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Résumé de l'article

Cet article fait état des résultats d'une enquête menée dans les rues de Toronto auprès de «quêteux» pour appréhender les éléments idéologiques et sociaux de leurs discours. Les récits de vie de ceux et de celles qui font «la manche» nous éclairent sur le rôle social qu'ils s'attribuent eux-mêmes. Une description détaillée de la façon dont ils exercent leur «métier» nous donne un aperçu d'un phénomène déplus en plus courant en milieu urbain. Nous apprenons aussi que ces «marginalisés» ont tendance de marginaliser à leur tour certains membres de la «confrérie» ou de la société en général, incorporant ainsi des nonnes sociales auxquelles ils prétendent s'opposer. L'un des deux auteurs a passé du temps à «quêter» avec les informateurs.

SPARE ANY CHANGE ? : POWER AND DISCOURSE IN TORONTO'S URBAN PANHANDLING SUBCULTURE

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Head down to avoid the cold wind, I walked hurriedly along the stony-grey sidewalks of downtown Toronto.[1] I had no intention of breaking my stride. My eyes kept hypnotic pace with each foot as first the right foot, then the left foot moved forward. Advancing mechanically, I stepped onto a series of pale-pink words, a text that someone had scrawled in chalk onto the sidewalk. The vulnerability of the pale-pink words was enhanced by the scabrous texture of the concrete surface upon which it was written. I halted. Curiosity caused me to remove my right foot which partially concealed the message. It read :

WOULD YOU RATHER I :
SELL DRUGS TO YOUR KIDS,
FUCK YOUR HUSBANDS,
OR BEG FOR MONEY ?

Time stood still. Suddenly, I realized that behind this anonymous message was a space for a panhandler to sit cross-legged, holding out her multi-purposed tuque or the cardboard base of a tattered Pepsi case. At that moment I wondered whether or not she was safe.

This essay draws upon the findings of four separate periods of fieldwork and, more specifically, upon a participant-observation research study of panhandlers and, panhandling conducted in fall-spring, 1993-94. Originally intended as a general study of the homeless in Toronto, Canada, the focus of this research soon shifted specifically to the ethnographic study of panhandlers as constituting a distinct urban street subculture, a subculture centred on the performance of a particular mode of subsistence involving asking passers-by if they can "spare any change." Since panhandling itself involves by its very nature an act of communication, this study examines how the members of this group interact with passers-by on an interpersonal level, and with government agencies and humanitarian services on an institutional, societal level.[2]

1 . While this article is a co-venture, the ethnographic fieldwork was conducted entirely by Karen Warner; hence the majority of the observations made in the first person refer to Warner's observations and experiences. The data were analyzed jointly with theoretical input coming from both authors. The responsibility for the organization and drafting of the final article was primarily Butler's.

2 . Academic literature regarding panhandlers and panhandling is virtually nonexistent. Therefore, one must turn to the wider issues of homelessness and poverty. In the past, literature regarding

Many view panhandling as a desperate effort to eke out a living around which certain individuals build a lifestyle. Little attention is devoted to identifying and analyzing panhandlers as a specific group, and therefore the cultural aspects associated with panhandlers as a subculture remain largely unexamined. Policies and solutions proposed by institutions tend to emphasize *structural* change rather than the deconstruction and transformation of the social relations which influence and are influenced by structure. Such an approach fails to analyze people in culture as affected by and affecting social problems; consequently, power relationships remain unaddressed within and between these subcultures, between members of these subcultures and socio-cultural institutions, or between these subcultures and members of society at large. Yet the question of power was a theme which arose time and time again during the discourse analysis of written, visual and, primarily, spoken texts.

Fairclough (1989) refers to discourse as language use that is socially and contextually determined, a notion which echoes Hymes' ethnography of speaking (1962). As a system of arbitrary symbols, language is used to encode and decode meaning as it relates to human experience. However, the process of producing and interpreting meaning — a process which is itself a human experience — relies upon more than an examination of the surface textual components of language. Hymes (1962) notes that the meaning of language also depends on analyzing and comprehending both linguistic and non-linguistic contexts.

Butler (1990) argues that context includes much more than the situational or environmental circumstances which surround the expression of a body of knowledge. Historical, sociocultural, general and particularistic contexts influence, and are influenced by underlying cognitive contexts (or bodies of cultural knowledge) which are manifested as beliefs, ideologies, traditions, tales, myths, values, norms, rules and codes of conduct. These contextual elements surface during oral expression.

Discourse as social practice has a number of important implications for the study of the subculture of panhandlers. First, language and society share an internal, dialectical relationship. Second, language is a social process which is practised amongst people everyday. Therefore, discourse refers to the entire process of social interaction within subcultures, and between subcultures and

homelessness has involved descriptive, ethnographic accounts of older, skid-row males who exhibit problems with alcohol (Simons *et al.*:1989). In contrast, studies conducted during the 1980s reveal that homeless and street subcultures are composed of all sorts of people including teenagers, women, families, people with and without substance abuse problems, unemployed individuals who desire jobs and individuals who are mentally impaired (Ibid.). More recent studies on homelessness tend to be presented from the ideological, policy-oriented and/or moralistic perspectives of governmental, social or religious institutions; perspectives which frequently ignore the voice of homeless and street people. These studies tend to be defined from an institutional perspective and involve such issues as housing, unemployment, demographic shifts, social disaffiliation and marginalization (racism, sexism, ageism), mental health, substance abuse, family breakdown, violence and abuse, social welfare constraints and budget cutbacks, access to education and opportunity, and class divisions in society, to name a few (Wright 1988).

mainstream society. Third, language is a socially conditioned process shaped by other, non-linguistic parts of society. According to Fairclough, the formal properties of texts interact with cognitive resources (such as knowledge of language, values, beliefs, and representations). Social conditions—or context—shape the cognitive resources that people, during interaction, bring to production and interpretation of discourse, resources which, in turn, shape the ways in which subsequent texts are produced and interpreted. Language is the product of social conditions situated within a particular historic period. Since urban street culture and mainstream society are very differently oriented in terms of value systems and behavioral norms, discourse at the interface can be nothing other than one of confrontation between the empowered and the disempowered.

Power, and therefore powerlessness, are, in fact, intrinsic to discourse as cognitive ideological contexts are translated into interpersonal contexts where unequal statuses and relationships constitute the norm. Moreover, certain sets of conventions are shaped by power relations in social institutions and in society as a whole. Conventions are not unified and homogeneous but are characterized by diversity and struggle. The resulting social roles and statuses formulate power relations and, in the process, shape cultural identities. As this paper will demonstrate, one cannot simply be a panhandler; one must perform in a certain manner to meet the societal expectations of this role-identity. To paraphrase Stubbs (1983), one must ***do*** a panhandler for the public. However, this public performance is only a small part of the set of behavioral norms attached to membership in this subculture.

The Context of the Study

The population of panhandlers, or "panners" as they prefer to call themselves, is carefully mapped and defined in terms of location within the urban environment. Panners station themselves at street level in locales where high volumes of pedestrian traffic pass during daytime and evening business hours. Panners refer to these locales as their "spot." Six distinct spots were initially chosen for study under the assumption that only one panner would be stationed at each spot (i.e., six samples each consisting of one participant). However, early in the research I discovered that more than one panner may "pan" (panhandle) at a particular spot. Since I planned to "hang out" with participants, as well as to conduct several in-depth interviews, the research design was modified to compare only two distinct spots: the Bookstore (Site B) and the Cinema (Site C).

Consequently, the choice of spots for study dictated participant selection. Upon their oral consent, panners who either panned or visited a designated spot were classified as participants. Site B was occupied by nine panhandlers ; three females and six males, while Site C was the territory of two panners, both male.

Observational data suggest that panning subculture is predominantly white male, although there are considerable numbers of female panners as well.[3] Participant ages ranged primarily from approximately fifteen to forty years.

To my surprise, early on in my research, an intermediary, Dad Paul,[4] emerged and facilitated my entry into Site B, which consisted of nine panners. Not only did he invite me to hang out with him at his spot, Dad Paul also accompanied me to other places where Site B panners congregated, such as the donut shop, fast-food restaurants, an alternative school for street kids, or the refuges they called "home." On a month-to-month basis, some panners resided in stinking, shoddy, ill-equipped apartments, while other panners inhabited makeshift tents which they hid in "their" park during the day, then erected for shelter at night.

Despite Dad Paul's assistance, panners were not inclined to trust readily. At some point during each encounter with a panner I was submitted to a "test" and my reaction determined whether or not my informant would continue his or her participation. Testing entailed asking me intimate questions about my sex life, family relationships and personal problems, then evaluating my degree of hesitation, openness, judgmentalness and honesty. Panners became more comfortable with me once they knew that I, too, had faced some difficult personal hardships during my lifetime. Since panners often feel misunderstood, they respected the fact that I had made the effort to learn about their experience by posing as a panner myself. Once they believed that I was sincerely interested in them, most panners seized the opportunity to talk with me.

Other than during interviews, note-taking was not often possible while in the field. However, I wrote up detailed field notes as soon as possible. To aid my memory, photographs of spots and participants accompanied my field notes. Five panners were selected and agreed to participate in in-depth, semi-structured, qualitative, one-on-one interviews. The selection of interview participants was influenced by both practical and personal safety considerations. From a practical perspective, as transient individuals who do not necessarily remain in the same spot or home from one day to the next, who do not carry appointment books and who, for obvious reasons, cannot be easily contacted by telephone, it was important that potential participants seem reliable. Since more than one interview was required, and interviews typically lasted one to two hours, it was essential to recruit participants who were available without interfering with their panning activities. Two female panners and two male panners were selected from Site B and one male panner was selected from Site C. Only four panners completed these interviews. A total of twelve hours was spent interviewing.

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3. Research by Kufeldt and Nimmo (1987) indicates there are equal numbers of male and female street kids. The fact that these numbers are not reflective of the panner population raises the question of the exploitation of the young females, many of whom, one assumes, are lured into prostitution. Again, this issue requires further research.
4. All names of participants in this study are pseudonyms.

During each participant's first interview, the purpose of the study was reviewed. Assurances of anonymity and confidentiality were of particular importance to panners because many panners are hiding from parents, spouses or other family members, and/or from governmental or legal authorities. As a result, most panners would provide only either their first names or their street names. Also, since many panners are suspicious of signing documents, the oral consent of each interview participant was tape-recorded. Since feelings of powerlessness and suspicion are common amongst panners, a small tape recorder was placed where panners could access it easily. Each panner was shown how to turn off the unit, demonstrating that he or she controlled the interview at all times.

All one hundred and nine interview questions were open-ended. The sequence of questions was of some importance, as seemingly innocent questions could spark a dramatic, negative response from some panners. It was crucial to remember that many panners had experienced a variety of physical and psychological abuse and traumas including domestic violence, incest, rape, street violence, the loss of personal property and money, drug and alcohol addictions and a host of other serious problems resulting in loss of family and friends, a feeling of low self-esteem and a sense of hopelessness. For these reasons, sensitive areas of discussion were interspersed among less threatening categories concerning the mechanics of panning. Sensitive topics included hygiene, ethics, finances, criminal record and life history.

The Informants and the Panner Culture

Before analyzing the data, I think it is important to attach human faces to some of the panhandlers who contributed a great deal of their time to help me with this research. *Dad Paul* is a thirty-eight-year-old, healthy-looking, white male who has been panning for seven months, this time. He appears much older than other men his age. Most mainstream people do not think he "looks" like a panner as he looks too average. About ten years ago, Dad Paul lived and panned on the streets, after he had left a bike club and successfully completed rehabilitation for substance abuse. He is often surrounded by street kids who gave him his nickname because he fulfils the role of a "father" in the "family" which survives on the streets.

Dad Paul graduated from a four-year university program. In community college, he completed a one-year program for certification as a legal clerk. He claims that his mother is a millionaire and that she is still alive, although apparently the two have not spoken in many years. This time, he has landed on the streets due to personal and business problems. Dad Paul owned his own business during the ten years between the first and second time he lived on the street.

Sam is a tough, young twenty-four-year-old Metis male who has lived on the streets since he was sixteen. Sam's father was abusive and too many problems were present on the home front for Sam to remain there. In order to obtain money, Sam fluctuates between panning and busking. He loves to sing and play the guitar, but right now he does not have an instrument, someone having stolen it and pawned it for drug money.

Sam has panned the Bookstore (Site B) for over a year. In order to share this spot with Sam, other panners must either be invited or ask permission. Otherwise, panners must be prepared to fight Sam for the location. It was Sam who invited Dad Paul to pan at this location. Even though Dad Paul has his "fatherly" status, Sam has seniority at the "spot" which is known as "Sam's spot" among panners. Both Dad Paul and Sam are considered "true panners" although Dad Paul sleeps in a tiny, unfurnished apartment, while Sam sleeps in the park.

Brad is a fifteen-year-old female street kid. She has lived on the streets since she was twelve, when she originally ran away from her abusive, alcoholic, adoptive father.[5] After being caught by authorities and returned home, only to run away again and again, she was finally kicked out for good by her parents. She panned for about one year, but no longer considers herself a panner. Sometimes she sits next to Dad Paul when he is panning in the spot.

A couple of months ago, Brad gave birth to a baby boy. The boy's father was deported back to his homeland of Romania. Meanwhile, she is trying to complete her high-school education through programs established for skids.[6] At present, she is staying with her baby in Dad Paul's apartment. Brad no longer thinks of herself as living on the streets, however she acknowledges : "I will always be a street kid."

Bill, like Dad Paul and Sam, is also a "true panner", but Bill is located at a Site C, the "Cinema." Site C is a ten-minute drive away from Site B. Bill has never met the "Bookstore" panners though he has panned the "Cinema" location for about five years. Bill, who is now forty but looks much older, panned for the first time twenty years ago. His appearance fits the stereotypical representation of a bum.

Bill tries to obtain enough money to rent a room in a cheap motel where the management know him. If he does not pan enough money, which is usually the case during warmer weather, he wanders the streets all night, spends as much time as possible in donut shops drinking coffee, then catches a couple of hours of sleep in a subway station until a security guard forces him to leave. Bill has become accustomed to the panning life and knows what to expect from it. He has no plans to do anything else. Although his life as a panhandler has its price, Bill insists he feels a sense of freedom that he never experienced during his previous employment as a taxi driver.

5 . In fact, the majority of panhandlers involved in this study had been adopted children, a point which might require further investigation at a future time.

6 . "Skid" is street slang for "street kid."

Of the nine panners at Site B, three are adult males (*Dad Paul, Lorne, Sam*), and two are male skids (*Hi Paul, Don*). Together, they are known as the "regular panners" at this site. In contrast, *Martin*, an adult male, and three female skids (*Rebecca, Cheryl, Brad*) are referred to as "occasional panners" at Site B. Sometimes occasional panners just drop by to visit the regulars at Site B, not necessarily to pan. Each female skid has her own panning site elsewhere. Site C is panned only by *Bill*. However, Bill is visited sometimes by his panner friend, *Clark*, who pans occasionally at another site to subsidize his earnings as a popcorn vendor at hockey games.

Because data collection began in one of Canada's coldest winters, the process of gaining entry was undertaken from my car. Parked across the street from a designated spot, the first step was to observe a panner. Many people seemed to stop and chat with a male panner, who appeared to be in his early fifties. I decided to approach him. I walked toward him, crouched to his eye level and initiated polite conversation. Without looking at me when he spoke, he asked gruffly, "What do you want ?" I introduced myself and explained my purpose. He offered to meet me later on at a nearby donut shop. This donut shop became our central meeting place, as well as the place where several panners congregated. That afternoon marked the beginning of an association and friendship with Dad Paul.

Although Dad Paul introduced me to "regular" and "occasional" panners, I never heard another panner use these terms. Rather, territoriality based on one's preferential status as a regular as opposed to an occasional panner is an understood code of conduct amongst panners. When this code is misunderstood or challenged by a panner, he or she is quickly socialized by the regular panner or a group of regular panners. A confrontation could ensue not only because a challenger seizes the spot of a regular panner, but also because the challenger has stationed himself or herself too close to a regular panner's spot. If panners are situated too close to one another, the intake of change and other items is reduced.

Confrontation may involve a range of behavior, depending upon how soon the encroacher (or challenger) relinquishes the spot, if he or she concedes it at all. The challenger may be taken aside civilly by one or more regular panners who explain the rules of the street to the individual. The two parties may negotiate sharing the spot, or the challenger may leave at this point. These confrontations are more likely to be combative than civil. For instance, one or more panners may instigate a yelling match, exchange profanities and/or call one another derogatory names. Shouting may or may not accompany poking and shoving the challenger. If the challenger does not surrender, the regular panner is forced to fight in order to keep his or her spot. If the panner is alone when he or she is challenged, the regular, particularly if female, may confront the challenger later with the help of his or her street friends. A postponed confrontation could take place anywhere the challenger is found, not necessarily at the spot. After the problem is resolved, usually, there is not an ongoing turf war with that particular challenger.

While panners used business terminology and metaphors when referring to the activity of panning, they also used language related to "having a job" and to "work." The usage of all work-related language was interchangeable. Notably, the language used depended on one's frame of reference or *gaze* (Mitchell 1988). For example, Dad Paul possessed an entrepreneurial background, and therefore he relied upon business analogies and terms. Hi Paul had held commissioned sales jobs, thereby associating panning with sales and marketing language. Bill used to be a taken-for-granted employee of a taxi company. His language reflected the status of an oppressed worker. Brad, a fifteen-year-old girl who has not had many jobs, interchanged all three frames of reference but her terminology tended to reflect Dad Paul's influence. Sam, who used to be a busker, compared panning to an art form whereby the provision of "entertainment" generated an income. Although males and females are equally capable of asking strangers for money in order to survive on the streets, it appeared that panning was a male-dominated economic activity.

The Discourse of Urban Panhandlers

The complementary, if oppositional, notions of *self* and *other* as they relate to the folk group were outlined in some detail by Jansen in his discussion of the esoteric-exoteric factor (Jansen 1965). While all individuals may possess distinct personal characteristics which differentiate them, they also share certain values, behavioral norms and beliefs which identify them as members of a group culture. This is a process of inclusion, but it is also one of exclusion as well, as those who do not share these values and beliefs are stigmatized, or *othered,* for their adherence to a different system of values and behavior. In the case of urban panhandlers, although the conventional mainstream culture certainly serves as a focus of their discourse of exclusion, the groups who are most *othered* are those whose activities are, on the surface, closest to their own. More specifically, discourse tends to target those who pretend to panhandle out of necessity while benefitting from other sources of income at the same time.

Sam explains why he does not engage in some form of socially sanctioned work. In the process, he "others" welfare recipients (a common activity of panners) without realizing that he is himself re-presenting cultural representations and stereotypes which have shaped both the identity of panhandlers and the social relations between panhandlers and society. Sam unleashes a tirade against **welfare recipients** :

> Half these people don't even need it. They just want to defraud the government because they're too lazy to work. I never said I wouldn't work. I just said I don't want a job that's going to be less than the cost of living. You get me a nice job that I can maybe work up to, that has some kind of potential. But if not - forget it ! I'll sit here until Hell freezes over.

The types of jobs to which Sam refers (and for which he is qualified) are the low-paying labour jobs which have evaporated as a result of the changing dynamics of the work force and economy. His comments typify the fatalistic attitude of many panners who ask "What's the use ?" Lewis writes :

> It represents an effort to cope with feelings of hopelessness and despair that develop from the realization of the improbability of achieving success in terms of the values and goals of the larger society. [1986:5]

Although Sam declares he would work in a "nice job," he appears unable to specify what he means by a nice job. Sam and other panners complain that they elect not to work in mainstream society because of the "bullshit" involved; someone else is always making the rules and impacting their sense of "getting ahead." Sam's harangue demonstrates the counter-hegemonic attitude against mainstream notions of the work ethic displayed by so many panners : "If I can't work on my terms, I won't 'work' in your world at all."

The poverty gaze is a frame of reference connected with a hegemonic notion of a work ethic closely tied to the measurement of success in terms of material accumulation. Dad Paul demonstrates an inability to cope with society's expectations of success which are linked to the work ethic :

> ... you are out there because you've given up or somebody has given up on you, and you haven't achieved the success you wanted in your life..., you look at the rich man on the hill and you're down at the bottom and you say to yourself, 'I can never get there'. You've made a 'choice' to stop yourself because you've said, 'I can never get there'. Someone else has said, 'You don't have the brains, the intellect, the training'. You haven't equipped yourself for it so you start to say at age 30 to 35, 'Gee, I'm not up the corporate ladder as high as I want to be' ... so you say, 'Fuck it - I'm going out and just do what I want to.... I'm going out and live on the street and be a bum, and see what happens to change my life'. And maybe people will give me money and maybe they won't.

The work ethic offers a narrow demarcation of the poverty experience and lifestyle. Dad Paul's statement reveals the complexities of ending up living in a street subculture. He discusses the sense of alienation experienced by operating unsuccessfully within the realm of society's expectations. The work ethic does not take into consideration the *poverty of spirit*: the low individual and group self-esteem common to panners, and to other forms of street life and homeless society, as a result of one's inability to meet the standards of the work ethic that are communicated daily through cultural representations and identities. By dropping out or quitting, as some members of mainstream society might view the situation, panhandlers implement a counter-hegemonic form of cultural resistance to the narrow and unrealistic standards of the work ethic. Since mainstream society does not view panning as "work," panners are not associated with the mainstream notion of the work ethic. According to the poverty gaze, society perceives panning as begging for money and begging does not signify a

form of work. Consequently, panhandlers are perceived as freeloading, not "earning" their way in society. This conclusion involves a moral judgment toward panners by certain members of society, such as Hughes, who base moral judgments on standards set by the work ethic :

> Beggars are standing everywhere... They have no shame... (they) don't even bother to concoct some far-off tal... My mother started working in a drug store when she was 12 years old, and after 47 years she still rises at 5:45 each morning to work in the office printing plant... (she) would sooner have gone hungry than ask for a handout. [1992:6]

In contrast, Brad's definition of panning typifies the perspective of most panners. She explains matter-of-factly that panning is "the business of making money: survival. I feel bad because I have to ask people for money. It's not a choice." Members of society who are critical of panhandlers believe that panhandling is a choice, and therefore blame panners for their circumstances. Hughes exemplifies this attitude when he states :

> I don't believe that people putting the touch on me have really fallen on such hard times that they need to resort to begging... begging has become a career choice, like dentistry or small-engine repair. [1992:6]

However, Dad Paul insists that panhandling and street life are not choices : "No one wants to be on the street for their life, it's demoralizing, it's degrading..."

The identity of panhandler is socially constructed by cultural representations that are based on the interlocking of Canada's poverty gaze with the hegemonic notion of the work ethic. Consequently, a myriad of popular discourses are produced and disseminated by popular culture, which in turn, determine social relations "between identities" of panhandler and society, and "within identities" of the panhandler.

Since panhandling is not a socially-sanctioned form of work, society judges panhandlers as morally deficient and criticizes them for their "choice." Ironically, as aware as panhandlers are of cultural representations and the formation of their own identity, they are unaware of the fact that they employ the same tactics society uses to marginalize panhandlers in order to "other" welfare recipients and judge them as immoral. This double process of "othering" signifies how morality and choice are problematic. There appear to be degrees of morality which depend upon one's "position of enunciation" (Hall 1990) : a position of power.

Panhandlers do not deem their own actions to be immoral, but rather, they believe panhandling symbolizes a counter-hegemonic form of cultural resistance to mainstream society's hegemonic notion of the work ethic. Panhandling is necessary for their survival. However, panners delude themselves by thinking that membership within the panhandler subculture is counter-hegemonic. As long

as panhandlers accept, internalize and re-present the cultural representations and identities produced and disseminated by dominant culture's hegemonic poverty gaze, panhandling will never be a counter-hegemonic form of cultural resistance. By assuming the role-identity of panhandler, panners are conforming to the stigmatization and marginalization of poverty; a position of enunciation which is, in actuality, powerless.

Ultimately, the aspect that remains unexamined is the impact that the entire process has on the identity of panhandler as self. Brad, her face devoid of expression, and her voice numb with resolve, best depicts this impact when she quietly admits : "I don't know what to call myself anymore. I'm just a person. I'm a human being. I'm a really confused human being —leave it at that."

The Poverty Gaze and Identity

Stuart Hall writes : "Practices of representation always implicate the positions from which we speak or write — the positions of enunciation" (Hall 1990:222). We have referred to the "position" from which society makes sense of poverty, homelessness and street life as the *poverty gaze*. When the poverty gaze is applied to the subculture of panhandlers, several positions influence the representations that are produced, disseminated, reinforced and re-presented by the mainstream media which impact the representations of panhandlers made by popular culture. These positions include : the assumption of newness, stereotypes and physical appearance and the notion of a homogeneous welfare category. Since the poverty gaze symbolizes a hegemonic position, one supposedly derived from and standing in stark contrast with the work ethic, it also implies a myriad of social discourses affiliated with panhandling. In turn, these discourses produce and reproduce culture and its social relations.

Hall conjoins the concept of representation with identity by suggesting that, "Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think...Instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, [we should think of identity as] a 'production,' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation." Cultural representations consist of images, myths, assumptions, stereotypes and archetypes which shape identities, which Hall defines as "the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past" (Hall 1990:227). Identities are socially constructed and are shaped by cultural representations in two ways. First, cultural representations inform society's representations of others. Second, cultural representations inform the individual's notion of self. It is this reciprocal relationship between representations and identities which impacts the dialectical social construction of other and self. In terms of panhandling, the self-other dialectic shapes the social relations in two ways: *between* identities and *within*

identities of panhandler and society. "Between identities" includes the relationships between panner and society, and between panner and other forms of homeless and/or street subculture. "Within identities" includes the relationships within the identity of panner as a group member, and within the identity of panner as self.

The Assumption of Newness

Headlines in the popular media are indicative of the first position which informs the poverty gaze. "Desperate jobless turn to begging" (*Toronto Star* 1992:A2). "More have hand outs: Beggars crowd the streets like never before" (*Winnipeg Free Press* 1992:A3). Panhandling is positioned in popular culture as a relatively new or recent phenomenon. In fact, homelessness and begging retain a long history. In nineteenth-century Britain, young "street urchins" or "nomads" (Hebdige:1979) were the equivalent of the street kids and panhandlers of today. In urban America from 1850 to 1920, homeless men were referred to as the "floating population" — tramps, transients and freeloaders (Schneider 1989:95). The individual histories of panhandlers reveal that panhandling is not new. Bill panhandled for the first time twenty years ago. Dad Paul panhandled for the first time ten years ago. Both men returned to mainstream life, only to find themselves back on the streets years later. This time, Bill has panhandled for five years, whereas Dad Paul has panhandled for only seven months. Sam has fluctuated between panhandling and busking for almost eight years. Brad panned for about one year out of the three years she has lived on the streets. Panning is not a new phenomenon. If anything, it is a chronic condition of urban society.

In the socially sanctioned work world, these panhandling durations imply the consistency of a regular job. In fact, many aspects of panning are similar to the tradition of the "work world," regardless of whether one has been oriented to the work world through the gaze of an employee, or through the gaze of a business owner. For example, panners maintain the same panning spot, pan regular hours, develop regular "customers," implement policies which regulate proper conduct in terms of the customer service relationship, organize "panning shifts" if more than one panner uses the same spot, recognize a system of seniority in terms of using a panning spot, and ostracize panners who do not follow the rules, to the point where the rule breaker may be kicked off the spot, or "fired."

Once one becomes part of the subculture of panhandling, it is difficult to return to, and remain in, mainstream society. Bill discusses the possibility of getting off the streets: "I haven't any time limits on it. Just if and when it happens, it happens." Bill's comments demonstrate a lack of planning and control over the events of his life. Regarding goal setting, Bill said :

> I haven't thought about it... Just haven't bothered... because then I find if you don't [accomplish these goals], you end up too disappointed. This way, if you don't set them and you happen to do something - great !

Even if panners set goals, a panning lifestyle makes it difficult to achieve one's goals. Sam acknowledges, "I have goals, but right now they're not really in much of a process." These responses are typical of what Bill and other panners refer to as being in a "rut."

Panners seldom have a concept of the future. Lewis called this phenomenon "present-time oriented" (1968:8). In terms of whether or not she thinks about the future, Brad answered honestly, "Not really, cause I'm out there day by day and I'm not really certain about it." Dad Paul states : "Someday, but not now, is the attitude. Someday I'll do it ; someday I will. And as only old folks know, someday comes and goes." Brad describes best the hold panning retains over panners :

> It's hard to leave ; you're so used to it. It's like brushing your teeth every day and then all of a sudden, you don't have a toothbrush any more ! And then it's, 'Oh, no ! I don't have a toothbrush.' That's kind of like how it is. It's a pattern ; it's a lifestyle ...

It is this pattern of their lifestyle which prevents panners from seeing the future or setting goals. Brad, upon being asked what types of work she would like to do, responds : "I don't know really any more. It gets lost in life itself."

Stereotypes and Physical Appearance

It is all too common for popular culture to represent images of the poor and homeless inaccurately. For instance, authenticity is in no way evident in the popular movie *The Fisher King*, in which actor Robin Williams portrays a homeless man as an eccentric and mentally unstable caricature. Representation by caricature transforms identity into stereotypes and archetypes, the second position which informs the poverty gaze. The problem is that in the everyday practice of popular culture, representations become reified, resulting in concrete identities. These concrete representations and identities construct social discourses. Unauthentic identities become absolute : fixed, essentialized and normalized. Representations in popular culture, based on stereotypes and archetypes, resemble symbols of homelessness and poverty, more so than authentic depictions of human beings.

Stereotypical, identity-forming representations are influenced by society's first impressions of the panhandler, which are predicated on physical appearance. For instance, in an article for *Eye*, Hughes writes very critically about panners : "These smart, healthy young panhandlers distract us from those who are truly in need" (1992:6). When a panner is judged by members of society as "healthy-looking," panners are then perceived to not be in need. What does "need" mean ? In Canada, need comprises the stereotyped images of weathered and weary-looking bag ladies and bums. Therefore, the identity of panhandler is socially constructed based on an image of the homeless, which, in itself, is not

authentic. Surprisingly, homeless people, including those panhandlers who are homeless, resemble the average passer-by more so than the stereotypical representations fixed by popular culture.

The underlying implication is that panners are healthy enough to work for money; and work is not begging. Hughes continues : "... in these bruise-blue recessionary times we hear true horror stories of working people being squeezed into impossibly tight financial situations. But being dealt a funny hand should never be enough to make you beg for money"(1992:6). Hughes' writing highlights many of the myths surrounding panhandlers and panhandling.

Dad Paul often refers to the myths and stereotypes that the media convey about panners :

> ... that is what "the media" has depicted street people to look like : all covered ; all hunched up on the sidewalk — the "bag lady syndrome" — freezing to death. I've slept on the sidewalk since I've had the apartment as a matter of fact.

Panhandlers are well aware of the poverty gaze and its implications for the panhandler identity. Even panners themselves play with these representations and identities.

If society recognizes panning as an activity, panning may well be conceived as a form of *play* rather than work. Some members of society believe that panners are not serious about earning a living or else they would have a real (from their perspective) job. However, both work and play are ways of organizing activities. Handelman argues that "... play may occur as we carry out tasks that are generally characterized as 'work' " (1987:155). Sam clarifies the difference between panhandling as a form of work versus a form of play:

> No, it's not a game. It can be a challenge sometimes like a game, but it's not a game for me. I live out here so whatever I make every day — that's what I have. So I don't fool around with this... I'm pretty serious about what I'm doing.

Do panners consider these income-earning tactics and re-presentations of panhandler identity as a form of manipulation or as type of a "con" ? Brad comments, "I do things that I've been doing for so long I don't consider them manipulation. It's a habit. I go out and pan, and I have a 'panner attitude'." Sam states : "Sympathy or not, I still have to make money. So, I'm not trying to manipulate them out of their money, I'm just asking them for the money." Most panners recognize that they utilize certain tactics which might help them gain sympathy and, therefore, obtain more money. For example, on slow days, Brad tries to make things look worse than they are by pretending she is cold when she is not really cold. Other tactics used by panners include wearing "bummy" clothes, or wearing too few clothes during the cold weather. Some panners surround themselves with knapsacks and other possessions in order to appear

homeless and transient when, in fact, they rent modest apartments. In the business world, this might be considered as "knowing your target market" and devising the appropriate "sales strategy" rather than manipulation or conning. While panners may not consider what they do a game, it is certainly a public performance involving various props and numerous theatrical techniques derived precisely from mainstream society's stereotypes.

Gender identities play a role in determining the most effective strategies to obtain money. Some of the men stop shaving their faces and washing their bodies and hair. The belief is that the appearance of whiskers and dirty, matted hair enables able-bodied male panners to fit the stereotype of a panhandler better. Others believe that dressing nicely and proper hygiene generate more money. It is known amongst panners that girls make more money. The female panners play with society's notions about gender by making, as Brad called it, "puppy-dog eyes." When Brad was nine months pregnant, Dad Paul encouraged her to display her bulging stomach to passers-by. Girls position themselves, and are positioned, as sex objects and vulnerable victims. In reality, the girls who pan are harassed more often than the male panners and tend to be propositioned frequently for sexual favours.

Representation also extends to what the public should not see about panhandling or panhandlers. Panners are very cautious to not let their customers see them in their daily lives outside of the activity of panning. If a panner smokes marijuana or drinks alcohol, most panners believe that it is better to do so during their private times and in their private spaces. This "leisure" practice is no different from people in mainstream society who use these activities for leisure and relaxation in the privacy of their homes, rather than indulging in them at work. Panners have rules of appropriateness and inappropriateness. For instance, it is not appropriate for customers to see panners entertaining themselves at a movie, or eating dinner in a nice restaurant. Likewise, it is not appropriate to pan while drunk or stoned.

Society's work ethic promotes the belief that being poor means forfeiting any kind of enjoyment or fun in life. The expectation is that the poor should be working at legitimate work every spare moment before they earn the right to enjoyment or leisure. The poor are not viewed as entitled, a standard advocated by a society which supports its own leisure activities, not to mention many of its daily necessities, with the illusion of money, namely, credit cards. Every day many people in mainstream society also live beyond their means, as a way of coping with reality and of escaping from it.

Dad Paul rationalizes the adoption of stereotypical panhandling personas : "We're not so stupid as to not use what's given to us to use and I don't think anyone should be that stupid to not use what's available to them to make their income. As long as its legal and moral." Panhandling is not an illegal activity in Canada, and unlike much of mainstream society, most panners do not think of

panning as immoral. Dad Paul explains : "Am I doing something moral ? Yes, because I don't steal ; I don't deal. I'm merely asking people for money."

In simple terms, panners feel they are doing what they need to do to survive. People choose whether or not they want to give. This removes the moral burden from panners. Bill explains :

> ... if they ask me why I need it ... I'll just tell them, it's to survive daily... I'm straightforward with those who want to ask. Now, if they want to think something else, that's their own mind that I figure is conning them.

Ironically, this removal of any moral burden underlies society's intolerance of panning: members of society are being forced to make a moral choice every time they encounter a panner. Do I give or do I not give money to this panhandler ? More often than not, popular discourses imply that homelessness and panhandling consist of individual, moral deficiency. Hughes writes angrily : "The trouble with beggars ... is their insincerity ... our compassion has been blunted by charlatans who don't think twice about handouts" (Ibid.). Dad Paul refutes this notion : "Immoral to me would be being on welfare and unemployment and panning at the same time."

Homogeneity and Welfare

In the third position, the poverty gaze assumes that the categories of poverty, homeless society and street subcultures are subsumed within a comprehensive, homogeneous category of *welfare recipient.* This "welfare gaze" assumes that people who are poor, homeless and/or survive on the streets, all accept welfare, or some other form of state assistance, and this assumption includes panhandlers. Consequently, individual group differences are rendered invisible and silent by this preoccupation with one homogeneous identity. However, the subculture of panhandling is no more homogeneous than the microcosm of homeless society or street life, or the macrocosm of society at large. Contrary to popular belief, most panners do not accept state assistance and, typically, panners do not respect people who accept state assistance, especially welfare. Brad believes that "Welfare is sort of like a drug: it gets addictive. You get on it; you're happy. You've got money." This finding is a far cry from the representation of panners depicted in popular culture. Yet, government policy and social service agendas treat poverty, homelessness and street life in Canada as a homogeneous problem which requires one overall solution, which, not surprisingly, no one has yet to determine or implement.

Headlines such as "Faring Well On Welfare" (Harvey 1994:7) confirm the dominant and negative perception associated with welfare recipients that is currently communicated by the mainstream media. The insinuation is that most of "those people" who receive welfare (or who "participate" in the government's

new "workfare" program) are making a more than adequate income as a result of the taxes paid by so-called hard-working members of society. Receiving welfare assistance has become associated with welfare fraud and during this time of budget cutbacks, restructuring and preoccupation with welfare fraud, the current poverty gaze casts suspicion upon one of the most visible forms of homeless society, the panhandler. The implication is that panhandlers choose to live on the streets, that they generate an adequate standard of living, and that they consciously defraud the system and the general public.

Panners are accused of exploiting the system. In fact, few of the panners included in the study even utilize services developed for the homeless and other street people. For instance, panners tell stories about becoming ill after eating meals prepared by volunteers and staff at mission soup kitchens and drop-in centres. Although these agencies prepare hot meals, charitable "filler food" is usually high in fat and low in nutrition. Consequently, many panners would rather chance the food that they receive from passers-by on the streets.

It must be realized that panhandlers receive several kinds of gifts other than money from their customers. These gifts include fast-food, home-cooked meals, clothing, footware, cigarettes, blankets, drugs and alcohol. Rebecca does not eat any of the donated food, fearing someone may have tampered with it. However, most panners accept this donated food. In fact, surplus food is a daily occurrence, and panners turn food away regularly. Many panhandlers prefer to buy food from grocery stores or from a fast-food outlet.

The hostel system is considered so unpleasant that many panners prefer to sleep on the streets. Dad Paul describes the hostel environment as "extremely depressing ; laying there at night, listening to some of the stories and the people moaning and screaming." The hostel environment is conducive to lice, theft, violence and a lack of privacy. Dad Paul continues his description of hostels :

> In the hostels ... you have to do something that is hard for some people to do and that's take all your clothes off. If you do that you're putting your clothes some place that is susceptible to being stolen. So your I.D. is there, your money is there, your weapon is there, unless you have someone that is close to you and hostels don't really have a lot of close friends that you would want to give your stuff to.

On the streets Dad Paul will leave anything with his partner, Sam.

Panners employ cultural representations similar to those of mainstream society. This serves to stigmatize, marginalize, *other* and exclude people who accept welfare. In fact, this feature is central to the "panner work ethic." Brad conveys a common stereotype : "... if they pay their rent and they spend the rest on drugs and booze and it's gone within a weekend, I think that's disgusting." Brad talks about being "jealous" of people on welfare because, as she states :

> I was surviving off the money I was making on the street but, yet, you get all these people on welfare and they have enough to live off for a month and probably some left over if they're lucky... — but I never had any of that.

An example of this point is evident in a story recounted to me by almost every panhandler I met. A panhandler was interviewed for a newspaper known for its conservative ideology. The resulting article claimed that this "informant panhandler" earned $25.00 per hour in addition to his $369.00 welfare cheque (Harder 1993:2). Accompanying the article was a large photograph of a smiling panhandler enjoying a spaghetti dinner and a glass of wine in a local restaurant. The message : panhandlers choose to live on the streets and in the process, take advantage of both the system and human charity. When discussing this article, panhandlers attributed the unusually low amounts of money obtained over the Christmas holidays to this representation which informed public perceptions about panhandlers. They expressed anger and resentment against the "inaccurate" depiction of their lifestyle. Two rumours were conveyed to me. First, the informer panhandler was supposedly paid for this story and treated to the meal by the reporter. Second, a group of panhandlers found the informer and beat him up. One panhandler even suggested that both of the "informant's" legs were broken. This story is an example of how the narrative tradition creates suitable counter-legends which provide panhandler subculture with evidence to refute information which assaults their notions of identity and propriety. Since representations in popular culture can have serious consequences for panhandlers in the reality of life on the streets, such narrative "evidence" is essential.

Panners agree that some people, such as the disabled and the mentally impaired, need welfare. However, even the wheelchair panner who pans across the road from Site B is disliked by other panners because he collects numerous government assistance cheques, yet continues to pan. The other panners consider him a "scammer" because he uses a "con" to obtain money from people. As the story is told, *Wheelchair* is an old man who works with a younger male partner. Apparently, Wheelchair parks his chair on a prominent, downtown corner and sits holding an old cookie tin, in which he places a bit of spare change and a morsel of food. After panning for a while, his young partner runs up to Wheelchair, grabs his money and food, then escapes down the street, leaving his victim behind wailing in distress. Supposedly this ploy earns Wheelchair a considerable amount of money from enraged and sympathetic bystanders. However, other panners consider such tactics immoral and counter-productive as Wheelchair "cuts their grass."[7] Again, the truth of the narrative is less significant than its function as a didactic account of how panning should **not** be conducted.

7 . This is a term used by panners to signify the activities of those who occupy a location too close to that of a regular, thereby competing with that panner's business.

Such stories are not uncommon among panners as they attempt to establish meaningful cultural representations identifying panners as a group with shared concept of self, and othering those who do not conform. For example, Dad Paul tells a story about the panner who lives in an expensive condominium in the "ritzy" part of the city. Panner work ethic advocates that one should not pan if he or she collects welfare. Brad states with conviction : "Panning should be left for the people who need it." Panners describe the people who need panning as the "true panners": panners who derive their income only from panning. In-group typing of panners shapes the identity of self in a way that is not represented in popular culture or communicated through the mass media. Insiders recognize that panner identity is not homogeneous to the broader category of welfare recipient.

Two other main types of panner identity exist. First, "part-time panners" are those panners who supplement their income with additional sources of income from the government, a socially-sanctioned job or the underground economy. "Part-time panners" consist of "fair-weather panners," and "weekend panners." Fair-weather panners are those people who only come out to pan during the nice weather. Weekend panners only pan during the weekend. The second main type of panner is the "scammer." Scammers include people who are perceived by other panners as not needing the money, such as "welfare panners." Drug addicts and alcoholics who use the money to "get a fix" are also considered scammers, and comprise one of the most disliked types of panners. Another scammer type includes the "storytellers" who lie about how they use the money, and how they obtain the money. Some overlap of identities may occur. For instance, Hi Paul is not respected by other panners because he would tell "customers" that the panning money pays for his rent when it really pays for his drugs. He also deceives people by using tactics such as wearing a sling on an uninjured arm in order to gain sympathy.

Thus, while there are sincere, conscientious panners, there are also pseudo-panners who abuse the system. The scammer identity has been broad-brushed to include all panners, without acknowledging differences. In contradiction to the generalized scammer representation of panners, many panners value honesty, believing that dishonesty eventually catches up with offenders. Dishonesty and scamming threaten the most crucial variable to panners: their "panning spot." Just as is the case in the business world, the panning spot's reputation means everything to a panner as there is a direct correlation between good and bad locations and level of income. Once a good panning spot has been located, familiarity becomes important. Panners obtain more money and generate more repeat business if customers see the same panner in the same spot on a regular basis.

In a shared panning spot, panners choose carefully who also uses their spot. A panner who does not play by the panner rules has the potential to give the "spot" a bad reputation. A bad reputation is then applied to all panners at that spot.

The owners and management of the business establishment at or near the panner's spot become angry when customers avoid their establishment, and begin to hassle the panners to make them leave. Lying, aggression, rudeness, insobriety or the portrayal of representations inconsistent with being "in need" all harm the reputation of the other panners in the same spot. Customers stop giving money and other items. Therefore, deceitful tactics only harm other people panning in that spot. As Dad Paul states: "There is honour among thieves. There is honour among people on the streets."

Although panners beg for money, they do not perceive panning as a form of economic exchange because they are not providing a product or service in return. However, their belief does not mean that panners do not reciprocate in any way. Manners tend to be very important and the most basic form of reciprocation. Most panners say "please" and "thank you." They realize this courtesy impacts the amount of "repeat business." Certain street vendors sometimes become heaped into the perceived homogeneous identity of panhandlers. In general, vendors and buskers are not viewed by panners as panhandlers, because they sell a product or service in exchange for money. Regardless of "earning" an income, many vendors comprise the broader categories of street life and/or homeless society. Despite their homeless or street status, some vendors are viewed as scammers by panners because they take away legitimate panning business. "Scammer vendors" consisting of individuals who sell cards professing some personal disability, such as deafness, and certain vendors who flog trinkets are considered by panners to be a "rip-off." Generally, panners view homeless people who sell "Outreach Connection" and "The Outrider" newsletters as being exploited by the owners of these papers. Consequently, panners do not consider these ventures a "more honourable alternative to begging in the streets" (Philp 1994:A9).

Conclusion

Lewis referred to the culture of poverty as a way of life that "provides human beings with a design for living, with a ready-made set of solutions for human problems, and so serves a significant adaptive function" (1971:207). While at first glance this definition might appear to apply to the situation of the urban panhandler, there are certain important differences which must be recognized. First, Lewis considered the culture of poverty as a way of life passed on from generation to generation along family lines. While panner culture certainly involves the transmission of certain survival strategies and performance characteristics amongst its members, most panners have lost contact with their family group, and often find themselves on the street precisely to escape this family environment. Second, by defining the culture of poverty on the basis of lack of resources, Lewis' definition would identify welfare recipients, many

single parents, panners, part-time panners, scammers, and other groups as belonging to a single urban subculture possessing a variety of strategies for dealing with their condition. However, we cannot ignore the fact that those who consider themselves to be true panners do not identify with or condone the techniques of those who employ other strategies to obtain money to survive.

That different survival strategies differentiate sub-group cultures whose members share certain values and behavioral norms which set them apart from others becomes abundantly clear now when we return to that blunt, somehow pathetic message :

WOULD YOU RATHER I :
SELL DRUGS TO YOUR KIDS,
FUCK YOUR HUSBANDS,
OR BEG FOR MONEY ?

Although the meaning of the pale text is communicated starkly, context precedes text, interacts with text, activates the interpretation of text and expands textual and cultural meanings. In the case of the anonymous and invisible author, passers-by first see pale pink words scrawled in chalk on a concrete sidewalk in downtown Toronto before he or she cognitively and emotionally links the words together as a text by reading them in sequence. Colours and textures provide visual contexts that are immersed in cultural values and meanings. In our culture, pink is often associated with women and femininity. In conjunction with the pale words, the use of chalk creates an impression of frailty, instability and impermanence. The particular use of pale chalk upon a concrete surface located within a fast-paced, urban setting instills a sense of coldness, hardness, roughness and near invisibility of the text as its messenger's pale words blend into the stony-grey sidewalk. Consciously or unconsciously, these contexts are evoked before passers-by internalize the text. Its message may or may not remain tomorrow. Many passers-by would have this symbolism in mind while reading the text. In terms of texture, chalk is evanescent : it can fade into the concrete, disappearing slowly, or it can be wiped out quickly and completely.

Many passers-by who read this message, especially urbanites exposed frequently to street subcultures such as that of panhandlers, may associate the evanescent nature of chalk with the transitory habits of panhandlers. In conjunction, the text makes crude reference to the sexual act with the readers' male spouses. As one reads the text, it is easily assumed that the author is female and that she is addressing not a single woman, but female mainstream society as a whole. This is a terse description of her options for survival as well as the "choice" she made in order to justify her means of survival. The contextual power of this confrontational, dynamic text initiates a connection with a "person." Otherwise, we might never have taken the time to acknowledge or understand.

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