

EXPROPRIATING PRIVACY: THE PUBLIC PERSONA OF THE PANDEMIC UNHOUSED

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ABSTRACT

During the winter of 2020, Toronto resident Khaleel Seivwright, began to construct small mobile shelters to provide insulation and privacy to unhoused residents living outdoors. Conditions produced by the COVID-19 pandemic increased demand on the city's already underfunded and strained shelter system, subsequently accelerating development of encampments in parks throughout the city. From the outset, these "tiny shelters" served as a flashpoint in public discourse on the question of the relative health, safety, and beauty of unhoused privacy. Drawing on media coverage of Seivwright's case, we address the question of the private persona as it emerges in relation to the unhoused, and to the practices of violent expropriation which daily police their existence. By examining the news discourses produced about Seivwright's tiny shelters, we interrogate how Seivwright's public persona came to represent encampment residents as well as himself subsequently emerging as a boundary subject mediating the contradictory relations immanent to domesticity: between public and private space and public and private identity. Our analysis asks how the limits of privacy are actively imposed and managed under capitalism: who is allowed to have domestic space, where is that domestic space allowed to exist, and crucially what public personas emerge in relation to practices departing from the normative bounds of capitalism's public/private distinction? Using critical discourse analysis (CDA), we examine the ways in which public personas are mediated by individuals and media institutions at the same time as addressing how personas themselves intervene in this process. CDA directs us to ask how personas are constituted through language. This emphasis on persona as both outcome of relations of power and as mediator in its own right permits us to address figures who are conventionally denied personas while simultaneously complicating and challenging the meanings behind domesticity within capitalist cities.

KEY WORDS

Unhoused; Housing; Space; Critical Discourse Analysis

INTRODUCTION

The winter of 2020 saw Toronto carpenter Khaleel Seivwright undertake a project to construct small, mobile shelters for the city's unhoused residents. With the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, Toronto's underfunded and overloaded shelter system experienced an increase in demand as many Toronto residents faced an intensification of their economic precarity. Between 2018 and 2022, the number of people using Toronto's shelter system increased from 6,600 to 9,700 (Gibson 2022; Hune-Brown 2019). Yet, due to the cramped conditions of most shelters in Toronto, many unhoused people expressed concern regarding the health and safety

of the shelter system fearing greater exposure to the COVID-19 virus (Boucher et al. 2022). Consequently, these dynamics accelerated the emergence of encampments of unhoused people in parks throughout the city. Encampments, also known as tent cities, are erected to support a larger group of unhoused people who collectively construct alternative forms of housing using items, such as tents, on either publicly or privately owned land (Boucher et al. 2022). As Boucher et al. (2022, p. 2) note, encampments “often form without official authorisation and thus violate local bylaws [. . .] In Canada, these bylaws have engaged significant Charter litigation and human rights analysis” yet their continued enforcement “harm[s] encampment residents in Canada and violate[s] international human rights law.”

Seivwright’s tiny shelters project responded to the scale of both the housing crisis as well as the pandemic in an attempt to afford Toronto’s unhoused residence a warm space to live until the City developed and enacted a longer-term and sustainable solution. With Seivwright’s announcement of his tiny shelters project on GoFundMe, housing activists, housed Toronto residents, Toronto’s local news media, as well as others began supporting his initiative. As such, through Seivwright the double crisis of housing and the pandemic became articulated as an emergent and imminent political issue. Yet, within a matter of months, the City filed an injunction against Seivwright and his tiny shelters demanding the cessation of his project.

These issues of access to housing and the enforcement of legal distinctions between public and private property raise the question of unhoused peoples’ capacity to practice public and private persona: how does the social production of and access to space mediate persona? Looking at news media discourse on Seivwright’s tiny shelter project, we use the concept of the boundary subject to illustrate the social relations shaping the production of public and private space as well as the persona’s capacity to navigate between and across these sites. As a boundary subject, Seivwright’s public persona helps manage a housing crisis which denies the unhoused personas by virtue of their exclusion from private property. We argue that critical discourse analysis’ (CDA) concern with language’s mediation of political possibility holds the capacity to capture these dynamics. Our analysis explores the representation of the relative transparency between public and private space, the scale of tiny shelters *vis-a-vis* the availability of public urban space in the city, and the risks immanent to the construction of “makeshift” shelters emphasises the need to think through the constitutive social relations through which space is produced, and persona comes to matter.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Persona studies emerged in dialogue with Arendt’s work on the private, the public, and the social. Arendt (2000) argued that the political transformations of modernity could in part be understood through the erosion of the barrier between what she called the “public” and “private” realms. Looking to classical antiquity, she contended that Ancient Greece demonstrated a strict separation between matters of private interest and matters of political interest. Political action could here constitute an outstanding difference from the normative features of everyday life because concern for such things was safely ensconced in the privately-held home and hearth of a slave owning elite. For these fortunate citizens, concern for the labour required for their own reproduction could take a backseat to the concern for their free expression in the political realm (p. 186). Yet this crucial division was torn asunder by the rise of the modern capitalist state and its concomitant public organisation of the life process itself (p. 197). The state of nature which enlightenment political philosophy expounded upon imagined a shared social space as the basic condition of life and therefore defined the private as a necessary retreat from this (p. 191). Social space, which Arendt argues emerged from the collapse of these two distinct spheres of life, fatally blended the private construction of self with the public construction of self.

This collapse, theorists of persona argue, enabled the production of persona as the public constitution of individual selfhood. Persona refers to a conception of the self-emerging

from the individual's navigation of private and public modes of (re)presentation. Tracing the concept through literary, psychoanalytical, and sociological modes of the early twentieth century, Marshall and Barbour (2015) argue that persona describes "the peculiar relation between the individual and the social in its production and enactment by individuals" (p. 2). They posit persona as constituted by different registers of performance which, articulated to different audiences, variously "allow the social to move into the territories of the previously private and intimate" (p. 6). Persona studies demonstrates a marked theoretical sympathy with the project of cultural studies, insofar as both attempt to foreground the agency of the subject *vis-a-vis* the social relations within which they find themselves enmeshed. De Certeau's notion of strategy and tactics informs Persona Studies' questioning of the "strategies foregrounding versions of public and private presentations and how these relate to the individual celebrity negotiating his/her position within institutions and the broader culture" (Barbour et al. 2017, p. 7).

Reference to de Certeau, together with Arendt's own implicit identification of public and private realms with particular spaces, draws attention to how persona emerges in relation to the social production of space. Walter Benjamin (2005, p. 733-34) demonstrates this in view of the bourgeois parlour rooms of the late-nineteenth century. A new capacity for the consumption of leisure goods, driven by the primitive accumulation of pre-capitalist cultural practices, the production of commodities and the emergence of a new middle-class to enjoy them, funneled all manner of pre-capitalist aesthetic forms into the front rooms of emergent bourgeoisie. Looking over these pristine, slip-covered and glass-encased objects, Benjamin argues the visitor to these homes might feel unwelcome; the room sought to reflect the outside world inwardly in object form. Benjamin articulates how the privacy of the modern capitalist subject is experienced not as a lack - "privation" in Arendt's terms (p. 191) - but as excess. But as with so many of the cultural forms he examines, Benjamin looks back on these parlours with a melancholic eye, arguing that the increasingly rapid circulation of commodities eventually effaced the real and imagined membrane between these crowded rooms and their exterior environments, exemplified and harried on by the austere steel and glass surfaces of modernist architecture - environments in which it became impossible to leave a meaningful trace of one's presence (2005, p. 734). The spatial turn in Marxist thought goes some length to develop a theory of how such transformations of the private realm come to be mediated by space, arguing that the subject does not navigate space so much as they are thoroughly and dialectically entwined with it. In the words of one of Marxist spatial theory's principal thinkers, Henri Lefebvre (1991, p. 179), "symmetries, interactions and reciprocal actions, axes and planes, centres and peripheries, and concrete oppositions" spin out of the material exchange between the body and its environment immanent to practice. Building on Lefebvre, Neil Smith (1984) emphasizes that the production of space also involves the production and integration of distinct spatial scales including the individual's relation to their immediate urban, regional, national, and global context (p. 180). This production of scale is understood not as a pre-given natural quality but as a contingent set of relations which emerges historically. What this means for the study of persona is that the individual's negotiation of public and private realms of presentation must be thought in terms of the navigation of particular spaces and the relations constituting and connecting these: the physical, conceptual, and imaginative dimensions of a given space both emerge from and condition the practices through which particular kinds of persona come into being.

Drawing on the insights of Marxist spatial theory, we can consider how the relation between the public and the private, and thus the individual subject's capacity to navigate these in their presentation of self, are mediated by transformations in the material and discursive spaces they inhabit. Though the constitution of self on digital platforms have often been characterised in both promotional and critical literature as delocalised, a number of scholars draw attention to the dialectical relation between platforms, the spatial contexts within which they are used, and the social relations which produce them (Farmaki et al. 2020; Kitchin &

Dodge 2011; Ash et al. 2018). But beyond consideration of digital persona production, attention to the dialectical entwinement of self and space is demanded by the present neoliberal regime of capital accumulation in which the rapid development and trade of land punctuates decades of violent urban redevelopment. In the context of the city of Toronto, where the average rent is unaffordable to nearly half of all renters (Connelly 2022), with chronic underinvestment in social housing amidst booming private housing stock development (Lehrer et al. 2010), alongside an overcrowded shelter system and rapid rises in deaths among the unhoused (Hunt and Caseletto 2022), access to private space has become a particularly scarce, though no less important, mediator of subjects' capacity to survive, much less to actively cultivate public and private persona.

By interrogating the social relations shaping the production of public personas as well as the spaces they navigate and inhabit, we are able to illustrate the ways in which certain public personas gain traction by mediating between different social groups, institutions, spaces, and/or discourses. In the case of Seivwright, his public persona came to fruition at the point of mediation. Although Seivwright likely did not intend to become a public persona through his tiny shelters project, in some instances, personas are developed regardless of authorial intentions (Moore et al. 2017). While Persona Studies have focused more directly on analysing the self-construction of a private persona for public consumption (Barbour et al. 2017; Humphrey 2017), our intention is to highlight the ways in which the emergence, construction, and movement of public personas often evade the author of the personas ability to manage their public image. In some instances, such as the case with Seivwright, his public persona extended beyond self-constructed images and narratives developed for social media platforms and entered other venues of public discourses, such as news media, precisely because of the mediating capacities afforded to his public persona.

As such, Star and Griesemer's (1989; 2011) conceptualisation of boundary objects are a useful way to think through the mobility and fluidity of Seivwright's public persona. According to Star and Griesemer, boundary objects have

Different meanings in different social worlds but their structure is common enough to more than one world to make them recognisable, a means of translation. The creation and management of boundary objects is key in developing and maintaining a coherence across intersecting social worlds (1989, p. 393).

However, although we understand objects as "a social configuration or ensemble of social relationships," (Jameson 1991, p. 137) public persona should not be viewed as an object wholly external to its subject. Bishop and Waring (2019) were the first to identify the notion of a boundary subject as distinct from yet related to boundary objects in their analysis of the role of a patient's subjectivity during the discharge process at clinical facilities. By conceptualising the boundary subject, Bishop and Waring were able to include the patient themselves as an integral component to the coordination of their care. Borrowing from Bishop and Waring, we extend the idea of a boundary subject to Persona Studies in order to capture both the social relations which underpin the construction of personas as well as acknowledging the relative autonomy some subjects maintain in shaping and directing their public personas. By framing public persona as a boundary subject, we can demonstrate the embeddedness of personas in the social worlds and spaces in which they are made in an attempt to move away from the prioritisation of concerns of individualism as the driving force informing their production.

Theories of the discursive production of subjectivity elucidate the relative autonomy afforded to boundary subjects in the production of their own public persona. Building on Antonio Gramsci's (1971) contention that class struggle necessitates the capture and maintenance of control over the limits of political possibility, theories of discourse identify the communicative techniques by which certain relations and the possible futures immanent to them become elided and closed off (Fairclough, 2003, p. 45). Discourse refers simply to "a

particular way of representing some part of the world” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 17). Different discourses include or leave out, imagine or deny, abstract or concretise different aspects of a given subject as a direct efflux of the interests of their authors (Fairclough 2000, p. 17).

Persona Studies has typically attempted to locate the agency of the individual in the discursive construction of their public self. Developed in relation to a tendency in cultural studies, Persona Studies theorise the collective agency of the audience vis-a-vis the mediated production of meaning. Marshall et al. (2015, p. 295) write that Persona Studies focuses on the “agency of the individual” in relation to these same processes of communication. Though consideration of collective and individual agency is of course an important part of any theory of social relations, we call attention here to the necessity of considering the mutual interpenetration and co-constitution of the individual and the social. We are interested here in tracing the social relations which structure and mediate these two entwined categories. While Marshall and Barbour (2015, p. 2) characterise persona as the study of “the relation between the individual and the social in its production and enactment by individuals,” the Marxist spatial thought described above, together with Norman Fairclough’s development of a critical materialist study of discourse, makes difficult any claim to the individual as discrete from and enacting the social. Our intervention attempts to address persona as not only “presentation and performance” (Marshall & Barbour 2015, p. 2) but also as a form of representation. In so doing, we are able to highlight the discursive orientation of representation while subsequently elucidating the social relations which always already underpin the construction of personas.

METHOD

For this research, we culled articles from several Canadian news outlets, ranging from local to national news media, including *The Globe and Mail*, the *Toronto Star*, *BlogTO*, *Toronto City News*, *NOW Magazine*, and *Toronto Life*. Through the collection of these sources, we were able to capture how Seivwright’s tiny shelter initiative as well as his public persona moved between regional and national scales while also highlighting any discrepancies that could emerge from each publication’s coverage. As Seivwright addressed an acute local crisis within Toronto, we included a variety of locally based news sources. We queried Factiva and Google News for mention of “tiny shelter”, “tiny shelters”, “Khaleel Seivwright” and “Seivwright” between October 2020 and October 2021, collecting for analysis all forty-two articles returned through this process. This period of time was selected because it includes both the launch of the tiny shelters project and the announcement of its (forced) conclusion. We selected the search terms used as they constituted necessary components of the discourse on Seivwright’s shelters and by extension provided us with access to the discursive negotiation of his public persona.

News media’s capacity to pull together and coordinate relations between different discourses made it a crucial pathway through which the discursive relations constituting Seivwright’s persona flowed. In the case of the sources we have selected, the interdiscursivity of news media bridges relations between the privacy of the unhoused, pandemic social distancing policy, and urban redevelopment to construct Seivwright’s public persona. In order to pull apart and explore these relations, we use Norman Fairclough’s framework for conducting Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA clarifies how the relation between social events and social actors is mediated by the networking of social practices through discourse. Texts relate to particular orders of discourse through three primary social practices: action, representation, and identification (Fairclough 2000, p. 22). Each practice is objectified in a different aspect of the internal and external relations between texts: genre (action), discourse (representation) and style (identification).

Action implies a social relation between elements, which we found in the mixture of different genres present in the news media sampled here. From journalistic investigation of the city’s management of Seivwright’s homes, to editorial commentary on these actions and the broader context of the entwined pandemic and housing crises, Seivwright’s persona was

actively positioned as a boundary subject navigating through disparate social groups and discursive sites. News media discourse on Sievwright enabled the establishment of a communicative relationship between Toronto's municipal government and housing advocates without the involvement of the unhoused, who were actively excluded from participation by virtue of their material conditions. As a boundary subject, Sievwright's public persona moved between antagonistic social groups, such as the Toronto municipal government and housing advocates. News media, then, operates as a confluent and intertextual site grouping together various relations which influences the construction and contextualisation of public personas.

Representation describes the elements themselves exemplified for us in news coverage positioning interviews with Seivwright, housing advocates, Toronto residents, and representatives from the municipal government alongside reports regarding the inaccessibility of housing produced by the city or non-profits within a single location. The interdiscursivity of news media therefore makes it a useful site to interrogate the social relations shaping the production of public personas. We look at how coverage of Sievwright mediates the relation between discourses on unhoused domesticity, the entwined crises of housing and the COVID pandemic, and the municipal government's management of both.

Finally, identification constitutes some undertaking, commitment to, or judgment of these elements exemplified here in news media's construction of Seivwright's public persona as a representative of the unhoused, and thus of structural issues associated with housing and the pandemic. As such, the utilisation of Sievwright's public persona as a representation of the discourses of both the unhoused and the housing crisis in Toronto illustrates not only the influence of news media discourse on the construction of the public persona, but also how the relation between privacy and access to property within capitalism crucially shapes individual agency, determining which subjects can emerge as public personas in the first place.

CONSTRUCTING SEIVWRIGHT'S PERSONA

The social event we are examining is the construction and subsequent destruction of the encampments in Toronto throughout the COVID pandemic. Sievwright emerged as a public persona which mediated the public-ness of the unhoused residents of these encampments. Through Sievwright, the encampments were articulated as a social, economic, and political issue which linked a network of actors in response, including the Toronto municipal government, housing advocates, Toronto residents, as well as others. Because of the context of domesticity and its close link to capitalist property relations, Sievwright stood in as one of the social actors for the unhoused.

Emerging from our analysis of these texts are three primary themes which we describe as follows: transparency, scale, and temperature. Each relates broadly to the spatial dimensions influencing the production of public and private personas, emphasising how the capacity to register *as persona* in news media discourse necessitates material practices objectified in and emerging in relation to the spaces in which they occur. Successive readings of lexical and semantic relations within and between texts paid particular attention to the presence of private space as a condition of the private and public persona, locating in this social relation three kinds of practices mediating the transparency of the borders between public and private space, the perceived scale of the private *vis-a-vis* the public, and the temperature requirements subtending the private. Moreover, the themes identified draw out the role Seivwright's public persona played as a boundary subject where his persona served to articulate the urgency and immediacy of the housing crisis as well as the pandemic to broader audiences. As the City of Toronto amplified their efforts through legal measures to remove Seivwright as a central figure in public discourses of the encampments, the loosely linked relations between housing advocates, the City, as well as encampment residents began deteriorating resulting in an amplification of violence enacted by the City towards encampment residents. Seivwright's public persona, as a

boundary subject, served to at least temporarily bridge the interests of these groups in an attempt to address the severity of the housing crisis during the first year of the pandemic.

Transparency

The first theme we identified throughout the news discourses analysed was the varying degrees of transparency – meaning the spatial and linguistic capacity to be known and/or unknown – afforded to Seivwright and encampment residents. The contrasting degrees of transparency afforded to these subjects illustrates the relationship between private space and the production of public personas – that is, one’s public persona is crucially mediated by their relation to private property. Seivwright’s status as a once-unhoused, now secure resident of Toronto positioned him as an external subject intervening in the city’s limited response to the housing crisis. Early coverage of his efforts positioned him as such an individual actor by taking note of some biographical details, including his age and occupation. For example, the earliest article on the tiny shelters, published in *BlogTo*, wrote:

Winter is notoriously difficult for underhoused residents in cities like Toronto, where temperatures reach deadly lows and shelters are almost always at capacity....With a global pandemic now thrown into the mix, further compounding what was already a raging affordable housing crisis, advocates are growing concerned for the safety of vulnerable Toronto residents — residents who, thanks to COVID-19, are more vulnerable than ever before...A 28-year-old carpenter has devised what seems like a suitable solution, at least for now, while government officials work to increase permanent affordable housing for all (O’Neil, 2020).

Other coverage characterised Seivwright as a singular representative of the unhoused, one whose perspective on his own shelters could have a determining effect on the city’s housing policy. *Toronto Star* columnist Sean Micaleff (2021) emphasised Seivwright’s contention that his shelters be a “temporary solution to the housing crisis”, while a profile of local artist Rajni Perera (Ansari 2021) included Seivwright’s efforts as an example that “people in power are listening to activists” (despite the fact that the city had actively suppressed Seivwright’s capacity to intervene).

Through the news media’s construction of Seivwright’s public persona the housing crisis became articulated as an urgent political and economic issue where his persona started operating as a boundary subject between the city of Toronto, encampment residents, housing advocates, as well as with local, provincial, and in some cases, national media. Seivwright’s public persona was used to both contextualise the growing housing crisis during the pandemic as well as cut across social groups normally at odds with each other. At least temporarily, Seivwright’s public persona participated in the translation of the housing crisis to a range of other social actors in Toronto, including news media. Through Seivwright’s public persona acting as a boundary subject, a bridge was erected between these disparate groups and spaces.

One set of practices mediating the transparency afforded to Seivwright operated concretely through the spaces of the encampments themselves. We use the term spatial transparency to refer to the architectural and institutional dimensions of space which support particular discourses of the self, including but not limited to the public and private persona. Benjamin’s analysis of the bourgeois parlour paid particular attention to how its relation to public space shifted with a growing sense of alienation produced by the expanded circulation of commodities and its architectural corollary in the relative visual transparency afforded by modernist buildings. An example of transparency in the case we analyse here is given in news discourses placing the relations between the interiors and exteriors of encampment dwellings in contradistinction to the interiors and exteriors of the City’s shelter system. Across the texts analysed here, the City of Toronto is continually quoted as identifying Seivwright’s efforts as “interfering with efforts to relocate people indoors” (Gibson 2021).

Seivwright's tiny shelters provided a degree of opacity for unhoused people to maintain a sense of privacy outside of the city's purview, which would have been inaccessible to them in the shelter system. Enclosed on all sides by wood and insulation, and thus impermeable to vision from the outside, the tiny shelters limited the city's capacity to record and manage the mobility of the unhoused people within their most intimate, ostensibly private spaces. A *Toronto Star* interview with one unhoused woman contrasted the sense of privacy afforded by the tiny shelters with that found in the City shelters:

The idea that these shelters are safer than encampments is false. [...] It's a feeling that many living in encampments share with Jewel, because having each other feels more secure. [...] In her last three weeks at the park, she lived in one of Khaleel Seivwright's tiny shelters, and had her first full night's sleep in months. That sense of security wasn't the same at the Bond [a City shelter]. On her first day, when staff did her intake, they didn't ask her any questions about prescription medication, medical needs, allergies, health conditions or mental health, including if she'd had thoughts of suicide. She also shared that most shelters in the city aren't safe for women, disabled people, people in the LGBTQ community, or people of colour -- and as a queer, disabled woman, she's faced sexual violence, drug abuse and homophobia in shelters around the city. (Salhia 2021).

The kind of inspection described here is mediated by the tiny shelters' location on public land as the threshold for entrance to these warm beds is not defined or demarcated by interviews, bag checks, quiet hours, and other surveillant practices used within the shelter system.

The city, in response to the encampments operating in public space and outside of normative municipal housing practices for the unhoused, actively positioned Seivwright's tiny shelters and the encampments broadly as dangerous, illegal, and ultimately a threat to the public enjoyment of these now occupied parks. For example, Emma Tietel writes in the *Toronto Star*, "Local carpenter Khaleel Seivwright's Tiny Shelters are dangerous, they [city officials] say. Living outside in general is dangerous, they say." (Tietel 2022). Liam Casey, reporting for the *Globe and Mail*, wrote,

The City's response to encampments takes into consideration the health and well-being of those living outside and the broader community needs," he said [...] "The city cannot force people to come inside and avail themselves of the many services offered by the City but living in an encampment in a city park is unhealthy and illegal.

Note here the emphasis on "broader community needs" which, left vague, identifies some proximate activities threatened by the use of public land for private space. These dangers were explicitly articulated as a threat to the physical security of the housed as well as the economic security of the local tourism sector in statements by Ontario Premier Doug Ford. Paraphrased in the *Toronto Star* (Gibson 2021) Premier Ford argued that "homeless people should leave the camps and accept spaces in the shelter system. While acknowledging fears about the system, from assaults to theft, he [Ford] cited the optics of encampments on past and future tourists."

Finally, the spatial mediation of the relation between the public and private spaces navigated by the unhoused was accompanied by linguistic practices which rendered their domestic lives opaque. Only a handful of articles referenced encampment residents by name, and only one of these endeavoured to elaborate the personal history of encampment dwellers to the same extent as was afforded Seivwright. Here, Seivwright's status as a boundary subject is emphasised through the absence of any personal or social details of the unhoused people who he has come to represent. For example, an op-ed published in the *Toronto Star*, uses the experience of Jewell, "a 50-year-old, queer, disabled woman who has been experiencing homelessness since the end of 2019" to relate some of the risks of violence and trauma

immanent to Toronto's shelter system (Salhia 2021). General disinterest in the domesticity of the unhoused was particularly apparent when compared with pronounced biographical interest in Seivwright. Evidenced by Kozak writing for *The Globe and Mail*,

Khaleel Seivwright, 28, a native Torontonion and professional carpenter, is building tiny shelters for homeless people living outside in Toronto this winter. [. . .] Mr. Sievwright once spent five months living in a tent in Vancouver and knows first-hand some of the immense challenges facing homeless people (2020).

Yet, when it came to discourses on the encampments circulating within Toronto City Hall, residents were not afforded the same anonymity present in news media coverage, as the City

spent months laying out plans to clear about two dozen people from a homeless encampment in a popular park [. . .] building dossiers on those living there [emphasis ours] and involving hundreds of municipal workers in the process, internal documents reveal. [. . .] The city also compiled aerial maps of all the tents in the park, each identified with a number and related to each resident (Casey 2022).

Even discussion of this openly surveillant activity on the part of the City neglected use of names, still referring to affected unhoused people under the anonymous group identity of the "encampment resident" (Casey 2022). Thus, while biographical detail could be afforded to Seivwright, no such effort was made in the representation of the unhoused. Rather, Seivwright's public persona operated as a boundary subject through which the unhoused came to be known without affording them a public persona or the private space which necessarily subtends this; thus, further illustrating the bounded relationship between the ability to produce a public persona and access to private space.

Scale

Mirroring Smith's conceptualisation of the production of scale (1984), Seivwright's public persona mediated different scalar hierarchies within the city. Here, scale pertains to the relative size of the homes within these parks, the amount of space the encampments take up within the park itself; the scale and size of the crises of housing and the COVID pandemic; and finally, anxieties about the limits of the production of relative space within the city. Coverage of Seivwright's tiny shelters elevated their scalar qualities beyond concerns with private space to concerns with how private space dominates and shapes the development of urban space more generally. At the same time, Seivwright's status as an individual actor was continually transcended via constant comparisons between his lone initiative and municipal policy.

These themes emerge through coverage of Seivwright which continually characterises him as an individual good samaritan producing homes on his own time with materials supplied by charity – a figure of humble means but substantial determination. A *Toronto Star* editorial (Heinonen 2020) describes him as a "Scarborough-based carpenter who took matters into his own hands" – a relative outsider, putting his skills as a craftsman to work in service to others. Micaloff, in the *Star*, registered awe at the apparent speed and effectiveness with which Seivwright acted: "[he] saw a problem and acted quickly. For that, he's a hero" (2021). A hero who, like David and Goliath, is made compelling by the substantial difference between the size of the issue and the capacities of one individual.

In contrast to the news discourses which continually stressed the singular and yet significantly meaningful intentions behind Seivwright's contributions, coverage repeatedly referenced the relative smallness of spaces afforded to unhoused people. Here, Seivwright's public persona is amplified through the immensity of his task whereas public acceptance of unhoused people occupying his tiny shelters is contingent on the continued emphasis of their small size. *The Globe and Mail*, reporting on Seivwright's shelters, devoted attention to the smallness of the structures both in terms of their spatial footprint and their cost of production:

The tiny shelters, complete with a small, double glazed window and hand-built insulated door, resemble the basic structure of a typical home, allowing someone to sit and lay down, but not high enough for a person to stand in. The structures are constructed with basic building materials including 2 x 6 pieces of lumber, plywood, and various layers of insulation, and will keep an occupant warm in temperatures well below freezing (Kozak 2020).

Much is made here of the shelters' *resemblance* to a conventional private home; they map more cleanly to established bourgeois norms of domesticity than do tents or even the city's shelters. On the other hand, the shelters' small size and economical production suggests they offer little disruption to the established fiscal and scalar hierarchy of the city; they might slot neatly into spaces currently unused for profitable development. The significance of Seivwright's endeavor, and the accordant smallness of the structures he built was addressed as a helpful creative solution to an overloaded shelter system. One Op-Ed columnist wrote in the *Toronto Star* that Seivwright's tiny shelters highlighted the limits of the municipal government's capacity to address the entwined housing and pandemic crises, arguing that "with Toronto's economy in a COVID – lockdown restrictions – swoon, there's only so much money to address the myriad social needs for which the city is responsible [. . .] Where would 2,000 more beds be carved out? Where would the money come from?" (DiManno 2020)

Discourse also emphasised that the shelters offered a technical solution to the presumed limits of affordable space available in the city. This was particularly pertinent in relation to the question of the use of park space with a number of texts emerging from the assumption that public parks' intended and therefore central use should be for the leisure practices of the city's housed population. Tracy Cook, the city's deputy manager, was quoted in an article on Seivwright's shelters articulating a vague threat posed by encampment residents to leisure practice, emphasising in a PowerPoint presentation concerning "Encampment Work – proposed Next Steps" that "we're all concerned with encampments come spring." The emphasis on seasonality here suggests that the encampments are an imminent danger to leisure practices in the city's parks as the weather improves. The city's chief communications officer, Brad Ross, similarly represented the unhoused encampment residents as existing outside of and in tension with their proximate housed community. Ross was quoted in *The Globe and Mail* arguing that the city "has taken extraordinary measures to help those people experiencing homelessness and is trying to strike a balance between the homeless and the community" (Casey 2022). The unhoused appear here as the obverse of the housed, a relationship defined by a fundamental tension which is the city's task to manage. This discourse on the perceived disruption of the use of leisure space ultimately found expression in the terms of the city's settlement with Seivwright which prevented him from "placing or relocating shelters built on 'city-owned land or otherwise creating a nuisance or interfering with the City's rights in violation of the City of Toronto Municipal Code" (Salem 2021). Parks, then, became off-limits to Seivwright's shelters.

With the city's injunction on Seivwright, the city clearly articulated a central anxiety around his intervention in the housing crisis, namely the erection of privately-owned spaces within public land. "Under the terms of the settlement," the *Toronto Star* (Salem 2021) noted, "Mr. Seivwright confirms he has *no ownership interest* [emphasis ours] in the tiny shelters." The anxieties over the limited affordances of public space for private housing evident in this discourse is subtended by an absolute conception of urban space. Texts observed here continually voice anxiety about the question of how much space is actually available for housing. Generally, the news media discourse that we observed posited that use of public park space for unhoused privacy constitutes an ultimate limit on the production of private space. Within the slim spatial margin for development, only the relative smallness of Seivwright's homes could mediate the vast and (presumably unaddressable) needs of the unhoused. This limit was articulated most firmly by Mayor John Tory, who argued that "the firm way, and frankly the compassionate way, [to deal with the issue] says these encampments can't remain without being acted on in public parks" (Gibson 2021). Discourse on the size of the encampments, then,

reasserts that there is in fact a distinction between private and public spaces which enabled Seivwright's public persona to emerge as a boundary subject mediating the hostile relationship between the City of Toronto and unhoused residents.

Temperature

The third theme gleaned from news discourses of Seivwright speaks to the limitations of a public persona mediating the housing crisis within the city. We use the concept of temperature to highlight three interrelated aspects of the discourses surrounding the tiny shelters: the perceived risks immanent to Seivwright's shelters, the city's (un)willingness to accept the shelters in public space, and the limitations of an individual persona to articulate, manage, and mediate these political questions as a boundary subject.

The warmth requirements of the human body mediates both supportive and antagonistic discourses on Seivwright's homes. On the one hand, we found that texts continually took note of the tiny shelters claimed capacity to heat at 20 degrees Celsius using only body heat. For example, Victoria Gibson, in the *Toronto Star* wrote, "On a GoFundMe page, Seivwright wrote that the structures were designed to be 'mainly heated by body heat,' and stay around 16 C in temperatures of -20 C." (Gibson 2021). Yet on the other hand, numerous texts registered alarm at the tiny shelters as supposed fire hazards referencing as support the fire-related death of one encampment resident who was *not* housed in one of Seivwright's homes. The city of Toronto's official position was "that the encampments are dangerous, that they pose a fire hazard, and that they endanger lives" (Heinonen 2022). In stating this, the city demarcates what is perceived to be acceptable and unacceptable forms of danger for encampment residents. Although unhoused people have referenced several dangers found within the shelter system, the city's position on the illegality of the encampments suggests a relative acceptance, or perhaps, normalisation of the threats within official shelter systems. The representation of fire in this discourse thus does two things: it highlights the management of temperature as a necessary condition of the private persona. And second, it actively gates access to warmth and, by extension, privacy by continually dictating the spatial and temporal parameters of the unhoused's capacity to generate warmth – namely, that it be provided in the shelter system or not at all.

Lastly, the discourse on fire articulated the perceived risks attendant with Seivwright's status as a small enterprising producer. Toronto's Fire Chief Jim Jessop was repeatedly quoted as cautioning against the unregulated construction of Seivwright's shelters. One article followed the observation that "there has been no link made between Seivwright's shelters and the site of the [fire] fatality" with a quote from Jessop noting that the fire "underscored the dangers of makeshift shelters" (Gibson 2021). A limit to the aforementioned David and Goliath construction of Seivwright's persona, then, is his ostensible inability to ensure safety relative to the institutional mechanisms afforded to urban planners and private developers. Seivwright was continually framed as one man who, despite being well-intentioned, acted primarily alone and thus without institutional mechanisms for quality control. Discourse on the risk of fire immanent to Seivwright's shelters demonstrates the incapacity of an individual persona to articulate and manage the political question of housing. As the narrative of risk of fire gained traction in news discourse, the illegality of Seivwright's structures became more pronounced. This manufactured tension between the City, Seivwright, and the risk of fire is illustrated in an article reported by the *Toronto Star*. Victoria Gibson writes that

The encampment discussion hit a flashpoint again in February. The city filed an injunction against Seivwright. And days later, a blaze erupted in a Corktown park encampment that claimed a life. 'It highlights the life safety risks of living in these types of structures,' Jessop said at the time. The wooden structure has not been publicly linked to Seivwright (Gibson 2021).

The injunctions served against Seivwright were continually represented alongside the city's intimations towards fire hazards within the encampments. Consequently, the functionality of Seivwright's public persona as a boundary subject began deteriorating the further, he was removed from news coverage. His growing incapacity to mediate between disparate social groups eventually culminated in the accelerated violent and forced expropriation of unhoused peoples from encampments around the city. Consequently, Seivwright's public persona stood in as both the ideal subject as well as the limit of political action within the neoliberal city: an entrepreneurial producer whose principled stance made a substantial difference to his community, but whose efforts paled in comparison to the capacities of the municipal government.

CONCLUSION

Public and private personas emerge in relation to space. They are contingent in part on the material social relations within which their subjects are caught up and thus they are substantially mediated by forces beyond the control of the individual. We use the concept of the boundary subject to illustrate the social relations influencing the production of public and private space as well as the capacity for a persona to move between and across these sites. This relation becomes acutely apparent in the construction of Seivwright's public persona as a boundary subject which manages the housing crisis as the unhoused, who are denied personas due to their exclusion from private property, come to be represented through the figure of the principled, enterprising, *housed* individual. In this paper, we argued that critical discourse analysis holds the capacity to capture these dynamics as it is expressly concerned with language's mediation of both political possibility as well as its limits. Our analysis of the representation of the relative transparency between public and private space, the scale of tiny shelters *vis-a-vis* the availability of public urban space in the city, and the risks immanent to the construction of "makeshift" shelters in discourses on Seivwright calls on scholars working in persona studies not to uncritically reproduce cultural studies' emphasis on audience agency, but to instead emphasise that because the individual cannot be disentangled from the social, we must think through the constitutive practices from which both of these relations come to matter.

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