

Spaces of Separation, Assimilation, and Citizenship

The Tenderloin comprises thirty blocks in less than half a square mile in downtown San Francisco. Its physical environment is characterized by four- to six-story residential buildings, each occupying about half a block's depth, with commercial storefronts. There is a dearth of open space other than streets and sidewalks, all arranged on a regular urban grid, with longer faces on the east-west axis, as envisioned by Jasper O'Farrell in his 1849 vision for the development of a Gold Rush instant city.¹ By the turn of the twentieth century, it was home to many bars, clubs, and jazz venues, which together with the nearby Barbary Coast made up the center of San Francisco's famously rowdy nightlife.² The popular media has long tended to frame the Tenderloin as an insular vice district, but its public face at the southern edge, Market Street, is also the city's major transit and commercial corridor, with ample sidewalks, shopping, and performance venues catering to socially diverse audiences.³ This physical environment, dense, timeworn, and squeezed between Civic Center in the west and the city's main tourist hotel area around Union Square in the east, shaped the neighborhood's character as a seedy, neon-lit adult playground.

In black-and-white video footage used in the 1970 documentary *Gay San Francisco*, the Tenderloin's sidewalks are illuminated by the lights of shop windows, marquees, and vehicular traffic—a metropolitan look very different from typical representations of San Francisco's quirky residential neighborhoods on rolling hills in the national media.⁴ As the camera traverses the streets of the Tenderloin, the narrator announces: "This is gay San Francisco. An inside look at the life of San Francisco's homosexuals. They work to conceal their sexual orientation by day, and only at night do they show their true colors. The city's downtown Tenderloin district is the home ground of the always-visible segment of the city's homosexuals and transvestites." Over the course of this film segment, his narration, intended for

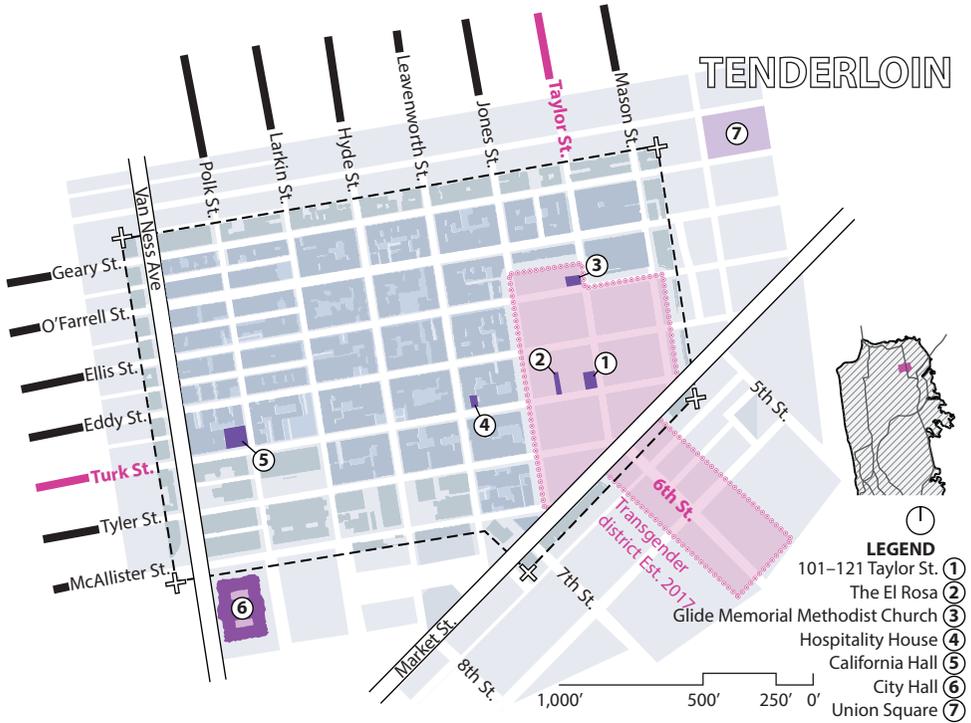
adult theater audiences as the film includes some pornographic content, fluctuates between curious about and critical toward homosexual people in the neighborhood, whom he refers to as “screaming queens.”⁵

Viewers of *Gay San Francisco* could understand that queer residents in the Tenderloin often had minimal resources—interviews on workplace discrimination and the way some individuals had been cut off from familial and social networks made that clear—but it did not mention another key dynamic: the police, in effect, confined queer and gender nonconforming people within a few blocks.⁶ In 1960 the “gayola” scandal—the news that a widespread network of policemen demanded bribes to let gay bars operate in the area—had been big news.⁷ Even if “gayola” led to the ouster of some policemen from the force, it did little to stave off police harassing queer people in the Tenderloin and elsewhere. The other side of police officers’ selective permission was control, and they kept close tabs on activities in the Tenderloin. The most heavily policed spaces were those occupied by the group of people that media coverage called drag queens, who were forced to remain within the boundaries of a small cluster of businesses and residential hotels around Turk and Taylor Streets, between Jones and Mason (map 1).⁸

The term drag queen initially described cross-dressing performers in homosexual subcultures in the United States, but the individuals who came to be grouped under the term often had very different ways of understanding their identities.⁹ In the context of the Tenderloin, the term signified the construction of a cultural identity outside mainstream societal norms that is predicated on gender and sexual nonconformity.¹⁰ In the 1960s some gender-nonconforming people shifted toward a transsexual identity as a form of mobility, entering society as the sex opposite to the one assigned at birth. Social marginalization was an experience that bonded most of those embodying what we now describe as transgender identities, who were obliged to adapt their everyday environments to meet their needs. Many engaged in prostitution because of barriers to formal employment due to their gender presentation or homosexuality, which was still illegal in San Francisco.

Transgender, as an analytical category, includes different ways of expressing gender identity beyond the binary male/female. The term can also enable transhistorical connections among marginalized groups without minimizing meaningful cultural and political differences.¹¹ When I refer to transgender embodiment in this chapter, I do not intend to conflate the experiences of the Tenderloin queens with later embodiments and the politics of transgender visibility in the present. However, to maintain historical accuracy, I use the terms Tenderloin queens and gay youth, acknowledging that these are external characterizations that, nonetheless, some of the individuals populating the spaces discussed in this chapter appropriated and transformed.

Nonprofit organizations in the Tenderloin seeking to address poverty and prostitution described the experiences of Tenderloin “street kids” in harrowing



MAP 1. Map of the Tenderloin showing the sites discussed in this chapter. © Gabriel Gonzalez & Stathis G. Yeros.

language. In reports and civic fora, reformers presented them as legitimate national subjects who had been failed by society¹² but were deserving of rights and assuming responsibilities.¹³ They appealed to the ethos of Johnson's War on Poverty, with its commitment—however flawed in execution—to equitably distribute wealth and opportunities to all US citizens. But by the late 1960s, the War on Poverty was in its waning years, and beginning with the Nixon administration in 1969, the US entered a period of prolonged government disinvestment from social programs. Nonprofits and members of the queer public published reports and reached out to media by connecting with journalists to fight for recognition and political rights.¹⁴ That involved presenting the “street kids” in terms that fit into binaries of race and gender: a racially diverse group of drag queens and gay male hustlers—including black, Asian American, Latina queens—were essentially whitewashed to create a social category distinct from the predominantly African American neighborhoods in San Francisco that competed with Tenderloin organizations for federal grants.¹⁵

In the Tenderloin, queens and gay youth also occupied, altered, and appropriated the physical environment in forms of queer, insurgent performance that were also “acts of citizenship.”¹⁶ Between 1965 and 1969, residential hotels, bars,

cafeterias, and even sidewalks became spaces of social and political insurgency. The aesthetic dimensions of such acts, which have visual, textural, aural, and performative dimensions, did more than shape nonnormative embodiments through behavior, fashion, and sociocultural discourse—though these effects are important too. The “acts of citizenship” discussed in this chapter also involved physical space, not as a backdrop but as an influence for new embodiments that in some cases remade the city in turn.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF A QUEER NEIGHBORHOOD

Adult entertainment that included sophisticated “female impersonation” performances was typical in San Francisco for a small but well-known part of its rowdy nightlife since the 1920s.¹⁷ The most famous nightclub to offer it was Finocchio’s, located at various spots in North Beach from 1929 to 1999. Finocchio’s had many gay and lesbian regulars, but in the 1950s it was also a stop for tourists seeking the spectacle of gender-transgressive performances and the racialized display of “exotic dancers” on stage.¹⁸ However, most of the venues that employed cross-dressing entertainers did not enjoy Finocchio’s peculiar popularity with tourists; nor were their performances quite so elaborate, or as focused on the shock of seeming “deception” around gender. Other forms of drag took more ironic, and sometimes subversive, forms.¹⁹

The modern gay rights movement, which developed in the 1950s, was sometimes critical of what could be disparaged as frivolous homosexual lifestyles, including socializing in bars and clubs. The Mattachine Society (established in 1950) and the Daughters of Bilitis (DoB, established in 1955), for example, espoused a politics of respectability rooted in assimilationism.²⁰ They fought to end employment discrimination and to safeguard the rights of gays and lesbians to socialize in public.²¹ Society for Individual Rights (or SIR) campaigned for these demands as well, but recognized that gay and lesbian bars were venues with established sexual minority publics, and thus offered an excellent opportunity to develop political consciousness based on shared experiences and demands.²² Founded in 1964, SIR’s magazine, *Vector*, was widely available on city newsstands of the era, thereby putting a face to the newfound confidence in urban homosexual identities. *Vector* reproduced glossy, sexually suggestive imagery along with news reports and political commentary.²³ Nevertheless, as the goals of gay political organizations began to yield results, especially by growing their membership and attracting nonhomosexual support, bar owners were under considerable pressure from City Hall, the police, and gay and lesbian organizations to maintain what they described as “respectable appearances.”²⁴ The majority of early homosexual activists both embodied and performed middle-class identities and generally followed a code of what was considered appropriate public conduct in exchange for tacit protection of their privacy rights by the police.²⁵

People who transgressed gender identities or did not want to conform to the assimilationist tendencies of the homophile movement in the mid- and late 1960s had to operate in a narrower field.²⁶ Many of them congregated in the Tenderloin, which was already known for its boisterous nightlife.²⁷ Several gay bars were located there, as were some dubiously labeled “tranny bars” that catered primarily to transsexual women.²⁸ The proliferation of such venues in the 1960s (though they focused on entertainment for people who did not necessarily live in the neighborhood), and the availability of cheap accommodation in SROs in the area made the Tenderloin the first stop for disenfranchised young gay people arriving in the city.

SRO hotels were a fixture of the downtowns of many cities in the United States from the 1880s to the 1930s. Tenants could stay there from a few days to several years. Although downtown SROs belonged to several categories, ranging from luxury suites for bachelors to rudimentary accommodation in closet-sized rooms, by the mid-1960s Tenderloin SROs housed primarily poor, working-class, and transient people.²⁹ These people had few contacts or work opportunities in San Francisco and many of them engaged in sex work as a means of survival. They made their way in a neighborhood whose art deco architectural elements gave it a feeling of lost grandeur, and they patronized the area’s cheap restaurants, corner stores, and bathhouses—the latter catering both to those who worked in offices during the day and to those who lived in SROs without facilities of their own.

The marginalized residents of the Tenderloin helped usher in a new phase in homosexual politics.³⁰ For the disenfranchised youth, and especially the self-identified drag queens, who rejected the norms of heterosexual society and were confined by poverty to the Tenderloin, everyday concerns were different from those of most SIR, Mattachine, and DoB members. Sex work was, for many of them, a means to raise the money necessary for cosmetic surgeries to enhance their gender presentation and for gender-affirming surgery after 1968, when Stanford physicians could perform the operation. Many Tenderloin queens were eager to learn from each other’s experiences in the residential hotels and the cafeterias where they met.

The neighborhood’s built environment further shaped the priorities of political activism, where SRO tenants did not have access to private kitchens or proper meeting spaces, aside from on-site dining halls, which were seldom available. Consequently, they relied on other parts of the Tenderloin’s urban economy for food and socializing. This circumstance contributed to the domestication of the sidewalks as spaces for socializing and coming out, in the sense of openly performing queer subject positions and creating peer support networks. Casual observers and participants recognized that this was a world not only sexually charged (though that was certainly the case) but also one where friendships enabled ways of life predicated on forms of alternative kinship.³¹ But the exuberance of the nightly scenes on sidewalks belied the devastating violence that was part of the everyday

experience of their queer denizens, who were the target of sexual violence, beatings from clients, and abuse from the police without being able to report any of it.

The groups and individuals who appear in this chapter were at the nexus of intersecting political movements, resulting in the formalization of distinct traits that subsequently described their sexual and gender identities. The performance of these identities in the neighborhood's physical environment between 1966 and 1970 demonstrates how participants of these cultures expressed queer futurity as prefigurative enactments of alternative ways of everyday life and relationship building.³² Studying these spaces and the discourses that developed about them also reveals entanglements between liberalism, national citizenship, and urban insurgencies that have informed the construction of difference within the framework of late capitalism.

SEEKING SHELTER

Young queer people were often running away from oppressive families and discriminating social norms in the places where they grew up.³³ In the Tenderloin, they also had to contend with discrimination by SRO managers, who were reluctant to rent to them based on their youth and sexual "deviance."³⁴ Accounts of residential arrangements that allowed young queer people to remain in the area in the 1960s and 1970s reveal a network of a few spaces where they lived and socialized, which included the all-night cafeterias Compton's and Plush Doggie (demolished for the construction of a transit station in the 1970s), the after-hours coffee-bar Chuckkers, and the after-hours Lettermen Club and Pearls, which reportedly turned a blind eye to underage patrons' fake IDs.³⁵ People also patronized amusement arcades to play at pinball machines and solicit sex.³⁶ Queens, in particular, socialized mainly around the intersection of Turk and Taylor Streets; the El Rosa, an SRO hotel on Turk Street, was a haven for queer newcomers.³⁷ They banded together, bonding, keeping an eye out for violent incidents, and celebrating holidays as a makeshift family.

Sex work had been part of the Tenderloin's urban economy since the turn of the century, and while not all young runaways who found shelter there in the early 1960s were sex workers, many found it one of the only real options for earning money.³⁸ At the time, the area consisted of competing territories organized mainly by the gender presentation of sex workers and the types of sexual services they offered. As a means of survival, gay youth in the Tenderloin had to quickly master a set of rules about each subgroup's reach and conduct, as well as learn the signs of impending danger. Even within the neighborhood, there were clearly defined areas where queens could and could not solicit customers, which they learned from each other. The police unofficially relegated their activities to a small area in the neighborhood's interior, while the streets that marked its edges, including Polk

and Market, which had more foot traffic, were off-limits.³⁹ Cisgender male sex workers seem to have enjoyed a little more mobility in the neighborhood, but also typically had to make do with soliciting on sidewalks since most bars and clubs were off-limits to them because they were underaged. Many bar owners strictly enforced this prohibition because gay bars were often targets of police raids. Queens and gay youth who joined the scene, with already-established categories that described who they were presumed to be, had to negotiate their own terms for how to belong. For many of them, especially those who today identify as transgender, coming together in the Tenderloin and recognizing their own challenges in each other's experiences was empowering. Living together in the El Rosa, one of the few residential hotels that offered accommodation, helped many of them find common cause.⁴⁰

Whereas bigger SROs were operated by impersonal management companies, the El Rosa had an elderly general manager, "Mama" Rosa, who was sympathetic to drag queens.⁴¹ According to Amanda St. Jaymes, who managed day-to-day operations there in the late 1960s, "Mama Rosa"—who might or might not have also owned the building—allowed residents to bring guests into their rooms. Often, they were customers paying for sex.⁴² Yet, St. Jaymes explained, the building was more than a place to sleep and host tricks: "The El Rosa was a wayward home for girls [queens]. There were so many of us there that our families had disowned us." The masculine pronoun "El" for a traditionally female name, "Rosa," was a deliberate nod to the queens who lived there.⁴³

The El Rosa was housed in a white three-story building on 162–166 Turk Street built in 1906 (fig. 4).⁴⁴ Larger SROs in the Tenderloin had ornate art deco facades, but the El Rosa's exterior was adorned only with the required metal fire stairs. The lack of architectural detailing, in keeping with its cheaper lodging, also suggested a lack of historical specificity. The building was neither art deco nor modernist. It was neither a landmark nor so decrepit as to stand out. In this sense, the El Rosa was a kind of aesthetic blank slate for the enactment of alternative queer embodiments and social relationships. If queens were treated as second-class citizens in their everyday lives, the symbolism of the building's architecture further emphasized that point. However, it also offered opportunities for residents to appropriate the physical space, symbolically making it their own.

The building contained an estimated forty tightly packed rooms, arranged in two rows along a central dead-end corridor that received no direct sunlight.⁴⁵ Except for the four rooms overlooking Turk Street, each of which had a large window to the street, all others had a single small window to the outside, most without a street view. Room interiors typically included a bed, a closet, and a wash basin; bathrooms, as was the usual for working-class residential hotels, were communal. Some SROs had a "loung" for socializing, such as a kitchen or dining hall, but the El Rosa did not (according to contemporary accounts there was a bar on the

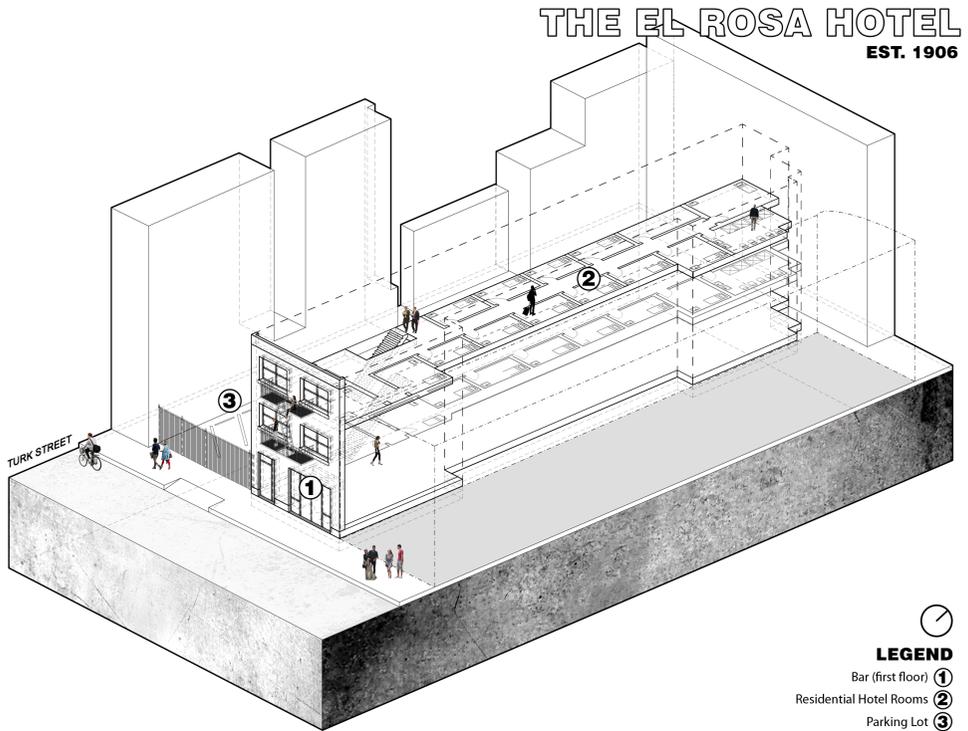


FIGURE 4. The El Rosa Hotel on Turk Street. The unit arrangement and dimensions are based on available planning and other archival material due to inability to access the site and are approximate. © Gabriel Gonzalez & Stathis G. Yeros.

ground floor, but queens who were under twenty-one were not allowed in). As a result, St. Jaymes and the other queens who lived there treated the building's immediate surroundings as their living room, extending queer domesticity to the streets and creating a public queer culture.⁴⁶

The building typologies of SROs like the El Rosa tended to give a communal character to everyday life and had done so since the turn of the twentieth century. People living near each other and sharing class or racial identification created self-sustaining communities of mutual support. Lodging houses served as literal and metaphorical “repair stations for workplace casualties.”⁴⁷ They were the only places where sick and wounded workers—often lacking adequate labor protections, let alone insurance—could recover with the help of other residents, who might at any given moment share their predicament. In the close quarters of the El Rosa and the businesses and streets that surrounded it, Tenderloin queens developed minority-group consciousness by recognizing their shared dangerous

urban conditions. The queens would often do roll calls to ensure everyone in their immediate community was present and accounted for during afternoon check-ins when they dressed and helped each other with makeup, getting ready for the evening.⁴⁸

It was not just the physical conditions of the Tenderloin that cultivated group consciousness. Workplace discrimination, for example, contributed to the confinement of queens and gay youth in the Tenderloin. For those who could pass and live as the gender opposite to their biological sex, finding and maintaining jobs in sectors of the economy other than entertainment and sex work was difficult. They were in constant danger of discovery by their coworkers or managers, especially when they had to show their identification documents as part of the hiring process, or when they had workplace disputes.⁴⁹ Others lacked high school diplomas; some queer runaways from rural areas had work skills not suited for the urban economy; and many did not have a permanent address to put in work applications.⁵⁰

Everyday acts of violence against Tenderloin queens were corporeal, institutional, and psychological. For queens, who were biologically male, wearing women's clothes posed a threat to their safety. Successfully passing as female could result in violent altercations with tricks (potential clients) who sometimes mistook queens for biologically female prostitutes and took the revelation of a queen's biological sex as a license to express their bigotry with violence. The accounts of those who made it through the 1960s and 1970s include stories of many others who did not. Senseless murders were part of the Tenderloin reality.⁵¹ Inhabiting the same sidewalks, the queens exchanged word-of-mouth tips about violent tricks and devised survival tactics that involved sharp heels, heavy custom-designed purses, and weapons made from beer bottles.⁵²

Moreover, dressing in drag was a punishable offense. It was often enough reason for a queen to be arrested, harassed, and brutally beaten by the notorious Tenderloin police patrols. The ad hoc enforcement of the law underlined how the power dynamic between police officers and Tenderloin queens played out: violence was imminent and unpredictable, marking the Tenderloin as a liminal zone that both allowed and denied the queens' rights to existence. Queens bore the brunt of police harassment, and those who were also people of color likely bore the most. It was, and is, hard to uncouple the racist and homophobic/transphobic motivation for police harassment. However, systemic racism in the Bay Area was expressed not only in segregationist practices (which were widespread) but also in repeatedly denying the humanity of people of color and asserting the power to dictate who is allowed to live and who is left to die.⁵³

Police harassment in the Tenderloin was rooted in a display of supremacist power, heteromascularity, and a Catholic morality that condemned homosexuality and gender deviance even as it turned a blind eye to extortion, illegal gambling,

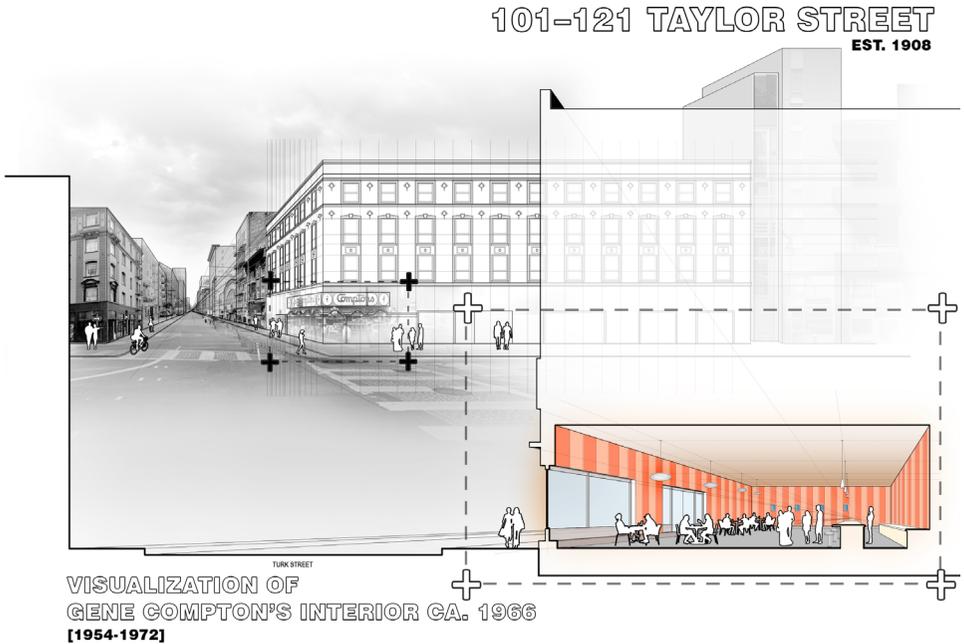


FIGURE 5. The SRO at 101-121 Taylor Street that housed Compton's Cafeteria in the 1960s. The interior visualization is based on available archival material and is approximate. © Gabriel Gonzalez & Stathis G. Yeros.

and other “vices” that were present in the Tenderloin.⁵⁴ In survivors’ accounts, a small number of police officers known to most Tenderloin night denizens perpetrated this harassment—arrests, beatings, and extortion. These officers were deliberately dispatched as a matter of routine, suggesting that both police and city administrators shrugged off the pattern of violence. No wonder, then, that police reform was a key demand for Tenderloin youth and major gay and lesbian organizations such as DoB, Mattachine, and SIR, all of which were, in the 1960s, starting to gain political power at the local level.⁵⁵

A conflict with the police led the block where El Rosa was situated—and more specifically, the corner of Turk and Taylor Streets—to acquire an almost legendary status in transgender studies, thanks largely to historian Susan Stryker’s work on early transgender liberation. This corner was the site of Gene Compton’s Cafeteria (fig. 5), where a riot broke out in August 1966, as detailed in Stryker’s 2005 documentary *Screaming Queens*. The riot’s direct cause was an altercation between the queens who were at Compton’s that evening and a member of the cafeteria staff, which led to the queens’ refusal to cooperate with Compton’s management and the policemen who arrived there ready for the familiar routine of arrests and

intimidation. Street fighting around the cafeteria followed window-smashing until a larger police contingent arrived. But the broader reason for the queens' defiance was anger at the police intrusion in an area where they had just begun to create conditions that gave them a sense of safety, as well as hope for personal and social change.⁵⁶ Safe spaces like the El Rosa offered shelter and a sense of power in numbers, while Compton's and the sidewalks surrounding the intersection functioned as a dining hall and public gathering places, respectively.

The diner, which was part of a local chain, was the center of queer social life in the area. It was close to Woolworth's, where queens shopped for cosmetics and eyelashes, and to a hair salon where they got their hair done. A bathhouse frequented by gay men stood next door. Because Compton's was open twenty-four hours a day, gay and bisexual men went there after the bars were closed, mixing with the queens who were not allowed into bars because they were too young. "You could go to Compton's, and it was its own little fairyland," Tamara Ching recalled. "I remember the waitresses with little doily napkins on their chest. It was beautiful because it was clean."⁵⁷ A typical 1960s diner, Compton's was furnished with modern plastic and metal furniture and was lit with bright fluorescent lights. That was a starkly different environment from the small hotel rooms where the queens lived. Both St. Jaymes and Ching, who frequented Compton's in 1966, evoked *The Wizard of Oz* to explain Compton's aspirational "scene." Referring to it as Oz, the modernity of the cafeteria's physical surroundings appeared to hold the promise of dignity and social transformation, perhaps like the Cowardly Lion finding his/her/their courage on their way to the Emerald City.

Queens went to Compton's to see each other and be seen, in a space that was part living room, part social club, with the relative safety of a clean and well-lit environment. Felicia Elizondo, who also frequented it in the mid-1960s, remembered, "Everybody would die for window seats, just to show off."⁵⁸ Elizondo added that people went to Compton's "to parade their fashions" in front of their peers and onlookers. This was a decade before the first gay bar with clear glass windows opened in the Castro.⁵⁹ Compton's plate-glass storefront mediated the queens' interactions with the neighborhood and symbolized their desire to be seen both as individuals and, as the riot indicated, a distinct social group. The casual camaraderie with other Tenderloin residents, especially young cisgender hustlers, that they had developed through everyday interactions at Compton's created a sense of collectivity that they expressed most dramatically for the first time in August 1966, with the violent response to police intrusion.

The area around the intersection of Turk and Taylor had the characteristics of a proto-queer territory, an urban enclave marked by the open expression of non-normative gender and sexuality in public. The contrast between the relative visibility of queer urban cultures in the neighborhood was markedly different from the social networks queer people had developed around urban parks and public restrooms. Those loose social networks were mainly based on clandestine, often

transactional sex. However, young queer people who inhabited those spaces developed friendships and networks of support that in the Bay Area often led them to the Tenderloin.⁶⁰

THE LIMITS OF ADVOCACY

While much of the support network that queens built in the Tenderloin came from unofficial forms of organizing in SROs, on sidewalks, and at Compton's, there was also formal organizing. Before turning to how institutional actors responded to the conditions of queer marginalization and poverty in the Tenderloin, examining how trans identity was understood at the time sheds light on those responses. A critical development was the publication of Harry Benjamin's *The Transsexual Phenomenon* in 1966. That study was the first systematic attempt to define transsexuality as a phenomenon distinct from homosexuality and transvestism.⁶¹ Benjamin, an endocrinologist and sexologist, coordinated a team of medical professionals to secretly perform the first gender-affirming surgeries at Carnegie Mellon University. He also maintained a part-time practice in San Francisco. *The Transsexual Phenomenon* provided a blueprint for action for Tenderloin queens and other gender-nonconforming Bay Area residents to seek institutional recognition as citizens with rights concerning their bodies.

One year before the book's publication, the San Francisco police department had taken the first step to address the seemingly constant source of conflict with Tenderloin youth by establishing the office of community-police relations.⁶² In 1965 Elliot Blackstone, a white, middle-aged, heterosexual policeman, became the first community-police liaison in the Central City area, which included the Tenderloin.⁶³ Blackstone's encounter with Benjamin's work (the two men eventually became friends, according to Blackstone's account) led to his staunch advocacy for the rights of the queens, with whom he was in regular contact.⁶⁴ Along with lesbian and gay rights activists, he spearheaded a referral program to give them access to doctors who could help them begin the medical transition process.⁶⁵ Blackstone saw dual responsibilities in his role. On the one hand, he sought to help transgender people "fit" in heterosexual society; on the other, he was committed to educating the police department and City Hall to "accept their different lifestyles."⁶⁶ Blackstone's matter-of-fact approach to achieving social change led to significant institutional progress, helping many people in the Tenderloin and elsewhere reach their gender and social transition goals.

For example, the issuance of temporary identification cards in the late 1960s with the name corresponding to the bearer's social gender was a seminal step on the road to institutional recognition of transgender identity. The Center for Special Problems, which had operated out of the city's Public Health Department since 1965, issued these cards, and one of Blackstone's undertakings was to advise transgender people on how to navigate the bureaucracy of government

and medical agencies. A certain amount of negotiation was required between doctors' offices and the center. Medical staff at the latter evaluated transgender people as patients, administered hormones, and eventually referred them to Stanford University Medical School to undergo medical procedures. The procedures themselves, however, were shrouded by a culture of secrecy until at least 1970.⁶⁷

The adoption of medical discourse in social and political advocacy constructed an assimilationist framework for recognizing "reformed" subjects and including them in national citizenship. Blackstone often presented the "transgender problem," as he saw it, as one of clothing and bathroom etiquette. On at least one occasion he facilitated a meeting between a queen and a police officer in order to convince the officer that there would be less distress and fewer public complaints if the queen went to the bathroom that best fit her social gender.⁶⁸ That type of argument was effective in incrementally shifting public policy, but it also naturalized the supervision of queer bodies by the police. The only way that the lives and bodies of queens could be understood by government apparatuses was by conforming to binary gender norms. But not everyone who embodied alternative gender and sexual identities subscribed to that binary. While many Tenderloin queens aspired to sex reassignment, others reveled in the many opportunities for gender expression that their immediate environment afforded.

The Tenderloin's physical and social environment was a vibrant mix of buildings and activities that included cheap housing, cafeterias, bars, some office buildings, and religious, labor, and homosexual organizing. Notably, some Bay Area labor unions had their offices in the Tenderloin, as did several nonprofit organizations.⁶⁹ The Glide Foundation and Glide Memorial Methodist Church under the leadership of Cecil Williams, a charismatic African American pastor, provided a critical link among the heterogeneous actors in that landscape. Class, sexuality, and race-based activism were juxtaposed within a few city blocks, and this proximity contributed to both synergies and antagonisms.⁷⁰ Glide Memorial dominated the intersection of Taylor and Eddy, a few blocks south of Turk and Taylor. Its long-standing social programs facilitated communication and political activism among the groups that were active in the Tenderloin, while their Methodist ethos influenced the tenor and priorities of this activism. In the 1960s, Glide Foundation organized a "night ministry," which reached out to marginalized youth directly in the cafeterias where they were. Glide also provided money and administrative support to shelters and soup kitchens in the Tenderloin.⁷¹ Unlike other institutions in the Tenderloin that relied on government support, the foundation's large operating budget came from San Francisco philanthropist Lizzie Glide's turn-of-the-century endowment. At the time of Glide's bequest, the north part of the Tenderloin housed upper-middle-class residents primarily, and Glide's founding mission to provide "a house of worship for all people" likely did not encompass addressing poverty in its immediate

vicinity. That changed when Williams arrived there in 1963, fresh from civil rights organizing in the South.

But even before Williams, some of the foundation's work had begun addressing the conditions of poverty among gay youth in the Tenderloin and nearby North Beach.⁷² Recognizing the unique challenges that homosexuality posed in how institutions addressed those conditions, a young member of the staff at Glide Foundation, Ted McIlvenna, who previously had been involved in youth outreach, spearheaded the establishment of the Council on Religion and the Homosexual (CRH) in 1964. CRH intended "to supplement the work of [homophile] groups . . . and to establish dialogue with many influential segments of San Francisco leadership."⁷³ It brought together representatives from homophile organizations as well as Methodist, Protestant, Episcopal, United Church of Christ, and Lutheran clergy members. CRH sought to expand the social justice missions of progressive religious leaders to include the rights of gays and lesbians, based on the template provided by civil rights activism. One of the CRH members was Del Martin, cofounder of DoB and a strong voice for lesbian and gay rights in the 1960s and 1970s. Martin, who worked as a secretary at the Glide Foundation during the mid-1960s, was instrumental in articulating the common goals of the disparate actors who came together in the service of homophile activism.⁷⁴ For Martin and other homophile organizers, to use the term that they employed at the time, the living conditions of Tenderloin youth reflected the conjunction of homosexual discrimination and poverty writ large.

The objectives of CRH and Glide's mission were aligned in their desire to reform Tenderloin residents by changing their conditions of poverty and "cultural deprivation" (the latter so identified by Glide's Methodist doctrine).⁷⁵ Homophile activists were concerned that the public perception of Tenderloin youth as drug addicts and sex workers, along with their constant battles with the police, would adversely affect public support for the whole movement.⁷⁶ CRH's reformist argument focused on addressing poverty and public health in the Tenderloin while at the same time advocating for the rights of homosexuals as a new social group. This position initiated a broader internal argument about how the support of homosexual causes could be consistent with Methodist doctrine, in full display during a Methodist conference in 1968, where conservative opinions against changing Methodists' treatment of homosexuality prevailed and the Glide delegation expressed a minority position.⁷⁷

In his autobiography, Williams recounts how he reconciled Methodist doctrine with his support for homosexual causes. When he was a young pastor, he had come under the sway of Liberation theology, a South American movement led by nuns and priests who were committed to social justice and worked for bottom-up solutions.⁷⁸ In Williams's interpretation and practice, the clergy had an obligation to augment the voices of grassroots activism. They had to act as intermediaries between social justice advocates and those holding institutional power. Williams's

reformist attitude was manifested not only in how the church addressed the rights of the dispossessed but also in the way he approached the symbolism of the church's physical space. He was less interested in upholding the traditional aspects of churchgoing than in expanding the notion of how people could use a church space. For example, in 1967 he removed the large wooden cross in front of the sanctuary to symbolically remove doctrinal and social barriers to entry.

By that time, Williams had adopted a hippie image to suit his message of personal spiritual quest and sociopolitical change. He grew his hair in the "afro" style, wore an African dashiki instead of the clerical robe, conducted spiritual unions between gay men, and introduced gospel music to the Sunday sermon.⁷⁹ Williams's countercultural image, his reformist attitude toward the church's institutional structure, the format of religious sermons, and the expansion of the building's uses created both a powerful personal brand and an increased following for the church during the 1960s and subsequent decades. However, in some respects, it also authorized a view of moral reform that was still top-down, particularly where CRH political advocacy on behalf of Tenderloin's gay youth was concerned.

In 1966 the Glide Foundation published *The Tenderloin Ghetto: The Young Reject in Our Society*, a report on the conditions of poverty and marginalization of gay youth in the area. The document was influential in urban reformers' advocacy for the designation of the Tenderloin as a zone of "urban blight."⁸⁰ The authors' argument that the area and its queer denizens needed to be reformed echoed the language and argument about the sociocultural roots of racialized poverty in the controversial Moynihan Report on black neighborhoods in American cities published by the US Department of Labor one year earlier. Left intellectual circles criticized Moynihan's analysis of the conditions of poverty in those neighborhoods in terms of pathologies, such as the lack of male-headed households purportedly leading to youth crime and social and psychological stagnation. However, the Moynihan Report still influenced liberal reformers, including members of the Tenderloin Committee, which was founded in 1966 to secure funds from the War on Poverty for social programs in the neighborhood. A significant aspect of the published material about social life in the Tenderloin was its strategic erasure of racial diversity. This material presented the Tenderloin as a "white ghetto" (this was the original title of the Glide Foundation report, though it was later changed). The report highlighted statistics that corroborated that assertion—though only including permanent residents—placing it within the racialized language that urban reformers ordinarily used to describe the social and spatial conditions in African American neighborhoods.

The Tenderloin Ghetto described the neighborhood as "notorious for prostitution, drunkenness, newsstands selling trashy pulp magazines, pimping, pill pushing, robbing and rolling, shoplifting, and other misbehavior."⁸¹ It proposed the establishment of new programs that aimed to utilize community resources—a goal that up to this point was consistent with Liberation theology—in order to

help (in the authors' words) "these outcasts of society, these young people who are unloved and unwanted because they don't seem to fit into society's general idea of productive citizenship."⁸² The invocation of citizenship is notable in this context because it clarified the reformers' intention to assimilate the "wayward Tenderloin youth" into an inclusive community of national subjects. Latent in the report's broader narrative was that inclusion could extend to homosexuals as long as they became "productive," in the sense of contributing to heterosexual society at large. The argument offered no space for the emergence of insurgent citizenship, in the sense of creating, to quote James Holston, "a counterpolitics that destabilizes the present and renders it fragile." Instead, Glide authors effectively endorsed the power of government to shape and control the lives of citizens, contrary to what one might expect from those with a stated commitment to bottom-up liberation.

Glide partnered with Central City, an organization representing the Tenderloin and part of the area South of Market Street (SoMa) that sought official designation by the San Francisco Economic Opportunity Council (SFEOC) as a Target Area for War on Poverty federal funds.⁸³ Toward that end, in their effort to establish the systemic causes of poverty in the Tenderloin, material produced by Glide and Central City, both jointly and as separate entities, presented Tenderloin youth as a categorically distinct group whose identity was based on homosexuality, resulting in marginalization, poverty, and drug affliction. This logic emphasized racial divisions within the newly constructed sociopolitical category of homosexuality. The homophile movement's whiteness was already a subject of debate at that time, and in succeeding decades the racial politics of gay liberation has been a significant source of conflict in queer coalition-building.⁸⁴ Everyday reality did not fully support commentators' overwhelming emphasis on whiteness in the neighborhood.⁸⁵ Still, some programs implemented during that time paved the way for necessary social infrastructures, such as community health clinics and free meal services. Nevertheless, *The Tenderloin Ghetto* framed the problems of poverty and marginalization in the area in a way that left out preexisting networks of support and relationships of kinship among Tenderloin queens and gay youth.

Failure to discuss those networks opened the way to erasing them, together with the physical environment that supported them. "Ghetto removal" efforts had already resulted in the displacement of thousands of San Francisco residents, primarily black and Asian, and their neighborhood cultural institutions.⁸⁶ In this light, the insistence of Central City advocates that their goal was to empower existing residents to develop their own support structures provided fodder for violent urban renewal. If the Tenderloin were a ghetto, what would prevent the wholesale removal of its people, as recent historical precedent suggested? The *San Francisco Chronicle*, which reached an audience far greater than that of the reports produced by Central City initiatives, reported on them and picked up on representations of the Tenderloin's physical environment in dystopian terms, characterizing the

neighborhood as a “dark spot” at the center of the otherwise picturesque city by the bay.⁸⁷

Glide and Central City’s portrayals of the Tenderloin were consistent with how many others viewed the Tenderloin: an area of rampant drug abuse, contributing to anomie and homelessness. In 1967, one year after the publication of *The Tenderloin Ghetto*, the Board of Directors of the Central City Target Area Action group published another report, *Drugs in the Tenderloin*.⁸⁸ It contained almost no verifiable quantitative data; instead, its narrative relied on the editors’ synthesis of what their interviewees said about their drug use and experiences in the neighborhood. Anonymized interviewees’ quotes were printed with little commentary in the body of the report, except for the framing provided by a three-page foreword and some statistical information (though without citations) before listing the informant quotes. The foreword uses metaphors and poetic language that reveal a heavy editorial hand, which also manifested in how quotes that ranged from a few lines to over one page long were edited, ordered, and juxtaposed.⁸⁹

The report’s description of the physical environment dispelled any romantic notions about their living condition from the get-go. The foreword shared the perspective of a “young addict,” who says that “when you cross over to the Tenderloin, it’s like walking into another room,”⁹⁰ a description that suggests a mixing of public and private spaces. And while the report’s editors sometimes expressed radical acceptance of alternative cultures, they also describe the Tenderloin as a troublesome domestic space:

The Boy-Girls shriek at one another up and down and across the street. The not-too-distant roar of motorcycles blends with the falsetto in an amazing harmony. A drunk lies in the gutter waiting for the Paddy wagon to take him home. Look at the 10 × 12 rooms filled with trash, strewn clothes and sleeping bodies. (Sometimes it’s hard to say which is which).⁹¹

The evocative prose—visual, auditory, and olfactory—reads sensorially.

The section titled “Magnitude of the Problem” that follows the foreword estimates that a thousand queer drug users lived in the area, and notes that the authors had presented a draft to “persons involved in the Tenderloin drug market” for them to provide comment before publication, suggesting some vetting and reflection from interlocutors who were also thinking about collective experience.⁹² The report’s main goals were to demonstrate the pain that drugs cause to individuals, thus building the capacity for empathy, and to understand the social and cultural currents that pulled young people into their vortex. On the one hand, drugs were associated with distinct countercultural lifestyles. (This had long been true, though by the late 1960s, there was a more distinct association of this counterculture with hippie communes in Haight-Ashbury and the Summer of Love in 1967.)⁹³ For young runaways arriving in the Tenderloin, selling drugs was one of the few

moneymaking activities available, and using was a shared experience. But drug users were also victimized and, to some extent, vilified. Using became the subject of intense debates about the limits of escapism, social bonding, and assimilation.⁹⁴

Drugs in the Tenderloin revealed varied rationales for drug use. One comment, ostensibly rewritten by the report's editors, described drugs as a form of escapism, noting that "the 'trip' or 'high' period of drug influence distorts reality almost to the point of nonexistence."⁹⁵ Considering the physical and social conditions of poverty and violence described earlier, the appeal of such distortion is easy to understand. Other informants spoke of their curiosity to taste the "forbidden fruit" of drugs as additional motivation. And a personal anecdote described the relationships forged in the hardships of navigating "hustling and scuffling" as "a common bond of destitution." This expressed a broader sociopolitical worldview. "Be a dope fiend and you have a minimal responsibility for what society is," the interviewee explained.⁹⁶ "You look at the people on the street, hating what they are (good citizens) and revel in the secret knowledge that they hate what you are (dope fiend)." Note how the interviewee legitimize his/her/their existence by claiming a political space that was antithetical to the "good citizen" concept put forth by *The Tenderloin Ghetto*. That sentiment was not unlike those of the queens who vied for the window booths at Compton's Cafeteria—a place where they could see and be seen—and protested police attempts to delegitimize their presence. Regardless of the ways different interviewees talked about their experiences, a standard assessment of their accounts in the report was that drug use, in the end, contributed to dire everyday conditions in the Tenderloin.

However, the Tenderloin was not just a set of sounds and images but, for the young people who lived there, a set of enacted relationships that determined their day-to-day survival both as individuals and as a group. The urgency of their needs meant that larger debates about the limits of advocacy had to coexist and often take a back seat to seeking government recognition of their struggles and institutional support. Glide and Central City's advocacy did result in the neighborhood's inclusion as a Target Area for War on Poverty funds, which only lasted for a few years, but were instrumental in the establishment of Hospitality House, a drop-in community center that offered food and activities for homeless youth founded in 1967. Hospitality House, which is still active in the Tenderloin, initially operated from a space above a gay club on Turk Street and later offered more programming, mainly focused on the arts, in other spaces. Glide continued to offer services for homeless youth, such as free meals and drop-in advising, throughout that and subsequent decades. However, as a counterreading of the reports produced during this time reveals, relationships among queer youth forged on the street and in SRO rooms held the promise of reimagining citizenship from a subaltern perspective. This view of citizenship centers countermainstream symbolic and material acts denoting membership to a queer community with its own ethical codes and

community obligations. These obligations were not toward nonprofits, government institutions, nor the broader community of national citizens. Queer grassroots activism between 1966 and 1968 offers some evidence that efforts toward this kind of citizenship coexisted with attempts to reform Tenderloin street life.

VANGUARD ACTS OF CITIZENSHIP

Jean-Paul Marat, a pseudonym inspired by the assassinated French revolutionary, was credited as one of the principal researchers of *Drugs in the Tenderloin*, and many of the report's interviewees shared the ideas and perspectives promoted by Vanguard, a short-lived but influential queer group of which Marat had been president. Founded in 1966, Vanguard was a grassroots organization by and for queer Tenderloin youth, who met in the basement of Glide Memorial Church to organize as a group that opposed their marginalization, victimization, and exploitation by the police, local business owners, and heterosexual society more broadly. At its height in 1966 it had approximately 25–30 members.⁹⁷ Vanguard used impassioned rhetoric to draw attention to social neglect and the pursuit of rights, though its members seem to have had competing priorities as they conceptualized citizenship rights. The group oscillated between assimilation on the one hand and leveraging “dope” friendships, as the report put it, on the other. Such friendships sought to enact alternative social structures inspired by revolutionary movements such as the Black Panthers, who were founded in Oakland also in 1966. Those conflicts showed up in *Drugs in the Tenderloin*, and they also were reflected in articles published in the group's magazine.⁹⁸

There are competing accounts of what the name Vanguard meant. Adrian Ravarour, a former Mormon priest and trained dancer who moved to the El Rosa in his mid-twenties to live with his partner—there, he became a gay organizer—claims that he came up with the name. It referred, he said, to a radical break with traditional movement in modern avant-garde dance.⁹⁹ Based on the literature produced under Vanguard's aegis, however, the name references Leninist political thought: the Bolshevik Party was known as the original vanguard party.¹⁰⁰ The *Vanguard* magazine's first five issues made clear that Vanguard's overarching goal, at least in the beginning, was the development of working-class consciousness. This transcended the categorical boundaries of sexual identity constructed by Central City reformers, without Vanguard members directly antagonizing them in print (though there is some evidence that was the case during public debates). Vanguard's attention to class issues blurred the binary of assimilation-separatism that has been prevalent in the modern homosexual movement.

Marat was especially interested in learning from the ongoing struggles of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, with which he found several affinities, especially

regarding how Black Panther leaders understood class conflict.¹⁰¹ In the first issue of *Vanguard* in 1966, Marat addressed the readers as “citizens of the Central City Area,” whom, he said, were being exploited by “many of the middle-class small businessmen” in the area.¹⁰² Among the exploiters, Marat listed “the slum landlord who charges fantastic rents for one-room hovels,” grocery store owners who charge high prices, “dope pushers,” and “the ‘upstanding middle-class citizen’ who, because of his hypocritical attitude, has caused the hustlers of the meat rack to sell their bodies to him to make a living, because he won’t employ them, for various irrational reasons.”¹⁰³

Marat’s analysis of the conditions of exploitation resonated with 1960s radical Left politics, including national civil rights uprisings and, more locally, in experiments with participatory democracy in Berkeley. Marat identified the city’s “corrupt power structure” as the main target of his pointed critique and ascribed class characteristics to this power structure. “Start Protesting the Middle-Class Bureaucracy That Rules This City,” he urged the readers. His call for political organizing did not end with Tenderloin youth. He concluded that article with an appeal for broader coalitions with “elderly residents” to “make something” of the area where they all lived together.

Marat and other *Vanguard* activists quickly realized the power of local media to help them further their cause. Joel Roberts, a key early *Vanguard* organizer, described how the organization entered public consciousness. They called Channel Seven, a local news station, as well as radio stations to “say, hey, gay kids on Market Street are having a demonstration” and “you’d better get down there.”¹⁰⁴ People were so used to thinking of residents, he said, as “the quiet oppressed minority of mentally ill criminals—the liberals thought we were mentally ill and the conservatives thought we were criminals, so we got busted either way,” so “the shock value alone was worth selling products behind it.” Roberts added that Channel Four reported on their activities and they even had opportunities to be photographed and talk to journalists from out of town. It was not uncommon for the media to cover the counterculture: in 1967 and 1968, for example, much attention was directed at Haight-Ashbury. But where this later movement was often depicted with sensationalizing editorials by outsiders, *Vanguard* was resolved to control the narrative about their own lives and sociopolitical demands.

For example, Marat announced in the first issue of *Vanguard* that he would provide members with a signed letter “on official stationery . . . stating their function(s) as official representatives of the organization,” due to problems that surfaced with misrepresentation of the group’s demands and priorities from people outside the Tenderloin.¹⁰⁵ The group also provided their own interpretation of the meaning and objectives of public demonstrations. For example, in the second issue of *Vanguard* in October 1966, two photographs accompanied the announcement of “Market Street Sweep,” an activist performance that took place sometime

that fall. The text next to the photographs explicitly linked Vanguard's politics to other radical movements of the 1960s while identifying "the street" as their proper political arena:

A "clean sweep" will be made on Market Street, not by the POLICE, but by the street people who are often the object of police harassment. The drug addicts, pill-heads, teenage hustlers, lesbians, and homosexuals who make San Francisco's "Meat Rack" their home, are tired of living in the midst of the filth thrown out onto the sidewalks and into the streets by nearby businessmen . . . This VANGUARD demonstration indicates the willingness of society's outcasts to work openly for an improvement in their own social-economic power. WE HAVE HEARD TO[O] MUCH ABOUT "WHITE POWER" and "BLACK POWER" SO GET READY TO HEAR ABOUT "STREET POWER."¹⁰⁶

The small group of young people, at least one of whom was in drag, protesting with brooms in hand, used the language of cleanliness to legitimize their demands, a language that presumably resonated with the action's intended middle-class audience. The depiction of "street people" as responsible and contributing members of society fell under the working-class citizenship framework that Marat and other *Vanguard* editors used to articulate rights claims. Moreover, transposing a domestic activity into the public laid symbolic and material claims to the neighborhood. The entanglement of the youth's demands for their rights and their attempt to foster a shared urban culture by defining a homosexual working-class identity in opposition to the rest of "bourgeois" society, as Marat put it in *Vanguard*, was an important early indication of the discontinuities and contradictions in the leaps between scales of action and analysis in subsequent homosexual social movements.

Vanguard's activities took place, both materially and symbolically, in the urban sphere, where members cultivated relationships with Glide and other like-minded organizations. To Marat and other *Vanguard* contributors, the street was the space to properly inhabit the Tenderloin. Editorials in the magazine analyzed the conditions of exploitation that their authors identified as root causes of the dire living conditions of Tenderloin youth. At the same time, the first five issues of *Vanguard* (before the magazine moved with its editor, Keith St. Clair, outside the Tenderloin and no longer represented the organization) depicted the physical environment as a grid of aesthetic experiences that enabled a complex set of relationships to emerge. This framing was similar to the performative aesthetics of poverty and drug use in *Drugs in the Tenderloin*. In the period between 1966 and 1970, the way in which homosexual and gender-nonconforming young people envisioned their rights as working-class citizens in the Tenderloin was in concert with representations of the neighborhood's environment by urban reformers associated with Central City antipoverty initiatives. However, the aesthetics of poverty expressed in everyday life that made queer identities legible also foreclosed possibilities for creating spaces outside the norms of urban rehabilitation.

The urban queer aesthetics of Tenderloin street life maintained the promise of insurgent politics and their associated cultures. These cultures came to life in a poetry section of early *Vanguard* issues. Poetic representations of street life revealed, even more strongly than Marat's impassioned rhetoric, the potential of the environment to inform queer struggles. They did so by producing particular queer embodiments based on everyday experiences, mental states of being, and imagined futures. Mark Miller's poem "The City" followed the press release for the Market Street "Clean Sweep." Miller presented the city through a list of active verbs: "Boosing, / Cruising; / Loosing. / Falling into suitcase nightmares / walking, / talking / midnight sun sign / lustre-dent / 'love for a ticket' / but my mon-eys spent."¹⁰⁷ The poem's protagonist is not stationary, waiting for "tomorrow" to come. Instead, their activities are situated in the present. Though seemingly aimless and without a clear direction or destination (the Midnight Sun, likely a gay bar, was too expensive to provide momentary respite), the character's walk recreates the conditions of their existence in the urban environment through alcohol, sex, losing suitcases, and casual conversations. It is the fleeting moments of cross-class socialization and recognition of queer people's shared needs for friendship, companionship, and sex that hold the promise of alternative, queer social structures.¹⁰⁸

For all its visibility during this period of early queer organizing, *Vanguard* was very short-lived, operating as an organization for little more than a year.¹⁰⁹ Still, some of the gay youth who moved out of the Tenderloin by the end of the decade carried ideas of countercultural group consciousness with them. For example, St. Claire, who published *Vanguard*, moved near Haight-Ashbury at the epicenter of hippie counterculture in the end of the 1960s. He continued to publish the magazine, which by 1970 was aligned more with free love and spiritual pursuits than the gay liberation movement. Among other things, later issues presented reports on alternative spiritual practices and psychedelic drugs. Although the Tenderloin still appeared sporadically as the backdrop of some featured stories and interviews, the focus shifted from urban public space toward individual spiritual explorations.

Many *Vanguard* members and the people whose interviews were published in *Drugs in the Tenderloin* described living in the neighborhood as a sequence of emotive aesthetic experiences: drug trips, living in crowded rooms, and having sex, for instance. Although a variety of queer cultures coexisted in the Tenderloin and their characteristics should not be conflated, both individual and group actions emphasized the need to legitimize emergent urban cultures on their own terms and take responsibility for the maintenance of public space. To the extent that *Vanguard*'s project of uniting homosexual and other working-class people in the Tenderloin made successful claims to the spaces where they lived, it called attention to inequalities created by differentiated citizenship based on homosexual marginalization. The queens and *Vanguard* members articulated their claims to the spaces they created in the Tenderloin out of necessity, by invoking the

rhetoric of safety and cleanliness. In this way, they pushed against the entrenched privileges of normative citizen-subjects in the context of contemporary urbanity. This form of urban queer citizenship, the insurgent elements of which were only partially realized, competed with other approaches toward establishing the basis of political rights and cultural identity over the next four decades.

The emergence of shared cultures is indispensable to articulating goals in the sphere of politics. Their characteristics in this chapter's spaces were articulated formally through the aesthetics of urban space, architecture, public performance, and even poetry. The claims that Tenderloin queens and gay youth made to the use of spaces in the Tenderloin reveal that their perceived rights and obligations derived from living in the city.¹¹⁰ These included the right to inhabit the public realm in drag, and receive service in local businesses in return for the obligation to maintain that environment, including the always busy sidewalks. This form of citizenship did not yet construct or depend on fixed sexual and gender identities, as did those spearheaded by urban gay and lesbian political movements in the following decades. However, it did have distinct aesthetic characteristics that informed insurgent "acts of citizenship" like the riot at Compton's. The modernity exuded by the diner—its glass facade, Formica furniture, linoleum flooring—symbolized the modern, respectful image that the queens fashioned within the confines of the intersection.

The characters in this story moved through the dense Tenderloin district, meeting each other there, joined by similar social and material conditions. In the four-year period between 1966 and 1970, they passed through El Rosa, socialized at Compton's, and organized politically at Glide. As everyday hardships in the neighborhood had to be addressed immediately and on an ongoing basis, there was a sense of urgency among queer residents and denizens. The need for structural changes that began during those years did not cease to exist in the following decade. However, as the next chapter will show, the priorities of major gay and lesbian subgroups in San Francisco began to change, moving toward single-issue urban politics and mainstream assimilation of the most visible characteristics of their cultures.