are thereafter cast into perpetual judgment, a case management that applies sanctions, designates transgressions, stipulates proper amends, and potentially expels those who fail to abide by this new social order defined as non-chronic homelessness.

**Conclusion**

Often posed as a significant break in homelessness policy, context illustrates that housing first remains beholden to the ideological genes of its forbearers: the poorhouse, scientific charity and, more recently, the Continuum of Care and homeless campuses model, models strictly adhering to the ideology of rehabilitating potential workers and consumers. For this reason, and to put it simply, John Stuart’s incredulity is justified. Although the program has potential, housing first fails to recognize, nay obscures, the delicate relationship between a capitalist mode of production, geography, homelessness, and stigma; it continually permits a framing of homelessness that ignores structural and political causes. Stigma is central to this obfuscation as it has a necessary function within capitalism. It works to demonize those rendered devalued and unproductive to disempower labor. Stigma, likewise, redirects attention away from capital’s constant need for the devalued and unproductive. Housing first takes the superficial, stigmatized framing of homelessness produced by and for capital and takes it as objective, total truth. Working from these false premises, it attempts to cure deviancies supposedly at the heart of
redundancy and unproductive existence through expensive interventions. Housing first’s incessant desire to sterilize city streets for smooth consumption, combined with its fetishistic rehabilitation of producers and consumers – attempting to revalue through reinvestment – merely operates to fine-tune the capitalist mill in order for it to incessantly produce and reproduce the unemployed and unemployable, the devalued, the redundant, the unproductive; those individuals that comprise the homeless class that housing first must repeatedly rehabilitate. To put it simply once again: as capital debilitates, housing first rehabilitates.

How housing first rehabilitates is the topic of the next chapter. Like chapter 2, then, we move back into the realm of practice. With the ideological genes of housing first outlined, as well as its function within a broader system of sociospatial management, we can more completely analyze the rationale and subtle techniques of housing first case management. Now within an apartment, now off the street, what sort of pressures – pushes, pulls, and drags – do housing first residents experience? How does housing first’s reworking of the therapeutic and medical framing of homelessness bring it above and beyond the poorhouse, scientific charity, and the Continuum of Care’s homeless campus, and where does it continue to be a pious disciple? It is to these questions that we now turn.
CHAPTER 4: HOUSE BREAKING: HABITATION AND REHABILITATION IN HOUSING FIRST CASE MANAGEMENT

I’ve done a lot of columns about people like Marty Moritz, almost always after they’re dead. People like Hersey Ross, who died alone under a tree at Margaret T. Hance Park in Phoenix…People like Myron Marquandt, who passed away in his brother’s arms on a bench near the entrance of the downtown Herberger Theatre Center…People like Aaron Taylor, who died after being lit on fire while sleeping on a bench outside Paradise Valley Mall over a Christmas holiday.

“The list goes on,” E.J. Montini (2011), columnist for the Arizona Republic continues. “The homeless are everywhere, although they seem to be invisible until the life goes out of them and a body must be removed from public space.” But things are changing in metropolitan Phoenix, the article suggests. Although the veteran reporter has carved too many tragic vignettes-cum-angry lamentations about metro Phoenix’s social and governmental contempt for the local homeless population, this time is different. The article’s protagonist, Moritz, is among thirty-plus residents in a new housing first program organized and funded by the local United Way and the City of Tempe (using federal stimulus funding). The city initiated the program in spring 2009. Within the state’s human services and social work community, it was (and is) known as the “Tempe Pilot Project” (VSUW 2012a). Although a pilot, the program was seen as a harbinger of things to come, the first page of a new chapter in the sullied chronicles of the desert metropolis’s history with extreme poverty and homelessness.

Certainly, the article goes on to explain, the halo of expectation recognized a genuine, and perhaps radical, shift in how to approach and address homelessness and homeless
individuals. As a housing first program, the traditional mantra of housing readiness, of earning one’s keep, is inverted; it somersaults forward. And through such forward momentum the homeless individual is able to crash through the sociopolitical reflective glass, limbs flailing in joy. Or so Montini argues. “An invisible man finds a new home and a new hope,” the headline reads. And this is a rare breakthrough for Montini, his optimism reflecting that of the homelessness industry more broadly. Previously, Montini’s Dickensian vignettes had stressed the paradoxical place of the Valley’s homeless class, how even when they are physically present they remain socially invisible (or at least until they burn to death or city sanitation removes their corpse) (Montini 2008; Montini 2010a). Of course, for most homeless people, they remain visible on the street or, just as likely, undetected through clothing and comportment or hidden within interstitial space. This duality itself is paradoxical enough when attempting to understand the place of homeless people as a uniform class. Yet for the homeless and out of place individual, the person begging or just being in open spaces, another paradox is evident: the individual is objectively seen but consciously unseen–pushed to peripheral vision at the behest of social stigma, of fear. This is the invisibility that Montini writes of and that for him housing first denies.

As interesting as this framing is, Montini fails to account for how homeless people are, for image-conscious municipalities, storeowners, developers, customers and housed residents, far too visible – an affront to public sensibilities and good business sense.52 In the Valley and

52 Evgeny Morozov (2013), writing in the New York Times, notes how the visibility of homeless individuals is a problem conceivably “solved” by theoretical advances in technology: “Last year the futurist Ayesha Khanna even described smart contact lenses that could make homeless people disappear from view, ‘enhancing our basic sense’ and, undoubtedly, making our lives so much more enjoyable. In a way, this does solve the problem of homelessness—unless, of course, you happen to be a homeless person.” Oddly enough, Khanna’s theoretical invention lends insight into the deeper argument that I think Montini is making in all his eulogistic columns: society seems less interested in saving lives then saving itself from life.
elsewhere, homeless people are incessantly pushed away through anti-homeless laws, dragged toward and contained in service ghettos, thrown in jail or banished to illegal encampments. At some point in this myopic shuffle many simply perish. But through housing first programs, people like Moritz become – suddenly – visible, a visibility not purchased through death, like so many others Montini decries, but by having a home. Moritz is – now – a legitimate citizen. With a “new home” and place of their own, Moritz and the others in housing first are re-admitted into the public proper. Such housing permits a private place for private activity – private consumption and reproduction. Housing first tenants, then, are empowered to voluntarily enter and use public space (so long as they do not “look homeless”) as productive (or at least less destructive) citizens. Moritz and others in housing first, to put it simply, become socially visible and legitimate (de-stigmatized) by appropriately appropriating space.

But what sort of a “new hope” do housing first residents, Moritz and others, achieve with their new home? Montini’s article describes a rehabilitated man, a man once plagued by unemployment and alcoholism who has become, through this new home, employed and sober. Undoubtedly, this is a significant portion of housing first’s story in the Valley (and elsewhere). Indeed, through the ethnographic portion of my research, I witnessed the transformation of Moritz’s life and many others through such housing. Yet this is where Montini’s story ends, and this storyline reflects countless media, governmental, and nonprofit narratives of housing.

53 The deaths of people on the street can spike during the Valley’s summer months, with temperatures regularly in the triple digits and peaking around 115 degrees. Outreach with water bottles or water and air conditioning stations (70 “Water Hydration Stations” across the Valley) attempt to assuage death due to heatstroke or dehydration (Ryan 2012; O’Connor 2013; NBC News 2013). Actions like this, especially when repeating annually, say something extremely important about our society, our “civilization.” How far have we come, really, if the lives of denizens are threatened by routine weather?

54 Recall that in chapter 3 I argued that stigma (i.e. invisibility, illegitimacy) depends not only upon production, but also consumption and reproduction, both of which necessitate a private place of one’s own – a home.

55 I also witnessed far more cases where the stagnant lack of affordable housing, social services, and employment in the Valley produced the “chronic homelessness” that housing first emerged to eradicate (see chapter 5).
first. Such stories fail to explore the means by which individual’s lives are transformed, how people like Marty are chosen, and what the processes of selection and case management say about the broader operating logic of housing first. What this chapter intends to do is fill-in these troubling gaps, to problematize these gutter fairytales and explore beyond their protagonists-cum-organizational poster-boys\textsuperscript{56} and to move past the housing first caricature of Marty Moritz.

I venture, therefore, into the depths of housing first case management, combining my 2009–10 ethnographic work in Tempe with more recent interviews and site visits at a larger housing first project in north-central Phoenix. The medical and moral framing of homelessness – described above – obfuscates structural causes and sharpens associations of deviancy; it also works upon case management techniques. Housing first case management, similar to techniques used by Charity Organization Societies and modern shelters, approaches the now housed individual as a case to be improved, a collection of deviant characteristics in need of rehabilitation through surveillance and discipline. As will be stressed below, this is not to say that housing first case management is but a clone of earlier models and philosophies, but only that it bears striking – and often overlooked – resemblance. Indeed housing first is a uniquely neoliberal program of poverty management in that it attempts to reintegrate individuals into the marketplace by giving them a habitat, a private space where marketable skills can be (re)produced, where they can be productive and thus de-stigmatized. A habitat enables once destitute individuals, individuals without a commodity to sell, whether it be labor-power or otherwise, to move into the sphere of exchange (and into the public sphere) voluntarily and with an acceptable purpose. With a habitat of their own, housing first residents become properly

\textsuperscript{56} I’m borrowing the term “poster boys” from Phyllis Habib, administrator of the Tempe Pilot Project’s case management organization Home at Last. She used it to describe the United Way’s posterization of Moritz and another tenant.
empowered (neo)liberal citizens, yet this empowerment remains structured – limited – by what Marx termed the “dull compulsions” of capitalism, the need to follow rational market actions or face dire consequences: homelessness, social invisibility or, sometimes, death. The disciplining power of the market significantly but incompletely replaces the disciplining power of the older, more paternalistic models of case management. Housing first, in other words, offers hope to its participants, but this hope is a qualified and contradictory one. Participants can only become partly “free” in the liberal sense, and even that liberal freedom, as I will show below, offers a severely truncated right to be fully visible. Subjected to both the sharp mandates of housing first’s paternalism and the dull compulsion of capitalism, housing first tenants are – like the still-homeless population – denied the chance to fully inhabit the city.

The right (not) to the city: Habitat, inhabit, and rehabilitation

Throughout this chapter I put to work several concepts of the French, Marxist theorist Henri Lefebvre to explore what sort of “hope” housing first clients obtain. Specifically, I employ his concepts of habitat versus inhabit and his now famous phrase/concept “the right to the city.” The right to the city is, for Lefebvre, a “cry and demand” for unalienated existence, a future beyond capitalist commodification and bureaucratic oligarchy. Along these lines, Harvey (2009b) stresses that the right to the city is the right to social surplus and the right to produce life democratically rather than at the behest of capital and its incessant drive for accumulation. “The right to the city,” writes Lefebvre (1996:174, original emphasis), “manifests itself as a superior form of rights: right to freedom, to individualization within socialization, to habitat and to inhabit. The right to the oeuvre, to participation and appropriation (clearly distinct from the right to property), are implied in the right to the city.” As Mitchell (2003, 233–6) stresses, the right to the city is not a singular, static right, but an action for utopian spatial form and social relations.
The right to the city is not just an urban right, but rather a cry and demand for a future urbanism, a new society altogether.

Lefebvre, then, puts this chapter in the position of a broad critique, for judging housing first much beyond its traditional framing in public policy induced program evaluation, feel-good newspaper columns, or public-private welfare propaganda. The “right to the city” demands a radical, utopian analysis. Yet Lefebvre is also useful because his theories stress the need for concrete rights, rights that must necessarily make tangible that broader, utopian right. For Mitchell (2003, 220), writing with homelessness in mind, the right to the city most crucially necessitates the right to housing. “[A]ny reasonable ‘right to the city,’” he argues, “requires also a right to inhabit the city, a right to housing. For Lefebvre…the right to housing was a necessary precondition of the right to the city.”

Perhaps, then, the right to the city is not solely about the right for individuals (including homeless persons) to occupy public space, at least not in the sense of a place being open to unmediated interaction, a place of strangers, difference and that gentle hum of unpredictability that comes with it. Indeed, a right to housing is a right to private space – a right not to the city. Mitchell (1995:118, original emphasis) attests that private places – homes – are corollary to and necessary for the appropriate appropriation of public space: “Since citizenship in modern democracy (at least ideologically) rests on a foundation of voluntary association, and since homeless people are involuntarily public, they cannot, by definition, be legitimate citizens.” Such ideological formations of modern liberal democracy have dire material consequences for homeless people: “[T]he desire to sweep homeless people from visibility,” Mitchell (2003:135, original emphasis) explains, “responds to the central contradiction of homelessness in a democracy composed of private individuals and private property…This contradiction turns on
publicity: homeless people are all too visible. Although the homeless are nearly always in public, they are rarely counted as part of the public.” Reminiscent of Moritz’s situation prior to his new home and new hope, Mitchell points toward the contradictory situation of homeless people in capitalist society, their visible public-ness yet their exclusion from the public. Rather than mere democratic sensibilities and traditions, the contradictory situation of homeless people stems from social stigma based upon production and reproduction.

The right to housing or habitat, and thus the ability to appropriately appropriate public space, to become legitimately visible, grants people a certain right to the city. Yet as important as private space is for individuals to become a proper part of the public and be granted a right to public space (not to mention their ability to reproduce themselves, to survive), the right to the city, as theorized by Lefebvre, entails much more than simply the right to housing. The right to the city, Lefebvre (1996, 174) explains, requires a right “to habitat and to inhabit.” Inhabit is a much larger set of relations than merely the right to habitat (housing) (c.f. Mitchell 2003). Inhabit includes the right to the city as oeuvre, as actively and democratically participating in the urban through decommodified desires rather than economic necessity (Lefebvre 1996, 103). Inhabiting necessitates the urban as “a place of desire, permanent disequilibrium, the seat of dissolution of normalities and constraints, the movement of play and the unpredictable” (Lefebvre 1996, 129). The right to the city is about the right to inhabit such a place. As the discussion below attests, housing first fails to achieve such a right. Indeed, housing first and most poverty management programs are antithetical to “disequilibrium” and abnormal behavior, antithetical to “play” and “desire.” Instead, housing first remains primarily about rehabilitation, about creating equilibrium and disciplining desire to be granted a right to habitat, to housing in the city.
Housing first in the Valley of the Sun

The extent of housing first in metropolitan Phoenix is in some ways difficult to measure. Most obviously, housing first is more a model than a particular policy, which makes tracking the program difficult. Its basic philosophy might be in place, yet it could logically be called something else, such as supportive housing, rapid re-housing, or permanent supportive housing. Furthermore, low-income housing programs and voucher systems (such as senior public housing or Section 8 housing), whether following the model of housing first or not, are altogether labeled as “permanent supportive housing” in the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s calculations (“supportive,” in this manner, can simply mean rent-subsidized rather than rehabilitative interventions). For example, according to the local United Way, which is heading the Valley’s plan to construct 1,000 units of housing for the chronically homeless by 2015, only about 96 units are currently occupied, with almost 400 units available or under construction. This stands in stark contrast to HUD’s provision of permanent supportive housing in the Valley, which reportedly provides 3,000 individual beds (DES 2011).

Similar to national trends, the chronically homeless population in the Valley is believed to comprise 10-20 percent of around the over six thousand individuals\(^5\) relegated to living on the street in greater Phoenix during the January Point-in-Time “street count” (see figure 11). According to the 2012 Point-in-Time count, this group of 932 individuals – typically unaffiliated men – “had become comfortable with their lifestyle” on the streets and were, therefore, needlessly and undeservingly using a disproportionate amount (around 50 percent) of public dollars on homelessness services (DES 2011; MAG 2006; City of Phoenix 2012; HUD 2013). In

\(^5\) Based upon Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data rather than the annual point-in-time count, from July 1, 2011 to June 30, 2012, approximately 7,965 single adults, 2,766 adults in families, 3,592 children between (14,323 total) experienced homelessness in the Valley (DES 2012). This seems to be the number most service providers use when quantifying greater Phoenix’s homeless population (Náñez 2010).
2008 the City of Phoenix and the Maricopa Association of Governments, therefore, followed similar trends across the United States (and much of the Western world) to manage the chronically homeless population (Newton 2008). Having received federal stimulus money through the Obama Administration’s Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program (HPRP)\textsuperscript{58} and through partnership with the local United Way, the Valley broke ground on its first officially housing first operation, what became known as the “Tempe Pilot Project” (VSUW 2012a).

![Total Arizona Point-in-Time Count](image)

**Figure 11**, Sources: HUD (2013); HUD and OCDP (2007)

The Pilot project is my first site of study. Opening in 2009, it is operated by Home at Last (HAL), an organization housed within the nonprofit status of Tempe First United Methodist Church, a congregation active in Tempe’s homelessness scene. The Pilot Project identified 35

\textsuperscript{58} The City of Tempe received $661,447 in HPRP funding (Náñez 2010), while Phoenix received approximately $6.9 million worth of stimulus funding (Bui 2010).
homeless individuals as “chronically homeless” and, within several months, offered them a choice of studio or one-bedroom apartments in Section 8 qualified complexes across Tempe. Once in their apartments, after being moved-in, taken to purchase basic housing supplies, and receiving donated or purchased furniture, individuals had 12-18 months of housing with their rent covered by funding the City of Tempe received in 2008 from HUD. If tenants had any income, 30 percent of those earnings would be used put towards the apartment’s rent. While in subsidized housing, “tenants” (avoiding the stigmatized term “client”) receive wrap-around case management from Home at Last.

Arizona Housing Incorporated’s (AHI) housing first program at their Collins Court apartment complex in Phoenix was my second site of study. A nonprofit affiliate of the Valley’s largest homeless shelter (CASS), AHI similarly employs vouchers to offer upwards of 80 chronically homeless individuals highly subsidized apartments at one of its complexes while using United Way funded (and other) case management services. Currently, AHI properties (four in total) house approximately 350 low-income residents, which could more than double by 2014. At Collins Court, twenty-seven apartments are exclusively reserved for chronically homeless individuals specifically referred by the Human Services Campus using special vouchers (to receive free or highly subsidized rent). The rest of the 80-unit complex remains open for chronically homeless “walk-ins” that either have employment or some other form of income (Interview, Gibson 2012).

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59 The apartment complex was named after Kevin Collins, a 47-year-old case manager who was shot and died lying in the street just outside CASS on a Monday morning (Poletta 2009).
Searching for the Chronically Homeless: Intake

When investigating the condition of homelessness, mistaking effect for cause, symptom for structure is not a novel phenomenon (Snow, Anderson, and Koegel 1994), yet in housing first’s outreach and intake procedures such logic is foundational. Housing first is a discriminate form of neoliberal poverty governance. The means by which it targets individuals on the street, separates and sorts the chronic from the broader homeless population, reveals much about its operational logic and intended case management techniques. Housing first in the Valley, more so than most major cities in states with more progressive welfare structures, is a very recent occurrence. Intake procedures have, for this reason, evolved quickly over time, becoming more fine-tuned and bureaucratic.

The Tempe Pilot Project’s search for the chronically homeless merely consisted of recognizing individuals through local drop-in centers, City of Tempe street outreach, or, to a much lesser extent, referrals from across the Valley. People like Moritz, people who had become a familiar face around Tempe’s fairly congested homeless archipelago, a regular “consumer” of services were granted access to the Tempe Pilot Project with case managers and administrators vouching for their qualifying chronic-ness. As Kim Van Nimwegan, former Director of HAL and the current Community Impact Manager, explains: “For every single person who applied for housing in Tempe I said they were homeless whether I knew it [officially] or not. I knew they were homeless, for sure, and for a while. Did I know it was for a year? Maybe not.” Van Nimwegan’s explanation not only depicts a fairly common case of frontline bureaucrats reinterpreting policy (Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011, 11; Lipsky 2010), but also a particular informality characteristic of the Tempe Pilot Project. Chronic-ness was a factor in obtaining housing, but others accompanied it. A probable “likelihood to succeed” in the program also
became an explicit qualification, an additional requisite anathema to housing first philosophy as espoused by its recognized inventor, Sam Tsemberis (see Tsemberis and Eisenberg 2001; Pathways to Housing n.d.).

Further, and as Van Nimwegan’s explanation implies, strong relationships between clientele (typically at the drop-in center where she – and I – worked) and outreach staff paved the way for admittance into this highly selective program. A particular form of institutional nepotism, in other words, skewed the lottery of housing first. Whereas pure “vulnerability” – a combination of visibility and the inability to become productive citizens – is the ideal yardstick measuring the chronic, social normalcy, good natured patience and respect in the face of bureaucratic machinery and intrusive (and infantilizing) examination comprise a significant undercurrent that redirected housing to the most “deserving” within the broader pool of the chronically homeless. Such deservingness, Katz (1996, 70) attests, is acquired by “an outward show of deference [which] merited relief. Any display of independence,” he continues, was “translated into ingratitude, and gratitude was everything. Clients had to show their appreciation cheerfully; they had to accept the advice so freely offered; they could not resist attempts of agents or visitors to reorder their lives.” Although writing of early US charity organizations, the dance of deservingness that Katz depicts was only too potent in housing first intake (and present throughout the program thereafter).

Whether or not this form of subjective qualification prompted the move toward a more bureaucratic and objective method of finding the chronic homeless is difficult to ascertain. Nevertheless, it seems fairly likely that, as with the scientific charity organizers at the turn of the century, new intake procedures were a means to “coordinate and rationalize charity,” to subtract all potential for unreflecting randomness (Cruickshank 1999, 48). The new intake process
adhered to by subsequent housing first developments in the Valley emerged as a tool to increase intake efficiency and housing first’s overall cost-effectiveness. As Van Nimwegan explains:

[I]n the community the understanding and the communication about this [housing first] being such an expensive intervention [means] that we have to be really strategic in targeting the right people for the right intervention. And that is exciting to me. You and I both know that we weren’t able to do that and some people were given this very expensive intervention that they probably did not need (Interview, Van Nimwegan 2012).

Referring to some of Tempe’s housing first clientele (though not, notably, the poster boys) that met the HUD definition of chronic-ness yet were far from the most vulnerable, visible, or mentally disturbed homeless individuals on the streets of Tempe, Van Nimwegan points toward a level of laxity in housing first intake. In other words, housing first, and indeed the “chronic” designation and the reality which it signifies – a fractional sub-category within the homeless population – is itself too broad for the program model to efficiently identify the truly deserving poor.

Further parsing of the chronically homeless population into the truly deserving versus the somewhat deserving required a tool that supersedes the interpersonal relationships that can cause programmatic infidelity. Enter the HEART Assessment. Considered a “best practice” pioneered

60 As of May 2013, HUD began to propose a more constricting revision to the definition of “chronic homelessness.” As the definition reads now, a chronically homeless individual/family is somebody that remained un-housed for at least 12 months or has had 4 homeless episodes within a three-year period (in addition to having a long-term disabling condition)(HUD 2007). “The proposed revision to the definition would require an added requirement on the episodic part of the chronically homeless definition. Households (individual or family) would [need to] have at least 12 cumulative months of homelessness in their four ‘occasions’ of homelessness during their three year period,” the Arizona Coalition to End Homelessness reports (2013). This would seriously limit the episodic yet multiple portion of the “chronically homeless” definition, restricting a chronic designation to individuals/families that have spent at least 1 year struggling on the street or in shelters. In this manner, HUD is attempting to target an even smaller portion of the homeless population while basically defining-out a huge portion of whom is now
in Seattle, WA, it is the tool to determine the chronically homeless and the medical and moral infirmities of each individual. The HEART Assessment (standing for Housing, Eligibility, Assessment, Referral Tool) is currently employed by all housing first programs receiving funding from the local United Way (currently ten). Each significant agency within the Valley’s 14-acre Human Services Campus, where the majority of the region’s homeless population is contained or treated, has a designated HEART Assessor, an individual trained in administering the “intense 2-hour assessment” (Interview, Van Nimwegan 2012). The official rationale for adopting HEART is that it:

[S]treamlines eligibility, assessment, and referral for permanent supportive housing projects in Maricopa County. It includes a database with vital information that connects individuals experiencing homelessness to the appropriate type of housing and funding. The information included in the database will clearly identify individuals as members of a target population, help determine the best sources of subsidies or housing to leverage in helping those individuals and minimize duplicative housing efforts across multiple agencies (VSUW 2012).

The Assessment explicitly functions as a technique for “targeting the right people for the right intervention,” a targeting made all the more important due to the sheer cost of keeping the extremely chronic from dying on the street/putting them into housing.

In addition to the bureaucratic, “objective,” and numerical critique of the homeless individual, the United Way document continues to explain that the Assessment “involves asking

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61 The Valley of the Sun United Way and the Human Services Campus adopted the HEART Assessment in 2011. As of the summer of 2012, HEART assessors at various Campus agencies were in the midst of being trained – over several days – to properly use the tool on a more substantial scale.
the homeless client a series of [scripted] questions” while “assessing [the] verbal and nonverbal communication” of clientele (VSUW 2012). The Assessment, like the Self-Sufficiency Matrix explored below, attempts to objectify the totality of the homeless person, judging not only responses to questions but social ticks, abnormal reactions or anything else that may lend credence to suspected yet hidden deviances (or lack thereof). The personal and social deviances that housing first and homeless campuses attempt to hide are, through this process, exhibited by the homeless individual. It becomes the homeless person’s responsibility to testify on behalf of their own abnormality and the assessor’s task to coax the unfortunate spectacle out into the light.

These workers and the HEART technology have become the gatekeepers for the newer, and larger, housing first programs in metropolitan Phoenix. The Assessment can be, and often is, understood as a biopolitical technology used to determine the life chances of homeless populations, calculating how likely it is a homeless individual will appear in Montini’s next tragic eulogy. HEART, then, appears to simply be a benevolent tool responding to Montini’s outrage. As the program description quoted above attests, and within the neoliberal, cost-benefit discourse of housing first, however, HEART evidently has more cynical functions. Taken in relation to neoliberal mandates, the Assessment is as much about calculating how much it costs to leave these persons on the street but alive as it is about rescuing the population from Montini’s columns.

To do this, the Assessment calculates a “vulnerability score” that diagnoses moral, medical, and social deviancy. Composed of ten different domains and “representing the limitations a homeless person may have in meeting their own needs” (VSUW 2012), HEART assesses the homeless individual’s ability to survive on the street, and to do so without
potentially consuming a disproportionate share of support or charity. For instance, it measures their capacity for “organization” and proper “social behavior,” along with their means of communication and “survival skills” on the street (Interview, Anonymous 2012). Furthermore, the Assessment gives specific attention to “indicated mortality risks,” “medical risks,” and substance abuse (VSUW 2012). These particular categories go beyond the typical qualifications of chronic homelessness, beyond co-occurring disorders and lengthy stints on the street or in shelter. HEART widens to not only include the foundational elements of chronic-ness but to include more nuanced and intrusive analyses of the homeless person’s very being. The street-savvy chronically homeless, the individuals that, according to Arizona’s Annual Report on homelessness (DES 2011), “had become comfortable with their lifestyle,” are much more likely to be recast as undeserving through the Assessment: they are less chronic, less costly and therefore less deserving of housing first; they can be neglected by the public, remaining invisible and with no right to the city.63 A level of normalcy that keeps individuals alive on the street comes to chain them to the gutter, undeserving (for the time being) of “expensive interventions” that could set them free.

Across the Valley, and as initiated by the local United Way, offering the expensive intervention of housing is explicitly becoming intertwined with government income. A new initiative is underway that will permit outreach workers to discover the chronically homeless individual through HEART and, with an expedited program, qualify that person for SSI (Supplemental Security Income) or SSDI (Social Security Disability Insurance) within 60 days

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62 HEART’s vulnerability score is determined by these ten domains (exactly as listed in the VSUW document): survival skills, indicated mortality risks, organization, substance abuse, social behavior, basic needs, medical risks, mental health, communication, and homelessness (VSUW 2012).

63 The US Interagency Council on Homelessness has specifically “encouraged communities to identify the most expensive persons” because such intervention will mean “significant reductions in costs because they are such high services users” (Culhane et al. 2007, 12–7).
as opposed to the standard 6 months on up to a year (Interview, Van Nimwegan 2012). With welfare support in motion, the chronically homeless individual can be moved into housing and remain housed at an even lesser cost to local municipalities. In some ways, of course, this model violates that of housing first, which posits housing as the initial step toward self-sufficiency (rather than Social Security income). On the other hand, this strategy fits squarely with housing first’s logic of efficiency, its blurring of cost-benefit analysis with deservingness. Those with SSI or SSDI become, in the eyes of the Valley’s housing first providers, the most deserving as they have qualified for the discriminate and difficult process of proving eligibility, an eligibility dependent upon previous employment (paying into the system) and years of medical records (Social Security Administration 2013a; Social Security Administration 2013b).

**Rehabilitation: Evaluation and Reformation**

How the “vulnerability score” is specifically calculated could not be accessed as the tool, like many psychological evaluations, remains confidential. Yet much can be logically concluded through, once again, looking at the tool in context. As the United Way’s description and several interviewees attest, HEART “aligns itself” with the “Arizona Self-Sufficiency Matrix” (VSUW 2012; Interview, Van Nimwegan 2012; Interview, Anonymous 2012). Nine years before HEART, in 2002, the Matrix emerged in Arizona as a “standardized instrument” (another “best practice”) for case managers and service providers to distinguish “client typologies” and track programmatic progress (Culhane et al. 2007, 20–4). Currently case management providers contracted by the local United Way are required to analyze clients with the tool at six-month intervals (on 1, 6, 12, 18 month anniversaries) and report their “Global Score” to the United Way. Whereas HEART determines eligibility through establishing a baseline, static score of “vulnerability,” the Matrix captures fluidity, deviations from this baseline whether positive or
negative. More than simple measurement, however, the Matrix is a means to illustrate for clientele their shortcomings, to encourage rehabilitation through overcoming recognized deviances. The Matrix is composed of seventeen domains, each with five levels ranging from extreme dependence or crisis to self-sufficiency (see figure 12).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DOMAIN</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Participant Goal? (X)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>Homeless or threatened with eviction.</td>
<td>In transitional, temporary or substandard housing; and/or current rent/mortgage is unaffordable (over 30% of income).</td>
<td>In stable housing that is safe but only marginally adequate.</td>
<td>Household is in safe, adequate subsidized housing.</td>
<td>Household is safe, adequate, unsubsidized housing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>No job.</td>
<td>Temporary, part-time or seasonal; inadequate pay, no benefits.</td>
<td>Employed full-time; inadequate pay; few benefits.</td>
<td>Employed full-time with adequate pay and benefits.</td>
<td>Maintains permanent employment with adequate income and benefits.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>No income.</td>
<td>Inadequate income and/or spontaneous or inappropriate spending.</td>
<td>Can meet basic needs with subsidy; appropriate spending.</td>
<td>Can meet basic needs and manage debt without assistance.</td>
<td>Income is sufficient, well managed; has discretionary income and is able to save.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>No food or means to prepare it. Relies to a significant degree on other sources of free or low-cost food.</td>
<td>Household is on food stamps.</td>
<td>Can meet basic food needs, but requires occasional assistance.</td>
<td>Can meet basic food needs without assistance.</td>
<td>Can choose to purchase any food household desires.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Care</td>
<td>Needs childcare, but none is available/ accessible and/or child is not eligible.</td>
<td>Childcare is unreliable or unaffordable, inadequate supervision is a problem for what childcare is available.</td>
<td>Affordable subsidized childcare is available, but limited.</td>
<td>Reliable, affordable childcare is available, no need for subsidies.</td>
<td>Able to select quality childcare by choice.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children’s Education</td>
<td>One or more school-aged children not enrolled in school.</td>
<td>One or more school-aged children enrolled in school, but not attending classes.</td>
<td>Enrolled in school, but one or more children only occasionally attending classes.</td>
<td>Enrolled in school and attending classes most of the time.</td>
<td>All school-aged children enrolled and attending on a regular basis.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOMAIN</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Score</td>
<td>Participant Goal? (X)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adult Education</td>
<td>Literacy problems and/or no high school diploma/GED are serious barriers to employment.</td>
<td>Enrolled in literacy and/or GED program and/or has sufficient command of English to where language is not a barrier to employment.</td>
<td>Has high school diploma/GED.</td>
<td>Needs additional education/training to improve employment situation and/or to resolve literacy problems to where they are able to function effectively in society.</td>
<td>Has completed education/training needed to become employable. No literacy problems.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Health Care</td>
<td>No medical coverage with immediate need.</td>
<td>No medical coverage and great difficulty accessing medical care when needed.</td>
<td>Some members (e.g. children) on AHCCCS.</td>
<td>All members can get medical care when needed, but may strain budget.</td>
<td>All members are covered by affordable, adequate health insurance.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Skills</td>
<td>Unable to meet basic needs such as hygiene, food, activities of daily living.</td>
<td>Can meet a few but not all needs of daily living without assistance.</td>
<td>Can meet most but not all daily living needs without assistance.</td>
<td>Able to meet all basic needs of daily living without assistance.</td>
<td>Able to provide beyond basic needs of daily living for self and family.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Relations</td>
<td>Lack of necessary support from family or friends; abuse (DV, child) is present or there is child neglect</td>
<td>Friends/family may be supportive, but lack ability or resources to help; family members do not relate well with one another; potential for abuse or neglect.</td>
<td>Some support from family/friends; family members acknowledge and seek to change negative behaviors; are learning to communicate and support.</td>
<td>Strong support from family or friends. Household members support each other’s efforts.</td>
<td>Has healthy/expanding support network; household is stable and communicatio n is consistently open.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobility</td>
<td>No access to transportation, public or private; may have a car that is inoperable.</td>
<td>Transportation is available, but unreliable, unpredictable, unaffordable; may have car but no insurance, license, etc.</td>
<td>Transportation is available and reliable, but limited and/or inconvenient; drivers are licensed and minimally insured.</td>
<td>Transportation is generally accessible to meet basic travel needs.</td>
<td>Transportation is readily available and affordable; car is adequately insured.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Involvement</td>
<td>Not applicable due to crisis situation, in “survival” mode.</td>
<td>Socially isolated and/or no social skills and/or lacks motivation to become involved.</td>
<td>Lacks knowledge of ways to become involved.</td>
<td>Some community involvement (advisory group, support group), but has barriers such as transportation, childcare issues.</td>
<td>Actively involved in community.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting Skills</td>
<td>There are safety concerns regarding parenting skills.</td>
<td>Parenting skills are minimal.</td>
<td>Parenting skills are apparent but not adequate.</td>
<td>Parenting skills are adequate.</td>
<td>Parenting skills are well developed.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domain</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Score</td>
<td>Participant Goal? (X)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal</td>
<td>Current outstanding warrants or tickets.</td>
<td>Current charges/trial pending, noncompliance with probation/parole.</td>
<td>Fully compliant with probation/parole terms.</td>
<td>Has successfully completed probation/parole within past 12 months, no new charges filed.</td>
<td>No active criminal justice involvement in more than 12 months and/or no felony criminal history.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health</td>
<td>Danger to self or others; recurring suicidal ideation; experiencing severe difficulty in day-to-day life due to psychological problems.</td>
<td>Recurrent mental health symptoms that may affect behavior, but not a danger to self/others; persistent problems with functioning due to mental health symptoms.</td>
<td>Mild symptoms may be present but are transient; only moderate difficulty in functioning due to mental health problems.</td>
<td>Minimal symptoms that are expectable responses to life stressors; only slight impairment in functioning.</td>
<td>Symptoms are absent or rare; good or superior functioning in wide range of activities; no more than every day problems or concerns.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance Abuse</td>
<td>Meets criteria for severe abuse/dependence; resulting problems so severe that institutional living or hospitalization may be necessary.</td>
<td>Meets criteria for dependence; preoccupation with use and/or obtaining drugs/alcohol; withdrawal or withdrawal avoidance behaviors evident; use results in avoidance or neglect of essential life activities.</td>
<td>Use within last 6 months; evidence of persistent or recurrent social, occupational, emotional or physical problems related to use (such as disruptive behavior or housing problems); problems have persisted for at least one month.</td>
<td>Client has used during last 6 months, but no evidence of persistent or recurrent social, occupational, emotional, or physical problems related to use; no evidence of recurrent drug use.</td>
<td>No drug use/alcohol abuse in last 6 months.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>Home or residence is not safe; immediate level of lethality is extremely high; possible CPS involvement.</td>
<td>Safety is threatened/temporary protection is unavailable; level of lethality is high.</td>
<td>Current level of safety is minimally adequate; ongoing safety planning is essential.</td>
<td>Environment is safe, however, future of such is uncertain; safety planning is important.</td>
<td>Environment is apparently safe and stable.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 12**, Arizona Self-sufficiency Matrix. Source: (Culhane et al. 2007, 22–4)

The six-month interval requirement gives the impression that the Matrix plays a relatively superfluous role in housing first case management. In other words, it makes housing first appear more as normal housing (habitat) rather than normalizing housing (rehabilitation). Arizona Housing Inc.’s properties, for instance, only employ the Matrix every six months, yet individuals coming into the program through HEART and other referrals are asked to meet with their case manager once every week. Jeff Gibson (interview 2012), Residential Coordinator of AHI,
however, explains the strict voluntarism and significant informality of such a meeting: “We’re not – there’s no penalty if they don’t [meet once every week], I tell them, you know – because I want to keep the rapport going – just walk by and say ‘Hey, everything’s going great.’ – ‘Okay, we’ve had our once a week.’ I want them to know if there’s a problem I’m gonna be here, plain and simple.” Perhaps this understanding of the Matrix’s role in housing first at AHI reflects a professional disdain for the Matrix, or maybe it stresses that the Residential Services Coordinator’s job cannot be boiled down into a technocratic and cybernetic diagnostic tool. Just as likely, the Matrix may indeed be less central to AHI properties and even most programs not under the same programmatic microscope as the Tempe Pilot Project. My guess is that it’s some combination of all of these. Indeed, the current Tempe case manager framed the Matrix more as a reporting tool than case management guide (Interview, Onofrio 2012).

Nevertheless, the current case manager explained, the Matrix remains a tool for determining gaps, and therefore arriving at specific goals or action steps to close those gaps (Interview, Onofrio 2012). In the Tempe Pilot Project, at its very outset at least, the Self-Sufficiency Matrix was paramount; it was the pivot around which case management revolved. In Tempe’s Home at Last case management, done by myself and more substantially by two others, normalization was the unspoken name of the game. At least once a week caseworkers would visit tenants at their apartment for a “check-in.” Rehashing the scientific charity technique of conducting “friendly visits” to transform the charitable worker “from an intrusive do-gooder into a friend” (Cruickshank 1999, 49), minutes of small-talk precede diving into the Matrix. Such chatter, however, is not to be misunderstood as genuine conversation. As Barbara Cruickshank’s (1999) analysis of scientific charity reveals, the housing first technique of approaching tenants (as extremely poor or unproductive and stigmatized people) is far from novel. Home at Last
caseworkers were, just like nineteenth-century friendly visitors, dispatched to “thoroughly know the poor;” to understand the minute details of their circumstances, to probe “their characters [which] must be classified and counted…carefully and faithfully ‘investigated’ and recorded in case notes” (Cruickshank 1999, 50).

After small talk, then, the caseworker questions the tenant to determine their progress toward self-sufficiency. The caseworker’s task in this instance is to subtly objectify the tenant, to superimpose their deficient reality against a normalized ideal (i.e. the “self-sufficient” adult). “The power of normalization,” Foucault (1977, 184) argues, “individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels.” Indeed, the Matrix is ideal tool for such a task. It rudimentarily transforms the tenant into a legible, quantitatively expressed case, an objectification that enables objective analysis. Now legible, it becomes apparent at which level the tenant exists in seventeen different categories, measuring everything from housing status (i.e. from “Homeless or threatened with eviction” all the way to “Unsubsidized housing”) to health and substance abuse issues. But the Matrix, like the HEART Assessment, goes further than categorizations – examinations – that mark one as chronic. The Matrix is able to account for a wider set of possible deficiencies that traditionally were not understood as medical or unavoidable characteristics that permitted one into the class of the “deserving poor,” such as “community involvement,” “life skills,” and “family relations” (Abt Associates 2005; Culhane et al. 2007, 1222–1224). After the tenant is alienated from her or himself, with the pieces of their life placed upon the proper domain/level atop this board game of normalization, their “global score” is calculated to determine which segments of their life are in progression or digression, all set against this particular ideal – the perfect score, the column of straight fives. The power inequity throughout this half-to-full hour is potent; the caseworker, with his or her actions
disciplined by the Matrix, suddenly become an explicit judge of object contra ideal, a moralizing disciplinarian, an examiner of a pathologized body and mind.

Weekly visits by the Tempe housing first case manager are but one technique to examine and reform tenants, to instill discipline and encourage self-governance. Whereas apartment visits are taken to discern the status of a person’s specific domain/level on the Matrix as a form of repetitive examination, in-house meetings appear a more informal, colloquial congregation of all Home at Last tenants and caseworkers. Circling a collage of tables at Tempe’s First United Methodist Church, which houses the program’s offices, tenants participate (often begrudgingly) in a variety of presentations or discussions every week or so. Individual experiences, Matrix scores, and case notes combine to locate shared and common deficiencies of the tenant population. In a sincere attempt to rectify these identified issues, caseworkers organize particular teachings to facilitate a numerical jump toward self-sufficiency. Thus, the superficialities categorically produced by the Matrix echo throughout the delivery of precise topics for presentation and discussion. For instance, it was determined that a sizeable portion of tenants was deemed deficient in budgeting (one domain of the Matrix). To address this issue, caseworkers arranged for a personal finance organization to deliver a Power Point lesson on budgetary basics and frugality (spending discipline) during one such weekly meeting.64 Other lessons, albeit often less formal, taught particular skills to tenants: computer and typing skills, cooking and nutrition classes, and informational sessions about adjusting to housed life and coping with depression and anxiety.

64 Teaching budgetary “skills” rarely went over well with clientele. As a case manager this was annoying. As a human being it was potently understandable, and witnessing such lecturing could be morally nauseating. I’ll let Oscar Wilde (2001 [1891], 130) explain: “Sometimes the poor are praised for being thrifty. But to recommend thrift to the poor is both grotesque and insulting. It is like advising a man who is starving to eat less…Man should not be ready to show that he can live like a badly fed animal.”
In some ways the stress upon skills in these presentations and within the Matrix itself departs from the substantially stigmatized language of moral deviance or medical disability, away from laziness, addiction, mental or physical incapacity to be productive citizens. Instead of posing homelessness as an atomistic and individual form of deviancy, something that cannot be transformed, the notion of skills enables some social and historical framing. Skills have to be taught, and for skills to be productive they have to be valued, they have to match the current demands of an always revolutionizing competitive market. Certainly this broadening of examination and reformation of “skills” remains overwhelmingly individualistic (Gowan 2010, 220), but it understands the homeless person or housing first client as malleable and potentially normal through standard teaching rather than forms of therapy, confinement, or medical intervention. This brings our attention once again to the connection between productivity and stigma. The stress put upon skills in the weekly in-house meetings, informed by the Matrix and preceded by HEART, can be seen to embody a neoliberal formulation of governance, a form of power that seeks not to control through brute force but rather to “fashion and guide the bodily comportments and inward states of others and of the self” (Huxley 2007, 187) through numerous and “dispersed tactics” (Foucault 1991, 95).

For institutions of poverty governance like housing first, pushing self-governance entails teaching rational economic behavior to the poor, the evident losers of a risk-laden and competitive capitalist market place. Drawing from Foucault’s critique of Gary Becker (1975), a neoliberal economist of the University of Chicago and the key theorist of “human capital,” Lemke (2001, 199) explains: “However pathological an individual may be, in the eyes of the neo-liberals he or she is always to a certain degree also a rational being, in other words sensitive to changes in the balance of profit and loss.” No matter how impoverished, the neoliberal
individual is perpetually capable of making rational economic decisions. But poor people or, more aptly, populations that have become redundant and devalued, are decommodified and therefore banished from the market, are incapable of being guided (or controlled) by the mundane necessities of economics, of intelligently employing scarce resources. Without value, whether through commodities or, most basely, the commodity of labor-power, they are unable to rejoin the competitive market and proper society. For this reason their behavior lacks market rationality, they remain undisciplined stigmatized actors and a drain on broader social development.

Extreme deprivation, as housing first philosophy so eloquently attests, has a high social cost, impelling the government to meet that cost to maintain its legitimacy. “Basically,” Foucault (2010:145) argues, the neoliberal state “has to intervene on society so that competitive mechanisms can play a regulatory role at every moment and every point in society” to create “a general regulation of society by the market.” As “free” laborers, as market actors housing first participants are indirectly controlled by the market rather than directly controlled by the state. They become independent and productive, transforming the issues of redundancy and devaluation to issues of self-care and personal responsibility. By way of skills training and self-improvement, of reinvesting in their once-depleted human capital (with the apartment and its lease playing no small part, as will be considered below), housing first tenants become self-entrepreneurs (Foucault 2010, 226). Caseworkers come to play a less central role in their clients’s self-sufficiency. Jeff Gibson, Residential Services Coordinator at Arizona Housing Inc.’s Collin’s Court property, articulates this neoliberal conception of individual responsibility:

Me: So how has your approach to being a case manager changed from working in Vista Colina [a family shelter] to working in a housing first, more hands-off environment?
Gibson: Well, yeah, it is kind of more of a hands-off, but it is also a “Here is your line – follow it. I’m not gonna hold your hand, but here’s your goals. This is what you need to do, okay? I’m not going to work harder than you to accomplish them. I’m going to give you what you need to do and then you go from there.” Whereas with the emergency shelters you’ve gotta be bam-bam-bam on-them, on-them, “Get it done,” you know, very strict. They’re on, in a shelter system they’re on a timeline, most of the time it’s 90 days and they have to move on. Here, in affordable supportive housing, it’s a lifetime. You’re – this is where you live. You’ve got a one-year lease, live it as you wish.

The theory goes that housing first tenants, with some integration into the market, may become productive and independent citizens, self-sufficient, predictable, and rational subjects of a capitalist political economy. In this scenario, the caseworker is but a conduit guiding the client toward market integration or other skills that may render them more productive and self-sufficient.

Yet however neoliberal the ends of housing first might be, no matter how “hands-off” case management techniques are compared to that of shelters, the means remain significantly paternalistic (c.f. Willse 2010). Housing first is still a program of treatment (Mitchell 2011, 948; Tsemberis, Gulcur, and Nakae 2004), after all – of normalization and the caseworker telling the tenant what is best for him or herself. Such paternalism emerges not only with the Matrix-measured deficiencies, but also the broader program design that continually frames homelessness as self-caused. The United Way evaluates the case management services that they fund (in

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65 A rehabilitative program design in housing first is supported by an ideology that continues to see homelessness as the result of laziness or lack of knowledge. Case manager Jeff Gibson (2012) explained his take on homelessness in metro Phoenix: “It’s amazing, I mean, it’s out there for a person who wants it. If they want it, it’s available for them, to get the help they need to get out of homelessness… I think emergency shelters at CASS are around 900 people a night and that’s you know, a lot of those are people who do not want to get off the street; it’s their life. They don’t
Tempe and Phoenix programs) by measuring their adherence to the “Support Service Standards in Permanent Supportive Housing.” The concise, three-page document explains that,

Effective service delivery will assist the individual [client] in adapting to living independently and maintaining his/her housing. Services should support the development of meaningful goals; including returning to school, finding a job, saving for the purchase of a home, or improving relationships with family members (VSUW 2012b).

The document proceeds to outline ten “General Supportive Services” and thirteen “Independent Living Skills” to be taught through “breaking down an overall skill into small steps, describing each step, modeling each step, allowing the individual to complete the steps and providing feedback, assigning homework, evaluating change, and programming the use of the skill” (ibid.).

This expanded list illustrates the extent of treatment (and the potential for disciplinary action) built into housing first. Indeed, rehabilitation is nearly total in housing first. Jeff Gibson (2012) of AHI bluntly stated the task of case managers: “We have to basically teach an adult how to be an adult.”

Through interviews with case managers and administrators, it seems that two of the 23 services/skills were of particular importance to teaching adulthood, and they often worked know any better. This is another way of teaching them. By having the supportive housing like this we can teach them a better way” (original emphasis). Diane Onofrio (2012), case manager in Tempe, offered similar framing.

66 The entire list of services include: new tenant orientation and tenant’s rights education, case management/service coordination, psychosocial assessment and goal development, individualized service planning, crisis intervention, peer mentoring, support groups, recreation/socialization opportunities, transportation, health and wellness activities, communication skills, conflict resolution/mediation training, financial management and budgeting, benefits counseling, meal preparation skills, nutritional education, personal hygiene/self care, housekeeping skills, transportation/using public transportation, medication management, first aid skills, stress management, safety and hazard recognition (VSUW 2012b).
together covertly. These include “psychosocial assessment”\textsuperscript{67} and “recreation/socialization opportunities.” AHI Director John Wall (2012) explains the rationale for recreational activities.

It [support services] has to appear very non-institutional, very non-clinical, it has to all look like, you know, they’re just organizing the next ice cream social. But, by the way, “If you want to pop in I got some brochures that could be interesting to you…” It has to be non-threatening for engagement.

Wall goes on to explain that case management and psychosocial assessment has to masquerade as recreation/socialization “because we do have what you might call a housing first approach,” where clients can technically abstain from such programmatic activities. It is through these “non-clinical” appearances that case managers in housing first are able to discern possible deficiencies in their clients’ behavior (are they quick to anger, unkempt, drunk, maybe wearing clothes beyond their means?) and create case plans of “sequenced steps that will overcome barriers” so clients can “complete the steps” toward self-sufficiency (VSUW 2012b).

Prescriptions of deficiency, to be sure, have their own effects upon clients, but the true force emerges through instruction, what Foucault (1977, 170) terms the “art of correct training.” The determined, measured, and recorded deficiencies are continually reified through the specific skills teachings or group discussion that advise tenants in the Tempe Pilot on how they may normalize themselves through self-reformation. Such ways of framing deficiency and providing care carries a “powerful hidden curriculum”: “listen and you will be better because I know better” (McKnight 1995, 11). Such a framing not only quells discontent toward socioeconomic

\textsuperscript{67} We should pause and think about the magnitude of “psychosocial.” The Oxford Dictionary defines the adjective as “of or relating to the interrelation of social factors and individual thought and behavior.” This is an extremely broad category for a case manager to “assess” and thereafter rehabilitate; it goes far beyond the other required skills teaching and services, focusing upon reforming an individual’s entire social \textit{personality}. 

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inequality while instilling self-blame and internal disciplining (Lyon-Calho 2000), but reinforces the hierarchy between caseworker and tenant. Self-sufficiency for the tenant is dependent upon accepting personal deficiencies (determined by the caseworker) and working to overcome those deficiencies (generally as the caseworker sees fit).

The practice of instruction is not the only example of how this tenant-caseworker power hierarchy remains significant in housing first. As Wall described above, the “non-threatening” social and recreational activities are of appearance only. As a case manager, smiles and conversation became the tool to examine the behavior and attitude of individual tenants, to – returning once again to the HEART Assessment’s language – “assess the verbal and nonverbal communication” of clientele (VSUW 2012). Apart from merely prescribing hidden deviancies, social and recreational activities help inform deservingness. Becoming deserving of assistance is, as Michael Katz (1996, 70) noted above, granted by “an outward show of deference” to the caseworker. For this reason, tenants remain affable and eager to please even when matrices and case plans are absent. Foucault (1977, 178) writes of how discipline creates “micro-penalties,” a form of punishment as subtle as the offence. Unlike failing to pay rent or violating the lease, micro-penalties exist to uphold unwritten social codes or norms of mass behavior (Foucault 1977, 179).

Micro-penalties, of course, are everywhere, and that they exist within housing first is not astounding. At the same time, however, they take a particular form within the Tempe Pilot Project (and, I would argue, housing first in general). Depending on perspective, these micro-penalties can, in fact, be immense. If a tenant needs a bus pass (which can be a big deal), for instance, he or she becomes more zealous and friendly, the caseworker more stolid and skeptical. Past infractions against housing first norms (i.e. taking the program seriously and respecting the
tenant-caseworker hierarchy) are calculated to determine the believability of the tenant’s alleged need. When were they last insolent, disrespectful of instruction? More importantly, will this favor enable them to move toward that ideal column of fives, or should the bus pass ($3.50) be reserved for a more disciplined tenant? Each of these micro-infractions carries an individual value, but the calculations are nearly instant. The sum total either results in the tenant receiving the reward or the caseworker rejecting their plea, administering a micro-penalty as a means of correcting the tenant’s behavior. In this example the reward is a bus pass, but it could be anything. It could (and often did) include such things as vouchers for clothing, help getting to the food bank, assistance with a Medicare application, or even going the extra mile to make sure the tenant is not evicted. The dual disciplinary system of gratification and punishment remains within housing first even as it claims to wholly disown the authoritarian regimes of the emergency shelter and homeless campus.

Rehabilitation: Surveillance and Security

The Tempe Pilot Project was explicitly based upon a “scattered site” strategy. Recognizing the dark legacy of ghettoized large public housing projects and attempting to distance itself from it (Interview, Wall 2012), the new strategy sprinkled tenants among Tempe’s Section 8 approved apartment complexes. There was constant stress put on maintaining a significant diffusion of tenants across the city and, if two or more were in the same complex, to at least make sure they were not next-door neighbors. The logic behind the strategy was clear, and significantly a product of the unique homeless “community” in Tempe. Largely populated by expatriates of the Zone, Tempe held a smaller, more concentrated population of homeless people. Individuals came into contact with each other quite often because only a handful of service providers existed in the small city. Further, homeless people were forced to congregate within minute islands of public
space in a heavily gentrified and privatized downtown (Amster 2008) (see chapter 2). This geographical constriction meant many were acquaintances, with relationships that, according to social services, were often centered on substance abuse or other regressive behavior. The city’s own legacy of managing homeless populations, of expulsion and containment, was now inversed through an intentional partitioning of ex-homeless tenants in the Tempe Pilot Project, an attempt to remove the housing first individual from the lingering pathologies of “street culture” by placing them within “normal” neighborhoods.

The housing first program is, like most welfare provision, conditional upon surveillance. As Sanford Schram (2000, 89–90) argues, modern welfare practice of care are defined by the act watching: “To watch is to care, to watch is to provide care, to watch is all by itself to create a climate in which the watched feel obligated to modify their behavior and demonstrate how they are responding to the care provided.” With individual tenants partitioned, each with their individual space, detached and largely segregated from the others, the case manager (myself and others), city outreach workers, and city safety inspectors are able to continuously watch and analyze the status of the tenant, forming what Foucault (1977, 171) terms the “network of gazes.” Indeed, like a panoptic ring or a series of cameras, these service providers were always in communication – questioning, discussing, determining if inclination of wrongdoing or trouble was simply an unfounded feeling of prejudice or not. On the other hand, such analyzing was rarely so subtle. Technically the apartment was the tenant’s, but the power relation consigned that juridical right to a mere notional claim. Caseworkers came and went as they pleased, as did city employees, often without prior notice (most tenants did not have phones to call beforehand). From the tenant’s perspective, surveillance and questioning could arrive at their doorstep at any moment, unannounced. Apartment complex staff, moreover, was all too aware of the uniqueness
of their new renters, holding a stack full of caseworkers’ cards at the ready in case something seemed awry. Herein is the most panoptic element of the program, one lost neither on the caseworker nor, I would imagine, the client. This situation, essentially, fosters a constant hum of insecurity, “a surveillance that is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous” (Foucault 1977, 201). This set of disciplinary techniques aims to physically regulate the behavior of tenants, even outside of direct, face-to-face visits.

Discipline is a type of power that divides, orders, and puts human multiplicities to use. It operates through “a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application” (Foucault 1977, 211, 216). If the apartment check-in is power at a particular level of application, one-on-one and small scale, then the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) is an apparatus for centralizing and informing dispersed surveillance and discipline. As a recipient of funding from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Tempe Pilot Project and Arizona Housing Inc. are required to utilize HMIS. When questioned about the tool, AHI Residential Services Coordinator Jeff Gibson (2012) was emphatic: “Oh yes. We’re big on HMIS, that’s the big thing.” Essentially HMIS is a database (typically accessed through web-based software) to survey the location(s) of homeless individuals, record their biographical “characteristics,” and track the services they have received. A photograph of the individual occasionally accompanies these recorded characteristics, which are often taken at one of the larger, more bureaucratically endowed service providers within the Human Services Campus. It is crucial to note, however, that such data are typically only visible to one organization – the organization that input these data elements to begin with.

In several ways, HMIS is just a digitizing of traditional social work case notes. The paper intake forms, which establish everything from social security number to a “primary reason for
homelessness,” are simply reproduced in electronic format. In addition to basic, static intake information, the Self-Sufficiency Matrix is also digitized into HMIS through Arizona’s custom programming (Willse 2008, 246). What makes HMIS uniquely disturbing, then, is not that it is a high-technology form of disciplinary techniques, but that it establishes the foundation for a vast network across the homeless archipelago. Although these electronic case notes and data are typically – or at least initially – only the properties of a single agency (and particular trained staff within that agency), they have the option to be shared among countless others. At the time of my 2008 HMIS training, the instructor explained that the sharing of client information and case notes (including Matrix scores) had yet to occur (at least in Arizona). The sharing of HMIS data that took place through the partnership between the City of Tempe and the Tempe First United Methodist Church (which houses Home at Last), then, was a novel episode. Through this partnership, both agencies could view clients and their basic data points, along with case notes and Matrix positions, input by the other. It seems that novelty did not last for long, as Gibson (Interview 2012) explained that AHI and Central Arizona Shelter Services (CASS), the main emergency shelter and service provider at the Human Services Campus, shared information through HMIS, maintaining a single database between these “brother and sister organizations.” Individually these organizations could view data about a particular tenant or homeless individual input by another agency, creating a veritable commons of surveillance data. In this manner, HMIS works to streamline communication across the dispersed, disciplining gazes of caseworkers and thereby strengthens the panoptic surveillance of homeless individuals. Though the disciplinary power of HMIS is impressive, further techniques are needed to analyze the mental states of tenants and foster up-close psychological discipline.
HMIS facilitates two (primary) forms of discipline. For one, it forces HUD funded organizations to gather particular data points through HUD-written questions (Willse 2008) and undertake official Matrix updates every six months (Interview, Gibson 2012). These particular questions essentially set services and casework upon a particular path that is difficult to diverge from. Second, and in the case of the homeless individual, it pierces all the protections of anonymity. Any past activity that is deemed unsavory by a caseworker or other staff, for instance, can find its way into the digital records. Such data could be a serious altercation or simply the continual use of services without marked progress toward self-sufficiency, a moral unworthiness determined by disproportionate use of services. Based on these data, listed next to a headshot, the undisciplined ones can be efficiently excluded. Meanwhile, those still included appreciate that any original sin could leave them banished from the few places upon which their survival depends.68

Above I have primarily been discussing the surveillance techniques and logics at work in Tempe, while noting the common usage of HMIS among all HUD-funded service providers, including HAL and AHI. I now move specifically to the surveillance and security situation at AHI’s apartment complex Collin’s Court. Whereas the scattered-site of Tempe’s housing first program supports a gentle hum of insecurity, the surveillance situation at Collin’s Court was much more overt. Eighty units of studios and one-bedroom apartments, set on two levels, fully enclose a long, sunny courtyard filled with newly planted shrubs, a community garden, barbecue pits, and lounging chairs spliced with shade from stretched cloth canopies. When questioned about the program’s rules and regulations I learned security cameras peppered courtyard. “There

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68 It remains unknown whether caseworkers at agencies are upfront with their clientele about the HMIS database and its surveillance capabilities. If clientele are unaware of the HMIS surveillance, it is much less likely to be disciplining force. During my work in the homeless drop-in center as within Home at Last, I never spoke to my clients about HMIS because our organization used it sparingly and I felt such divulgence would only lead to more guarded behavior, clouding my examinations and hindering rapport-building.
are cameras all around,” Gibson (2012) explains, “and everybody knows it.” Staff of the partnered property management company continually surveys the open spaces of the complex. “Security is tight!” remarked Phillip (2012), an ex-chronically homeless tenant. “They got cameras: two over on this side, three over on this side, one looking straight at my door! (laughs).” Another tenant, Clara, took issue (rather heatedly) with the enclosed complex. “They’re lookin’ up my skirt a little too much. Guests are signing in and out, and being escorted to apartments. I’m 65 years old! What do they think I’m going to do?” Phillip likewise noted the confined geography of the complex. “It’s like a gated community. They got gates and if anybody comes they gotta come through the office. And the gates are locked, you can’t…”⁶⁹ Even so, Phillip and others remained rather unconcerned with the level or security, merely stating “It’s cool” when pressed further. In other conversations with tenants other than Phillip and Clara, the security and surveillance measures of the complex failed to arise at all.

John Wall (2012), Supportive Housing Director for AHI explains the rationale behind the security and surveillance measures.

[Each] property has 24-hour coverage because we think it’s really important for safety and security for the people we’re serving. And a lot of times we’re in neighborhoods that aren’t the greatest and people are coming from years of experience being on the street or in shelters, you know? Their circle of friends might be people that use drugs, or panhandling or whatever and we want them to have a different approach to life, something more healthy. They’re welcome to have guests and all that but it would have

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⁶⁹ Phillip abruptly stopped and redirected the conversation here, so it is unclear what actions the security cameras and “gated community” prohibited here.
to be, you know, we want to know who’s coming on property so that we can maintain everyone’s safety and make it a nice place to live.

One particular tenant’s framing of the security measures reflected Wall’s understanding. Set within the impoverished neighborhoods of North Phoenix, where homeless individuals remain on adjacent streets and properties (Ferraresi 2009b; Ferraresi 2009a; Interview, Casey 2012), she expressed appreciation for protection from the potential dangers of the street. Yet Wall’s push for security is not, like standard apartment complexes, to deter break-ins or car theft. Rather it emerges from the same medicalized framing of homelessness central to the definition of the chronically homeless individual, the same legislative logic that treats surplus populations and redundant laborers as “voluntary criminals,” assuming their poverty could be “cured” through mere individual “good will” (Marx 1967, 686) and self-discipline. AHI’s housing first, like the mental institutions of the nineteenth-century, believe that rehabilitation can only exist through isolated and “well-ordered institutions” away from previous, paroxysmal places and relations (Dear and Wolch 1987, 35).

Within these frameworks, housing first participants, in both the Tempe and Phoenix programs, are understood to be child-like and impulsive. The tenants’ very chronic-ness, their deep ailments and addictions, are seen to be caused less by poverty than moral failing or medical disability. While this moral and medical form of casework “absolves people in poverty for their lack of income,” Schram (2000, 97) contends, “it reinscribes the idea that they are different and deficient.” Taken at a broader scale, Schram continues, “Medicalizing poverty becomes just another way of suggesting there is a ‘culture of poverty’ at work in keeping ‘the underclass’ down.” Evidently, Wall understands a culture of poverty lurking on the streets outside the complex walls, waiting ready to reignite the culture of poverty lurking within each and every
resident. And this is not an errant framing by housing first advocates and homelessness workers. Indeed, the idea of contagious demoralization is embodied in the 1930s concept of the “sheltered man,” a once-normal individual who had gradually become inured to the vice and hopelessness concentrated in homeless shelters and poorhouses (Hopper 2003a, 49). Careful to avoid such contagion, HAL worked to disperse tenants across the city and to discourage clients from having visitors that remained on the street or in shelter. This same framing, intentionally or not, reinscribes stigma upon the homeless population, justifying anti-homeless laws and the explicit containment of homeless populations within the impoverished abyss of the Human Services Campus. Housing first participants are significantly subjects of a paternalism based upon rehabilitation, a process that can only occur if carefully separated from pathologized individuals and, simultaneously, sheltered from pathologized landscapes.

**The right to habitation: The liberating lease and “dull compulsion”**

Housing first is, in many ways described above, a rehabilitative program, a paternalistic institution of social control operating under the auspices of moral and medical reformation of the chronically homeless individual. Rather contradictorily, however, housing first finds its novelty among homelessness social policies due to its relatively neoliberal (or libertarian, in the US sense) philosophy and practice that often permits clients (“tenants” or “residents”) to abstain from case management. Although this laissez-faire attitude has been neglected in the discussion so far, it was very present in both Tempe and Collin’s Court (and AHI in general). Abstention from services, based upon the protection of the semi-independent lease, is central to housing first.

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70 More than simply posing property before refurbishment as crime- and drug-ridden, City of Phoenix officials also complained of how the nearby alleyways and washes contained a high number of homeless individuals, “people that didn’t want to go to the shelter” because they “wanted to be independent” (quoted in Poletta 2012). Collins Court emerged to address this problem, but it did so incompletely, as Wall’s worries suggest. Such incompleteness, then, comes to threaten the very function of housing first’s rehabilitation.
philosophy. “We do have what you might call a housing first approach,” Wall (2012) explains, “meaning that people here have leases, they can say ‘I’m gonna pay my rent’ or ‘My rent’s being paid, leave me alone, I don’t want to talk to anybody, I don’t want to have to deal with any programs,’ and they don’t.” Wall continues to explain – echoing Tsemberis (2010) – that if services were required there is a significant chance clients would leave the program even with the promise of housing.

This aspect of housing first has serious implications for the labor process of case managers. When asked about case management techniques, Jeff Gibson (2012) of AHI responded: “Well, the thing here is that this is landlord-tenant. We can tell them and talk to them until we’re blue in the face, but we can’t force them to do anything. If they don’t do it, we can’t tell them to leave. That’s not where we’re at; we’re just trying to be supportive and that’s all we can do.” Onofrio (2012), HAL case manager in Tempe, expresses a similar sentiment.

What’s very different is that most case managers have something hanging over their clients’ head…But here [in housing first] there’s really nothing to tie them back to having to be case managed other than them wanting to participate. So I think the challenge here is keeping them engaged and to make things relevant.

Both housing first case managers, each with a background in homeless-related casework, stress the impotency of their power over clientele relative to that of emergency shelters and other welfare services. To counter impotency, housing first case managers continually have to, as Onofrio put it, “make things relevant.” In more authoritarian case management regimes, services were delivered to captive audiences. In housing first, on the other hand, services are for sale to a voluntary group of consumers. Case managers no longer maintain a monopoly on the clients’
time, but rather must fashion service that meet clients’ demand, they must earn participation. The liberal, propertied relationship between client and case manager places services in a sphere of open, voluntary exchange. There is, then, a market of paternalist services to be bought or boycotted.

Impotency is also influenced by geography. This is particularly true when it comes to the Tempe Program, where the scattered-site model makes independence much easier for tenants and surveillance much harder (and more expensive) for case managers. Along with a liberating geography, current case management at HAL appears to have become less intrusive since my time there. When asked about home visits, HAL administrator Phyllis Habib (2012) explained why they are uncommon. “Some have bedbugs, so we won’t go into that house. Some don’t really want us in there. So it’s their apartment, it’s their Section 8 voucher; all that [the Section 8 application process] is complete so they’re really working with us voluntarily.” In all these cases, the rehabilitative techniques of housing first, evaluation and reformation through surveillance and micro-penalties, become considerably (if unevenly) obstructed by the contractual relationship between housing first tenant and private property manager or landlord, and it seems housing first philosophy understands and appreciates such obstruction.

As renters with government housing vouchers, these freedoms are of course limited. Yet the lease agreements under housing first, whether through Section 8 vouchers in Tempe or other forms of vouchers at AHI properties in Phoenix, contain few stipulations beyond the standard tenant-landlord contract. According to Van Nimwegan (2012) of the United Way, who oversees most housing first developments in the Valley, lease contracts contain no requirements for tenants to cooperate with case management services, even if – through some vouchers – clients are asked to periodically meet with case managers. Section 8 vouchers, though, and like all
forms of government housing, may restrict eligibility for recent (five to ten years in Tempe’s case) criminal activity, with particularly strict rules for drug-, arson-, or sex-related crimes (Nan McKay and Associates Inc. 2011; Interview, Van Nimwegan 2012).

The construction of a liberal property relation, then, establishes a legitimate mechanism by which tenants/residents can refuse to be subjected to case management services. Their apartment is, legally, private space, even if it is rented (and publicly subsidized) rather than owned. As such, tenants maintain that base, defining right that one inherits with private property: the right to exclude. And with this contracted property right individuals obtain a collection of protections from large-scale- or micro-penalties, skirting the disciplinary powers of the case manager. “The privileging of property rights” in liberal political-economic systems, Blomley (2004, 3) writes, “sustains valued political functions – most importantly that of the liberty of the owner.” This particular liberty, the right to property and the right not to sleep on city streets or in shelters, enables housing first tenants a place from which they can legitimately challenge the disciplining and infantilizing forms of case management. It also allows clients to become fairly legitimate citizens, to engage with the public sphere voluntarily, to appropriately appropriate public space and achieve some right to the city.

Even with protection from the rehabilitative techniques of case management, however, the housed clients have something to lose. “The lease,” Wall (2012) explained, “is in a lot of ways a very powerful tool, and sometimes going through the eviction process can really focus the mind.” He continues:

All of a sudden, it’s “You have an eviction notice.” So at that time is when people get serious about getting a job, saving money, and getting with the team, and sometimes not,
but even if we have to go through an eviction process, other people on the property will say “Wow, this is the real world,” and that’s an important thing for people to realize.

The housing first lease, like all leases, bills or mortgages, functions as a disciplinary agent. The lease that brings liberation also brings discipline, compulsion. As Wall attests, the threat of eviction becomes a “powerful tool” for reforming the chronically homeless individual into the realities of capitalist economy, of alienating, so he implies, the homeless individual from the economic freedoms they once enjoyed on the street. In other words, the desperation and precarious situation that homeless individuals have while in authoritarian shelters or regimented transitional housing programs reemerge when clients are faced with eviction (or other such crises).\footnote{Such situations need not be at the level of eviction. As I argued above, desperate needs for such mundane things as a bus pass or referrals could just as easily become significant tools for disciplining housing first clients.}

Housing first case management ensures that clientele appreciate their relationship to the lease, organizing possible eviction as external spectacle to guide internal behavior. A certain collection of individual economic behaviors is required to uphold the client’s end of the contract. Once their desperation becomes potent, once people realize that housing first is far from a utopian free-ride, very much still in “the real world,” they again become amenable to drastic self-reformation, open to the case manager’s decisions on how they may reform themselves to avoid eviction, how they may keep their visible deservingness. Case management organizes various paths toward reformation while organizing the clients’ consciousness through a constant veneration of personal responsibility (to organize the anguish of self-guilt).

Although the potential to compel the tenant back into the scolding arms of rehabilitative case management is important, Wall’s notion of the real world brings us back to the discussion
of housing first as an instantiation of neoliberal governance, of neoliberal social control, and Lefebvre’s right to the city. The real world Wall implies is the world of the competitive capitalist market, an objective game of winners and losers. The chronically homeless individual, Wall suggests, may have forgotten the hard requirements of the competitive market. As discussed above, the rehabilitative techniques of skills training in housing first, and most welfare programs (i.e. workfare), are meant to reinvest in human capital so individuals can be integrated into and coordinated by the marketplace. But many, if not most, chronic individuals are incapable physically or mentally of becoming re-valued in the marketplace, no matter how many typing classes they take at the Goodwill. Many, moreover, are free from having to revalue their labor power due to almost guaranteed government income. They are, in most senses, de commodified individuals.

It is this particular population – the most chronic – whom housing first is designed to reintegrate into the real world of liberal market rationalities. As Lemke (2001, 201) argues, the neoliberal state, through establishing specialized state apparatuses, develops “indirect techniques for leading and controlling individuals with at the same time not being responsible for them,” it transforms social problems into problems of self-care. Rather than pure self-care, though, housing first lends partial self-care. The state attempts to divest itself of obligation as much as possible so long as individuals stay off the street (in private, not public, housing), so long as they do not become chronic once again. In this manner, housing first can be seen as an adapted form of neoliberal policy, coming much closer to Foucault’s definition of German neoliberalism. Ordoliberalism, as he calls it, “involves an individualization of social policy and individualization through social policy…it does not involve providing individuals with a social cover for risks, but according everyone a sort of economic space within which they can take on
and confront risks” (Foucault 2010, 144). The housing first apartment proceeds as such an individual space. It is a space rented and overseen by an individual tenant. This individuality permits a housing first client to venture out into the real world, into that sphere of competitive capitalism.

This sphere, then, forces the client to make enterprising decisions with scarce resources or face eviction, expulsion from the city, invisibility. With at least one foot in the market, many of the disciplinary methods of rehabilitation are rendered redundant. Capitalism itself has long been theorized as a means of controlling the actions of society, of creating probable paths of behavior adhering to rational economic decisions. One of the earliest observations comes from Marx. “The dull compulsion of economic relations completes the subjection of the laborer to the capitalist,” Marx (1967, 689) explains. “Direct force outside economic relations,” he continues, “is of course still used, but only exceptionally. In the ordinary run of things, the laborer can be left to the ‘natural laws of production,’ i.e., to his dependence on capital.” As a machine of social control, the state – save its functions of regulating labor and enabling primitive accumulation – is significantly diminished under a capitalist mode of production. Power, in other words, is decentralized under capitalism, and bowing to capital, or social power, as Marx and Engels (1978) term it, is less an act of sharp submission than of dependence, of dull compulsion.

Far from a wayward analysis, neoliberal patriarch Friedrich Hayek noted exactly the same processes of social control. Rather than framing it as a dehumanizing and ironic re-definition of “freedom” under capitalism, Hayek expounds upon the usefulness of capitalist relations of production in dispersing (and dulling) power and its disciplining potential. This dispersion of power is not only helpful but, for Hayek, the only technically feasible and morally tolerable means of governance. “[D]ecentralization has become necessary” Hayek (2007, 96)
stresses, “because nobody can consciously balance all the considerations bearing on the
decisions of so many individuals,” at least not without impinging upon individual freedom and
causing economic disequilibria. The free market – bonded to “formal law” – thus becomes the
necessary framework for dispersed guidance, the means to distribute information from the
hegemonic compass of proper social behavior: the market.

Such dull compulsion is seemingly innocuous and objective; it provides a predictable
framework with the same “rules of the game” for everybody (Friedman 2002). It is also
economical, efficient, individualized. This latter description rings familiar with all neoliberal
reforms, especially those concerning state welfare. Capital’s latent pools of the privation cannot
operate without social cost because, without a commodity to exchange, the individual within
capitalism is by definition un-free, bonded to poverty, a drain on social development. Un-free
and out of place, jails, hospitals, police, social workers, homeless shelters emerge to meet the
new “paupers.” These social costs, along with general anti-aesthetics of poverty on commodified
landscapes (Mair 1986), all come into play and modern (neo)liberal government is coming to
realize this.

The emergence of housing first, its skills training, self-improvement, and endowing of
clients with a space of their own, can, therefore, be seen as a means to artificially reintroduce
market rationality into the depths of the unemployed, unemployable, or destitute. Neoliberal
social control, in other words, operates by expanding the dull compulsion that Marx identified
and Hayek reiterated even if it means spending state monies for rehabilitating those without
commodities into that sphere of market rationalities. Neoliberal poverty governance attempts to
create “free” and “self-sufficient” market actors by giving the poor an exchangeable commodity
(money or labor-power) and a base of financial obligation (an apartment) as a means to avert the
more expensive and morally questionable state measures taken to incentivize or contain those rendered redundant and devalued by capitalist production, such as Marx’s “bloody legislation against vagabondage” (anti-homeless laws) or the degrading rituals of shelters (Hopper 2003a; Mitchell 1997).

**Conclusion**

On the one end, case management tools strictly define normalcy and rehabilitate according to the Self-Sufficiency Matrix and the broader mandates of a neoliberal welfare program. On the other hand, landlord contracts enable the tenant to resist paternalist intrusions, to live their life as they desire so long as the lease remains unbroken. There is, therefore, an antinomy between the case manager’s right to rehabilitate and the client’s right to habitat. “Between equal rights,” Marx (1967, 225) contends, “force decides.” In light of the discussion above, it is apparent that the power to rehabilitate continually, if unevenly, subverts the client’s right to habitation. This power imbalance stems from the fact that the housing first client remains an extremely poor individual within a capitalist political economy where wealth (capital) remains the most tangible form of social power.

In either case, housing first gives individuals a space to reproduce themselves so they may enter the marketplace as potential producers and consumers. Artificially reintegrated into the dull compulsions of the market, costly paternalist techniques diminish. Objective and necessary market rationalities govern the behavior of clientele, producing self-entrepreneurs eager to reinvest in their human capital and discerningly economize their existence lest they revisit the punitive street. The conscious torment of personal responsibility and its necessary self-guilt, then, replaces alien paternalism.
Rather than a right to the city that fulfills Lefebvre’s concept of inhabitation, rather than the genuine right to the city, housing first clients like Moritz are relegated to an inferior right that contradictorily combines rehabilitation with habitation, deviancy with normalcy, invisibility with visibility. Housing first reinforces the idea of homelessness as the result of an individual ailment or failure. Poverty and redundancy as moral-medical deficiencies do not condemn capitalism as an unjust system but rather encourage liberal rehabilitation to stoke neoliberal processes necessary for capital’s ceaseless accumulation. Housing first, in other words, is as much about producing house broken individuals as it is about providing housing to so-called broken individuals. This housing, certainly, grants people like Moritz some hope, but this is a (neo)liberal hope, a hope that enables one to be guided by the market’s invisible hand rather than crushed by the state’s omnipresent fist; it is a hope to live in struggling poverty rather than die on the streets of urban America. To put it simply, the right to the city is not only impossible within housing first; it is impossible within a society where housing first is a possibility.

Housing first offers a pathway neither toward the right to the city nor to a lesser right of habitat, or housing without rehabilitation. But housing first deserves to be analyzed on perhaps a less radical, less theoretical light. How, for instance, might we analyze housing first on its own terms, as a public policy amidst other modes of poverty governance? As we saw in chapter 3, unemployment or labor redundancy is intrinsic to capital, making homelessness an expected side effect. But this expectation does not preclude an examination of what housing first does for homelessness and homeless policy. In chapter 2 I explored the emergence and function of housing first as a policy of sociospatial management, especially in relation to homeless campuses and anti-homeless laws. In the third I looked at the ideological roots of housing first. In the fifth chapter I again place housing first in a public policy context. This time around, though, I look
less at housing first’s geographical emergence and function and more at its economic emergence and function within a neoliberal policy context. I then examine how it operates within this neoliberal context, how its goals are inherently limited as it confronts a retrenched and divested local, state, and national welfare system even as boosters myopically hail its ambitious, trailblazing operations to end homelessness.
CHAPTER 5: CONTEXT OF CONTRADICTION: WELFARE, POVERTY, AND “ENDING HOMELESSNESS”

Managing homelessness is so passé. The expressed policy aim, nowadays, is to end the sordid affair once and for all. Rather than taking this as mere rhetorical policy fanfare, at the national, state, and city scales the date the United States intends to solve homelessness is surprisingly soon, sometimes within a few years. In other words, it is testable, and this testability (and government culpability) inspires excitement, an excitement for genuine progress or, conversely, the cynical excitement a nonbeliever feels as she awakes the day of yet another evangelical doomsday prophecy, eager to hear floundering excuses for another non-rapture (but being a bit disappointed nonetheless).

No matter to what sort of excitement one subscribes to, most can agree that “ending” or “solving” homelessness is an ambitious social and political endeavor. “White House has Ambitious Plan to End Homelessness,” read a 2010 Washington Post headline. In the same article columnist Henri Cauvin (2010) recounts the Obama Administration’s national plan to end “chronic homelessness” and homelessness among veterans by 2015, as well to end familial and youth homelessness by 2020. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Secretary Shaun Donovan lauded the federal strategy as “the most far-reaching and ambitious plan to end homelessness in our history” (USICH 2010, 3).

Federal ambitions have encouraged municipal and state efforts as well. “Officials with the Valley of the Sun United Way,” writes Arizona Republic columnist Dianna Náñez (2012, B

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72 Quick deadlines have already proven overly ambitious. In 2008 the Bush Administration planned to end homelessness by 2012 (Sparks 2011). It seems such intentions are either duplicitous political spectacle or a desperate rallying cry (or both).
1–3), “believe a new approach can do more than manage homeless populations. They believe they can end it.” In conjunction with state and local housing authorities, as well as numerous partnerships with nonprofit charities, the local United Way’s “ambitious” “end homelessness initiative” is, like the federal strategy, attempting to seriously reduce chronic and veteran homelessness by 2015 (they are, of course, related).

Clearly, we live in ambitious times, at least in the realm of US homelessness policy. But from where does such ambition arise? Why do policymakers across all government scales believe that they can close the book on a phenomenon as old as capitalism (Marx 1967, 602; Polanyi 2001, 87) in just a few short years? As the Arizona Republic quote above suggests, there is a “new approach” toward homelessness and homeless individuals that, so they believe, promises the social technology necessary to eradicate the presence of un-housed individuals on city streets or contained in nighttime shelters. The new approach, of course, is housing first.

Housing first’s efficiency is central to its existence, to its newfound ideological popularity, practical success, and to the new optimism of the United State’s homelessness policy. As discussed in chapter 1, the program design centers on cost-effectiveness and targeted, small-scale interventions with quantifiable results. This cost-effectiveness comes to resonate with a broad political spectrum in the context of punctuated calls for public austerity (itself a form of neoliberalism) (Blyth 2013) and continued corporate welfare. In this sense, housing first should be understood as the result of neoliberal policies, not only the neoliberalization of policy in the housing and homelessness sphere, but also the collective neoliberalization of socioeconomic

73 Pauperism, a term denoting out-of-placeness and unproductivity (“masterless men”), is of course, in many ways much, much older than capitalism of the late 18th century (Simon 1991).
74 In a drastic neoliberal move, in 2009, and in the midst of budgetary crisis, the Arizona legislature and Governor Brewer passed legislation that enables the state to sell the House and Senate buildings at the Capitol, along with the State Hospital and State fairgrounds, and then rent these properties back from a private owner. It was seen as a quick-fix to budget shortfalls and legislative impasse (L. Scott 2009).
policy within a broader global movement of footloose and financialized capital (Harvey 2007, xxv). Yet, as my study of housing first operations in metropolitan Phoenix will illustrate, housing first, for all its novelty and ambition, remains hindered by and in contradiction with the US and the Grand Canyon State’s thoroughly gutted social welfare system. While housing first might appear (theoretically) a novel cure-all for stagnant and chronic homelessness, stagnancy wrought through decades of iatrogenic emergency shelter-based and homeless criminalization policy, it must be understood (in practice) within the wider sphere of how Arizona governs the impoverished social whole. Housing first, in other worlds, finds itself within a contradictory context, one severely limiting its potential to “end homelessness” by 2015 or anytime thereafter.

**Why neoliberalism?**

Neoliberalism is best understood as an uneasy pairing. There is neoliberal ideology, and then there is neoliberal practice, or “actually existing neoliberalism” (Peck, Theodore, and Brenner 2010). Both build from the central tenets of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century liberalism: market exchange, limited government, and the sanctity of private property. Ideologically, neoliberalism argues that as these tenets increase in purity, so will individual development and social well-being. Thus, as state “interference” retreats, the market is able to fill the void, objectively coordinating social interaction, permitting free development without fear of majoritarian tyranny or historical prejudice. In this vein, neoliberal ideology argues that “social good will be maximized by maximizing the reach and frequency of market transactions, and it seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market” (Harvey 2005, 3). The “neo” in neoliberalism comes from the focus on artificially expanding the competitive capitalist market (and the necessary rationalities, social relations, and controls that come with it) into once non-marketized spheres. Rather than being simply laissez faire, neoliberalism actively attempts to
liberalize (in the philosophical sense) all social – including governmental – actions by using the powers of the state (see Hayek 2007, 85–86; Friedman 2002, 25).

Although neoliberal ideas were expressed throughout the postwar era, they failed to find a significant audience until the 1970s and 1980s (Peck 2010). Harvey (2005, 19) argues that neoliberal ideas were adopted into policy at the behest of economic elites increasingly aware of a steadily declining rate of capital accumulation within the Keynesian or Fordist political-economic regime. Punctuated by the economic crisis of the 1970s (and further by the crisis of 1980-2), popular agitation gave fertile ground for heterodox ideas, with neoliberalism – backed by big business and wealthy investors, as well as an increasingly insecure working class – crowned as hegemon. Conservative politicians, most notably President Reagan and UK Prime Minister Thatcher, along with Barry Goldwater presiding in Arizona, became willing conduits for this radical restructuring of government (Peck 2010).

In practice, of course, this utopian project – laid-out in the canonical texts of F.A. Hayek (2007), Milton Friedman (2002) and his Chicago School acolytes (Coase 1974; Stigler 1971; Becker 1975) (among others) – has been much more complex and unevenly applied than its sweeping sterile blueprint. Nevertheless, there are particular policies discernable as exceptionally neoliberal, policies that clearly find their genesis in the ideology depicted above. In the context of declining profitability, Theodore and colleagues (2011, 15) explain that,

[N]eoliberal doctrines were deployed to justify, inter alia, the deregulation of state control over industry, assaults on organized labor, the reduction of corporate taxes, the privatization of public services and assets, the dismantling of social assistance programs,
the enhancement of international capital mobility, and the intensification of interlocality competition.

Yet, this framing so far can be a bit misleading. Neoliberalism is not simply a match lit in heaven that set the social safety net ablaze. Certainly, neoliberalism and such inspired policies have engulfed poor communities and the public services on which they depend. But this is wildfire, not a wholesale explosion of neoliberal institutions and norms; it responds to historical grooves and contemporary political winds. Heeding Wendy Larner’s (2003, 509) caution, discussions of neoliberalism must account for its variants, hybridity, path dependency, and “the multiple and contradictory aspects of neoliberal spaces, techniques, and subjects” (original emphasis).

As noted in the introduction, housing first is an exceptionally neoliberal policy project, yet this policy must be understood within the Valley’s wider means of poverty management. By critiquing Peck and Tickell’s (2002) well-worn concept of neoliberal “rollback” and “rollout,” we can begin to understand the dialectical and contradictory relationship between housing first as neoliberal rollout within the thoroughly rolled- and rolling-back municipal, state, and national welfare system. To do this, we have to move beyond any simplified periodization of neoliberalism, a periodization that often posits rollback, a process of state retrenchment and deregulation, as a 1970-1980s phenomenon and rollout, typified by corporate welfare policies and state privatization, coming about more recently (c.f. Peck and Tickell 2002, 384). Instead, neoliberalization must be theorized as a simultaneous and dialectical rollout and rollback. It seems that such a framing is especially crucial in a “Sun Belt” city like Phoenix, where elite businessmen colluded with politicians to support state subsidization of capital and to disempower
labor and democratic oversight long before the 1970s and ‘80s (Shermer 2013, 3). It is also crucial to understand that the crisis of 2008-9 birthed its own set of Keynesian-like policies, however fleeting or inadequate, particularly in the realm of poverty governance and homelessness assistance (WRAP 2010, 5). Without paying attention to context, to neoliberal rollback/out as well as the 2008-9 stint of “Keynesian rollout,” the early popularity and crisis-driven development of seemingly “progressive” or “radical policies” like housing first do not make any sense. These quasi-Keynesian governmental policies – only somewhat neoliberal – are both crucial to the political history of housing first (and its wider impact) and routinely overlooked by critical scholars (see Peck, Theodore, and Brenner 2010; and Harvey 2009a).

This chapter attempts to speak to some of those oversights.

Nevertheless, Peck and Tickell capture some of this logic in their complication of neoliberal rollout. Much of rollout, they (Peck and Tickell 2002, 389) argue, centers on accounting for the essential fallout of neoliberal rollback, of sweeping the ashes of neoliberal reforms with “new modes of ‘social’ and penal policymaking, concerned specifically with the

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75 A living testament to Arizona’s neoliberal tradition is evident in its version of the Medicaid program, the Arizona Healthcare Cost Containment System, or AHCCCS (pronounced “access”). The phrasing of the program itself smacks of neoliberal/fiscal-conservative buzzwords, but its history is even more illuminating. In 1965, national legislation gave the nation Medicare and Medicaid. By 1972 forty-nine states had adopted Medicaid – Arizona was the sole holdout. The Reagan Administration granted waivers that permitted variations of Medicaid in 1982. During that year, and after 17 years of debating Medicaid, passing and then repealing laws that courts ruled unconstitutional, Arizona had AHCCCS (Kirschner 2012).

76 The Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008 established the National Housing Trust Fund, a program to build or preserve 1.5 million units of affordable housing over 10 years, including the passage of Neighborhood Stabilization Program that designated $7 billion for reclaiming and redeveloping foreclosed affordable housing units over three years (Immergluck 2011b, 28). This year also saw the creation of 335 “Ten-year Plans to End Homelessness” across 860 cites. In 2009, President Obama signed into the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act (HEARTH), which awards communities that implement housing first strategies with homeless assistance funding. The recently passed Helping Families Save Their Homes Act ensures that tenants of foreclosed properties are given 90 days to find alternative housing (WRAP 2010, 5–6). The 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), meanwhile, designated $1.5 billion for “rapid re-housing” of homeless or near-homeless people (Ziff and Greenwalt 2012). This $1.5 billion stands in contrast to the total $831 billion spent through ARRA (Congressional Budget Office 2012), but excludes the $131 billion for Medicare and Medicaid ($1.7 billion in AZ) (HHS 2013), the $2.25 billion of Low-income Housing Tax Credits, and the $20 billion for food stamps (Committee on Appropriations 2009).
aggressive reregulation, disciplining, and containment of those marginalized or dispossessed.”

Housing first is one such new mode of social policymaking. Rather than looking at housing first as merely a form of neoliberal rollout, however, this chapter will explore how housing first – as poverty governance – is in contradiction with a context of neoliberal policy, policies that themselves dialectically arise to manage the contradictions of capital (Harvey 2005, 12; Blyth 2013). I employ the term “contradiction” in two ways, then. I view it both philosophically, in Hegelian and Marxian (dialectical) sense (see L. Wilde 1991), and in the colloquial sense (i.e. confrontation, transformation, conflict). I intentionally interchange these usages to argue that the technical contradictions of capital (exchange- versus use-value, over-accumulation/under-consumption, accumulation by dispossession) are managed through exchange-value driven governance that inherits these contradictions while it attempts to manage them. Housing first, as an instantiation of neoliberal capital (deriving from massive homelessness and dispossession), maintains an internal opposition to itself (ending homelessness and giving persons a home) because it works to speed-up capital accumulation (and its contradictions). Housing first is in opposition to (and derives from) state retrenchment (exchange-value governance). This dialectical process of contradiction leads to endless metamorphosis of social values and policy, constantly powering a whirlpool of rollout and rollback, of immediately melting all that becomes solid (Berman 1982, 90).

Drawing from interview and ethnographic data, as well as policy and media reports, I explore how housing first is inherently limited by the same neoliberal forces (rollback/austerity) that sparked its mercurial ascendance. I conclude by revisiting the context of contradiction in relation to housing first as program and housing first as a means to end homelessness.
Housing First as “Marketized” Poverty Governance

Housing first also needs to be understood within its overall poverty governance context. And, within this context, we have to ask what makes housing first so neoliberal. Indeed, the federal housing programs during the Great Depression, the public housing outlays after World War Two and up through the 1970s were all premised upon using public monies to connect the potentially homeless with homes, and these were nothing do with neoliberalism, quite the opposite actually. To understand housing first as a neoliberal roll-out, we have to first understand the policy context that housing first was born into (namely, the social service world after President Clinton “ended welfare as we knew it” in 1996) and how housing first in Phoenix and Tempe operates within what Soss and colleagues term as “the marketization of poverty governance.”

“Marketization,” Soss et al. (2011, 176) explain, entails the “drive to reconstruct poverty governance so that it follows market principles, becomes more reliant on market actors, services labor markets, yields profits for investors, and works to construct self-disciplined low-wage workers.” This is accomplished, they continue, through competitive grant bidding and incentives/punishment for contracted agencies in public-private partnerships. Tony Sparks (2011), in his outstanding piece on “ten-year plans to end homelessness,” a 2008 federal mandate synonymous with housing first and “solving” (chronic and/or veteran) homelessness (Gowan 2010, 267), shows how housing first and its chronic objects are the further entrenchment of neoliberal policy rather than a radical deviation. Housing first, for instance, necessarily works within what has been, since 1996, a competitive federal (HUD) grant process “wherein localities and non-profits pitch rehabilitative frameworks” to solve homelessness in the long-term (Sparks 2011, 1517). Such competitive grant processes, typified by awards based increasingly on performance rather than simple need, has only increased with President Obama’s latest
reiteration of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act: the 2009 HEARTH Act (Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing), which further focused upon targeting chronic and veteran homelessness (NAEH 2009b).

The rapid diffusion of housing first as a national strategy to end homelessness illustrates what Peck (2002) explains as the recent US shift toward “fast policy” – policies that are, if deemed successful, rapidly adopted across space and scale. Housing first, then, is a policy framework that encourages the increased competition among neighboring municipalities, states, and so forth based upon a narrow set of cost-benefit measurements (and often ignoring historical and geographical variations). The rise of housing first as a “best practice” (and the very idea of “best practice”) (USICH 2010) suggests how integral such rapid policy transfers have been to housing first’s recent ascendance (Klodawsky 2009). Indeed, the Tempe Pilot Program (later replicated by others in Arizona) came directly from studying housing first developments in Salt Lake City, Utah in 2008, a site that was considered not just for its geographic proximity but also for its political similarity, for fully appreciating the political and ideological hurdle that conservative politicians must be persuaded to leap over, a leap that would bring them into new policy spaces which first demanded a re-conception of homeless populations not as irredeemable addicts in need of “tough love” (see Teir 1998) but as first and foremost people without homes (Interview James 2012).

Notions of fast-policy transfers and the neoliberalization of governance are typically associated with state devolution, of increasingly shifting social welfare responsibilities from the federal level to localities and, oftentimes, contracted nonprofit organizations (Wolch 1990). In housing first, and homelessness policy more broadly, devolution of responsibility to the state, municipal, and nonprofit charity scale (to foster competition) is accompanied by the maintenance
of federal control. “As roll-back policies stripped already struggling social service agencies of funding lines,” Sparks (2011, 1517) contends, “roll-out policies offered money with the contingency that local programs reflect federal priorities. The result was,” he concludes, “the harmonization, across the nation, of neoliberal prerogatives with local service provision.”

The harmonization, of course, requires oversight. Again, there is an evaluation of the chronically homeless individual, this time an evaluation that is entered into the web-based software program – the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). As a web-based database it can easily aggregate and calculate homeless individuals (into particular subpopulations) across the US. In some ways, then, it is a recurring census of the homeless population. It is also, in Arizona’s unique case, a tool of what Willse (2008, 246) terms “post-welfare homeless management.” Rather than basic data elements collected from each homeless client (name, Social Security number, age, ethnicity, etc.) in Arizona the “Self-Sufficiency Matrix” has been added to HMIS software. The Matrix, as I discuss in chapter 4, is a means to longitudinally track the progress of a client toward so-called self-sufficiency. “However,” Willse (2008, 246) adds, “HUD’s commentary on this program makes clear how this data will be used to serve clients is of almost incidental concern. The State of Arizona plans to use this data to create aggregate rates of self-sufficiency improvement for agencies” (original emphasis). Currently, at least in metro Phoenix, HMIS data are compiled to create a “Program Performance Report” to rank homelessness and housing first agencies based on their performance (the performance of their clientele) and allocate funding accordingly.
Housing first in a “rolled-back” context

The phrase “window of opportunity” frequented John Wall’s description of housing first in metropolitan Phoenix. Wall, Supportive Housing Director for Arizona Housing Inc., the provider of the greatest number of supportive housing units in the Valley, continually stressed the unique potential of a depressed economy, of the progress to be made amidst a surplus of foreclosed properties and federal outlays to stem the tide of housing devaluation.\(^{77}\) Indeed, all of AHI’s housing complexes (both traditional affordable housing and housing first-style supportive housing) were acquired during real estate crises. The 2008 subprime mortgage crisis, like the preceding crisis in the late 1990s, abetted by the neoliberal deregulation that permitted greater “financial innovations,” eventually led to a crisis of widespread default, resulting in the skyrocketing numbers of foreclosed properties (hitting housing markets like Phoenix the hardest) (Immergluck 2011a, 130–1). With the negative effects of vacant homes well appreciated, in 2008 the federal government established the Neighborhood Stabilization Act (NSP), totaling $7 billion over three years of its (re)enactment.

Neighborhood Stabilization is very different from public housing. In metro Phoenix and elsewhere, NSP has been used to reclaim, rehabilitate, and reuse vacant properties for private developers (Immergluck 2011b, 48). With the combination of investors dumping vacant properties and the influx of NSP funds, Arizona Housing Inc. (AHI) was able to purchase and refurbish several properties throughout the poorer areas of Phoenix (in partnership with a private

\(^{77}\) Housing construction has, since the 1970s decamping of high-tech firms, been the lifeblood of metropolitan Phoenix. “Reliance on housing construction,” Elizabeth Shermer (2013, 336–7) explains, “made postindustrial Phoenix an epicenter of the housing crisis that preceded the Great Recession. Prices dropped 50 percent between 2006 and 2008.”
property development firm). Before using almost $4 million in NSP funding, $1 million of Federal Home Loan Bank Affordable Housing Program grant, and $387,000 from a Federal Continuum of Care Grant, Collins Court was a vacant motel, “an awful, awful property,” Wall notes, filled with prostitution and drugs (CSH 2012; Interview, Wall 2012). The site was also a space for extremely cheap lodging, with 22 of the current residents actually having lived in the property itself before rehabilitation (Reid 2012). NSP funding, in this particular site at least, essentially replaced one form of affordable housing with another (albeit a completely refurbished, less crime-ridden property).

Peck and Tickell (2002, 400) explain that “One of the most striking features of the recent history of neoliberalism is its quite remarkable transformative capacity”; its “ability to absorb or displace crisis tendencies, to ride – and to capitalize upon – the very economic cycles and localized policy failures that it was complicit in creating.” The case of NSP, a program derived from the crisis of deregulation and overproduction of housing (and the resulting homelessness), and housing first, a program to remove homeless populations from public space and the public budget, illustrates such transformative capacity, a circuitous ability for capitalism (neoliberal or otherwise) to adapt to the crises of its own formation without reworking the relations of (re)production so central to the necessary logics of capital accumulation. Or, to be more accurate, these policies illustrate poverty governance’s ability to exist without reworking the relations of production in favor of the poor. Even so, new contradictions within neoliberal capital repeatedly arise. There is, as noted, only a window of opportunity for AHI and others in the supportive

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78 AHI is certainly not alone in this activity. Native American Connections, a leader in the Valley’s affordable housing scene (for Natives and non-Natives alike), has likewise purchased and refurbished vacant properties for low-income residents and homeless individuals using NSP funding along with grants, deferred developer fees, and private funding (Smokey 2010). See Gersema (2011b) for a similar development in South Phoenix directed toward poor seniors.

79 AHI’s strategy of converting cheap motels into institutions for the chronically homeless is also currently underway in South Phoenix, a project expected to be complete by the end of 2013 (Estes 2013).
housing game. With NSP funding being a stopgap measure during the worst of the Great Recession, that window is quickly shutting, leaving AHI and others to refocus on the less lucrative world of Low-income Housing Tax Credits (Interview, Wall 2012) and other federal funding streams that are waning as policy moves toward the neoliberal ideology of austerity.

Whereas the fixed-site apartment complex model of Arizona Housing Inc. depended upon NSP funding and rock bottom real estate markets, several other programs in metro Phoenix find their support in Section 8 vouchers. The Tempe Pilot Program was only able to rapidly house 35 chronically homeless individuals in apartments across the city using over $600,000 in federal stimulus funding. Like NSP, that funding stream eventually closed in 2012. Anticipating this change, Tempe had to hastily revise Section 8 voucher qualification guidelines to make sure the Pilot Program’s residents did not find themselves back on the streets at the end of their 12-18 month voucher. This reworking essentially prioritized chronic homelessness and waved previous restrictions on felonies. Although a crucial move for the 35 individuals in the Tempe Pilot Program, voucher modifications also meant 35 otherwise qualified individuals would not receive a housing voucher (Interview James 2012). Just like the NSP funding for AHI, then, the Tempe Pilot essentially prioritized the more vulnerable and more expensive chronically homeless over households with extremely low incomes (incomes below 30 percent of an area’s median income), resulting in a neutral impact on affordable housing in metro Phoenix.

Both of these cases make clear that housing first found a footing in metro Phoenix largely due to the real estate crisis, ensuing economic depression, and the Keynesian-like federal outlays that followed. These cases also make apparent how much housing first – a novel policy design – remains dependent upon traditional HUD programs. Unfortunately, these programs (Section 8, Supportive Housing, etc.) have significantly been diminished since the 1970s with the rise of
neoliberal domestic policy (Rice and Sard 2007). HUD’s budget, for example, has been cut by 65 percent since 1978, resulting in a drastic slowdown of public housing construction. “In recent years, over 200,000 private-sector rental units have been lost annually, and 1.2 million unsubsidized affordable housing units disappeared from 1993-2003,” the Western Regional Advocacy Project report notes (WRAP 2010, i). “For the 2006 fiscal year,” Law (2007) writes, “HUD allocated a total of $193 million in homeless assistance grants to new housing and service programs, a 45-percent decrease from FY2003.” Even the funding specifically designated for “permanent housing” (the backbone of housing first) dropped from $97 million in 2003 to $77 million in 2006” (Law 2007). By 2007, five years after Bush expressed his administration’s commitment to ending chronic homelessness, HUD’s budget was cut by $3.3 billion, eclipsing the $70 million raised for homeless assistance grants from 2002-7 (Rice and Sard 2007). These cuts have a direct effect upon local public housing authorities and their ability to provide housing vouchers to the unemployed, elderly, or disabled, rendering these often-unrecognized foundations of housing first significantly limiting to its success. “How can they [legislators] cut Section 8 but believe in Housing First as a concept?” asks Paul Boden, executive director of the Western Regional Advocacy Project, a coalition of activists focused on homelessness and housing issues. “They’re cutting housing but doing housing first. It’s not just ironic,” Boden concludes, “it’s hypocritical” (quoted in Law 2007).

Currently, Arizona has about eight thousand Section 8 vouchers of the total forty thousand HUD-subsidized units. Yet last year, 200,000 Arizonans’ paid more than 68 percent of their income on housing (Reagor 2013), 80 66 percent of whom are of extremely low income and

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80 Up from 175,000 Arizonan’s paying more than 50 percent of their income on housing in 2011 (DES 2012, 5). Arizona also had the nation’s second highest rate of poverty (21 percent) in 2009 (behind Mississippi), increasing from 18 percent in 2008 (the national average is slightly higher than 14 percent) (Beard 2011). Approximately 48
could likely qualify for Section 8 (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities 2012a), and over 27,000 experiencing homelessness at some point in 2012 (DES 2012, 5). In 2011, the City of Tempe opened the Section 8 waiting list for those 75 percent below the federal poverty line (versus the 30 percent below the federal poverty rate needed to qualify). At the end of the first day, the city received 1,811 pre-applications (Náñez 2011). The city itself can subsidize apartments for only 1,082 households, households that are typically employed within Tempe and are homeless (City of Tempe 2013). Phoenix issues approximately 5,500 Section 8 vouchers with its $43 million allotment from HUD. Yet another 8,000 citizens remain on the program’s waiting list, a number that would undoubtedly be higher had the city not stopped accepting applications in 2005 (as vouchers have not increased since 2003). In December 2009, as Tempe began housing the chronically homeless, none of the Valley’s municipalities were accepting Section 8 applications due to outsized waiting lists (Anderson 2009).

A housing first development in Goodyear, AZ attempted to replicate Tempe’s move from stimulus funds into Section 8 housing but, unfortunately, the southwestern Phoenix suburb had a dearth of vouchers available, forcing the local United Way to frantically find funding to keep clients in their apartments. Kim Van Nimwegan of the local United Way, who oversees housing first developments in metro Phoenix, described the use of Section 8 vouchers as a “clever solution to the problem of a lack of affordable housing.” With the impasse experienced in the Goodyear program fresh in her memory, however, she stressed that Section 8 is “not a sustainable solution” due to the overall budget cuts to (and insecurity of) public housing support.

million US citizens lived in poverty in 2011, with 6.5 million spending more than 50 percent of their income on housing amidst almost 10 percent rental vacancy rates and cuts in social spending (apart from Medicare) (NAEH 2013, 3).
The status of Section 8 in Arizona is inextricably related to the state’s and the nation’s overall lack of affordable housing. Recent research concluded that Arizona — once the state to find affordable housing (Ross 2011) — is now the second-worst in the nation for low-income housing (behind Nevada) (Snyder 2012). The dwindling supply of affordable housing in Arizona is but one example of national trends. Extremely low-income households (ELI) of Arizona were particularly hard-hit due to high foreclosures, reaching an estimated 150,000 houses between 2007-11 (Reagor 2011). “For every 100 such households,” Snyder (2012) explains, “there were only 20 rental units that were affordable and available in Arizona in 2012.” This devastating fact stands in contrast to the national average of 30 units of affordable housing for every 100 extremely low-income households, a population of 9.8 million nationwide that confront an absolute shortage of 4.3 million affordable housing units (this leaves out the fact that many affordable units are occupied by non-ELI renters) (NLIHC 2012). Snyder (2012) goes on to note how Arizona’s housing trust fund has just recently been cut from $30 million to $2.5 million.

Beyond the lack of affordable housing, which inevitably leads to recurrent homelessness, housing first in the Valley has yet to find a sustainable solution to the basic issue of paying the rents of chronically homeless clientele within already “affordable” housing units. Additionally, housing first developments have yet to overcome the burden placed upon their residents by the insufficient funding/exclusivity of countless other welfare programs. Diane Onofrio, Case Manager of the Tempe Pilot Program explains, in breathless tone, the lingering challenges of the program well into its third year:

One of the biggest challenges of our Pilot Program is that our people were not hand-selected as people with income. If you’re dealing with, like, SMI [seriously mentally-ill support] and they were all lucky enough to already be on Social Security, then you’ve got
people in housing with an income who may or may not have food stamps, who can buy food and the toilet paper and the toothpaste. We’ve got people who have no income at all and have never had an income, so they just get food stamps. So they’re still wheeling-and-dealing to get things like toothpaste and deodorant – things you can’t buy with food stamps. Some are working off-and-on. Some are on Social Security and those people actually seem to be more stable because they have health insurance and an income. The other people… it’s been really tough. We’ve been trying to get people to admit that they have mental health issues and that they need to be evaluated (Interview, Onofrio 2012).

Onofrio’s explanation raises several issues within housing first. For one, she notes that housing first programs in greater Phoenix are often only available to individuals that have Supplemental Social Security (SSI) income or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) to cut down on the costs of their housing and services (i.e. so they have an income to buy non-food stamp items and can pay a portion of their rent). Both SSI and SSDI, it should be stressed, are impressively discriminate programs, requiring a physician’s documentation of disability/inability to undertake significant “gainful activity” (Ruffing 2013). Only 15 percent of the Valley’s homeless population are recorded to have SSI, while 12.3 percent have SSDI support (DES 2012). Needless to say, chronically homeless individuals rarely have the means to afford continuous medical check-ups while maintaining such records (approximately 27 percent have Medicaid, while 3.9 percent were on Medicare) (DES 2012). In this manner, chronically homeless individuals are often required to become “regulars” at homeless shelters or places like the Human Services Campus (including the Healthcare for the Homeless facility) to begin documenting their disability. Even if those with little to no assets or income qualify, the benefits are often impossibly scant, with a monthly income regularly around $600 (Legander 2006, 38).
SSDI, meanwhile, operates as a social insurance program with stringent eligibility criteria. This includes having worked much of their adult lives and worked during at least five of the last ten years, along with documented proof of a long-lasting and “severe impairment” that inhibits (valued) work. Once an application is received, less than 50 percent are awarded SSDI benefits after waiting – on average – about a year for processing (Ruffing 2013, 6–7).

The difficulties of SSI and SSDI, then, often lead case managers to push their clients toward a seriously mentally ill designation. Although this requirement raises several ethical and political issues (see Lyon-Calvo 2000; Mathieu 1993), it finds contradiction with Arizona’s medical services realm in the age of austerity (Blyth 2013). In the wake of Arizona’s billion-dollar budget crisis (Reinhart 2011c), Governor Brewer and the Arizona legislature denied preventative care and routine check-ups to some 640,000 Arizonans’ on the state’s version of Medicaid, saving $2.8 million over 2011-12 (only funding emergency services and generic pharmaceuticals) (Lee 2010; Reinhart 2011c). Later, the state required mandatory co-payments and denied Medicaid enrollment for childless adults, cutting an estimated 110,000 Arizonans on the premise that such inclusion was no longer “sustainable,” as Governor Brewer put it (Reinhart 2011b). With the rolls already thinned, lawmakers purged 12,000 seriously mentally ill individuals who did not qualify for (the now more exclusive) Medicaid from any state healthcare assistance, with a rough saving of $50 million (Reinhart 2011d). After widespread popular outrage and complaints that Brewer was merely shifting the healthcare costs onto other agencies, oftentimes those dealing with the Valley’s homeless population (‘Preparing for the

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81 Critics noted how these cuts had an especially devastating impact on women’s health, as the cuts included gynecological exams, which physicians suggest be done annually, especially if using birth control (Lee 2010).

82 Arizona’s prison system for years has operated as a de facto mental institution. Those unable to attain treatment due to the state’s scant mental health system often self-medicate using illegal narcotics, which can, when caught, lead to arrest. “Decades ago,” Republic columnist Montini (2009) writes, “we decided that mental health was not a crime, which is true. And we did away with what used to be called (in a good way, first, then a bad way) asylums.
Storm: Public Behavioral Health Care in Arizona” 2010), Brewer convinced the Republican-controlled state legislature to return $38.7 million of the $50 million originally cut. Most recently, in 2013, after months of bitter negotiations, Governor Brewer and dissenting Republicans successfully lobbied the state legislature to backtrack and re-institute Medicaid or lose what’s left of federal welfare funding. Unless action was taken, cuts could have meant an additional 63,000 found themselves without health insurance, which would be accompanied by an even larger budget shortfall due to the loss of federal matching funds (Pitzl 2013). Fortunately for impoverished Arizonans, the recent decision to expand Medicaid – as part of the national healthcare overhaul – permits 350,000 extremely poor residents to join while netting the state $1.6 billion from the federal government. Nonetheless, there are currently petition campaigns to overrule this hard-fought legislation (Reinhart 2013).

These service reductions, of course, were occurring amidst skyrocketing unemployment, which often includes people – entire families – losing their healthcare coverage and means of income. Those uninsured and unable to qualify for the state’s Medicaid program regularly find themselves back in the Zone of the Human Services Campus, receiving free or subsidized care from Maricopa County’s overburdened Healthcare for the Homeless clinic (Reinhart 2012). The years following Arizona’s budgetary crisis also witnessed 20 percent funding cuts for TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), the flagship program of the Clinton Administration’s promise to end welfare (as we knew it).83 In the summer of 2011, Arizona

Now, in what seems like a strategy that is much more cruel, we wait until a mentally ill person gets into trouble with the law, then treat them as criminals rather than ill people.” When we consider the report (part of a lawsuit) produced by Amnesty International, it becomes evident that Montini’s inclination is true – this system is much crueler. The human rights NGO reported that “Arizona’s state prisons overuse solitary confinement in cruel, inhumane and illegal ways, particularly for mentally ill prisoners and juveniles as young as 14,” resulting in heightened mental illness and a prison suicide rate that is double the national average (Ortega 2012).

83 “Arizona TANF recipients,” Reinheart (2011a) explains, “must sign an agreement avowing that they will look for work, accept any jobs offered, ensure their children attend school, keep children’s immunization up to date and
abruptly left 3,500 families (6,500 children) without a source of income. Apart from merely axing families from the rolls by reducing the program’s budget, a 2012 law reduced the duration that families can receive aid from three to two years – making it one of the shortest in the country (Reinhart 2011a). Cuts to the welfare-to-work program, which costs about $210 each month for a family, saved the state $8.6 million, with a net effect of removing 17,600 families, or about half of Arizona’s TANF caseload. Additionally, the state cut $1.1 billion from childcare subsidies (purging 20,000 children from the rolls)\textsuperscript{84}, job training (40 percent cuts), and other services. The rationale of austerity is simple. “The state is broke,” Republican Senator Rick Murphy of Glendale, explained, “tax payers can’t shoulder any more burden.” “If you make them [welfare recipients] comfortable,” Murphy concludes, “they will just stay” (quoted in Reinhart 2011a). Others, of course, criticized these cuts as “an attack on the poor” that merely created crisis and thrust families and individuals further into poverty at a time of their greatest need. These cuts, amidst a rising housing first, reproduced homelessness in Arizona. Indeed, the cuts correlated with a 27 percent increase in family homelessness, 60 percent of whom were homeless for the first time (Reinhart 2011a). If these families remain on the street long enough, and pass the HEART Assessment, they might become eligible for housing first housing.

\\textsuperscript{84} A recent report ranks Arizona as the 47\textsuperscript{th} worst state for child well being (down from 46\textsuperscript{th} in 2011), and poverty is taken as the primary determinant. “Nationally,” Chen (2013) writes, “23 percent of U.S. children in 2011 lived in poverty – defined as income below $22,811 for a family of four – up from 22 percent in 2010. In Arizona, the number of children in poverty was 27 percent in 2011.”
The lingering presence of hunger and extreme poverty continually contradict housing first’s efforts as well. Almost all clients in both the Tempe and Phoenix programs were on food stamps (Interview, Van Nimwegen 2012). As a program based upon the ratio between living expenses and income, those with subsidized apartments routinely received paltry amounts, somewhere around $30-50 per month. Indeed, the average payout of food stamps in Arizona is $4.16 per day (PHX BEAT 2012), reflecting the heavy cuts the federal program has endured since the 1980s, and especially the $27.7 billion worth of cuts the Clinton Administration achieved through its infamous welfare “reform” by narrowing eligibility (M. B. Katz 2008, 303). Collins Court has a community garden to supplement clients’ tight budgets, and clients in Tempe’s program often volunteered at soup kitchens and drop-in centers to grab a free meal or two. The program also hosted canned food drives for those in housing.

Forced entrepreneurial behavior reared its head for clientele for non-food items as well. While working as a case manager within the Tempe Pilot Program, I worked with housing first clients to organize a car wash fundraiser to purchase, in bulk, the basic necessities that, as Onofrio stresses, one cannot purchase through food stamps: toiletries, kitchen, and cleaning supplies. These items may appear trite, but they are, in fact, quite debilitating, especially for individuals constantly pushed toward “self-sufficiency” and living in a context of isolation, disability, illness, and utter poverty. “You’d be surprised how hard it is to live” without these basic items, one client explained (Interview, Jim 2012). With no place else to turn, the cash-

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85 It should be noted that this contradiction, and some others I discuss elsewhere, are explicitly appreciated by some of the supporters of housing first, including its “founder” Sam Tsemberis. “These [housing first] programs, it might be said, help individuals graduate from the trauma of homelessness into the normal everyday misery of extreme poverty, stigma, and unemployment” (Tsemberis 2010, 52).

86 To be eligible for food stamps a household must already be extremely poor, with an income at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty line (11,170 annually for a single-person household) and generally have less than $2,000 in assets or savings. It should be noted that in 2009 the eligibility standards were temporarily liberalized (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities 2012b).
strapped agency turned to the youth sports fundraising playbook, wielding neon poster boards to attract cars and scrubbing away at wheels to score a month’s supply of Comet. This was seen as the next-best solution to having clientele, as another put it, “go fly a sign on the freeway” (panhandle) or donate blood plasma (Interview, Sam 2012). Such realities are rarely discussed amidst housing first and its boosters’ giddy rhetoric and ambitious policy aims. This all begs the obvious question: Can we “end welfare” at the same time as “ending homelessness”?

**Conclusion: Contradiction or Harmony?**

Foucault (2010, 147, 226) explains how the “homo economicus” under neoliberalism “is not the man of exchange or man the consumer; he is the man of enterprise and production” that looks upon enterprise selfishly; the economic human is “the entrepreneur of himself.” Within housing first, and due to the contradictions that it faces, due to the continued poverty, misery, and isolation entrenched within neoliberal institutions and “small-state” ideology, agencies and clientele are compelled to become self-entrepreneurs (so long as it’s legal). Although evidence suggests that the situation is improving within metro Phoenix’s nascent housing first operations, “wheeling-and-dealing” should not be seen as strictly aberrational. “Really the number one outcome that we’re looking for is that people remain housed. And then, not that it’s not important or icing on the cake,” Van Nimwegan (2012) of the United Way explains, “but, and yes we hope that they’re moving toward health and self-sufficiency, but honestly it’s about remaining housed.”

Such a basic goal can only be appreciated in the wake of gentrification and the dismantling of public housing and other crucial social welfare programs. Housing first, as Van Nimwegan suggests, exists primarily to remove homeless people from public space and the public budget by the most efficient means yet discovered – giving them a roof. This process is
enabled by placing a specific and quantitative economic value upon the chronically homeless individual, by re-valuing those rendered devalued by capital and thus permitting their inclusion in the market-based calculus that is so foundational to neoliberal social policy. With cost-effectiveness centrally recognized, fast policy transfer allows housing first to diffuse rapidly across the nation (and abroad) as a “best practice” in addressing expensive homelessness. Such efficiency in housing first is undergirded by a thoroughly marketized form of poverty governance that determines funding and support through competitive grant processes and disciplined – and surveilled – adherence to federal priorities and federally recognized best practices. Although Arizona’s endeavor to include self-sufficiency scores within their performance evaluations portends greater longitude in determining success, the contradictory context makes “remaining housed” the single realistic goal for agencies. It is this basic goal that allows housing first to operate so “efficiently,” that allows it to consistently leave agencies and clientele struggling to taste that icing on the cake.

In this framing, housing first’s apparent contradictions may be envisioned as mere limitations. Lack of food, basic supplies, healthcare, and so forth are limitations, but they do not necessarily qualify as contradictions because they do not render housing first a failure on its own terms: keeping people housed cheaply (and off the expensive street). When I asked Van Nimwegan to about these contradictions outright, she (awkwardly) replied:

You still can’t do anything without a roof over your head…It’s still better than the alternative. So if you have a roof over your head and you still don’t have enough to eat, well it’s still, you know, I don’t know – we’re working on it (Interview, Van Nimwegan 2012).
So, housing first as program may only be limited, and that limitation appears to be central to its cost-effectiveness in metro Phoenix. In other words, housing first does not find contradiction in its own terms.

To find contradiction between housing first as neoliberal rollout within a neoliberally rolled-back context, we have to go return to where the argument started: housing first as the primary technology to “solve” or “end” homelessness by 2015 (or whenever). By appreciating the context discussed above, it is apparent that housing first – emerging during the continued assault on Medicaid, food stamps, behavioral healthcare, affordable housing, Section 8 vouchers, public space, and Social Security, along with the entrenched processes leading to wage polarization and unemployment – faces serious contradictions. These, of course, are not simply conflicting policies, but also instantiations of poverty governance’s attempt to rectify the broader contradictions of capital, the continued impoverishment of the greater public to manage crises of over-accumulation to benefit the capitalist class (Harvey 2009a).

As a means of closing the book on homelessness, then, housing first is doomed to failure. Housing first can, however, continue to effectively and efficiently hide the most visible, human symbols of capitalist contradiction, to contain the most unsightly products of capital’s neoliberal reforms by employing the nihilistic market calculus so central to neoliberal social policy. For the time being, housing first functions to grease the wheels of capital accumulation while working to ideologically appease opponents of obvious neoliberal reforms. To put it bluntly, housing first operates less in contradiction than in harmony with a context of neoliberal capital.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The majority of people spoil their lives by an unhealthy and exaggerated altruism – are forced, indeed, so to spoil them. They find themselves surrounded by hideous poverty, by hideous ugliness, by hideous starvation. It is inevitable that they should be strongly moved by all this. The emotions of man are stirred more quickly than man’s intelligence…it is much more easy to have sympathy with suffering than it is to have sympathy with thought. Accordingly, with admirable, though misdirected intentions, they very seriously and very sentimentally set themselves to the task of remedying the evils that they see. But their remedies do not cure the disease: they merely prolong it. Indeed, their remedies are part of the disease. They try to solve the problem of poverty, for instance, by keeping the poor alive; or, in the case of a very advanced school, by amusing the poor. But this is not a solution: it is an aggravation of the difficulty. The proper aim is to try and reconstruct society on such a basis that poverty will be impossible. - Oscar Wilde (2001 [1891], 127)

Housing first, like homelessness, is generated by contradiction, by capital’s crises. The crisis of capital accumulation of the 1970s and ‘80s found a temporary fix by disempowering labor through neoliberal reforms and sinking capital into downtown through redevelopment and gentrification schemes. As metro Phoenix’s wealthy and white residents and businesses largely fled to the suburban halo throughout the ‘50s and ‘60s, the city’s skid row, the Deuce, became – politically – the easiest place for gentrification to occur. When the Deuce’s cheap housing was gentrified or demolished, former residents found themselves on the streets. The destruction of cheap housing accompanied the economic recession of 1980-2, along with drastic cuts in public housing and other forms of welfare assistance (again disciplining labor), created a “crisis” of mass homelessness across the US that largely remains with us today.

At first glance, the manner by which the Valley socially and spatially manages the homeless population appears contradictory, as shattered ice. Yet wait awhile, and we can understand how they melt to become single stream. Although Marx and Engels (1978, 476) captured the constant revolutionizing of capital with his observation that - under capitalism - "everything that is solid melts into air," they forgot to expand upon the metaphor. What they
should’ve said, and I think what their broader argument asserts, is that seemingly fragmented and isolated institutions and systems are never completely perpendicular and disordered. There is struggle and conflict, to be sure, but there is also harmony at times within the dialectic. In other words, there are structures that "coerce" and "compel," that "discipline" and "rationalize" society toward some “order,” however unstable. All that is solid under capital may melt into air, but it also might just melt into water for a while; it might find a receptive society and make itself a groove, one that carves a path deep enough to delay its evaporation into air, one that serves a purpose conducive to profitable capital revolution.

Such is the case with the Valley’s mode of homelessness management. Metro Phoenix reacted primarily with punitive anti-homeless laws and exclusionary zoning but also some emergency shelters and services. Rather than solely conflicting policies and ideologies (“compassion vs. criminalization”), these two models indeed work together, dialectically picking-up the slack where the other is lagging. Anti-homeless laws became the tool to push homeless individuals toward the newly created skid row in the historically discriminated and systematically polluted South Phoenix. Emergency shelters and a broad conglomeration of services, meanwhile, became the instrument to pull in homeless individuals from the old skid row, from downtown Phoenix and other geographies of upper-class work and leisure. These two strategies of sociospatial management – emerging in the early 1980s – remain with us today. Over the last few decades, these tools were sharpened: anti-homeless laws proliferated in Phoenix and neighboring municipalities, particularly Tempe. Along with punitive policies came those of compassion, including the establishment of the Human Services Campus in South Phoenix, the so-called “magnet” for homeless citizens. Rather than anti-homeless laws being in contradiction with shelters and services, then, they together function as two different means to
contain homeless populations to shore-up the Valley’s everlasting pilgrimage toward creating a paradisiacal tourist mecca. Their explicit blending, using the threat of arrest and other interventions to encourage or compel the use of compassionate services, epitomizes the dynamism of criminalization and compassion. Housing first, finally, is the latest reaction to the limitations of these efforts to drag-in homeless populations; it is the newest tool to attract, contain, and normalize the recalcitrant “chronically homeless” – the worst of the worst. These policies all undoubtedly contain contradictions, conflicting ideologies and practices. Yet these contradictions, however unstable, function together as a handy multi-tool to sterilize redeveloped city streets.

As push, pull, drag and housing first (pull 2.0!) clear away homeless people en route to the tourist mecca, homelessness itself is a modern interpretation of redundant, devalued labor generated by and reproduced through capitalist relations of production, a political-economic system that requires an “industrial reserve army” (Marx 1967, 265). For this reason, homeless populations should be understood as an economic class of the redundant and systematically dispossessed. Instead, social stigma functions to shame unproductive and de-commodified populations by assuming their unemployment, their lack of possessions and placeless-ness derives from individual fault. For this reason, services for the unemployed and homeless have, with the diffusion of a capitalist political economy, attempted to reform the stigmatized through work and entrepreneurial discipline. Of late, this disciplining has been colored by therapeutic interpretations, where rehabilitating productivity and/or social discipline must be achieved through medical and psychosocial treatment.

Together, these framings of unproductiveness and out-of-place-ness – of homelessness – function to obfuscate the systemic production of and necessity for a dispossessed class in
capitalism. If misery and poverty are self-caused, so the logic goes, then the status quo can remain. Further, if homelessness is but the conglomeration of individual deviancies and disabilities, then our social response must likewise remain individual, and our techniques must target said deficiencies. Housing first, in some ways recognizing the primacy of housing for an individual to be productive and in-place, inverts this obfuscating framing; it lets us see that a homeless person’s abnormality is not simply an individual and internal disorder but rather something that has a geographical and social cause (i.e. the lack of a home). This inversion is certainly present in housing first programs and ideologies, yet, rather contradictorily, housing first remains centered upon treating the individual (moral, medical, and social) deficiencies of the “chronically homeless” person. Housing first, for this reason, reinscribes its clientele with stigma, with a social marking of shame that justifies capitalist social relations and nihilistic public policy that continue to produce and reproduce out-of-place and surplus populations.

Understanding homelessness and extreme poverty as an internal deviancy not only informs and justifies the more established homelessness management, of criminalization and compassionate treatment, but it sticks with housing first case management as well. Housing first case management objectifies the client to drag out internal deviancies and, through establishing case plans and thereafter watching and checking-up on the client, works to whittle-away eccentricities and cure mental, physical, or moral infirmities. But this imperative contradicts with the fact that clients have an independent lease and are technically able to abstain from most case management services. In this light, the paternalistic and punitive moralisms of criminalization and compassion ease. Housing first is understood as a progressive and libertarian program that gives new hope to the poor.
The lease though, is not purely liberating; it is also a tool of discipline. The independent lease means that clients are largely on their own, that they are forced back into the “real world” of paying rent and economizing their desperate existence lest they wind-up back on the street. Furthermore, and in contradiction with the libertarian framing, housing first case management uses the precariousness of client’s housing situation to push tenants into rehabilitative regimens (not unlike the threat of arrest to push homeless persons into the shelter-case management nexus). Together, these contradictory practices and ideas about housing first meld with a neoliberal framing of individual entrepreneurship and state retrenchment, but they do not necessarily meld with each other. In other words, this internal conflict remains unresolved – a struggle – within housing first. In metropolitan Phoenix at least, the lease functioned more as a tool for instilling market discipline – as part of a broader paternalistic and rehabilitative case management framework – than a means to challenge treatment and normalization.

Housing first, obviously, operates upon a tense foundation of contradictory ideologies and practices. It simultaneously understands homelessness as a symptom of individual internal deviancy and as a symptom of not having a private space in which to live. It prescribes paternalistic rehabilitative case management techniques based upon a client-caseworker hierarchy while recasting the chronically homeless person as an independent property holder. These framings are instantiations of broader political-economic and policy contradictions. The stigmatization of the devalued and unproductive segments of society functions to disempower labor at the gain of capital; it has likewise justified cuts in social spending and the now several decades old assault on welfare. These cuts have increased the ranks of homeless and extremely poor; they have also meant longer, “chronic” homelessness.
Housing first emerged to target this group of individuals, and so far it has done fairly well. The program’s primary and most basic task is to get chronically homeless people off the street and into a cost-saving apartment, and to do this with and within the context of extreme poverty and the dearth of public services produced in the name of austerity and welfare “reform.” In this framing, housing first is succeeding (while giving the extremely dispossessed a new purchase on life, a “new hope,” as Montini (2010b) put it). The fact that clientele often remain extremely poor and unable to access services that they need to truly become “self-sufficient,” then, is of ancillary importance for housing first.

Things only become really problematic when look at housing first on a wider scale. Here it becomes evident that the continued precariousness of clientele reflects that of millions of individuals just barely staying off the street. The years of “ending welfare” rapidly catch-up with and overtake housing first’s claim to “end homelessness.” Rather than solving homelessness, unfortunately, housing first will continue to confront extreme poverty and homelessness produced and reproduced by a sporadic political economy and a neoliberal public policy. At a wider scale, housing first is a failure.

Some may understand these contradictions as a failure of housing first in general, a gross perversion of the original housing first philosophy. But housing first is not totally broken. Indeed, I think it is working exactly as it must. It is a program that operates within the current necessities of a neoliberal urbanism and policy. It is, in many ways, the ideal policy. Housing first is a new means by which the unproductive classes are reintegrated into the proper public sphere and, correspondingly, into the sphere of exchange amidst the circuits of capital accumulation. Altogether, the federal shift toward housing first neatly exhibits Foucault’s (1984, 262–3) conception of biopolitics, what he defines as “the administration of bodies and the
calculated management of life” to perfect “the adjustment of the accumulation of men to that of capital, the joining of the growth of human groups to the expansion of the productive forces and the differential allocation of profit.” For a neoliberal form of poverty governance, one measuring interventions less through a lens of morality than cost-benefit analysis, housing first became a bargain, a silver bullet that pulls in and contains the most visible and expensive homeless populations from gentrified storefronts (obstacles to capital accumulation) in the most efficient means yet discovered (much more efficiently and effectively than the push, pull, or drag we saw in chapter 2). As entrepreneurial municipalities demolish affordable housing for upscale redevelopment, as they gentrify working-class neighborhoods and cut services for the extremely poor and recently displaced to augment capital investment, housing first emerges as the ideal neoliberal solution, easily fitting within capital’s new grooves. It physically hides away the most visible and stigmatized outcomes of neoliberal capitalism while ideologically working to hide this fact, to obfuscate the relationship between accumulation and dispossession, between extreme wealth and poverty, between gentrification, budget cuts, unemployment, and homelessness.

Housing first, then, is not broken for neoliberal capital. Just as importantly, it is working just fine for the individuals I witnessed flourish in housing first programs. It is also working for those case managers dealing with the systematically dispossessed and oppressed – “the chronically homeless;” it is some sunshine for that grey twilight within which they labor. It is, however, broken at a wider scale and from a broader social justice perspective. Housing first might be the best thing to come out of homelessness policy in some time. But while it has potential, it is not enough. Housing first will not reform case management or challenge the stigmatization of those no longer needed by capital. It will not contest the criminalization of homelessness nor stop people from dying on the streets. It will not impel political
institutions/politicians to care more about their citizens than about attracting upper-class investment. Housing first will not end chronic poverty. It will not do any of these things because the housing first program or policy or philosophy is not radical; it is not a social movement; it is woefully uncontroversial. At its best, it will provide housing to a fraction of the poor and homeless while making us feel good about ourselves. At its worst, housing first will function to reproduce neoliberal geographies built to subsidize capital accumulation, to uphold social institutions that reproduce homelessness and extreme poverty, and to maintain political legitimacy by effectively hiding the most visible symbols of capitalist contradiction and neoliberal state policy: homeless people (chronic or otherwise) and the extremely poor. Housing first will function in this manner because housing first was primarily (re)produced by neoliberal urbanism to sustain neoliberal urbanism.

While I do not fully believe that housing first is entirely “an aggravation of the difficulty,” as Wilde chastises charity above, he is correct that anti-poverty charity programs are not a solution, and we should therefore recognize them in all their incapacity. Instead of sustaining poverty (avoiding starvation, death), “The proper aim” Wilde argues, “is to try and reconstruct society on such a basis that poverty will be impossible.” This necessarily means that we have to go beyond quick-fix policies that serve a fraction of the dispossessed, indeed that we begin to think seriously about why homelessness and extreme poverty is, and has been, endemic to modern society. It also means that we have to ruthlessly criticize even the most seemingly progressive and ambitious programs, programs like housing first. Such refocus means that we not spend most our energy scolding policies, ideas, and institutions that are most obviously regressive and destructive. As Foucault (2006, 41) put it, “The real political task in a society such as ours is to criticize the working of institutions which appear to be both neutral and
independent; to criticize them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight them.” Housing first, as I hope to have illustrated, is neither neutral nor independent; it is shot through with political violence. With such political violence unmasked, the next step is to fight – not to fight against housing first, but rather to fight the deep, systemic origins of mass homelessness and poverty so that such a contradictory institution like housing first no longer has a logical function in our society.
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