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# **Homeless subjects and the chance of space**

***A more-than-human geography of homelessness in Turin***

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Michele Lancione

*Thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D. in the Department of Geography,  
Durham University*

July 2011

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# Abstract

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This work is based upon an ethnographic enquiry in Turin, North-West of Italy, to interrogate homelessness as a subjective condition that emerges from the entanglements of the individual and the city. Arguing that canonical framings of homelessness do not take into full consideration the nuances that intervene between homeless people and the mechanosphere of the city, this work develops a detailed theoretical and empirical investigation of the more-than-human relations through which homeless subjects emerge. Three research questions are pursued: the first two investigating how subjects are constituted in the process of being and becoming homeless individuals, and the third questioning how the public and private institutions that provide service to homeless people actually open or close opportunities to them. The concept of *chance of space* has been developed to sustain the hypothesis that city's space offers infinite potentialities to homeless subjects, which however are constantly codified and normalized by the discursive and relational powers consciously and unconsciously at work in the urban fabric. The research questions have been tackled through an in-deep ethnographic investigation developed in three long chapters, which lead to theoretical and political outcomes.

This work shows that interrogating homelessness in a more-than-human fashion a world of multiples subjects emerges, with various attitudes, capabilities, relational and affective characterizations. It opens the door to the recognition of spatial chances that might lead, if recognized and enacted, to enrich homeless subjects' perspectives. Accordingly, a critique of the mainstream normative approach on homelessness is developed, arguing in favour of new political stances that extend the validity of this enquiry beyond Turin's case. What is claimed is the necessity to take seriously the entanglements between space, time and the homeless subject; to advocate a right to difference and consequently to differentiated interventions; and to challenge the rigidity of certain urban contexts in order to enact homeless people own capabilities.

“I can point to one or two things I have definitely learned by being hard up. I shall never again think that all tramps are drunken scoundrels, nor expect a beggar to be grateful when I give him a penny, nor be surprised if men out of work lack energy, nor subscribe to the Salvation Army, nor pawn my clothes, nor refuse a handbill, nor enjoy a meal at a smart restaurant. That is a beginning”.

(George Orwell, “Down and out in Paris and London”, Penguin, 2001 [1933]:253-254)

*Estragon*: What do we do now?

*Vladimir*: While waiting.

*E*: While waiting.

*Silence*.

*V*: We could do our exercises.

*E*: Our movements.

*V*: Our elevations.

*E*: Our relaxations.

*V*: Our elongations.

*E*: Our relaxations.

*V*: To warm us up.

*E*: To calm us down.

*V*: Off we go.

(Samuel Beckett, “Waiting for Godot: A Tragicomedy in Two Acts”, Faber and Faber, 1998 [1953]:Act 2)

“The road to hell is paved with good intention”

(Madonna, feat. Justin Timberlake, “4 Minutes”, Warner Bros., 2007)

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---

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The author has taken all the photos.

# Note on ethnographies

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The material presented in this work has been gained with different ethnographic methods. As explained in Chapter 3, in the field I always carried with me a tape recorder and several notebooks, using them in accordance to the environments and the situations. In the text I reported directed speeches using the following scheme: (Name, Month, Year, Kind) – where the kind of the material presented can be of the following three forms:

- TI – Taped Interview: semi-structured interview or free chat that has been reordered and transcribed;
- WI – Written Interview: semi-structured interview that has been precisely reported;
- SN – Sketched Note: post-field note, which have been used only when the maximum degree of fidelity with the original speech could be provided.

The names of homeless individuals have been changed to protect their privacy.

The author has translated all the material from the original language (Italian) into English.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

---

### 1.1 Feeling homelessness

*Somewhere, sometime in my childhood*

*My mum:* Hurry up! We're late. We're going to wait for your uncle at the train station.

*Me:* Which uncle?

*Mum:* I already told you, you should remember him!

*Me:* But where has he been until now?

*Mum:* ... He has been traveling around. Sometimes here, sometimes there. Hurry now!

*Me:* But why has he being traveling? He has not got a house like us? Why he has not stayed with grandpa?

*Mum:* I told you. They had a fight, so your uncle went away. Now stop asking questions and get dressed!

*Me:* But if we fight you won't send me away, right?

*Bucharest, 28 December 2003*

The first time I got in touch with Florian I was trying to buy a ticket in the metro, in Bucharest. The employee at the ticket box did not understand English at all, and my Rumanian was still too poor (I

had been there no more than two weeks). Florian helped me and explained which deal was best for my travel needs. He could speak Italian, as well as Spanish and a bit of French as, although just 24 years old at the time, he had already worked and studied

abroad. Since that day I'd been seeing him more or less every morning, panhandling

in the wagon of the metro, and we became acquainted. One day, just after Christmas, I went to him with a small present and he invited me to see his home. He was living, as many



others, in a subterranean square room heated by the passage of some hot pipes (later I understood that those were rooms aimed at the technical control and repair of the remote heating system of the city).

I went down the manhole with him, and in the darkness I met other people laying on some dirty mattresses among rubbish and mud (in some ways they had managed to have electricity down there, so I could see almost everything). Florian told me that he was hoping to find a better place to stay, but that it was almost impossible to find enough money to rent a place for him and his friends. Saying this he was holding in his hand a small plastic bag filled with Aurolac, a Romanian brand of synthetic colorant that, if inhaled as him and many others were usually doing, produces mild hallucinogenic effects.

### *Turin, a cold rainy afternoon in November 2009*

I was walking on a sidewalk with Antonio, one of the first homeless people that I've met in the street. The sidewalk was tiny, so I was walking in front of him, without any particular direction to follow. As I would have done a lot of time during the months of my fieldwork, I was just walking, breathing and listening more to the street than to Antonio. That day in particular he was quite silent – he said because of the weather. *"When the rain comes"*, he explained, *"my right heel hurts. And I don't feel like doing anything at all"*. At one point, we were still walking, nobody around us, I felt him stopping behind me. I stopped too, I turned in his direction and asked:

*"So, what's going on?"*

*"Look"*, he replied.

Between us there was just an empty space, a small portion of sidewalk. *"What should*

*I see, Antonio? There is nothing here"*, I said looking at him and pointing with my hand at the ground. *"You are crazy"*, he answered. Then he bent down, put something in his pocket, and told me: *"Let's go now"*. I looked at the ground, seeing the same empty space as before, and we kept on walking without a precise destination.

At the time I'm writing this work up, more than one year has passed from that afternoon in Turin, one year that I've spent thinking at things like the one that happened there. Whatever I have understood, my aim is to let it move among the pages that are going to follow.



Homelessness has been at the centre of my personal and academic concern for a while, as the vignettes above show. What has always intrigued me, in the story of my uncle (who is now the proud father of three pestiferous children), of the Rumanian street kids (the subject of my bachelor degree thesis), or the homeless people that I've met in my travels, is that being homelessness is *nuance*. Homeless

people have always surprised me for the skills, tricks, thoughts, affective dimensions (both positive and negative), and connections that they have in their street lives. These are all aspects, however, barely acknowledged in the popular and academic writing on homelessness. Although I'm not a Catholic, I was born and raised in a Catholic country where I've learned that homeless people are *the* poor, deprived and unskilled. The media taught me the same lesson, and the academic literature I've encountered in later years, although with differences, was not able to fully express the nuances that I was feeling encountering them. Starting from these premises, the major aim of this work is to fill the blank spots that are present in the ways through which homelessness is thought, depicted, and tackled, and to sketch a new way of how to approach it both theoretically/methodologically and politically.

The reasons that have driven the making of this research are essentially three. Firstly, although it is very difficult (and might be contradictory too) to measure the homelessness phenomenon, it is certain that in the last decade it is numerically increased (at least in Europe). This has mainly been due to the enlargement of the European Union (EU), to the economical crises, and to the relevant waves of immigration that have interested certain EU's countries (i.e. Feantsa, 2003; 2008). EU welfare's system; EU immigration's policy; local social aid; local multicultural issues... are just few of the possible levels of interrelation between the emergence of homelessness and the political, social and cultural spheres of the European continent. Homelessness is hence a factual issue in Europe, about which there is the necessity to know more, and to know differently, in order to confront it adequately.

Secondly, homelessness has gained more and more an urban characterization. This poses a whole set of issues concerning the management of cities, not only from an economical but also from a social and cultural point of view. How should the "issue" of homelessness be managed in a general urban framework characterized by the progressive withdrawal of the public sector and the increasing dominance of the private one? How should homelessness be managed in a political and social climate of increasing intolerance and fear toward the "stranger"? To understand better how homelessness is constituted, produced and reproduced at its own level (the street), is hence of pivotal importance to answer to those questions without being driven by pre-assumption or, worse, by popular emotionalisms.

Thirdly, it is worth to interrogate ourselves – as academics – on this widely studied issue because something is still missing from our understanding of it. This work does not argue that the knowledge produced until now is not useful, but suggests that there is the necessity to move further, to go where no one (or few) had previously been before. A lot has been written about the economical causes of homelessness and its macro-political responses (as social housing), but too little has been said about the constitution and the dynamics of homelessness at the street level (where it actually happens). This last point is particularly true especially in relation to the issue of homeless people's subjectivity. We know too little, in fact, about how those subjectivities are produced and reproduced in the daily encounter with the street: how are the perspectives, feelings, beliefs, projects and desires of homeless people built in the more-than-human world of the street, and how is this relevant for the issue of homelessness itself?

The aim of this research is to understand how homeless people's subjectivity is constituted in (and with) the urban, sustaining the hypothesis that only looking within these entanglements is possible to grasp the subjective nuances of homeless people's lives (which are considered the missing point in the current knowledge about homelessness). Theorizing homelessness as a more-than-human encounter that takes place in codified street's contexts (Chapter 2), investigating, through an opportune methodological approach (Chapter 3), how the subjectivities of homelessness are relationally constituted in the event of becoming (Chapter 4) or being (Chapter 5) an homeless person, and describing the central aspects of the discourses and powers within which those relations are soaked (Chapter 6), had lead this work firstly to a major theoretical/methodological reflection on the issue of homelessness (Chapter 7), and secondly to an advocacy for a political turn that can concretely challenge the ways through which homelessness has been canonically approached (Chapter 8). The work presented here is based on a ten months intensive fieldwork that took place in Turin, Italy, were I've done in-deep ethnographical work with 7 individuals, interviewed educators, social assistant and volunteers, and collected numerous homeless people's life-stories (for an introduction to the fieldwork, see Chapter 3).

Two of the most important contributors to the literature on the matter have pointed out almost two decades ago that: "Like people everywhere, the homeless must eat, sleep, eliminate, make ends meet, and carve out a sense of meaning and

self respect. The homeless, however, must attend to these survival requisites without the resources and social-support structures that most of us take for granted” (Snow & Anderson, 1993:40). The work presented here is about those things, about how they happen: through which entanglements with the urban world, and most importantly with what kind of effects on homeless people. The aim of this first chapter is to show why such view is perceived as important, and to set the ground for the approach proposed.

## **1.2 Studying homelessness**

In the latter 30 years there has been a proliferation of data and studies on what can be called, in a foucauldian way, the “economy of homelessness” – hence the “knowledge of all the processes related to population in its larger sense” (Foucault, 2000:216-217). The knowledge produced has been of various kinds and cannot be reduced to one category nor can be understood as serving to one and only form of governmentality: starting from the systematic works that have been done at the beginning of the previous century (and even before) on tramps, hobos and similar figures till the last very specific accounts on homeless life, it is really easy to get lost and very difficult to keep track of what have been written (for a review, see: Fitzpatrick, Kemp, & Klinker, 2000; Henslin, 1993; Klinker & Fitzpatrick, 2000; Klodawsky & Blomley, 2009; 2010; Snow & Mulchay, 2001; Sommer, 2001). This burden of works ranges from topics like “the causes of homelessness”, or the “gender differences among homelessness” to very specific focus on the housing stock or, for instance, the victimization of homeless people. The most frequent thematics (which are summarized in fig.1.1, based on the finding of Klinker & Fitzpatrick, 2000) are related to accommodation and housing issues; to the definition of the concept of “homelessness”; and to the health and the needs of homeless people.

Fig.1.1 Tag-cloud with the most frequent thematic discussed in homelessness' literature



Source: Graphical elaboration of the author from Klinker & Fitzpatrick (2000)

From a “geographical” point of view there are two extremes within which the literature moves. As Takahashi pointed out: “while many geographers subscribe to structural explanations for the contemporary rise in homelessness, there are a significant number of social scientists who believe that individual vulnerabilities or deficits constitute the primary cause” (Takahashi, 1996:295). In the geographical literature there is hence a clear distinction between “macro” and “micro” approaches upon the matter, which poses, from the point of view of this work, two sets of problematic. The firsts are related to the definitions and categorizations of the homeless world, and the second to the epistemological and methodological frameworks chosen to approach homelessness (which can be divided in at least four categories: macro approaches; disease model; life-career approach; punitive framework approach).

Concerning the first set of problematic aspects, (almost) every research on homelessness starts with a definition of what is homelessness and who are homeless people. The literature defines lots of different situations in which an individual might be defined as homeless but generally those situations are the ones that refer to “the lack of a right or access to their own secure and minimally adequate housing space” (Bramley, 1988:26). Moreover, homelessness has also been defined looking at other factors that go beyond the mere housing problem.

Homelessness, in this view, it “is not a purely housing-based concept, but has significant emotional, social and psychological dimensions” (Fitzpatrick, Kemp, & Klinker, 2000; see also Somerville, 1992). An example of the possible ways to define this phenomenon is that of Ravenhill (2008), when she points out that an homeless person might be defined as roofless; houseless; precariously housed; part of an homeless community; or simply a street users. Although in a certain perspective these definitions are perhaps true, this work does not agree with them and also does not propose a strict definition of homelessness. The reasons are two.

The first is that defining something implies always a certain degree of immobility. If, for instance, we would set a very strict definition of what does it mean to be “roofless”, we would not be able to take into account those situations where someone is between “homelessness” and “rooflessness”. Moreover, we would not be able to track the changes that lag in the process between one definition and the other and, even more importantly, to understand *how* different people experience them. The second point is connected with the first: definitions contain also a certain degree of hierarchy. How and who decide if it is “better” (or more socially acceptable) to be roofless or homeless? This might sound as a silly question, but it carries relevant political meanings. In this sense, this work arguments not only against strict and precise definitions of what are “homeless people”, but against all that set of classifications that do not allow to understand how things are produced, but only label, organize, and categorize them (for an example of those, see McNaught & Bhugra, 1996). This approach is widely used in the literature on homelessness. For instance, Ravenhill (2008) constructs at least 13 different sub-cultures of the homeless culture (the street drinking, the clown, the drug-addicted, the day-centre groupies, the intermittent participants, the homeless at heart, etc.), and Barnao (2004), a wide-known Italian sociologist in the field of homelessness studies, defines at least 8 different groups of homeless people (drug addicted, drinkers, drug seller, etc.). The problem posed by these classifications is that those groups are made by individuals whom subjectivity changes and is recast on a daily basis. How can we be able to see changes, to grasp them, if we are either looking at the street’s word through those limited spectrum or classifying everything in such a strict way? In other words, we should be aware of the fact that “absolute truths about homelessness and homeless people do not exist [...] because there is no discrete phenomenon to study” (Pleace, 1998:57) and that, in a more general fashion, “categories matter. To the extent that routine social life endows them with readily available names, markers, intergroup practices, and internal

connections, categories facilitate unequal treatment by both members and outsiders” (Tilly, 2003:33; Tilly, 2000; 2001).

Rejecting any strict categorization, this work argues for the recognition of the differences and shadows within “homeless people” and of the strategies of survival and adaptation are so eclectic and various that it makes no sense to label them. Coherently with this position, while seeking for the people to include in the case-study this research adopted a weak and wide understanding of homelessness (namely: people that did not have a house, or that got only a temporary accommodation, or that were street users, or that were shifting between these points) – but after that moment it did not harness these people with any particular category or concept. Rather, the approach has been to get close to an individual for what he/she was in his/her daily life – a man or woman living in the street, doing stuff on the street, and letting the street doing stuff on him/her. This way of proceeding has opened up the possibility to see things as they were happening, leaving the chance open for (even sudden) changes.

Concerning the second set of problematic aspects, there are at least four common epistemological and methodological frameworks chosen to approach homelessness which pose issues that need to be overcome.

The first concerns the so-called “structuralist” approach. Structural approaches to homelessness “focus on two interconnected trends: rising economic marginality and shrinking affordable shelter resources” (Takahashi, 1996:291). These approaches correlate “macro” variables with the condition of homelessness, mostly trying to detect both why one might become homeless and what is the (numerical) size of this issue. These contributions range from works that correlate labour market trends with homelessness (for example relating unemployment and homelessness – e.g. Rossi, 1989); to other that focus specifically on housing issues (as for instance the lack of affordable housing, Doherty & Edgard, 2001; Ellwood & Summers, 1986; Swanstrom, 1989). Similarly, other focus on the correlation between welfare systems and homelessness (e.g. Anderson, 2004) or urban marginalities in a more general fashion (Murie & Musterd, 2004; Musterd, 2006, 2008; Wacquant, 1996, 1999, 2008). For the most part, these contributions are rather structural, seeking to correlate (on a causal basis) macro-dynamics with the life of homeless people (explicit examples are Jenks, 1994; Kemp, Mackay, & Lynch, 2001; Ropers, 1988; Wolch, Dear, & Akita, 1988).

Without neglecting the importance of those studies – particularly in comparative terms – there is a major problem posed by them. This is related to the causal link between the macro and the micro, which is commonly present in these works. This link is problematic precisely because of the distinction, often non-argued, between micro/macro societal realms. Homelessness is hence usually depicted as an issue that arises from macro-economical dynamics that are presented as disconnected from the individual, “above” him or her, as if they were hidden Durkheimian forces that could be understood through their own. In doing so, these approaches usually tell us very few about the individual perspectives, agencies and performances in dealing with such “forces”: the stress is on the structural/macro dynamics rather than on the role played by individuals. This works argue, on the contrary, that “the small always holds the key to the understanding of the big” (Latour, 2001:4) meaning not, with this, to re-produce the distinction between the macro and the micro but to stress that the social is just a sum of uncountable micro, which are positioned at different horizontal length one to the other (Latour, 2005). Without entering in the pernicious distinction between the “structure” and the “individual”, this work claims hence (in a fashion similar to ANT scholars) that there is no micro and no macro, but just a set of elements that interact with each others at different length, elements that in the end could be understood only tracing the relations that exist among them.

In this fashion, since the aim of this work is to observe the dynamics that produce and reproduce homeless people subjectivities in a daily basis in the street, the most logical point-of-departure from which start this enquiry has seemed the street itself. Homelessness, indeed, takes place there, and not in other “hidden”, macro, places. This is simply because those places do not exist, but are just theoretical “vertical” lines of something that actually take place on different horizontal planes. The street is not seen, hence, as a separate, bounded, micro-world, but as the starting point where is possible trace the connections that might also lead to those matters usually conceived as macro (e.g. policies related to social housing; cut in the social expenses; repressive policies toward homelessness; etc.), as, for instance, the empirical data presented in Chapter 6 show. In a word, this work critiques macro and structural approaches since they tend to oversimplify and homogenize the street level, offering few clues concerning its internal (and even external, if such a difference does exist) dynamics, and propose instead to blur the distinction between micro and macro in order to acknowledge the importance of the elements that, relating, actually compose homeless people’s street lives.

The second framework concerns contributions that are specific to certain particular aspects of homeless people's lives. Mainly these contributions are concerned with the health of homeless people, which is a rich field of enquiries both for practitioners (e.g. Croft-White & Rayner, 1999) and scholars. As it has been pointed out: "health is the area of single homeless people's lives that has been best covered in research" (Fitzpatrick, Kemp, & Klinker, 2000:36).

The vast majority of these works can be inscribed into what has been called the "disease model", hence a way to look at homelessness through the disabilities of homeless people (Gowan, 2000). The fundamental assumption at the base of this model is clearly stated by Bhugra: "not all mentally ill are homeless and neither are all homeless mentally ill. However, there is a very clear association between the two" (Bhugra, 1996:xv). Nonetheless, this "clear association" has never really been proved, as the results produced by those researches are highly heterogeneous. As Barnao has shown: "the variability of the estimations produced in those researches is probably linked with the use of definitions (for mental illness, alcoholism, and for drug addiction) and for the different detection methods" (Barnao, 2004:35).

In brief, although this research pays attention to the diseases that homeless people encounter in their daily life, it nonetheless distances from this specific body of literature firstly because of its statistical methodology and secondly because usually, as Snow, Anderson and Koegel (1994) have pointed out, homeless people are studied out of their context without taking street's dynamics into full consideration. Moreover, in a "disease-model" approach the subjectivity of homeless people would be labelled as "ill" from the very beginning, and would be suddenly understood in a framework that moves within the normal and pathological borders: a way-of-seeing that does not leave space for other understandings, other possibilities, other (not normative-pathological) subjectivities (see Chapter 8).

A third problematic approach widely used in enquiries on homelessness is what we can call the "life career approach". This approach is based upon the study of the biography of the individuals from the point of view of their "career" (working career, relational career, moral career - and so on). In sociology "careers" are life trajectories that develop and evolve during time. They "concern the different sphere or dimension by which the existence of human being is made (familiar,

friendly, working, educational, biological)" (Meo, 2000:7). This approach is linked to (and derives from) the study of the "stress management" of individual (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984), hence with individuals' capacity of "coping" with the adversities of life. The intent is to show how an individual – following a certain "career" and coping with the problem of his/her life – becomes a homeless person. "Route maps" – which are, in Ravenhill terms, "brief summary of the individual's life" (Ravenhill, 2008:97) – are constructed for this purpose.

Although this is a commonly used approach in sociological work on homelessness (Chamberlayne, Rustin & Wengraf, 2002; Pavialin, Sosin, Westerfelt, & Matsueda, 1993; Ravenhill, 2008; and, in Italy, Meo, 2000) its usefulness appears far from sufficient. If it is undoubtedly true that it allows to condense lots of information about the life of the individual in a concise and direct form, it does not tell anything about *how* the changes in the careers take place and, moreover, *how* the individual actually "copes" with every different issue. In the point of view proposed here this mode of proceeding leaves out more than it brings in, as it leaves completely apart the relational formation of the individual, hence the study of his/her encounter with the world. Relevant information could be found indeed inside the processes that constitute the career of the individual: how things happened in that way? Through which relational paths? Who and what was involved? These are questions that should be posed in order to investigate homeless people's lives without hurrying in representing them as comfortable – but simplistic – "route maps" (Ravenhill, 2008) or "life journeys" (Chamberlayne, Rustin & Wengraf, 2002). Moreover, with the concept of "career" a lot more is left out: only certain events – usually the most stressful ones – are taken into consideration, with small room for the little, constant, changes of the daily life of the individual.

The fourth and last point is related to the so-called "punitive framework". DeVerteuil, May and Mahs have argued that in geographical terms homelessness has been (and still is) treated from a specific point of view, painting an "escalation of punitive measures against homeless people" (DeVerteuil, May, & Mahs, 2009:647). For these authors this is particularly true in the work of Mike Davis (when he shows the containment of homeless people in a shrinking Skid Row in Low Angeles) (Davis, 1992); Neil Smith and his revanchist city (Smith, 1993; 1996; 1998); and in the "annihilation of homeless people and their geographies" argued by Don Mitchell (Mitchell, 1992), or, by the same author, in the idea of a

“geography of survival”, where homeless people are almost imprisoned within CCTV control, trespass law and various forms of criminalization (Mitchell & Heynen, 2009). The list could be, however, much longer as there are lots of works (within our discipline) that can be assigned to this “punitive framework approach”: from a whole set of enquiries that began in the middle ‘80s – as it is the case of Mair’s analysis of the post-industrial city and homeless people (Mair, 1986) – to nowadays – as it is the case of Berti’s and his description of what he calls “exclusionary practices” (Berti, 2010:839) (an approach that tends to assign a major importance to the “law”, without recognizing either the informal power spread in the daily life of homeless people or their capacity to internalize, and re-working, the formal power of law).

Although the critics of the punitive framework do not want to elude the problem of the control and harassment of homeless people, they “suggest that to frame homeless geographies exclusively in terms of ‘collapse’ is to ignore the increasingly varied and complex geographies of homelessness that characterize the contemporary city” (DeVerteuil, May, & Mahs, 2009:647). Following these authors (see also DeVerteuil, 2003; 2006), those works pose particularly two kinds of problems. Firstly, they tend to underestimate the different ways through which different homeless persons might experience the “revanchist city”. Secondly, “too often in work framed by the punitive turn it appears as though homeless people lack any agency at all: the hapless victims of mass evictions and street sweeps” (DeVerteuil, May, & Mahs, 2009:659). This kind of approach does not allow to understand the differences and, most importantly, to see how different subjectivities are constructed and deconstructed in the homeless response to the “punitive framework”. In this sense there is the need to allow “for varied and complex spaces of homelessness that belie any sense of ‘collapsing’ homeless geographies” (DeVerteuil, Marr, & Snow, 2009:634).

To conclude, this research contribute to the current literature criticizing those works that: a) approach the issue of homelessness relying too much on definition and categorization; b) rely on macro-quantitative perspectives; c) spot the light either on specific issues (disease model) or on schematization of the life of the homeless (life-career approach); d) tend to see only one face of the medal – an oppressive face that leaves few spaces for the investigation of what actually happens in the homeless people’s street life. In a word, the account proposed is

aimed at showing the “varied and creative tactics homeless people themselves draw upon in order to carve out a space in the city” (DeVerteuil, May, & Mahs, 2009:661). Some geographers are beginning to trace this path, stressing the necessity to “remap” the homeless city turning the spot on homeless people’s performativities. As Cloke, Johnsen and May have written: “the movements and pauses of homeless people in the city can also be understood in terms of issues of affect and performativity which are not obviously governed by the rationalities of regulation or tactical response” (Cloke, May, & Johnsen, 2008:259; see also Cloke, Johnsen, & May, 2005; 2007; May, 2000a; 2000b; May, Cloke, & Johnsen, 2007). This is a theoretical and methodological shift that is necessary, firstly, because it might permit to see things previously unseen and secondly because the bulk of homelessness studies that has been just presented reproduce (depicting homeless people either as numbers, pathological bodies, or un-powerful means in the hand of the revanchist city) “the inner-city stigmas, prejudices, fears, and fantasies of mainstream society, whether intentional or not” (Baeten, 2004:256).

### **1.3 Finding a path**

When I confronted with the limitations of the current literature on homelessness, it became automatic for me to turn to that kind of works that used ethnographic methods to sustain their enquiries, as they seemed the one best suited to grasp homeless people’s world at the street level, where is possible to “understand how both exclusion and inclusion work in daily practice” (Herbert, 2008:5). This choice has been influenced both by my previous geographical background (shaped by Italian geographers acquainted with the study of social territories – e.g. Dematteis, 1985; Gambi 1973; Farinelli 1983; and especially Governa, 1997; 2004) and by the fact that I’ve been always fascinated by urban anthropological strands (Fox, 1977; Kemper, 1991; Sanjek, 1990; Sobrero, 2005; Ware, 1994; Whyte, 1993) and their methodologies (Foster & Kemper, 1974).

In this fashion, the first book at which this research refers, is the classic “The hobo” by Neil Anderson (Anderson, 1999 [1923]), an insight into the urban jungle of the hobos (migratory workers) diffused in America from the end of the 19th century. Anderson, at least in part of his life, was a hobo himself and this allowed

him to settle deeply into hobonemia's life – the street world that he described as a truly ethno-reporter. His work has been relevant for this research for his capacity to show the performativities of the daily life of those people without categorizing or judging them at all (as it is, at least partially, also the case of Harper's account of Americans tramps – Harper, 2006). More than this classic there are other relevant ethnographical studies, mostly done in the first half of the '90s, which have influenced my approach to homelessness. Liebow account of the life of homeless women, which shows the heterogeneity and complexity of the subjectivities that fall under the label "homeless women" (Liebow, 1993); Snow and Anderson study the homeless' street life, showing how these people are resourceful and capable of different ways of life (Snow & Anderson, 1993); as well as Ruddick's geographical enquiry on the negotiation of youth homelessness identities in LA (Ruddick, 1996) – are all examples of ethnographical works that will be widely quoted in this work. Their strength relies on the fact that – probably thanks to the long fieldworks that sustain them – they dismantle the stereotypes on the homeless figure, showing the various and complex subjectivities that aim the streets, going beyond, hence, some of the limitations that have been previously outlined.

Concerning the contemporary literature, among a couple of works that do not come from the Anglo-Saxon world – i.e. Bonadonna's account of the life of homeless people in Rome (Bonadonna, 2005) and, to a lesser extend, Dumont's comparative although anthropologically grounded work on homelessness in Brighton, Parma and Caen (Dumont, 2007) – other enquiries on which I've relied in the course of this research are essentially four. The first two are works that, although not directly related to homelessness, show their relevance through the attention posed on street's people daily practices. Venkatesh's study of the black economy of a Southside Chicago neighbourhood and Duneier's account of magazines street's vendors in New York's Greenwich Village allow the reader, indeed, to enter into the dynamics of those spaces and peoples, gaining a knowledge otherwise impossible to reach. In details, I have been inspired by the capability of these researches to show how street spaces are full of possibilities (Venkatesh, 2008) and by their capacity to show, describe and portrait the daily life of street people from "another" point of view (Duneier, 1999) – both aspects that are almost missing in the canonical literature on homelessness. The other two ethnographical works are Bourgois and Schonberg's "Righthouse Dopefield" – an outstanding work on drug addiction within homeless people (Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009) – and the eclectic but extremely powerful Desjarlais's "Shelter

blues” – a work that for its ethnographical methodology and style of writing has profoundly inspired the course of this research (Desjarlais, 1997).

Although all these works can be criticized, it is possible to find in them a great potential for a renovated urban ethnography capable to show the shadows, practices, hopes and fears of street’s life. Criticizing Duneier, Wacquant has written: “Duneier does not discuss the structural forces [...] that directly shape and bound the material and symbolic space within which vendors operate” (Loic Wacquant, 2002:1480). This is undoubtedly true. However, Duneier’s spot (as the one of the other authors previously cited) has not been directed toward those “structural” (or “hidden” – to refer once again to Durkheim, 1964 [1894]) forces. On the contrary, the aim was (as it is here too) to look within street’s practices, in order to fill the knowledge’s gap that so many structural, macro and functionalist researches (e.g. Wacquant, 2008) left apart.

Setting the ground for this work it was nonetheless unavoidable to face the limitations that canonical urban ethnography brings with itself, particularly concerning the ways through which the *city* has been traditionally approached. A good example is Setha’s review of the anthropological literature on city in the first half of the ‘90s (period that has been particularly relevant for anthropologically-based account of homelessness). In this review she recognized a “number of theoretically useful images and metaphors of the city” (Low, 1996:402) that emerge from the anthropological literature from 1989, namely: the ethnic, divided, gendered, contested, de-industrialized, global, informational, modernist, postmodern, fortress, sacred and traditional city. These are all classifications that, in a sense, aim to answer to Wirth’s well-known question: “What is the city”? (Wirth, 1938). They try to define it, to picture it in a niche, to reduce its possible meaning. In this sense, both canonical anthropological and geographical accounts of the city, have always tried to define the city associating different identities to it (e.g. Marcuse, 2000; Parr, 2007; Short, 2000; or, to a lesser extent, Goheen, 1998; Le Galès, 2006; Mendieta, 2001; Sassen, 2004): the “ethnic city” is different from the “contest city”, which is in the end different from the “de-industrialized city”, and so on. These are all identities artificially associated with the city, which is understood (or depicted) on the basis of the speculative difference between those (fictive) identities. However, this poses some serious limitations. First of, these identities do not exist in reality and they express few of what actually resides behind them.

Secondly, the city in this sense is seen just as a scenario where various things happen, and not as *the more-than-human environment that spreads out from the entanglements of things themselves*. Once again we are confronted with categorizations and labels, superimpositions of meanings and explications.

To study a city as a whole, without dividing it into comfortable classifications, is of course impossible. As Hannerz pointed out:

“one would have to take into account all its people - city fathers, urban villagers, spiralists, street people, whatever kinds one may recognize. And one would have to follow them through all domains of activities, not only as they make a living but also as they run their households, deal with neighbours, brush against each other in the city square, or simply relax. Moreover one would want to require of such a study not only that the ethnography is all there but that one would get a reasonably clear idea of how it all hangs together” (Hannerz, 1980:297).

However, it is possible to take the urban into account in a different way than the one just criticized, namely seeking for difference, not comparing fictive identities but rather understanding that things are different in themselves, for themselves (Deleuze, 2004 [1968]). As Deleuze stated: “If philosophy has a positive and direct relation to things, it is only insofar as philosophy claims to grasp the thing itself, according to what it is, in its difference from everything it is not, in other words, in its internal difference” (Deleuze, 2003:32). In other words, confronting the urban this work has not to tried to seek for an answer to the question “What is a city?”, but rather to rework this question into “How is a city?”. How things come into being in the urban? How they take and change form? How they relate? Do homeless people constitute their subjectivity *with* the city?

In this sense, the city is seen here as a site of human and non-human relations of assemblages (hence, a mechanosphere or a “machinic city”, Amin and Thrift, 2002) which continuously create and enact different spaces. This does not mean that the city is a place as any other. Rather, there are a bunch of characteristics that make cities different from any other place, but these are understood as particular and non-fix outcomes of that ceaseless and unpredictable

encounter of urban assemblages (therefore, they do not trace differential identities of the “city”, but they are its differential-internal humus). Turin is not different from any other urban settlement in the world: it has its internal and external differences, which need to be fully investigated to render its urban heterogeneity. In this sense, there are a bunch of interesting elements that makes Turin a particular mechanosphere-in-motion where to investigate homelessness, which can be acknowledge concentrating on its relational spaces; on the variety of its assemblages; and on the fluxes that cross it.

Acknowledging its barely topographical appearance (its location in the north-west of Italy, in a natural and cultural intersection between the Mediterranean sea, the Alps, and the Francophone areas of French and Switzerland), it is worth concentrating on the fact that Turin is made up of spaces characterized by different – and contested – values, affects and powers that have a concrete role in homeless people’s lives (Amin, 2006; Amin & Thrift, 2004; Diouf, 2008; Frisby, 2008; Governa, 2005; Lancione, 2010; Jacobs, 1993; Sandercock, 1998; Schrank, 2008). This is particularly true in relation to the wide presence of public and private (especially religious-driven) institutions in the city (see Chapter 6), which work with marginalized and poor people (and hence with homeless individuals too) creating a considerable high amount of spaces dedicated to the needs of those people. This socio-spatial layout is almost unique in Italy (with the partial exception of Rome) (see Governa & Lancione, 2011) and Europe (where religious institutions are usually far less present and active than in Italy). In this sense, Turin has been chosen for the unique opportunity that it offers: to investigate how such spaces relate with the homeless subjects, with which effects, and through which relational patterns.

As any other urban sites, Turin is made up by an incredibly high amount of heterogeneous relations (Bridge & Watson, 2000; Merrifield, 1996) of heterogeneous hybrid assemblages (Latour & Hermant, 1998; Pile, 2004a, 2004b; Thrift & Graham, 2007), with countless possible outcomes (Allen, 1999; Amin, 2007; 2008; Amin & Graham, 1997). Although this is not a unique point on Turin, what it makes this city particularly interesting in relation to a more-than-human study of homelessness it is its huge relational complexity packet into a city of no more than 1million inhabitants. Its richness is, moreover, always in productive movement: from the capital of the Savoy’s Reign, through the industrial capital of

Italy (with the FIAT automobile factory), to the cultural city that hosted the Winter Olympic Games in 2006... the assemblages that populate Turin has always produced (and still do) particular discourses and spaces, which have created a urban heritage that can be hardly found in any other Italian city.

Moreover, these assemblages are the result of relations that are not limited to the administrative boundaries of the city (hence, no Weberian walls) (Amin, 2002; 2005; Ethington, 2008; Prakash & Kruse, 2008). Therefore the city – as mechanosphere – is created and also re-created by relations (fluxes) that are not bounded inside the materiality, or the administrative boundaries, of the city itself (Amin & Thrift, 2007; Massey, 2005; 2007). In this sense Turin has always been a crossroads of people (attracting immigrants from the South of Italy for the whole XX<sup>o</sup> century, due to its industrial activities), of goods (being one of the most rich cities in Italy and Europe), and stories (culturally and politically speaking), making it a vibrant and exciting environment where to investigate the entanglements of the homeless subjects.

Turin can hence been deciphered as a “‘web of life’, in which all living organisms, plants and animals alike, are bound together in a vast system of interlinked and interdependent lives” (Park, 1936:1). Homeless people in (or better: and) Turin should be hence understood in this framework: not divided from (or just located in) the city, but part of it and constituted through it. In the interconnections (relation of assemblages) that we have just listed above we find the “trans-human material culture” (Amin, 2007:110) of Turin, its never-finished hybrid ecology, which allows us to distinguish this urban environment from other cities and to take this into account while investigating the nuances of homelessness.

Although all these interconnections are of pair importance, in this work we are going to give particular attention to the first (hence to the spaces produced by the institutions that work with homeless people). This is mainly due by the fact that Turin really offers an incredible opportunity in this sense, an opportunity that has a political relevance too: how these spaces affect the subjects is, indeed, a relevant political question (see Chapter 6 and 8). This choice carries unavoidably some limitations. It has been impossible, for instance, to fully acknowledge the relevance of certain interstitial urban spaces in the live of homeless people (although they have been taken into consideration in the fieldwork, see Chapter 4 and 5), or to dedicate attention to the relational dynamics of non-Italian homeless individuals.

The choice has been, therefore, to concentrate our effort on some specific points that are both characteristics of the city and of the lives of homeless people within it. We do believe, in this sense, that the theoretical and methodological insights gained from this perspective (see Chapter 7) can be easily applied in further development of this work.

## 1.4 Epistemological issues

In order to substantially overcome the issues posed by the canonical approaches that have been outlined, the last step has been to confront directly what we might call the “epistemology of representation”. As Hinchliffe has pointed out: “traditionally, epistemology has led to particular conceptualizations of knowledge and action. To gain knowledge is to produce and possess an internal representation of a situation or setting. Meanwhile, to use knowledge effectively is to order and evaluate those representations, before using them to direct action”. This way of seeing poses, however, two issues:

“First, it is premised upon an abstraction and privileging of mental processes, implying that all acts are secondary to the processing of (or even deliberation over) knowledge as representation. As this suggests, actions are merely regarded as the consequences of thoughts [...] Second, and as a consequence of the privileging of mind over matter, a hierarchy of representational and thereby knowledge systems is set up. In terms of Western epistemology, and as is well known, this has led to the valuing of knowledge that is considered to be devoid of emotion, bodily interference, and political commitment” (Hinchliffe, 2000:575-576).

Apart few exceptions (as Bonadonna, Anderson, Duneier, Desjerlais, Ruddick, Venkatesh, Cloke, May and Jonhsen, and a few others) canonical approaches to homelessness adopt precisely this kind of traditional epistemological approach to representation. In order to see things in a different way, hence to explore another epistemology of representation, the approach adopted in the

theoretical and empirical phase of this research is based on the premise that we live in a world where “there are no pre-existing objects. Rather, all kind of hybrids are being continually recast by processes of circulation within and between particular spaces” (Thrift, 2008:139). The epistemology of representation that we need should be therefore enough “loose” and flexible to grasp at least part of these entanglements.

One possibility in this sense is to take a “non-representational” attitude toward the world, hence “a commitment to an understanding of practice and performance that refuses to privilege mental representations” (Hinchliffe, 2000:576). This approach does not diminish the concept of representation as a whole. Rather, it considers it from a different epistemological point of view: “non-representational styles of thinking can by no means be characterised as anti-representation per se. Rather what pass for representations are apprehended as performative presentations, not reflections of some a priori order waiting to be unveiled, decoded, or revealed” (Anderson & Harrison, 2010:19). In this sense

“such an approach implies that knowing evolves not only within “minds”, but emerges collectively through engagement of shared action. In this sense, if there is a “location” for knowledge, it is not an objectively precise place or space or tangibly concrete point [...] if knowing is to be understood as “anchored” in any way, it is, perhaps counter-intuitively, anchored with/in an unfolding of events which is perpetually adrift in relational motion” (Haskell, Linds, & Ippolito, 2002:3).

Therefore, the train of thought in which this work is inscribed promotes an understanding of the social realm based on the performativities (e.g. Thrift, 2004a) and affects (e.g. Amin, 2007; Anderson, 2009; Thrift, 2004b) that are (consciously and unconsciously, by human and non human) created, performed and dismantled in the social space itself (e.g. Harrison, Pile, & Thrift, 2004). The attitude of this research is hence based on three points: a de-humanized account both of society and subjectivity (the “more than human” of Whatmore, 2002); a focus upon the daily practices that take place in the unconscious “background” of our encounter with the world, with a major attention directed toward the habits, dispositions, affects and power within which those practices move (Anderson and Harrison, 2010; Thrift, 2008); an attention posed upon events, hence upon the changes,

modifications, movements (the so called “flash of unexpected” (Thrift, 2000:214) in a “fluid spatiality” where it is not possible to “determine identities nice and neatly, once for all” (Mol & Law, 1994:660; see also Law & Mol, 1995).

## **1.5 Layout of the work**

Coherently with what has been argued, in order to allow “the researcher to address some novel questions about the cultures of everyday urban experience that more conventional, representationally oriented, methods fail to address adequately” (Latham, 2003:1994) – a full reconceptualization of the ways through which the entanglements between homeless people and the city can be grasped is needed. Chapter 2 proposes hence a theoretical tool able to unfold homeless people subjectivity in a different, more-than-human way, careful to emotions, and open to spatial chances and changes. After a short methodological chapter (3), which serves both as link between the theory and the empirical material and as a presentation of the undertaken fieldwork, the main research question of this work (how homeless people subjectivity is constituted in the street) is tackled in three different steps.

Chapter 4 is focused on the event of becoming a homeless person. Taking into account the relational patterns of three individuals that were entering the street at the beginning of the undertaken fieldwork (middle October 2009), the chapter shows how different subjects emerge from different contextualized practices, offering moreover a first insight into the role played by certain urban assemblages in shaping their condition. Chapter 5 continues on this path, going deeply into the relational entanglements of being a homeless person. Four long-term homeless people’s accounts are presented, in order firstly to investigate how they perform the city in different moments of the day (morning, afternoon, evening/nights), and secondly to analyse even further the effects of certain assemblages on the constitutions of different long-term-homeless subjects. Chapter 4 and 5 provides hence two separate reflections on the issue of becoming and being a homeless individual, with the latter enriching the perspective of the former into the investigation of the dynamics that lead to the constitution of the homeless subjects. Relying on the outcomes of these two chapters, Chapter 6 investigate deeply the

role played by public and private interventions in shaping homeless people's subjectivities in Turin. This particular focus has been aimed at two scopes: firstly at providing further empirical evidences (already sketched within the previous two chapters) of the discursive and relational power through which those institutions influence homeless subjects; secondly, to set the ground for a critique of the normative approaches to homelessness.

The relevance of this thesis should be seen in its tuning with the various street dynamics within which homeless' people lives are soaked. What is gained with this perspective is a new awareness on the elements involved in the constitution of homeless people subjectivities, which is going to be theoretically exposed in Chapter 7. The outcome of this enquiry would serve, in the end, to settle a new political discourse on homelessness with the aim of showing possible new political paths for facing it, which is the theme of the concluding chapter of the work.

# Chapter 2

## A more-than-human theory

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### 2.1 Introduction

The main theoretical assumptions of the non-representational approach on homelessness adopted in this work are two. The first is that space-time is a virtually infinite dimension that is continuously codified into particular patterned contexts. The second is that subjectivity and space are interwoven, one affecting the other, with no causal determinant between the two and no ontological pre-eminence of human beings upon the “material” world of things.

The first part of this chapter has been dedicated to the first point. It has been written waiving together some philosophical stances on how we might conceive *space*, through the exposition of shorts episodes, life-stories and performativities of four homeless people that I’ve encountered in my fieldwork. These are Paolo, Albano, Roberto and Antonio: the first was a “new” homeless at the beginning of this research (less than 2 months of street life), the latter were long-term homeless people (years of street life). Relying on this first part, the second part of the chapter has been dedicated to the conceptualisation that has been adopted in order to grasp homeless people’s subjectivity constitution in Turin’s streets.

## 2.2 A philosophical premise on space

This work sustains that homeless people's space is not contained within the homeless themselves, neither is the result of their relational encounters with the city. In other words, *space is neither a property of any assemblages, or an outcome of their relations*. What is proposed is that *space* – or, better said, *spacetime* – is a framework with some characteristics that are very close to the Spinozian idea of *substance*. For Spinoza substance is something “that is in itself and is conceived through itself” (Spinoza, 1996 [1675]:1), therefore something that is “conceptually independent” and also “ontologically independent, depending for its existence on nothing outside itself” (Scruton, 2002 [1986]:42).

In this sense substance – or *spacetime* – might be seen as that independent framework where homelessness takes place, without which homelessness itself (as everything else) would not be able to take place at all:

“When I say that I mean by substance that which is conceived through and in itself; and that I mean by modification or accident that which is in something else, and is conceived through that wherein it is, evidently *it follows that substance is by nature prior to its accidents*. For without the former the latter can neither be nor be conceived. Secondly *it follows that besides substances and accidents nothing exists really or externally to the intellect*”

(Spinoza, “Correspondence”; quoted in Scruton, 2002:43 – italics added)

Another way to look at spacetime more or less in the same fashion, but with a greater interaction with the framework proposed in the pages that follow, is the Deleuzian's concept of “plane of consistency” (developed by him also into what he called “immanence”). In this sense spacetime could be conceived as that dimension where “nothing develops, but things arrive late or early, and form this or that assemblage depending on their compositions [...] We call this plane [...] a plane of immanence and univocity” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004 [1980]:294). This is the plane beyond everything, with everything in, where everything takes place. Moreover, this is a plane immanent in itself, that does not depend neither on the assemblages, nor on their relations: “the immanent event is actualized in a state of

things and of the lived that make it happen. The plane of immanence is itself actualized in an object and a subject to which it attributes itself" (Deleuze, 2001 [1995]:31).

However, things can take different forms in spacetime: the variety that populates the world, in term of beings, materialities, emotions and so on, is the clearest example of the multiplicity that is localized in this absolute dimension. Moreover, things change too: sometimes abruptly and sometimes slowly, modifying both their aspects and their deeper characteristics. Coherently both with the Spinozian idea of substance and the Deleuzian concept of immanence, if we assume that spacetime cannot be produced and that the things localized within it are multiples and changeable, absolute spacetime is not only that dimension where things *take* place, but is that dimension where all the possible (infinite) things of the world *might* happen. In other words, the spatio-temporal dimension where things are located and happen must conceive in itself also the infiniteness of the possible becoming of things.

This particular point of view on space and time allow to acknowledge from the very beginning that the "*ontological modalities [of things] are infinite*. They organise themselves into constellations of incorporeal Universes of reference with unlimited combinatories and creativity" (Guattari, 1995:45 – italics added). Homeless people should not be, in this sense, different. They take place in spacetime; they perform it; they construct their subjectivity in it – but each one of the forms taken by their settlements, performances and subjectivities is just one of the infinite possibilities (chances) that the infinity of space and time offers.

It is relevant to confront homelessness from this premise on space and time because it does not close homeless people into static and rigid pre-assumed categories. On the contrary, it re-displaces them with all the other things of the world, within a whole universe of possibilities that have to be taken into account in confronting their condition. How things relationally develop in absolute spacetime codifying it, and how homeless people's subjectivity constitutes within it, are the central points to which we should now turn.

### ***2.2.1 Relations in a more-than-human world***

Following Haraway and others, "we" (human and non human) are "all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism" (Haraway, 1991:150; see also Thrift, 2008; Whatmore, 2002). The world is hence made by "hybrids": the human, technological, biological (and abiotic too) realms that melt

together in a daily on-going recasting, forming a complex geography that cannot be confined to the human realm (and its agency). The world is, in other words, “made up of all kinds of things brought in to relation with one another by many and various spaces through a continuous and largely involuntary process of encounter, and the violent training that such encounter forces” (Thrift, 2006:139). Homeless people “by themselves”, in this sense, do not exist or, to say it better, “homeless people” should be understood not as bounded and autonomous human beings but as products of relationalities between the human and non-human realm that takes place in the city. A clear example of this hybridity was Paolo’s relation with his PC.

The first time I met Paolo he was cueing to enter in the soup kitchen where I was volunteering in the morning. He was a 40-year-old man, who arrived in the street after having divorced with his wife (after the divorce he lost his job and suffered from a serious nervous breakdown). At that time he was “new” to the street, as he was living in there just from a couple of months. The thing that surprised me most about him was that he was not talking, like many others, about street’s stuff (money, the cold weather, the institutional services for homeless people, etc.) but that he was talking most of the time about his PC. This PC was in a Motel where he slept before ending his money and starting sleeping in public dormitories: the Motel’s manager kept it because Paolo did not manage to pay the whole bill for his permanence there. The absence of this PC was making him really nervous and was shaping the way through which he was spending his daily time (and space) in the city. First of all, he was talking almost only about this PC – to rehold it became a relevant part of his daily desires. Secondly, it was influencing a lot what Paolo was concretely doing in his street’s life: he started begging to “*have the money, go there [to the Motel’s owner], take back my stuff and let them know who is the boss here*”; he began to spend his time in different internet points, where although he did not “*like that kind of PCs; they are slow, old, and everyone can see what you do*” but at least he “*could surf the web, read the news, play my games*”; he did not get in touch with any other homeless people because “*they are ignorant, they live in another era, they don’t even understand how to turn on a PC*” (Paolo, Dec. 2009, WI).

This relation (which although was an “absence” was deeply “present” in his life) was shaping Paolo’s subjectivity: it was making him do certain things (e.g. going to the internet point; begging) and not others (e.g. using his time to seek for a job). In a word, we could not understand Paolo as a homeless individual without taking into consideration his PC: they were deeply interconnected with each other, the latter having a great influence upon the former. We should consider Paolo *and*

the PC, not Paolo alone: “the minimal element is not the enclosed, charged, and polarized point, but the open fold; not a given One, but a differential relation; not an ‘is’ but an ‘and’” (Doel, 2000:126). But how it might be possible to conceptualize this more-than-human encounter in order to grasp its relevance for the life of a homeless person as Paolo? In brief, to understand this it is necessary to look at the “relationality through which the human and other kinds are configured in particular and provisional ways” (Whatmore, 2002: 118).

What this work proposes is that the only way to genuinely grasp the hybridity of the world is to conceive relations not as *ways of being*, but as *ways of having*. This is one way to move from an individualistic human-based-account to a truly more-than-human, plural and hybrid conception of how things come to happen in the world. This is an idea almost forgotten, but that we can trace back (as Latour, 2001 pointed out) to the work of Gabriel Tarde:

“Toute la philosophie s’est fondée jusqu’ici sur le verbe *Etre*, dont la définition semblait la pierre philosophale à découvrir. On peut affirmer que, si elle eut été fondée sur le verbe *Avoir*, bien des débats stériles, bien des piétinements de l’esprit sur place auraient été évités. De ce principe Je suis, impossible de déduire, malgré toute la subtilité du monde, nulle autre existence que la mienne; de là la négation de la réalité extérieure. Mais posez d’abord ce postulat: “J’ai” comme fait fondamental, l’*eu* et l’*ayant* sont donnés à la fois comme inseparables”. (Tarde, 2002 [1893]:43,44)<sup>1</sup>

In the relational account presented in this work, “to have” means precisely what it means: to possess, to hold (although this does not mean necessarily “to control” – e.g. plant’s roots have relations with leaves, on a plane in which no one control the other). “To have” hence should be understood as to “possess” in its old etymological meaning: “to hold, occupy, reside in” without regard to ownership (it derives, indeed, from the Latin verb *possidere*, from *potis* ‘able, capable’ + *sedere* ‘sit’). In this sense, to say that two elements in relation with each other are “having” each other, means that one is belonging to the other and vice versa, with no ontological distinction between the two (therefore, independently of the “nature” of

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<sup>1</sup> “So far, all of philosophy has been founded on the verb To be, whose definition seemed to have been the Rosetta’s stone to be discovered. One may say that, if only philosophy had been founded on the verb To have, many sterile discussions, many slowdown of the mind, would have been avoided. From this principle ‘I am’, it is impossible to deduce any other existence than mine, in spite of all the subtleties of the world. But affirm first this postulate : ‘I have’ as the basic fact, and then the had as well as the having are given at the same time as inseparable” (translated in Latour, 2001).

these things). “To be” loses its sense because nothing is a “being” but everything is “in becoming” precisely through endless “having” processes between the different, hybrids, parts that form the world. “Being” is, in other words, just a kinetic force toward the next “to have”, toward the next relation, and toward the next thing to be produced.

We should now turn to another focal point: the focus on the difference between human and non-human. If they are on the same ontological level, how are we supposed to manage the concept of “agency” (the capacity of acting to produce a particular result)? The answer depends on the way we think at agency. “If action is defined a priori as what “intentional” “meaningful” human do” (Latour, 2004:226) there is no room for objects or things of any sort. “By contrast, if we stick to our decision to start from the controversies about actors and agencies, then anything that modifies a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor”. This means that “there might exist many metaphysical shades between full causality and sheer non-existence: things might authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid and so on, in addition to “determining” and serving as a “backdrop for human action” (Latour, 2004: 226). In other words, if “agency” is conceived as the capacity of something to change the “state of affair” of something else (Latour, 1999; 2000; 2005; Law and Callon, 1992), hence everything – even Paolo’s PC – got this capacity.

However, what about the consciousness, the rationality, the meaningful capacity of human beings to *être*? In the point of view adopted here, these are only some *characteristics* of the human specie (as to run fast is a characteristics of Leopards and to reflect of mirrors) or, to say it differently, intelligence is never “a property of an organism but of the organism and its environment” (Thrift, 2005:464). Therefore we should investigate not the being, but the “wider ecologies of intelligence made up of many things” (Thrift, 2005:469) where human beings are not a precise entity, but a mix, as everything else. In the end, looking at the world through a “to have” point of view means to know that we are just pieces, in an endless production:

“it’s to imagine that materials and social [...] are like bits of cloth that have been sewn together. It’s to imagine that there are *many ways of sewing*. It’s to imagine that there are many kinds of thread. [...] And it’s to remember that a heap of pieces of cloth can be turned into a *whole variety of patchworks*”.  
(Law and Mol, 1995:290; *italics added*).

This is a hybrid-recasting world, without *beings*. Therefore, “if a sociology is

to exist, the social fluid had to be followed wherever it circulates, even through things made of non-social stuff" (Latour, 2004: 225). Homeless people are still there, but they are not at the centre of the account anymore. We can understand and study their subjectivity, but this implies the fact that we should take into consideration – at the same level – all the other elements that compose the world. In fact, human (and hence homeless people) subjectivity "does not only produce itself through the psychogenetic stages of psychoanalysis or the "mathemes" of the Unconscious, *but also in the large-scale social machines* of language and the mass media-*which cannot be described as human*" (Guattari, 1995:9 – italics added; see also Guattari, 2007). Paolo's PC hence matters, and should matter in our enquiries, if we want to study homelessness unfolding, rather than simplify, it.

### **2.2.2 Homeless-assemblage and the multi world**

In order to recognize the challenging complexity of homeless people's life in the street I've turned toward the philosophical work of Deleuze and Guattari, which contains powerful and fascinating theoretical "tools" in this sense. Their philosophy, at least concerning the idea of the rhizome, is a philosophy of "multiplicities" (Khalifa, 2003). The rhizome itself might be simply understood as an image of thought, as a metaphor, which could serve the purpose of representing the multiplicity of homeless people world. The basic idea is that there are not dualisms and not binary choices: rather there are multiple heterogeneous, horizontal, trans-species connections... in a continuous process of re-casting that takes place on a plane of consistency, or absolute spacetime. Their philosophy fits perfectly, thus, with the accounts adopted here, a relational hybrids account where "any point of a rhizome can be connected to any other, and must be" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004 [1980]:7).

A first relevant concept in their philosophy is the one of "assemblage". Assemblages, or, as they also call them, "rhizomatic multiplicities", are composed of "particles that do not divide without changing in nature, and [of] distances that do not vary entering another multiplicity" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004 [1980]:37). In other words, assemblages are the product of every relation, and every relation is always made by assemblages that are formed by other assemblages (De Landa, 2006). There is no end and no beginning in this process:

"everywhere it is machines-real ones, not figurative ones: machines driving other machines, machines being driven by other machines, with all the necessary couplings and

connections. An organ-machine is plugged into an energy-source-machine: the one produces a flow that the other interrupts" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2000 [1972]:1).

In this sense, we should look at homeless people not as "homeless" but as assemblages formed, dismantled, and continuously re-created with the other stuff of the world.

Therefore Albano – a 50-year-old man who, when I've met him for the first time, was living in the street since several years – was an assemblage. He was that kind of person who collects everything, bringing it with him everywhere. The first time I've met him he was looking in a rubbish bin seeking for something. When I asked him what he was looking for, he replied to me: *"I'm just looking if I can find something interesting"* (Albano, Jan. 2010, TI). "Something interesting" was, for him, something that he could sell at the black market, or something that he could use as bargaining with some other homeless. Albano was moving through Turin's street always with a huge backpack and several other bags (sometimes even with a suitcase). As he was not usually sleeping in public dormitories (because he did not like them) he was carrying this stuff with him 24h a day, from the corner where he was sleeping to the soup kitchen, the streets, the buses, and so on. These bags and their contents (clothes, kitchen cooking utilities, radios, books, etc.) were to him more than a way to gain some money. To say it right, that stuff was his life, his subjectivity: it was "Albano" as much as "Albano's body" itself. He was concerned by it, taking care of it and – as much as Paolo with his PC – influenced by it (as he was using his time and space in function of those goods). Albano-as-assemblage was, hence, constituted by the materiality and meanings of the things that he was collecting, carrying and selling, as well as by the affective dimension carried by them. In a sense, Albano was made up by those things, and vice versa: both materially and emotionally.

In the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari, assemblages are made both of "collective assemblages of enunciations" (Khalifa, 2003:130) and of machinic assemblages. Roughly speaking, another way to say the same thing is to state that assemblages are made by "content" and "expression" (both terms that the two French philosophers have taken from the semiological work of the Danish linguist Louis Hjelmslev). Content might be seen as the "material" part of the assemblage, but a material that must be understood as a kind of plane of all the possible combinations of "bodies, of actions and passions" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004 [1980]:97) which that assemblage might take. Albano's "content" might be

conceived, hence, as the whole set of possible combinations that his body and the materials that he was collecting, using, and dropping after a moment (or being dropped off – as, for instance, something broke) might take. “Expression” might be seen as all the possible combinations of “acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies” (Ibid:98) which that assemblage might take (Albano’s expression could be, hence, both the meanings that he was giving to the assemblages that he was having, as well as the meaning that they – together – were relationally expressing). In other words, we can understand as content the plane of the possible materiality of something, than, as expression, all the attributes, the “adjectival” of that content (e.g. the set of linguistic statement that defines something).

In this fashion, the content and expression contained into the assemblages created by and with homeless people should not be understood as two dichotomies – something which “with Hjelmslev, still repeats Saussure’s signifier/signified couplet” (Guattari, 1995:23) – rather, they are in a continuous relations of re-casting, they are inter-changeable (situation by situation and relation by relation their roles might change) and they are part of the same unity that is continuously shaped by human and non-human, material and conceptual, “lines”. This is a process, in the end, that continuously creates and re-creates different more-than-human assemblages (hybrid relations of content and expression), which relate themselves in a complex “mechanosphere” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004 [1980]) creating, once again, other assemblages (with new form of relation between their content and expression). The direct consequence of this way of thinking is that homeless people’s world is no more and no less than a continuous process in which different assemblages with different contents and expressions relate to each other, territorialize, and a moment after they change their form, deterritorializing and being ready to constitute a new assemblage (re-territorializing). To understand why this “ontology of change” is relevant for a research on homelessness and the city, it is worth to focus again on Albano-as-assemblage.

We should take for a moment into consideration a very common assemblage of the city: a traffic light+a person in front of it. For the New Oxford America Dictionary a traffic light is “a set of automatically operated colored lights, typically red, amber, and green, for controlling traffic at road junctions and crosswalks” which, in the end, might or might not allow the person to cross the street. This is a definition that makes sense for all of us, made by a *content* (the coloured lights and the person waiting) and an *expression* (the control of traffic and

the following possibility to cross the street). But this is only one of the possible endless ways in which a traffic light+a person can assemble each other. Other possible assemblage-of-assemblages, which Albano showed me in many different occasions, are: a steel pylon that is sometimes used to hang clothes (*content*: steel pylon with projections; *expression*: clothes hanger); a comfortable steel pylon behind which is possible to piss (*content*: steel pylon with a particular shape; *expression*: urinal); a device thanks to which is possible to control the flow of the cars and know exactly when is the right moment to beg at the cars that are waiting to move (*content*: electronic lights; *expression*: the opportunity to work/beg); etcetera...

This is only a very short list of what an assemblage as a traffic light+Albano might be, as the list could be more or less infinite. Therefore, is a traffic light “a set of automatically operated coloured lights...” which allows someone to cross the street, or not? This work claims that the answer is *at the same time* (and in the same space) yes and no. Correctly speaking, a traffic light+Albano is an assemblage made up by content and expression, where the former is the plane of *all* the possible materiality of the traffic light and Albano, and the latter is the plane of *all* the possible attributes of the same object and person. In this sense, a traffic light+Albano can be (at least theoretically) *everything*.

To synthesize how those remarks on the possible infinite way through which the assemblages that create homeless people’s lives relate to each other, it is now important to stress four characteristics of this process that lay at the basis of the approach taken in this work (fig. 2.1 summarized the main points that are going to follow). Curiously enough, these characteristics could be easily understood and summarized grabbing some concepts from the complex world of quantum mechanics theory.

The first point is that in order to have knowledge of something is not possible to look at it as “a seamless whole” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004 [1980]:4) but only seeking within the relations of that thing with everything else. In the case of the traffic light+Albano, this means that it does not exist anything as a “traffic light” or an “Albano” dissociated *both* from the endless possibilities of the their content-expression articulation *and* from the environment with which this specific assemblage is related.

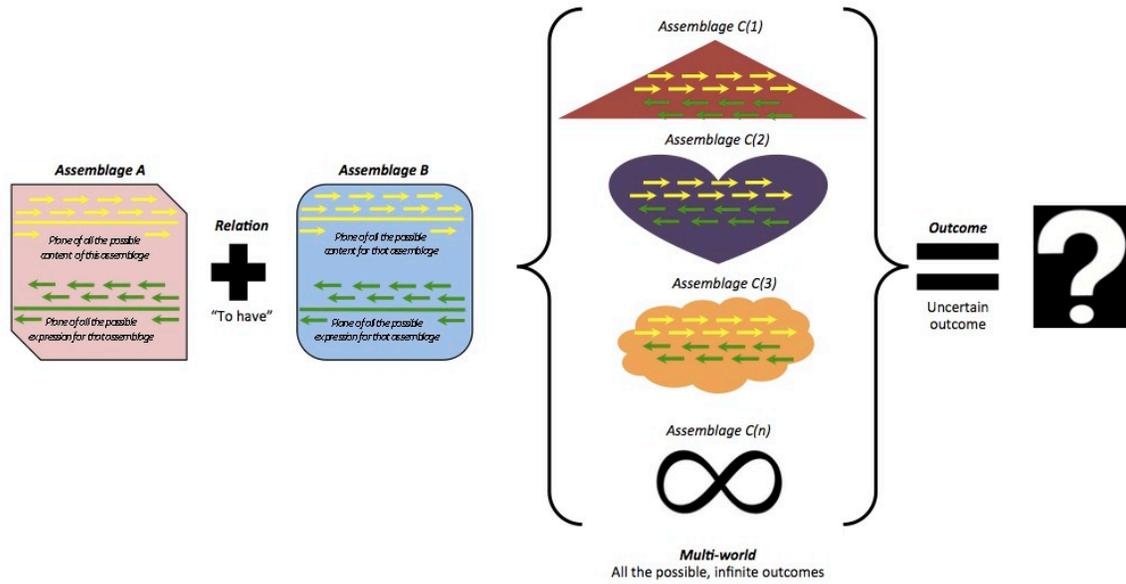
Secondly, before a new homeless-assemblage is created, hence before it is defined (territorialized), an infinite set of possibilities arises: in that moment, we face a *multi-world* imaginary. Albano in front of the traffic light, before relating to it

and constituting a brand new assemblage (traffic light+Albano), can be literally everything (traffic light+Albano<sub>(1)</sub>, traffic light+Albano<sub>(2)</sub>, traffic light+Albano<sub>(n)...</sub>). Its potential of *being* (as continuous process of *having*) is endless. But in the end, it will territorialize, and then it will be possible to see only a minute part of all that potentiality (for instance traffic light+Albano would be seen just as an assemblage to regulate traffic that allows a man to cross the street). But how is it so? “The answer given is that this is the narrowly parochial view of an observer in this universe, but [...] reality is much greater than so constrained a picture suggests [...] Reality is a multiverse rather than a simple universe” (Polkinghorne, 2002:52). In other words, we might conceive the traffic light+Albano in the New Oxford American Dictionary’s way, but the traffic light+Albano is *at the same moment in the same space* also something else. Or at least, it got the potential to be so.

Thirdly, to acknowledge this multi-world imaginary, we should describe things following the *superimposition principle*. In quantum physics, superimposition means that to completely describe a particle (which is always made by a wave function and a particle form – i.e. quanta) one must include a description of every possible state and the probability of the particle being in that state. In other words, if the traffic light+Albano can be everything – hence it has an endless series of superimposed status – to correctly describe it there is the necessity to: a) *be aware of this potentiality*; b) *describe also this potentiality*.

Fourthly, following the previous point “it is no longer possible to predict exactly what will happen when we make an observation” (Polkinghorne, 2002:24). In other words, observing the deterritorialization-reterritorialization process by which an homeless-assemblage becomes another homeless-assemblage, for the superimposition principle it is not possible to know what the result will be. In this sense, looking at street’s dynamics through these glasses, we are always in front of the Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle. This principle is “all about fuzziness, but paradoxically, there is nothing fuzzy about it” (Susskind, 2008:93) – that is to say that knowledge about homelessness, even in this uncertain environment, is still possible. The challenge is to accept the continuous motion of street’s things and to learn how to deal with it, without expecting any fixed, clear, outcome.

Fig 2.1 Assemblages and the multi-world idea



Source: graphical elaboration of the author

### 2.2.3 Abstract machines: regulating infiniteness

Although the assemblage traffic light+Albano in certain cases can assume very different meanings and functions, it is usually conceived as the dictionary tells (a device that controls the traffic allowing a man to cross the street). The question in this sense is not really why the assemblage traffic light+Albano might be in certain cases a form of clothes-hanger or of urinal, rather why it is so difficult to catch the potential that relies behind the process of assemblage-of-assemblages within which everything (hence homeless people too) is constituted.

Commonly speaking, the “traffic light” is that thing identified by a signifier –



– and a signified – “device to regulate the traffic” – which is recognized thanks to its differences in relation (for instance) to the traffic policeman (hence through the classical Saussure’s differential understanding). The same thing happens with homeless people: they can be identified by various stigmatized



signifiers – e.g. “” or “” or “”<sup>2</sup> – as well by the differences that apparently exist between “us” and “them” (us, the normal, they, the

<sup>2</sup> These are the three first images that comes out typing “homeless” in Google Image Research (March 2010)

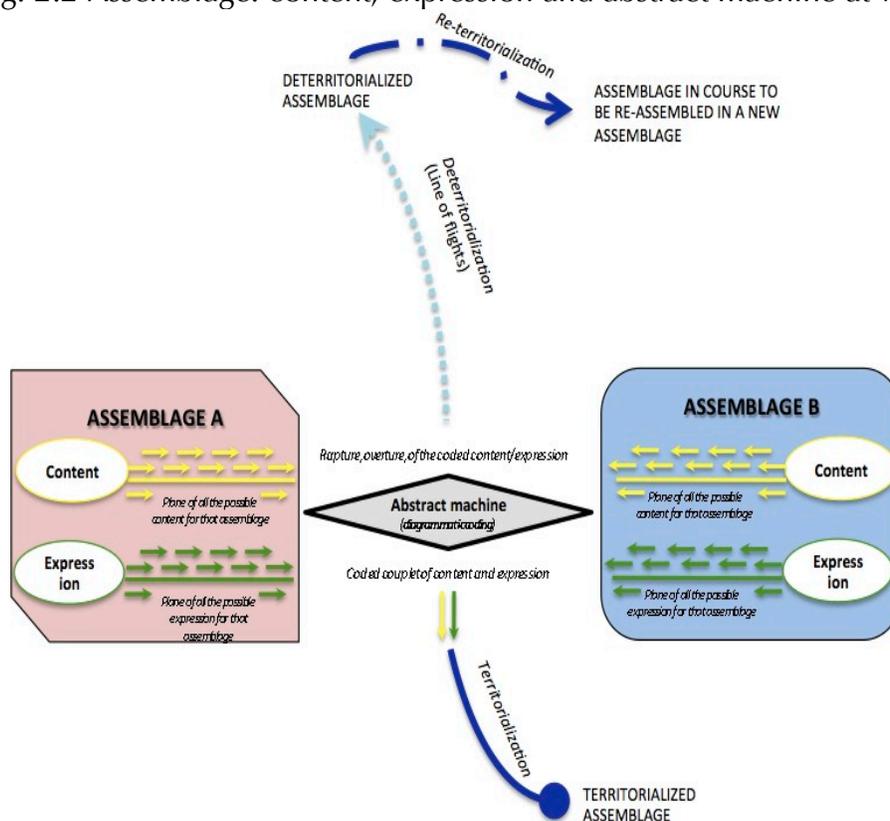
pathological). However, although on one side this makes perfectly sense, on the other it is not an absolute truth, especially in the assemblage-of-assemblages process that leads to the creation of a new assemblage. Why are we ready to see only the most obvious outcomes without acknowledging the possibility of the unknown? Where all the potentiality and indeterminacy of that relational process has gone?

This work argues that the potential is still there, and calls it the “chance of space”. This chance is *not* the potential “to be” something – a pointless matter, as we have seen – but “to have”, to relate to something else and to translate, thanks to this relation, into a new assemblage that is not predictable from the beginning and that could be potentially everything. This chance is always there, in every relation-of-assemblages that constitutes the assemblages of the street: if it is generally not recognized, it is because something obscures our visual. This something is what we can call – grabbing again from Deleuze and Guattari – an *abstract machine*.

In Guattari’s own terms, “when we speak of abstract machines, by “abstract” we can also understand “extract” in the sense of extracting” (Guattari, 1995 [1992]:35). In this sense, the point from which emerges the relevance of abstract machines for this work is the following. Every assemblage has got an infinite number of relational ways in which it can be what it is. When this assemblage territorializes, it takes a form of content+expression that is more or less stable (e.g. traffic light+Albano = clothes hanger) although it still has the potential to be everything else (e.g. traffic light+Albano = *n* assemblages). However, that particular content and expression, which has been territorialized in that assemblage in that moment, *obscures all the other possibilities*: we recognize the fact that “traffic light+Albano”, as assemblage, is constituted by a content (clothes hanger) and an expression (device used to dry or hand clothes) *but* we do not see anymore any other possibility out of this couplet. The content and expression which have emerged from the relation between the traffic light and Albano are the result of a coding process made by an abstract machine: abstract, because the potential is unintelligible; machine, because it interrupts and it fixes (although not forever). In other words, abstract machines are “always singular keys that open or close an assemblage” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004 [1980]:368): closing it, because they let us see only a minor part of the endless possible combination of content and expression that that assemblage might take (hence reducing its potentiality/chance); but opening it too, because they can be broken, dismantled, studied, in order to see the potentialities of any assemblage (hence to see all the content-expression

couplets that we do not perceive). Abstract machines are at the heart of the process by which new assemblages, through the relational “to have” of their contents and expressions, are endlessly created and disrupted in the street world of homeless people (fig. 2.2 offers a visual account of this process).

Fig. 2.2 Assemblage: content, expression and abstract machine at work



Source: graphical elaboration of the author

Abstract machines code, regulate the flux, and shape the intelligible form of any assemblage. However, they should not be conceived as something separate from the assemblage itself. Rather, they are something that belongs to any (homeless)assemblage. To understand how abstract machines work, coding the relations that a homeless person have in his/her life, it is worth to spend a few rows to show Roberto’s daily practices (Roberto was a long-term homeless person that I’ve met several times around Turin’s train station during the fieldwork).

Roberto’s street life was not completely different from Albano’s, in the sense that they were both deeply bounded up with certain street’s dynamics and spaces (see, for other similar cases, chapter 5). However, there was a difference in the

sense that Roberto was having more relations with Turin's institutions (private and public) that provide services (as food, place to sleep, social assistance, etc.) to homeless people like him. In a normal day Roberto was having at least three fundamental relational encounters. The first was with the soup kitchen where he was having breakfast and collecting second-hand clothes, which was managed by some nuns of a religious institution present in the city. In that place Roberto was always very kind with the nuns and was participating actively at the life of the soup kitchen, helping from time to time to clean or to keep that place in order. Moreover, he was always respectful to them and their religious faith, avoiding swearing to God while he was there. What he was gaining from this were the best second hand clothes that were passing through the nuns' hands, as well as some money from time to time. The second was with the soup kitchen (managed by another religious congregation) where he used to eat lunch. Here he was, once again, very respectful and was always trying to appear more materially poor and dirty of what he actually was, to impress the priest who was in charge of that service and in order to possibly gain some spare coins. The third was with a centre for homeless people managed by the City, where he was going in the afternoon to spend his spare time. Although here it was very difficult for him to obtain some "fast help" (which, from his point of view, meant money), he was going there because it was a good point where to meet other homeless people like him who might had something interesting to offer (for instance some kind of street business or some alcohol). When he was there he was always making jokes with the social assistant present (a man with a good sense of humour) as well as trying to be as smarter as possible with the other homeless people.

There are four relevant things to notice in Roberto's daily account to understand how abstract machines work. The first is that all those institutions (the private religious ones, and the social service of the city) were spreading particular *discourses on homelessness*, with different ways to approach it and meanings associated to it. Although this has not been fully clear from the example above, it is important to highlight that the ways through which those institutions approach the issue of homelessness (through their discourses and formal and informal rules) are very different and produce very different outcomes (a full discussion on this point will be developed in chapter 6). The second is that Roberto was shaping his behaviours in order to fit within those discourses: his ways to approach the nuns or the social assistant were different because he was trying to get out the most from those relations. The third is that although Roberto consciously tried to manage those discourses in his favour, at the same time he was deeply shaped by them – as

it is clear from the fact that that kind of daily practices were for him a normal activity, almost a ritual that shaped his subjectivity in terms of what to do and how to do it. Fourthly, the ensemble of relationalities that Roberto was having with those institutions constituted a web of assemblage-of-assemblages quite rigid or, to say it better, deeply codified. The discourses that were on top of the relations that Roberto was having with them were, in fact, codifying those relations in certain ways and not others, reducing from the very beginning the possibilities of the multi-world that we have acknowledged before in Albano's account.

Following Roberto's example it is possible to say more about what abstract machines are and how much they are relevant. As Roberto's encounter with the institutions showed, abstract machines can take the form of discourses, images, smells, emotions, formal and informal rules, and so on – everything, in a word, which actually limits or opens a particular (homeless)assemblage to the multi-world and its chances. These are knowledge and discourses imbued of *power* because they *produce* something (Isin, 2002; 2005; G. Rose, 2007; Smart, 2002): new knowledge, new discourses and, at the end – taking a central point in Foucault's account – new (more-than-human) *subjects* (Foucault, 2000b [1982]). There is not, thus, any possible answer to the (rhetorical) question of Foucault: “who has power?” (Foucault, 2007 [1976]), as no assemblage actually really holds it, but everyone is “invest[ed by] it, mark[ed by] it [...] forced [by] it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs” (Foucault, 1991 [1977]:25), precisely through the abstract machines work.

Abstract machines are hence relevant in the study of homelessness proposed here because they – coding the relationalities of homeless people in the street – actively contribute to the constitution of what homeless people are. They “consist of *unformed matters and nonformal functions*” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004 [1980]:562) that work like a Foucauldian diagram, precisely because they *de facto* regulate the assemblage-of-assemblages process through which homeless people constitute the projects, desires and feeling through which they live their lives. A diagram is, in few words, an “ideal form of power” (Huxley, 2007:194) without “determinate goals” (Amin and Thrift, 2002) (in fact the on-going coding of abstract machine has not precise goals: it just happens). This work argues that in studying homelessness it is necessary to be acquainted with this diagrammatical coding, in order “to individuate the regularities that are giving form to the multitude of local, fluid, fleeting endeavours, stratagems, and tactics that characterize the forces seeking to govern this or that aspect of [...] existence” (Osborne & Rose,

1999:759). In other words, it is necessary to acknowledge that abstract machines are of different kinds, functions and strengths, and that through their role in the relational formation of the assemblages, they produce different effects for the homeless individual.

#### **2.2.4 Homeless people, city's contexts and the chance of space**

As we have seen, *absolute spacetime* is that quadridimensional dimension where not only everything takes place, but where *everything* has the potential to take place. In absolute spacetime there are no fixities, nothing is sure, and things can change suddenly: new assemblages can be created, other disrupted, or nothing can change at all. However, in the process of relations through which assemblages are created, abstract machines intervene to code them in certain ways and not others. In a sense, abstract machines – coding assemblages – code *spacetime* too. This means that although homeless people (and we) “live” in spacetime, they perceive and are used to see only a small portion of it: a coded, “extracted” portion. In other words, “space is constructed by the constant dialogical interaction of a multiplicity of voices; at any point in space and time it is possible to see a chronotope which is more or less fixed depending upon the strength of competing centripetal (monological) and centrifugal (dialogical) forces” (Holloway & Kneale, 2000:82). These portions of absolute spacetime are still *spacetime*, but a reworked form of it, a secondary product of it.

In this sense homeless people constitute themselves as subjects not *in* absolute spacetime but in other, coded, spaces – which in this work are called “contexts” – that follow certain coded patterns. Although Deleuze’s “striated space” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004 [1980]) and Bakhtin’s chronotope (Bakhtin, 1981) have both been used in a fashion similar to the non-representational idea of “context” proposed here (see Hillier, 2011 for the former and Desjarlais, 1997 or Holloway & Kneale, 2000 for the latter), “context” appears more coherent with the framework of this work. Indeed context is

“a performative social situation, a plural event which is more or less spatially extensive and more or less temporally specific. It is, in other words, a parcel of socially constructed time-space which is more or less “elongated” [...] In each of these parcels of time-space “subjects” and “objects” are aligned in particular ways which provide particular orientation to action [...] In other words, context

are not passive; they are productive time-spaces which have to be produced" (Thrift, 1996:43).

These contexts are the effects of the relationalities between assemblages, the effects of the opening and closure of the abstract machines of those assemblages. In contexts homelessness takes place, coding spacetime and its *chances*.

Coherently with the argumentation that the "city" is not a mere scenario of action but a full actant in the play (see Chapter 1), *urban spaces* are here conceived as contexts that emerge from the relationalities of hybrid assemblages, ceaselessly coded by heterogeneous abstract machines. The city is hence seen as a set of different contexts, which does not necessitate to be defined in order to be understood: what matters is just how relations take place and which form they take. In other words there is not "the" city, but just a mechanosphere of contexts where hybrid relations take place (Amin & Thrift, 2002)<sup>3</sup>. Homeless people and the city are hence on the same level: the level of the mechanosphere, where is not possible to trace distinctions between the two, as both are the same thing (more-than-human assemblages in continuous recasting). In this sense city's contexts, as product of the relation between assemblages are, in a sense, false: they are not really produced (as space), but just reworked form of spacetime. Still, they matter a lot in homeless people lives, for at least two reasons.

First of, as contexts are the product of the way through which (homeless)assemblages relate, this works claims that *relations* should be at the centre of any investigation on homelessness. In this sense, contexts can be studied following a relational approach to space. Contexts should hence be mapped "emphasizing the multiplicity of space-time generated in/by the movements and rhythms of heterogeneous association" (Whatmore, 2002:6). What is important to stress here is that contexts might be huge, complex. The assemblages that form them might take very rigid territorialized forms – almost "objectified" (Simmel, 1971a; 1971b [1908]; Spykman, 2007 [1925]) – leaving very few opportunities to break the abstract machines that code them. They might be very powerful, rigid, almost completely annihilating the chances of absolute spacetime. In this sense emerges the second relevant point concerning them: power (which should be read in a relational way too, see Isin, 2000).

As we have seen before, abstract machines function as diagrammatic devices that code absolute spacetime. The direct effect of this coding is the artificial creation of contexts where it may be very difficult (for the discourses, the rules, the

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<sup>3</sup> The mechanosphere of the city has, of course, some characteristics that distinguish its contexts from others. I've listed some of these in Chapter 1.

various codes spread within them) to perceive what's behind them (the chance of space). In other terms, Foucault's governmentality (how we govern and are governed within specific regimes – Elden, 2007) is everywhere in urban contexts. As Lefebvre wrote: "Power is everywhere; it is omnipresent, assigned to Being. It is everywhere in space. It is in everyday discourse and commonplace notions, as well as in police batons and armoured cars. It is in objects d'art as well as in missiles" (Lefebvre, 1976:86-87). Power is, in this sense, a power-geometry (Massey, 1993; 2000) present in every urban context performed by homeless people: and this is the second reason why contexts are relevant in the study of homeless people's lives.

At this point, a question naturally arises: should we care about absolute spacetime, or should we concentrate on what we usually perceive as space (i.e. contexts)? Obviously, the answer is *both*. To get a whole picture of this mechanosphere we might say, paraphrasing Lefebvre, that:

"The social relations of production [i.e. assemblages] have a social existence [i.e. an existence in context] to the extent that they have a spatial existence [i.e. immanence in absolute spacetime]; they project themselves into a space [i.e. absolute spacetime], becoming inscribed there [i.e. thanks to the process of associations they "have" each other and a new assemblage is created], and in the process of producing space itself [i.e. the new assemblage will start to code the absolute spacetime thanks to the abstract machine on top of it, and a context is created]".

(Lefebvre, 1991 [1974]:129)

The difference between the account presented in this work and the Lefebvrian's (and Soja, 1996) one, is in the main ontological framework adopted. In a word, this work assimilates their tripartite division among spatial practice (Firstspace), representation of space (Secondspace) and representational spaces (Thirdspace) within the logic of the *context*. But the "engine" of space, its infiniteness, its chances (of opening and closure) is in absolute spacetime (which is immanent). In other words, this work argues that to talk about urban spaces (contexts) is necessary to fully acknowledge the existence of the multitudinous to which they are attached, from which emerge the chances that might challenge our perspectives on homelessness and the city.

### **2.2.5 A last row: the usefulness of this premise on space**

The following vignette represents one of my encounters with the last homeless person that is taken into account in this chapter, Antonio (whom we have already encountered at the beginning of Chapter 1). The analysis of this vignette shows why such complex premise on space has been relevant in order to enrich our view on homelessness.

Early November 2009. Antonio and me were sitting on a tram, in Turin. I was spending quite a lot of time with him at that time, following him wherever he was going. That morning we drop on that tram – the old amber 16 – without any special reason. We set on its old-fashioned wood seats, one in front of the other with the corridor in the middle. The light was coming from the windows, passing through the bags, the shoes and the arms of the people standing around us. *Where are we going?* I asked him when the tram was moving making its typical noise, a loud mixture of railways, steel and lots of vibrations coming through the backbones. He was looking around as searching for something, and didn't reply to me. The 16 was going on, stopping from time to time to let people come in and go out. I was starving and becoming impatient, because I thought I was just losing my time (a sensation that occurred to me most of the time of my fieldwork, every time surprising me of the contrary). I stand up – waving a bit for the inertia of the tram's motion – and directing toward him, I touched his left shoulder. He looked at me. *Ehi, Antonio. Where are we going?*

*I don't know*, he replied peacefully.

*How it comes that you don't know?* I said, with a sarcastic smile on my face. He laughed, showing me a couple of holes between his teeth and he told me again, *I don't know*. Then he added: *Let's sit down*.

Surprised, I went back to my seat and I slumped down on it. Then, increasing the tone of my voice to overcome the noises around us, I added: *But are you waiting for someone?*

He looked at me once again, as a teacher would look at a dumb student, and he told me: *No*. I was puzzled.

I started then to think at my own affairs. When I was probably thinking at the list of groceries that I had to buy that same day, a loud muffled bang came just below the pavement. (*I realized after a while, hearing the comment of the driver, that sometimes in the old line of the 16 there are rocks that can interfere with the movement of the train*).

*Sbam!*

Just after it, the tram shacked abruptly and stopped with three syncopated movements. The noise of the people around me increased sharply, with some of them laboriously in balance screaming at the driver and some others picking up their stuff from the floor.

In that moment I saw Antonio holding an old woman, assuring she was feeling good, and then helping her collecting the tomato that had fell out of her shopping bag.

I thought: look at him, how good he is. Then, I realised something.

A moment after he had helped the old woman to re-arrange all her stuff, he looked in her eyes catching her gratitude and – it was a matter of second – he started telling her a couple of good, very simple, jokes (something about a plane with an American, an Italian and a French

having a trip with a Cheese-Ghost). Then, after the woman laughed and seemed a bit more relaxed, he began to talk about “his” life conditions: the fact that he had no job, that that same day was the birthday of his bellowed kid (although he hasn’t got any) but he had no money to buy any present, and so on. The woman listened at him and, with a sincere concern for the disadvantageous life condition of Antonio, took out of her pocket a brand new shining green note: 5 Euros.

During all this, Antonio never looked at me.

The 16 moved again, the light was still coming in and out of it, as the people at every stop. But I’m pretty sure that he was feeling my eyes upon him. I was learning that everything can happen. That space opens and closes. That new assemblages might always be created and disrupted. And that a rock that hits a tram can deterritorialize it as a form of public transport, and reterritorialize it as a good way to make the money that you need for your own business. (Danilo, Nov. 2009, SN).

This vignette can be read in many different ways. However, the first thing that appears obvious is that such description of one of Antonio’s daily event would hardly find a collocation in the canonical – especially geographical – literature on homelessness. Similar accounts might be found, on the contrary, in some of the compelling anthropological narration at which we have referred in the previous chapter. Nonetheless, the way through which this research intends to approach this narration (as all the other present in the following pages) is quite uncommon: the stress is not on Antonio-as-being, but on the more-than-human relations that shaped the context where Antonio-as-subject was located. Following what has been said in the last few pages of this chapter, these relations should be read giving prominence to the importance of things; to the relevance of emotions; of powers; of abstract machines that ceaseless codify spacetime; as well as to the fact that events are unpredictable, hence contexts change but they cannot be fully controlled (the outcome is always unknown and can be anything, it is a *chance*).

To read this narration coherently with the account proposed until here would mean to pay attention to the following points (a full description of the approach and the methods implied in this work will be given soon, in Chapter 3):

- The crowded atmosphere of the assemblages of the tram (people, noises, lights, etc.) and all the emotional and power features carried by them (i.e. In order to understand which assemblages and abstract machines are at work in that particular context);
- The quietness of Antonio – his attitude – in sitting in a bus without any particular reason for doing so (i.e. In order to situate the individual in the context just-for-what-he/she-does, without over-imposing any categorisation

- see next section on subjectivity);
- The agency of things (e.g. The stone that interferes with the movement of the bus), which must be acknowledged in order to grasp the deterritorialization's process that leads contexts and assemblages to reterritorialize in different ways:
  - The reactions of the people affected by the agency of the stone that hits the tram, and a whole new set of relationalities, emotionality and power relations;
  - The approach of Antonio towards the elderly woman, and his dialectical capacities, which can be grasped only recording it, without pre-assumption on Antonio himself;
  - The emergence of a new assemblage, the 5 euro green banknote, which carries particular meanings (abstract machines) and could open new and unknown relational chances to Antonio:
    - Etc.
    - Etc.
    - Etc.

These are all more-than-human interweaving assemblages that relate to each other in a context where everything could possibly happen, and where the subjectivity of homeless people is constituted. The theoretical argumentation so far has served to show that homeless people's street life cannot be reduced to certain spatial or analytical patterns. Absolute spacetime, as conceptual framework, gives us the possibility to read the homeless world as in becoming. Arguing that homeless people and the city relate on this plane means, in a word, that is possible to conceptually face them without any fix conceptual grid – without, for instance, harnessing them into pre-theorized spaces (as the “street”, the “sidewalk”, the “soup kitchen”) that have some relational characteristic but not others. Indeed there are “multiple spaces and times, not a Newtonian grid” (Nigel Thrift, 2000:221).

In recognizing the infiniteness of absolute spacetime, and in describing the relationalities happening in it paying attention at all the details listed above (and more), we could see things previously unseen. Not only the fact that a stone might open new spaces (a fact of little political relevance, someone might argue) but also the fact that Antonio, soaked in that particular unexpected process, has reacted in a certain way, both responding to an external stimulus (the agency of the stone) and activating some of his capacities in a certain way and not in another, capturing some potential of the absolute spacetime in which he was located. Antonio, in

other words, saw that that particular configuration of spacetime was changing (due to the stone that hit the tram) and caught a chance, constituting a new assemblage with the old woman and her bags. Understanding homeless people's space and time in this way really opens up the possibility to see – and accept, and recognize – the “flash of unexpected”. This conceptual overture has at least three relevant political aspects that concern the study of homelessness.

First of, this mode of proceeding, hence the fact that we pay attention at the development of a particular situation, allows us to recognize – for instance – that Antonio has some capacities that are not obvious: the capacity to codify a situation, to think quickly, to relate to it in order to gain his success, etc.

Secondly, recognising the capacities of Antonio, and keeping on following how the world relates to him and how he relates to the world (although this distinction exists only in an analytical fashion) we could say something more about Antonio's complex subjectivity: how is his subjectivity shaped by those events? In which ways? Looking at how he moves (and is moved by) space, what can we learn about him?

Thirdly, only analysing the interweaving having of the different assemblages that relate in a context, we would be able to describe the discourses, powers and affects carried by them. Antonio's discursive ability to depict himself as the “poor”, the charitable attitude expressed by the elderly woman, as well as the power carried by the money she gave him, are all aspects of the encounter between homeless people and the city that seem to concretely shape the lives of these individuals.

## **2.3 Mapping the homeless subject**

### ***2.3.1 Subjects in context***

The last theoretical step that is needed is to focus with more precision upon *homeless people*: how is it possible to concentrate on them without losing the variety of things just described?

A first possible movement is to acknowledge the importance of homeless people's body. Since the analysis of space and homeless people presented in this work is complex “we can no longer see the cultural sat atop of biology, no longer see the body as a container, no longer see a Manichean inside—outside division” (Crang & Thrift, 2000:8). The homeless body is *in* context, it performs it, it is

performed by it: “the body acts within an environment that appears to require it to respond in certain ways, but this environment is actually created and organized precisely by means of how people move around it” (Bell, 1997:139). Moreover, “bodies are normalized, and they suffer under the weight of the conventions that they are thus brought to repeat” (Loxley, 2007:121) and this can lead to an “identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts” (Butler, 1999:179). Homeless people can thus be understood as identities constituted through the normalization of their actions, hence in the same way as Butler understands the category of gender: “through the stylization of the body” (Ibid: 179).

Bodies alone, however, cannot fully express the affective and power dimension of homeless people’s street lives. Identity, moreover, is a fix concept that does not fully allow the expression of the self, neither the recognition of its more-than-human encounter with the things of the world. To avoid this limitation, a second possible movement is to concentrate on the main topic of this research, which relies on some of these suggestions but enriches them further: the subject.

For Lacan the subject is understood as “the very process of becoming what we call human, [that] happens in relation to images on which we model ourselves as though in a mirror” (Blum & Nast, 2000:183). This view of the subject is, as Lefebvre noticed, limiting: “Lacan’s subject, Lefebvre avers, is produced exclusively in the arena of images and language; consequently, the body is reduced to two dimensions” (Blum & Nast, 2000:184). For Lefebvre the relevant point is to include in the understanding of the subject “the underlying material, spatial and political forces that have the possibility to transcend the visual domain” (Simonsen, 2005:5). In other words Lefebvre’s subject is spatialized:

“space – my space – is not the context of which I constitute ‘textuality’: instead, it is first of all my body, and then it is my body’s counterpart or ‘other’, its mirror-image or shadow; it is the shifting intersection between that which touches, penetrates, threatens or benefits my body on the one hand, and all other bodies on the other” (Lefebvre, 1991 [1974]:184).

Starting from these premises, in this work homeless people’s subjectivity is seen as *a way to look specifically at human beings in (an through) an account that is no more human-centred*. The subject is hence the map of the entanglements between the body, the conscious, the unconscious and all the assemblages and

affective atmospheres of the urban. It is a map in motion, never fixed, that territorialize and deterritorialize itself continuously. It is a way to de-centre the importance of human rationality in a world where agency, power and affects are diffused. The human subject – coherently with the philosophical premises of this work – is not seen anymore as the “disengaged first-person-singular self calls on each of us to become a responsible thinking mind, self-reliant for her or his judgements on life, the universe and everything” (Pile & Thrift, 1995:14) but as the contingent sum of the context’s dynamics (Thrift, 1996:40), the power relations where individuals are placed (Ogborn, 1995) and the other more-than-human elements that we have highlighted until now (Wylie, 2010).

Homeless subjects are in context, but they change and are shaped not *in* it but *with* it. The (urban) world is indeed

“one in which various networks of the social make their way into the world according to different times and by occupying different spaces. Human subjects are the momentary creations of these networks, conjured into existence according to the summonings of particular contexts, and working to positional and dispositional ethics that they are often only vaguely conscious of” (Thrift, 2003:2021).

Subjectivity is hence the right conceptual tool to grasp the interrelations of absolute spacetime, contexts, more-than-human relations, powers, affects and bodies: homeless people are seen hence as *subjects* and not as a “social group” or “individuals”. This is a way to acknowledge that

“techno- logical machines of information and communication operate at the heart of human subjectivity, not only within its memory and intelligence, but within its sensibility, affects and unconscious fantasm. *Recognition of these machinic dimensions of subjectivation leads us to insist, in our attempt at redefinition, on the heterogeneity of the components leading to the production of subjectivity*” (Guattari, 1995:4, italics added).

### **2.3.2 Pathways to the homeless subject**

In order to concretely grasp the homeless subject, we have reworked Pile and Thrift’s “six ways to the subject” (Pile and Thrift, 1995), concentrating upon

three points: positioning, movement/practice, affects and power – which should be seen as the first theoretical-methodological tools needed to enact the philosophical machinery proposed in the previous pages.

*Positioning* is a way to “allow people to speak for themselves” (Pile, Thrift, 1995:17). Coherently with the critique of the canonical approaches on homelessness presented in the previous chapter, positioning is useful because it consists in letting the subjects *position, locate, express*, themselves without over-imposing rigid pre-assumption on them. The two elements that I’ve taken into consideration to understand how people position themselves in context are their *desires* and *projects*.

The first sociologist that stressed the importance of desire (and of belief too) was without any doubt Gabriel Tarde. Tarde saw belief and desire as “les formes ou forces innées et constitutive du sujet, les moules où il [sic] reçoit les matériaux brut de la sensation” (Tarde, 2005 [1895]:240)<sup>4</sup>. He hence saw desire as a constitutive part of the subject, one of the most intimate relational encounters with it (relations were indeed central in his sociological enquiry – i.e. Tarde, 2005a [1898]; Barry & Thrift, 2007). For Tarde “desire” was a quantifiable social factor: “if we deny [its] qualitative character, we declare sociology to be impossible” (Tarde, 1899:34). In this work, however, desire is not conceived as a quantitative element. Rather, it is conceived as the “mark of the constraints by which our pleasures are produced, afflicted, enhanced and proliferated” (Butler, 1999b:20). Therefore desires are all that wishes and aims that a subject claims for him or herself, which emerge by the constraints of the context in which he or she is immersed: they are what the person wishes, nothing less and nothing more, and they are grabbed as-they-come, with the consciousness that they are influenced by the context.

Projects are then grasped as a counter-balance element of desire. They are desires that are actually pursued and performed by subjects, through their encounters with urban worlds. Desires and projects permit to position the individual in contexts, allowing the analysis of the distance between them and to put this distance in relation to the relational patterns of the subject (helping to depict the differences that intervene among homeless people themselves).

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<sup>4</sup> The desire is “the shapes or the innate and constitutive forces of the subject, the mussels where he [sic] recognizes the raw material of sensation” (Translated by the author).

*Movement/practice* is the point that stresses the relational and performative ways through which the subject is constituted: “the subject lives the material world; it is of that world and produced by it” (Pile & Thrift, 1995:19). The relevance of this point is that allows to read homelessness through the movements of homeless people in the city, what they do, how they constitute with city’s assemblages. Performative practices are hence at the centre of this enquire, where the homeless-body plays a major role. In this sense, if “performance is usually thought of as the expressive impact of daily behavior with the body at its center” (Blumen, 2007:805), the body “is unique in playing a dual role as both the vehicle of perception and the object perceived [...] the body is always active [and] is always located in time and space, which are conceived through the body” (Thrift, 1996:13).

The attention on movement and practices (which has gained, in the last fifteen years, a major relevance in the geographical literature, Nash, 2000) is hence a way to acknowledge the importance of things and contexts (as well as the chances offered by space) in the life of homeless people, lives where “the environment is no longer passive. Instead it becomes a manifold of possibilities” (Thrift & Dewsbury, 2000:415) that are “rendered visible in the act of doing” (Dewsbury, 2000:472).

*Affects* and *powers* are conceived here as the two elements that compose every “to have”, every relational hybrid encounter of homeless people with the city. Therefore affects and powers have a major role in shaping homeless’ people subjectivities and are the third and last element that has been taken into consideration. In this fashion, contexts are seen as “affective atmospheres” (Anderson, 2009), soaked in joy, fear, excitement, love, hate, etc. If cities are “maelstrom of affects” (Thrift, 2008:XX) and affect itself is “a vital part of current social constructions, one which makes it possible to talk of a performative principle whose goal is to harness affect to power in ways hitherto unthought of” (Thrift, 2003: 2020), homeless people are therefore both the product and producer of such emotions, which play an important role in their life (Cloke, May, & Johnsen, 2010).

Moreover, as it has been argued, contexts are the outcome of relations enacted and shaped by abstract machines – discourses, rules and formal and

informal norms that codify spacetime in a way or another. In this sense, the more the context is rigidly codified, the less there is the possibility for the rise of different chances. Hence, discourses play a determining role in the modelling of homeless people's subjectivity too. As Butler pointed out: "if a word ... might be said to 'do' a thing, then it appears that the word not only signifies a thing, but that this signification will also be an enactment of the thing. It seems here that the meaning of a performative act is to be found in this apparent coincidence of signifying and enacting'" (Butler, 1995:198). Therefore, "the 'doing' of discourse cites already established formations of knowledge and it is this citation which produces social subjects" (Gregson & Rose, 2000:436).

In this work the homeless subject is hence rendered in its more-than-human spatial encounter with the city through geographies of positioning, performance and affective/powerful relationalities. A triad that, although (as any performative-based account) "it may never bring us to a neat conclusion" (Smith, 2000:635), it allows to challenge directly the fixities of homelessness' study.

### **2.3 A more-than-human geography of homeless people and the city: The thesis**

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the literature on homelessness has not investigated adequately homeless people at the street level or, if it has done so, the city (as a set of heterogeneous assemblages) has always been no more than a scenario. In other words:

"Researcher have typically viewed space as a platform or context to understand poverty [...] In both adaptation and resistance accounts of the actions of the poor, scholars view space as a background factor or neutral force where structural contexts are analytically separate from capacities for human agency" (Gotham, 2003:738).

Moreover, homeless people have generally been studied as deviant, pathologic, or, in the better cases, as people who need care and assistance.

Although each of these descriptions might be to a certain extent true, this work relies on two different hypotheses: one strictly related to the forms of homeless people's subjectivity, and the other to its interrelation with the city's contexts.

Firstly, we want to argue that homeless people's subjectivity (deleted brackets) is made up by sets of small things which take place in determinate urban contexts. This does not mean, however, that "subjectivity" is an easy and decisive concept to work with. Confronting homelessness through the concept of subjectivity can be, indeed, particularly odd – especially if we try to conceptualize this term neatly and once for all. The first hypothesis of this work is not, hence, that defining the homeless subjects we could say something more about them; but precisely that confronting them through the complexities of their subjectivities, we might understand better how they come into being in the street. Therefore the aim is to interrogate homeless individuals from the point of view of the different lines/relationalities/patterns that contribute to constitute them, using the concept of subjectivity as a weak conceptual container crossed by many strands that cannot be held all together – but of which we can at least be aware of.

Since "'worlds' are not formed in the mind before they are lived in, rather we come to know and enact a world from inhabiting it, from becoming attuned to its differences, positions and juxtapositions, from a training of our senses, dispositions and expectations and from being able to initiate, imitate and elaborate skilled lines of action" (Anderson & Harrison, 2010:9) and that "each living body both is space and has its space; it produces itself in space at the same time as it produces that space" (Simonsen, 2005:4) the constitution of the homeless subject is an elaborate process of encounter with the city with which we need to confront somehow, without being too much frightened about its complexity. Through the analysis of homeless people's positioning/how they see themselves; their movements and practices/what they do and how; and their encounters/affective and power relations with the urban, we aim to depict at least part of the complexities and dynamics of these beings. The first hypothesis of this work is hence that turning the light on this more-than-human and ceaseless constitution of the homeless subjects we can be able to understand better which are the things that concretely affect homeless people's lives.

Secondly, not only wider city's contexts and homeless' subjectivity are co-constituted, but these contexts might be more or less open to changes. These are chances offered by the infiniteness of absolute spacetime that, in a sense, could be

understood as a sort of immanent life – or, better said, of “a” life that “occurs before and alongside the formation of subjectivity, across human and non-human materialities and in-between distinctions between body and soul, materiality and incorporeality” (Deleuze, 2001 [1995]:13). The second hypothesis of this work is that sometimes homeless people are able to enact particular capabilities in order to grasp the chances offered by the space-time of the city: acknowledging these events can give us a new powerful perspective on the more-than-human, extravagant, and usually unconscious resources of these people.

In order to test these hypotheses it has been necessary to translate the theoretical framework just proposed into concrete researchable questions, enacted through coherent approaches and methods. The next chapter is about this, and will serve also as an introduction to the fieldwork.

# Chapter 3

## “Doing” homeless ethnographies

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### 3.1 Introduction

The more-than-human approach to homelessness presented until here– at least theoretically – permits to investigate how homeless people’s subjectivities constitute within the street without falling into the pitfalls of the canonical approaches.

Relations, affects/power and the flash of unexpected are not, however, easily at the hand or, better said, are not objects that can be counted or grasped in a simple way. To overcome this issue, that is half epistemological and half methodological, we have developed an approach that allows to translate the theory presented in the previous chapter into a concrete way of reading homelessness from a more-than-human, nuanced and non-representational point of view. This approach is based on autoethnography from below (to let the position of the individual arise from the field); journalistic reporting (to grasp relations without classifying them too much); and poiesis (to perceive, see and depict space in all its affective and power nuances, as well as chances) – three aspects that are hence fully integrated with the subjectivity’s account outlined before.

### 3.2 Non-representing homelessness

The approach adopted in this work has been developed through the use – among others – of autoethnographical methods, hence through “a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context” (Reed-Danahay, 1997:9). In particular, as the self-positioning of the individual has been identified as the first step to take in order to investigate homeless people’s subjectivity at the street level, this work refers particularly to the notion of “autoethnography from below”, which allows “the accustomed objects of research [to] produce self-representations that are meant to intervene in ethnographic and other dominant discourses about them” (Butz & Besio, 2009:1667).

In a niche, during the fieldwork this has meant to seriously take into account the things that homeless people were saying to me as they were saying them to me. Homeless people’s subjectivity has been hence depicted not only as the result of their relational lives in contexts, but also as the outcome of their thoughts and speeches. Their desires and projects have been acknowledged exactly as they came, for what they were, leading to “ontological implications [that] requires scholars to understand research participants as reflexive subjects whose self-narrations and indeed identities are constituted in relation to their own in a field that encompasses and entangles both parties” (Butz & Besio, 2009:1668). Approaching in this way homeless people’s most intimate desires and projects has meant to “let the actors have some room to express themselves” (Latour, 2005:142). In the end, this has allowed the ethnographical enquiry of this work to grab the self-positioning of individual without filtering it from the very beginning, and hence registering it in its original (although always contextualized) form.

In order to find a way to grasp the relational practices through which homeless individuals perform (and are performed by) the urban realm, which is the second relevant point in the constitution of the homeless subject, I have referred back to my geographical and anthropological background. As it has been previously stated, one of the first and most-known ethnographical study of homelessness is Anderson’s “The Hobo” (Anderson, 1999 [1923]), which was done

in the '20s under the influence of Robert Park, contributing to the formation of the so-called Chicago school of sociology. One of the most interesting features of this work, as well of others that explicitly refer to Anderson's approach (e.g. Harper, 2006), consists in the fact that the author shows the links and connection of "the hobo" neither harnessing them into theoretical schematization nor trying to explain them too rigidly. Anderson seems, in other words, to act more like a reporter than a sociological researcher: he told a story without being naively interested in explaining it too much. In a sense, this is close to what ANT claimed much later: what is relevant is to trace things and their connections, without adding any particular explanation (Latour, 2005). ANT, however, poses some problems (particularly in relation to the role of the *actant* that actually aligns the actor-network, Murdoch, 1998; 2006) and becomes quite rigid when it comes to the distinction between mediator/translator (Latour, 1999; Latour, 1988; Law, 2008; Law & Callon, 1992). Although the ANT framework has been relevant in this work (especially in relation to the agency of things, Latour & Hermant, 1998) the journalistic-reporting method of the early Chicago school seems, on the other hand, more adapt for the kind of non-representational enquiry proposed.

Lindner has clearly shown Park's attachment to use reporting as-a-method, describing it in this way:

"As an explorer, the reporter develops research techniques which correspond both to the image of the adventurer and to the altered conditions in the world of the big city: observation and interview, on-the-spot investigation and undercover research. The big city free rein to the art of observation [...] Just like the ethnologist, the reporter has his sources, "key persons", like the concierge, the hotel porter, the bartender and his "native" informants in the ethnic quarters" (Lindner, 2006:29).

What is proposed here is that using a kind of journalist approach to the social realm we could actually trace the relations (of a more-than-human fashion) without being pre-determined in our inquiries by any form of theoretical slavery. In the end, just like Anderson, in order to grasp the relational performativities of homeless people in Turin, the approach of this work has been to detect things (in the field) without discerning their potential value a-priori (hence no mediators, no translators) and, than, to describe relations as they were seen and perceived by

me, without adding to them any particular explanation (the theory proposed in Chapter 2 has been conceived, indeed, more as a methodological tool rather than as classification or explicatory system). More-than-human relations and performances have hence been ethnographically gained and journalistically portrayed, displaying thus their nuances as much as possible and letting the door open for the possibility to read them under many points of view.

The third and last aspect that characterizes the approach adopted in this study is the acknowledgement that nothing is static, that context change continuously, that new spaces can open and other close being always soaked in different affective and powerful dimensions, and that this takes place without pre-determined causes and hence is unpredictable in nature. To address this difficult stance (how it might be possible to grasp powers, affects, and chances?) we have referred to the concept of *poiesis*, which Heidegger describes as a bringing-forth, hence as “the arising of something from out of itself” (Heidegger, 1954:318). *Poiesis* is understood in this work as a way of doing things or, better said, *of doing them being done by them*: it is the creation of meanings without filters, an encounter with the world that exceeds the world itself.

This way of approaching homeless people’s unpredictable world (with its emotional and powerful characterizations) rises both from my personal inclinations (as I’m used to write poems) and from my previous geographical background – Dematteis’ advocacy to see the geographer as a poet too is well known in Italy (Dematteis, 1985; 2010). To be poetic, to act (as researchers) in *poiesis* does not mean neither to invent something nor to be particularly artistic. Rather, it is a tuning with the infiniteness of space, an opening to its unpredictability, but also to its affective atmospheres, its chains, its discourses. It is a way to grasp the

“tacit choreographies of everyday events [that] create situational, personal and cultural expressions of life. Gestures and movement sequences are co-creations of multiple kinds of expressiveness. Poetics of human movement in quite ordinary everyday events create dynamics of form as a special circulation of energy and life in the heart of a situation, a person, a group, a culture” (Engel, 2007:20).

*Poiesis* is hence more a sensational inclination toward the field rather than a methodological schema. It consists in being open to the unexpected, in recognizing it, in acknowledging its importance; as well as to be empathically tuned with the otherness of the world, being ready to follow it and being followed by it forgetting the theoretical grid that researchers usually prepare. This kind of opening allowed this work to see homelessness in a poetic way: not in the sense of romanticizing it, forgetting the hardness usually carried by it, but rather in the sense of letting it express itself in front of me-as-researcher and in relation to me – a passage that, as it should be clear from the empirical chapters, let me grasp the numerous nuances of the people (and the relational worlds) involved in it. To paraphrase Linder, the mention of *poiesis* in the framework of this work “is no accident. In a culture distorted by norms, it is the empathy, intuition and sensitivity of the poetic person that can successfully break through the ossified shells of conventional thought. After all, the Greek *poietai* was the creative man per se” (Lindner, 2006:204).

The actualization of the complex theory of homeless people’s subjectivity advanced in the previous chapter pass hence through these three approaches (autoethnography from below; reporting; *poiesis*). Their strength lies not in their newness in the field of homelessness study, but in their potential to be tools of collection rather than instruments of classification. These approaches have guaranteed a constant bond between the ethnographical enquiry and the theory, to which we will turn (in section 3.8) after the presentation of the fieldwork and of the methodologies that sustain this work.

### **3.3 An introduction to the fieldwork**

The fieldwork on which this work is based lasted ten months, from October 2009 to June 2010, and has been done in (and with) Turin – a wealthy north-western Italian city of almost 1,000,000 inhabitants (much more if we consider the whole metropolitan area), Olympic city in 2006, home of the FIAT (the well-known cars-maker), and of several good old-fashioned bars and patisseries. I’ve chosen Turin for three practical reasons. The first is that I already knew it, as I’ve lived there for six years (during my undergraduate and master studies, as well as during

my first academic experiences). This allowed me to save a lot of time in setting the fieldwork, and permitted to understand better what people were talking about when referring to the urban environment. The second reason is that Turin is one of the biggest city in Italy, generally considered a wealthy place, which nonetheless had faced (during the industrialization process of the '50s and the deindustrialization process of the '80s) and still faces today (for the impoverishment of large sectors of the population, the increasing immigration, and the aging process) many social issues, not last homelessness. The third and last reason is related to the fact that I felt the necessity to do a work that could be potentially relevant for the city in which I've spent much of my young-adult time, a city that with its troubles has given me a lot in terms of personal experience.

For this fieldwork I've followed with attention the relational patterns of 7 people, three short-term homeless people (Chapter 4) and four long-term ones (Chapter 5), all males, all Italians. The reason why I've chosen to concentrate only on Italian men depends from the fact that both immigrants (women or men) and Italian women have completely different relational patterns from the ones of Italian homeless men (as they have access to dedicated services that are, particularly for women, quite developed in Turin). In the end, as the approach taken is not a comparative one but an in-deep analysis, a choice was to be made and I've decided (after a month, September 2009, in which I've done my pilot work) to focus on the group I felt would be easy to enter in contact with (once again the reason was to have more time to spend with them).

The 7 individuals on whom I've decided to focus have been chosen following three loose-criteria: a) the time they had already been in the street; b) their age (the youngest was 23-years-old and the older 71); their wish to be part of this study and to spend some time with me. Apart from the 7 individuals on whom I've decided to focus (who have been formally interviewed at least five times each), I've interviewed other 47 homeless people (30 Italian men, 4 Italian women, 11 foreigner men and 2 foreigner women) and encountered many others. Those stories have helped me in understanding better some of the homelessness contexts in Turin and although I've not used these materials in this work, some of them appear here and there (Chapter 1, 2, 6). Apart from homeless people, I've formally interviewed also 16 persons working in different roles (social educators, nuns, social assistants, volunteers, etc.) with homeless people, although, once again, I've used only the most relevant part of this material in the making of this work (fig. 3.1).

Fig. 3.1 The ethnographic material presented in the work

<i>Name</i>	<i>Basic info</i>	<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Kind</i>
Carlo	Short-term homeless	4	Main ethnographies
Marco	Short-term homeless	4	Main ethnographies
Valerio	Short-term homeless	4	Main ethnographies
Daniele	Long-term homeless	5, 6	Main ethnographies
Giuseppe	Long-term homeless	5	Main ethnographies
Giorgio	Long-term homeless	5, 6	Main ethnographies
Davide	Long-term homeless	5	Main ethnographies
Paolo	Short-term homeless	2	Secondary ethnographies
Albano	Long-term homeless	2	Secondary ethnographies
Roberto	Long-term homeless	2, 6	Secondary ethnographies
Antonio	Long-term homeless	1, 2	Secondary ethnographies
Silvano	Short-term homeless	6	Secondary ethnographies
Ivan	Social educator	5	Institutional interviews
Bruno	Social educator	6	Institutional interviews
Nicoletta	Social assistant	6	Institutional interviews
Simona	Volunteer	6	Institutional interviews
Angelo	Volunteer/Responsible of service	6	Institutional interviews
Nun Teresa	Responsible of service	6	Institutional interviews
Friar Stefano	Responsible of service	6	Institutional interviews
Marco Borgione	Councillor of the City	6	Institutional interviews

These numbers, however, do not give the sense of how I've done the research I'm going to present. Formal interviews (usually semi-structured) have been just a very small part of it, especially with the 7 people that I've followed the most: walking, eating, chatting, smoking, drinking as well as getting excited or bored with them had been the core of this work. Numbers can't give justice to this

approach that needs to be described literally. However, I can give at least little statistical information. During the ten months of my fieldwork I've offered more or less 278 cigarettes, an average of 5 coffees a week (which means roughly 200 in total), at least one meal a week (meals were less accepted than coffees); and I've been the fortunate object of many other similar attentions (the most disparate presents were randomly given to me). I've been spending an average of at least 6 hours a day in the field (when I was serving as volunteer even more), and last but not least my documents have been checked by police officers several times (especially in the main train station of the city).

### **3.4 Settling down in the field**

Before turning to the presentation of the methods used in this work, I should now spend few words about the first two issues that I had to face in approaching the field, namely where to begin and how to get in touch with homeless people in Turin (and how to gain their trust and respect).

Concerning the first problematic, at the beginning of September 2009, during my pilot study, I tried three different routes. The first one was to move freely in the city's areas most frequented by homeless people, and try to get in touch with them. However, this tentative failed after the first tries: homeless people were not recognizing me as one of them, neither as someone who they could trust. The street, in other words, was not giving me the adequate context where to build a relationship of mutual trust: the encounters were too fast and soaked in reciprocal suspect. The second option was to try to be one of them, hence to introduce myself in their worlds as a fictive homeless. However, although this option was surely highly fascinating, it raised an incredible high amount of problems. First of all, I was living in Turin and although I could have slept with them in dormitories, benches or wherever, sooner or later I had to return to my flat with the risk to be discovered either by homeless people themselves or by the volunteers, social assistants and educators that I would have known in the street. Secondly, I know a certain amount of people in the city, and to pretend to keep secret that I was undertaking a cover research would have been silly. Thirdly, to pretend to be a homeless would have changed the main enquiry of my research, moving the focus

from the *subjectivities* of homeless people to the changes of my *own subject* during the play. Last but not least, pretending to be one of them and let them believe this, would have not only increased the difficulty in the collection of materials (notes, audio recording, etc.) but would have raised an incommensurably high number of ethical issues. After having tried these options I turned then to the third one, which consisted in choosing as starting point an institution where volunteering and then, from there, starting to get more close to homeless people. After having tried to volunteer in a dormitory (of the Gruppo Abele, a big Catholic-oriented institution) I've ended up in the biggest (and almost only one) morning soup kitchen of the city: the Vincenziani's morning soup kitchen, located via Nizza 24 (just along the main train station, Porta Nuova) (Fig. 3.2).

To be right, this is not only a soup kitchen, but a centre – owned and managed by the Company of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, a Society of Apostolic Life for women within the Catholic Church (see Chapter 6) – which, at the time of my fieldwork, was offering a wide range of services for homeless people. The reasons why I've chosen it are essentially four. Firstly, in Turin the Vincenziani's service for homeless people is historically one of the most important, big and frequented. Sooner or later almost every homeless people of the city through there, and this is especially valid for the Italians – whom usually gather around the main train station – hence it was a good place where to meet homeless persons. Secondly, breakfast was served from 7.30 a.m. This allowed me to have the whole day, from morning to night, to do my observation – in a word I could potentially follow the individuals from the very beginning of their day. Thirdly, two days a week there was a free distribution of clothes for Italian men. Homeless people were hence waiting for their turn (even for two or three hours) in the same room where they have had their breakfast, just sitting and barely talking to each other. Once I got their trust that became a fixed appointment for me, because it was a relaxed environment where it was possible both to gather information, ask questions, and to observe their interpersonal dynamics. Fourth, to be a volunteer allowed me to understand better the discourses and the dynamics of the provision of services for homeless people (which have set the ground for some of the reasoning presented in Chapter 6).

This choice raised, however, some issues too. The most important was that at the beginning of my volunteering I was looked suspiciously from both sides. By the volunteers, who perceived that I was not a Catholic like them (for instance, I never joined them in praying before serving the breakfast). However, as I always

worked with passion and respect, I never encountered any particular trouble. By homeless people, because they were thinking that I was working for the soup kitchen trying to steal their secrets and personal stories. This last point could create lots of problems for my work, but fortunately two separate factors helped me to overcome it. The first is related to the way I got in touch with homeless people, and the second to the way I managed their private data.

Antonio, whom we have already encountered in the previous chapter, has been my gatekeeper. Gatekeepers are fundamental in any kind of ethnographical work, and especially in fields where the social status of the researcher and of the other parts is visibly different. Everyone had one gatekeeper: from Carl, that opened the doors of the world of tramps to Harper (Harper, 2006); to Hakim, who helped Duneier in his experience with magazines street vendors (Duneier, 1999); or to Marco, who allowed Bonadonna to write probably one of best ethnographical account of homelessness in Italy (Bonadonna, 2005); the examples are many. Antonio was mine. I firstly encountered him on a very cold morning at the beginning of October 2009. I had just finished to serve breakfast and moved outside the soup kitchen. On the sidewalk there were a bunch of homeless men talking. I passed them and I heard that one was making a joke, in the Neapolitan dialect. I stopped and I listened to the joke, barely noticed by anyone (I can understand the dialect of Napoli since my father is from there). The joke finished – it was a good, although quite hard, joke – and people dispersed and formed new groups. In that moment I caught the occasion to get in touch with the man that had just finished to tell the funny story, offering him a cigarette and asking if he would have liked to have a coffee at the bar. He said yes, and from the morning after he started to introduce me to everyone as the “guy who is going to write a book on homelessness”. People were generally suspicious, but being introduced by a well known and respected character of the street as Antonio made a difference.

However, Antonio alone would not have been enough to built relationships of trust and respect between me and the homeless persons I encountered and followed. Looking back at the field I must say that the key element that allowed me to (almost) never have trouble and being (almost) always well accepted by them has been the way I’ve managed their private information: I never spoke of someone with someone else; never referred to facts, places or persons I knew during my chatting with them; and never tried to push them hard on talking about things they would have not liked to say. However, as these points (and similar others) have been very important, I will return on them later.

Fig. 3.2 The Vincenziani's morning soup kitchen, via Nizza 24, Turin

*Homeless people cueing outside the soup kitchen – February 2010*



The soup kitchen was essentially a medium size room with more or less 20 square tables (4 seats each). In the west wall there were three big windows with ground glasses (the light came in, but was not possible to see outside); at the top left of the east wall there was a door that led to the place where the free clothes were distributed and the ambulatory was located (there was no free access to this area); and on the northern side there were two other doors that led to two rooms: one where there was the care and listening centre; the other where was possible to collect the tickets which allowed to take free showers at the public baths dispersed in the city. On the remaining side there was the entrance, which consisted in a big anti-panic door lifeguarded by an ex-homeless (a tall, fat and slow guy with a disenchanted view of the world) who was working (with a bursary from the social services of the Municipality) for the nuns. Illustrations both of Catholic prayers and of Catholic's holy scene were painted on all the walls.

*Yogurt ready to be served – January 2010*



The breakfast was served by two nuns and some volunteers (three or four persons usually with a strong Catholic belief) between 7.30 a.m. and 8.30 a.m. However, homeless people usually arrived before that time and waited either on the sidewalk in front of the building or in the internal courtyard. They usually arrived around 6.00 a.m., or even before, as outside the soup kitchen there was every morning a sheet of paper where to sign, in order to reserve the turn for the collection of the free clothes (which usually began half an hour after the end of the breakfast service, at 9.00 a.m.). For this reason, there were people arriving even at 5.00 a.m., as almost every homeless aimed to be among the firsts to be served in order to have the best choice of clothes. Every time there were more or less around 150-200 people eating during the hour of service, which were mostly males with a prevalence of foreigners (roughly 40% Italians and 60% immigrants; the 95% were males). The atmosphere was chaotic. The service usually started with one of the nuns praying and giving a short sermon, most of the time about the meaning of poverty and the importance of Catholic's charity. After that the service started: volunteers were going around giving either tea or milk with coffee; biscuits; and, depending on the availability of the day, heated pizza, yogurt, or marmalade. The tables were made ready before the commencement of the service, with a basket of bread, four cups with spoons and paper towels.

*Having breakfast – January 2010*



Homeless people were entering and going out continuously for one hour, creating a lot of confusion (as they were moving always with bags of any kind). Sometimes this confusion degenerated into fights – among homeless people – and in discussion concerning the service – between homeless people and the volunteers (this happened to me a couple of time too). The chaos and the confusion were created, however, more from the density and the movements of people and parcels than from voices – barely anyone was talking to each other. The place, in the end, was generally quite and clean (particularly in the first 10 minutes of the service) and well heated. The smell was a humid one: wet clothes mixing with hot milk powder; the same smell every morning during the eight months I've been going there (in the last two months of my fieldwork the soup kitchen closed down for renovation works).

### 3.5 Methodological tools

Different methods have been developed in accordance to the three approaches showed before (autoethnography from below; reporting and poiesis) in order to grasp the positioning of individuals, trace their relations, and collect info on the discursive practices that take place within the street. I will briefly present them accordingly to the chapter they refer to, then I will turn to how I have concretely analysed the materials.

Chapter 4 and 5 tackle the main research question of this work from two different perspectives, investigating how different subjects constitute themselves in the process of becoming and being homeless individuals (Fig. 3.3). The methods used for the gathering of the materials useful for these chapters were essentially five.

*Participant observation.* Walking with homeless people, going in public parks or at the train station (during day and night), having coffees and lunches, queuing with them to access soup kitchens or other services, as well as laying on a bench without much to say or to do, or being a special guest in a marriage between homeless persons, were all practices that allowed me to observe their relations, affects and powers in the contexts where they were taking place (Cook, 2005; Kesby, Kindon, & Pain, 2005). During my participant observation I was barely taking any written note, relying most on audio notes with spare thoughts or observation.

*Not-undercover observation.* Being a volunteer in the soup kitchen allowed me to collect materials and impressions that have been fundamental for the case study. Once again, audio notes helped me to save time, as it was impossible to take hand-notes while volunteering. The observation of homeless life in the soup kitchen was not-undercover, as all (at least the Italians) knew what I was doing there and that I was not linked to the Vincenziani's institution by any mean.

*Undercover observation.* I've used this kind of observation just a couple of times in the fieldwork, to understand better certain dynamics. Going to the black

market pretending to be a customer rather than someone interested in the dynamics that shaped that place; sitting in the waiting room of the Porta Susa train station and walking around the place for many hours just to watch the movements of homeless people although pretending to be someone waiting for a train; or cueing out of the Emergenza Freddo's camp (see Chapter 6) pretending to be an homeless just to understand what kind of population was going there; have all been undercover observations relevant particularly for the verification of the information gathered with interviews and chats.

*Informal chats.* Although this methodology is fully part of participant observation methods, informal chats (hence chats not guided by *any* wish of gathering particular information) have been deeply relevant for my study. First of, these chats allowed me to build relationships of trust with the homeless people that I had encountered, as they saw me not only as a "journalist" or as a "researcher" but as someone with whom they could talk even about football, music, or their personal troubles. Secondly, these chats had been relevant to gather information otherwise impossible to collect – as certain nuances of the character, certain preferences or desires (particularly useful for the positioning side) – and even to depict the small relational changes not perceived as important by the individual but still worth to record.

*Semi-structured interviews.* I've applied this classical, although not banal and easy (Valentine, 2005a), method mostly in the Vincenziani's soup kitchen (when people were waiting for taking clothes) and at the Cottolengo's dormitory (where I was going every Wednesday evening, from 8 p.m. to 11 p.m., from March to the beginning of May 2010, to meet the homeless people that were sleeping there). In these places I had the opportunity to conduce in-deep interviews with the 7 homeless people that I had followed mostly (seeking, in the end, to understand better the material collected with other methodologies), and with a wide number of other homeless individuals – even women and foreigners.

Fig. 3.3 The methods used for the ethnographical fieldwork – Chapter 4 and 5

*Partying at the marriage between two homeless persons*



An unusual moment of the participant observation undertaken with homeless people. I've been invited to this marriage as a guest, like other homeless, recognized by everyone as a friend and not anymore as the "journalist" or the "researcher".

*In the Vincenziani's soup kitchen*



Not-undercover observation: spending my time with homeless people as volunteer

*The Sunday black market at Porta Palazzo*



Undercover observation: walking in the black market pretending to be a customer (I was

carrying and hidden camera)

*Piazza Carlo Felice, a public garden near the main train station*



Informal chats: going to meet a homeless person sitting on a bench in a public garden.

*My notebooks for semi-structured interviews*



Some of the notebooks I was always carrying with me, using them mainly for semi-structured interviews.

Chapter 6 concerns the analysis of the institutions (public or private) that provide services for homeless people, in order to unfold the discursive powers (as well as the affective dimensions) rendered by them. The methods used for the gathering of the materials useful for this chapter were essentially four (fig. 3.4).

*Structured and semi-structured interviews.* These interviews have been done to heads of services, social assistants, social educators, volunteers and even to the Communal Councillor of Turin for Social Policies. Interviews were mainly semi-structured, although in a few cases (as for instance with the Councillor) the interviews have been more structured. Nonetheless I preferred, where possible, to stick to first kind, as it permits the raising of unexpected meanings, sentences, nuances, which are quite relevant for the analysis of the discourse.

*Collection of documents.* For the analysis of the discourses produced by the different institutions I've been collecting any kind of document produced by them:

brochures, books, flyers, and even stickers. These have been useful to understand the rhetorical of certain kinds of discourses and ways of “help”.

*Participant observations.* Being within the institutions (as volunteer) allowed me to grasp better the meaning and nuances of the discourses spread by them. I’ve been volunteering, as it has been said, in the Vincenziani’s soup kitchen (from October 2009 to April 2010); in the Cottolengo’s dormitory (from March 2010 to May 2010); and in disparate occasions in other services too (as for instance at the Sant’Antonio da Padova’s soup kitchen).

*Photo analysis.* Although I have not used photo-analysis consistently, this technique helped me to enrich my knowledge of the discourses produced by the institutions that I’ve taken into consideration. Analysing pictures taken by me, as well as images produced by them (contained in brochures or in their website) has been a valuable tool to find confirmations of what I depicted in other *signs* (as written texts or recorded speeches) (Aitken & Craine, 2005).

Apart from the methodologies just outlined, each chapter has been enriched with series of photographs that I’ve taken during the fieldwork. The intention has been to photograph the contexts performed by the homeless people that have been taken into consideration. Prominence has been given, hence, to the more-than-human rather than to beings, although without the aim to do any kind of precise ethno-photography. Moreover, photographs helped me during the writing process as devices to re-settle myself into the feelings and emotions of the fieldwork, stimulating reflections on the gathered data.



*Nun Teresa*



Participant observation as volunteer: Nun Teresa – head of the Vincenziani's soup kitchen at the time of my fieldwork – running into the kitchen.

*Counselling services' waiting rooms*

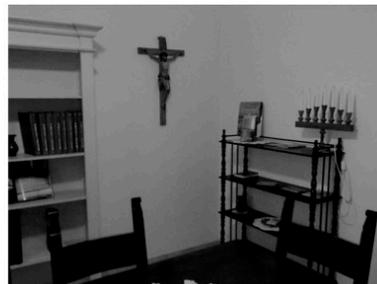


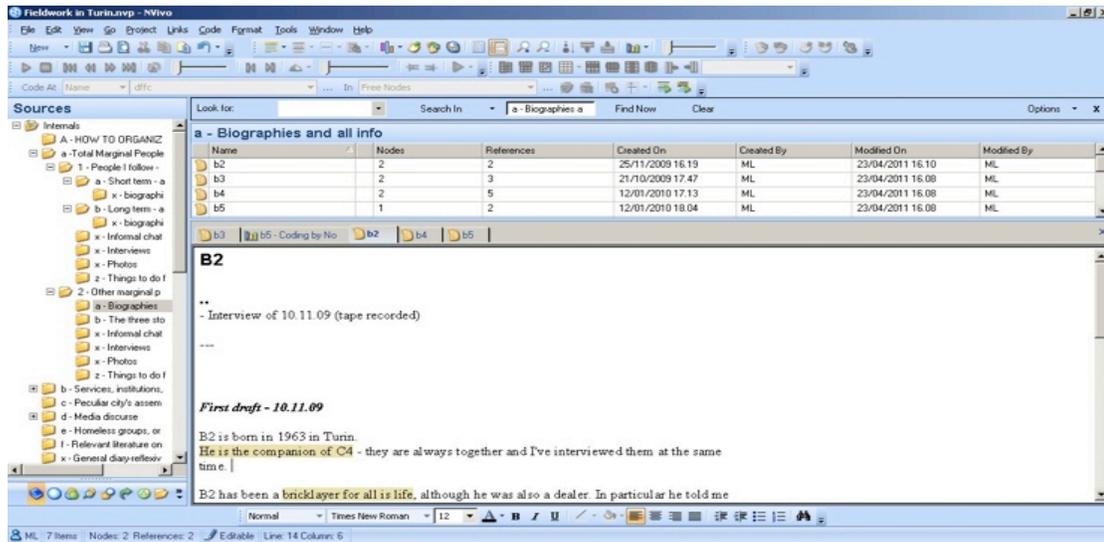
Photo analysis: on the left, the office where the social educators of the Territorial Unit of via Sacchi were receiving homeless people; on the right, two examples of waiting rooms for the counselling services offered by the Cottolengo and the Sant'Antonio da Padova religious institutions. The symbolic powers at work reveal the messages and discourses spread by the different institutions: the public efficiency and bureaucracy (evident from the prominence of the PC) versus the faith in God and in its messages (evident from the prominence of religious icons).

### **3.6 The analysis of the materials and the writing of the work**

The organization and the analysis of the material collected with the previous methods has been realized through different tentative, which in the end have led to the choice of the one more coherent with the theory and the approach proposed in this work.

The first attempt has been to organize and codify the chats, the interviews and all the other sources of information using different CAQDAS software as NVivo 8 and HyperRESEARCH (Cope, 2005; Crang, 2005 - Fig.3.5). If at an initial stage I was quite impressed by the number of things that I could have done coding and interconnecting chunks of texts, audio and images, in the end I was completely loosing the grip of my work: too much codification and too much classification were leading me to an highly rigid and standardized approach that was exactly the opposite of what I was aiming for. Affective nuances and emotions were drifted away, and the inter-rationalities between human and non-human hard to show. In few words, I felt that CAQDAS software were not helping me but instead they were codifying the context of my analysis (working, in this sense, truly as abstract machines). I decided then to leave them apart and to go at the opposite side of the camp, with a completely different approach.

Fig. 3.5 NVivo 8 screenshot



Analysing materials using CAQDAS software was turning my research into a sterile classification of data rather than to a multiplication of meanings.

The second major attempt to organize and analyse the materials consisted in maps hand-drawn by me (fig. 3.6). These maps were representing the relational pattern of the individuals, plus their positioning and most evident affects and powers. In a word, they were aimed at being *maps of the subject*. They were drawn starting from tables containing strings of text with data concerning the most common speeches of the individuals, their desires and projects, as well as their movements and practices in the city from morning to night (the frequency of a certain speech or relational encounter determined either its dimension or its presence in the map). In this sense, maps would have been both a tool to facilitate my writing and a device to communicate in a visual form the outcome of the research. However, they posed some serious limitations. First of, they could be easily misunderstood: although they were not meant to represent, they would have certainly been received as form of simplified representation. Secondly, they were too rigid, without being able to fully acknowledge the nuances of the relational encounters of homeless people. Thirdly, they were not able at all to represent the chance of space, as they were limited both by my actual capacity to draw and my imagination.



above mentioned, adding my personal remembrances, notes and comment – highlighting in the end the part of the text that could be particularly relevant for the main work.

What I've followed is hence a less rigid and technically driven method to organize and analyse the materials. This had allowed me to leave room for the (hopefully) full expression of the shadows and chances of the accounts presented (in this sense the use of a particular software – Scrivener – aimed and designed for the writing of screenplays, in which I could incorporate all the media that I had collected, had been tremendously helpful).

In the concrete writing of the thesis, in the end, I've tried to report the relationalities that I've been able to depict without closing them into rigid classification and schematisation (coherently with the reporting/autoethnography/poiesis triad previously presented). In this sense, both in the organization and in the writing of this work I've tried to follow Latour's claim about avoiding social explanations and just describing things (fig. 3.7), which seemed to me the same as Park's suggestion to Anderson (the author of "The Hobo"): "write down only what you see, hear, and know, like a newspaper reporter" (Anderson, 1999 [1923]:25).

Fig. 3.7 An advocacy for description

In his "Re-assembling the social" Bruno Latour argues in favour of descriptive account, using a fictive talk with one of his student to show his message. I report a small passage that has been deeply relevant for my approach to the writing of this work:

*Student:* But descriptions are too long. I have to explain instead.

*Professor:* See? This is where I disagree with most of the training in the social sciences.

*S:* You would disagree with the need for social sciences to provide an explanation for the data they accumulate? And you call yourself a social scientist and an objectivist!

*P:* I'd say that if your description needs an explanation, it's not a good description, that's all. Only bad descriptions need an explanation. It's quite simple really. What is meant by a 'social explanation' most of the time? Adding another actor to provide those already described with the energy necessary to act. But if you have to add one, then the network was not complete. And if the actors already assembled do not have enough energy to act, then they are not 'actors' but mere intermediaries, dopes, puppets. They do nothing, so they should not be in the description anyhow. I have never seen a good description in need of an explanation. But I have read countless bad descriptions to which nothing was added by a massive addition of 'explanations'

(Latour, 2005:147)

### 3.7 Ethical issues

Working with sensible population and data raises lots of ethical issues (Dowling, 2005; Valentine, 2005b). The ones that I've faced directly were concerned not only with the act of doing fieldwork research, but even with the communication process (hence the writing) of the final work.

Concerning the first point I've respected the following ethical points:

- Do not speak about someone own affairs in his/her presence or absence – firstly in order to respect the privacy of individuals, and secondly in order to avoid the breaking of the relationship of trust between me and them;
- Do not report to social assistants, educators and volunteers any data concerning the homeless persons interviewed;
- Do not make any relevant favour or job for homeless people in order to do not allow them to think that I could have changed their situation;
- Do not create any sort of expectations about my research. I've always made clear that mine would be an academic work that would have not been written in Italian and that probably would have not changed their situation (for this reason some of them distrusted me, but this happened just with few persons). However, during my fieldwork I felt morally obliged toward these people and their stories, as well as the commitment of leaving in Turin at least part of the outcomes of my work. I've decided, hence, to write a social novel (followed by a short essay focused on Turin's case) on the matter (Lancione, 2011). Initially my aim was simply to give it to them, and then I submitted it to some publishers obtaining positive responses. The novel has been published in late June 2011 (fig. 3.8), and all the homeless people that I've followed most, plus a selected number of institutional members, received it.

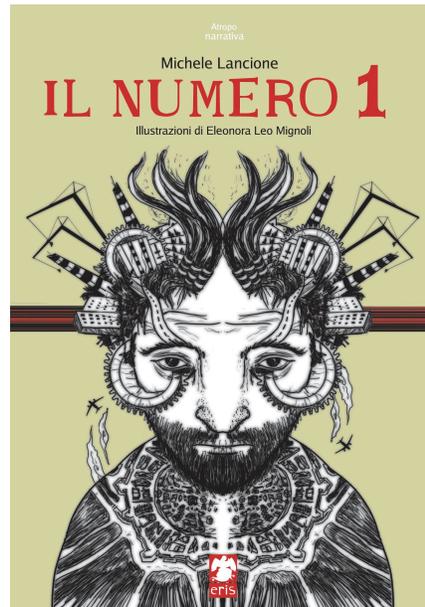
Concerning the second point, I've aligned the writing of this work to the respect of the following ethical points:

- I have changed all the names of the homeless people presented in the work,

- even when they had explicitly requested me to do the contrary (the data are too sensible to do so);
- I have decided to do not use any photo in which is possible to recognize someone at a first glance;
  - I have decided to write most of the text using past forms, to highlight the fact that the “social” is always in motion and to acknowledge the inevitable changes that shape space and subjects;
  - Although this is a research concerning (Italian) homeless man, I have written most of the text taking into consideration the important issue of masculinity style-of-writing and gender-sensitive-language. For this reason, when possible I’ve used the third person plural, the formula his/her, or I’ve eliminate the pronoun altogether.

The aim of these bullet points is double. Firstly, to respect the personal life and the trust of the people I’ve encountered without letting them feeling as “sources” of data. They were (and hopefully remain even in this text) complex *subjects*: to show this complexity and to build a political argument able to enact it was and still remains my main purpose. Secondly, to avoid a narrative of homeless individuals that would have portrayed them as the poor, marginalized and deprived men of our time, as it is so commonly done both by TV and academics (for a critique, Del Casino & Jocoy, 2008). In this sense I’ve tried to follow the advices of those scholars that, in the field of homelessness studies, have enriched our knowledge on the matter without bend it to canonical and stereotyped account (e.g. Cloke, May, Johnsen, 2010; Desjarlais, 1997; Takahashi, 1996), showing, for instance, that “there are some broken windows on these blocks. But mainly there are windows that look broken to people who are just passing by” (Duneier,1999:315).

Fig. 3.8 Il numero 1



“Il numero 1” is the illustrated social novel that I wrote between the end of 2009 and middle 2010. It is written in Italian and it features a short introduction by a homeless person that I’ve encountered in my fieldwork; a short essay that I wrote at the beginning of 2011, containing some general reflection on homelessness in Turin; as well as 20 original black and white illustrations (made by Eleonora Leo Mignoli, a young Italian artist). A small but fierce editor based in Turin has published the novel at the end of June 2011. Initially it had a local distribution, with presentation in the city and then, from September 2011, is distributed nationally in Italy.

### 3.8 Being on track

Doing homeless ethnographies with the aim to grasp how homeless subjects emerge in the more-than-human contexts of the city undoubtedly poses many challenges. Classical ethnographical methods such the one used in this work could easily reduce its theoretical premises and hypothesis, leading to more canonical narration of homelessness. However, both the methods used and the analysis of data have been constantly verified within the framework proposed in order to insure the maximum degree of coherence. In this sense the approaches presented at the beginning of this chapter should be seen as bridges between the theory and the methodology used in this research, which allow to stay on track and to analyse

the material in line with the theorization. Concretely speaking, this coherence has been achieved through three levels (Fig. 3.9).

At a more theoretical level, a first degree of coherence has been sought in the instrumentalization of the main research question (how homeless people subjectivity is constituted at the street level) and the theory proposed. In order to translate the more-than-human theory of homeless people's subjectivity into researchable questions, it has been decided to divide the ethnographical material accordingly to two different spatio-temporal situations that have been faced in the field: the process of becoming a homeless person (Chapter 4 – individuals with less than 6 months of street life) and the one of being a homeless individual (Chapter 5 – individuals with more than 2 years of street life). This macro-division has been based on the theorization proposed: if homeless people's subjectivity is relationally shaped by the contexts in which they are immersed, a major pre-eminence should be given to the different kinds of contexts performed entering in the street *and* living the street for a long time. The aim has not been, hence, to divide homeless people in strict groups, but just to grasp as much as possible the different positionings, relationalities and affective/powerful dimensions that take place in these two different spatio-temporal moments (which do not have any causal determinacy). Moreover, a third focus has been directed toward the role played by the discursive powers of the institutions present in the contexts performed by short and long-term homeless individuals. This last empirical focus (Chapter 6) has offered specific insights on the role played by abstract machines in the constitution of homeless subjects and the chances left for them. The points raised by the ethnographic enquiries of Chapter 4, 5 and 6 have been then further scrutinized in Chapter 7, where a major theoretical and methodological reflection has been provided.

At the level of the fieldwork, a second degree of coherence has been provided by the tuning of each method used with the approach proposed at the beginning of this chapter. In other words, autoethnography, reporting and poiesis have truly been *modus operandi* for me: performances through which I've used the methods presented in this chapter. The coherence of the fieldwork with the theory has hence been guaranteed by a constant effort to allow the *self-positioning* of individuals, rather than the desk-bound description of them; reporting *the relational patterns* of homeless people rather than representing them in sociological groups and categories; and acknowledging the *chances* (and unpredictability) *of space*, which derive from the continuous relational changes of a urban world that is all but

fix and static. In order to assure this, I've been checking weekly the material that I was gathering in light of those approaches, as well as analysing it (in the way showed before) trying to reduce at minimum any conceptual harnessing.

Lastly, at the level of the writing of the research, a third degree of coherence has been guaranteed by the wide use of original quotes from the fieldwork (in-line with the autoethnographical stance); by the journalistic style of writing; and by the constant reference to the main framework (not to proof it, but to use it as a non-representational epistemological lens). In the end, the ethical commitments expressed both in Chapter 1 and in this, have been fully developed in Chapter 8 – assuring hence a final degree of coherence to this research.

Fig. 3.9 Table summarizing aim, theorization, approach and methodologies

<i>Main aim</i>	<i>Theorization</i>	<i>Approach</i>	<i>Methodological tool</i>
<i>To understand how homeless people's subjectivity is constituted in (and with) the street, in order to grasp the nuances of homeless people's lives</i>	Homeless subjects emerge both from their own positioning...	Autoethnography from below ( <i>let the informants, and the city, speak for themselves</i> )	Informal chats Participant observation Semi-structured interviews
	... and from their more-than-human relational encounter with the city...	Journalist reporting, ANT narrative style ( <i>to describe without judging or trying to objectify</i> )	Participant observation Non-undercover observation Undercover observation Semi-structured interviews
	... which are always made in codified contexts that can offer, nonetheless, infinite chances of space.	A <i>poietic</i> attitude toward the social ( <i>to do not read it as a structural, fix, machine, but to be open to the unexpected</i> )	Informal chats and gathering around the city Discursive analysis of documents ( <i>to understand the rigidity of context</i> ) Participant observation

# Chapter 4

## Becoming homeless

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### 4.1 Introduction

This first empirical chapter is focused on the relationalities and contexts in which three persons (that at the time of the fieldwork had their first encounter with the street) were interwoven. Following the theorization proposed in chapter 2 this chapter is divided in three main parts.

The first part is dedicated to the positioning of these individuals (whom are called here “short-term” or “new” homeless people) and to their first approach with the street (fig. 4.1). Its aim is to show both how different people, with different “port of entry” in the city (none of them have been previously in Turin), got in touch with the city and to show how the city itself (with its uncountable number of assemblages) had different effects upon them. What is investigated is the relevance of these relational patters in the process of becoming a homeless person, seeking to understand if and how they produce heterogeneous kind of expectations, performativities and subjectivities.

The second part of the chapter is dedicated at the production of contexts and subjectivities that take place just after this first encounter. We have called this part “events”, meaning with this word that ensemble of non-fixed, non-predetermined, and always open to changes spatial processes that shape the subject. Therefore “events” are seen here from a double perspective, both as “continual differing [...] that takes-place in relation to an ever-changing complex of

other events” and as “a rare surprise that breaks with how the background is organized” (Anderson & Harrison, 2010:20-21). We present three sorts of events: waking up; seeking for a job; and fill time. Going through their analysis, we investigate how the relations between homeless people and the materiality of the world produce different urban contexts. The points highlighted in part one and two are deployed in the third part of this chapter, where we summarize the most interesting findings.

This chapter serves as introduction to the world of homelessness seen from a non-representational and more-than-human perspective, which will be further investigated in Chapter 5 (where deeper reflections will be provided).

Fig. 4.1 Turin’s main train station, Porta Nuova



*“You drop of the train and everything moves fast. Too fast. You don’t know where to go, what to do. You don’t know anything and so you just start walking around”*

(Carlo, Nov. 2009, WI)

## 4.2 Positioning<sup>5</sup>

To begin we introduce the three people taken into consideration, presenting for each of them a short biographical note including their own perspectives on life (hence their positioning through projects and desires). The three persons are Carlo, Marco and Valerio. I've met them in the soup kitchen where I was volunteering, just few days after their "entrance" in the street, and from that time I've started recording everything that could be of interest to understand better their encounter with the urban world.

### 4.2.1 Bios

Carlo was born in the south of Italy in the second half of the '50s and firstly arrived in Turin at the end of September 2009. In the South he has been working until 1998, year in which he left his job in order to assist his mother, who was sick, at home. He spent ten years of his life looking after his mother (from 1998 to 2008). For this reason he lost his job and when his mother died he found himself alone. Without a job and a family, he decided to leave the South to seek a new life and choose Turin because his sister was living there. One of his most expressed desires was to find a job. He would have liked to go back to 1998, when he stopped to work in order to take care of his mother. He was talking a lot about his skills as seller, as his precedent job was door-to-door selling and, at the time I first met him, he was planning to write down his CV and bring it to the various Temporary employment agencies of Turin.

Marco was born in 1986 in Bergamo (near Milano). After the middle school he did not go to the college, and started working directly with his brother in their small bricklayers company (his father died when Marco was a kid). He has had a normal life in the provincial area of Bergamo, going out with his girlfriend, working and practicing several sports – cycling (at a competitive level) as well as Thai-box. However, in 2006 the job decreased sharply, and Marco's brother started to get into affairs with unsavoury people. Marco told me that his brother began having relationships with people connected with the Casalesi's clan, one of the most

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<sup>5</sup> The data showed have been collected in a period of four months' observation (middle November 2009 – end of March 2010).

powerful Camorra's groups (the Neapolitan organized crime syndicate, widely spread in the North of Italy). The businesses of his brother collapsed and the judiciary took over: Marco (at the time I first met him) was waiting to stand in front of a criminal court for his (not fully conscious) involvement in his brother's affairs (who left Italy in order to avoid the judgment). He decided to leave Bergamo because in that place there was nothing for him anymore (no money and no people to love). He chose Turin because it was the closest city to go except from Milan, which he did not like at all. As Carlo, one of his most expressed desires was to work and *"go back to a normal life. I want to have my own money, to practice Thai-box, to do some exercising"* (Marco, Nov. 2009, TI). Therefore doing sport was another relevant desire. He was planning indeed to find a free space where he could practice Thai-box and, again as Carlo, to write down his CV (one of his plan was to send it via internet to different construction companies of the city).

Valerio was born in the middle '60s near Turin. He probably suffered of a slight mental retardation, or, at least, he was seeing the world more like a child than a 44-year-old man. This does not mean, however, that he had some proven mental issue or that he could not be auto-sufficient (in certain situations, on the contrary, he seemed to behave in perfectly rational and logical ways). Valerio left home when he was 20-year-old after some violent fights with his father. He spent 20 years of his life working here and there, having quite a long relationship with a woman that at one point left him. He worked for 8 years as a carnny man in a mobile Amusement Park managed by Roma people. At one point he lost his job and he started to sleep in an abandoned house near Turin (in Orbassano). He spent there more than 5 years of his life, mainly recycling stolen goods or items that he found in the rubbish, and doing part-time precarious jobs around that place (in that house he got electricity and water too). At one point the Municipality of Orbassano decided to demolish the house, and so he went back to his family. He spent there less than a year, then he started again going around, doing precarious jobs. At one point he came back to Orbassano. He slept in the street less than a week but the police forbid him to stay in that condition (Orbassano is quite a small municipality, where his presence in the street was suddenly noted). Therefore he was moved to Turin and consigned to the social assistance system of the City. When I first met him, he told me that one of his desires was to get a house – contrarily to the others, he barely mentioned job. His projects were, nonetheless, not fully clear – probably the most clearer project expressed by him was to seek for some doctors in order to recover from his precarious health condition (he was suffering from diabetes and

cirrhosis, although he was not an alcoholic).

#### **4.2.2 Spaces of “*connaissance*”**

Having set the grounds, we turn to the descriptions of the spaces in which those people had their first encounter with the street. We have divided these spatio-temporal patterns (for the sake of clarity) into two moments: the description of their first approach with the city (their “port of entry” to it); and the description of the very first days and weeks that they had spent in that new world.

The first relation of Carlo with Torino was a small sofa in the house of his sister, where he began to sleep from the first day, although he realized from the very beginning that his presence there was not fully accepted by his sister’s husband.

From the first days he began to seek a job (pursuing, hence, his main desire), but he did not find any. Contemporarily, the husband of his sister started to press on him for making him leave the house, telling him that there was no space for him there and that, in the end, he was not welcome. Although Carlo knew that he could not stay anymore in that house, at the same time he did not know how to find another place without paying for it. One day – after only one week that he had arrived in the city – he met a Catholic nun in via Nizza (a street along Porta Nuova, the main train station) and asked her information about the social services of the city. She answered that if he needed a place to sleep he should have asked to the Bartolomeo & C. association (a private institution with Catholic orientation located near that train station). A moment after, Carlo went to this association and they told him that he could sleep there for one month. That same night he went to sleep at the Bartolomeo’s place without telling anything to his sister.

Carlo’s port of entry in the city has been, hence, the Bartolomeo’s association. At that time, although a bit scared about the things that were happening to him, he was quite optimistic. The fact of sleeping in an autonomous way, far from his past and the husband of his sister, created lots of expectations in him: a clean bed and a kind environment at the dormitory, as well as a new city to discover, made him feel quite optimistic about his future. However, at that time he did not know the city at all. So, during his movements to find a job, he gradually started to get in touch with Turin – at least concerning the central area. This happened through different relations with some assemblages that he was encountering in his firsts movements throughout the city.

His first feelings about the city came from the free-newspaper that he was reading (these are free daily journals full of advertising which is possible to collect in lots of different places). Some of these journals have tabloid tones and are usually full of crime news, which in Turin are mainly concentrated in few neighbourhoods – for instance in the one near the main train station close to the association where Carlo was sleeping (San Salvario). Reading the city through those newspapers deeply shaped the idea that Carlo got of the city itself, an idea that eradicated in him since the very first days. This influenced not only the opinion that he constituted about the city, but also the way in which he was moving in it – he consciously avoided certain neighbourhoods and was always talking about them in vivid tones. For instance once I told him that I was going to meet another homeless in San Salvario he was almost forbidding me to do so, although I'm pretty sure that he never really had been there before: *"Don't go there. It is full of drug dealers. Haven't you read what happened two days ago? The police went there and caught them all. It is better not to go there, avoid it"* (Carlo, Dec. 2009, SN). These free newspapers shaped, with the discursive power carried by them (Van Dijk, 1995), his attitude toward certain kind of relations and spaces – which in the end modeled his subjectivity too: he became suspicious of certain areas and more concerned about where to go or not.

In his first days in the street Carlo had at least other two interesting kind of relations, which both show his wish to retain an attitude toward his life as much similar as possible with his previous experiences. In fact, although he was sleeping in a dormitory, Carlo was going every morning to drink coffee and read free newspapers in a bar near the train station (the assemblage bar+daily newspaper+coffee is widely popular in Italy – fig. 4.2). Even if Carlo was not someone who liked noises and confusions, he was enjoying the fact of being in a bar as someone “normal”, just taking a coffee before going to work. Sometimes he asked the barman to explain the routes of the buses, and the names of the different street. Those kind of relationalities – made by the affective atmosphere of the sounds of the bar, its colours, the barman and the fact that all this in Italy is recognized as a common ritual – were affecting his mood and preparing him to face the new world that begun after the threshold of the bar. In a similar fashion, and this is the second example, he was going everyday to an internet point that was just along the city centre. He was going there to upload his CV online, in order to find job. In a niche, what is important to notice is that to move from that train station area to another point (where the internet point was located) it was for him a sort of daily ritual, a task to do, something that made him feel that he was filling his

time (and consequentially, his space too) with “useful” relationalities.

In the end Carlo’s first encounter with the street was influenced both by the things with which he related during his daytime (the newspapers, the bar) and the place in which he ended up sleeping. The relation with the free newspapers that he was reading in the morning made him feel that it was better to avoid certain places, but also certain people. These are, in fact, the places (as San Salvatio) where usually homeless and immigrants concentrate, so in his first days in the street he did not encounter them directly. However, the environment of Bartolomeo & C. made him feel protected, with good expectations toward his new life. Starting from (and influenced by) those relationalities, he tried to live what he was considering to be a “normal” life in “normal” spaces. His first moments in the city made him believe that there were lots of opportunities out there, although at the same time dangers were present too. The fact of avoiding certain relations (with some places and some people) and, at the same time, the fact of going daily at the bar and at the internet point made him feel that he was not really doing a “street life”, but that he was just passing through a difficult moment of his new life.

Fig. 4.2 One of the bar near the main train station, which Carlo was frequenting at the beginning of his street life.



*“I was going there everyday. I like to take coffee at the bar. Every time I was going out of it I felt that*

*a new day was beginning”*  
(Carlo, Dec. 2009, WI)

Marco arrived in Turin for the first time of his life by train, knowing nothing about the city. The first person that he met was a homeless that was hanging around in the station. He was a long-time homeless man that gave him a map of Turin and showed how it was possible to sleep in the trains during the night. Later, he will refer to this person as his “Charon”. He explained to Marco not only how to sleep in trains (at what time was best to enter in them, at which platform and how) but also how it was possible to eat for free (for breakfast, lunch and dinner) in the different soup kitchens of the city. However, Marco did not start from the very beginning to go in those places, because he still had some money and he preferred to buy his own food.

He spent his first days going around in the area near the train station, crossing many time San Salvario, the neighbourhood which we referred before. These walks gave him a double-faced first impression on the city. He perceived a big, new place, where he could manage to find a job easily. The movements around the station (noises, people, buses, cars, etc.) gave him a positive emotional boost in the pursuing of his main desire (to find a job). However, he also felt (thanks to his journey around the train station) that that area was full of problems and of potential troubles. Therefore, he decided that was better to avoid that area in order to do not be involved in any kind of issue.

He slept in the station for three nights, in different train wagons. He was suffering from the cold and from the fact that train seats were dirty. This particular relation with train seats made him feel that his hygiene was decreasing, a sensation that he did not like at all. The fourth night he had a serious freezing problem and someone called an ambulance to take him to the hospital. From his narration is evident that he did not like the hospital: *“When I arrived in the hospital they took me to the first aid area, gave me a tea and some pills, and then moved me in a room where other people were sleeping. They barely asked my name and the doctor told me that next morning I would have been discharged from the hospital. I felt alone like I never felt before, and I didn’t sleep all night long”* (Marco, Dec. 2009, WI). He spent there only one night, to recover from the cold, although he could barely sleep as his bed was in a room with several other people. The absence of that particular layout of assemblages that might allow someone to sleep (a clean, silent, place) was hence the first shocking encounter that Marco had with the street of Turin.

Before leaving the hospital a doctor asked him if he knew any place to go and, as he answered negatively, this man told him to go to a place called “Emergenza Freddo”. This is a set of containers with bunk beds that the Municipality of Turin provides for homeless people during winter months. It is located in a huge park in the West periphery of the city, called the Pellerina park (see Chapter 6). Marco took a bus and went from the hospital directly to that place. This trip lasted more or less 40 minutes and, sitting in that bus, he got the impression that Turin was too big and chaotic for him: a few relational encounters with certain assemblages (as the train and the hospital) reversed not only his first impression of the city but especially his emotional attitude toward it. He started to sleep at the “Emergenza freddo” in a container with seven other people (mainly from Eastern Europe and Maghreb). He did not like this place at all, for several reasons. Firstly, because it was dirty and full of people. Noise and fights were the companionships of every night, so it was barely possible to sleep (once again, he was not able to relate to a context comfortable enough for relaxing). Secondly, sleeping there, he felt that he had arrived at the bottom of society – he couldn’t stand the cue to enter, and neither the cue to get every morning a free coffee in a plastic glass offered by a Red Cross volunteer. Thirdly, he did not like the fact that that place was really far from the city centre, where he kept on going everyday (as it was the only place he already knew of the city).

The chaos of the city, the cars, the buses and the noises created a particular relational assemblage that had a precise influence on Marco, letting him feel a certain degree of discomfort (although at least at the beginning this feeling was a mixture of discomfort and fascination). Marco first relational encounter with the city shifted hence from a sort of aesthetic and positive walking (de Certeau, 1984), to a stressful face-to-face with urban auto-mobility (Thrift, 2004c) and other urban rhythms. This change of perspective and subjective feelings were not effects of the fate, rather the results of Marco’s assembling with things like the dirty seats of the train, the solitariness of the hospital, or the Emergenza Freddo’s camp. The city, in a sense, related violently with him, bringing him to a relational entanglement with contexts that he never really thought possible (fig. 4.3). However, these relational stresses put him in the position of realizing better at what point of his young life he had arrived. In his head this became even more clear when he related to the Emergenza Freddo’s assemblage: the dirtiness and deprivation of that place made him feel that he needed to get active as soon as possible in order to change what was going on.

Fig. 4.3 One of the crossroads that leads to the Pellerina's park, one late evening of November 2009



*"People don't look where they go! Look. To reach the camp you risk to die. It is so far... [...] Look at these cars. They seem to bump into you, they don't care!"*

(Marco, Nov. 2009, TI)

Although Valerio had had previous experiences of street's life, he never really lived without a house. At the time he was occupying the house in Orbassano he got both a sanitary system and electricity, which he was using even to warm up the place and, most importantly, he was considering that place as his home or, to use Veness's words, an un-home:

*"In-home describes the personal worlds of people whose environments and experiences do not conform with society's standards but which uphold their personal values and needs. As the paper has argued, dilapidated houses, cars and shelters (all labeled homelessness by society) may become un-home to the people involved when these personal worlds have meaning. Often these un-homes are associated with values commonly embedded in the home ideal: order, work, family and personal accountability"* (Veness, 1993:334).

Therefore, we can consider Valerio's first encounter with the homeless' world when he lost his un-home and forcibly moved to Turin.

As he arrived in Turin brought by the police, his first encounter with the city

was with an institutional office (the one of the social assistant that was put in charge to follow him). The same day in which he arrived in Turin, this social assistant brought him to the first aid help centre for homeless of via Sacchi, 47 (close to the main train station, on its west side). This centre is a place owned by the City and managed (with public founding) by a private social cooperative. Its role is to assist new homeless people through a wide range of services: a small dormitory, an ambulatory, and a “territorial unit” composed by three social assistants and educators (their role is to “follow” homeless people in their needs, and to map the presence of homeless individuals in the city – we return on this in Chapter 6). Valerio’s first impression of the city derived hence from this encounter with those social assistants: for the first time of his life he felt to be at the centre of the attention and, although scared for everything (Valerio was a big, sometimes aggressive, guy, but with a weak and sensible character) he was quite excited about this news. Sleeping in the dormitory from the very beginning, having regular meeting with different social assistant and spending most of his free time either in the via Sacchi’s centre or in the train station, did not allow Valerio to experience the city out of the “system of help” where he was brought from the very beginning.

In the first couple of weeks of this new life, he was having regular meetings both with social assistants and doctors. These relational encounters, made in completely new environments for him (offices, counselling rooms, ambulatoires), gave him the sensation to be at the centre of the attention: they made him feel to be, to a certain extent, “important”. This shaped his perception of the self from a pathological neglected (the sensation, for instance, that he always had with his parents) to a “special”, particularly considered one.

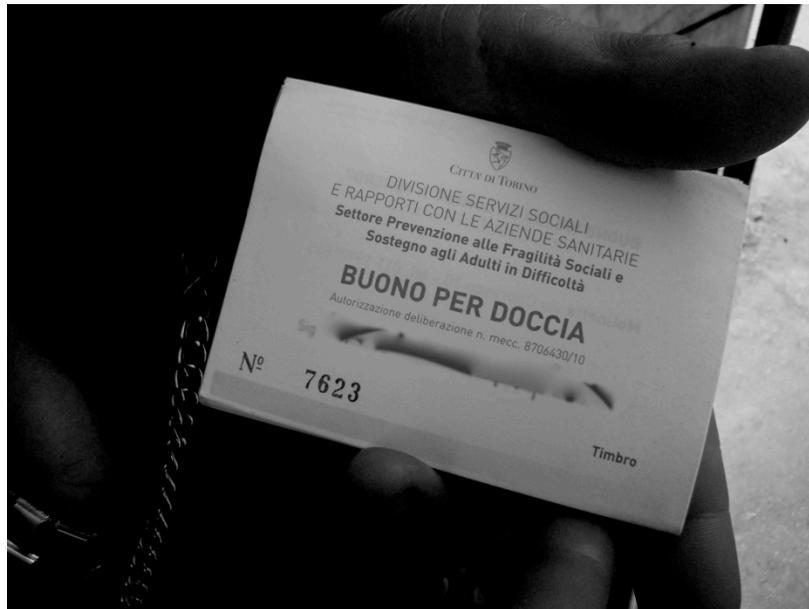
Apart from these encounters he was spending most of his time in other centres, with other homeless people (although keeping always a certain degree of distance from them, moving always alone). After a very short time he already knew almost all the public and private facilities (dormitories, soup kitchens, free-clothes distribution and so on) dispersed in the city. He interiorized their locations, their rules and their schedules with an impressive capacity. He was able to tell you the pro and the cons of everyplace just after few weeks, and seemed day-by-day more familiar with that system of help. To a certain degree, he was enjoying the fact of knowing and having experienced so much: people were asking him information and he was very happy to show his knowledge. I still remember his wallet: full of very different kind of things (pieces of journals, adhesives, flayers) but with all the cards to access the free services for homeless people in a precise order. He was happy of having these cards, showing them with pleasure and with a sort of

proudness that could be seen as the signal of how much his new self was deeply related to their materiality and meanings.

The only thing that he really did not like was concerned with sleeping. When I've first met him (in the soup kitchen where I was volunteering) he told me that it was strange for him to sleep in a dormitory with several other people. Although he never shared his room with more than four people, he was lamenting that he was unable to restore. However, he stopped to complain about this as soon as he moved to another dormitory, and then to another one: his subjectivity began to get used to those places, and he even started to depict good and bad things about each dormitory.

In the end, the first encounter that Valerio had with the street was deeply influenced by the assemblages – human and non-human – part of the “system of help” that took him in charge from the very beginning (fig. 4.4). Although he was initially scared and intimidated by what he was seeing and perceiving (for instance in the dormitory) after a very short time he started to assimilate as much as possible the inputs he was receiving both from social assistants and doctors (which made him feel important) and the materiality of the city's world that he was discovering (i.e. his attachment and jealousy toward his cards is a clear example of this). His attitude toward the street has been, hence, quite optimistic from the very beginning, although different from that of Carlo and Marco. If they were optimistic in the sense that they were confident that among all the chaos of the city an opportunity might have raised up, Valerio was optimistic in the sense of being fascinated and excited of *that* new life – his new street life relationally bounded to the institutional contexts to which he was relating.

Fig. 4.4 Valerio showing me one of his tickets to access the City's public baths  
"Buono per doccia" means "Ticket for having a shower"



*"Look! I got them all - eh, eh!"*  
(Valerio, Jan. 2010, SN)

### 4.3 Events

In this second part we present an analysis of three *events* that are generally present in the life of homeless people at the very beginning of their encounter with the street. As it has been said, we intend "event" in a non representational fashion, meaning with this word the ensemble of non-fixed and non-predetermined spatial processes of which we cannot know the outcome from the inputs, and that always offer the chance for something different to happen. In this sense "events" are a way of "thinking about how change occurs in relation to the on-going formation of 'the social'" (Anderson & Harrison, 2010:22).

We take into account three sorts of "events": waking up; seeking for a job; and filling time. They have been chosen firstly because they are the ones most commonly shared by "new" homeless people, and secondly because they are complex events that involve a high number of relationalities and assemblages enacted in different contexts. To recall the theorization presented in Chapter 2, for this work means that the (relational) configuration of the assemblages that

composes a particular event can actually take infinite forms (the multi world idea); it is never fully predictable (the uncertain principle); once fixed (territorialized) it can always change in something different; when it takes a certain spatial configuration (assemblage X on a particular context) it means that is obscuring (coding through an abstract machine) all the other possibilities contingent to the infiniteness of absolute spacetime (within which are hidden the countless chances of space that in the end represents all the vagueness and the openness of *events*). The aim of the following sections is to investigate how this hybrid interplay between short-term homeless people and the assemblages of the city – which takes form in the events of waking up, working and filling time – shapes the subjectivity of homeless people themselves.

#### ***4.3.1 Waking up***

It is more or less around 5.00 – 6.00 a.m. that Turin wakes up. Buses start to go up and down the streets, trucks and commercial vans cross the urban area to collect and deliver goods, bars and newsstands open their doors to the firsts people that go to work by foot, cycling or driving their vehicles. The “homeless” city is not different, it is constituted in the same place, although enacted in particular kind of contexts.

For the vast majority of homeless people in Turin the morning’s alarm clock is determined by the opening time of the largest (and almost only one) soup kitchen that provides free breakfast in the city. This centre, managed by the Company of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul and located on the east side (via Nizza, 24) of the main train station (Porta Nuova), does not only provide free breakfast (every morning except Sunday) but also a wide range of other services (a care and listening centre; medical ambulatory; distribution of free second hand clothes; etc. – see Chapter 3 and 6). This is the place where more or less everyone who lived in the street or did a certain degree of street life during the time of this study was passing through, at least in the morning. Having a relation with this place, its chairs, walls, pictures, nuns, volunteers, smells and foods was thus a daily practice for lots of heterogeneous people.

Carlo was sitting every time at the same table, with other three Italians. He was one of the first arriving at the soup kitchen, either if he needed to take some clothes after the service or not. He was carrying with him in one hand a bag containing brochures of possible jobs, and in the other one of the free newspapers

that we have already encountered. He was sitting down barely talking to anyone, looking at his cup of milk with coffee, and eating quite a lot (two or three packets of biscuits, two cups of milk). He was very kind with the volunteers, always tanking for everything he was receiving. He did not like the noise of the room and, most of all, he never really considered himself part of that “population” (in technical term, he was “distancing his identity” from the group, Snow & Anderson, 1987). This was clear not only from his speeches, but particularly from the fact that he was spending little time in the centre. Even when he was stopping there to take clothes, he never talked with anyone and always tried to spent as less time as possible in there. For him it was not important to take the best clothes, but only to leave that centre as soon as he could. In a word, he always tried to relate to the assemblages present there (food, clothes, other homeless, nuns or volunteers) at a minimum level, a functional one. However, this does not mean that this context was irrelevant for the constitution of his subjectivity. There are two episodes that are worth highlighting in this sense.

The first happened one morning when he did not manage to arrive in time to enter, loosing so the opportunity to have breakfast. In that occasion I met him outside the centre at 8.40 a.m., and I suddenly realized that he was stressed and worried about his plans for the day. At first I thought that his concern was the fact that he did not had breakfast, so I told him to come with me to take a coffee at the bar on the other side of the road. He came, but – even after a coffee with two croissants – he was still in tension. The impression that I gained from that occasion was that he was just stressed for some of his affairs. However, the second episode led me toward another kind of thinking. Some time later, he did manage to reach the soup kitchen on time but he did not find a seat near the Italians he was generally seating with (although, as I’ve said, almost without speaking). Once again I had the impression that he was stressed, disturbed by something. After the service I went to him and I asked if everything was ok. He replied: “Yes...”. And added: *“But I don’t like this place anymore. There are too many people, too much is going on here. It might be better if I stop coming, and go somewhere else”* (Carlo, Jan. 2010, SN).

Although at a first sight it might seem that he was having a “weak” relation both with the people and the materiality of the soup kitchen, actually this is only partially true. His punctuality and his choice of seat, taken together with his wish to spend as less time as possible in there, designed a particular context that had an influence on him. Entering at a certain time; seating at a certain table; eating certain things at not others; seemed all to be *choices* of Carlo. However these

*choices* codified spacetime in a particular context, characterized by particular assemblages, which became of certain relevance for Carlo own well-being and for his attitude toward life. There is, hence, a double process to note: firstly we have Carlo's choices and secondly the context (with some particular assemblages) that was influencing Carlo-as-subject. This is not a simple feedback process. Rather, if we take seriously the more-than-human world as a sum of different interweaving kind of agencies, this is a relational constitution of a hybrid assemblage (Carlo + that precise configuration of things, timing, people) moving on a certain, codified, slice of spacetime.

When this particular space deterritorialized due to certain events – the fact that he was late; the fact that that particular seat was not available – and it reterritorialized in different spatial forms – a coffee offered by me; another seat – Carlo suffered and was challenged up to the point to reconsider having breakfast there. The soup kitchen in that particular spatial form, the one with which he preferred to interact and the one that became relationally part of himself, was giving him a certain degree of stability, of routines, of peace, which allowed him to better think at the things that he had to do during his day. He did not wish to renegotiate this spatio-temporal layout, and when small relational chances happened and new assemblages and spaces where created he suddenly felt that something was going wrong. This is not the demonstration of the importance of the “soup kitchen” for himself, but only of a particular contextualized form of that soup kitchen, the form that he choose and that was having so much subjective importance for him (fig. 4.5).

Fig. 4.5 Homeless people leaving the Vincenziani soup kitchen



*"I don't like this place anymore. There are too many people, too much is going on here. It might be better if I stop coming here, and go somewhere else"*

(Carlo, Jan. 2010, SN)

For the other short-term homeless persons considered in this chapter, the mechanism of subjective constitution through relations in the codified space of the soup kitchen were the same, although with different forms and outcomes.

Marco was spending generally more time in the soup kitchen than Carlo. He was talking with people, eating quite a lot, although complaining for the general quality of the food. The assemblage that he created with the soup kitchen had configurations that can be divided into two groups. At the beginning – at the time of his first encounter with this service – he was considering it just as a way as any other to have breakfast: he was going there because he did not have the money to go anywhere else. However, the more he frequented this place the more he was relying on it, and being influenced by it, essentially on two aspects: talking with people and reading (philosophical and religious books taken from a public library) in its warm room. Particularly concerning the latter, he was purposely signing the list for the free clothes distribution as one of the last, so he had to wait a lot to get his turn (even 3 hours) and could spend this time reading at the tables (which were cleaned after the breakfast service). He liked this place for its light, and the fact that was more or less calm (again, very few people were talking to each other even when waiting for the clothes), brought him to deterritorialize it as a soup kitchen and reterritorialize it as a library room. Reading in this place became a sort of daily

activity for him. Therefore this was a context that affected the way in which he was both organizing his day and living it: a context that constituted his subject, although in different ways from Carlo (once again this is the demonstration that there is not one “soup kitchen” but infinite possible soup kitchens codified – through certain abstract machines, as the needs of Carlo or the books of Marco – into particular and heterogeneous contexts).

The situation was quite different for Valerio. He was always among the firsts to arrive at the soup kitchen, and among the firsts to put his name on the clothes’ list. However, he was doing that not because he had to go elsewhere, but because he was taking the most out of all the relationalities present in there. He was enjoying eating pizza, and for this reason he was seating in the table most close to the door from which the volunteers were coming out with the trays, in order to choose the best slices. He was complaining when the pizza with tomato was not available, and one day that the milk was not particularly good he got furious.

The deterritorializations that I’ve highlighted for Carlo were for him even more important, particularly concerning the availability of food, clothes, or seats in the soup kitchen. He was talking with the nuns, trying to show them his attachment to that place and he definitely was among the last persons to leave the room when the distribution of clothes was closed at an end. We could argue that he was seeking for personal care and attention from others, but also that his expectations were shaped by the relationalities in which he was interwoven. Going there everyday was, for him, more than a basic need: it was a precise spatio-temporal configuration in which he was living his life, which should be seen not only as a personal (cognitive lead) choice, but as an hybrid sum of materialities, events, assemblages that were re-producing that particular codified context. In a word, Valerio was expecting to receive the red pizza; to talk with the nun; or to receive the best second hand pair of gloves – and all this expectations became really relevant for his life. It is worth adding an example related to this.

I clearly remember one morning in which I was serving slices of Panettone (a traditional northern Italian sweet eaten during Christmas’ time). Having asked him if he would like to have one of them, I received a refuse. He told me: “*There is pizza today?*” “*No, Valerio*”, I said. “*Today there is only Panettone*”. He looked at me in the eyes and, with angriness, he said: “*So you can eat it by yourself*” (Valerio, Jan. 2010, SN). Three days after, seeing that everyone else was enjoying it, he started to eat Panettone and kept on asking for it even when he could receive the pizza. The Panettone, with its sweet bread and candied fruits, entered in (and

related to) Valerio, shaping both his expectations and needs: it was relevant for him, now, to arrive earlier and choose the best seat in order to get as much slices of that sweet as possible. The opening and closing of spacetime (hence its codification through abstract machines as the discourse around pizza or the Panettone – i.e. their general acceptability status) created a new context with new assemblages: from Valerio+red pizza to Valerio+Panettone, which in the end shaped the hybrid subjectivity (expectations, projects, desires – as well as the amount of sugar in his diabetic veins) of Valerio himself.

#### **4.3.2 Seeking a job**

In this section we are going to investigate that particular process of formation of assemblages called “work”: how this takes place in the case of people that are becoming homeless? What kind of relationalities, with what meanings, effects, subjectivities and consequences are involved in this process? We concentrates on this aspect because almost anyone who enters the street for the first time wishes, or at least declares to wish so, to find a job in order to get back to a “normal life”. Looking within this ensemble of efforts and expectations is hence pivotal to understand the process of becoming a homeless person, especially because these are paths filled with difficult relationalities:

“The job-seeking efforts of the homeless, particularly the recently dislocated and the straddlers, are encumbered by a host of obstacles that further undermine the dependability and utility for survival of work as conventionally conceived”  
(Snow & Anderson, 1993:143).

Following the perspective adopted in this work, the contexts of work of new homeless people should not be sought within particular fixed places (this or that social centre) or fixed practices (this or that social bursary) but they should be traced among the relationalities that intervene between the “city” and them. This leads to the obvious conclusion that there is not one “assemblage of work” valid for everyone and not one singular context where this takes place.

Seeking for a job in one of the richest cities of Italy, inhabited by almost 1,000,000 persons with 236,207 companies (from the singularly owned ones, to the biggest factories) (Commercial Chamber of Turin, 2010) could appear not an impossible task. Occasions to be involved in the relational process of work could be almost endless, particularly if we take into account even informal and illegal jobs: the numbers of assemblages that is possible to create appear uncountable.

However, apart from the almost obvious economical difficulties and crisis of the financial capitalistic regime of our western society, seeking and finding a job is a relational spatial process where small things can make a big difference – particularly for people, as homeless, that cannot benefit from social or familiar networks of support.

Marco, after his first days in the Emergenza Freddo's containers, started to seek for a job intensively, actively transforming his main desire into a concrete project. In order to find a job, Marco began to bring his CV in different Temporary employment agencies (private agencies that intermediate between the companies and the aspirant worker – fig. 4.6). Moreover, he was buying a local newspaper with job advertising and he was going to an internet point to seek for a job online. These activities were occupying all his time: he was starting just after breakfast at the soup kitchen and ending just before going to the Emergenza Freddo (and, accordingly to what he said to me, he was thinking at this 24/h a day, even dreaming about all the advertises he was answering to). He decreased a lot the time that he was using to eat, read or relax in order to concentrate as much as possible on the research. In those days he was living on a precise context constituted by his mobile phone, the map of Turin's Temporary employment agencies, his block notes full of numbers and opportunities, and a new copy of the newspaper with the advertising always under his arm.

Those days were for him interwoven with these particular assemblages. He was completely soaked up within the web of the Temporary employment agencies dispersed in the city and the virtual web of phone calls (which he was doing in order to apply to the different job's opportunities he was finding). Although at the beginning he was quite optimist and excited by this research, just after a few days he began to feel an emotional discomfort, mainly for two reasons. First of, he did not have a residence in Turin. On his ID he still had his residence located in Bergamo, near Milan, and this was creating troubles with the Temporary employment agencies. In brief, he learned how to lie concerning his condition: they were asking if, although he had no residence, he was having a stable house in Turin, and he was replying affirmatively, sometimes even giving fake addresses. However, none of these Agencies called him back. Secondly, even when he was calling to reply to a job offer things were not going in the right direction. The jobs were mainly outside the city or, if they were in the city, they were mostly offering the position of door-to-door salesman without a fixed income (the income was proportionate to the number of goods or services sold). This was an option that he

did not like, as he had the urgency to earn money in order to get rid both of the street and of the Emergenza Freddo. Therefore, although his huge efforts (for instance at one point he was not having lunch anymore in order to have more time to find a job), things were not going well. He started to loose weight and at one point he told me that he was not sure if what he was doing was worth the effort: *“Finding a job is impossible. If something can go wrong, it goes. If I find a job, it is too far. I have to choose if I prefer to eat, to sleep or to work. Maybe is better if I do like the others: I stop to seek for a job, and I start to survive like them”* (Marco, Jan. 2010, TI). He said this for the first time just three weeks after he started seeking a job.

There are particularly three episodes in Marco’s efforts to find a job that we want to recall here, one with a positive (although provisional) ending, the others not. The first is related to a flyer that Marco found one day on a sidewalk. It was a note about a religious reading group of the Bible that was meeting in a Protestant Church in Turin. As Marco was a Catholic intrigued by the bible, he decided to give it a try and that same day he went to the Church where the reading group was meeting. From that moment he started to go there almost daily, he got in touch with a minister of that church and he told him that he was looking for a job. I still remember the day in which he came to me, enthusiastic, because the minister had found him a little job: to paint the flat of a woman that was part of that community. Marco did the job in a couple of days but, in the end, did not receive any money – they gave him some food and a new pair of shoes. After a while he stopped to go to that Church because, he told me, *“They want me to enter in their religious community, but I don’t have even the money to get the bus to go there”* (Marco, Feb. 2010, WI).

The second episode is related to its mobile phone. To have a phone number is an essential requisite to find a job. Phone numbers and mobile phones work as abstract machine: they might serve to allow the connection with other assemblages, opening new chances, but they even work on the opposite way. One day Marco received a phone call from an employee of an Agency, which told him to call a certain person to speak about a job opportunity. He called that person – the owner of a small bricklayers company working in Turin – which told him to call back a few minutes later. Unfortunately, Marco ended its mobile phone credit with that last call and did not have enough money to by a top up (5 euro is the minimum charge that you can buy). He was almost desperate and he went to anyone he knew asking for that money. When he finally found someone that allowed him to use his phone, two hours had passed and it was too late: the owner

of the company told him that he already found who he was looking for.

The third and last episode concerns another job opportunity that Marco found. It was another bricklayer job that he found thanks to an on-line advertising. The only problem was that this job was located at the periphery of Pinerolo, a town located 40 kilometres southwest of Turin. The first time he tried to reach Pinerolo by bus the journey lasted one hour and a half and he couldn't manage to arrive at the opening of the building side in time (7.30 a.m. in the morning). The second time he tried to go there by train, but the controller found him without ticket and drop him off the train in the middle way between Turin and Pinerolo. Kilometres, tickets and timing were all machines at work to stop Marco's chances to open a new useful space. Moreover, even if he would have managed to reach the place of work, he couldn't be able to have neither breakfast nor lunch (as in Pinerolo there aren't free service for indigent persons), and of course he did not have enough money to get food in any other way. He should have worked without eating, and with the constant impossibility to get to work on time (either for the timing or the cost of the transport), for at least one month (only after the first month of work he would have earn some money). After the second time the train controller dropped him off the train, he desisted.

The fact that in the end Marco did not find a more or less fixed job – although he spent a lot of energies to find one – made him feel exhausted, deprived and depressed. The absence of the opening of a new space, hence the closure of all the possibilities to enter in a new context of work, had a huge impact on Marco's subjectivity. The thing to recall here is not, however, just his discomfort without a job. What is worth to highlight is how this happened. One day, on this regard, he told me: *"It is impossible to be a normal, honest, person here. It is the environment that makes you to do bad things. They don't listen to me. They do not want to help me. And in this city it is impossible to find a job. It is the whole thing that brings you to steal, to sell Nun Teresa's clothes, to do whatever you can do to find money!"* (Marco, Feb. 2010, WI).

There is a whole set of events, a chain of assemblage-of-assemblages, that led Marco to that train of thoughts. First of, there is the fact that the more he was seeking for a job through "normal" channels (Temporary employment agencies, advertising, etc.) the more he started to get unsatisfied from that kind of research: no one was answering, the Agencies did not find any work at all for him, and Marco began to loose the hope to find a job in that way. This led him to spend less and less time in this research, and to learn other ways to make money (as selling second-hand clothes or becoming an abusive parking man), practices on which we

will return in the following chapter. His subjectivity interiorized, hence, the impossibility of certain contexts to open him new opportunities. In this sense the Agencies and the advertising had been abstract machines of a sneaky kind: on one side they made him believe that he could reach other spaces, but on the other they never led him there, partly because there were few jobs available, partly because of other small events that he couldn't fully control or be aware of. Secondly, the modification of Marco's attitude toward work changed thanks to the small things with which he was related to that did not work properly. The mobile phone and the buses are clear example of this. They stop to work, or they work only in a certain way and not in another, and the possibility of Marco to relate to a job vanished. Nonetheless, it is worth recording that small things can open new spaces too: as the flyer that he found on the sidewalk did – although it was a chance of space that lasted only for a short time.

Fig. 4.6 A Temporary employment agency in the Porta Palazzo's neighborhood, usually frequented by Marco



*"I have to choose if I prefer to eat, to sleep or to work. Maybe is better if I do like the others: I stop to seek for a job, and I start to survive like them"*

(Marco, Jan. 2010, TI)

Carlo, on the contrary, found a job thanks to his tenacity to knock at every possible door in the city. He spent almost a month just going in all the different Temporary employment agencies of the city as well as in replying to every advertise he was able to find. Things ended differently for him, in respect of Marco, for two main reasons – one contingent, the other substantially related to the assemblages with which he melted. The first depends on the fact that he accepted

to work as seller without a fixed income, relying hence only on a percentage of the price of the goods he was selling. The second is connected with the place he ended up sleeping in. After his first period (a month) at the Bartolomeo & C. he had to leave it, and as he wasn't able to find any place in the public dormitories of the city, he went to sleep at the Emergenza Freddo's camp. During the two weeks that he spent there he was not shaving himself anymore, and his general personal hygiene was decreasing (this was evident from the fact that his clothes were dirty and he wasn't changing them anymore). In brief, he was taking less care of himself. Once he told me: *"I can't sleep there. I never sleep there. There is too much noise, too much dirtiness. I just want to sleep now, but I don't know where"* (Carlo, Dec. 2010, WI).

Because of that place, of the assemblages (human – other homeless individuals – and not human – the quality of the bed; the heating system; the location; the dirtiness) with which he was relating, his first necessity was not anymore to seek for a job, but to sleep, to rest, to feel better. However something at one point happened. Without too much hope, one day he went to another Catholic-orientated private service for poor people, the Sermig. He went there after having read in a library a book by the founder of this organization, and although he successively heard other homeless complaining about it because of its strict rules of access and of permanence (see Chapter 6), he decided anyway to give it a try. Therefore he went there and got lucky, as the day in which he asked for a place was exactly the only day in the month in which they were accepting new people. After two days spent there, he was looking like a new man: the relation with a clean place, with rooms of no more than three people, clean blankets and a social educator, gave him the energies and to hope to keep on seeking for a job – which he found a week later.

Valerio did not really ever look for a job (coherently, in this sense, with his own desires). As we have said, from the very beginning he was immersed into the "social system" of the city and his subjectivity became suddenly shaped by it. His "job" gradually became to follow his appointments either with his social assistant, or with doctors and other staff. At one point – as he needed in any case some money – he started to work for the nun's of San Vincenzo. He was helping a man doing removals for the nuns (the San Vincenzo institution is owner of some estates in Turin). They were paying him 25 euro for a working day, without any kind of contract, insurance or clear working time (they were telling him if that day there was work to do just after breakfast). From a relational perspective there are two

important things to highlight here.

The first is that Valerio's subjectivity and his view on the world were definitely strongly shaped by the contexts he was frequenting (soup kitchens, dormitories, social assistant's offices) and the people he was in touch with (other homeless people, nuns, priests, social educators). In this sense, he started very soon to strictly relate to that system of help and assistance without perceiving the need to seek for something different (hence even to find a "normal" job). They were giving him what he needed: attention and psychological care. However, at the same time this kind of attention had a second effect upon him. As he needed, as anyone else, some money to live and something to do to fill his time, he started to work in the black economy – as many other homeless people were doing (see next chapter). However, this movement toward the opening of a new context and of new sets of assemblages (the world of the black economy) was determined by two concomitant events apparently directly related to the "system of help" in which Valerio was day by day more soaked.

Firstly, the fact that the public social services he was in relation with (due to their bureaucratic latency) were not able to open new opportunities, led him to get discouraged by the possibility to get a job in the formal economy. Secondly, the fact that the same services (as well as the private religious ones) were decoding the world for him in a certain way, offering him the opportunity to survive without so much effort, to feel "loved" and "cared", and even the opportunity to work thanks to the fact that he was in good relation with some particular individual assemblages of that system (in this case, one San Vincenzo's nun), led him to believe that he could manage his situation in that way. This last point is particularly relevant. As the abstract machine that allows Valerio to work was a machine of familiarity, charity, and favour (in the sense that to receive a job was a kind offer from someone who claimed to love him), this opened to him a particular relational context where some things were possible (to gain 25 euro for a working day) and some others were not (would you ask for a contract or an insurance if you are working just to do a favour to someone else?). This is an example of how contexts shape the hybrid subjectivity of individuals: having a contract, some specified duties and rights, and clear working time, influence the subject in quite different ways than working because of some moral obligation toward someone, without clear rights or working time. Therefore, those relations have influenced Valerio's attitude toward work, and although his refusal to seek for a job individually or his entrance in the black economy should not be associated directly with them, certainly they had a determinant influence on the ways he decided to earn the

money he needed to survive.

### **4.3.3 Filling time**

Having a lot of free time is a common characteristic among people living street lives. To “fill time” is, hence, an occupation like many others. If you do not have a job, do not have a family and do not know exactly what to do to change your condition, it is clear that you will have a lot of time at your disposal. As Meo pointed out:

“the greatest torment felt during the day, between the exit from the dormitory and the entrance in a soup kitchen or between a “tour” to search work and the entrance in a centre for the free distribution of clothes, it is however how and where spend time: daily life is made of waits and time is perceived as too empty” (Meo, 2000:121)

Time is however in the same dimension of space. More specifically, for the perspective adopted here, time and space are interwoven in *spacetime*. In this sense, to put it simply, if you have a lot of time to “fill” this means that you have a lot of space to fill too. Fill spacetime means, hence, nothing more and nothing less of having relations with the assemblages of the world, relations that codify that spacetime in certain contexts and not others. Reading the performativities that homeless people enact in order to fill spacetime, brings directly to two obvious conclusions: a) that those performativities will constitute a particular context that will affect the subjectivities of homeless people themselves; b) that there is always the *chance* that the assemblages involved in those spaces deterritorialize them into new kind of spaces (which might offer new opportunities or denying others).

Coherently with the theory proposed, it should not be surprising to notice that the more Valerio was relating to the system of help where he was forcefully brought, the less he was having (or perceiving to have) “free time”. This was caused by the facts that the system of help he was interwoven in was constituted by assemblage-of-assemblages that decode spacetime in strict and precise ways. The abstract machine of those contexts were of different kinds: precise schedules (of dormitories, soup kitchens, offices, churches that might have given some help); documents (as the cards to access the services); various codes of speech and codes of behaving to learn in order to get the most out of them; etc. The more, hence, Valerio was having relations and constituting new assemblages through those

codified space, the less he had time (and space) to do (and go) anything (and anywhere) else. To talk with Valerio more than ten minutes was, for instance, almost impossible. You had to follow him in his wandering across the city: from the dormitory to the breakfast, from the breakfast to the lunch, from the lunch to the black market, from the black market to the free distribution of sandwiches, from there to the dormitory. And back again. Free time was not an issue for him (precisely because of the effects of those assemblages on his subjectivity), although the kind of his spacetime it is certainly relevant in order to understand better what actually being homeless means (Chapter 5 is, in the end, mainly about this point).

Fig. 4.7 Valerio moving around with his backpack



*"I don't have time now, I've to go to the doctor, then to the Cottolengo, then I will go to via Sacchi.  
After that? I can't. I've to take the bus to the dormitory!"*

(Valerio, Feb. 2010, SN)

Things were slightly different for Carlo and Marco. They were complaining a lot about the abundance of their free time. For instance Marco once told me: *"I've given my CV to all the Temporary employment agency. I've called all the possible numbers. Talked with everyone. Now I've just to wait. What else can I do?"* (Marco, Jan. 2010, SN). It is interesting to notice how the issue of the "free time" has been solved by the two, once again accordingly to what (relationally speaking) happened to them.

Carlo was spending his free time having mainly two kind of relations: one with the library (which was giving to him the necessary peace that he could not find while sleeping at the Emergenza Freddo) and the other with buses (where he was dropping in, sitting in, and going around the city with no destination, just to avoid walking in the cold winter of Turin). These two ways to fill his free time had in common the characteristic of constituting (with Carlo) solitaires kind of assemblages; contexts which were codified only to a certain extent (allowing him to get rid of them quite easily); and, most importantly, that helped him to recover the energies that he was loosing in its relations with the Emergenza Freddo's camps.

However, what is important to highlight here *is not* that he *chose* that spaces (in contrast, for instance, with Valerio, who had been brought into a certain kind of space almost without choice). Rather, what is relevant is to compare the effects of the more-than-human relations between Valerio-and-the-system-of-help and Carlo-and-the-library. In this sense, the constitution of an assemblage instead of another, seems to matter both for the subjectivity of the homeless person and for the chances that the related context might offer: Carlo became aware of the Sermig precisely because in a public library he had the opportunity to browse a book written by Ernesto Olivero (the founder of that organization), and this happened because he constituted as assemblage in a certain kind context (free and not much codified). In the end, the chance of space seems connected with the degree of codification of the contexts in which the subject relationally operates. In this case the library is a context with fewer and weaker codifications (to keep quiet, to do not steal books, etc.), than the complex system of help in which Valerio constituted himself (enmeshed by schedules, norms, discourses and precise practices highly codifying). Carlo had hence a relational chance that rose up from a precise kind of context, a line-of-flight that Valerio did not have not because of his personal attitudes, but because of the contexts in which he was constituting.

The trajectory followed by the “free time” of Marco is interesting as well because it shows even clearly how much the kind of assemblages that homeless people constitute with the city matter. If at the beginning of his search for a job Marco admittedly had almost no free time (as he was deeply soaked into the network made by his phone, his block notes, the Agencies and the internet points) after a while his free time increased consistently (because he was giving up the search). In that moment Marco began to fill his time reading a lot, as he was doing before arriving to the street – so, in a sense, he was relating with public libraries as

Carlo was doing too. However, concerning the job nothing changed for him and he started to get involved more and more in other kind of performativities closest to Valerio's ones. (It is worth to recall here that the chance of space is not something that is possible to control. In other words the library could provide more chances than another highly codified context, as it happened to Carlo, but it can't guarantee them). Marco was hence spending his "free time" to go to a centre where homeless people could take free coffee during the morning (Opportunanda), or he was starting to understand where and how was better to go for various kind of free services (food, clothes, etc.). In a sense what we see here is the decay of a relational expectation and of a desire (his hope to find a job) and the birth of different expectations, assemblages and contexts (through relationalities directed toward particular kind of "street" assemblages).

The answer to the obvious question "why this happened?" should be sought – in a relational, grounded, point of view – into the answer to the question "how this happened?". This happened thanks to the fact that Marco was spending all his time in the street, frequenting only the places that he already knew (soup kitchen, train station, daily centre) with the people that he was trying to avoid but that in the end became day by day his companions (i.e. other homeless like him). His increasing attitude to fill his free time with homeless individuals and within their contexts arose precisely because he did not see any other relational chance, any other *chance of space*. Of course this has had an influence upon Marco's subjectivity, bringing him more and more attached to the street (and its coded spaces) and less directed toward his initial projects and desires (get rid of the street as soon as possible).

## **4.6 Becoming more-than-human homeless subjects**

The premise of this first ethnographic enquire has been that "instead of a knowable world "out there" waiting to be discovered [...] we have [...] a world which can only ever be partially known as a product of our encounters with it" (Greenhough, 2010:40). This is the importance of the theorization proposed in Chapter 2: only through the analysis of homeless people's more-than-human performances we can be able to detect the:

"key traces of homelessness in the city: some permanent,

others transient; some visible, others largely invisible to the public eye” which in the end can lead us “to build a more nuanced account of the homeless city” (Cloke, May, Johnsen, 2008:246).

The relevance of this first journey resides in showing that these encounters matter in the shaping of how “new” homeless people perform their new worlds and construct their projects and desires, therefore in the showing of how they build the map of their subjectivity. The materials presented in this chapter offer two initial clues on this latter point.

The first is that Carlo, Marco and Valerio have had very different ways of performing the city, with distinct emotional aspects emerging from them. If subjects are constituted by both their positioning in the world and their relational entanglements, it could be easily argued that these homeless persons were completely different *subjects* (concerning their most intimate projects/desires; relational patterns; and chances).

In this regard, an emblematic point consists in the ways through which they were relating with the Vincenziani’s soup kitchen. Carlo was seeking in it a form of stability. Marco was reterritorializing it as a place to read. Valerio was enacting it as a way to survive in the street – each one involving distinctive sets of emotions, powers, and nuances. Even more differences rose in looking at how they got in touch with Turin and at how they configured it in their minds: Carlo’s newspapers, Marco’s Emergenza Freddo and hospital experiences, and Valerio’s dormitories were completely different encounters with (and understanding of) the urban fabric. Once again these ways of performing the city were first of all ways of performing the self: of constituting Carlo, Marco and Valerio as homeless subjects.

Acknowledging that “as homeless people move within, between, and through places sometimes by necessity, sometimes by choice, such movements are liable to have a significant impact upon a person’s [...] experience of homelessness” (May, 2000b:737) is hence the right movement to take. Recognizing this point is not a theoretical exercise, but it has a relevant political and moral weight. How do the policies and interventions promoted towards homeless people take or not into consideration these fundamental differences? How do different contexts (enacted through heterogeneous discourses and relationalities) produce in the end different subjects? How do these contexts open and close spatial chances

to the homeless subject? Concentrating on how the positioning of Carlo, Marco and Valerio developed through the four months of observation, which is the second point to stress, can offer some interesting suggestions in this sense.

At the beginning Carlo and Marco positioned themselves with clear desires (to find a job) and coherent projects (to send their CVs to the Temporary employment agencies). Valerio, on the contrary, had a vague desire of finding a house, but without any coherent project attached to it. At the end of my observation Carlo had been the only one to achieve his main desire, as he found a job sometime after having entered the Sermig. Marco did not find any job, and started to slightly change his main desire from “to find a job” to “to find a way to survive in the street”, still retaining however a coherent track between that new desire and the concrete planned actions he was taking on (as learning how the black market works). Valerio did not present much changes: he still wanted to have a house, although barely work in that direction (as, for instance, could be if he would have tried to apply for a social housing estate).

One of the reasons of these differences resides, coherently with the theorization proposed in this work, in the relational paths of these individuals. Apart from Valerio, the other two individuals were moving in non-institutional and not-much codified contexts in order to find a job. Carlo and Marco were, indeed, sending their CVs via internet; frequenting the Temporary employment agencies; spending their time in libraries; re-codifying the morning’s soup kitchen in different ways; and having particular experiences as Marco’s attempt to work outside the city. All these were contexts with weak degrees of codifications, more flexible and open than Valerio’s institutional one. From those former contexts unexpected relationalities emerged, as Carlo’s encounter with Oliviero’s book (and the subsequent relation with the Sermig), or as Marco’s work with the religious community.

The outcomes of these two encounters have been different because everything depends, in the end, on the kind of context where the chance is enacted. Carlo related to a context (the Sermig) that made him responsible, with duties and rights (see Chapter 6). This relational pattern activated in him a positive strength, because it was coherent with his main purpose (to work, to feel active, to get out of the street) and led him to believe again in his main desire and to actually pursue it. Marco related to a different kind of context (the one of the religious

community), which instead of betting on his capacities perpetrated a different kind of discourse (one of adaptation to a certain belief). This relational pattern was far from Marco's idea of working (as he was expecting to be paid for what he was doing), so he did not recognize the chance offered to him. The effect on his subjectivity was to discourage him about his possibilities and capabilities, which led him (in concurs with the other relational patterns that he had – as the other failures in finding a job) to gradually move from his first main desire to finding a way to survive in the street. The codification of the context proposed to Marco, and the relational disruption that he had (as the fact of ending the credit of his mobile exactly when he needed it), are the reasons why at one point his story diverges from that of Carlo. Valerio, in the end, was in a completely different situation from the very beginning. He was immersed, indeed, into a highly codified context made of schedules (when and where the services were available) and discourses (how to behave with the social assistants; how to relate to nuns and priests, etc.), which could provide very few *overtures* to him.

Therefore, the findings of this first ethnographic enquiry strengthen what has been argued in Chapter 2, namely that the chance of space is always present but is less visible when there are many abstract machines at works. These do not open new spaces to the subject, but gradually codify him/her into their logic. Valerio's adaptation to the Panettone or to the informal work he was doing for the Vincenziani's nuns are both example of this. The point here is not to argue that these adaptations are bad or good a priori, but to stress that certain kind of relational patterns produce certain kinds of subjects: Valerio's incapacity to express his own desires or to pursue them is the result of the context he was operating in, a context that was not investing in him or change his street's habits but that, on the contrary, contributed in designing them (a process that appears similar to the one that Marco was enduring in the final phase of the observation).

In the end, this chapter has showed that in the process of becoming homeless persons what matter the most are not only the previous biographies of the individuals, nor only their personal attitude toward life. Apart from those aspects, what really counts are the relationalities of the subject with the more-than-human assemblages (from the smallest to the institutionalized ones) present in the city, with their agencies, affects and powers. As the narrative presented demonstrates, different subjectivities emerge according to what (and how) people do. The role of the even smallest assemblages of the city in such processes has been depicted, and

the fact that space offers (and closes down) relational opportunities has been highlighted. Further reflections on these points will take place in the following pages, which have been designed to unfold more the urban entanglements within which homeless subjects emerge, endure and take place.

# Chapter 5

## Being homeless

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### 5.1 Introduction

The narration presented in the previous chapter has shown the nuances of the encounters with the street of three new homeless people. In a sense the previous chapter has acknowledged the differences that homelessness can take without being able, nonetheless, to fully show the daily routines and tactics of the homeless subjects. Being a homeless person involves things that need to be further investigated: what are the relational patterns followed by these individuals? What are the chances and the nuances? How do long-term homeless people constitute as more-than-human subjects in their daily encounter with the city?

In this chapter we move further in answering our second research question, which shifts the focus from a certain phenomenon (the entrance in a new relational world) to another (the adaptation to that world and the reification of its meanings). Focusing on the situation of being a homeless person we take into consideration people whom have lived in the street for more than 2 years. This situation is all but uncommon: long-term or “chronic” homelessness is (although if sometimes unexplicitly) one of the most studied aspects in the literature (e.g. Fitzpatrick’s *et al.* review clearly shows that the most investigated aspects of homeless people’s life are not concerned with their first encounter with the street, but with how they survive and concretely live in it – Fitzpatrick, Kemp, & Klinker, 2000) (fig. 5.1).

Fig. 5.1 Homeless people waiting outside the Cottolengo's soup kitchen



*“Apart from immigrants, years and years pass and I see always the same faces. There is a bunch of 20-30 people that are out there since I’ve started this job [8 years ago], and something tells me that they will be there for much longer”*

(Ivan, social educator working at Cottolengo, Feb. 2010, WI)

Long-term homeless people fit perfectly with most of the stereotypes on homelessness. *Being* homeless is, at least in our society, to be a *long-term* street liver, and this definition comes with sets of different stigmatizations as these people are seen as mentally ill, unproductive, drinkers, and so on. In a way this is the classical stigmatization process, which is strongest with long-term homeless rather than the others the previous chapter. The expectation of our western society is to be productive and self-dependent: this is the stereotype of the wealthy white man or woman. “Chronic” homeless people disappoint this stereotype, thanks to different attributes, hence, they become stigmatized (of a “discredited kind”, as they are usually aware of this stigmatization) (Goffman, 1990 [1963]). In other words “homeless persons become marginalized because of their perceived lack of productivity and contribution to society” (Takahashi, 1996:299). If, in the end, de-categorize and de-construct homelessness is already difficult when we encounter

people who have just begun their encounter with the street, the real challenge emerges now, with people who are deeply eradicated into certain kinds of lives. More than stigmatization, there are other three aspects to consider as a form of introduction to long-term homeless people's world.

The first concerns the adaptation to the street. We have already seen this point in detail in the previous chapter. However, it is worth to stress that adaptation is not – as it might sound – a passive process, rather it should be read as the on-going sum of performances where new assemblages are always created and disrupted both without end and fixed outcomes. Adaptation is constitutive of new worlds (the homeless person's new life in the street) in the sense that is the process of co-constitution of new spaces and new subjectivities. The adaptive phase is not “a” phase, but a cycle of relations with some fixities but also with the possibility of ruptures and changes (hence of chances too). This way to read adaptation is not completely new. An example is Dumont's explanation of the process that leads individuals to the street, which is a matrix of spatialization/re-spatialization and socialization/re-socialization where “le « milieu rue » par l'ensemble de ses contraintes impose une nouvelle socialisation, re-socialisation, et une nouvelle spatialisation, re-spatialisation” (Dumont, 2007:109)<sup>6</sup>. The difference is that the *adaptation* proposed here is never-ending, always in motion, and open to de-socialization and de-spatialization movements too.

The second aspect is concerned with the daily routine within which long-term homeless people's lives appear to be bounded. The (anthropological) literature is full of descriptions of these routines, with particular attention to the institutions that seem to shape them. It is worth reminding that these routines are fixed only to a certain extent (as the chance of space is always behind the curtain of every relation) and that – most importantly – they are the spatial outcome of the ways through which homeless people perform the city. In this sense, “the emergence of significant local circumstances may also be traced in the interpenetration of service networks, different mixes of service users and place-specific experiences of being homeless” (Cloke, May, Johnsen, 2010:208). Therefore these “life cycles” should always be seen as relationally and mutually constituted between different *actants*, and not superimposed by some actants (the institutions) on others (the homeless persons) (a point, this latter one, clearly shown by the critique of the revanchist approach to homelessness – e.g. DeVerteuil, 2006

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<sup>6</sup> “The milieu of the street, due to its constraints, imposes a new socialization, re-socialization, and a new spatialization, re-spatialization” (Translated by the autor).

– which will be further investigated in Chapter 6).

The third aspect is what Snow and Anderson called “cognitive orientation”, hence that attitude that “develop largely in response to the problematic material and social condition of the homeless, and they frequently reinforce their homelessness” (Snow, Anderson, 1993:293). As these authors pointed out:

“cognitive factors influencing the careers of the homeless include an inability to form specific plans for extrication, a tendency to focus narrowly on street routines, confusion and demoralization brought on by the double binds of street life, role engulfment, and unfamiliarity and discomfort with conventional social life. Each of these factors tends to mire individuals deeper in homelessness” (Snow, Anderson, 1993: 298).

Once again, although we acknowledge the importance of cognitive factors in the process of subjectivity-formation, we should take them into consideration without disassociating the practices within which they are co-constituted. In this sense it is not enough (although certainly correct) to say that “since each of these cognitive dilemmas is firmly connected to street life, to transcend them would entail transcending lived experience” (Ibid:298), but is necessary to recognize the existence of different “cognitive factors” too, hence even of those that do not fit into the negative depiction that we generally do of homeless people’s capabilities. In other words, we should acknowledge also those factors that emerge from extravagant, and not-fully considered, practices. Moreover, although cognitive factors surely assume a certain degree of fixity through the spatial and temporal routines of homeless people, since these routines should not be understood as fixed (see previous point) even the cognitive part of the subject has to be read as mutable; in on-going formation; and, most importantly, open to unpredictable changes.

Having said this, our aim is now to look within the life cycles of the street and the cognitive factors of the individuals, in order to grasp *how* long-term homeless people perform the city and, in doing so, they construct their more-than-human subjectivities. The analytical steps followed will be only partly similar to the ones in the previous chapter. After having positioned the four individuals that we are going to take into consideration, we will trace different maps of their journeys

in the city of Turin during different times of the day (morning, afternoon, evening-night) paying particular attention at the affective atmospheres and powerful relations involved (“events” have been hence investigated deeper than before, without isolating them from their daily formation). After this ethnographical narration we will show patterns that, despite their complexity (or precisely thanks to it), tell interesting things on how being homeless individuals take place.

In this chapter we are going to encounter Daniele, 53-year-old, in the street for 4 years; Giuseppe, 45-year-old, in the street for 5 years; Giorgio, 68-year-old, in the street for 6 years; and Davide, 35-year-old, in the street from more for 5 years. They have been chosen, among the others I’ve interviewed and followed, because although they are obviously different in some aspects (i.e. the age) under other perspectives they form an homogeneous group of people (i.e. the years spent in the street; the fact that none of them is affected by mental problems; and the fact that two of them are heavy drinkers, while the other two are not). Another reason why we concentrate on an homogeneous group of white men living in the street from several years is that, as it has been said few pages ago, these kind of men fit perfectly into the classical stereotype of the homeless person: unemployed; lonely; possible drinker; and with several years of street’s life experience.

## **5.2 Positioning**

Daniele was an ex bricklayer. He worked for several years in his own business, which ended because he lost the vast majority of his possession gambling and betting. He was a funny, talkative man. He loved to talk, mostly about politics and women. One of the things he loved the most, especially when he was spending his time in a public park in front of the main train station of Turin (Porta Nuova), was to try to chat with the girls that were passing there. He was not aggressive, and by no mean violent, although he liked to make loud comments on them and looking at the reaction that they had. Daniele was caring a lot about his look. Although he had various health troubles, which made him look sick, he was always carefully dressed and clean. He was pretty much aware of the current fashion-trends, and loved to spend his free time looking for bags (one of his

favourite items) or caps in one of the largest open-air market of the city (Porta Palazzo's Market). At the time of my fieldwork Daniele was without any document, because he lost them and he was not able to get another copy from its original town of residence. For this reason he was in touch with a social assistant of the city who opened a file for him in order to obtain the fictive residence in "Via della Casa Comunale, 1" (see Chapter 6). However, he was having problems in obtaining this document, because to obtain it the individual has to prove to be a dispossessed. Unfortunately for him, Daniele was still officially owning a car although he did not possess it anymore. For this reason his documentation to obtain the ID was taking more time than it should. Concerning his projects, Daniele was spending at least two mornings a week in order to sort out his bureaucratic problem. Other times were dedicated to medical assistance, and to find a way to solve his health issues. His desires were connected partly with his projects (he wished especially to increase the quality of his material life, especially in order to recover his health) and partly not, as one of his greater desire was to demonstrate to his children (whom he was not seeing for a long time) that he found his way out of the street without the help of anyone.

Fig. 5.2 Daniele clothes' bag after the distribution



*"You don't have shoes like this. No one have them. Look: aren't they beautiful? If you want to buy something like this you're going to spend more than 50 euros. I love this shoes, they fit me well!".*

(Daniele, Jan. 2010, SN)

Giuseppe was a difficult person to chat with. He was as talkative as Daniele but he had the tendency to say lots of things that resulted to be not true – so the difficulty was to try to distinguish the “true” Giuseppe from the fictive one. In the end, I’ve decided that they were both “true”, in the sense that even the fictive storytelling of Giuseppe, both on his past and on his future, were parts of his subjectivity as anything else (moreover, as Snow and Anderson, 1987, have shown, fictive storytelling is a practice common to almost every homeless person). One of the favourite topics of Giuseppe were his kids. Although I had not the chance to understand if he was still in contact with them, sometimes he disappeared from Turin returning after a week or so, claiming to have visited his kids that were supposedly living in another region of Italy. Giuseppe was a heavy drinker, with serious alcohol-related problems (as diabetes). Moreover, he loved to listen to music, and he was always carrying with him his audiocassette or cd player. Turning to the projects and desires’ side, if it is quite easy to say something on the latter – as he was explicitly saying that one of his greatest desire was to find a work – it is quite hard for me to say something on the former. In fact Giuseppe never really showed to me that he was pursuing actively some end. One time he told me that he had sent his CV to an Agency for temporary work, but I never had the occasion to understand if this was true or not.

Fig. 5.3 Giuseppe audiocassette player



*“Where are they?! [his headphones] I can’t find them anymore... I’m sure, they have taken them*

*from me. Fuck. You know? I had just bought a CD by Madonna, from the Moroccan [in the black market]. And now? I can't listen to it. But, I'm sure... They should be around here somewhere".*

(Giuseppe, after having lost his headphones, Nov. 2009, SN)

The oldest man that we are taking into consideration is Giorgio, who was still in the street at the age of almost seventy-years-old (an unusual age for a street liver, as in Turin the City provides particular services for elderly people in order to avoid these kind of situations). However Giorgio could not enter in any social estate because he needed firstly to prove his state of necessity. This was due from the fact that although he had been living in the street for a while, he was arrived in Turin from a short time and the social assistants needed to certify his position. His project was firstly to obtain the fictive residence in Via della Casa Comunale and thento apply for a public tenement. For this reason he was following all the procedure to do so, always carrying with him a bag with his personal documentations, and he was quite optimistic about the outcome (although conscious of the terrible long time required). To be optimistic almost about everything was, in the end, one of his main traits. Concerning his desires, Giorgio usually said that he would like to contact some old friends of him, whom he was missing. However this was not more than a claim, as I never found out if he ever did it or not.

Fig. 5.4 Giorgio with one of the bags he was always carry with him



*"I will get out of this situation. You see... it is only a matter of believing in it, and of will, and I*

*will have to work, a lot! Now things are not quite ok... but they will get better soon. I fix this, and that - et voilà: I will be out of this!".*

(Giorgio, Mar. 2010, WI)

Davide had the fictive residence in Via della Casa Comunale, and was getting a small financial subsidy from the city (more or less 150 euro a month). The social assistants of the Municipality were following him to let him obtain a social housing flat, although the paperwork was very long. He was a “medium” drinker, in the sense that he could manage to do not drink for days without any physical drawback (as hand’s shaking). Nonetheless, he was suffering of various physical pains and he was spending quite a lot of time in hospitals. One of the things that he was repeating most frequently was that he hated immigrants: he was sure that they were stealing all the possibility of jobs from him, and that they were getting the best food and clothes from the religious institutions of the city leaving the Italian, like him, in the corner. I was not able, during the months I’ve been in touch with him, to find anything that could get even close to what I call here “project”. He wasn’t spending any time or efforts in any particular activity, although he was quite verbose when asked about his desires. The main one of them was to do what he had never done in his life, as going to the cinema, or to the theatre, to feel the aesthetic pleasure of such activities.

Fig. 5.5 Group of non-Italian citizens hanging around Cottolengo’s soup kitchen



*“They [the immigrants] have advantages that you can’t have. They have the best food, the best clothes. They get place in dormitory. The State helps them, and forgets about his own sons... I don’t*

*feel Italian anymore; Italy is shit, because of all this people. They come here and they behave like bosses. They spit on the ground, they piss everywhere! They should go back home. If I go to their countries I would like to see if I receive the same treatment!”.*

(Davide, Nov. 2009, TI)

### **5.3 Mornings**

For the most of us the beginning of a new day consists in going out of our houses and getting in touch with the city again. We start to perform it with the car, the bus or by foot and we usually have an ending point where to go (factory, office, school...) which gives us the sense of our first journey of the day. Generally homeless people do more or less the same. They too get out of the place where they had slept (a shelter, a train, or a sidewalk) and they move somewhere else, toward a place that can give them the sense of their getting up and relate once again with the urban. In Turin this place is generally the San Vincenzo's centre of via Nizza, where I've been volunteering and about which I've already said before. The four persons that we take into consideration were starting their days (as the vast majority of the homeless people that I've encountered) precisely in this place, waiting outside its door generally from 6 a.m. (in order to sign their name on the list for the free clothes distribution) to 7.30 a.m., when the door of the soup kitchen were opening.

Daniele was always having his breakfast at the Vincenziani's. Before arriving there one of the first relation that he was having with the city was with the train station, where he was collecting two or three different free newspapers from the hands of the guys that were distributing them. These newspapers were his daily digests of information (to which he was really attached) carrying them always with him. As he loved to talk about Italian politics, these newspapers offered him a way to be updated on the latest debates. However, as all of them were quite conservative-oriented and with lots of articles (with exacerbated tones) on local facts, his opinions were particularly radical especially on matters as immigration or criminality. Moreover, these newspapers were shaping his geographical movements within the city too. As Carlo, who we met in the previous chapter, he

was indeed afraid of going to San Salvario (the neighbourhood near the San Vincenzo's soup kitchen, just close to the train station) because there were happening, to use Daniele's own words: *"the worst things. Drug, prostitutes... Everyday there is a news on San Salvario. I'd prefer to sleep in the street rather than living in a place like that!"* (Daniele, Dec. 2009, WI). Therefore, the discourses contained in those newspapers were, at least partially, governing his movements especially because he had no other resources of information (as Martin has shown, the same neighbourhood can be depicted in very different ways by the local or the national medias, Martin, 2000).

After having his breakfast he was spending a few time talking with other people, although without giving too much confidence to anyone. Daniele was not part of any specific group and tended to be close to the "new" homeless people (as Marco, the young guy we encountered in the previous chapter) rather than with others. When the free distribution of clothes was available he was always trying to be one of the firsts to be served in order to choose the clothes that suited him the most. He was trying to be very kind and calm with the volunteers, and in this way he was usually able to get nicer clothes. He was particularly attached to jeans, t-shirts and baseball hats too, and his humour changed a lot accordingly to what kind of clothes he was able to get.

Around 10 a.m. he was usually getting out from the clothes distribution (when this did not take place he was spending his time at Opportunanda, another association in the same area that offered a morning drop-in for homeless people). The rest of his morning was usually dedicated to his health issues (e.g. being visited by doctors, or making documents) or spent with his social assistant, with whom he checked (at least twice a week) the status of his residence request. It is worth noting that he had a very negative attitude toward this encounter not because of the social assistant, but because of the bureaucratic system – pictured by him with *"that fucking PC"* (Daniele, Dec. 2009, WI) – which was not able to solve his situation. When he was not taking care of those two things, he was usually waiting for lunchtime in the park in front of Porta Nuova's train station reading the newspaper he collected before. He was enjoying that park in particular because there he could *"sit down on a bench, and look at the station. I love that station, it's beautiful. And I love to look at all the girls that pass there!"* (Daniele, Mar. 2010, SN). When lunchtime arrived, he was never going to any soup kitchen in order to eat. He preferred to buy his own food, especially in a Kebab shop near the train station that got TV too, which he liked to watch. When I asked him why he was not going to

any soup kitchen he answered that he would have done so only if he did not have any money: *"I feel better in the bar, I rest there. I look at the people. They got TV too! ... Cottolengo [one soup kitchen] is not for me. Too many people there. Too many immigrants. Have you ever been there? There are only immigrants. No, no, no. If I can, I eat Kebab – you should see what beautiful pieces of girl [sic] you can find there!"* (Daniele, Dec. 2009, WI).

Fig. 5.6 "Leggo", one of the free newspapers mostly diffused in Turin



Vincenziani's Soup Kitchen, Dec. 2010

Giuseppe was starting his day drinking a sip of wine (a white cheap wine sold in carton bricks) waiting for the Vincenziani's soup kitchen to be opened. He was arriving there always very early in the morning (sometimes even before 6 a.m.) feeling bad, with headaches and pain in all his body. He was drinking with other people that were drinkers like him. Once he told me: *"Do you know why I drink so early? Because this is the only thing that stop my [physical] pains. Look at my hands. [They were shaking a lot]. The only thing I can do to stop them is to drink"* (Giuseppe, Apr. 2010, SN).

He was spending most of his mornings around the soup kitchen, especially when the free distribution of clothes was available, making jokes with other people and drinking. When the distribution did not take place, he used to do the same just

a few hundreds meters away from the soup kitchen, under the porticos of via Nizza or he was going to the Opportunanda's drop in. To buy wine, he was sharing his spare coins with other drinkers: "alcohol, like the need for money, generates certain social patterns that facilitate its procurement" (e.g. Bottle gangs) (Cohen & Sokolovsky, 1989:195). Usually he was the one in charge to buy the wine: he was collecting the coins and then going to one small supermarket in the train station's area. Sometimes I was going there with him and I noticed that the boss of the supermarket was allowing him to pay less than it was due (for instance taking two bricks for the price of one).

Apart from the soup kitchen, one of Giuseppe's favourite places – especially in rainy days – were libraries, particularly the one where it was possible to use a free internet connection. Once in there, he was able to spend more than two hours just playing some simple games (as Window's minefield) or surfing the web (especially on websites where it was possible to play online games). Around 11.30 a.m. he was going to reach the soup kitchen in order to have his lunch. (From time to time – especially when he was too drunk – he was skipping it. This was leading him to have strong headaches in the afternoon). In very few occasions he was going to eat in the largest soup kitchen of the city, the Cottolengo, but he did not like it much. When he was there he felt stressed, and eating was almost a pain: *"I prefer via Brugnone [another soup kitchen managed by a group of Catholic nuns]. At the Cottolengo food is shit, people smell bad... there are 400 people at time eating there! It is not a place for me. Too much confusion. It burns my head up!"* (Giuseppe, Dec. 2010, WI). It comes without saying that in each movement that Giuseppe was having in the city, his favourite companion was his cd player, playing disco music. If music concurs in the production of city's space (i.e. Krims, 2007), in a sense Giuseppe was a truly urban ethnomusicologist, playing the space, performing it and constituting his subjectivity through music too.

Fig. 5.7 An empty pack of the wine most diffused within homeless people in Turin



Vincenziani's Soup kitchen, Mar. 2010

As the other two, also Giorgio was beginning his day at the Vincenziani's centre. Nonetheless, contrary to the others, even when he spent his time there to wait for the free clothes distribution, he did not like too much to talk with any other people and did not enjoy in any other way his time there. Although everybody knew him, he never got close or hanged out with anyone. He was impatient: *"These people have nothing to do. You see? They just drink. They do nothing. I think that they do not really want to get out of here. But I do. I do and I will"* (Giorgio, Jan. 2010, WI) (in Snow and Anderson's terms, Giorgio was distancing his identity from the one of the other belonging to the group – the homeless group – of which he was trying to reject the stigma; Snow and Anderson, 1987).

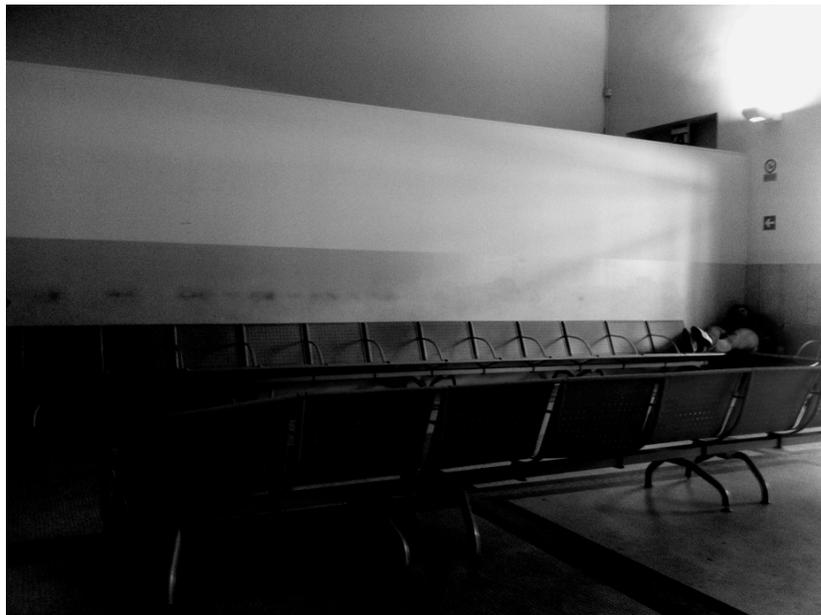
One of the first things that he was normally doing was to go, after having finished his breakfast, to the public bath in order to take a shower and to shave. He was caring a lot about his appearance but in a different sense than Daniele, as he was interested more in physical hygiene than in clothes. The importance of this aspect for him is even clearer noticing that when he could not manage to go to the public bath (this was happening especially when he had to wait a lot for his turn in the clothes' distribution) he was going to the Lingotto (a commercial centre in the southern side of the city) to shave in its toilets. Once, I went with him and watched with my eyes the calm and naturalness with which he was using the sink of the

commercial centre's toilet to shave himself. *"You see? Done. Now I feel better!"* (Giorgio, Mar. 2010, SN).

Giorgio was always carrying with him two bags. A big one with clothes and other personal belongings (as his shaving set) and another, smaller, with all his documents. These documents were, for him, one of the most precious things on earth. Part of them were showing his property less status, and others were the evidences of the path that he was following (with his social assistant) in order to get a public tenancy. In ten months I never saw him doing even the shortest route without holding that small bag in his hands.

As Giuseppe, Giorgio was eating in the soup kitchens of the city. At the beginning of my case study (October) he used to go to the Brugnone's soup kitchen, to move afterwards in the small public park near it. However, when the winter came, he moved to the Sant'Antonio da Padova soup kitchen, because this centre was located not far from the second train station of the city (Porta Susa) where he was going after having eaten, to seat in the public waiting room and get some rest.

Fig. 5.8 Giorgio resting in the Porta Susa's train station waiting room



Porta Susa train station, Feb. 2010

Davide was the only one of the four that was not usually going to the Vincenziani's centre to have breakfast. I haven't seen him in that centre more than one-two times a week. In the other occasions he simply did not have any kind of breakfast. Once I've interrogated him on this point, and he replied that he was not hungry in the morning and that he did not like to eat in a place with so many other people. Moreover, he told me that his only concern in the morning was... to wake up: *"Blessed who makes my eyes open this morning too"* (Davide, Nov. 2009, WI) is the statement that (as he told me) he pronounced every morning after having disclosed his eyes.

His morning was quite simple, with very few movements. Usually he was spending it alone in the main train station, or in a park close to it, waiting for the time to go to the soup kitchen to eat. During that time either he drunk (although he drunk far less than Giuseppe) or slept. The only other relational pattern that could change this routine took place if he had an appointment with his social assistant. In that case, before the appointment he was going to wash himself to the public bath. This happened, once again, only when he had to go to the social assistant. The bare fact of having an appointment was refreshing his energies: *"If I have something to do, my day becomes full. Otherwise, I just wait the end of it"* (Davide, Nov. 2009, WI) (without anything special to do, even his self-care was pretty much inexistent).

Despite this apparent immobility, even Davide was having lots of relations with the things of the city. One of the most relevant was with the things that he was collecting around (in the train station, in the street, and even taking stuff out of public bins). He was carrying every time with him at least two bags full of things of various genre: clothes, covers, old electronic devices (such radio), medicines, food, etc. I never found out what all those things really meant for him. Although partly of them were certainly destined to the black market, I tend to think that at least a part were of a certain affective importance. As Bonadonna pointed out: *"Things that we consider as garbage, for them have got a significance. The one who lost every form of private property collect a squashed bin of Coca-Cola associating to it a meaning completely different and new"* (Bonadonna, 2005:42-43).

Fig. 5.9 Davide with his bags full of stuff



City centre, Apr. 2010

## 5.4 Afternoons

For people that live the city in its outdoors, afternoons' time and space can vary in relation to a lot of factors: from the type of relational patterns followed by the individual (more or less linked with institutions, more or less linked with works opportunities, and so on), to the weather and the season. As Cohen pointed out: homeless people:

“cyclical schedules are molded by the agencies and institutions on which they depend for daily meals, monthly checks, or daily room tickets. Often they must be in and out of their flops by a certain time. Some are regulated by the season, living on the street during the warm months and in the flops when the weather turns cold” (Cohen & Sokolovsky, 1989:76).

As we have seen mornings' contexts are usually punctuated by some institutions (the Vincenziani's soup kitchen, Opportunanda's drop in, etc.) which nonetheless vary quite a lot from individual to individual. Afternoon's time-space, which starts after lunch, is less structured and can tell us even more on the subjectivities of the people taken into account.

Almost anyone living or working in the area of the Piazza Carlo Felice's public park, in front of the Porta Nuova train station of Turin, knew Daniele (at least visually). After having eaten his kebab, Daniele was indeed working as abusive parking-man in a small parking area just along this public park. It was a good area to work as parking-man, as it was a very central place always busy with cars coming and going, stopping there just for a short period of time. To work there, Daniele had to give to other two homeless persons like him a small percentage of the money that he got. However this was not upsetting him, as he knew that it was the only possible way to work there. Speaking about relations and performances, there are two aspects of them that seem particularly relevant to me.

The first is that the relations, the more-than-human associations, which he was having in this place were of various nature with different meanings, affects and power carried by them. Daniele was performing his job smiling at people, making jokes and having fun with them. This was due partly to his personal character (funny and open to the others) and partly to an ability that he developed day by day: *"If you smile to them, if you make a positive comment on their shoes, or on their cars, if you say something about, I don't know, football, fashion, politics... it depends on who the hell you have in front of you!, well, if you do so, and you never ask for money, money comes. Not much, but something comes"* (Daniele, May 2010, WI). The affective atmosphere of these relations among Daniele, the parking area, the different typologies of cars, and the "customers", not only made him to "fulfill economic roles that make it possible for [him] to support [his] habits and meet [his] everyday needs without robbing or hurting anyone" (Duneier, 1999:110) but were allowing him to develop certain capabilities instead of others. They were modifying his subjectivity, how he perceived himself, and how he was planning his daily life. Daniele was seeing himself as a parking-man, with a public distinctive role. He was talking about his activity as anyone else can do, exacerbating the negative aspects (as, for instance, the fact that he was breathing all the day the smog of the cars), and complaining about what was missing (as, for instance, a public toilet in that area).

The second aspect of Daniele's performances in his afternoon's working time, it is that he was able to take breaks from work too, hence to open new relational spaces and performances that were fundamental parts of his activity. There are a couple of them worth mentioning. First of, more or less once every

hour he was going in the public park I've mentioned before to meet and chat for a while with other homeless persons. These were individuals working as abusive parking-man too along the same area, or simply people who stopped there from time to time during their journeys in the city. Daniele did not like too much those people, but was in a good relation with a couple of them. The topics of their chats were related to the weather, football, and Italian politics or, more often, they were talking about some other homeless person that was not present. Sometimes they even spoke about some "affair": a mobile phone to sell, a spare battery to find, and other similar stuff. However, they were never speaking about themselves – neither concerning their present activities, nor their past. Their relations were hence characterized by a general lack of trust of each other, and I'm not wrong if I say that the emotional atmosphere of those encounters was quite "cold" and suspicious. Nonetheless, Daniele was going there because *"you never know. Sometimes you can get some deal, something pops up. Even from them. Even from people like me. You never know"* (Daniele, Apr. 2010, WI). He was, in the end, well aware that space is not fix, and that changes and chances can be always behind the corner.

Secondly, Daniele used to leave the square where he was doing the parking to move a few hundreds meters far, where it was located a small corner shop with automatic machines for coffee and tea. This stop was making him feel good. It was giving him the sense of his work, and was re-charging him of positive feelings and good attitude: *"I need a break, you know. This is my break from the job. Coffee is not good for my health. But I need a break. It is like I'm doing a kind of normal job!"* (Daniele, Apr. 2010, SN).

Fig. 5.10 Daniele as abusive parking-man



Near Porta Nuova train station, Mar. 2010

Giuseppe's afternoon was changing a lot in relation to essentially one thing: alcohol. If he had drunk heavily in the morning, usually at the beginning of the afternoon he was already drunk. He hence moved from place to place, mainly in the same area, between the train station, San Salvario, and the park in front of the train station. He spent his time with a couple of other guys, drinker like him, just laughing, chatting and moving around. Alcohol in this sense was designing for him his relational life, both with humans (e.g. other homeless people who were drinking like him) and with non-humans (they were choosing the places best suited to drink without being annoyed by the police or other people, mainly in shadowed area of the train station). In this sense, as with any other dependence to a particular substance (as with smoking, or taking drugs), the agency of a particular *thing* in the constitution of their subjectivity is undoubtedly clear (Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009). Giuseppe's afternoons were hence an opera played under alcohol's chords, where the punctuated stops were the supermarket; the steps where was possible to lie down; the space between two public bins where to piss; and so on. In this way he was interiorizing not only the addiction to the alcohol, but a whole set of practices (as pissing in the street, or telling fictive stories about himself or others) that were shaping himself as subject in a particular way.

His relational pattern could take, nonetheless, also another form. Especially in the days in which the Vincenziani's free-distribution of clothes was available, Giuseppe was drinking less than usual. The reason was that when he had managed

to collect some clothes, and after having had his lunch, he was moving to the area of Porta Palazzo (the market). There, it was quite easy to meet people (mainly immigrants from the Maghreb) who were working in the black market that was taking place every Sunday partly in the Porta Palazzo's square and partly around that area. Giuseppe was hence bringing almost all the clothes that he had taken from the nuns to a couple of those people whom he knew well. In return, he was receiving little money, which in the end became one of the few monetary incomes of his street's life. Giuseppe was hence "part of both the mainstream economy and the shady world" (Venkatesh, 2008:23), earning his income from the shady one and spending it on the mainstream. What is interesting to notice is that Giuseppe de-territorialized the Vincenziani's service of first-aid clothes distribution into a new kind of assemblage, a work – or at least an income – opportunity. Many homeless persons were doing the same, showing hence a particular ability to connect their own necessity, to both the institutional and shadowed machinery of the street. However, what is particularly interesting in Giuseppe's account is that he was able to "relate less" with the alcohol if he needed to do so. In the sense of this work, Giuseppe was de-territorializing himself, as subject, too: having some relations (of production and exchange) and leaving some others (of consumption). His subject was hence both the product of his alcoholic journey – as it could appear obvious labelling him as "homeless drinker" – but not only.

Fig. 5.11 The Sunday black market of Porta Palazzo where Giuseppe used to sell his clothes



Porta Palazzo, Mar. 2010

Giorgio's afternoons were more linked with the services provided by the institutions and associations working with homeless people, than the ones of the others we have already seen. His journeys depended a lot, nonetheless, on the weather.

After having had lunch and having spent sometime in the Porta Susa train station, if the weather was not good (rainy or particularly cold) he was moving either to a public library (mainly for taking advantage of the heating) or to the daytime centre of via Pacini, 18 (managed by the "Gruppo Abele" association, one of the biggest third-sector religious-based group in the city). In this centre Giorgio was spending a great part of his afternoon, having tea and talking with few other people. However, from his point of view, this place was not useful: *"I need to work. To find a house. Here I only drink tea doing nothing. He and she [pointing at two educators who were working there] are good. I have nice chats with them. But nothing more. Tomorrow I won't come here again"* (Giorgio, Feb. 2010, WI). As Cloke, May and Johnsen have recently pointed out:

"through attempting to provide a space of refuge and support, it is clear that day centers remain somewhat ambiguous, and certainly fragile, spaces. Common to most day centre is in fact a discord between the intentions of service providers, who aim to create a therapeutic haven open to all, and the realities of such environments for both staff and service users alike" (Cloke, May, Johnsen, 2010:145).

In the end, this part of Giorgio's afternoon was a mixture of positive and negative feelings, of care and expectation, which did not find a common ground where to meet.

If the weather was not so bad, Giorgio performed his afternoon doing what he called "tour". The "tour" was a journey that led Giorgio to three or four churches located in different areas of the city, which he reached taking buses and trams. The aim of the "tour" was to collect alms from the priests and nuns working in these churches. The interesting facts in this practice are two. Firstly, Giorgio was able to remember on what days this or that priest was giving alms – this, in-fact, was not happening all days but only on certain moments of the week. Moreover, he was able to arrange his "tour" in order to reach the right church on time still

having time to reach the other ones, hence he was organizing in his mind when-to-which-bus with considerable precision. Therefore Giorgio was using his cognitive ability to design a particular actor-network in order to reach his purposes, an actor-network made of buses, trams, priests and discourses too (as he was presenting himself to the priest as the “poor” who needs “charity”). Apart from noticing the capabilities that Giorgio was showing in his “tour”, the second interesting thing to stress is that *alms* were a *powerful* relational tool for him for at least two reasons. The first is that they were modelling his day, making him moving in the city in a certain way and making him spending his time for a certain purpose (collecting coins). The second is that the ways those priests and nuns were giving money to him (and to a lot of other homeless people too) were carrying a particular form of discourse (the Catholic’s charitable vision) which, in the end, was modelling Giorgio’s subjectivity: how to behave in order to get the coins; how to arrange his day in order to have time to do his “tour”; the fact that he was not thinking of finding any other way of subsidize himself; etc.

A last interesting performance took place in the late afternoon, when Giorgio was usually returning to the Porta Susa train station. Waiting for the evening there, he was generally taking advantage of a free tea distribution made just outside the train station by the volunteers of an association. He had a positive feeling about the people who were distributing the tea, and although he was not considering this of any particular help for his situation, he was talking positively about it: *“These people are not bad. I come here, I take the tea, I talk with them. This is fine. It lasts half an hour, but is better than nothing!”* (Giorgio, Dec. 2009, SN). Nonetheless, although it is relevant to notice the positive affects involved in this relation, as with the Pacini’s centre, Giorgio was not able to find a line-of-flight, an escape, in the relations offered by those services, which in the end he considered to be not helpful for him.

Fig. 5.12 A Church frequented by Giorgio in his seeking for alms

(The notice states “Charity is benevolent”)



One kilometre south of the main train station, Porta Nuova, Apr. 2010

Davide’s afternoon did not have many variations. After having eaten in a soup kitchen he was going back to the Porta Nuova train station. Here he was going around collecting things from the ground or directly from the trash bins of the station. From time to time he was stopping and sitting down, mainly just outside the main entrance, drinking or reading newspapers and magazines he had collected previously.

What is worth noticing here is one of the form of power in which his relational patterns were soaked, which emerged directly from the Station’s architecture – or, better said, from its renovation works. Once he told me: *“They change it. They are changing everything. Now is full of shops. You can’t sit anywhere. You can sit only on the benches near the platform, but there is cold. They don’t want us here”* (Davide, Dec. 2009, SN). One of the major changes in course at that time was the complete removal of the passengers’ waiting room, which in the past was widely used by homeless people. From that moment on, passengers would have waited for their trains in bars, and homeless people would

have performed the station in different ways: either sitting on the benches near the platform or, as Davide, finding other hidden corners *“where the heating of the shops comes out. You can manage to warm up a bit, but you can’t really lie down or the police strips you away”* (Davide, Dec. 2009, SN).

The revanchist city was, in this case, in action. However, this did not lead straight to the “annihilation of homeless people” (Mitchel, 1997:131). Davide was not “annihilated”, and we can understand this if we concentrate on *how* people perform their homelessness. To look at Davide’s own way to find the spaces where the heating of the shop came out, shows us something that Mitchel’s perspective does not take into consideration at all: the fact that he was able to re-imagine the train station as a different space, practicing it differently. This perspective allows to recognize two aspects. First, that Davide got the capability of performing things differently, hence of being all but annihilated. Secondly that politics of containment are always partial, and our counter-political effort should start from the recognition of the escape capabilities of individuals rather than from general political analysis (I will return on this point in the following chapters).

More than the station, Davide had few other choices, considering that he did not like to move a lot and had no particular reason in doing so. If “poverty limited where a person could stay or go” (Desjarlais, 1999), Davide’s poor ability to move (because his health condition) and limited number of both projects and desires, were almost bounding him to the station. There were only two other relationalities worth noticing that I’ve been able to register. The first was with the via Sacchi’s day centre (owned by the City and managed by a social cooperative). This was a context where people could wash, shave and be visited by a doctor. Moreover they could talk with each other and be helped by the social educators who work there. Davide was going there very few times a week just to talk with a social educator he had a good relationship with. What we see here is, hence, an affective link that led Davide to the social educator, turning the afternoon of the former in (at least for some minutes) something emotionally better and different. The other relational pattern was taking place especially during rainy days: *“I sit on a bus, and I go. I like to see the city from the windows. And buses are warm. Sometimes I drink too, and then is done, I sleep. Time passes and another day has gone”* (Davide, Dec. 2009, SN).

Fig. 5.13 The outdoor of the via Sacchi's daycentre



Near Porta Nuova train station, Apr. 2010

## 5.5 Evenings/nights

When evening comes, the night shortly arises on the city. People return to their homes or get ready to go out for dinner, and have fun. This is the time in which one of the most crowded place of the daytime, the train station, which is also one of the most performed context by homeless people, suddenly turns to be an empty cathedral where few people come and go, hurrying and looking around suspiciously. The end of the day is for the vast majority of homeless people just another encounter with the assemblages of the urban. Finding a place where to sleep becomes *the* issue, and sidewalks, trains, benches, and dormitories arise as possible answers.

In Turin to sleep or not in a dormitory depends mainly from two factors. Firstly, it depends from the number of beds available every night in the City and private's shelters. Secondly, and less evidently, it is related to the type of identity

card that the individual possesses. If “those who are powerful are not those who “hold” power but are those able to enroll, convince and enlist others into networks on terms which allow the initial actors to “represent” these others” (Murdoch, 1995:748), from an actor-network perspective, in the actor-network created by homeless people and the dormitory’s system, “who” holds the power is precisely the ID card, because it can represent the other (the homeless person) in at least two different ways.

The first is the case of people who do not have an ID (e.g. Immigrants) or of people that have an ID with the residence in another city, not in Turin. For the ways through which the dormitory’s system of the City is designed and managed, in this case the ID does not formally represent the homeless, because it does not recognize him or her as fully eligible to the services offered from the City of Turin. Therefore, who falls in this category cannot sleep in a public dormitory for more than 7 consecutive days and, after those, can just try to find a free place as they are entitled to have other 7 days of permanence in another dormitory (see next chapter). The second is the case either of an ID given from the social service of City to people who do not have a stable and formal residence (the fictive residence of Via della Casa Comunale, 1), or of people that do possess an ID with residence in Turin. These persons have the right to stay in a public dormitory for 1 month, then they are inscribed in a waiting list and have to move to another dormitory for other 30 days. In approaching the evenings and the nights of homeless people in Turin we shall hence be aware of how their ID-abstract machines can open or close spaces, because this deeply influences the different ways through which they perform the city.

Daniele used to spend his last hours of the daytime hanging around the train station or using some of the money he collected during the afternoon to spend his time in bars where, although he did not drink at all because of his health problematic, he tried to warm up, eat something and watch some TV. However bars shut down quite early, so most of the time he was going to one of the numerous places where it was possible to play at slot machines or cards. These “bet centres” are widely diffused (and popular) around the Porta Nuova’s area. Daniele was going there for three main reasons: he loved to bet; he needed a warm place; and he liked their atmosphere. This is perfectly in line with what the literature has started to suggest: “the movements and pauses of homeless people

in the city can also be understood in terms of issues of affect and performativity which are not obviously governed by the rationalities of regulation or tactical response" (Cloke, May, Johnsen, 2008:259). Although he was conscious of the power that these places were having on him – *"To bet is my death. It will kill me, I know. But I love it. What can I do?"* (Daniele, Jan. 2010, TI) – he could not avoid to go there and to spend most of the money that he had previously earned. The colours, lights and sounds of those places, which were deeply exciting him, spellbound him: *"When I'm there I feel another person. I relax. I enjoy everything and I have a lot of fun. This life is shit: would you take from me betting too?!"* (Daniele, Jan. 2010, TI).

As he did not have any ID, Daniele was sleeping in different places (but mainly in two). During summertime, if the weather was good, he was spending the night on a bench in a small square in the centre of the city: *"I prefer to sleep in Piazza Bodoni because is small. Everyone can see me there, I feel much better, protected. I do not want to sleep in a park: you never know who the hell is going to wake you up there!"* (Daniele, May 2010, WI). However during the time of my fieldwork he was going to sleep mainly in the train station, where it was possible to enter in the wagons of the trains that were parked there for the night. There were two rules to follow sleeping in those trains: *"You have to go there later than midnight, so no-one will see you, neither the police. They start to go around the station only very soon in the morning. Then, you have to get up early man! 4.30, 5. No more. Otherwise you will leave with the train, or the police will wake you up"* (Daniele, May 2010, WI). Of those wagons he did not like the fact that they were cold and dirty, although sometimes he was lucky enough to get a train with a sleeping wagon: *"When I get one of them, I can really sleep!"* (Daniele, May 2010, WI). However, most of the time he was waking up more tired than he went to sleep. Once I went with him at midnight to see how it looks like to sleep in a wagon. The first thing I noticed was that in a train you could find even ten homeless people, but they usually did not sleep all in the same wagon. The second was that wagons were really cold. And the third was that I understood finally why Daniele told me that he was feeling uncomfortable and unsafe in sleeping there: *"Only if you are drunk you can sleep here without being worried"* (Daniele, May 2010, WI). Trains are dark and full of little noises. They relate to you in a cold way, telling you that your pullover and your jacket will be never enough for the night. They make you suspicious of everyone, of shadows. When I went there, I thought that that kind of environment could be ok for a lot of things (traveling, chatting, enjoying a

landscape) but not sleeping, especially if the train is on a binary in a station of a big city. Daniele was frightened about the wagons' context (sometimes, for this reason, he preferred to sleep outside the train than in), but he still preferred this solution than doing a day-by-day cue in front of some dormitory with the hope of finding a place to rest. This was his way to still have the control of his own life and to choose what was best for him, at least from his point of view.

Fig. 5.14 Sleeping in the train station



Porta Nuova train station, May 2010

When the evening was approaching, Giuseppe was usually sober even if he had drunk a lot during the day. His first stop was the Cappuccini's church (a church located on a hill very close to the city centre) in order to collect a bag of sandwiches distributed by the friars that live there. In alternative, he took his food from the Vincenziani's soup kitchen (the same of the morning), which distributed sandwiches too. However, he preferred the former (although there was a fifteen-minute walk to reach the church in top of the hill) because their bread was usually *"fresher, and with more stuff inside. Ham, cheese, omelette. Better than Nun Teresa's sandwiches [the oldest nun of the Vincenziani's soup kitchen]"* (Giuseppe, Nov. 2010, WI). If the weather was good, in order to eat he usually moved to a small park, with few people around. He seated on a bench and started to eat listening to music. If the weather was not good, he seated on a bus and started long

journeys without a final end, again listening to music. In both cases it is important to notice that Giuseppe was spending this time alone, far from his bottle-gang companions, without drinking and just trying to chill-out from the (alcoholic) routine of his day.

Giuseppe had an ID but without the residence in Turin (his residence was still located in the region where he was born), and this was influencing his availability of choices to spend the night. Once I've asked him why he was not going to apply for an ID from the social services of the city, and he said to me: *"I find it humiliating. If on my identity card there is written "Via della Casa Comunale", it is like to have written on my front 'ehi, guys, I'm homeless, I don't have a house... do you want to give me a job?' No way. I prefer to lay in the street"* (Giuseppe, Dec. 2010, WI). Therefore, he was well aware of the discursive power of that particular ID. The fact of do not having an ID with residence in the City of Turin did not preclude him completely the dormitories (as I've said, he could spend one consecutive week in a dormitory). Nonetheless, he was usually not sleeping in them. The main reason was that he did not like to share his night space with other homeless people. In this sense, the dormitory system "as it is conceived and usually practiced, welcomes anyone only in a theoretical sense [...] It removes, for instance, the ones who fears to be in few square meters with other people, locked into a small room" (Bonadonna, 2005:109), as it was precisely in Giuseppe's case. In the end, he was performing his night sleeping in the waiting room of one of the city's hospitals: he was moving around 10 p.m. to the Hospital Martini, and slept on the chairs of its first aid area.

There are two interesting things to notice in this performance. The first is why he was going there. The answer is that *"at the Martini people are friendly. They let you sleep. Well, this happens also in other places. But at the Martini no-one annoys you, and in the morning is also possible to take a good coffee at the machines. The doctors know me! They use the same machine to drink coffee"* (Giuseppe, Dec. 2010, WI). The second is that sleeping was affecting his health, this time in a bad way. Although he generally liked the Martini as place, one of the things Giuseppe was complaining most about his life were the chairs of the first-aid waiting room on which he was sleeping. Every morning he was waking up with backbone pain. Although surely he had not started to drink for this reason, alcohol helped him to reduce the pain and to feel better, as he told me more than once: *"Wine is the only thing that makes me feel good. I wake up from that fucking chair, my head explodes, my back hurts – I drink a shot, then I take my coffee, then I can*

*go out and I feel better”* (Giuseppe, Dec. 2010, WI). We are not suggesting that Giuseppe’s addiction to alcohol was due to the chairs of the hospital, but stressing the importance of those chairs in modifying Giuseppe as subject – hence in allowing him to find psychological excuses for sustaining his addiction.

Fig. 5.15 Collecting free food at the Cappuccini’s church



Cappuccini’s hill, May 2010

Giorgio was having his dinner as Giuseppe, taking sandwiches from the Cappuccini’s church around 5.30 p.m. However the reason for this choice was different: Giorgio was going there because he liked to see Turin from the hill. *“If it is not cold, I sit down up there and I look at the city. I like this, it reminds me of XXX [the city where he was born]. After half an hour up there I feel better, I still hope in change. Because things will change, I’m sure of this”* (Giorgio, Feb. 2010, WI). After having eaten, or if it was too cold to eat in the outdoors, Giuseppe was going back to the Porta Susa train station, and waited there for the time to go to sleep. Waiting in the train station was for him something good, firstly because it was warm, and secondly because *“if I’m in the waiting room I’m just like one of the other passengers”* (Giorgio, Mar. 2010, SN). Nonetheless, he did not like how other homeless people behaved or looked: *“Look at them! They occupy three or four seats. They take off their shoes. They eat and burp. They drink. Of course people hate them. I think that you should preserve a bit of humanity even in the street, not*

*behave like an animal!*" (Giorgio, Mar. 2010, SN). Once again, he was distancing himself from the identity and stereotype of "homeless people", or at least from that kind of behaviours that he associated to the stereotype of homelessness, through a whole set of performances (seat and eat in a certain way) and tactics (for instance without sitting near other homeless people).

In order to sleep Giorgio was going to the Pellerina's Park, in the Emergenza Freddo's containers. Giorgio, who did not have the residence in Turin, chose this place essentially because it was the only one that could guarantee him a long stay even without a residence in the city. This did not mean, however, that Giorgio was enjoying staying there. Indeed, he did not like that place at all: *"Every evening there is a fight. Romanians against Moroccan, Moroccan against Algerian, and so on. They drink. They smoke there. Every night the police comes: and fights stop. After a while, they begin again. I can't sleep. It is impossible to sleep, to rest a bit..."* (Giorgio, Feb. 2010, TI). Moreover, he was complaining about the extremely hot electric heating of those small containers, and also about the lack of cleanness. In the end, the assemblage Giorgio+container+bunk beds+noises, etc. resulted in a tired and demotivated subject. I still remember Giorgio almost falling asleep when having breakfast, as he could barely managed to close his eyes during the night.

Fig. 5.16 Sleeping at the Emergenza Freddo's camp

("Modulo abitativo" means "Habitation module")



Pellerina's Park, January 2010

Davide's supper consisted in the sandwiches that he was taking at the Vincenziani's soup kitchen. In fact, although *"they are better, I do not want to climb that fucking hill to eat at Cappuccini's. They can go to hell. Why have I to climb so far? These sandwiches are terrible. See? The bread is cement. But they are fine. I don't care. I'm not even hungry"* (Davide, Feb. 2010, WI). He was having, so, a very weak relation with food, to which he was not interested in. While eating it, he was sitting down under the porticos of via Nizza, or via Sacchi (the two road alongside the train station) and stayed there. When it was colder, he was moving inside the train station, because *"there are places in which the heating comes out from the shops and you can stay there without almost no-one could notice you. These are the only good places of this station"* (Davide, Dec. 2009, SN).

Davide had the residence in Turin, in the fictive "Via della Casa Comunale", so he could sleep in the public dormitory for 30 consecutive days. From time to time he slept in shelters, but generally he preferred to avoid them. The reasons were three. Firstly, he was concerned about his stuff – the things he was carrying with him every time – being scared that someone in the dormitory could rob him (those things were, hence, shaping his relational patterns). The second reason was more pragmatic: he simply did not always managed to insert his name in the waiting list of the public dormitories, so he was not be able to book his turn. Thirdly, he hated the noises of the public dormitory. A similar situation as the one of Grace, a woman followed by Liebow in his compelling account of homeless women's lives:

*"there's no getting sleep in a shelter [...] There was indeed much night noise and movement. There was snoring, coughing, sneezing, wheezing, retching, farting, cries from bad dreams, occasional weeping or seizures, talking aloud to oneself or to someone else who may or may not have been present, and always movement to and from the bathroom"* (Liebow, 1993:27).

Therefore, most of the time he slept in the first-aid-waiting room of hospitals or in the train station. The nights were for him quite hard. He was usually drinking more during the evenings than during the day (the exact contrary of Giuseppe), as he was scared by the night. He did not have a preferred place where to go. If the weather was bad, he turned for train's wagons, although without liking them: *"Wagons are dangerous. People are drunk. Sometimes I'm drunk too. And they are*

*damn cold. Well, less than outside, but damn cold!"* (Davide, Feb. 2010, WI). If the weather was acceptable, he was sleeping outside, on the benches of the public park near Porta Nuova or under the porticos of via Nizza. Here what threatened him mostly was the fact of being without any kind of protection between him and the rest of the world. Davide's subjectivity was hence moulded by the night: by the coldness of trains or sidewalks, by the alcohol, and by the noises and sensations dispersed in it.

Fig. 5.17 Sleeping outside



Piazza Castello's porticos (the main square of Turin), Feb. 2010

## 5.6 Patterns

The relational journeys presented in this chapter are *maps*, which should be seen as "metaphor for the subject" (Pile, Thrift, 1995:13), constructed between the individual and the machinery of the city. What we have seen are long-term homeless people whom

"map the urban space in function of the distribution of institutional and non-institutional resources, making for

[themselves] daily life-environments which are alternative to a home, but which still represent a minimum degree of familiarity and stability, precisely because they are frequented routinely" (Meo, 2000:143).

In this sense we can argue that "people without home elaborate active, equilibrate and rational strategies of adaptation to the city lived from the street. [...] Street life is not only a form of passive and parasitic exclusion" (Bonadonna, 2005:73). The aim of this section is to look within those maps in order to highlight patterns and differences of being a homeless individual in Turin, comparing them, at the same time, with the one depicted in the process of becoming a homeless person.

Similarly with the account showed in the previous chapter, the first thing that emerges is that there *cannot be* clear patterns in being homeless. In this sense, "being is becoming [...], the subject endures through continually breaking down, but this is not a negative event" (Doel, 1995:230). Long-term homeless subjects are formed in this world, through performances that are "bound up in complex ways with the architecture of the city" (Cloke, May, Johnsen, 2010:62). To understand them, this complexity has to be traced and not reduced, highlighting especially those elements that appear to be less recognized by canonical views on homelessness. These consist in the ways through which Daniele, Giuseppe, Giorgio and Davide *positioned in and performed the city*.

Positioning, as it has been argued at the end of Chapter 4, matters. The projects/desires couplet, as expressed by each individual, tells how they portrait themselves and their lives in the world, offering an important focalization on their affective universe. In the short-term homeless people account of the previous chapter we have seen a certain degree of continuity between people's projects (hence what people actually pursue) and their desires (their general aims, aspirations and wishes). At a minimum degree of speculation this means that they were consciously trying to achieve goals directly connected with what they felt as being positive outcomes. They were trying to achieve, in other words, objectives seen as means of their happiness, of their being satisfied, no matter what those objectives were about. As we have seen this was particularly true with Carlo and Marco, who were negotiating their encounters with the street's world more or less by their own, without being too much entangled into rigid and codified contexts, as

it was the case of Valerio. Despite the other two, Valerio was moving and performing into more codified contexts that were the result of the rules, codices and discourses spread by the institutions that were following him. In his case we had noticed a small distance between his projects and desires. Valerio was hence positioning himself in at least two different ways: what he was trying to be, and what he would like to be.

What we have seen in this chapter is similar to Valerio's situation. Daniele was the only one that, to a certain extent, was pursuing an objective (gaining the fictive ID from the Municipality) that was linked with one of his desires (increasing the quality of his material life). Giuseppe wanted to work (desire) but he had not real projects in that sense. Giorgio wanted to contact some old friends (desire) but he had never done anything like this (although it is important to notice that he was actively pursuing another project – i.e. to obtain the fictive ID). Davide wished to go to the cinema, or theatre (desire) but he had never done so (although he could easily save enough money to do it at least once). Therefore these subjects were all, like Valerio, positioning themselves differently in respect of their projects (if they had any) and desires.

What is interesting to notice is that Giuseppe, Giorgio and Davide were performing in contexts more coded than the ones of Daniele. The formers were (with differences) relating with soup kitchens in the morning, soup kitchens in the afternoon, free distribution of food in the evening, free distribution of clothes, free distribution of other goods (as tea), social assistants, day centres, alms from churches, etc. hence with assemblages codified and codifying. Daniele, on the contrary, was just going to the soup kitchen in the morning and was relating with his social assistant in order to get the ID. To eat (he was buying his own food), to get money (abusive parking), to sleep (trains), to have fun or socialize (betting centres), he was performing a world less codified, with less formal and informal rules and especially with less discourses directed toward him. These accounts reinvigorate, hence, the suggestion proposed at the end of the previous chapter: the more the spatio-temporal context in which the individual life is coded, the more we can recognize this type of distance between his/her projects/desires. In other words, not only “the street changes the perception of reality, and [...] the relation of the self with the cultural system he belongs to” (Bonadonna, 2005:75) but also is able to change the intimate self too.

Turning to the daily practices of these individuals, in this chapter we encountered four subjects with very different ways to perform the mornings, afternoons and evenings/nights of the city. What is worth to stress here is the importance of their affective and powerful encounters with even the smallest urban assemblages, which in the end were shaping their performances in the Turin's machine. In this sense, things matter: "as they are appropriated, cared for, share, traded, barricaded, disturbed or destroyed, conjure feelings, sensations. They are a part of the complex relationships defining the boundary between the self and other" (Sibley, 1995:137). Daily free-newspapers were influencing the ways through which Daniele was performing and imagining the city. He was attached but also deeply influenced by them (for instance in his judgment upon the San Salvario neighbourhood – as Carlo in the previous chapter). Daniele's city was relationally constructed in the practice of reading and re-reading those newspapers. A similar affective-power relation was the one of Giorgio with his documents, which were designing part of his relational world too (since they related to his procedure to get a social housing tenement, they were generators of meetings, procedures and formal duties). Partly similar were Giuseppe and Davide's relations with other small objects: with a cd player the former (which was effecting the ways through which he was experiencing the world – being excited, nuanced, by music) and bags of disparate things the latter (which were carrying both affective and economical meanings). We say partly similar to the other two just because Giuseppe and Davide were having also a strong relation (particularly the former) with alcohol, especially cheap white wine, which was determining both their health and their most intimate emotions (making them being happy, angry, excited or depressed). As in the process of becoming a homeless individual, small things have a role in modelling the ways of being homeless, constituting their street's contexts and generating the on-going formation of uncountable street's subjectivities.

Nonetheless, apart from showing the fact that these individuals were different subjects created, enacted and performed in their encounter with the mechanosphere of the city, there is a new and important detail that emerges clearly from the analysis undertaken in this chapter – namely the fact that looking at their performativities it is possible to re-discover their (sometimes extravagant) capabilities (Nussbaum, 2002; Sen, 1978; 1994). Although this point was already present in the analysis of becoming a homeless person (as was Marco or Carlo's ability to work with a PC, or Valerio's capacity to get the most out of the different

services), moving the focus from the “events” through which new homeless people constitute to the analysis of the daily conscious and unconscious practices of long-time-street-livers, let this aspect rise better.

Daniele’s amazing capacity of delighting people who were finding a parking slot thanks to him is a clear expression of this point. When he was receiving money from the motorists he knew that it was thanks to the fact that they have laughed, smiled or even only turned their head up because of him. And this fact was changing his day, his attitude toward the world, and his expectation toward life: in a word, his subjectivity. Giuseppe’s own ability to re-design the first-hand aid of the Vincenziani’s clothes distribution, in order to re-territorialize it as a way of income is equally relevant – particularly for his capacity to choose the best clothes from the distribution thinking at their potential in the street market. In the same fashion it was Giorgio’s map of all the churches that were giving alms: a matrix-map made by the location of the churches, the timetable of the alms distribution, and the bus timetable and directions too. In the end, Davide’s ability to escape from the containment actuated in the Porta Nuova train station shows a capacity to imagine urban contexts differently, and to enact cognitive resources in order to escape exclusive’s powers.

Each of those set of performances, as each of those capabilities, were unique relational assets of Daniele, Giuseppe, Giorgio and Davide. They should not give us a romanticized view upon long-term homeless people. They are just there to be recognized, suggesting new ways in which it might be possible to understand long-term street subjects.

## **5.7 Becoming and being homeless in the more-than-human city**

The processes of *becoming* and *being* a homeless individual have been investigated without any pre-assumed path or characterization, coherently with the theorization proposed that sees “being” just as continuous and unpredictable forms of “to have”, to relate. In this sense the investigation so far should be seen as a two-steps process of acknowledging practices, experiences, capabilities and the chance of space of different homeless persons, which allowed the consideration of the

complex entanglements within which they constitute. Both in the case of becoming and being a homeless person we have portrayed hence subjects whom “should be recorded in terms of [their] genealogical inscription within different social apparatuses, according to [their] evolution and mutation within a succession of permeable and shifting contexts” (Doel, 1995:226).

The last two chapters have presented two self-integrating narrations, which provide both elements already recognized by the current literature and some innovative insights. The former are, for instance, the acknowledgement of homeless people’s health issues (e.g. Bines, 1994; Pleace & Quilgars, 1996), the role of begging, seeking for alms or working in the black economy (e.g. Dean, 1999; Fitzpatrick & Kennedy, 2001), or the loose attachment to other people (e.g. Snow and Anderson, 1993). On the other side, the latter can be divided into two groups of elements: those that have been recognized, but that thanks to the approach proposed can be seen from a different perspective; and those that have been barely highlighted at all. The aim of this section is to summarize the major findings of the last two chapters in light of the current literature, in order to set the ground for further investigations. In this sense, there are at least five relevant points to stress.

The first point concerns the political relevance of the way through which both being and becoming homeless has been analysed. In Chapter 1 we have criticized those accounts that read homeless population analytically, dividing it among different groups and typologies. Focusing on the multiplicity and internal differences between the homeless subjects, in Chapter 4 and 5 we have tried on the contrary to grasp homeless people’s “practical knowledge of the micro-architectures of the city” (Cloke, May & Johnsen 2008:244). The advocacy of this work is that through this kind of analysis we can – following Takahashi suggestion (1996) – tackle the stereotypes surrounding homeless people’s world. That’s because from this perspective homeless people’s lives appear “more than a random or chaotic affair” (Snow & Anderson, 1993: 168) and start to appear with their own internal logic, complex as they are. In this sense becoming homeless is not just a traumatic sociological event with which the individual has to cope (i.e. Ravenhill, 2008). Rather, it is a relational process that does not lead to a precise outcome (“the” homeless person), but to heterogeneous more-than-human subjects co-constituted with the city, which can be understood only within their complex practices and that do not follow any precise “career”. Being homeless, in this

sense, is not different. Adopting a complex view of this phenomenon it is not possible anymore to state that homeless “world [...] is an intrinsically vulnerable and negative one, premised on the ever-present logic of exclusion” (Blomley, 2006:4) – but it becomes imperative to recognize the nuances and the unexpected of that world without romanticizing it, to acknowledge that “different homeless people negotiate their marginality in places, in a variety of ways, above and beyond their “spoiled” identity as homeless” (Ruddick, 1996:43).

The second point that emerges from the fieldwork is that is not enough to recognize the importance of performances, but it is necessary to acknowledge their differences. Homeless’ world is coloured with multiples nuances (of affects, powers, projects, desires) and homeless’ performances change from individual to individual. In this sense, becoming and being homeless is a set of heterogeneous experiences. Dejerlais is one of the few scholar in the field of homeless studies who have clearly stated the relevance of the different ways of experiencing the street world:

“to experience is to move through a landscape at once physical and metaphoric [...] is to engage in a process of perception, action, and reflection couched in mindful introspection” and in order to recognize its multiplicity “instead of assuming that “experience”, “emotions”, or “narratives” are existential givens, ontologically prior to certain cultural realities, we need to question their origins and makings” (Dejerlais, 1997:20-24).

In other words, there is not one “experience” of becoming or being homeless individuals, rather there are as many “experiences” as “performances”. Chapter 4 and 5 have presented many examples in this sense. Examplea are the ways through which Giuseppe and Davide were experiencing their addiction to alcohol: the different time of the day in which they were drinking, the fact that they were doing it with or without others, the meanings that they associated to it. Others are the relation that homeless people have with the institutional services aimed at helping them, such the Vincenziani’s soup kitchen that was frequented by the vast majority of homeless persons that I’ve encountered. If for some of them “places to eat are also inscribed with other functionalities and affective characteristics [... and] day centres can be understood as providing homeless people with an important space of sociality” (Cloke, May, Johnsen, 2008:252), as it was for

Valerio, Daniele, or Giuseppe, for some others the Vincenziani's soup kitchen was just a way of having breakfast without wishing to have any kind of sociability (as it was for Giorgio) or a way to punctuate their selves with some stable reference (as it was for Carlo). The attention at the different ways through which people perform their experiences has been hence recognized in all its importance, without generalizing it in only one form.

The third point is that things matter. Becoming a homeless individual is a matter of learning codes and other practical means that can be understood, as Dejerlais puts it, as tactics:

“for de Certeau, the difference between strategies and tactics hinges on the spatial and organizational capacities of different social actors. While strategies, which belong to the powerful, imply a proper and durable locus that enables a person, group, or institution to “keep itself, at a distance, in a position of withdrawal, foresight, and self-collection”, tactics are “an art of the weak” [de Certau, 1984:35-37] A tactic is determined by the absence of power as much as a strategy is organized by the postulation of power. Without a proper locus that would provide the conditions necessary for autonomy and sustainable planning, tacticians must resort to isolated actions, various tricks and ruses, and the “good bad tricks of rhetoric” (Dejerlais, 1996:183).

These tactics are usually depicted as the conscious ways through which the individuals perform the street. In this sense they can be understood as skills (Cohen & Sokolovsky, 1989), or even as “network of socio-spatial strategies [that the individuals develop] in order to survive” (Beazley, 2002:1666-1667). If this is certainly true, what is missed from these descriptions is something that clearly emerged in the analysis of the relational patterns of being a homeless person: namely that tactics and skills are largely pre-cognitive too, and always constructed and enacted as assemblages made by the mixing of the human agencies of the homeless persons and the non-human agencies of the city. In a niche what is at play both in becoming and being homeless is the constitution of more-than-human agencies and intelligences with the city (Thrift, 2008), which are both effects and causes of how homeless people perform the urban.

Valerio, for instance, was a tactician in knowing and using most of the free-services for homeless people that the city provided, but his tactical knowledge was performed only thanks to the cards he was carrying with him that, at the same time, were also directing him through certain relational patterns (his attachment to the services) and not others. The more-than-human nature of those tactics is clearer, as usual (Graham & Thrift, 2007), when *things* stop to work and release, in a flash, all their agency power. Marco's tactical use of PCs, trains, buses and newspapers in seeking for a job revealed, indeed, all its more-than-human substance when his mobile phone abandoned him and did not allow him to call back the possible employer. Things matter hence, as Davide's collections of objects or Giuseppe's relation with the seats of the Emergency room of the Hospital demonstrated. However this is true not only because they concretely shape the contexts performed by human beings, but precisely because while shaping contexts they shape subjects too.

Fourthly, the relational encounters that short and long-term homeless people have with things, people and places, carry emotional nuances that are of fundamental importance. Especially in becoming homeless:

“legacies with friends or acquaintances became loosen. The shame to reveal his state of necessity, often pushes the new homeless person to avoid, in his daily routes, his neighbourhood of origin, the streets and the places in which he might encounter someone he knows” (Meo, 2000:122).

The new homeless person is hence emotionally fragile in a different way than the long-term one, who usually has developed an alternative sociability (as Giovanni and his “bottle gang”). Duneier argued that among new homeless people it is possible to find the so called “fuck it mentality”: “before finding a “mentor” or a “sponsor” working the streets, each of these men reached a moment of personal emotional crisis” (Duneier, 1999:60). Carlo's distress of not finding his favourite seat at the soup kitchen, or Marco's depressive attitude in looking for a job, are both important emotional patterns in the constitution of their subjectivities.

However, there are also positive emotions and affects in the process of becoming and being a homeless subject. As Liebow showed talking about homeless women “one-on-one relationships with friends, with God, and with themselves had lightened somewhat the crushing weight of homelessness” (Liebow,

1993:188). In this fashion, Marco's interest for religious writings; Daniele's affection for betting centres; Giovanni's attachment to music; are all small but extremely relevant emotions that – if recognized and grasped in time – could be positively activated and promoted instead of being forgotten or neglected.

The last point is the recognition of the capabilities of homeless people. Especially in the sociological literature it is possible to find description of homeless people that seem to lack any agency or capacity:

“Once the person starts to adapt to the new situation, there is a sequence of changes that will lead to the loosing of resources and capabilities, which makes [the life of the homeless] more and more vulnerable” (Meo, 2000:149).

If it is undoubtedly true that in the process of becoming and being homeless something is lost, we should not dismiss the fact that these subjects develop other skills and abilities, and change the ones they already had. In other words, “drawing attention to the knowing and creative deployment of impression management, but also to the prediscursive and emotional aspects of homeless people's lives, gives back to homeless people not only an agency but also a humanity” (Cloke, May & Johnsen 2008:260), where agency and humanity are seen here as other ways to understand the possibilities of the individual. The attention to the details of the street life of these people, and the poetic overture toward the unexpected, allow the approach undertaken to recognize the – even extravagant – capabilities of these people, which is relevant because not doing so contributes to close the chances of change for these people.

## Chapter 6

# Institutional contexts and the homeless subject

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### 6.1 What else shapes the homeless subject?

In the last two empirical chapters we have showed how homeless subjects differ greatly both compared to each other and in regard of their own attributes (such as their desires, projects and capabilities). Their subjectivities emerge in the daily encounter they have with the street. Homeless subjects are indeed constituted through their performances in the urban world, which always carry emotional nuances, powers, and more-than-human agencies, which need to be fully acknowledged.

However, there seems to be another general theme that emerges from the analysis proposed in the last two chapters: the specific role of certain urban contexts in shaping both short and long-term homeless people's subjectivities and the enactment of spatial chances that might change their condition. These contexts should not be seen as separate entities from the points just highlighted: their role become indeed relevant only looking at the power, affects and agencies that relationally constitute them. Nonetheless, since some of these contexts appear to be quite fix (territorialized) and powerful, it seems worth spending particular attention on them. In the light of the analysed material, their relevance appears evident in at least three forms.

Firstly, both in the case of becoming and being homeless, particular abstract

machines are at play opening and closing spatial chances, and contributing to what homeless people actually are. If contexts are not too rigid, abstract machines can let the infinite potential of absolute spacetime to rise. The most evident of these chances presented in this work has been that of Carlo, who related to the Sermig passing through a book collected in a public library and end up to find his way out thanks to this. However, as the example of Marco and the Protestant Church showed, it is not only the rigidity but also the kind of codification of the context that matters in the opening and closure of spatial chances. It is worth questioning, hence, which is the level and kind of codification that characterize the contexts where homelessness in Turin is enacted at most – because it is precisely thanks to these codes that the chance of space might or not rise.

Secondly, contexts affect also the ways through which the homeless subjects constitute in the street, modelling their relational patterns. An example is related to the informal jobs done by them, which were usually two: begging, mainly collecting alms from certain institutions (as Giorgio from the churches of Turin); and selling at the black market the things that they had received for free (as it was, for instance, the case of Valerio, Marco and Giuseppe). These practices seem contextualized in a double sense: they are performed in certain contexts (the black market, the church, etc.), which are soaked in particular discourses that can affect the subjects in many ways; and, at the same time, these same contexts seem to be the outcome of certain institutional practices (to give alms, or to offer free foods or clothes) that need to be investigated as well.

Thirdly, contexts shape the positioning of homeless people too (hence their most intimate projects and desires). Although it has been already argued, it is worth stressing again that the differences encountered between the positioning of short and long-term homeless people are mostly due to the different contexts performed by (many of) them. As we have seen, in the first case there was a certain degree of continuity between people's desires and projects, hence there were some links between what they wished and what they pursued. However, this was true only for the individuals that were not acting in strictly codified contexts. We have portrayed, indeed, the case of Valerio, who was performing into a more codified context that was the result of the rules, codices and discourses spread by the institutions that were taking care of him. In his case we had highlighted a small but relevant distance between his projects and desires, which became even more marked when we took into consideration long-term homeless people. Here, indeed, the contexts within which the majority of homeless people were immersed

seemed to facilitate the disconnection from their desires and the projects that they actually pursued.

In the light of these points, a further reflection is needed on the relevance played by the degree of codification and the kind of the urban contexts where homelessness takes place most of the time. How are these contexts produced? What abstract machines are at work, and with which meanings? What effect do they have on homeless subjects, and how does these open or close spatial opportunities to them? In this sense, more than on the other assemblages that populate the city, it seems worth concentrating on the different institutions that work to provide services for homeless people – firstly because they play a role in each of the three points showed above, and secondly because they constantly produce contexts which are highly frequented by the vast majority of homeless people.

A precise focus on these institutions is necessary not only for the spatio-temporal relevance of their contexts for the homeless subjects, but also because they voluntarily enact policies aimed at facing, tackling, or simply managing homeless people's lives. In other words, they intentionally design contexts for the issue of homelessness, rising then moral and political stances (of opportunity, adequacy and efficiency) that cannot be fully recognized in the other assemblages that intervene in the urban life of homeless subjects (such as newspapers, mobile phones, trains, etc.). Therefore these institutions have not only a role – as assemblages – but also a direct responsibility in the effects of their political actions.

Investigating how these contexts work does not mean to compare public and private policies on homelessness per-se. Rather, the focus is on the presentation of their influence on the homeless subjects, to investigate better how these subjects become what they are in the urban realm. In this sense, since contexts emerge from the diagrammatical and discursive coding of abstract machines, our scope is not to undertake a systematic analysis of the policies about homelessness enacted in Turin, but to investigate how from certain discourses emerge certain contexts which, in the end, affect the homeless subject in certain particular ways. The aim of this discursive analysis (Aitken, 2005; Lees, 2004; Waitt, 2005) is to compare its findings with the outcomes of the empirical investigations previously presented (see section 6.5), with the scope of widening further our knowledge about the constitution of the homeless subject at the street

level.

## **6.2 The homeless industry in Turin's contexts**

In a brochure presenting the services for homeless people in Turin (done by an association that works with them, Opportunanda, 2005), it is shown that in the city there are (divided among private and public): 17 first aid-dormitories (whose typology varies a lot, sometimes allowing the access only to certain categories); 25 places where is possible to eat (4 main soup kitchens and a vast majority of distribution of sandwiches or of alimentary packages); 10 day drop-in centres (certain specialized in women, others for drug addicted persons); 8 public baths; 15 health centres; 22 places for the free distribution of clothes; more than 60 counselling centres, mainly managed by the churches and religious congregations present in the city (some specialized in certain cases – as alcohol or drug addiction, abused women, immigration; some other open to everyone). To this, we should add the small associations that work with homeless people (usually bringing them hot beverages in the train stations of the city), or the private help given by citizens (which is almost impossible to enumerate). Moreover, every sector of Turin (which is divided into 10 administrative sectors) has its own Social assistant centre, which is linked to the main one, and which is in charge of following the bureaucratic issues of the homeless individuals who are (at least formally) resident in that sector. This amount of services forms what Ravenhill calls “homeless industry”, hence those “statutory and voluntary sector organizations, campaigners, churches and charities, plus academics, intellectuals, research organizations, authors and even university or college training courses” (Ravenhill, 2008:14) which work with, or are interested in, homelessness.

Although Opportunanda's brochure is quite out-dated (2005), and some of these services are not present in the city anymore, it is still highly representative of their amount. The picture is hence very complex, and it is by no mean possible to trace and depict all the meanings, discourses, affects and powers involved in this complex web. The choice is hence been of taking into consideration a number of public and private-religious institutions I've been in contact with, which are considered to be the biggest and most relevant of the city. The decision to

concentrate only on certain public and private institutions derives from the fact that, as the account presented in Chapter 4 and 5 demonstrates, these are the institutional assemblages to which homeless people are most frequently related: on the City side, the Service for Needing Adults, the Emergenza Freddo's camp and the via Sacchi's centre; on the private institutions side, the Cottolengo and the Vincenziani's centres.

### **6.3 City's contexts and the pathological homeless subject**

The City of Turin provides different public services for homeless people. The system can be divided into two parts: there is the General Social Service of the City, which controls the neighbourhood's Social services to which should refer all the homeless that have a residence in one of the 10 sectors of the city; and then there is the "Servizio Adulti in Difficoltà" (Service for Needing Adults), an office of the Municipality where social assistants and educators work, to which should refer the people that have a fictive residence in "Via della Casa Comunale, 1". All the persons without ID and the people (needing immigrants too) without a formal residence in Turin can refer to the Service for Needing Adults but are entitled to receive fewer services. These social services work with homeless people in different ways (taking care of their sanitary needs; evaluating their situation; offering, if they are eligible, financial assistance; following their practices for a social housing estate; proposing educational paths to be followed; etc.), and they act always in relation with other services of the city (mainly with health services, hospitals, and services dedicated to drug and alcohol issues).

In this chapter we take into account both the Service for Needing Adults (to which we will refer simply as "Service") and other relevant City's policies. As a first step, we present an analysis of the discourses on homelessness made by these public institutions, then we describe the interventions of the Service and present three examples that show how these policies relate to homeless people's subjectivities.

### **6.3.1 City's discourses**

In an interview that I've done to Marco Borgione, the Social Services' Municipal Councillor of Turin (hence the highest political figure in the city on this matter), it is possible to find how the City actually sees, reads and describes homeless people. Asked to who are directed the services that the City offers, he answered:

*"The target audience is represented by people without economical and personal resources, to which we should add relational fragility and social marginality. Often there is the coexistence of problematic that are competence of the sanitary system: addictions and/or mental disease/distress, or even problematic that are competences of the Ministry of Justice. The variety of the problematic means that there is the necessity to offer integrated answers to complex needs, in particular to the ones of health"* (italics added) (Borgione, Jun. 2010, WI).

This picture of homeless people is focalized on two particular discourses: the personal deficiencies of the individual, and his/her health issues. The first are represented by those elements that push the individual away from the stereotype of the productive occidental man – with a job, a wide and strong social network, and certain codified personal abilities. The second is a discourse that tends to associate certain pathologies to homeless people, without arguing too much if these are a default characteristic of a homeless person or if they are successive emerging features of his/her relational life in the street.

The homeless person that emerges from this description is hence recognized and depicted more for what he/she lacks (economical and personal resources) than for what he/she has (or could have); more for his/her sanitary problems (addictions and mental diseases) than for his/her potentialities; and the final stress is put on the health issues of the individuals, hence the spectrum through which homeless people are read seems really close to the "disease" model criticized in Chapter 1.

As "language generates reality in the inescapable context of power" (Haraway, 1991:78) this kind of discourse is directly translated into the policies activated by the City, which are indeed oriented to the physical distress (health, hunger, sleep) and to social issues (possession of ID, other administrative issues) of

the individuals.

### **6.3.2 City's interventions**

The Service for Needing Adults deals with those people without a fixed home who do not reside in Turin. Nonetheless, they must be resident in the fictive Via della Casa Comunale 1 in order to get full assistance, and be 18-65-year-old (if younger or elder they have to refer to different offices). If they are immigrants or Italian who are not resident in Via della Casa Comunale and that at the same time they are not resident anywhere else in Turin, they are not entitled to receive full assistance but just a minimum help (Città di Torino, 2009).

In the first case the individual is entitled to take advantage of all the assistance provided by the Service. This includes: access to all the public dormitories of the city (see fig. 6.1), on a basis of 30 consecutive and renewable days (without any temporal limitation for the renovation); possibility to attend a personalized colloquium and receive assistance in order to get financial aid from the City; assistance for the procedures necessary to get a social housing estate; possibility to follow one of the reintegration's paths proposed by the Service, which include smaller first and second-level residential dormitories (where the individual is followed by social educators); specialized sanitary assistance and possibility to access specialized services for drug and alcohol addiction.

In the second case the individual is allowed to take advantage only of certain services and in accordance to specific, limited, modalities. These are: the possibility to sleep in a public dormitory only for 7 consecutive days. After this period, it is possible to reserve a place in another dormitory but as place are limited, it is most common that the individual will start to do the so called "1+1" – which means that day by day he/she has to seek a place to sleep, waiting (from the middle afternoon) in front of one City dormitory hoping to get a place for the night (each dormitory has always 2 free places that cannot be booked); the possibility to access the medical clinic of via Sacchi, 47 (near the main train station), for general health visit; the impossibility to access the second level services and dormitories; the impossibility to apply for any financial help or social housing estate; the impossibility of being followed by a social assistant (they are followed, as individuals, only if they apply for the residence in Via della Casa Comunale, 1).

The City promotes other two interesting initiatives. These are the "Educativa

territoriale” (Territorial educative) and the “Servizio Boa” (Buoy service) – (there are moreover other two actions: the emergencies camp for the winter season, “Emergenza freddo”, and the project LIMEN – on which we return later on). The Educativa Territoriale is a group of three social educators based in the multi-functional centre of via Sacchi, 47, which comprehends a dormitory, a small medical clinic, and a space used for counselling. The mission of these social educators is, among other things, clearly explained by what Bruno (the head educator of this service) once told me: *“We have to monitor the situation of homelessness in the street of Turin, producing reports on it, and trying to “coupling” [get in touch] with the new homeless people that we encounter”* (Bruno, Apr. 2010, WI). The aim of this service is to introduce homeless people into the world of the public assistance, trying to understand how the City can help them (or if they can be re-directed to other services). The Servizio Boa is more or less the same, but enacted at night (every night, from Monday to Sunday, from 8.00 p.m. to 1.00 a.m.). It is composed by two social educators who, driving a small van, go to the places most frequented by homeless people at night (train stations, parks, sidewalks) offering them hot beverages, covers and – if the individual wishes so – the opportunity to be transferred into a public dormitory (if there are not already booked beds).

The City of Turin, through the Service for Needing Adults, provides hence an articulated set of responses to homelessness. If we read those responses through the lens of the discourses on homelessness made by the City itself, we can recognize the fact that homelessness is read from different points of view (the economic, sanitary and physical one) although is not fully acknowledged the importance of other elements, as a specific knowledge of the life that people do in the street. If it is true that the City provides two interesting initiatives such as Educativa Territoriale and Servizio Boa that pay attention (particularly the former) to the stories of each individual, it is nonetheless true that: a) the small elements that compose the street’s life of the individual (such as the one that we have highlighted in the previous chapters) are never fully acknowledge; b) after the “coupling”, the individual is inserted into the standardized machine of City’s help that, by default, read his/her necessities and problematic from a disease, goods-based model, generally without caring to much about the subjective differences between one individual and another.

Fig. 6.1 Table listing the first-aid public dormitories in the City of Turin

*(All managed by social cooperatives at the time of my fieldwork. More private dormitories were present, mainly managed by associations and religious institutions)*

<i>Street</i>	<i>Number of bed</i>	<i>Reserved to</i>
Corso Tazzoli, 76	24	Men, women
Via Foligno, 10	24	Men, women
Via Traves, 7	24	Men, women
Via Sacchi, 47	8	Only men
Via Carrera, 181	24	Only men
Via Osoppo, 51	12	Only women
Via Pacini, 6	15	Only women

*Source: Data from Città di Torino, 2009 updated by the author*

To get deeper into these last two points, we present three examples that show better than others how the system of help enacted by the City concurs in shaping homeless people's subjectivities. We have concentrated particularly on those individuals that do not have the residence in Via della Casa Comunale, 1 because this was the most common situation encountered in the fieldwork<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> This could be explained by the fact that obtaining the fictive residence in Via della Casa Comunale 1 is not easy (the smallest bureaucratic impediment can block all) and sometimes homeless people precisely do not want to have it. This latter case depends on the fact that "Via della Casa Comunale 1" carries a stigmatization with it, as the case of Giuseppe in the previous chapter shown. Giuseppe was claiming that to have written in his ID that he was residing at "Via della Casa Comunale 1" was like having written in his front that he was a homeless person. In this sense, his account is similar to the one told by Liebow, when he reported the story of a woman arguing that it was impossible for her to find a job because the only telephone number she could give to her possible employer was the one of the shelter in which she was sleeping: "To give the shelter telephone number as one's own is, in effect, to announce that one is homeless: staff at the day shelter answer the phone with "Mainlie Church Day Shelter for Women". Shirley protested that she could never get a job so long as shelter staff answered the phone that way" (Liebow, 1993:53). Once again small things, as an ID or a telephone number, matter a lot in opening and closing relational spaces to homeless people – and this is the reason why many of them refused, like Giuseppe, to apply for the fictive residence offered by the City.

### **6.3.3 City's contexts for homeless people: three exemplifications**

The first exemplification is related to the 1+1 system. As we have said, if a homeless person does not have a residence in Turin (either a real or a fictive one) he/she is entitled to sleep in a public dormitory for no more of 7 days. Afterwards, they have to sign their name on a waiting list for a new dormitory but in the meantime they do not have any place to go. The opportunities that these individuals have in this case are three: to sleep in the street (or in trains, or wherever); to sleep, in the winter season, at the Emergenza Freddo's camp; or to try, on a daily basis (the 1+1), to get one of the two free places that every dormitory allocates per night.

Silvano was a short-term homeless person that I've met at the beginning of my fieldwork. Although I've seen him no more than a couple of times, his description of the 1+1 system is very emblematic (and could be easily agreed by all the homeless persons that have done the same). The first thing to notice is the emotional frustration of having to deal with such a system:

*"You have to go in front of the dormitory at 4, 5 p.m., and start cueing. You stay there, and wait. You can't go later on... or you won't find place for sure: it is full of people that just stand out of the dormitory for all day long. There are even people that take the place for someone else... and then you have to fight. It's insane"* (Silvano, Oct. 2009, WI).

Then, there is the waste of time that such system implies. A waste of time that strictly codifies the relational day of homeless people:

*"If you go there at 5 p.m.... you know what this mean? That you can't do anything else. You wake up, you go to the nuns [at the Vincenziani's soup] then you hang a bit around and it's time for lunch. When you start to seek for a job, is already time for the cue at the dormitory: what kind of life is this? Tell me. How am I supposed to deal with this? To get out of here?"* (Silvano, Oct. 2009, WI).

In the end, there is the stress of sleeping one night in one place without knowing what is going to happen the following night:

*"When you go out in the morning you know that you have to start all over again, from the beginning. I can't leave my stuff anywhere. I can't settle a bit. I've nothing with me, I can't think at anything else but where I'm gonna cue in the*

*afternoon. I can't go on like this. I've to get a way, to find another way"* (Silvano, Oct. 2009, WI).

The 1+1 system is a way to codify spacetime that annihilate any chance of space, because it forces the individual to wait a long time before knowing if he/she can or not get a place to sleep: half of the day of a homeless subject trying the 1+1 is spent in waiting in front of a door, reducing dramatically the possible other relational patterns that he/she could have. Moreover, this system affects the subjectivity of individuals from a double point of view. Firstly, on an affective sense, because it moves them emotionally up and down – from success (have gained a place) to in-success (the contrary). Secondly, it is a powerful force of motion, because it makes them moving around the city changing continuously dormitory. This is undoubtedly a source of strong stress for anyone experiencing it, not at last because if the spaces of the dormitories “have moods and physiologies as much as people did” (Dejarlais, 1997:58) homeless people doing the 1+1 must negotiate everyday new relational patterns, receiving contradictory and multiples stimulus, which in the end do not allow them to concentrate on their own projects, and desires.

Fig. 6.2 Homeless person resting in the premises of the Vincenziani's soup kitchen



*“When you miss the 1+1 you won’t sleep. So what do you do? You try to survive until the morning. And then you sleep wherever you can”*

(Silvano, Oct. 2009, WI)

The second example concerns the bureaucracy that surrounded the obtaining of the fictive residence in Via della Casa Comunale, 1. As we said, to obtain this residence is the only way to avoid the 1+1 system, and although many homeless people did not like it because of the stigma that it carries, some others chose it anyway. To obtain it the individual necessitated to demonstrate to the Service two fundamental things: to not have a residence anywhere and to not possess anything. If the first point was quite easy to demonstrate by everyone, the second posed some issues.

In this sense we have encountered the case of Daniele in the previous chapter. Daniele was without any documents, because he lost them and he was not able to get another copy from its original town of residence (a condition common

among many other homeless people that I've encountered). Although he was not enthusiastic about the idea of getting a fictive residence in Via della Casa Comunale, 1 he decided (before the beginning this enquiry) to try to get one: this would have allowed him not only to find places in dormitories, but to be followed better in all his needs (we should remember that Daniele was suffering from a precarious health condition). However, unfortunately for him, Daniele was still the official owner of a car, although he did not possess it anymore. For this reason the procedure to obtain the ID was lasting more time than it should:

*"I got this car... I can't even remember when. [Pause]. I don't have it anymore, of course! But their fucking PC still says that I'm the owner. But owner of what?! I don't have that car anymore"* (Daniele, Apr. 2010, WI).

The only solution for him was to cancel the ownership of that car, but this is a procedure that costs some money (more or less 80 euros) and implies further paperwork. The Service could not provide these money to him, as he was not entitled to receive any help from the City:

*"How can I pay for this? I'm stuck. They do not pay for me. I don't have the money. I can't get the residence. And that's it. I do not understand this system. [Pause]. The best thing would be to go there [to the Service offices] and say: fuck you all. Then to run away"* (Daniele, Apr. 2010, WI).

(Finally Daniele managed to find the money and received some extra assistance from the Service, so at the end of my case study things were starting to go differently, although he still did not have his ID and 9 months were passed since I've met him for the first time).

The bureaucratic ways necessary to obtain the fictive residence in Via della Casa Comunale, 1 could be read as form of governmentality, hence as a way "to arrange things in such a way that, through a certain number of means, such-and-such ends may be achieved" (Foucault, 2000a:211), where the "certain[s] number of means" were the two conditions necessarily to get the card (which is the end to achieve). What is relevant to notice is that this form of governmentality had particular effects on the individuals that decided to relate to it. Daniele was stressed, incredibly angry toward the "system", and could not understand why things could not be easier for someone in his position. When speaking about this matter he was used to tell me: *"They do not want to help you, they want to drive*

*you crazy!"* (Daniele, Apr. 2010, SN). He was loosing faith in the system of help provided by the City, and every-time he was having a meeting with someone from the Service he was coming back depressed and frustrated.

The governmentalities behind the Via della Casa Comunale, 1 fictive residence shaped subjects in different ways. At the emotional level, they were creating stress, leading the individual to a state of frustration and depression for the difficulties encountered in the process. On the side of power, they were binding the subject to procedures that were difficult to understand and skip. Moreover, when finally the residence would have been gained, there was a further stigmatizing effect difficult – if not impossible – to counter-balance by the subject him/herself. In the end, this procedure was proposing the individual a standardized and monolithic context not being able to keep into consideration the singularities of each one (as Daniele's old car issue), introducing the subject in a web of powerful bureaucratic relationalities highly binding and conditioning.

Fig. 6.3 Marco's attempt to receive a document from one of the registry offices of the city

(Marco – see Chapter 4 – has attempted many times to regularize his ID position with the City, but he never managed to fix it due to lots of bureaucratic impediments)



Registry office in the northern side of Turin, February 2010

The third exemplification regards a place where homeless people that

couldn't sleep in dormitories and wouldn't sleep in the street, could go during the winter season: the Emergenza Freddo's camp.

The "Emergenza Freddo" (Cold emergency) was a camp located in the middle of one of the biggest public parks in Turin, in the west side of the city (30-40 minutes by bus from the city centre). It was a project that started in 2003, "finalized at the night welcoming of homeless people" (Città di Torino, 2009) in the cold season (it was usually open from November to late March). The camp was made of 15 containers, which could allocate up to 8 people each in bunk beds. It was open from 7.30 p.m. to 8.00 a.m., every night, and it offered (apart a place to sleep) a common bathroom, two showers and the possibility to have a free coffee (made by an automatic machine) both in the evening and in the morning. Two people, one from the Military Civil Protection and another from the Red Cross, monitored the entrance of the camp, and were sleeping in a separate container located along the others.

Homeless people could enter the camp without any document, and sleep there as long as there were free beds to allocate (during my fieldwork the camp never reached its full capacity). The population of the camp was generally made by two-thirds of immigrants (mainly arriving from Maghreb and Eastern Europe) and one-third of Italians (mainly people that did not have an ID with residence in Turin). Although formally forbidden, the consumption of alcohol and smoking was a common practice in the containers and violent verbal and physical fights were the norm, especially between immigrants and Italians. For this reason the assistants of the camp were calling the police almost every night.

In the Emergenza Freddo's camp was hence possible to enter without document and to do all sort of activities. In this sense, this place can be figured as an "exceptional" context from the rest of the others in the city although by no mean counter posed to the City's authority (the exception and the camp itself were indeed created and allowed by the City). In the Red Cross' Vademecum for the activities of the camp there was written:

"Service staff must register the guests asking them their generalities: Name – Surname – Nationality – Sex (it is not necessary to ask for any Identity Document, as this area [the Camp] is recognized as "free zone" unlike all the other dormitories of the city)" (Croce Rossa Italiana, 2008).

In this sense, if “being outside and yet belonging: [...] is the topological structure of the state of exception” (Agamben, 2005:35), the Emergenza Freddo’s camp was a state of exception out of the City’s normal rule, but enacted by the City itself (through the suspension of the norm) and established within the city itself (physically and relationally) (a relational pattern similar to the favela’s one depicted by Diken, 2005).

In the call for the public financing of the camp the objective of this project were clearly stated by the City itself:

“The project has among its objectives to assure a service that protects the physical integrity of vulnerable subjects, and to protect the general interest of the whole community under the profile of security, health, public order and of civilized living” (Città di Torino, 2009 ).

Moreover, in an interview that I’ve done to Angelo, the responsible of the camp, he told me:

*“Listen to me. This is a thing that has been done to remove from the road dangerous people. The Major does not want them on the street. They create problems, especially when they are drunk. Here, instead, they are left at their own destiny, without annoying anyone”* (Angelo, Feb. 2010, TI).

The discourse that emerges from these strands is one that aims to create an exception (the camp) for two reasons: to offer a warm place during the cold season in order to “protect the physical integrity of vulnerable subjects”, and to control a population perceived as dangerous. It is possible to understand this camp as a state of exception (particularly because it is an “emergency” site, where the emergency is nonetheless repeated every year), because it controls the bare life of individuals (their body, which enters in the container and is not freely moving around the city) without considering their *bios*, their political values (no ID is asked, no personal information – on their situation – taken) (Agamben, 1998). In a sense, we might consider this as a “soft” State of Exception, because the entrance and the exit were free. However what is interesting to notice is not the topological structure of this camp, but its spatial formations: “the state of exception, is spatializing, not spatialized. When we say that the exception is spatializing, we emphasize processes of transformation and emergence (the topological) and fold the operation of spatialization into the field of potential” (Diken & Lausten, 2006:501). In other

words is worth to notice that the exception was not only responding to the two needs for which it was created (stated above), but was creating other, much relevant, effects: the relational, spatial, process that starting from this camp had effects on homeless people's subjectivities.

Homeless people that enter in this camp change their subjectivity, accepting the code of the camp itself that suspends every rule usually adopted in dormitories (where is not possible to drink, smoke or make noise) or in any other City's service (which are not available to the ones without documents). The tales of Roberto – a homeless that we have briefly encountered in Chapter 1 – are illuminating in this sense:

*“At the Pellerina's [the Park where the Camp was located] people do whatever they want. They drink, they fight, they masturbate, they shit... everything: no rules. The man of the Red Cross closes himself in his container and that's all – people can do whatever they want. And if you are there the choices are just three: you drink and you try to spend the night, you fight with someone, or you are lucky that you are so tired that you fall asleep. [Pause] But it does not last long. Someone or something always wakes you up!”* (Roberto, Dec. 2009, WI).

The exception of this place displaced the subjects to a whole set of relationalities that are not usual at night: rumours, smokes, alcohols, shouts, fights:

*“You can't sleep there! You've to trust me. Would you sleep if someone is smoking, someone else snoring like a pork, and in the other container a fight has just begun? Would you tell to the one that is smoking and talking with his friend to stop doing so? They are crazy. It is full of Moroccans and Rumanians there. They always have knives with them. I go there just 'cause it's warm, that's it. But I'm gonna stop with it, it's shit”* (Roberto, Dec. 2009, WI).

The first part of the project's document states that its aim is to protect the “physical integrity of vulnerable subject” – but obviously the suspension of the norm does not allow it. Homeless people like Roberto were hence deeply demoralized because of the night spent in there (see also Giorgio's account in the previous chapter). Alcohol was their companion, increasing their health problematic and dependences. A sense of frustration pervaded them, because they already knew that was barely possible to sleep without be awakened by some fight or some other issue. The strong aversion of homeless people (especially Italians) for

this place was demonstrated by the fact that the camp never reached its full capacity and that many of them preferred to sleep in trains or in the street rather than going into those containers.

The institution of an exception like the Emergenza Freddo's camp had, hence, consequences that cannot be simply understood from its scopes. This site was not only a charitable opportunity, neither only a form of control on homeless people – but a machine that through its numerous codes (activated through the suspension of the norm) and assemblages (the containers, the presence of cigarettes and alcohol, etc.) affected homeless subjects themselves.

Fig. 6.4 The Emergenza Freddo's camp



*"This is not a dormitory. There are very few rules here. People can enter even without documents. This is the last resource for anyone, exactly in the middle of nowhere"*

(Angelo, Feb. 2010, TI)

These three examples have not been portrayed to show that *all* (or part) of Turin's policies on homelessness are bad, revanchist or not working at all. The aim has been to show how three different interventions have effects of which they probably aren't aware. These policies contribute to the constitution of homeless people's subjectivities through their discourses, codes and complex relational

patterns because “subjects are produced bio-politically” (Schlosser, 2008:1624).

The 1+1 system, the bureaucracy of the fictive residence and the Emergenza Freddo’s camp are very different examples of how the City’s discourse on homelessness – based upon physical and sanitary spots, rather than on the specificity of the subject – concretely takes place in the lives of homeless people in Turin, relating to (and shaping) them. The subjects that emerge from the encounters that have been briefly outlined are all different (as were Silvano, Daniele, Roberto and Giorgio) but share some characteristics: affects like stress, frustration, anger; and power relations as the sensation of something bigger and far that cannot be controlled but controls (as Daniele’s old car), were common to all. Those policies were hence unconsciously doing much more of what they had been set up for, and this is exactly the point why is necessary to find a new way to understand homelessness *and* the urban.

## **6.4 Religious contexts and the “poor” homeless subject**

In Italy, Turin is generally considered the city of the “social Saints”, because of the high number of Catholic figures (as Don Bosco or Cottolengo) who have established there activities and institutions to fight poverty (an image that had some consequences in the ways the social sector has been historically managed, Governa & Lancione, 2010). The most important and recognized religious institutions working in this field in Turin are Cottolengo, Vincenziani, and – although not formally religious but faith-driven – Gruppo Abele and Sermig. These institutions provide a complex array of services for homeless people, services that are driven by heterogeneous discourses on homelessness. In this section we confront with at least part of this complexity, taking into consideration the former two institutions.

### **6.4.1 God’s servant**

Cottolengo and Vincenziani are among the most big and powerful religious groups operating in Italy. In Turin both institutions “although early planners recognized the benefits of a decentralized system” are located “in the inner city’s

most powerless and impoverished neighbourhoods” (Brinegar, 2003:71): the Cottolengo in Porta Palazzo (the area with the higher number of immigrants in Turin, characterized by issues as drug dealing and prostitution) and the Vincenziani in via Nizza, just along the Porta Nuova train station, in the San Salvario neighbourhood (as we have said before, this is another problematic place with issues similar to Porta Palazzo’s ones).

The “Small house of the Divine Providence, Cottolengo” is a religious institution founded at the beginning of the XIX<sup>o</sup> century near Turin by a priest, Don Cottolengo, who lately become saint of the Roman Catholic Church with the name Saint Giuseppe Benedetto Cottolengo. Wikipedia states: “Today Cottolengo Fathers, Sisters, and Brothers still work together in activities primarily geared at communicating God’s love for the poorest. They are spread out all over the world: Ecuador, India, Italy, Kenya, Switzerland, Tanzania and United States”<sup>8</sup>. Cottolengo is, indeed, one of the powerful and biggest charitable institution of the Catholic Church and certainly the oldest and historically most recognized third-sector institution based in Turin. Concerning homelessness, Cottolengo offers a vast sets of services, which are managed by a branch of the institution called “Casa Accoglienza” (Welcoming House). The responsible of the Casa is a friar – at the time of my fieldwork his name was Stefano – who work there in cooperation with two social educators, one social assistant, and several others people (partly hired, as the cook, and partly volunteers, as the ones that serve the meals).

The most relevant services provided by the Casa are: *the counselling service*, managed by a social assistant. Everyone that wants to be entitled to the other services must have an interview with the social assistant, which at the end releases the card that allows the access to the other services (the card expires after one month, but is endlessly renewable). The counselling service offers information about how to access to dormitories, how to be entitle to receive assistant from the City, and it gives general information on job, housing and document issues. (It is also possible to access, using this service, to the “housing project” of the Cottolengo, which is able to provide accommodations in certain particular cases – although I was not able to understand exactly how and for who); *the soup kitchen*, open from 10.30 a.m. to 12.30 a.m. This is the biggest soup kitchen of the city, which serves an average of 380 meals per day. It is open from Monday to Saturday;

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<sup>8</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giuseppe\\_Benedetto\\_Cottolengo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giuseppe_Benedetto_Cottolengo), retrieved on October 2010.

*the dormitory*, with 23 beds, managed in a private way (hence this dormitory is not in relation with the shelter's system of the City). It offers place to sleep for maximum one month, not removable in the same year, and it is closed during summer time – from June to September. People whom sleep here receive supper and breakfast too, and they are entitle to use the showers located in the same building; *the free distribution of shoes*, which takes place everyday from Monday to Friday, usually in the early morning; *the free distribution of clothes* and the possibility to *use the showers*, which both take place in the early afternoon from Monday to Friday (3 days a week reserved to immigrants; 2 days a week reserved to Italians); *the religious consultations*, with a priest of the Cottolengo, available every Thursday morning.

Fig. 6.5 The entrance of the counselling centre of the Cottolengo



Cottolengo's motto is "Join us with an open hearth, we will enter in your hearth".

The Company of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, is a Society of Apostolic Life for women within the Catholic Church. Wikipedia states: "It was founded in 1633 and devoted to *servicing Jesus Christ in persons who are*

*poor* through corporal and spiritual works of mercy” (italics added)<sup>9</sup>.

In Turin the Vincenziani’s service for homeless people is historically one of the most important and bigger. As have been said in Chapter 3, it is in their breakfast soup kitchen that I had done my volunteering service for 8 of the 10 months of my fieldwork. In this place, located just along Porta Nuova’s train station, were available the following services<sup>10</sup>: *the morning soup kitchen*, with more than 250 breakfast given each day, operating from 7.30 to 8.30 a.m. (the breakfast included by a choice of milk with coffee or tea, plus a pack of biscuits and a slice of pizza); *the distribution of sandwiches every evening*, from Monday to Saturday, around 6.30 p.m., more or less 150 each evening (the bag was containing two sandwiches and sometimes a small brick of fruit juice); *the free distribution of clothes*, divided among Italians (Monday and Friday) and foreigners (Tuesday and Thursday) – Wednesday was allocated for women. There was no formal limitation to the number of times an individual could take clothes, which were distributes by some volunteers in an apposite room; *the free medical ambulatory*, where it was possible to receive medical consultancy but most importantly where it was possible to get both various medicaments (foot cream, denture adhesive, pills for headaches, etc.) and the cards necessary to have showers in the public baths; *the counselling service*, similar to the one of the Cottolengo, managed by a volunteer that was giving also some spare alms from time to time; *the monthly distribution of alimentary packs*, between 250-300 each month, which were made of CE (European Community Conformity Product) labelled food (two confections of pasta, one of rice, three tins of tomatoes, other tins of vegetables, bread, butter, salt, and sometimes coffee and oil too).

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<sup>9</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daughters\\_of\\_Charity\\_of\\_Saint\\_Vincent\\_de\\_Paul](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daughters_of_Charity_of_Saint_Vincent_de_Paul), retrieved on October 2010.

<sup>10</sup> This list of service is the one that I’ve encountered during my fieldwork. Since then there has been a major reworking of the service provided and things are slightly changed.

Fig. 6.6 The entrance of the Vincenziani's center

“Casa Santa Luisa” was the name of the Vincenziani's center/soup kitchen. “Senza fissa dimora” is one of the Italian form for “homeless people”).



The Vincenziani's family motto is “Seeing Christ in the face of the poor”.

#### **6.4.2 God's discourses**

From the brochure describing the activities of the “Casa accoglienza” (Cottolengo, 2009) it is possible to discern the discourse on homelessness that driven this activity. Cottolengo states that:

“The operative choices within which the Casa accoglienza operates are founded on a particular attitude defined as “loving concern for the poor” (*attenzione premurosa verso il povero*). Moreover:

“The person is at the centre and in the hearth of all the people working in the Casa [...] This attention to the person is founded on these fundamental principles” – among the global care for the person, and the wish to let the person

participate actively in the project, there is the following principle, the first, worth being reported here:

*“Caritas Christi urget nos” (The love of Christ leads us):* founding the strength from God’s love, the Casa accoglienza’s service aim to respond to the Gospel’s invitation of taking care of the poorest, in whom is recognized the presence of Jesus. Saint Cottolengo used to repeat that: *“Poor are Jesus”*.

What is worth noticing is that it is stated that poor are not *“like”* Jesus, but they *are* Jesus.

Fig. 6.7 The Cottolengo’s soup kitchen at night  
(note the presence of religious icons all over the wall)



*Me: “When are you satisfied of your work?”*

*Friar Stefano (head of Casa Accoglienza): “When the other see me as a landmark. I won’t say as a father, but at least as someone to whom they can refer”.*

(Stefano, Mar. 2010, WI)

In a book edited by the Vincenziani’s community, describing the approach to the poor promoted by them based on the teaching of Saint Vincenzo de Paoli (Centro Liturgico Vincenziano, 2001), it is possible to find the two *“fundamental principles of the spirituality of the Vincenziani’s communities”*. Those are: *“The*

principle of the imitation of the Charity of Christ towards the poor” and “The principle of the faith in the presence of Christ in the poor”. Concretely speaking, the Vincenziani should serve the poor “with love, utility” and for both “corporal and spiritual assistance” (Centro Liturgico Vincenziano, 2001:18) always taking him or her into consideration as someone who “contains Christ”. The same love and devotion attributed to Christ should hence be attributed to the poor, passing through material and spiritual assistance:

“Removing a material need, taking care of a physical or moral pain is a sufficient, although partial, object of the Cristian and Vincenziani’s charity. [...] But the Vincenziani’s charity will never forget the spiritual aspect of the need [...] and it will try, once given the material assistance, to see if from the friendship will rise a good atmosphere that allows even the spiritual help” (Centro Liturgico Vincenziano, 2001:18).

Therefore, material help leads to friendship, which in the end leads to spiritual help. But what is the goal of the spiritual help?

“From the colloquium on spiritual’s problems it will emerge that the poor – who, like any other human being, is made for God – wishes to serve God and part of his reign” (Ibid:19)

The poor is hence seen as Christ, but there is also the explicit exigency of “taking his [sic] soul to [...] God himself, of which him [the poor person] [sic] needs like any other” (Ibid:19). Homeless people are hence seen as “poor”, expression of Christ and, on the end, as souls to be redeemed and helped in the name of God.

Fig. 6.8 Homeless people in the Vincenziani's soup kitchen  
(Note the wide presence of religious icons on the walls)



One early morning of December, nun Teresa was talking to the homeless people seated in the soup kitchen (she usually did that just before serving the breakfast):

*Nun: "We should always remind us of the people who are less lucky than you and me. People in poor countries, with war. And we should never forget that Christ is close to them, as he is close to you too. The love of Christ makes us feel stronger and better, it is protective and warm..."*

*Homeless person from the back of the room: "So Jesus Christ was not with me tonight in the train station. It was damn cold!"*

*[A spare laughing from the crowd]*

*Nun: "... it is protective and warm. We should never forget that with the love of Christ we can get across all difficulties..."*

(Nun Teresa, Dec. 2009, SN)

These two kind of discourses are very different from the ones on which City's services are based. If this latters were concentrated on the physical and social issues of homeless people, the formers seem to be more concentrated both on the immediate material needs and on the spiritual help. Both Cottolengo and Vincenziani's discourses have nonetheless something in common with the one of the City: they do not take into account the complex relational patterns that lead to

homeless people as *subjects*, hence as individuals with projects, desires, affects and powers constituted and re-constituted in the City's mechanosphere.

If the power of "naming a thing is the power of objectifying, of totalizing. The other is simultaneously produced and located outside the more real in the twin discourses of life and human sciences, of natural sciences and humanism" (Haraway, 1991:79-80), Cottolengo and Vincenziani's argumentation that the poor is Christ leads to the objectification of the individual homeless into a precise category. This objectification is, in other words, a characterization: the poor is the one to be loved, is the one who needs love, because through this love we will be able to reach Christ. Homeless people are hence characterized as *medium* to reach God's love. This way of seeing the poor assumes its entire powerful connotation when is compared with the kind of services through which this vision is enacted.

Cottolengo and Vincenziani's services are of a "welfare universalist" form: they are for everyone, without limitation in time, and for everyone the same kind. Soup kitchen, clothes distribution, shoes distribution, distribution of alimentary packages and free medical assistance are all clear example of this. The poor has to be loved and love is the same for everyone and it is endless: because it is God's love. Therefore, the services through which this love is taken and distributed should be like love itself – infinite, immense and equal for everyone. Personal (and subject) differences cannot matter too much because the centre of the discourse is not the *subject* but *God's love* expressed, contained and enacted through the individual. We turn now to some exemplifications of the interventions of these institutions, which help to show better the link between discourses, practices, and subjects.

#### ***6.4.3 Religious contexts for homeless people: three exemplifications***

The first exemplification regards the counselling services. In the Vincenziani's case a layman volunteer managed the counselling without any specific professionalism on the matter: his approach was listening to the homeless persons without offering them any particular path to follow. In this counselling the discourse of the "love" to the poor was enacted as in any other Vincenziani's service: most of the time spare alms were given to the homeless persons at the end of each colloquium (this was the reason why many of the homeless people I've met were cueing to counsel there). More interesting was the case of the Cottolengo's

counselling service that was managed by a professional social assistant employed by the Cottolengo.

According to Nicoletta (social assistant of the Casa Accoglienza) in 2009 she did *“295 interviews. Among them, 5 individuals have decided to be helped by the Cottolengo and start a path with us”*. Asked how a person might be helped in this way, she answered: *“They start to be followed by us when there is interest from both sides”* (Nicoletta, Feb. 2010, WI).

What we can conclude from this is that the person, in order to be followed by Cottolengo’s social assistant, needs to demonstrate his or her will to comply a certain path, which is made by numerous interviews and encounters with the social assistant. However, this is unlikely to happen for the vast majority of people (as the number cited by Nicoletta clearly states) for several reasons. Firstly, because of the general lack of trust that homeless people have towards social assistants. Secondly, because of the urgency that most of the homeless people feel in resolving their situation. Thirdly, because this listening centre was set to give an answer (and offer possible paths) only to certain kinds of subjects and not others, namely to subject who understood the importance of following a path and who corresponded to Cottolengo’s own policy on poverty. Moreover, Cottolengo’s method was to engage the subject in several interviews based on their biographical pattern and on their actual economical situation. The individual was hence considered once again only from his or her physical and material situation, in a way close to the City’s one. The affective atmosphere of these encounters was, moreover, another source of stress for the individuals that felt to be asked every-time the same questions without gaining any concrete advantage from it. As many homeless people that I’ve encountered told me, counselling services are painful because the individual does not want to talk about his/her personal past without seeing the concrete opportunity to change his/her status. As Liebow pointed out talking about homeless women:

*“It is difficult to appreciate the intensity of feeling, the bonedeeep resentment that many of the women felt at always having to answer questions, often very personal, and often the same ones, over and over again. But having to answer questions was part of the price they paid for being powerless”* (Liebow, 1993:137).

At Cottolengo’s things were going exactly in this way, because only the one

who “naturally” filled the discourse proposed by the social assistant and the institution could be helped. The others – powerless – were left out more by the design of this system than by its financial and human resources.

To fulfil the Cottolengo’s counselling scheme the homeless-in-case should be a patient, meek and willing person, not followed by any other institution, who trusts Cottolengo as something able to help him/her although not immediately. Homeless people are, nonetheless, quite the opposite, especially if they have lived in the street for a long time. Their subjectivities are, as shown in the previous chapter, complex and difficult to grasp if referring only to their biographical paths or their actual material situations, and their will to start paths of which they do not see the end is approximately close to zero. Without fully considering the distancing of their projects and desires; the importance of small street’s things that are not usually considered important; or without letting the person express his/her own capabilities, hence without making him/her responsible but only offering standardized path to follow – leads the Cottolengo’s counseling service to be useful only for the few that fit its codified diagram (affecting all the others, nonetheless, with emotionally painful encounters that were diminishing the subject trust into institutional help).

Fig. 6.9 The reception of the Cottolengo’s counseling service



Cottolengo’s counseling service, Mar. 2010

The second brief example is taken from the distribution of food to homeless people. From time to time in the Vincenziani's soup kitchen volunteers were not only distributing milk, tea, pizza and biscuits but, accordingly to the availability of the day, even other goods. For instance I recorded the presence of Panettone (a typical northern Italian sweet eaten at Christmas) starting from two weeks *after* Christmas and ending almost at the end of February. The presence of so much Panettone "out-of-season" was due to the fact that the soup kitchen was receiving large amounts of food as donations (from private citizens and supermarkets). Although the Panettone was generally well accepted, some homeless people were roughly refusing it arguing that they would not like "to eat Panettone at Easter".

A even better example in this sense is the one of yogurt, which was available normally twice a week. The issue with this item is that it was generally expired – although still good to eat, as the expire date was usually reached just the day before. When the yogurt was available the vast majority of homeless people were firstly checking the expiration data on the package then, if it was passed, either they were refusing it, or they were taking it although complaining.

As the vignette below shows (fig. 6.10) this was not a practice common only to the Vincenziani's, but a widely diffuse custom among religious' institution. What lies behind this practice is the discourse we have already outlined – the poor is poor and needs to be helped, in any way: no matter of his or her emotional responses to the relation, because the centre of the attention is universal *love*, not the person. (I'm not arguing, of course, that this was done on purpose – discursive analysis like the one proposed here serves the scope of outlining more what is unconscious and hidden than what is obvious and consciously done). These practices were hence influencing homeless subjects – through the agency of deteriorated or out-of-season food – leading them to feel less "normal", and even more dissociated (and stigmatized), then the people living, and eating, out of the soup kitchen.

Fig. 6.10 Butter given at the distribution of alimentary packages at the Sant'Antonio da Padova soup kitchen

(Notice that every single package is marked with the label "Prodotto CE" – European Community Conformity Product – and that from every pack has been removed the expiry date – the scratches on the packages indicate the points where the indication was stripped away).



Woman: "Don't you have any other butter?"

Me: "No, I'm sorry"

Woman: "That one is expired"

Me: "..."

Woman: [Looking at the butter] "..."

Me: "Do you still want one?"

Woman: [Keeping on looking at the butter] "Yes"

(Sant'Antonio da Padova soup kitchen, Jan. 2010, SN)

The third and last example is related to the free distribution of clothes. As we have said, this distribution was available in both the institutions taken here in consideration, as well as in many other centres. These distributions were usually unlimited, in the sense that individuals could go as many times a week as they wished (Cottolengo's posed some restriction on clothes, but no one on shoes). One interesting thing that emerges comparing the schedules of Cottolengo and Vincenziani's distributions (which were the largest in the city) is that they were *not*

given in the same days and hours, allowing hence people to take advantage of both: talking about Italians, Cottolengo's clothes distribution was on Tuesday and Thursday, then Vincenziani's one was on Monday and Friday. Shoes' distribution at Cottolengo was taking place everyday.

Some homeless people, as we have already seen with Valerio, Giuseppe and Giorgio, had the capacity to remember every place of the city that was distributing something for free: alms, clothes, shoes, food – no matter what, they had a map in their mind concerning it. Those maps were, nonetheless, not only concerned with schedules and norms, but particularly with the different attitudes that the individual should have adopted with the different services and volunteers. Homeless people were able to remember the names of the different volunteers (or priests and nuns) and their "weak points", hence the relational point were to push in order to gain the most out of that encounter. What we see here, once again, is an unrecognized set of capabilities that homeless people were enacting for their own sake.

The most interesting thing to highlight is, nonetheless, another one. Some homeless people – like Giuseppe (see previous chapter) – were truly actant (in ANT's terms) of actor-networks aligned and translated by them. Most of the clothes collected from those services were *translated*, indeed, into the black market of Porta Palazzo. The homeless were hence taking these clothes and usually giving them to other people (mostly immigrants from the Maghreb) that were selling them at the market. New assemblages and works were hence created by the (almost) unlimited availability of free clothes (which was the result of the particular discourse on poverty spread by those institutions) and by the capabilities of homeless people. These actor-networks were nonetheless affecting the subjectivities of those people, particularly of long-term homeless individuals whom, in the end, did not felt the necessity anymore to find other ways to gain some money: the black economy was fair enough for them, as it was the institutional context that was making it possible. The projects, or desires, to return to a formal job were hence heavily tested by the availability of such opportunities.

Fig. 6.11 The room of the clothes' distribution at the Vincenziani's

(Note the religious icon on the wall)



“Look what beautiful jacket I’ve taken today! [Showing me] ... Eh... Carla [one of the volunteers at the distribution] has a soft spot for me... [Smiling]”

(Daniele, Feb. 2010, SN)

In this section we proposed examples that show the interconnection between certain kinds of religious discourses on homelessness, their practical enactments, and their effects on homeless people’s subjectivity. Although we agree with Cloke, May and Johnsen that “while so much of the geographical literature on homelessness continues to focus on the recent “punitive turn” in urban policy [...] soup runs provide a powerful reminder of a quite different current running through the homeless city: the unconditional outpouring of *agape* and *caritas*” (Cloke, May & Johnsen, 2010:115), we claim that it is important to fully investigate and acknowledge the meaning of such *agape* and *caritas*. Positive affective elements were without any doubts present in the relations of homeless people with those institutions (as Daniele’s relations with the volunteers of the Vincenziani’s free clothes distribution). However, strict codes (as Cottolengo’s counselling service), negative affective atmospheres (created, for instance, by small assemblages – as Vincenziani’s yogurt) and deep relational influences (as the distribution of clothes’

effects) were nonetheless present, as outcomes (probably unconscious, but by no mean less relevant) of the religious universalist welfare approach of those institutions.

## **6.5 Becoming and being homeless vs. public and private contexts for homeless people**

As Chapter 4 and 5 have showed, the distinctiveness of homeless people's lives

“resides in a patterned set of behaviours, routines, and orientations that are adaptive responses to the predicament of homelessness itself and to the associated conditions of street life. [...] The political climate with respect to the homes effects how they spend their days. The matrix of social-services and control agencies and commercial establishments that deal directly with the homeless also shapes their routines and options” (Snow & Anderson, 1993:76-77).

In this sense, the presentation of the role played by private and public institutions showed so far served the scope of further widening the findings of the previous empirical investigations, showing that this matrix not only shapes homeless people's options, but subjectivities too. The aim has not been to confront policies, but to investigate the relational effects of these interventions: hence to understand what kind of contexts they enact and how these contexts shape the homeless subject. There are at least three sets of institutional practices worth underlying in this sense.

The first set concerns the rigidity of City's bureaucracy and the ambiguous effects of certain policies (as the 1+1 system or the Emergenza Freddo's camp). Chapter 4 has shown the role of the City in the spatio-temporal momentous of becoming a homeless individual. Marco's distress in being abruptly catapulted in the Emergenza Freddo's realm, or the formal efficiency through which Valerio's

case has been treated from the very beginning (putting him directly into the networks of services for homeless people) have had enormous effects in the formation of new street subjectivities: in the first case because of the shock procured, in the second one for the institutionalisation of Valerio into a realm not able to recognize his own specificities. Chapter 5 showed similar patterns, stressing nonetheless the role played by the bureaucratic system of the City in closing spatial opportunities to long-term homeless individuals (the absence of a formal residence in Turin, or the difficulties in obtaining one, are both examples of this).

The specific material presented in this chapter rendered better the role that policies encountered have in the constitution of homeless people's subjectivity, showing the amount of stress, fear and demotivation that interventions such the *Emergenza Freddo's* camp produce. Moreover, the slowness and complexity of City's bureaucracy has been investigated further, clarifying better how bureaucracy works as an abstract machine that does not take into consideration – through its monolithic attitude – any internal difference of homeless' subjects: thanks to the discourse on which bureaucratic practices are based, City's interventions become a system where exceptions are not allowed, and where a simple document can become the vehicle through which entire contexts are produced and performed leading to the closure of spatial chances.

A second set of institutional practices concerns the pitfalls of the universal welfare approach of Catholic institutions. Seeing the poor as Christ, these interventions put the spot more on the *love* to be pursued rather than the necessities of each subject. The material presented in this chapter has unfolded better the relational mechanisms that allowed Valerio (Chapter 4), Giorgio and Giovanni (Chapter 5) to re-work the help received by religious institutions into other meanings (as the case of the free clothes sold in Porta Palazzo's black market).

Moreover, the discursive analysis presented in the previous pages has clarified why homeless people own capabilities are not taken into full consideration by the religious institutions that work with them. Homelessness is in fact read through the eyes of God's love for the poor, hence through the unconditioned material and spiritual assistance to him/her, without the necessity to pose any attention to the unexpected and even extravagant nuances of the homeless subject.

The third point – which has not been highlighted enough in the text, but that has been a constant in all the ethnographic material presented – concerns the fact that these policies, services and institutional practices are not (or barely) coordinated among each other. This produces redundancies of services and discourses (as the free distribution of clothes at the Vincenziani and the Cottolengo, which take place in different days) to which some homeless people refer, constituting their relational patterns in accordance to these repetitions. The accounts presented in Chapter 5 are example of this, as Valerio's collection of services cards that shows his attachment to that particular network (Chapter 4).

In the end, it is possible to state that homogeneous contexts are produced from these redundancies, where certain patterned behaviours and codes are present. The importance of these contexts is not, however, that they allow the individual to rely or to depend on them, but once again that they relationally shape the homeless subject: in his/her most intimate projects/desires; relational patterns; and in the chances that he/she could eventually get from city's space.

In the light of the empirical evidences presented until now, these three sets of practice of government can be defined as *normative* interventions, hence as abstract machines that rely (in their contextualized enactment) on the discourse of homelessness produced by the institutions themselves rather than on homelessness' street dynamics, on their internal differences and nuances (which in this work have been recognized both in being and becoming a homeless individual). In other words, the homeless subject is neither the inspiration nor the focus of these interventions although he/she is undoubtedly shaped by the context enacted by them.

The investigation presented in this chapter should have made clear that in order to avoid such relevant drawbacks, new discourses on homelessness should be imagined, as it is only tackling those normative machineries that homelessness could be seen differently and the chances offered by space fully taken into consideration. In order to work in this direction, we should now turn to the presentation of two kinds of policies present in the city that dissociate from the ones already discussed.

## 6.6 Different contexts

Other than the policies and activities just shown, in Turin are present other practices that produce different contexts than the ones just outlined. We are going to remark two of them, one from the City and the other from a faith-oriented institution (the Sermig), which will lead to the conclusion of this chapter.

### 6.6.1 City's LIMEN project

The project LIMEN, previously called S.I.S.T.EMA. (Integrated System of Services for Fighting against Drug Addiction and Marginality) (Città di Torino, 2008), is a project developed by the City of Turin (by the Office for Needing Adults) in 2009 (Città di Torino, 2009b)<sup>11</sup>. Its general objectives are to specialize the interventions that take place in the first-aid centre of the city, in particular integrating the educational, psychological and medical assistance into a single, individually-oriented, intervention.

The project – which is active into three experimental sites: two dormitories and the daily centre of Via Sacchi, 47 that we already encountered – consists in the contemporary work of two or three specialists (one social educator, one doctor or nurse, and one psychologist) who meet homeless individuals with addiction or other sanitary-related problems. The aims are: to individuate persons with serious health problematic that are not followed by any care service; to evaluate their condition from different perspectives (not only the sanitary one); to relate to them, in order to propose specialist intervention accordingly to their different needs.

From one point of view, the project still recalls the already known discourse that City's institutions make about homeless people (the following quotes had been taken from the project description, Città di Torino, 2009b):

“The experience of this latest years suggests that the most common

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<sup>11</sup> The project has been recently re-approved by the City with a Deliberation of the 8<sup>th</sup> of November, 2010. The founding for the period 16/11/2010 – 15/11/2011 is of 48,000 euro, divided among the Social Cooperative Parella and Valdocco, which concretely will enact the project in the three different sites.

typologies of homeless people who frequent the dormitories of the city are: people who barely recognize their addiction to alcohol and/or drugs; people with different failures of community's help; people with prison's experiences and evident mental distress"

There is still, hence, a focus on health and diseases. However, this project pays attention also to other things that compose the subjectivity of homeless individuals: "These critical aspects, which are often interwoven into the biographies of each person [...], are widened further by *the life in the street*" (italics added).

The LIMEN project, integrating more perspectives (educational, sanitary and psychological), is hence able to pay a major attention to the street's dynamics that influence the individuals. This is not only a theoretical acknowledgement. The project is enacted mainly in the Via Sacchi's centre, where the Educativa Territoriale team works (about which we have said before). Scope of this team of educator is to investigate the presence of homeless people in the street of Turin, to get in touch with them, and to offer them differentiated solutions in accordance to their cases. Bruno, the main educator working in this centre, is a widely known and respected figure among homeless people in Turin, and really has the grasp of what is going on in train stations, meeting places and other hidden refuges.

The discourse that emerges from this project is one that, although particularly disease-centred, it opens up the possibility to take into account the individual from various perspectives and it explicitly acknowledges the relevance of the street in affecting them. In fact the LIMEN project aims to increase the "threshold below which a stimulus is not perceived or is not distinguished from another" (which is exactly the definition of the world *limen*, by the New Oxford American Dictionary), acknowledging the complexity of each subject, particularly from the point of view of his/her heterogeneous problematic and relationalities.

As the Educativa Territoriale pointed out: "The opportunity to work [...] with other professional figures [...] allowed to make a good use of the synergies between the different services, allowing integrated and effective interventions on the addressed audience; a formula that also this year has been confirmed as the outcome of the functional educative/social/sanitary work done" (Educativa Territoriale via Sacchi, 2009 – This report refers to the project S.I.S.T.EMA., but this

conclusion, as the educators of the via Sacchi's centre have confirmed me, could be considered valid for the LIMEN project too).

Fig. 6.12 Homeless person working in the street near Turin's main train station



*“The existence of a homeless people is sucked away by the street. The city is at the same time a resource, but also what changes you in your daily struggle to survive”*

(Bruno, Social Educator of the Via Sacchi Centre, Mar. 2010, WI)

### **6.6.2 Sermig's approach**

The Sermig – an Italian acronym that stands for Young People's Missionary Service – was created in 1964 by Ernesto Olivero, a charismatic layman with a strong faith in God (from a Catholic point of view). The Sermig is a brotherhood where young people, families, monks and nuns, live together praying, meditating and working on a wide range of activities (among the one that I'm going to recall, Sermig operates stably in various countries of the Global South). Concerning homelessness the Sermig (which is located, as the Cottolengo, in the Porta Palazzo's area), have three main activities: a medical centre, a night shelter and a residential shelter (this latter is just for women).

On Sermig's website it is possible to find interesting materials to understand how this institution works with homeless people (Sermig, 2011):

*“A man needs a home, a job, an education and medical care... but it's not*

enough. A man needs to love and to feel loved amongst his fellow man, but even this is not enough. Man needs God because he's the son of God. His deepest desires are the sign of his origin from the God of Love. It's God who teaches us to love, who allows us to feel the compassion in our heart, like the Samaritan of the Gospel. It's God who teaches us to leave behind our comforts, and to satisfy the needs of our brothers".

From this statement it is possible to depict a strong religious discourse behind the actions of the Sermig. This discourse is, however, enacted in a slightly different way from the religious institutions we have seen before (it is worth reminding that the Sermig is not a formal religious institution, but a private association, although with a strong spiritual ascendancy).

It is interesting to see how they describe their "home", hence the Arsenal of Peace, which includes the services previously stated (the medical centre and the shelters):

"Our homes, in all corners of the world, should be similar to the Arsenal of Peace in Turin: they will be renovated thanks to the work of many, cosy but simple, cared for and embellished with works of art to offer everyone, even the poorest, the chance to come in contact with what is beautiful. They will be open-air monasteries in large cities, places of brotherhood and for those seeking God, places offering comfort like the old monasteries, willing to offer care and support to anyone at any time of the day or night" (Sermig, 2011).

Once again, it is possible to find in this statement the profound spiritual commitment of the Sermig and its volunteers. However, the stress is not in seeking God in the poor, but in let anyone who is needing of help – or who is seeking God – enter the Sermig. Moreover, and most importantly for this study:

"Everyone is willing to help any man or woman who sincerely wants to find the way out of a bad situation, provided that he or she accepts a method, a family, and a righteous path. The Arsenal is not only inside the Arsenal, it's also outside: our Brotherhoods are people who mix with others, to share and to be shared" (Sermig, 2011).

The poor is not seen as Christ, and there is not the will to change him or her spiritually. The Catholic discourse is present at the Sermig, of course, but it is seen as a drive of the mission of the volunteers, not as a discourse to import in the mind

of who stays there. The stress is, in any case, on the method that the people who enter there have to follow, not on their status as “homeless”, “poor”, etc. The discourse is on the necessity of respecting a methodology, a path, not on the spiritual condition of the individual.

This discourse is concretely enacted asking everyone that want to sleep there to respect the following points: paying 1,50 euro per night to sleep. When the individual is not able to pay the fee, he or she must provide some of his/her skills to the Sermig’s mission; in the case the individual wants to have breakfast, he/she has to take a coffee from an automatic machine (it costs 30cents of euro). The dinner is included in the sleeping cost; talking with the volunteers about their projects and desires, and being active in achieving them; respecting other people and things (as shelter’s furniture); commitment to do not carry weapons and to do not bring alcohol or any other substance into the Sermig; signing an agreement between the individual and the Sermig, which reports the duties listed above.

This method is rigid, because it allows the access only to those who can understand and agree with the path offered. But at the same time it is clear from the very beginning, and it does not allow for kind of universalist welfare: it is limited in time (one month, although renewable on a case-to-case basis), and its scope is precise.

This kind of discourse on the poor and on homeless people leads, in the point of view of this work, to two effects. The first is that this rigidity is a form of codification, because it creates a context that allows certain things and not other (as all the other system of help described until here). However, and this is the second point, the context created by the Sermig is very different from the ones of the others institutions taken into consideration. This context does not, in fact, create any form of strict attachment to the services that it offers but, on the contrary, aims to make the individual who relate to it responsible. Moreover the person is not engaged in a series of standardized interviews, but is made responsible of certain duties from the very beginning.

Although Sermig’s discourse still presents an high degree of codification, in the end its code opens up the possibility for the individual to work on him-herself as a subject (because it makes him/her responsible, because he/she is helped to find work, because he/she is taken into consideration for his/her ideas, projects and desires) and not as a mere user (hence as someone who holds a card and takes advantage of some first-hand service). The case of Carlo, presented in the fourth

chapter of this work is exemplar: being assigned some duties he found again the strength to pursue more closely to his projects and, in the end, he found a job. Of course this is not what happens to everyone, but still is an important result worth highlighting.

To be even clearer, Cottolengo's and Sermig's shelter are, in this sense, built upon two completely different discourses that lead to different productions of subjects. The first wants to help the poor as Christ, giving him/her free food, clothes, a bed and some social assistance. The second asks the homeless subject to pay to sleep, to pay to have breakfast and to be responsible when receiving personalized social assistance. The perspective is different, and the subjects that emerge are different too: in the first case we see a context theoretically open to all, where homeless people eradicate deeper and deeper, leading to several specific issues (distancing from their projects-desires; fixed relational patterns; non-recognition of their abilities; etc.); on the other we see a close context codified from the very beginning that nonetheless allows, once the code has been accepted, to open new spaces for the individual.

Sermig's services are not free from problematic sides (as it is their complete isolation from the other services of the city). However, their attention to the different shadows of the subject, enacted first of through his/her responsibility, is certainly an interesting example of how to work in the direction of augmenting and not decreasing the chances of homeless' space.

Fig. 6.13 The interior of the Sermig's shelter  
(Note that no religious icon is visible)



*“From our point of view there is a reciprocity in what we give and what the people get. Reciprocity of duties and rights. For this reason we ask everyone to give a small financial contribution for their staying here. And if someone can't pay, we let him do some small work [in the Sermig's estate] in return, of course according to the abilities of each one”*

(Simona, volunteer at the Sermig's dormitory, Feb. 2010, WI)

## **6.7 Discourses, contexts and the homeless subject**

The city is made of assemblages that constitute different contexts in maelstroms of powers “enmeshed in networks of relations” (Bosco, 2006:143). In these contexts, as it has been argued in Chapter 2, abstract machines are constantly at work, through discourses, practices and affects that have effects on the life of homeless people. Chapter 4 and 5 have presented the role of these machines suggesting that the chances offered by the infiniteness of space are directly linked with the ways through which their diagrammatical coding takes place, an enquiry that has been strengthened by the investigation undertaken in this chapter.

As it has been showed in Chapter 1, the role of institutions has been depicted in the literature in two main ways: the revanchist (or the one that highlights the control aspects of those services) and the welfares (the one that highlights the services offered by them). On the first side we have the advocate of the era of “malign neglect” toward homeless people (Wolch & Dear, 1993), marginalized and regulated in service-dependended-ghetto with restricted mobility. In this kind of studies:

“where did they appear, service-providers tended to be characterized either as the unwitting handmaidens of a punitive state, or as groups of people [...] responding to charitable impulses that are self-serving and identity building rather than constitutive of any progressive response to the plight of homeless people” (Cloke, May & Johnsen, 2010:4).

On the other side, some authors have recently questioned (e.g. Tosi, 2007) or tackled (as DeVerteuil, 2006) the revanchist scenario, focusing more on the welfare provision for homeless people and on the care and affects that are present in these spaces.

The material collected in this work does not allow me to tend in one direction or another. After having investigated the role of institutionalized abstract machines and their codified contexts in Turin, I propose instead that these services, although they are usually managed and offered with a lot of passion, care and attention to the other and do not have explicit revanchist purposes, end up in co-constituting homeless people’s subjectivities in certain codified forms and not in other more open ways, reducing hence their chances (of change) and losing the opportunity to investigate and enact their own capabilities. In this sense, although we agree with Cloke, May and Johnsen when they argue that these services do not control the homeless person in revanchist terms, we claim that (at least in Turin) the *postsecularism* turn (Cloke, May, & Johnsen, 2010:41) is yet to come.

Looking at the discourses and interventions of those institutions, it is possible to argue that their influence on homeless people’s subjectivities takes place in more or less the same way that Parr and Philo have detected in relation to “mad identities”, that are:

“constituted through the geographies of mentally distressed people as they move across and between a diversity of sited

where their circumstances, lifestyles, experiences and problems become an issue (are acknowledged, discussed, responded to and acted upon). Often, but not always, these sites are ones where these people interact with mental health care professionals of various kinds, and in so doing their identities are inevitably shaped by [...] the prevailing “establishment” views of what their “conditions” really entail and require” (Parr & Philo, 1995:200).

In a word, as Foucault has clearly shown, discourses produce particular knowledge that have the power to control and modify contexts and subjects (Foucault, 2000b; Ogborn, 1995; Thrift, 2007).

In this sense, the policies and interventions investigated in this chapter act as “a way of diagramming human existence, human conduct, human subjectivities, human life itself – diagramming it in the name of government” (Osborne & Rose, 1999:737). This is in fact valid not only, as it has been widely recognized, when institutions enact their power through the physical containment of the inmate (e.g. Foucault, 1991 [1977]; Goffman, 1961; Wood, 2007), but even – as it is the case here – when they are just providing free services that anyone could accept or refuse. In the end, these are institutionalized practices with biopolitical consequences, which are generally unexpected because:

“such ensembles of practices do not actualize themselves in perfect realization of their logic. First, because their logic is always a contested epistemic object for them. Second, because things always change in unintended ways. Biopolitical [...] practices do not articulate a design in nature” (Dillon & Lobo-Guerrero, 2008:267).

As it has been argued, these interventions are of a normative kind because they are constructed around particular discourses on homelessness that seem disconnected from the nuances of homelessness itself. Therefore, in order to describe with attention the discursive functioning of the private and public provision of services has been useful to highlight that “if we are to reorganize the spaces of care for homeless individual we must interrogate how the policy practices of government discursively manage homeless subjects” (Del Casino & Jocoy, 2008:195). Arguing in favour of such reorganization, it is worth to recall the most evident consequences of these normative political practices, which seem to

be at least three.

*Not considering the importance of the small relational patterns of homeless people's street life, they are not able to move away from certain fixed categories about homelessness. In other word, without acknowledging the variety of things involved in homeless people's life, they tent to constitute highly stereotyped discourses on homelessness, either from the sanitary-social or the caritas-agape point of view. Doing so, they contribute to reproduce (along with certain literature) the stigmatizing knowledge on the matter (Baeten, 2004).*

*Not concentrating on the subjects, they are not able neither to recognize homeless people capabilities, nor their own projects and desires – (all elements that this work has demonstrated to be important to grasp homelessness in its wideness).*

*Proposing redundant, undifferentiated and standardized services, they codify spacetime in a strict way, which do not allow positive line-of-flights to the subject. In other words, the contexts of these policies and interventions barely change and offer new relational chances to the homeless person, linking him or her to repetitive sets of discourses and practices. The chance of space, present in contexts less codified (see Chapter 4) is almost completely annihilated by these interventions.*

The chapter has also shown other political paths that are currently present in Turin. LIMEN's project and Sermig's approach are exceptions, as they both work in different ways from the normative politics just recalled. Their attentions (although to different degrees) to the positioning and the personal relational patterns of the individuals; to the small things that make street's life; to the capabilities of each one; to the creation of more integrated and less codified operational contexts (through the integration of different perspectives in the first case, and the responsibility in the use of services in the second) – lead to the acknowledging of the *chance of space*. In other words, they lead to the appreciation (not only vaguely theoretical) that homeless people's lives can change according to the kind of codification through which interventions are enacted.

Relying also on these last two interventions, the aim of this work is now to imagine how different, non-normative, political paths could be implemented in order to dismiss the drawbacks of the current canonical approaches on homelessness. In order to do this, we turn firstly to a final theoretical reflection

around the material presented until here and then to the last chapter, where the political reflections that came out of this work are going to be presented.

# Chapter 7

## A theory of homelessness?

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### 7.1 Back to theory

The material presented until here can be interpreted as a spatio-temporal journey across the land of the homeless-as-subject. This is a land where desires, projects, affects, powers, discourses, and urban materialities of various genres continuously relate to each other, sometimes territorializing and some other disrupting themselves, to re-territorialize then in a different form. It is a land of heterogeneous assemblages; it is a realm where the process of relations between homeless people and the city constitutes particular kind of urban contexts, which in the end have circular – ceaseless – effects on homeless themselves; it is an atmosphere of affects, and powers; it is a land made of slices of absolute spacetime that, although codified, are not fixed and might open – or close down – chances for homeless individuals.

The homeless subject is a spatio-temporal result of these different nuances and meshes. He/she is not born out of a linear process, but emerges from precarious modes of organization of different spatio-temporal urban strata/contexts: the soup kitchen, the train station, the schedule of the bus, this or that institutional or informal activity, etc. He/she is an assemblage that precariously emerges within

“two distinct axes comprising the four types of valence: first, between the intermingling machinic assemblage of bodies, actions and passions (content) and that of a collective assemblage of enunciation of acts and statements

(expression); and second, between territorial stabilising lines of articulation and that of deterritorialising lines of flight” (Dewsbury, 2011: 150).

In this sense, and coherently with the theorization advanced in this work, the homeless-as-subject can be seen as a Deleuzian-Guattarian BwO (Body without Organs), firstly because it is a more-than-human body, and secondly because it is a body “constantly in the process of composing itself (becoming) through encounters with other bodies” (Greenhough, 2011:134). The homeless-as-subject is hence multiples in itself (because it constantly changes) but also multiples in the multitude (because there is no subject like any other). To take such approach on homelessness clearly means to refuse “homelessness” or “homeless people” as categories able to explain, or to investigate, such multiplicity. Rather, they cover it, simplifying and normalizing homeless people’s lives through sets of discourses, practices, and theoretical investigations, based on these pre-assumed categories.

The only possible movement is to try to understand how this multiplicity comes into being, to describe its facets, to be ready for its sudden changes. For this reason this work poses, as main research question, the following dilemma: “*How the homeless subject is constituted in the street?*”. The role of this chapter is to highlight possible answers to this question, reworking the theorization proposed in Chapter 2 and relying on the most relevant findings of the ethnographies presented in Chapter 4, 5 and 6.

## **7.2 The constitution of the homeless subject**

In the investigation of homelessness through the positioning of the individuals, their more-than-human relational performances in the urban, and their affective and powerful dimensions, many things have emerged. In this chapter we have chosen to deploy three points among many others, because we perceive them to be the most relevant and interesting findings of this enquiry. The answer to my main research question is not, hence, a one-way answer, but a set of multiples line-of-flights that can help to re-modulate (re-assemble) our current knowledge on the matter of homelessness at the street level. In this sense, the three elements that offer

insights on how homeless people's subjectivities are constituted within the street are: assemblages and the agency of things; the role of contexts; and the relevance of homeless people own capabilities.

### **7.2.1 Vitalist homelessness**

Canonical readings of homelessness barely pay attention to the small things of the urban to which homeless people relate. This is partially valid also for the ethnographic studies of homelessness that we have encountered in this work. Although they stress the relevance of objects (e.g. Bonadonna, 2005), alcohol (e.g. Cohen & Sokolovsky, 1989), or other small devices (e.g. Desjarlais, 1997; Duneier, 1999) (to cite just a few), they still portrait those things as part of the backwards scenario where homelessness takes place, giving to these things just a relatively small importance in the economy of homeless people's lives. This work has argued, on the contrary, that things and the materiality of the city are an integral part of the homeless subjects – as much as their own believes, failures, and most intimate sensations. The homeless subject is hence an assemblage like any other, “composed of heterogeneous elements that may be human and non-human, organic and inorganic, technical and natural. In broad terms, assemblage is, then, part of a more general reconstitution of the social that seeks to blur divisions of social–material, near–far and structure–agency” (Anderson, McFarlane, 2011:124).

The first element to stress in order to understand how homeless people's subjectivities are constituted in the street is hence that the homeless individual always exceeds his/her own body, his/her own categorization. The “homeless” is hence a subject who is not “a direct result of the properties of its component parts” but rather:

“It is the interactions between human and nonhuman components that form the assemblage—interaction as mutually constitutive symbiosis rather than just parts that are related—and these interactions cannot be reduced to individual properties alone” (McFarlane, 2011:208)

Urban materialities and homelessness are not, in this sense, two separate elements. Homeless people subjectivities (hence their position in the world, their views upon it, their performances, etc.) are constituted relationally in a continuous engagement with the disperse agencies that populate the urban. Homeless people

and urban agencies are “distributed via the materiality of the body as a mutually constitutive communication with the materiality of the world” (Dewsbury, 2011:150), and it is precisely within these movements that homeless people’s (more-than-human) subjectivities are constituted.

To give the adequate resonance to the agency of things, Bennett has introduced the notion of *shi*, from old Chinese tradition. *Shi* “names the dynamic force emanating from a spatio-temporal configuration rather than from any particular element within it” (Bennett, 2010:35), which means that “an assemblage owes its agentic capacity to the vitality of the materialities that constitute it” (Ibid:34). This work has provided plenty empirical evidence of such inextricable unity between human beings and stuff-of-the-city, (hence of the urban’s *shi* that constitute the homeless subject), showing that the same object has different subjective effects on different individuals (which is, in the end, one of the major reasons to advocate for the minute description of how these assemblages come into being).

Apart from the most obvious cases (as the agency of mobile phones, or of the transportation systems, on Marco; the effects of alms, or documents, on Giorgio; or the relational effect of the services’ card on Valerio – all widely documented in Chapter 4 and 5) we would briefly recall here just one example in this sense. This is related to clothes. Both Daniele and Giuseppe (Chapter 5) cared a lot about these particular items, although with relevant differences. Daniele was affected by the aesthetic power of clothes, being influenced by them in considering his look and his own sense of beauty. Giuseppe was instead governed by the economical value that these clothes might have in the black market of Porta Palazzo, being influenced in the economical arrangements of his life. Moreover, these two subjects were implying different relational performances with these clothes. Daniele was adopting particular tactics in choosing the items that suited him the most (e.g. making jokes to the volunteer in charge of the distribution); while Giuseppe was controlling his alcohol addiction in order to make the right choice in relation to the market value of the same stuff (e.g. drinking less during the mornings in which the free distribution was available). Free clothing was hence affecting Daniele and Giuseppe’s subjectivities deeply, but in different ways: in the former case, shaping the aesthetic self-estimation of the subject and increasing his positive feelings; in the latter, modelling the relational performances of the subject (Giuseppe, as I’ve shown, constituted a precise actor-network in order to sell these items at the black market) and his capabilities to control alcohol addiction.

The political relevance in considering the “homeless” as an assemblage that constitute his/her subjectivity with the things of the urban reside in the fact that

“In emphasizing the ensemble nature of action and the interconnections between persons and things, a theory of vibrant matter presents individuals as simply incapable of bearing full responsibility for their effects” (Bennett, 2010:37)

Which is to say, in other words, that homeless people’s lives in the street (what they do, how they do it) cannot become subject of politics that pretend to read the homeless individual as an autonomous being dissociated from the entanglements of the more-than-human. Clothes, to recall the example just presented, are not the same for Daniele and Giuseppe and they do not have the same agentic effect on them: each political act on these individuals should start hence from these little, but fundamental, differences (more in Chapter 8).

### ***7.2.2 Contexts as urban crossroads***

Abstract machines always regulate every relation between two or more assemblages through codes, explicit or implicit rules, norms of various genres, which actually determine the context where the relation is enacted and performed. Since contexts are just a codified slice of absolute spacetime, abstract machines have the role of determining the degree of overture (to chance) of the context, as well as its kinds (rigid, selective, formal, informal, etc.). Contexts are the second important element that contributes to the constitution of the heterogeneous subjectivities that populate the street, precisely because they can affect the opportunities that homeless people have and the quality of their street lives.

The relevance of “context” as concept emerges from the fact that although contexts are just no less and no more than territorialized assemblages (which means, in a sense, that they are conceptually the same thing), it helps us to identify better the multitude of powers that are present in every assemblage-of-assemblages process. Each context is in fact characterized by sets of abstract machines that can be identified, studied, and eventually tackled. The recognition of the role of these machines is pivotal because it allows us to read power not as a one-way process directed from something (police, an institution, or whatever) to the homeless individual, but rather to depict it as a form of “multiple co-existences – assemblage

connotes not a central governing power, nor a power distributed equally, but power as plurality in transformation” (McFarlane, Anderson, 2011:125)

In this sense, homeless people’s subjectivities are not the result of absolute forms of control; revanchist politics; or unavoidable exploitative procedures. Rather, their subjectivities emerge from the (conscious or unconscious) negotiation of the codes that the different urban abstract machines poses to them. Sometimes homeless individuals accept those codes, in order to gain some benefit (e.g. as the the practice of trying to look poor and deprived in order to receive alms); some other times they reject them (e.g. as the case of the fictive residence of Via della Casa Comunale, 1, refused for the stigmatization that it carries); or they are effected by them without being fully aware of this process (e.g. as the case of Valerio in Chapter 4 clearly showed).

Chapter 6 has already provided articulate examples of how certain urban contexts affect the homeless subject, so I won’t add much here. However, what is worth noticing is that contexts can be understood as “crossroads” too, hence as emerging spatio-temporal slices where things can take one direction or another (an idea which is fully coherent with the territorialization-deterritorialization-reterritorialization processes described in this work). For Simone crossroads

“isn’t just a spatial notion. Anywhere can be a crossroads at a particular time. The key is how spaces get turned into crossroads-points and experiences of intersection” (Simone, 2010:192).

Contexts can be seen as powerful crossroads, hence as intersections (of assemblages) coded in certain ways and not others. To say it differently, contexts/crossroads have the (conscious or unconscious) power to offer chances to the homeless subject. If this happen or not, it depends only on the ways these contexts/crossroads have been codified. This work has offered plenty of examples on this matter. The most evident among the others are the ones of Valerio and Carlo: if the latter enjoyed the particular kind of code proposed to him by the Sermig (which opened a real chance to him, see Chapter 4 and 6), the former internalized the institutional codes proposed to him without having the (relational) opportunity to go beyond them, or even to challenge them (see Chapter 4).

Apart from the role that contexts/crossroads play in shaping homeless people’s chances, the political relevance of considering them as an integral element in the constitution of the homeless subject is determined precisely by the

fact that everything that intersects in a crossroads (hence that relates to the assemblages, and the abstract machines, of a certain context) change itself:

“Intersections is about people and ways of doing things coming down to a crossroad, not knowing what else is going to be there, and no one being able to completely dominate what takes place there, since there are many different ways to get there and get out. Whatever happens, people coming to the crossroad are changed” (Simone, 2010:192).

The empirical material presented in the previous chapters clearly shows how this happens, particularly concerning the distance between the desires and projects of the homeless individuals. As it has been showed, this distance is influenced also by the contexts performed by those people: the more the context is rigid, the less the individual seems to be able articulate coherently projects for his/her own desires. The constitution of the homeless subjects passes, hence, even through this intimate element (the couplet desires/projects), which nonetheless needs, once again, to be read relationally – in conjunction with the other assemblages (especially the institutionalized ones) of the city.

### ***7.2.3 The beauty of homeless people's capabilities***

Homeless people are usually perceived (or depicted) as unable beings, or beings that have lost a certain set of canonical capabilities (as the ability to sustain themselves through a “normal” kind of work). This way of seeing, as it has been argued (Chapter 1), often reproduces the stigma and prejudice around this category of people. Although certain scholars admit that homeless people enact particular abilities to cope with the events that they encounter in the street, these abilities are mainly seen just as consequential effects, as inevitable reactions, to the deprivation of street's life. However, this work has shown that paying attention to the daily performances of homeless people in the street reveals that these people are all but unskilled. Not only they imagine and enact different ways to cope with the urban harsh, but they are the depositary of unexpected powerful faculties. Capabilities are hence the third element to acknowledge in order to understand how their subjectivities constitute in the street, at least for two reasons: firstly because without doing so we would loose an important nuance of homeless people's lives; and

secondly because these capabilities (like everything else) are relationally constructed with the urban, affecting, hence, the most intimate self of these individuals.

In order to stress the political relevance of this point, it might be useful to read it in comparison to the concept of “beauty”. As the African urbanist Tshikala Kayembe Biaya has pointed out

“What is considered beautiful in one culture may easily be perceived as pure ugliness in another [...] There are dimensions of aesthetic life which elude determination. It follows that a sociological-anthropological reading gives us only partial information about the practices of beauty. Nor can beauty be analysed in purely literary and aesthetic terms. Such analyses would neglect the relationships of power and inequality that always structure the field of taste and distaste, of pleasure and sensation, of the beautiful and the ugly” (Biaya, 2004:1).

Strange capacities are often seen and perceived as deviant, dangerous and even “ugly”. This is certainly the case of homeless people’s extravagant skills: rather than see it as a manager, we perceive Giuseppe’s ability to collect and sell clothes as a deviant, illegal, activity; rather than perceive him as a great actor, we are usually annoyed by Daniele’s jokes and attentions in parking our cars; or rather than being amused by Giorgio’s capacity to remember all the churches that give spare alms and to organize his movements in order to visit them all, we look at him just as a deprived beggar; and so on. However, these capabilities should not be read in “deterministic” terms. As Biaya pointed out talking about different concepts of beauty in Dakar and Addis Ababa, we cannot read them just from their bare appearance, but we should trace the connections with the wider environment from which they come from.

Recognize these abilities as such, in their own value, give us a more nuanced account of what it means to be a homeless subject in the contemporary urban. Homeless subjects do not only “cope” with the urban, but they construct (cognitively and not) new ways of imagining both the city and their lives. In this sense they practice different ways to re-appropriate the figure of the “homeless”: they challenge it, they do not passively assume it or, to say it in other words, the elements that characterize the “homeless” in the common imaginary “are not

consumed in a passive manner. They are re-appropriated selectively” (Biaya, 2004:6).

And it is precisely within this process of re-appropriation (re-territorialization) that the homeless subject is shaped relationally. “Capability” is, indeed, a relational term. It derives from French *capacité*, from Latin *capacita*, which in the end derives from *capax*: *capac* – “that can contain”, from *capere*, “take or hold” (from the New Oxford America Dictionary). If we take seriously that relations are just ways of having something, to reside in something, to hold it while being held by it (see Chapter 2)... we should acknowledge that the eclectic capabilities of homeless people emerge from the ceaseless entanglements of the subject with the urban. The political issue is to recognize this process, and to invest on it rather than neglecting it from the very beginning, in order to factually recognize that “at the hearth of city life is the capacity for its different people, spaces, activities, and things to interact in ways that exceed any attempt to regulate them” (Simone, 2010:3)

### **7.3 Poietic encounters and the chance of space**

Assemblages, contexts and homeless people’s capabilities seem, in the end, three pivotal elements in the constitution of the homeless subject at the street level. The street and the city are not however static realms where homeless people’s subjectivities are constituted once for all. Rather,

“the city is the conjunction of seemingly endless possibilities of remaking. With its artifice of architectures, infrastructures, and sedimentation channeling movement, transaction, and physical proximity, bodies constantly are “on the line” to affect and be affected, “delivered up” to specific terrain and possibilities of recognition or coalescence” (Simone, 2004:9).

One of the major challenge of this work has been to fully acknowledge this remaking, recognizing from the very beginning the immanence of spacetime, the ceaselessly constitutions of different contexts and subjects, and the overture to chances that urban space-motions might have. To do so, three approaches have

been developed: autoethnography from below; journalistic reporting; and poiesis (see Chapter 3). In this section we want to spend a few more words on this last approach, poiesis, as it seems the one best suited to grasp the fluidity of the relations between homeless people and the urban.

As it has been argued, poiesis is conceived here more as a tendency, an attitude, a preparedness toward the unknown, the unknowable, and the unexpected that unavoidably emerges in the constitution of the homeless subject. In the same fashion as Shapiro use of Whitman's words to reveal the micropolitics of New York (seeking poiesis through a direct link with poetry), we have collected and interpreted the ethnographic material to reveal the micropolitics of the constitution of homeless people's subjectivities (the difference with Shapiro's account is that we have not used poems, but rather direct speeches or emotional encounters – which can be seen, to a certain extent, as seeds of every poems). This has meant not to offer a theory of the city, neither of homelessness. Rather, it has meant to offer a

“poetics of the city, a series of interventions that figure the city by composing encounters between artistic texts and conceptual frames (effectively art-knowledge encounters). [...] My poetic encounters - the ways I figure and compose the materials in diverse genre - are attempts to illuminate aspects of the actual encounters that constitute the micropolitics of urban life worlds” (Shapiro, 2010:24).

To approach homeless people's lives in the street in this way has meant to collect information as-they-came to my ears, hands, or to my intimate self. Poiesis as a method means simply to be empathic with the human and more-than-human beings that populate the city, being open to record what is not expected, what sounds strange, and even what is completely non-sense. This inclination has seemed to me the only way to grasp what actually exceeds the urban itself: “rather than mere interpersonal perception, the bodily encounters in/with the city provoke corporeal “innervations”, discharges of energy” (Shapiro, 2010:145). In this sense poiesis should not be conceived as a standalone methodology, but as a powerful background where all the other methods normally implied in an ethnographic research are let free to move. There cannot be a “manual of instruction” about how to do poiesis, simply because it is not something to do: rather, it is just an overture toward “l'Autre”, to say it in Lefebvrian terms. Several years of traveling in the most

disparate outskirts of the Eastern Europe, just making photos and being enchanted by Soviet architecture; years of volunteering with elderly, kids, or “excluded” groups (as Roma people); and the fact that I do love to write and read poems... have been probably the best training for the poetic attitude that I’ve tried to display in this work.

If the answer to my main research question stresses three points that are at the same time factual (because they happen) but also possibilities (as they offer insights on how we might look at homelessness in a nuanced way, both theoretically and methodologically), there still is a final argument to make. This is precisely about what we cannot see, about the infiniteness of absolute spacetime, about the uncountable chances that pass through the life of homeless people at every moment, everyday. A point that we have tried to grasp through poiesis, in order to acknowledge that

“change is not just willed by us humans but comes about equally through the materialities of the world in which we are just a part, and which, through habit, we encompass in the everyday, ever changing, assemblage of thought, intensity and matter” (Dewsbury, 2011:151).

This point is the chance of space, the opening that assemblages might have, which is of absolute political relevance because it lets us emphasising how urbanism and homeless people life “might be produced otherwise” making “us to consider how an alternative world might be assembled” (McFarlane, 2011:211)

Homeless people are usually well aware of the chances that urban spaces might offer. This is most evident in the cases in which they are “anticipating that the unexpected will show up somewhere and that their job is to be prepared to find some way to take advantage of it” (Simone, 2010:98). That were the cases, for instance, of Daniele – who was going to the public park to chat with other homeless individuals because some interesting affair might have emerged – or of those individuals that were refusing to sleep at the Emergenza Freddo’s camp (to avoid the chance of fights) or to apply for the fictive residence in Via della Casa Comunale, 1 (to avoid the chance of being stigmatized by it). These should be seen, in Simone’s terms, as “politics of anticipation”, which are possible only because homeless people feel that chances are always there, under the curtains of the different abstract machines at work in the city. These are micro-politics enacted in both sense: either to get a positive chance, or to mobilize “one’s energies and

attentions to minimize disappointment when preferred ways of doing things do not work out” (Simone, 2010:98).

However, the chance of space sometimes emerges unexpectedly, without the possibility to anticipate it by any mean. This has been the case of Marco (when he found a work thanks to a flyer of a Protestant Church) and of Carlo (and is fortunate encounter with the Sermig). In this case the challenge (both for practitioners and academics) is double: on one side they should be enough poetic to accept and acknowledge the unexpected chance; and on the other they should find the way to code that chance in positive ways for the homeless subjects. Chapter 6 has already showed a couple of examples in this sense, while the concluding chapter of this work tries to articulate an original political approach around this point.

## **7.4 From theory to politics**

The arguments exposed in this chapter are, in the end, the answers to the two hypothesis on which this work is based, which have been stated at the end of Chapter 1. The first, which derived mainly from the philosophical strands followed, was related to the claim that turning the light on the more-than-human and ceaselessly constitution of homeless subjects we would be able to understand better what are the things that concretely affect homeless people’s lives. As the ethnographical work has shown, describing the relations that homeless people have with the small things of the city (as newspapers, mobile phones, buses, etc.) and concentrating upon the discourses and the abstract machines that govern their performance in different contexts, we have been able to describe precisely what and how affects the street’s lives of those people. The second hypothesis, which derived mainly from my past personal experiences with homeless and marginalized people, was that sometimes they are able to enact particular capabilities in other to grasp the chances offered by the urban scenario. The fieldwork has shown, in this sense, that homeless people do have a wide set of capabilities – although often extravagant – which can be seen as deposits of potentiality to enact in positive and open context, which could design different paths in the constitution of homeless people’s subjectivities.

This work does not provide a theory of homelessness, neither a theory of the homeless subject. At least, it does not provide a “pure” theory of the homeless subject. Nonetheless, this work has proposed precise strands that could be followed to trace how the constitution of homeless people’s subjectivities takes place in the contemporary urban.

However, although this work already marks a distinction from the canonical approaches on homelessness, this is not enough for me. After a ten-months fieldwork within the street of Turin, I feel the moral commitment to say something more, to try to move the proposed strands to another level, which might be useful for further ethical and political reflections on homelessness’ issues (both in Turin and elsewhere). In other words, despite the fact that this engagement might be to a certain extent problematic (Latour, 2005), I feel – like Bourgois and Schomberg – that

“it is imperative to link theory and practice. Otherwise, we would be merely intellectual voyeurs. It is politically and analytically gratifying to engage with critical theory, but we also need to operate at the level of immediate policy options and specific local interventions that can be implemented in both the short and the long term” (Bourgois & Schomberg, 2009:97).

Adopting the view that theory cannot be divided from practice, and from political engagement too, the next chapter tries both to tackle the discourses that constitute the contexts where homeless subjects are produced and to offer insights for a new politics of homelessness, able to take into consideration both homeless people’s nuances and the chances that they actually have.

# Chapter 8

## Political reflections

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### 8.1 Problematizing political assumptions

The remaining pages of this work claim that if we want to get closer to homeless subjects and their street's entanglements, in order to address the importance of the theoretical reflections outlined in the previous chapter, we need to reconsider the approach to homelessness usually taken both by academics and practitioners.

In our societies homeless people are depicted by the media, popular and institutional discourses, as *deviancies* from the norm. If the “normal, in the most usual sense of the word, is that which is met in the majority of cases of a determined kind, or that which constitutes either the average or standard of a measurable characteristic” (Canguilhem, 2007 [1966]:9) homeless people are deviant because they are not productive in the sense of the capitalistic society in which we live (Snow and Anderson, 1993; Takahashi, 1996). In this sense homeless people are seen as a pathology of our society, but a pathology that is constructed in a normative sense (to use Canguilhem words) because it is linked to the disconnection from the norm. Homeless people are hence pathological deviancies because they do not fit anymore into the character of the “healthy and productive white man” on the basis of which normality is defined.

Relying on the evidences of the analysis presented in Chapter 6, it is possible to argue that the most common approach taken both by the public and private-religious institutions tends to adopt this point of view in approaching homelessness. The focus of the policies and interventions enacted by these

institutions is indeed on the realignment of the *pathological being* into the *normative canon* of the *normal*. In other words, both the social-assistants interventions (with their attempt to recuperate the sick body, and to offer respectable paths “back to society”) and the universal welfare approaches of religious institutions (with their provision of food and goods) are designed on the basis of what is generally (and normative) perceived as good and normal (a job, a house, clean clothes, etc.) with the intention of aligning the homeless individual to that standard.

The ethical pre-assumption of these interventions seems hence to be designed following this subsequent path:

- Normality is X (the wealthy, healthy and productive white man), *hence*
- Everything and everyone that differ from X is seen as a deviancy, a form of social pathology that could be cured, *hence*
- As homeless people obviously differ from X they should be helped in order to return to X, to fit again in it, because this is perceived as the good to be achieved, the normal to be established, *hence*
- Normative interventions are taken, and although they differ in discursive and practical means, they nonetheless are driven toward the re-stabilization of the normal.

Following Canguilhem’s thought (Canguilhem, 2007 [1966]; see also Gordon, 1998; Osborne & Rose, 1998; Rose, 1998) what is evident in this path is that the “pathology” of homelessness is read in regard to the normative norm and not *in itself*. The ethical pre-assumption that drives public and private intervention does not investigate *into* the pathology, but rather defines it (through the norm) and then tackles it just from this definition. In other words the pathology is never taken in consideration, but always seen in the light of its artificial linkage with the norm, in being the artificial “other side” of the norm.

What we claim is that this is problematic because it does not allow to take in consideration the entanglements of the pathological-homeless person, which are multiples and quite relevant (because they offer heterogeneous suggestions to approach homelessness). In order to change this *ethical* (and concretely *political*) perspective there are different options. For instance, it might be possible to challenge the notion of “normal”, and question the neo-capitalistic discourse of its roots. At another level, it might be possible to question the logical path that defines the pathology only in the comparison to what is perceived as normal. Following these strands would mean to engage radical and revolutionary shifts (as many post-

Marxist and activist provide), but it would probably also mean to loose the grip of the actual situation. To avoid this, and to offer some concrete short and medium term political suggestions, we propose to turn the attention again to the path previously outlined in order to highlight a missing passage.

To put it simply, we propose that the steps in the schema should be five instead of four: between the recognition of homeless people as deviant from the norm and the subsequent enactment of intervention we should acknowledge the pathology in itself, in its components and nuances. Once the pathology is defined through the norm, our interventions should *not* be enacted on the basis of this definition (trying desperately to realign the deviancy and producing, with different *normalities* – Mol, 1998 – either negative feelings or claustrophobic and pervasive contexts), but this intervention should be aimed at the investigation of the ground-dynamics of these pathologies, and then be enacted on the light of these findings.

Considering the pathology in itself means to acknowledge that pathologies are not empty containers shaped by the normative discourse, but are complex situations with at least two characteristics. Firstly, the pathological is something that changes from individual to individual, accordingly to the environment (Canguilhem, 1977 [1966]), hence the contexts, where homeless people perform their lives. Secondly, the environment and the individual constitute themselves relationally, forming more-than-human assemblages (or, to use a word adopted by Canguilhem himself, cyborgs – Hacking, 1998), hence the pathological subject has to be taken into consideration in his/her numerous more-than-human nuances.

Therefore, if the pathological has to be understood in relation to the linkage between the individual and the environment, our interventions should not rely on trying to achieve the “normal” through discursive normalizations, but we should focus on the pathological subject and his/her becoming, his/her performances, his/her “freedom of movement, the freedom to come and go”, as Badiou has stated investigating Canguilhem’s approach to the subject (Badiou, 1998:232).

In this sense the pathology, freed from being just the negative alter ego of the normal, looses its stigmatizing and stereotyped connotation and becomes (or, better said, begins to be acknowledged as) a multi-faced phenomenon with heterogeneous nuances unavoidably constituted with street’s contexts. In other words, focusing on the pathology *refreshes* the pathology itself. This is, in the end, the political shift proposed here, a kind of politics “that is less about dour denouncements of injustice or sober analyses of normative principles, and more about enhancing, and celebrating, our immersion in Being” (Popke, 2009:81).

## 8.2 Reconfiguring politics and homelessness: Politics and the chance of space

Focusing on the pathology itself, and hence concentrating on the dynamics of homeless' street life, means essentially to argue in favour of a *contextualized* and *open to chances* politics of the multiples. In other words, if homeless people are heterogeneous subjects that ceaselessly re-constitute themselves in the city's fabric, the only possible locus for *an politics on homelessness* is within this becoming multiplicity, which should be understood not as a "pluralized notion of identity, identity multiplied by n locations, but [...] rather [as] an ever-changing, non-totalizable collectivity, an assemblage defined, not by its abiding identity or principle of sameness over time, but through its capacity to undergo permutations and transformations" (Grosz, 1993:170).

Approaching homelessness ethically would mean hence to acknowledge its heterogeneous and in becoming dimensions, rather than read it simply as deviancy from the norm. Therefore this ethic, and even the political stances that emerge from it, cannot be detached from the contexts where the homeless' multiplicity takes place. It is hence a politics-of-experience, which emerges from it, which cannot be dissociated from it. To reverse the argument, as homeless "experience is not outside social, political, historical and cultural forces [it] cannot provide an outside position from which to establish a place for judgement, a pure perspective from which to judge theory or culture" (Grosz, 1993b:40) any political position on homelessness is by default within and not outside lived-homelessness itself. As Negri, commenting on Spinoza, has pointed out: "The world is ethical only to the extent that, and because, we ourselves live it" (Negri, 2004:4).

However, how should this politics-of-experience be characterized? In term of homeless people's lives, we propose that the best locus for any political consideration on homelessness is within the openings and closures of the contexts in which they perform their own existence, as it is only within the relationalities that animate these contexts that homeless people as subjects (hence in their multiplicity) can be recognized. A politics of this form must thus concentrate on the opportunities that the urban fabric offers to the homeless person, at the street level and in a more-than-human fashion, as well as on its denials and closures. As we

have argued in this work, absolute spacetime is an infinite dimension where not only all takes place, but where all *can* take place: this infinite potential is always present in the unavoidable process of codification ceaselessly conducted by the assemblages that populate the world (through their abstract machines). From this codification emerge contexts where homeless people's lives take place, in their multiplicity and changing forms. A politics-of-(homeless)-experience should hence be focused on the opening and closure of these contexts and on how they related to the homeless subject. In this sense, it should be a political approach directed toward the recognition of the *chance of space*, because it is only in the potentiality of this *chance* (which can be more or less constrained) that we might have room for changes in homeless people's lives and subjectivities.

As we have seen describing the life of seven homeless people in Turin, when space is not strictly codified (or is codified in order to take in consideration the multiplicity of the homeless being, as in the case of the Sermig), we have positive outcomes in term of homelessness: people feel better; they enrich their relational patterns; and have more chances (*poietic* encounters with the urban fabric) that in certain cases can lead to radical positive changes. These elements are not present in contexts highly codified. A grounded political approach to homelessness should be interested in just this difference, "becoming critical of norms under which we are asked to act but which we cannot fully choose" (Thrift, 2008:14) – where the "norms" are the opening and closure of space enacted by abstract machines that we cannot fully control.

Such approach cannot lead to any universal principle of justice, as street's dynamics and relational patterns change from subject to subject. It is not a theory of justice on homelessness, but an acknowledgement of the relational entanglements of homeless people's lives, and of the chances offered by them. It is hence a way to be in-the-process-of-homelessness, with the "commitment to being open to new possibilities", hence "a kind of witnessing through which we are exposed to the potential for being-otherwise" (Popke, 2009:82-83). It is an "ethical act [...] of composition, of construction" (Negri, 2004: 5), because it allows to grasp the chances offered by space to homeless people, in order to depict and enact, new performative encounters that might lead to different subjects. This is the recognition of the fact that contexts such the one produced by the discursive power of bureaucracy or religion are too rigid and codified in order to open new possibilities, not last because they are not concentrated on the subject but on the normative discourse that they produce. This is the recognition that small things (as

a mobile phone, or an identity card) might open and close relational paths that actually affect homeless subjects in many ways. This is the acknowledgement that homeless people are able to re-work their contexts by themselves, showing hidden capabilities that could be enacted in different ways, offering them different chances. This is about the removal of discursive and relational constraints. This is about the re-working of our approach to homelessness from the grounded, relational, more-than-human and open to changes perspective of this politics.

The quality of the contexts where homeless people have their relational encounter with the world can therefore be evaluated through this politics-of-experience. It is, in other words, “a sphere of judgements regarding the possibilities, and actuality of connections, arrangements, linkages, machines” (Grosz, 1993a:172), sustained by “an ethos ... which adds to the world by framing an energetics of encounter in creative and caring ways which add to the potential for what may become” (Thrift, 2004a:127, quoted in Popke, 2009). Such approach will not lead to the end of homelessness, neither it can assure positive outcomes for everybody. However, it offers a radical new way to avoid the simplification of approaching homelessness as the other side of the norm, which contributes to the production of the normative, almost institutionalized, homeless subject.

To sum up, it seems that the following three points (which distinguish it from the normative model) characterize this political approach to homelessness.

Firstly, in acknowledging the fact that “I am not in space and time, nor do I conceive space and time; I belong to them, my body combines with them and includes them. The scope of this inclusion is the measure of that of my existence” (Merleau-Ponty, 2005 [1945]:140) it allows to stay within homeless people’s relational realm, not the normative abstract. *Therefore, it advocates the necessity to take seriously the entanglements between space, time and the homeless subject.*

Secondly, in acknowledging the fact that “the body, as a producer of difference (through rhythms, gestures, imagination), has an inherent right to difference, formulated against forces of homogenization, fragmentation, and the hierarchical organized power” (Simonsen, 2005:11), it allows to recognize the bare fact that homeless subjects are different, and change continuously in their more-than-human encounter with the city. *Therefore, it advocates a right to difference and consequently to provide differentiated interventions.*

Thirdly, in acknowledging that “activity and passivity, good and bad refer to

the ability to increase or decrease one's capacities, strengths and abilities. [...] the question of ethics is raised whenever the question of a being's, or an assemblage's, capacities and abilities are raised" (Grosz, 1993:172) it allows to recognize the openings and closures of space, and the presence of homeless people own capabilities. *Therefore, it advocates the necessity to challenge the rigidity of certain context, and to work in the direction of enacting homeless people own capabilities in positive and open ways.*

### **8.3 Concrete moral policies**

From every ethic always derives moral strands that are possible to follow in order to concretely enact the framework adopted. In the last section of this work we propose some of these strands, which should just be seen as opportunities rather than prescriptions. They have been individuated on the basis of the local situation that we have investigated in Turin, and are addressed mainly to the Vincenziani's Soup Kitchen, the Cottolengo's and the Service for Needing Adults of the City (this choice has been made on the light of the empirical enquiry proposed in Chapter 6). Nonetheless, these strands are presented in a more general fashion because they can be valuable for all that situations where homelessness is faced through the normative framework.

*Recognize difference.* Policies and interventions should be designed first of all on the basis this point. As this work has possibly showed, homeless subjects are different in at least two senses: in themselves (regarding their desires and projects) and in their relational patterns with the city. Counselling services in particular should be designed in a way able to grasp difference rather than reduce it to simplified categories, investigating as much as possible both the distance that intervene between the desires and the projects of subjects (which can tell us a lot about their annihilation) and the ways through which they perform the city. These are fundamental information that can lead to a new kind of knowledge on homelessness itself, which permit to avoid monolithic procedures and standardized approaches turning the spot of the intervention on the *subject* rather than on *homeless people* as pre-assumed category.

*Recognize the more-than-human nature of homeless people.* Things, as I've argued extensively in this work, matter. Buses, mobile phones, newspapers, as well as the material quality of the environment where services are provided, matter a lot in the constitution of homeless people's expectations, self-estimation, abilities and so on. Policies and interventions – especially the ones based on the universal welfare approach – should turn the provision of goods and facilities from the quantitative to the quality realm, where quality is measured not only in the bare term of value but in term of the capacity of the service or good provided to activate new chances for the individual, or to positively achieve his/her aims. Once again, the provision of goods (as well as of services) needs to be re-directed toward the subject, acknowledging that “we have to shed our mechanist visions of the machine and promote a conception which encompasses all of its aspects: technological, biological, informatic, social, theoretical and aesthetic” (Guattari, 1995:107).

*Recognize the importance of ID's issues.* Among the things that shape homeless' people life and subjectivities, IDs are certainly one of the most powerful devices. They can open the access to certain services, or close it. They can, moreover, be vehicles of stigmatization (as it is the case of the Via della Casa Comunale, 1 fictive residence). The Public sector's monolithic approach, through its often extremely rigid bureaucracy, has a fundamental role in diverting (especially short-term) homeless people from the path proposed by the institution to searching of other ways to survive in the street. Moreover, it has a role in reproducing the stigmatizations that surround the life of these persons. A major effort should hence be promoted in order to simplify the norms and to reduce the gap between the bureaucratic forms and the subjects, as well in imagining new ways to associate fictive residences also to people that do not actually reside in the city (in this sense the proposal of Mendel to give to homeless people the temporary right to use un-common places – as garden sheds – as temporary residence seems interesting; Mendel, 2011:163).

*Recognize shadow work.* Car-parking, the collection of second hand materials from garbage or from the street, as well as the recycling of second hand

clothes are all forms of work labelled as “abusive” just because of a norm, an abstract machine, that codifies spacetime in a certain way closing, hence, opportunities. In this sense:

“the homeless, who [...] always work somehow and somewhere, for example collecting tins and recycling other materials, in today’s reality are probably the only ones systematically doing this socially important work. Yet, society shows no sign of recognition for them” (Mendel, 2011:164).

The recognition of these works can be an easy and powerful step in order to open new chances to homeless people that already perform them or that might activate themselves in that direction.

*Recognize extravagant capacities.* Re-directing the attention to the subject and his/her relational patterns, produce a direct outcome: the possibility to grasp the potentialities and the capacities of each subject. The first moral strand that anyone working with and studying homelessness should follow is to fight definitions as the following one: “the excluded poor as individual lack the conceptual flexibility and general cognitive ability to participate in an appropriate fashion in a postindustrial society either as producer or as consumers” (Byrne, 2005:133). This is simply not true: it is a misunderstanding that derives from seeing the homeless poor just as the back-face side of the normal and productive being. However, in approaching homelessness through a politics-of-experience it is undoubtedly possible to recognize the fact that homeless people exceed (through their own capabilities) the stereotype, the regulatory regime, and the discourse imposed over them. If intelligence is not a matter of the individual but of the individual and the environment, the “cognitive ability” of homeless subjects should be grasped in this constant more-than-human relation. The challenge is to concentrate on each one of them, and find new, innovative, extravagant, ways to make the most out of this intelligence, working both on what they can and want do, and on the environment in which they are soaked.

*Recognize the role of discourses in the constitution of context and subjects.* The homeless as social pathology or the homeless as “Christ” are powerful abstract

machines that affect, as I've shown in this work, *how* homeless people live their lives. Analysing the ways through which homeless people are portrayed, and then the ways through which we move from discourse to the practical enactment of policies and services is *fundamental*. As Liebow has pointed out:

"We talk increasingly about an "underclass" as we try to put more and more distance between ourselves and the very poor. "Underclass" suggests that they live outside (under) the system in which the rest of us live. But homeless women [and men] do live in the same real world that most of us live in" (Liebow, 1993:228).

This is, in the end, the major pitfall of the normative political approach on which I've spent the last few pages, and that could also be expressed in other – perhaps more direct – terms:

"It is easy to react to the plight of such individuals through popular stereotypes of the poor skid row derelict who is homeless by choice, unwilling to work, constantly inebriated, possibly psychotic, reluctant to conform to norms of personal hygiene and dress, and beyond redemption. In order to address the problem of homelessness, it is necessary to avoid such popular characterizations and to examine the interweaving of the numerous elements that generate and sustain these individuals" (Cohen & Sokolovsky, 1989:13).

Concretely speaking, a political and linguistic revision is needed: this does not mean that we could not refer to diseases or Jesus Christ in approaching homelessness, but it means that we could not define and approach it through these normative labels without taking into consideration homelessness in itself.

*Recognize right and duties to homeless people.* As I've shown, the rigidity of certain contexts enacted (mainly) by the universal welfare approach is not able to provide chances to homeless people contributing, moreover, to the production of subjectivities that are characterized both by the distancing of ones own desires from his/her projects and by the relational permanence of the homeless subjects in these contexts (which, although performed in many different and sometimes

innovative ways, still remains deeply eradicated into the street). All the points presented in this list can be seen as possible ways through which politicians, religious people, social educators and practitioners, can rework these rigid contexts into less codified spaces, opening up the possibility for new chances of space. This could be done re-codifying those contexts (and, hence, re-thinking those services) in ways based upon the recognition of the homeless subject as someone in charge of some duty and holder of rights. This kind of codification is radically different from the one currently adopted by the universal welfare approach of religious institutions (but also by some public policies). The latter is based upon the general opening to everyone without concentrating on the specificities of anyone: a codification that can offer only limited chances (e.g. to offer some ways to materially survive in the street).

Moreover, this codification is only apparently “weak” or “loose”, but on the contrary is highly constraining as it is enacted through discourses that are extremely powerful in shaping homeless people’s subjectivity (as I’ve shown in this work with the examples of the counselling services, and the distributions of food and clothes). On the contrary, associating duties and rights with the homeless subject making them responsible for their actions, can be a positive boost both for their positioning (the relation between their desires and projects) and for the relational patterns that they follow. In this latter sense, this re-codification might open new chances to them. In fact, although it might seem that imposing duties is a form of strict codification of a context, it is not necessarily so. It all depends on the ways through which this is done: if duties are related to the capabilities of the subject, and the discourse surrounding the intervention is directed toward the multiple ways through which someone can challenge his/her life, the context will be all but close to changes (and chances).

As Lavanco and Santinello (two Italian scholars sensitive to the universal welfare approach of many Catholic institutions, which they call the “social maternage model”) have recently argued, we should face homelessness through the “construction of an individual project, modelled on the need of the person, but also on his [sic] resources and possibilities, both in a personal sense (abilities, capabilities, wishes) and in concerning the support networks and other opportunities available in that particular context (work, housing, relations)” (Lavanco & Santinello, 2009:97).

## 8.4 Limits and opportunities

We are aware of the fact that the policies proposed could be seen, to a certain extent, as too revolutionary. They certainly claim, in fact, a re-working of the private and public discourses on homelessness spread by the institutions showed in the previous chapter. Some of them could even appear as too vague: to recognize both difference and the more-than-human nature of homeless people is theoretically already a complex task, and could become almost impossible practically. Moreover, there can be good reasons for which such policies could be acknowledged only conceptually and never implemented. One of them is the fact that they certainly require further investments in order to prepare social assistants and volunteers to be ready to grasp the multiplicity of the homeless subjects. Another could be at the level of religious institutions, which might be hostile in converting their messages (as seen the poor as Christ) to more post-secular accounts (although this is certainly possible without losing their stress on the faith in God, as Sermig's case demonstrates).

Nonetheless, these policies could be enacted – at least partially – choosing the one that could guarantee the most-immediate outcomes. Among the one proposed, these are at least three. Firstly, the recognition of rights and duties to homeless people, which could be implemented both by private and public institutions (in the form of making the individual responsible for what he/she does). Just as example, this could be done by asking the individuals to do small jobs for the soup kitchens and shelters (as cleaning or shopping), through regular contracts with a minimum wage (which should differ from the canonical social bursary both for a major attention to the capacity of the individual and for their major length); or even offering mobile-phones or PC's for free loan, with the obligation to return them in good conditions, and associating the time of the leasing to any proof presented by the homeless person that such devices have been used in looking for a job. The effect of such policies could lead to the re-alignment of the projects and desires couplet of each subject (reinvigorating his/her own strength and positivity). Secondly, the acknowledgement of the importance of IDs in the access of public services, which might be expressed with the simplification of the bureaucratic machinery in order to obtain an ID with fictive or real residence. This would

facilitate the access to city's services, and would most of all avoid stressing the subject as much as it actually happens. Thirdly, shadow's work – as parking-helper – could be formally recognized and managed very easily, without any individual contract but just bringing such activities under the umbrella of law's legitimacy. Their recognition could change homeless people attitude toward their own life, leading to positive outcomes similar to the one expressed in the first point.

In the end, although the political claims expressed in this work might seem at a first sight too theoretical and vague, they are not. Indeed, as the last three points have shown, they could be enacted very easily, starting first of all from small changes in the attitude that nuns, priest, volunteers, social educators and assistants take in facing homelessness. Thinking carefully, as this work as shown, at the role that small things and discourses have in the life of homeless subjects, should give enough good reasons to try at least part of these minimum political refinements.

## **8.5 Concluding remarks**

The approach taken in this work can be described as *an ethnographic enquiry on homelessness aimed at grasping the relevance of street's contexts and chances in the more-than-human constitution of homeless people's subjectivities*. Its commitment has been related to the necessity to fill a blank spot in our knowledge – namely understand how homelessness subjectivities are produced *within* and *with* city's contexts.

The literature has been criticized arguing that canonical framing of homelessness do not take into full consideration the nuances that intervene between homeless people and the mechanosphere of the city, constraining it under different analytical umbrella (the disease model, the life-career and the revanchist approach) that do not allow to display the constitution of homelessness at the street level. Developing a non-representational approach and a more-than-human theory of the homeless subjects, the importance of things, affects and power in the constitution of homeless people subjectivity has been theoretically acknowledged. In this fashion, the undertaken fieldwork has investigated how heterogeneous homeless subjects are produced in their contexts, and how spatial chances (of relational change) are opened or closed to them.

This work has hence showed that interrogating homelessness in a more-

than-human fashion a world of multiples subjects emerges, with various attitudes, capabilities, relational and affective characterizations. This theoretical/methodological approach has opened the door to the recognition of spatial chances that might lead, if recognized and enacted, to enrich homeless subjects' perspectives. Accordingly, a critique of the mainstream normative approach on homelessness has been provided, arguing in favour of new political stances that extend the validity of this enquiry beyond Turin's case. The political engagement of this work has hence asserted the necessity to take seriously the entanglements between space, time and the homeless subject; to advocate a right to difference and consequently to differentiated interventions; and to challenge the rigidity of certain urban contexts in order to enact homeless people own capabilities.

The theorization proposed in this work is surely of a radical kind and could probably appear too complex, especially concerning its language (mainly mutated from Deleuze, Guattari and Foucault) that might become a problem for non-specialist readers. In its implementation and divulgation to practitioners, concepts as "content", "expression", "abstract machine" or even "codification", could easily go and leave space to the analysis of discourses and the attention posed on the chance of space. In this sense, both the re-worked theoretical account presented in Chapter 7 and the ethnographies presented in Chapter 4, 5 and 6 could offer interesting material to facilitate the translation of the points expressed in this chapter into concrete political acts. More than this general point, it is worth to conclude this work highlighting its limitations and strengths (at least the one that appear most evident to the author).

Concerning the first point, one of the major limitations of this work is that does not include a conceptualization of homeless people's relational marginality. Although the attention posed on discourses and on some neglected chances to homeless people, the theorization proposed has not been able to fully conceptualize how the homeless subject suffers, in certain circumstances, of lack of contractual power. Decisions are taken on this population, and contexts enacted, without the possibility for homeless people to have an active role in the decision-making process. This point seems particularly relevant especially in light of the political stances proposed in this work, which claim for the assignment of rights and duties to homeless themselves. How could homeless individual negotiate them? In this sense, further researches should be done to understand how the more-

than-human homeless subject could be empowered to resist, or being acknowledge of, the discursive forces that tend to annihilate him/her to the street.

Moreover, the theorization proposed lacked a consistent focus on homeless' people emotions. Although they have been acknowledge, the dimension of discourse and power has been developed more than the affective one. In this sense, the role of joy, fear, excitements, etc. need to be integrated more with the detailed relational study proposed in this research. A major attention to this point could reinforce the analysis of the contexts where homeless subjects are produced, unfolding even more their differences.

A final point on which further work is certainly needed concerns methodology. The more-than-human theorization proposed in this work is of a complex kind and requires not only a coherent approach (achieved, here, through autoethnography from below; reporting; and poiesis) but also further methodological investigations. How the more-than-human could become a methodology in itself? How the role of things in shaping the subjects could be taken into account not only from raptures and closures, but also in its ontological form? More reflections definitely occur, moreover, at the authoethnographic level, in order to grasp the nuances of each singular position without mediating them too much.

Apart these limitations, this work has provided some new contributions to homeless theory too, both in conceptual and political terms, which have been fully expressed in Chapter 7.

This work has taken into account homelessness de-humanising and de-categorizing it. The homeless has been stripped away from its stigmatized categorization, and re-allocated within the other things of the world as an *assemblage* like other. This has provided insights barely present in the literature and, more importantly, it has contribute to wider the spectrum of the things that should be taken into consideration in analysing homeless' people world, in order to acknowledge "the often complex forms of deliberation, calculation, and engagement through which residents [and homeless people] try to do more than simply register the factualness of a bare existence" (Simone, 2010:333). This has lead to the recognition, rather than denial, of the differences of homeless people, following the advocacy of May, Cloke, and Johnsen (2007) (concerned with the differences within British women's experiences of visible homelessness).

In this sense, there are not homeless people to study, but just homeless *subjects* to be traced, in order to grasp the *more-than-human* entanglements that

constitute them in particular *contexts*. In this sense, if “the appropriate unit of analysis for democratic theory is neither the individual human nor an exclusively human collective but the (ontologically heterogeneous) “public” coalescing around a problem” (Bennett, 2010:108), having paid attention to contexts, things and the nuances of the subject is a political movement too, because it moves the attention from a supposed autonomous entity, “the (pathological) homeless”, to the interweaving sum of materialities that constitute the subject – challenging directly the ways through which homelessness is faced (and studied).

This last point and the attention posed on the emotional details of homeless people life, have lead also to an advocacy for homeless people *capabilities*. Talking about gay and lesbians persons, Valentine and Bell have pointed out that

“the performative choices available to those with non- or counter-hegemonic sexualities are in part an embodiment of the regulatory regimes which operate to constrain the possibilities of performance, and in part a claiming of the sexed self as a site of resistance precisely to those regulatory regimes” (Bell & Valentine, 1995:143).

In a sense, for homeless people is the same: they do not acknowledge their capabilities to themselves, or they do not see them at all because they recognize themselves as homeless: deprived, non-able and poor men (or women). In light of this, the political issue is that they choose to do only certain things and not other, precisely because it is not recognized that they could do those other things (maybe also in a different and innovative way of the imagined one). Only seeing and acknowledging the fact that they exceed (through their capabilities) the stereotype, the regulatory regime, the discourse imposed over them, we have been able to recognize the necessity for new paths, new contexts and new line-of-flights that could really change their condition.

Moreover, this research has argued for an understanding of homelessness that is not static, not ever enduring, but always in motion and subjected to unpredictable outcomes. The concept of *chance of space* has been developed to sustain the hypothesis that city’s space offers infinite potentialities to homeless subjects, and this has opened the door for an innovative analysis of urban contexts read from their codification and powerful effects (rather than from their supposed revanchist attitude). The proposition of this point has lead to the recognition that the City’s bureaucracy, with its attention at the homeless as sociologically deviant, or the universal welfare approach of religious institutions, with their seeing the poor as Christ, are not able (although with different nuances and reasons) to take

into consideration neither homeless' capabilities, nor their different subjectivities. The political paths suggested in the previous sections could be seen as first and partial tentative to overcome these important issues.

With this work we haven't claimed to present "the truth" or a comprehensive theory on homelessness. However, we attested the necessity to seek for "a" truth around homelessness, "a" truth that, in Badiou's term, is "committed to chance. It is unpredictable, incalculable. It is beyond what is" and appear only when new event emerges, new assemblages and subjectivities take place (Badiou, 2009:46). This truth lies, in the end, in the recognition of the complexity of the homeless subjects, and in the enactment of the chances that urban space can offer to them. To work in this direction, a poetic warmachine should be activated (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004 [1980]), both against the fixities of the so-called "social pathologies" (as homelessness has been for a long time depicted) and against discourses that reproduce the homeless world. With the theorization proposed and the transposition of my encounters with Paolo, Albano, Roberto, Antonio, Carlo, Marco, Valerio, Daniele, Giuseppe, Giorgio, Davide and Silvano, I hope to have showed how we might begin this *war* for such never-ending, open and multiple truth.

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