

Introduction

The Queer Politics of Space

The San Francisco LGBT Center, a nonprofit organization that provides employment and financial support, referrals, and youth services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, along with space for cultural events, is housed in a complex of two buildings (fig. 1). The larger, completed in 2002, is a glass box, its interior visible to passersby. The smaller is a renovated 1894 Victorian three-story building painted in bold, saturated purple, decorated with rainbow flags. The dialogue between two styles, one representing modernity and the other tradition, is an architectural compromise. Initially, the center had planned to demolish the Victorian building and build the new center in its stead, but a newly organized gay preservationist group, Friends of 1800, successfully lobbied in 1997 to protect the older building as part of the city's queer architectural history.¹ For almost a century, they argued, it "commanded its site with great dignity," adding that it was built by two women—members of the Castro family for which Castro Street was named—"who had come to San Francisco to seize their own freedom." It therefore represented, they pointed out, "a legacy of self-determination and rejection of mainstream oppression."² The building also symbolized queer contributions to the city's architectural legacy, since for two decades queer residents had been preserving and renovating Victorian buildings in neighborhoods such as the Castro, the Mission, and Haight-Ashbury.

The center is located on Market Street, the city's main thoroughfare, near a busy intersection, and during the evening commute there tends to be a lively sidewalk scene in front of its main entrance. On February 6, 2003, the sidewalk was even more crowded than usual. A group of approximately fifty demonstrators had gathered there in the late afternoon to protest the arrival of then-supervisor Gavin Newsom for a fundraising event at the center. The demonstrators were members of



FIGURE 1. The San Francisco LGBT Center on Market Street in 2022. Architects: Edward D. Goodrich (original, 1894), Jane Cee Architects (addition and remodel, 2002). Photograph by Craig Lee. © Craig Lee/San Francisco Examiner.

Gay Shame, an urban collective of queer and transgender people opposing gay and lesbian assimilationist politics that uphold social hierarchies based on class, race, ethnicity, and ability. Its members, in San Francisco and New York, had begun protesting corporate sponsorship of mainstream LGBTQ+ organizations and events in 1998 by organizing countercelebrations of radical queer cultures annually during Pride. These celebrations led to more political demonstrations, street protests, public space takeovers, and picketing, such that, in less than a decade, Gay Shame had built a robust counterpublic. Now, they were targeting Newsom's support for a proposition that he dubbed "care not cash," which cut welfare support for homeless and economically marginalized people, diverting the money to homeless shelters instead. According to Gay Shame and other critics, the strategy would lead to further marginalization of queer people, women, and people of color, because of histories of discrimination and mistreatment at homeless shelters.³

The fundraiser's organizers had rejected Gay Shame's requests to address event participants, so they were chanting against Newsom's policies outside as attendees went past a small police contingent guarding the entrance. After escorting Newsom and his then-wife Kimberlie Guilfoyle, an assistant attorney general, inside the building, the police accosted the protesters with raised batons, and soon, demonstrators were bleeding.⁴ One left the scene with a broken tooth, and another passed out from a policeman's chokehold. The police arrested four protesters, who were kept in jail for a few hours.

The incident brought fresh attention to ongoing political debates about who benefited from gay and lesbian visibility in San Francisco, and about how queer citizenship itself might be conceived in relation to urban, cultural, and national belonging. Fundraiser organizers, for example, included members of the city's mainstream organizations that understood LGBTQ+ people as an interest group with the capacity to intervene in local politics to secure their rights. They also shared a liberal understanding of citizenship for queer and trans people as a set of rights they had by virtue of their membership in the national community. In this view, queer and trans people have historically expanded the logic of who is considered worthy of inclusion into the community of national citizens by demanding equality with heterosexual citizens.

The success of this position was evident in the attendance of local politicians at the center event, and by the fact that, the following year, in his first months as mayor, Newsom made headlines by establishing San Francisco as the first city in the United States where gays and lesbians were allowed to marry. It was a symbolic move as Newsom knew his order would be struck down in court. Nevertheless, until the California attorney general nulled wedding licenses a few months later, a gay pride festival of sorts took place outside City Hall. Gay and lesbian couples from all over the country arrived to get married in San Francisco, some of them camping out in front of the building.⁵ Such celebratory scenes were repeated eleven years later when the landmark Supreme Court decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) gave same-sex couples the right to marry in the United States, concretizing the success of assimilationist visions of LGBTQ+ citizenship.

Gay Shame's politics, on the other hand, are rooted in the radical dismissal of the nation-state's role in conferring rights to its citizens—marriage included. They reject the structural biases and racial and class hierarchies embedded in how membership in the community of national citizens is evaluated, and instead construct an insurgent form of citizenship based on membership in an alternative queer community. This community conceptualizes rights differently from the institutions of the nation-state; for example, they believe in the right to housing but seek to abolish the right to private property. To that end, they seek to create spaces away from mainstream LGBTQ+ institutions, where they can build solidarity through protest, mutual support, and cultural experimentation.

Newsom used Gay Shame's 2003 protest to paint them as a violent group operating from the margins, highlighting instead his reformist message to address homelessness as a social ill, which appealed to pro-business and pro-tourism groups, while simultaneously touting his support for LGBTQ+ liberal causes.⁶ This helped him secure part of the "gay vote" in a mayoral election in which he ran against both an openly gay candidate and a lesbian candidate. San Francisco politics has long operated under the assumption that gays and lesbians, voting as a political bloc, could determine the outcome of local elections, from Harvey Milk's political campaigns in the mid-1970s to Dianne Feinstein's administration, from 1978–88, which often pitted different gay and lesbian groups against each

other to maintain an electoral majority.⁷ As a result of the power of the “gay vote,” any ambitious politician subsequently sought to consolidate the support of the city’s mainstream gay and lesbian organizations.

But as the scenes in front of the LGBT Center in 2003 and City Hall in 2004 remind us, San Francisco’s sexually and gender nonconforming residents are not a monolith.⁸ The queer population includes anarchist trans liberationists and powerbrokers in city government, couples eager to marry and others who see marriage as itself a fundamentally repressive institution. When we turn our gaze to the urban landscape in which they live and work, celebrate and protest—to single-family homes, housing collectives, office buildings, plazas, bathhouses, and sidewalks—we get a sense of the varieties of queer placemaking and the power of queer political demands, including policing reforms, rights to work and housing, the provision of healthcare, and political representation.

In the Bay Area, some of this has been a matter of visibility: as queer people shaped the Bay Area’s physical landscape, they established territories where they expressed their sexuality freely and, as urban residents, established local political power in numbers. Queer territorialization took many forms since 1965, when this book’s narrative begins, including the conversion of existing building types such as cafeterias and bathhouses to spaces for specifically queer socializing and the display of gay erotic imagery in public space, such as on billboards and shop windows. (They also shaped the contemporary vocabulary of queer identity discourse, whereby the term queer denotes nonmainstream sexual and gender embodiments.)⁹ However, visibility, though essential in the pursuit of group rights, is not the only, nor, I will argue, necessarily the most effective way to get those rights. Queer residents across the Bay also engaged with space in collective housing, underground dance clubs, and community gardens, as part of a wider suite of tactics with which residents queered urbanism itself. Conflicts around urban space—including marginalization and dispossession—have prompted queer social collectives to articulate changing demands by way of embodied and emplaced practices. Where urbanism’s administrative logic works to control bodies, subjectivities, and desires, they create insurgent ruptures to this logic that prefigure alternative forms of organizing queer social life.¹⁰

Queering Urbanism examines past spatial struggles through case studies at the scale of buildings, neighborhoods, and cities. I draw on ethnographic fieldwork and archival research to understand how queer spaces emerged and how queer inhabitants of the Bay Area have used various spatial tactics—including occupations, transformations, and reclamations of physical environments—as they articulate specific demands for spaces and services as queer citizenship rights. Critiques have not always happened through the language of citizenship. However, during some critical activist periods in the San Francisco Bay, including gay liberation, the response to AIDS, and antigentrification organizing, activists have indeed invoked citizenship, sometimes as the basis for LGBTQ+ people’s inclusion in urban and national political communities and sometimes to highlight

their rejection of state institutions. When we consider the histories of queer citizenship and queer urban habitation together, we can see how queer cultures have pushed both into and against mainstream US society, using tactics that are both—and sometimes simultaneously—ideological and material.

This is not a linear history of queer people moving from, say, the margins to the center: dispossession of people vulnerable to the Bay's affordability crisis and oppression of radical queer and trans social and cultural expressions continue. But it can show us how, in different ways at different times, queer cultures have worked to fight for their rights to shape the city as a place where they can realize nonmainstream ways to live together, have sex, and build pluralist urban social movements. And as different groups and individuals, with sometimes quite different social experiences and political priorities, live close together, they have learned from and with one another, using that knowledge to advance the horizons of queer politics.

THE POLITICS OF URBAN LIFE

For decades, scholars have scrutinized the motives and tactics of sexually and gender nonconforming people to assert their rights as social subgroups with distinct cultures and politics.¹¹ This scholarship brings together legal and cultural discourses, psychoanalytic theory, philosophy, and politics, as well as investigations into queer cultural production such as performance, visual art, and literature.¹² There has been excellent work, which I build upon here, but it tends to treat the physical environment, and especially buildings, when they appear at all, as a backdrop or container for social life.¹³ That said, architects and sociologists have written enough about certain spaces of urban homosexuality—including bathhouses, public toilets, and domestic interiors—to make clear that queer sociality takes specific, material forms in specific, material places.¹⁴ The aesthetics of these places matters, but not in a stable, taxonomic way that can be fixed in place and time. In fact, attempts to exalt particular, seemingly queer aesthetics—such as specific buildings or symbols—can end up distracting from on-the-ground political struggles.

Consider, for example, the rainbow-washing of the Castro, the most well-known gay area in San Francisco, where, during a recent street renovation, the rainbow flag was literally embedded in the asphalt of a pedestrian crossing at a prominent intersection (fig. 2).¹⁵ For queer people who are priced out of the Castro, and who watch wealthy young heterosexual couples move in, the celebration of the area's queer legacy can appear an empty symbolic gesture.¹⁶ The same goes for the transgender flags painted on street lighting poles in the downtown Tenderloin neighborhood, where Compton's Cafeteria Transgender Cultural District, the first transgender cultural district in the United States, was established in 2017 (fig. 3).¹⁷ The little flags recognize history, but it's not as though they meet the demands for healthcare, employment, and housing reforms that gender nonconforming people have been making in the area and beyond since the mid-1960s.¹⁸

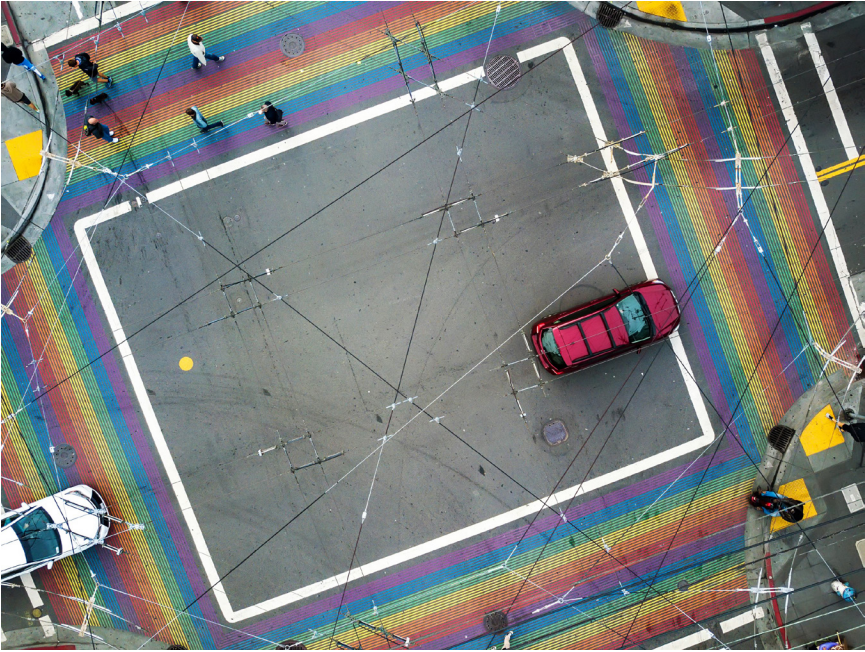


FIGURE 2. The rainbow crosswalk at Castro and Eighteenth Streets in January 2018. Similar crosswalks are installed in queer neighborhoods in cities around the United States and abroad. Photograph by Andriy Bezuglov. © Alamy.



FIGURE 3. Trans flags painted on light poles in San Francisco's Compton's Cafeteria Transgender Cultural District in June 2023. Photograph by Lori Eanes. © Lori Eanes.

The current use of the building that housed Compton's Cafeteria, the site of a 1966 riot memorialized in the cultural district's name, as transitional housing operated by the largest for-profit prison company in the United States is even more problematic, demonstrating the carceral logic of how the state and private capital circumscribe social inclusion.¹⁹

These phenomena are integral to contemporary urbanism. Since the 1970s, scholars and policy makers alike have largely understood urbanism in connection with a political discourse of the right to the city, analyzing how everyday habitation produces urban space.²⁰ *Queering Urbanism* builds on that work to investigate how the environment shapes and is shaped by queer people asserting their own right to the city by creating territories that can be both physical and discursive. Operating at the edges of assimilationist practices, queer territorialization demonstrates that the right to the city as a demand should be conceptualized as a set of various emplaced rights—the right to inhabit, alter, and create new urban spaces—rather than simply, or primarily, as a set of political rights.²¹

Demands for the right to urban spaces advance particular forms of citizenship. These demands shed light on how individuals' rights are used, denied, or conditionally granted to maintain social hierarchies in cities and, in some cases, to undo them. In the most general sense, citizenship refers to a bundle of rights and obligations associated with membership in a particular social group. Historically, governing elites have used citizenship to maintain social hierarchies by excluding “unworthy” subjects from electoral politics at the state level.²² In the United States, national citizenship status was conferred automatically to property-owning white men. Subsequent discussions about citizenship as a set of rights attached to specific obligations were applied predominantly to historically disenfranchised groups, including women, African Americans, Native Americans, ethnic minorities, immigrants, homosexuals, transgender, and disabled people. Those disenfranchised groups used the formal attributes of citizenship discourse to safeguard their inclusion in national institutions, beginning with the right to vote, and to articulate socioeconomic demands, such as the right to inhabit the public sphere.²³ In the 1960s and 1970s, progressive coalitions systematically expanded the normative category of the white, heterosexual, cisgender, national citizen, demonstrating the plurality of subject positions within multiculturalist societies, and asserting the rights of minorities.²⁴

The meteoric rise of LGBTQ+ rights discourse in the social and political arenas of the United States since the 1960s has relied on deliberate exclusions and gradual, carefully mediated expansions of which homosexual subject-positions would be included in the imagined community of national citizens. I want to distinguish between demands for equality and the associated obligations of “good citizenship” that derive from membership in the national political community, and the meaning of queer citizenship in this book.²⁵ From the mid-1960s until the present, the national LGBTQ+ movement in the United States has focused on legal and political equality.²⁶ However, beginning in the 1990s disenfranchised queer people,

especially people of color, began to articulate a new basis for socioeconomic rights predicated on alternative ways of life and nonbinary cultural identities that did not fit within the neoliberal nation-state. Urban queer cultures did not (only) seek accommodation by courts of law and city planners, questioning the mantra of desiring a “seat at the table.” They formed counterpublics with their own ethical structures and cultural codes. Such countercultures have existed throughout the much longer history of queer placemaking, but it has been within the past thirty years that members of these “stranger cultures,” as political theorist Shane Phelan calls them, have advanced distinct visions of queer citizenship.²⁷

Both notions of citizenship engage with the nation-state, the first by seeking to reform its institutions and the second by creating alternative self-governance structures and cultural belonging. These notions have coexisted since the beginning of the narrative that unfolds in *Queering Urbanism*. The genealogy of the debates that the book traces sheds light on the historical conditions that brought each to the forefront of urban activism. Together, they describe how sexuality became intelligible as a legal category in liberal democracies and what that recognition did for homosexual and heterosexual subjects, who suddenly had to consider what it meant to “have” sexuality.²⁸

In a book investigating the politics of everyday queer life, it is important to define at the outset how historically contingent sexually and gender nonconforming identities inform and are informed by urban habitation. The terms queer, transgender, gay, and lesbian have historically specific meanings. In the following chapters, they are situated in the contexts in which they emerged, recognizing the differences in the political project that each invokes. Each term’s historicity reveals that the postwar identity-building project was the product of contestations, deliberate exclusions, and expansions of the institutional construction of sexual difference. I also refer to the terms queer and transgender as they have been mobilized in contemporary critical theory to denote more generally the analytical work that the terms do to disrupt normative ways of signifying sexual and gender differences.²⁹ The two terms are not interchangeable. Instead, each chapter will clarify the meaningful differences between them, as the notions of queering and transing enter the lexicon of spatial analysis.

SITUATING QUEERNESS AND TRANSNESS

The spaces that the people in this book have historically inhabited and their queering tactics range from transgender community formation in the Tenderloin to adaptations of Victorian flats for gay and lesbian cohabitation and from urban activism to address government inaction in the face of AIDS in San Francisco to the establishment of a queer Community Land Trust in Oakland. They span a time frame, from 1964 to the present, in which visions of queer liberation oscillated from focusing on assimilating LGBTQ+ social life in the Bay Area’s cities to organizing insurgent actions, though sometimes both tendencies have been present

at the same time. During the early homophile movement in the 1960s, gay and lesbian organizers' political strategy focused on respectability and workplace anti-discrimination. Homosexuality became intelligible as a social identity during this time, and homosexual minority groups asserted their political power at the local level. This resulted in increased freedoms for gays and lesbians, with the important qualification that individuals who enjoyed those freedoms were predominantly white, cisgender, middle class, and able-bodied.³⁰

The gay liberation movement emerged both within and alongside other late-1960s countercultural movements, especially, in the Bay Area, the New Left. The failure of leftist political uprisings globally (epitomized by the Parisian May of 1968) provoked the critique of Marxist class-based struggles as limited in their capacity to engender broader anticapitalist political coalitions.³¹ New Left organizing sought to build stronger coalitions based on recognizing politically disenfranchised social groups on their own terms without collapsing cultural differences within a universal political identity for those groups. Sociologist Elizabeth Armstrong argues that gay liberation activists represented the most successful strand of New Left politics.³² That was partly because gay liberationists after 1969 instrumentalized homosexual identity to argue for their inclusion on an equal basis in the political community of liberal democratic citizenship.³³ The Bay Area was a hotbed for New Left and gay liberation activities, engendering synergies among countercultural groups in the 1960s that contributed to the politicization of homosexuality. Especially in Berkeley, which had been the epicenter of the free speech movement, radical political ideas circulated through word of mouth, numerous newsletters, and community fora. Within that environment, cohabiting collectives fused hippie counterculture with liberation politics, seeking (but not always succeeding) to build coalitions among anticapitalist collectives, black liberation, and the gay liberation movement.³⁴

LGBTQ+ political rights developed alongside the growing visibility and organizational priorities of queer social life in urban environments. However, political gains achieved through court battles since the 1960s and abetted by nonviolent grassroots activism were not without a significant backlash from a coalition of right-wing and Christian "culture warriors," for whom sexual liberation was the *bête noire*.³⁵ In the 1970s and 1980s, conservatives lamented the diverse cast of nonwhite characters who steadily gained visibility and prominence in popular culture, the media, and entertainment. At the same time, liberals witnessed the selective inclusion of new subjects within the political group of national citizens paired with the privatization of public life and upward redistribution of economic resources.

Citizenship Debates

A significant shift occurred in the 1990s in how disenfranchised groups articulated their rights claims in the context of national citizenship discourse.³⁶ Formerly pluralistic movements that joined together leftist radical groups that rejected the capitalist structure of the economy and liberal activists who advocated economic

and social reforms had already begun to crumble in the previous decade. Cultural critic Lauren Berlant argues that the economic and social reforms of the Reagan administrations in the 1980s privatized national citizenship. Right-wing politicians began constructing an idealized private sphere that permeated US social life through advertising and public discourse. Mass media created a national public whose “survival” depended “on personal acts and identities performed in the intimate domains of the quotidian.”³⁷ Berlant argues that surveillance of this intimate domain was diffused and decentralized in the privatized public sphere of television networks and mass culture more generally. As a result, private citizens internalized the ideals and aspirations of that culture, sidelining earlier liberal demands for economic redistribution through government investment in housing, education, and welfare.³⁸

Identity politics, as a form of minority-group political consciousness within Western liberal democracies that originated during the civil rights movement, led to antagonisms among social groups.³⁹ These groups sought to safeguard their interests, legitimating their demands for recognition and participation in the national body politic achieved in part through equal participation in every aspect of the commodified public sphere. However, within the public sphere in consumer capitalist societies, hierarchical relationships are not incidental and transient but essential for its function. Interest groups operating under this logic flatten internal differences to build minority subjects that can “compete” within this politico-economic system. Existing systems of minority stigmatization and subordination are thus challenged based on demonstrating social and economic contribution. Shane Phelan argues that stigmatization and subordination, which historically give minority groups a common political project, “injure the subjects produced through their operations.” She explains that “the injury is constitutive of the identity” and therefore “identity politics is a response to, a demand for the end of, such injury.”⁴⁰ However, identity politics reinscribes injury within a new register of antagonistic relationships by motivating subordinated groups to reexperience injury without challenging it as such. Advancing a theory that would lead to the queering of normative citizenship, Phelan argues that “without a vision of a desired future, such a politics amounts to a continual picking at the scab of suffering.” Locating this vision in physical spaces, as I do in this book, gives concrete examples, however partial, provisional, and inchoate.

Critics of national citizenship from queer and transgender standpoints have argued that the very language of recognition and legal accommodation leads to the assimilation of dissenting political views within a culture of social homogeneity. Moreover, nonprofit organizations abet assimilation with the false promise of upward mobility aided by carceral removal of those not conforming to its norms.⁴¹ National citizenship becomes the great equalizer, where minority groups such as LGBTQ+ people seek to make their case for political and social rights. This makes individual dissent more difficult. Homonormativity describes how a depoliticized

gay culture centered on domesticity and consumption upholds the dominant structure of heterosexual political institutions.⁴² Homonormative gay and lesbian citizens model their identities on white middle-class normativity, whereby whiteness denotes the aspirational status of full citizen. Their demands already since the 1970s have centered, among others, on developing an expansive national gay commercial sphere catering to their social needs and transferring property ownership to their partners. Institutions of the neoliberal state developed the capacity to accommodate both demands. Those accommodations prompted many gays and lesbians to sideline pluralist democratic politics such as extensive debate and openly engaging dissenting views in the media, because such politics in the 1990s could disrupt the structural underpinnings of their success.⁴³

Aihwa Ong's anthropological approach to understanding claims of national belonging by minority populations in the United States demonstrates that "othering" minorities upholds the exclusionary logic of normative citizenship.⁴⁴ Ong focuses on immigrant citizenship and argues that "racial oppositions are not merely the work of discriminatory laws and outright racists, but the everyday product of people's maintenance of their 'comfort level' of permissible liberal norms against the socially deviant newcomers who disturb that sense of comfort."⁴⁵ Similar discomfort with queer and transgender people's cultures, especially people of color, is at the root of liberal identity politics' framing of "acceptable" homosexuality. Moreover, cultural difference cannot easily be codified in a narrow set of legal accommodations and, as scholars building on Kimberlé Crenshaw's foundational work on intersectional oppression during the last thirty years have shown, individual experiences are shaped by multiple vectors of marginalization that can, but do not always have to, operate simultaneously.⁴⁶ Pursuing the rights of transgender people in courts as the latest frontier in civil rights struggles often does not account for how marginality and criminalization, and not only gender and sexual nonconformity, shape the experiences of transgender people and especially transgender people of color and immigrants.⁴⁷ Following this line of critique, the case studies in this book are evaluated from the perspective of their inhabitants' attitudes toward assimilation and the materialist conditions that informed those attitudes.

For example, top-down placemaking efforts by planners and commercial interests in the Castro recognize queerness without granting rights to queer and transgender people, especially youth and those who are "priced out" of the neighborhood to this space. Moreover, as transgender rights have come to the forefront of debates about equality after 2010, a familiar phenomenon has emerged concerning branding trans space as the space of personal reinvention to fit late capitalist self-help and lifestyle cultures. Architecture, and especially domestic interiors, plays a pivotal role in this branding. The Malibu home of the celebrity former athlete and reality television personality Caitlyn Jenner, for instance, was featured prominently as the backdrop of her coming-out feature as transgender in *Vanity Fair* in 2015. She was photographed there by Annie Leibowitz amidst gowns, earthy

textures, and a cluttered vanity.⁴⁸ The aesthetic dimension of Jenner's transgender coming out is not presented, and certainly not conceived, as part of a transgender counterculture that questions normative aesthetics of who/what constitutes femininity. Moreover, as the cultural revanchism of right-wing media and political rhetoric in the post-Trump era demonstrates, the inclusion of transgender as a category of difference in popular culture and state institutions that purport to restore the "virility" of American society is "at best an addendum waiting to be nullified."⁴⁹ Contrary to Jenner's coming out, the processes of queering space in this book reveal how insurgent place-based demands have historically informed specifically queer articulations of space and citizenship that, during the time of their inception and development, were antithetical to mainstream heterosexual social norms.

According to anthropologist James Holston, insurgency in the context of the historical development of modern citizenship is "an acting counter [process], a counterpolitics, that destabilizes the present and renders it fragile, defamiliarizing the coherence with which it usually presents itself."⁵⁰ In this formulation, insurgent citizenship "erupts" from "historical sites of differentiation."⁵¹ These are physical and discursive sites where difference has historically functioned as a way to legalize inequality by distributing rights based on formalizing racial and class divisions.⁵² In this context, insurgencies appropriate the language of national citizenship to counter the inequalities produced by the legal construction of privileged citizen-subjects.⁵³ This notion of citizenship that is based on recognizing formal difference as the first step toward insurgency must be distinguished from debates about sociopolitical rights through the lens of the politics of difference, which shaped feminist and then gay and lesbian debates about inclusion to national citizenship between 1970 and 2000 and are still prevalent today.⁵⁴ The politics of difference typically refers to the formalization of difference in national political discourse through policy decisions recognizing special rights for minority groups. These policies, such as the right of instruction in a regional language or dialect within nation-states, tend to neutralize universal national citizenship as an equalizing force in society. While these policies question homogeneity as the conceptual foundation of equality by seeking to recognize the needs of particular groups of citizens that comprise the national community, they run the risk of distributing inequality.⁵⁵

If the notion of a multicultural national community is revealed as always already fragmented and incomplete, the analytical lens of insurgent citizenship highlights how these fragments can relate to each other in contingent, uneasy, and constantly shifting alliances. Understanding social stratification as a structural part rather than an aberration of national citizenship helps identify precise moments when insurgencies in physical spaces expand the scope of what it means to belong to the city and the nation. This sense of belonging is the outcome of local attachments that people develop in physical spaces.⁵⁶ Employing a framework of

insurgent queer citizenship, this book examines temporal and material fissures in the production of inequality, such as spatial occupations, appropriations, and physical alterations. Seen through that lens, sexually and gender nonconforming people comprise a heterogeneous minority group that has historically emerged and constantly changes in conjunction with modern urbanity.

Queer Territorialization in San Francisco

The historical narrative that traverses the discussion of this book's case studies begins in 1964. That was the year that a feature in *Life* magazine "exposed homosexuality in America" to a heterosexual audience, as its author proclaimed.⁵⁷ Bill Eppridge's photographs for *Life* included San Francisco bar interiors and some images of public spaces in Los Angeles and New York, which intended to take the pulse of urban homosexual experiences. At the same time, the accompanying essay made a case for the emergence of distinct homosexual identities in the different cities that the reporter visited. In San Francisco gay bars played a central role in constructing a gay cultural identity and ensuing political demands.⁵⁸

José Sarria's controversial performances at the Black Cat bar in North Beach in the late 1950s and early 1960s, before the time of the *Life* photo-essay, are important examples of the bars' role in the emergence of a homosexual citizenship discourse. Sarria was a female impersonator, or drag performer in today's terms, and an openly gay man whose shows at the Black Cat were popular underground attractions.⁵⁹ Those shows propelled him to the center of homosexual life in the city at that time. Sarria's drag performances concluded with his call for all attendees to hold hands and chant with him "God Save the Nelly Queen," a proto-liberation anthem that turned the always crowded bar into a space where gay men could affirm their homosexuality in a semipublic setting.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, public expressions of homosexuality in the 1960s were illegal in San Francisco. This only changed in 1972, while homosexual sex was still illegal statewide until 1975. As a result, the Black Cat was subjected to frequent police raids and received numerous fines on charges of acting as "a hangout for homosexuals" and allowing "lewd behavior."⁶¹

Sarria was also the first openly gay man to run for a seat in the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in 1961, a defiant act that raised the stakes in the fraught relationship between the police and the nascent gay and lesbian affinity groups in the city. His bid was unsuccessful, but the symbolism raised eyebrows among the city's elites and fueled the gay rights movement.⁶² Sarria's outspokenness and perseverance partly relied on delivering his message with humor. For example, when the police raided gay bars and arrested people on charges of female impersonation, Sarria advised cross-dressing men to attach paper signs on their outfits with text that proclaimed, "I am a man."⁶³ But police raids continued, and eventually the Black Cat succumbed to economic pressures wrought by fines in 1963. Sol Stoumen, the café's heterosexual owner, had led a long battle against police

discrimination based on the right of homosexual men and women to congregate in commercial spaces. In 1951 *Stoumen* had taken the case of police officers' attempts to close the Black Cat on prostitution charges to the California Supreme Court and won. The *Stoumen v. Reilly* decision established an important precedent but did little to fend off the vigorous policing of homosexual acts in the city, which was in no small part due to the desire of the police to reassert their dominance.⁶⁴

Nonetheless, by the time the Black Cat closed, the number of homosexual hangouts in the city had increased notably.⁶⁵ Bars catering to homosexual men were concentrated mainly in Polk Gulch, while women's bars maintained a presence in North Beach throughout the 1960s.⁶⁶ In addition, in 1962 several bar owners established the Tavern Guild, now considered the first gay business association in the United States. The guild's intention was to help gay bar owners to stop "fighting among themselves and [start] fighting the system."⁶⁷ As a new political consciousness developed among people who identified as gay and lesbian in the late 1960s, the guild leadership understood the importance of physical spaces for entertainment and socializing as necessary components in building identity-based affinity groups and organized fundraising events in bars to support a variety of causes. The guild attempted to create a dialogue between gay and lesbian communities and local politicians by, for example, sponsoring "candidate nights" to get to know their political platforms. These types of events, although successful in creating the groundwork for the "gay vote" theory of the 1970s, were criticized by gay liberationists in 1969 as accommodationist.⁶⁸

As the politics of homosexuality unfolded at the municipal level in the 1970s and played out to a national audience, urban homosexualities developed territorial characteristics. Gay neighborhoods such as the Castro and Folsom were marked by overt symbols of sexual nonconformity. They appeared in tourist maps of the city as bounded areas with distinct cultural traits.⁶⁹ The concentration of single-sex households in particular zip codes was another metric to understand the territorialization of homosexuality in the city's landscape. The analysis of demographic information about gay residential concentrations, gay businesses, and gay voting patterns in San Francisco in the 1970s and 1980s demonstrates how gay and lesbian political rights were achieved by linking urban homosexual placemaking with responsible citizenship.⁷⁰

Meanwhile, the material conditions that enabled gay and lesbian appropriations of spaces can complement disaggregated data and reveal these spaces' insurgent potential. Leather bars and sex clubs consolidated their presence on and around Folsom Street, for example, after migrating there from the Embarcadero, the area around the port of San Francisco known to many homosexual men between 1940 and 1970 for clandestine and often outright dangerous encounters with other men.⁷¹ This territorial consolidation was the result of the displacement of working-class people and of gay hangouts from the Embarcadero when the city embarked on a range of "urban rehabilitation" projects beginning in the 1960s. However, the

emergence of the “miracle mile” on Folsom, as queer theorist Gayle Rubin called it, allowed men and women to develop and to a certain extent celebrate new sexual subjectivities through experimentation with the contours of corporeal pleasure.⁷²

With the urban visibility of gay cultures in the 1970s, the openness and publicity of leather and BDSM sexual cultures and practices inspired as varied a set of visitors as Tom of Finland and Michel Foucault.⁷³ As a result, it became more difficult for urban redevelopment projects to uproot their spatial legacy, not for lack of consistent efforts to “rehabilitate” the area.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, planning debates around that time, which pitted social groups against each other, had a lasting effect reflected in current building regulations and planning priorities in the Bay Area.⁷⁵ Some of the few remaining working-class lodgings in the city were demolished in the 1970s as new leisure and tourist-oriented developments encroached the areas around the city center beginning in the 1980s.⁷⁶ These changes ignited a movement for the protection of housing in which queer and transgender groups participated vociferously in subsequent decades, creating new platforms for the intersection of queer and racial justice activism in the present.

Activists on the ground crossed paths with—and often included in their ranks—artists and academics who were chronicling queer life and taking part in queer and transgender cultural critique. The pioneering Lesbian and Gay Studies Department at San Francisco City College, the first academic division in the United States to center LGBTQ+ studies in its curriculum, has been a hub for queer and anticolonial teaching and activism since 1989.⁷⁷ The University of California Berkeley, with its history of student activism in the 1960s, was fertile ground both for the development of queer theory and for a large number of queer student organizations that took ideas from lectures and seminar readings to their meetings and activities, transforming them in the process. Queer theorist Judith Butler, who taught in Berkeley for over thirty years, noted in the preface to the tenth-anniversary edition of her influential 1993 book *Gender Trouble* that her argument “was produced not merely from the academy, but from convergent social movements of which [she had been] a part.”⁷⁸ As Butler put it, the “internal dissension” in these movements provided her with a fertile intellectual terrain to hone her analytical skills and engage in emancipatory and future-oriented political projects.⁷⁹ With the establishment of queer theory as a field of study in 1990, many queer organizers either were educated in this intellectual environment or were in regular contact with those who had been. This created a productive feedback loop with insights from new queer identities entering back into academia via the spaces where researchers lived and socialized.

It also meant that, by the 1980s and 1990s, San Francisco was emerging as a privileged location to study gay and lesbian territorialization. Trans theorist Jack Halberstam has argued that queer studies’ preoccupation with cities risks equating “the physical journey from small town to big city with the psychological journey from closet case to out and proud,” and as other scholars have pointed out,

we should be careful not to project the experiences of queer people in Western metropolises onto those in other contexts, including rural areas and cities and towns across the Global South.⁸⁰ I take these points to heart, but I also believe that we have much to learn from a close focus on particular urban environments.⁸¹ Within cities, specific cultures, demands, and forms of territorialization differ among groups. Therefore, by viewing urban homonormativity through a critical lens, the study of urban queer experience can reveal unanticipated coalitions of the dispossessed in urban and more-than-urban environments. In the San Francisco Bay context, the construction of Chicanx and Latinx homosexualities, for example, demonstrates how physical and discursive spaces, such as community centers in the Mission, and debates about immigration, de-centered whiteness as the defining attribute of urban homosexual identities.⁸² Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Latinx queer and transgender people in the Mission articulated their own parameters of what it means to be an immigrant queer person carrying distinct cultural influences, which they mapped onto existing landscapes of homosexuality in the city.⁸³ These types of queer identity formation give voice and agency to people whose embodied sexual and gender identities may shift over the course of their lives as a consequence, for instance, of an AIDS diagnosis or immigration status.

Each chapter of *Queering Urbanism* historicizes gay, lesbian, transgender, and queer embodiments that emerged in response to specific post-WWII political debates and ways of inhabiting the city. I do so to de-center gay and lesbian spaces that have received considerable scholarly attention by examining how they have historically excluded other people, and why. In this context, the notion of insurgent queer citizenship helps explain the meaningful differences between normative ways of inhabiting the city and subaltern spatial practices, in which public space is both the product of social struggles and the proper demand of these struggles.⁸⁴ To queer urbanism, this book attempts to map out a heterogeneous network of spaces, people, and organizations that blur the boundaries of what is public and what is private along with what counts as institutional and what is considered grassroots, in the realm of the contemporary city.

Chapter 1 examines a network of spaces around the intersection of Turk and Taylor Streets in San Francisco's Tenderloin neighborhood, where, between 1964 and 1970, a group of gender and sexually nonconforming young adults fought to inhabit sidewalks, Single Room Occupancy hotels, and cafeterias. In the process, they created shared cultures, articulated political demands, built coalitions with antipoverty activists affiliated with Glide Memorial Methodist Church, and became visible subjects to federal and state agencies. During the process of securing "urban revitalization" federal funds from the War on Poverty, Glide-affiliated activists wrote a series of reports that framed the Tenderloin as a "ghetto," wracked by violence and in need of reform. The reductive, even caricatured view of queer life in these reports frames demands for the recognition of queer people's rights as

the need to assimilate them in mainstream society as “productive citizens,” thereby revealing the limits of assimilationist discourse to achieve social change.

In the 1970s, gay lifestyles across the city were subject to intense politicization and public scrutiny. Much attention went to the Castro, where, as I explore in chapter 2, gay men consolidated territorial claims, moving into the neighborhood’s Victorians, renovating them, and creating a kind of “village life” that made gay culture newly visible. The dominant form of hypermasculine gay embodiment during that time, the “Castro clone,” fits into this popular imagination, demonstrating how everyday habitation influenced gay embodiment, and the reverse, how gay embodiment mapped onto architectural interiors and urban public space. The chapter explores how gay men’s substantive claims to urban space through gay territorialization led to an attendant logic of cultural belonging and ultimately a form of insurgent citizenship as a set of ruptures with traditional representations of the family home, and with expressions of sex and sexuality in public. Between 1969 and 1982, gay men employed notions of self-realization, community-building, and political representation to demand and ultimately win the right to openly display cultural markers of sexual difference and gain recognition of new homosexual relationships outside the nuclear family structure. But as Bay Area residents, popular media, advertising executives, and local government officials scrutinized gay life, gay men risked entering a kind of invisible closet, having to conform to popular gay embodiments to be recognized.

Chapter 3 turns to a series of spaces created by lesbian feminists and analyzes territorialization as a catalyst for lesbian identity formation. This includes the first openly lesbian bar in San Francisco, established in 1966, as well as two feminist bookstores, Information Center Incorporated in Oakland and Old Wives’ Tales in San Francisco, which were founded in the 1970s and functioned as movement-spaces. Lesbian feminist collectives claimed spaces and built prefigurative communities against long odds, but they were not immune to conflicts from within—such as disagreements around how to run these spaces collectively—or to pressure from without. The consolidation of independent bookstores and publishers into corporate entities that squeezed independent bookstores’ profits led to feminist bookstore closures in the late 1980s and 1990s. Meanwhile, five blocks away from Old Wives’ Tales, the Women’s Building of the Bay Area, founded in the Mission in 1979, became a cultural center that provided—and still provides—office space for women’s organizations and is a hub for feminist, including lesbian feminist, cultural activities. In the two decades after its establishment, changes within the women’s movement played out in everyday decisions about room organization, shared maintenance, and architectural symbolism. The Women’s Building story demonstrates how late-1970s feminist activism combined radical demands for rethinking private ownership in favor of collective structures with ideas about women’s cultural exceptionalism and insurgent demands for their right to build women’s spaces and run them independently. The influence of lesbians

within the feminist movement in developing territorial characteristics is noticeable in the organization's engagement with the Mission neighborhood, which was the epicenter of lesbian territorialization—the consolidation of the otherwise dispersed lesbian presence—in the Bay.

Chapter 4 traces broader cultural shifts in queer urban habitation during the 1980s, as the AIDS crisis—and the accompanying rise of homophobia, fear, and the closure of bathhouses—resulted in what I call the desexualization of San Francisco, and in the reversal of many of the previous decade's gains in visibility as well as sexual and social experimentation. By analyzing debates about the bathhouse closures, AIDS treatment in a dedicated hospital ward, and a ten-year-long occupation of a downtown plaza to protest government inaction in the face of AIDS, I trace the growing prominence of a broad human rights discourse during this period. Where queer San Franciscans had primarily made earlier rights-claims based on inhabiting specific sites and participating in economic activities in the city, homosexual citizens in both the Bay and the nation were now demanding the right to healthy urban life. It was a vision that sought to expand insurgent queer citizenship from the right to inhabit specific neighborhoods (the Castro, the Tenderloin) and buildings (the Victorian flat, gay bars and clubs, bathhouses) to the right of coproducing the urban public realm in equal terms with heterosexual citizens. But in practice, it also meant that middle-class, predominantly white gay and lesbian spaces were more quickly enfolded into a late-capitalist, sanitized urbanity because they became intelligible to the heterosexual public, their inhabitants relatable, and their economic contributions measurable. That process was also accelerated by the co-occurring displacement of black, brown, and Latinx residents away from the neighborhoods and the institutions that had previously supported them. The urban landscape's desexualization, then, was part of broader processes of deracination, class disenfranchisement, and gentrification.

Chapter 5 turns to queer and transgender collectively run spaces in San Francisco and Oakland during the last fifteen years to examine the state of queer and transgender urban habitation in the context of advanced gentrification, along with the meaning and tactics of spatial activism. Throughout San Francisco and in some parts of Oakland, such as Fruitvale, where the building at the center of my analysis in this chapter is located, queer and trans people, and especially people of color, have forged arrangements of collective living. This form of territorialization is different from earlier gay and lesbian neighborhood formation: it lacks a physical center and it engenders demands for the right to housing, for citizens' participation in cocreating public space, and to decide about what that public space looks like. Its queer insurgent attributes do not mirror race- and class-based politics; they are part of them. At the center of this activism is fighting dispossession, and as housing costs and rents continue to rise, some collectives have turned to Community Land Trusts (CLT—a form of collective tenure that removes land from the capitalist real estate market) to maintain ownership of the spaces where they

have built their distinct ways of life. In 2017, for example, queer and transgender people of color spearheaded the creation of the self-declared Liberated 23rd Avenue Building in an immigrant neighborhood in Oakland. In addition to owning the property collectively, they built a meaningful shared queer culture through art, intergenerational, and intercultural interactions. Yet as the area gentrifies with the influx of capital for multifamily housing and public investments in transit and other public amenities that change the immigrant neighborhood's physical landscape, the changing class and racial makeup and subdued gentrification aesthetics threaten to render Liberated 23rd a symbolic rather than functional example of queer citizens' insurgent resistance to mainstream pressure to assimilate or perish. The brief epilogue connects the stakes for each of the groups and individuals who have spearheaded place-based insurgencies, working with and against the state to simultaneously reshape American citizenship and urbanism. Rather than affirm a narrative of gradual inclusion into mainstream society and politics, the histories of queer urban social movements and their spaces in this book highlight and harness the creative energies of oppositional urban cultures.