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Makeshift borders in Porte de la Chapelle

Strategies of imperfect inhabitation across Paris' Boulevard Périphérique

Parigi
teoria urbana
informalità
confini
Paris
urban theory
makeshift
borders

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L'articolo indaga i luoghi della migrazione e l'abitare lungo il confine del Boulevard Périphérique di Parigi, identificando quanto tale infrastruttura materiale generi spazi di soglia e incontro tra l'urgenza di resistenza e la violenza politica del rifiuto.

Ai confini parigini, le costanti pratiche di contenimento e controllo coesistono con la produzione di resistenze collettive e luoghi di solidarietà. Lo testimoniano le molteplici esperienze di abitazioni informali nel corso degli anni, come La Zone e le bidonvilles della periferia nord-orientale, nonché l'attuale sistema disperso di campi di persone in transito che proliferano dal 2015. Queste dinamiche testimoniano l'ambivalente prossimità che permea tali geografie come simultaneamente controllate, esclusive e protettive, attraverso opache liminalità che fungono da terreno fertile per corpi altrettanto opachi.

L'articolo nasce da una ricerca sul campo sviluppata tra settembre 2021 e settembre 2022 nella Grand Paris, in collaborazione con associazioni locali a sostegno di persone in movimento, persone richiedenti asilo e rifugiati all'interno dei campi del confine parigino. Lo studio mirava a rendere visibili modelli plurali di produzione dello spazio urbano, trascurati dalla città contemporanea neoliberista e securitizzata, promuovendo nuove forme di abitare. Sulla base di ciò, la ricerca mirava a decifrare nuove categorie di pianificazione urbana che testimoniano il gigantesco potere delle pratiche autonome contro la negligenza degli Stati e delle organizzazioni internazionali. Approfondendo tali dinamiche di resistenza e strategie imperfette di abitare l'inabitabile, l'articolo guarda ai confini come occasioni per mettere in atto progetti minori in grado di mantenere vive quelle aree in cui forme plurali di vita trovano gradi di protezione e legittimità nella loro espressione spaziale.

The paper investigates spaces of displacement and makeshift inhabitations along the border of Paris' Boulevard Périphérique, identifying how such a material infrastructure generates thresholds and encounters between the urgency of resistance and the political violence of rejection.

At Parisian borders, ongoing practices of containment and control coexist with the production of collective resistance and solidarity. This is testified by the multiple experiences of makeshift dwellings over the years, such as La Zone and the bidonvilles of the northeastern periphery, as well as the current dispersed system of makeshift camps that have been proliferating since 2015. These dynamics testify to the ambivalent proximity that permeates such geographies as simultaneously controlled, exclusive, and protective, through opaque liminalities that serve as fertile ground for equally opaque bodies.

The paper stems from field-based research developed between September 2021 and September 2022 in Greater Paris, collaborating with local associations supporting people on the move and refugees inside Parisian border makeshift camps. The study attempted to make visible plural patterns of urban space production, neglected by the contemporary neoliberal and securitised city, and promote new forms of inhabitation. Based on that, the research aimed at deciphering new categories of urban planning that testify to the gigantic power of autonomous practices against the negligence of states and international organisations alike. By delving into such dynamics of resistance and imperfect strategies of inhabiting the uninhabitable, the paper looks at borders as occasions to enact weak and minor projects able to keep alive those areas in which plural lives find degrees of protection and legitimacy in their spatial expression.

INTRODUCTION

Since 2015, thousands of refugees, people on the move and people seeking asylum have transited through Greater Paris either to seek refuge in France or continue their journey to the United Kingdom. Several makeshift camps and other types of informal shelters have proliferated in the French capital since then, in the form of temporary settlements, through more or less dispersed tents or precarious cardboard boxes in public spaces, as well as through the occupation of vacant buildings.

Owing to the extreme temporary nature of such camps, unfinished migrations or the consequence of the inefficiency of the system of reception and accommodation of people seeking asylum in France, many of these settlements are either situated near the main railway stations (Babels, 2017), or along Paris' borders, along what locals call 'intra-muros', distinctly marked by the circular outline of the *Périphérique*.

In the years from 2015 to 2017, considered to be the apex of the so-called European "migration crisis", the city saw the development of makeshift camps, shelters, and squats capable of accommodating thousands of people, as a fix to address the inertia and incapability of governments and international organisations to provide decent protection and support.

Until now, the neighbourhood of Porte de la Chapelle, on the border between the XVIII arrondissement of Paris (intra-muros) and the municipality of Saint Denis (extra-muros), has been an emblematic space of transit and refuge. Despite the ongoing police evacuations[1] and public hostility, the district has remained a favoured place for makeshift inhabitation and solidarity since 2015.

As an administrative borderland between two prefectures and municipalities, characterised by the massive presence of transport infrastructures, the area has served both as a liminal territory of marginalisation as well as serving as a pretext to keep the undesirables (Agier, 2016) in their invisible makeshift roofs of exclusion and make them stranded within such spaces of blurred authority.



Fig.1 - Night maraude of Wilson in Porte de la Chapelle (S. Mastromarino, 2022).



Fig.2 - Breakfast maraude near Porte de la Chapelle (S. Mastromarino, 2022).

Here, at the same time, the municipality of Paris, together with the association "Emmaus solidarité", opened up the humanitarian camp of Porte de la Chapelle in November 2016, with a capacity of 400 places, intended to host first migratory arrivals.

Even after the humanitarian camp was dismantled, Porte de la Chapelle continued being one of the main places of transit and refuge for most people on the move arriving in the capital, with makeshift camps settling every week and local associations distributing aid through daily "maraudes"[2] (Fig.1 and Fig.2).

This paper investigates how borders are inhabited and politicised, and how marginalised bodies and spaces coexist in the contemporary European neoliberal city, constantly bordered, and zoned to conform to common perceptions of renewal and security.

By delving into spaces in which new patterns of imperfect inhabitation are constantly renegotiated to guarantee the existence of fragile and common lives, our aim is to analyse the border as a medium to promote new categories of architectural and urban planning. This spatial inquiry restores the ephemeral and ongoing taxonomies of border infrastructures, as continuously repositioned, reconsidered and reactivated by different means.

Barriers, infrastructures of connection, makeshift camps and spaces of solidarity are different yet contiguous sequences of a common infrastructure of holding that find fertile ground at the border. Not only are such conditions kept marginal and concurrently pushed outside and inside in an eternal state of opacity, but it is exactly through such opacity that borders embody and people's right to space becomes visible and manifested as an autonomous resistive act of their own legitimacy.

It is a means of separation between "us" and "them", a "vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary" and it is therefore "in a constant state of transition" (Anzaldùa, 1987: 3). Borders reflect the equally ongoing temporary and marginalised condition of racialized bodies in transit. Accepting the assumption that borders are multifaceted, ideological, and imagined spaces that raise new conceptions of sovereignty (Longo, 2019) and institutional material dispositifs that allow a silent reproduction of policies of segregation as well as forced displacement by governments and municipalities, we propose to shift the epistemological foci to the experiences of the 'bordered people' that survive such dynamics of dispossession yet find new ways to "live with this trouble" (Haraway, 2016) by dwelling beyond the shelter.

With this paper, we claim to define and represent not only the power of the often marginalised in resettling and dismantling borders as an occasion of inhabitation but also to take these experiences as a reference to question the relation between urbanity and the makeshift.

Based on that, the research questions the possibility to theorise a series of margins that sustain the power of marginalised autonomies and reframe new patterns of a subaltern urbanism (Roy, 2011), destructuring the monist criteria that classify public space inhabitation as (il)legal, (il)legitimate, (im)mobile.

How do urban borders reflect the dynamics of holding people on the move as a concurrent act of ongoing reception and rejection? How do makeshift camps and people's network of solidarity reshape – and resist – the urban borders, zoning, and plans of the gentrified urban renewal of Paris? Can these strategies of imperfect inhabitation and resistance provide references to decipher new emergency practices of dwelling beyond the shelter?

Drawing on the encounters between vulnerability and resistance (Butler et alii, 2016) at Porte de la Chapelle, we aim at making visible and legitimate the power of minor and autonomous voices in architectural and urban planning across borders and cities.

This means understanding the threshold that lies between 'projecting' and 'separating', so restoring the responsibility of urban planning and policies to create spaces of coexistence and difference (Di Campli and Bianchetti, 2019) that refuse practices of differential inclusion.

The paper stems from empirical observations carried out throughout one year of field-based research on spaces of migration and refuge in France.[3]

Longitudinal data have been collected from testimonies and experiences of displacement from people on the move and from supporting actors through participatory observation, by collaborating with local associations supporting people on the move through weekly aid distributions and informal sheltering. Semi-structured and in-depth interviews have been coded and cross-compared to identify contingencies and genealogies in Porte de la Chapelle. Newspapers and national and local reports allowed us to gather information about evictions and violence at the border and represent them through spatial and textual counter-narratives of displacement in the area.

The research has used cartographic analyses, photography, and statistical and territorial data. Other than studying the territory through a multi-scale approach, the convergence of ethnographic research and architectural inspection permitted drawing on the analysed spaces as spatial dispositifs to acknowledge urban theories and philosophical inquiries.

The mapping of makeshift camps, spaces of support and practices of hostility has been overlaid to identify common spaces of vulnerability and holding. In fact, the research aimed at highlighting the ambivalent status of control and care towards refugees, people seeking asylum and people on the move, as a result of the concurrent practices of rejection and solidarity.

Displacement and encampments have long been at the forefront of policy and planning agendas for states and international organisations, across internal frontiers and urban areas. The thousands of people that transited through Paris and inhabited temporarily across the border of the Périphérique have soon faced the inefficiency of its system of reception and the hostility of law enforcement, and local citizens as well as urban projects

of regeneration and renewal. By recounting the stories of the dispossession of people on the move and local associations, the research looked at those tactics that resist such politics of exclusion by reactivating the marginal.

It stressed the urgency to rethink the threshold and planning visions by including makeshift shelters as decolonial and non-dominant transit shelters.

The research was finalised into a project that attempted to restore degrees of protection to such radical places of resistance on borders. It aimed at encompassing those minor voices, weak and fragile infrastructures of life (Bianchetti and Boano, 2022) as a catalyst for new categories of planning and design.

As a result, the observed situations of resistance on borders were analysed and re-questioned with local associations to collaboratively design prototypes of makeshift reception and protection, such as pop-up kitchens, public furniture, as well as essential facilities to endow people on the move and supporting actors inhabiting shelters and public spaces.

The first part of this paper will analyse Paris through the historical socio-economic, and political mechanisms at the origins of a scattered social and material borderland. We will provide of the Périphérique as an example of ongoing infrastructure of differential exclusion, concurrently softening and enhancing its boundaries to keep unhoused people and people on the move in their continual dispossessed and placeless status. By exploring the case of Porte de la Chapelle, the paper aims at providing material examples of how borders attract subaltern patterns of urban space production through convulsive mechanisms of exclusion as well as opaque infrastructures of protection and care.

By recounting the ambivalent history of solidarity and control at the Parisian outskirts, as well as the attempts and future objectives of institutional urban planning and policies to shelter yet preserve a common perception of urban renewal, Porte de la Chapelle will highlight such ambiguous contingencies of care and control at urban borders.

Finally, we conclude by analysing possible encounters between urbanity, borders, and the makeshift practices of resistance by people on the move and supporting actors.

We aim at making visible such radical infrastructures in which one can see the gigantic power of marginalised autonomies against the negligence of states, the strategies elaborated by people left at the border to inhabit the marginal and manifest new legitimacies and identities of urbanity.

GREATER PARIS: BORDERS AS CATALYSTS OF MAKESHIFT DWELLING

Genealogy of Parisian borders

The territory of Greater Paris represents an emblematic case of spatial inequality, where the conflictual relationship of bodies and spaces inhabiting the neoliberal contemporary city, has radically transformed the city of passages into a territory in which spatial and social borders have cancelled out any possible condition of porosity (Viganò et al., 2018).

It is a material borderland, where the massive presence of infrastructures of production and mobility define margins of contrasting spaces and methods of adaptation; a social borderland, where wealth, poverty and vulnerability are able to encounter each other and, at the same time, are made visibly distant (Secchi, 2013).

On the one hand were the densely constructed, nineteenth century Haussmannian Paris and the business districts of the western luxury residential banlieues of the prefecture of Hauts-de-Seine; on the other hand, were the industries, immigrant hubs and former bidonvilles of the “quatre-ving-treize”, the prefecture of Seine Saint Denis.

In the common imagination, the city of the rich is in the south-west, in the VII or XVI arrondissements of the large Haussmannian parks and palaces.

The city of the poor is near the north-eastern borders and ‘extra-muros’, around the municipalities of Saint-Denis, Aubervilliers and La Courneve (Fig.3).

While on one side, the causes of this division are to be found in a plurality of stories of industrial and financial planning, immigration, and common perception, on the other, their origins respond to the unique strategy of separation and zoning at the centre of the urbanisation of capitalist societies, of which the French capital is an emblematic catalyst example (Dear and Scott, 1981).

The new asset of the city created during Haussmann’s time is already spatially strategical by virtue of overcoming sanitarian and production crises through to the recodification of zones,and the connections between dynamic centres of activity, all perceived to systematically generate capital (Harvey, 2003).

Throughout the entire nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the production of the city was driven by the intention of generating a new collective image of social order under the pressure of progress and innovation. Its erratic course is to be found in the conflictual relationship between this strategy and the acts of resistance and support towards vulnerable classes, progressively made distant or invisible.

Paris, as a scenario of modernity inhabited by conflictual classes (Benjamin, 1935), recalls the generation of collective resistance, the socialistic utopias, and most importantly, the elaboration of

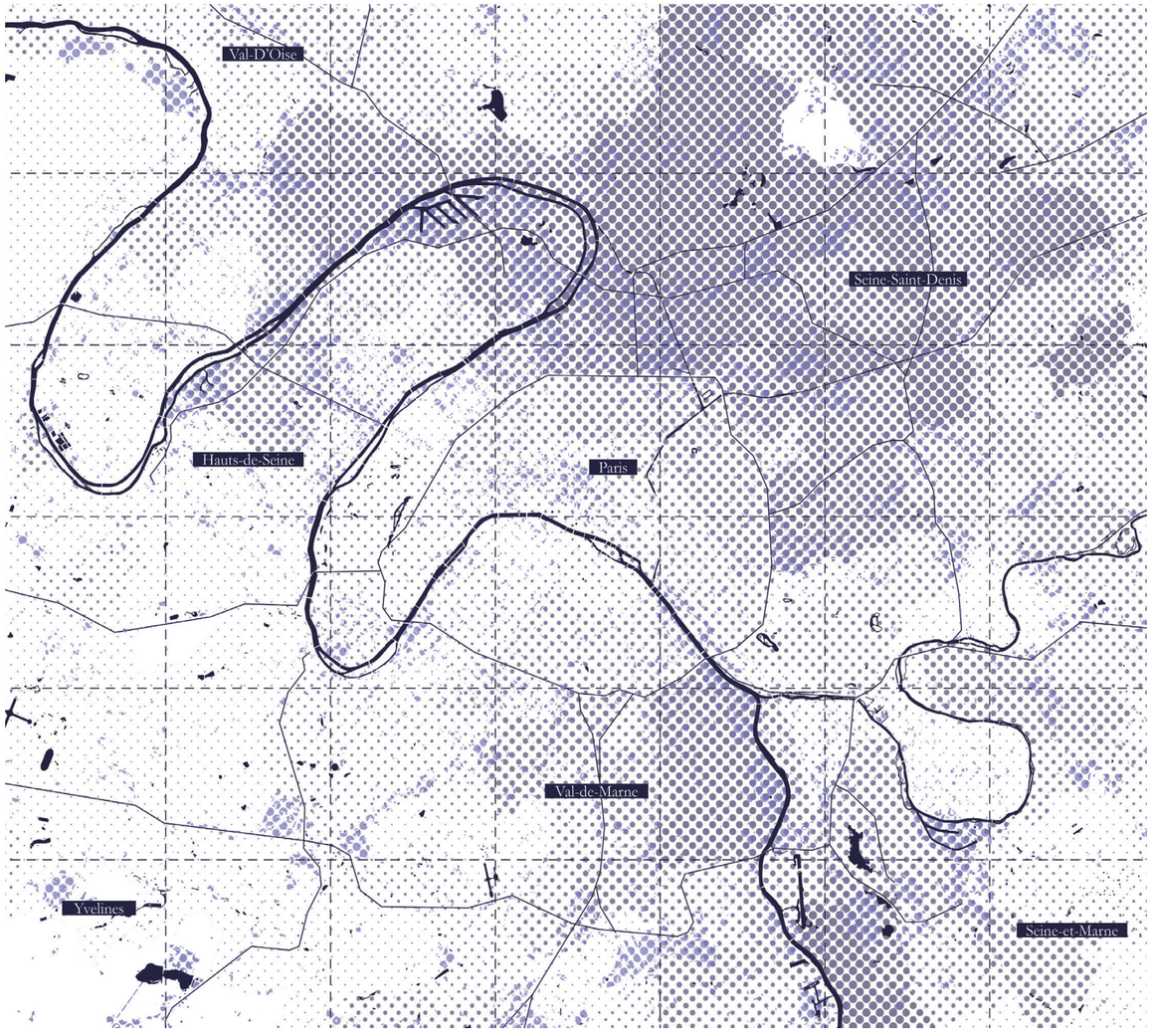


Fig.3 Industrial areas (blue) and percentage of people living in low-income (black, greater by intensity) in Greater Paris (S. Mastromarino, 2022).

new forms of self-organisation and occupation of spaces and practices of refuge.

Multiple experiences have followed this ambivalence throughout the years, such as the development of La Zone, the area of slums and informal dwellings that proliferated to occupy the voids left by the deconstruction of the Enceinte de Thiers (the outer wall of Paris); the bidonvilles of the industrial areas around Nanterre or Saint-Denis, responding to the urge of housing for the labour force; the porous system of squats and shelters; and nowadays, the makeshift camps of people seeking asylum and people on the move of the north-eastern arrondissements of the city and in neighbouring municipalities.

Peculiarly, all these new forms of subaltern urbanisation (Roy, 2011) mainly occurred and keep orbiting around the material and administrative border of the Périphérique, pushed by repulsive forces and spatial opportunities of take informal action both inside and outside on the outskirts of the French capital. To counter-act these phenomena, the efforts of urban public policies from the 1970s onwards were aimed precisely at including these areas into the bigger conurbation of Paris, which in some ways culminated into the current conformation of the area of Grand Paris. However, obsessed with what Secchi defines as a “quantitative theory of the production of building market” (Secchi, 1984) – that is basically the idea that it was enough to build houses to solve the “problem of integration” – housing and public projects then followed the necessity to separate and divide, enhancing the border and the progressive reproduction of nuclei of wealth and security, leaving behind the dimension of a possible collective coexistence.

Transferring this historical analysis to the twenty-first century and across the spectrum of spaces of displacement and refuge the

question of collective lives – in contrast to differential inclusivity and progressive borderisation – remains unsolved. In the context of the Grand Paris, such spaces of displacement remain anchored to the need to delimit, separate, move away, to open and to close. Urban planning becomes a dispositif of control for the creation of a collective idea of safety and order.

Based on that, public policies, covered under the spectrum of urban regeneration, are justified to exercise their dominant power to separate and force established forms of local practices and identities.

At the same time, those forcibly displaced by these acts of exclusion through inclusion, are pushed to find makeshift solutions to subvert these processes, forging new strategies to inhabit the systematised uninhabitability of certain spaces.

Residual voids, vacant buildings, and wastelands are some of the spaces that have become, on the one hand, the result of the zoned contemporary city and, on the other, the shelter for the undesired bodies from the space of ordinariness. Critically reading the territory through these places of difference permits deciphering practices of adaptation and sharing that generate the need for movement and coexistence between black bodies in a white space (Mbembe, 2019).

Looking at the methods and dispositifs used by refugees, people seeking asylum and people on the move to subvert established local identities and claim their right to space is fundamental to interpreting unsettled urban and architectural patterns of imperfect inhabitation on the edge.

Porte de la Chapelle

Based on participatory observation carried out through volunteering assistance to people in transit between September 2021 and August 2022 in Paris, we present the case of Porte de la Chapelle as a fragment of such infrastructure of concurrent dynamics of care and control (Tazzioli, 2018; Sharpe, 2016; Derrida, 2000) at urban borders. Porte de la Chapelle serves to represent the complex and often conflictual approaches to addressing the spatial legitimacy of marginalised communities in urban areas, as well as people's autonomous power of claiming a right to space.

Through longitudinal analysis of the area, we have been able to recount the evolutions and current conformations of border inhabitation in the area, in order to understand such strategies of imperfect dwelling and their function as a generator of legitimate patterns of urban infrastructures of lives.

Porte de la Chapelle is a neighbourhood in the XVIII arrondissement at the edges of the capital, bordering the city of Saint-Denis. As the name suggests, it is part of the 17 gates of the city, situated on the old Enceinte de Thiers (outer wall) replaced by the Boulevard Périphérique.

The area is recognised by the massive presence of infrastructure, being it the intersections of various local and national roads and motorways commencing from this gate and creating an important and massive transport hub. Given the peripheric and industrial nature, the presence of important infrastructures, and notably the historical establishment of informal dwellings and bidonvilles, Porte de la Chapelle represents specific urban and social properties in the collective imagination of the inhabitants – those linked with immigration, clandestine, precarious, and unsafe activities.

The bordering infrastructure shapes a territory composed of a series of liminal spaces with unspecified functions or management: a patchwork of different yet equally undefined spaces that blur the dichotomy between what is public and private or their accessibility (Fig.4).

In this context, Porte de la Chapelle becomes an active space of migration and refuge in the city, providing opaque spaces that allow the presence of equally opaque bodies. From 2015 and with the progressive evacuation of the Calais jungle, makeshift camps started to establish in the northeastern periphery of the capital, especially in the neighbourhood of La Chapelle. Starting from La Chapelle and Stalingrad, people in transit and refugees have been progressively displaced and pushed outside of the city.

Pushing displaced persons from Paris and from the neighbouring departments soon made the border the privileged and densest space of refuge, keeping people in a constant stateless status marked by the opacity of the spaces they inhabited.

With the presence of such a vulnerable and dispossessed population, the reputation of the neighbourhood develops further as the setting of many other situations of precarity, such as prostitution, drug dealing, and different kinds of criminality.

In fact, institutional support and law enforcement have been mainly oriented on preserving the boundaries between local communities and the unsafe conditions in the camps, defending the safety of residents by constantly evacuating and displacing the unhoused people. Despite the perpetual evacuations and rejection of displaced persons in Porte de la Chapelle over time, the neighbourhood is also home to one of the main dispositifs of reception put into action in 2016 by the municipality of Paris.

The Centre Humanitaire de Porte de la Chapelle, commissioned by the nation and managed by the capital city and Emmaus Solidarité, was conceived by the architect Julien Beller in the form of what has been nicknamed "the bubble" (Fig.5).

The project continues, with the objective to create temporary dwellings for first arrivals, thus with the consequent aim to curtail the situation of people living in the streets and makeshift camps.

Other than promoting a new critical place of categorisation and concentration (Katz, 2022), a visibly overstretched reception with biometric recognition upon entrance (Agier and Le Courant, 2022), the centre has often not been enough to host arrivals, enabling the proliferation of dispersed makeshift camps in its proximities, made of people waiting to be located in the centre, unwilling to enter it or refused for lack of available places. Both for its physical configurations and for the ambivalent concurrency of practices of rejection and reception to which it was subjected, Porte de la Chapelle might probably be considered the main space of displacement in the capital since 2015, with frequent forced evacuations, often consisting of thousands of people.

At the same time, the area is at the centre of processes of renewal initiated in 2002 by the city of Paris. The municipality is gradually putting into action the propositions of the Grand Projet de Renouvellement Urbain (GPRU), an operation of redesignation of areas of primary intervention, through projects intended to tackle the unfavourable living condition of its inhabitants, and promoting economic development and access to services and public spaces. The main interventions in Porte de la Chapelle include the research centre of Campus Condorcet or the ZAC Gare des Mines-Fillettes. This is a project extended on either side of the ring road aiming at promoting social inclusion by dismantling the threshold of the Périphérique. In addition to the already established process of gentrification and therefore protracted displacement of refugees and people on the move in areas to be reconsidered, the Olympic Games to be held in Paris in 2024 have been imagined as a way to give a new prosperous life to the neighbourhoods of the Parisian periphery and the department of Seine-Saint-Denis.

Based on that, Saint-Denis, right on the outskirts of Porte de la Chapelle, would become the location of the majority of Olympic sites and Porte de la Chapelle a



Fig.4 - Residual spaces and inhabitants under the Périphérique, Porte de la Chapelle (S. Mastromarino, 2022).



Fig.5 - Former humanitarian camp "the Bubble", now the construction site of the Campus Condorcet (S. Mastromarino, 2022).



Fig.6 - Crossings and Olympic Games 2024 construction sites in Porte de la Chapelle. (S. Mastromarino, 2022).

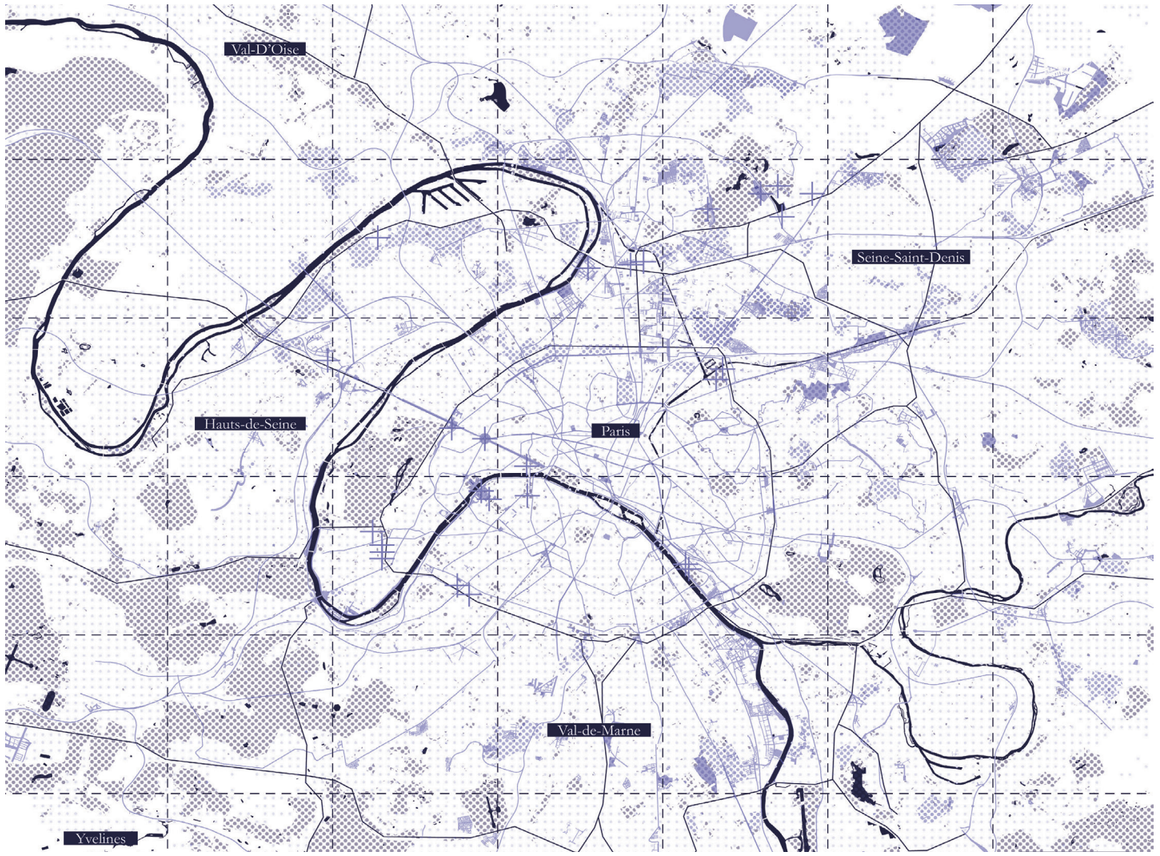


Fig.7 - Main areas of urban renewal (blue) and JO2024 sites (crosses) (S. Mastromarino, 2022).

great new hub of touristic and sporting attractions with the construction of the Paris Arena II (Fig.6 and Fig.7).

This decision provoked a big reaction among activists and researchers (Wolfe, 2023), especially those with concerns around the increased potential phenomena of gentrification and additional dispersion of the unhoused and vulnerable populations inhabiting these places.

This is progressively testified by the operations of the municipality in the first months of 2023, such as the recurrent police harassments and evacuations of refugees in the area[4]. Once again, people are forcibly displaced into a limbo of opaque assistance, while their spaces of resistance become ruins of solidarity, making visible their ambivalent state on hold.

CONCLUSION: BORDER URBANISM

Borders to hold the marginal

The current situation at Porte de la Chapelle, analysed throughout the field-based research in 2021 and 2022, as well as through ongoing observation of the actions of volunteers and activists in the area, shows a sensibly less dense presence of people on the move and people seeking asylum, with makeshift camps that appear more as an archipelago of tents and informal dwellings distributed within and across the existing infrastructure.

Compared to past years, the people transiting here are progressively confronted with the spatial violence of planning agendas and evictions, through interventions of renewal, gentrification and touristification driven by the upcoming architectural interventions of the Campus Condorcet and/or the Olympic Arena.

Nonetheless, the strong attachment of displaced persons to the place, either for the presence of support or for the already established multiculturality of this neighbourhood, makes it still highly frequented daily and a perpetual space of people's makeshift inhabitation. Based on this context, understanding the ambivalent dynamics of reception and rejection across the Périphérique requires requestioning the role of borders in reshaping the social continuous reconfiguration of neoliberal cities. The empirical research promotes the urge for a paradigm shift in urban planning, especially when related to those liminal and dividing areas where marginalised communities are displaced. By destructuring the conceptual and material representation of the borderland, we attempt to interrogate the role of the urban and architectural project in keeping alive those areas in which loss, multiplicity and difference find spatial legitimacy.

To begin with, the border itself constitutes a spatial dimension, not a mere line, but a borderland constituted by an infinity of punctual elements characterised by the interconnection and conflict between the two localities and identities of the bordering territories.

As a buffer zone, the border space takes its form from its separating elements, implying that its material and social characteristics are defined and made spatial through its relationship with the neighbouring and the outside (Febvre, 1988).

What crosses this liminality is then somehow equally separate, categorised, simultaneously inside and outside the physical space and its normativity. The border itself changes depending on who travers it. It is an "interactive biopolitical architecture" that constructs and deconstructs itself depending on the relationships between individuals and state, a "regulating device that mediates between birth and nationhood" (Petti et al., 2007: 77). Consequently, the border space is the epistemic element – or, citing Sassen (2007), "heuristic space" –, a generator of the multiple and subjective gazes through which the territory can be perceived.

It is precisely through this controversial reflection that the border space, be it the national frontier, the urban/rural separation or the urban liminalities of unsolved legacies, is positioned at the backbone of the practices of differential inclusion that enable ambivalent dynamics of hostility and solidarity towards the marginalised and undesirables (Agier, 2008).

Placing these assumptions in the urban environment, the concept of the right to the city emerges, as well as the ambivalent boundary between the citizen and the inhabitant.

Referring to the "right to the city", Lefebvre questions if inhabitants have the same right to the city as citizens. He argues that it is not the citizenship, but "the everyday experience of inhabiting the city that entitles one to a right to the city", being it the "set in motion when inhabitants decide to rise up and reclaim space in the city, when they assert use value over exchange value, encounter over consumption, interaction over segregation, free activity and play over work" (Lefebvre, 1996). Based on that, people who transit, by settling and unsettling through imperfect and resistive acts of habitation, claim their right to space and the equal legitimacy of those who have the privilege to call themselves a citizen.

However, despite the conceptual validity of this assertion, the real scenario is made up of people constantly trying to find new ways to protect themselves from police eviction and public hostility, in a context of differential inclusion triggered by the progressive privatisation of public spaces and gentrified urban renewal. Being deprived of the political space, yet present in the physical one, refugees and people on the move themselves are therefore forced to find strategies to inhabit the city and imperfectly dwell in their spaces.

"Building uninhabitable places," Boano and Astolfo argue, "is the negation of the historical a priori of architecture: to inhabit" (Boano and Astolfo, 2020: 556) that finds some degree of flexibility and opacity at borders, in their urban, rural, or political connotation, as a liminal space of blurred autonomy, ownership and control.

Within this, displacement, among other forms of marginality and exclusion, plays a remarkable role in reshaping the social map of the city, as defined by Lefebvre, especially if we refer to the contemporary European neoliberal city, as a transnational hub of connections and political implication.

Displacement defines new patterns in an entrenched transnational urban system, through sociocultural and political processes and spaces by which actors forge connections between localities across (often) national frontiers.

These dynamics coexist, on the one hand, with the uncertain and opaque marginalisation of the displaced people, and, on the other, with a spatial system created and regulated by boundaries and geopolitical liminalities.

The imaginaries of the contemporary city, often described as an archipelago of fluid spaces, crossed by constant flows and primary representation of the transnational space, implode when those spaces and relations do not function as intended, plunging into crisis, and revealing their flaws (Hilal and Petti, 2019).

This is the case of most of the makeshift camps and spaces of refuge analysed in the Greater Paris area. Porte de la Chapelle is an administrative border and infrastructural hub, an encounter of different mobility systems and a crossing point for a great number of daily commuters, passing through for a couple of minutes a day. It is a place of different levels, passages and surfaces which accordingly generate a series of liminalities and wastelands that remain unsolved in the calculated and zoned system of the city. It embodies the property of the urban border as a space not initially conceived to be inhabited, but rather to be traversed, where the efforts of planning were focused on transport and systems of connections.

This place falls into crisis when people are forced to inhabit it, deconstructing its primary function as a space of transit, and reassembling it as a space of shelter and support – as maintained by the several associations that act in these liminal areas of the city.

Delphine Seyrig, Porte d'Aubervilliers, Cheval Noir or La Marseillaise[5] are several other examples of makeshift places

of dwelling and refuge where borders have enacted such forms of displaced urbanity, reacting to the differential exclusion that public spaces embody in the neoliberal European city. Hence, through different practices of appropriation of space across the border, the inhabitants are building the public space, subverting norms and limitations and reshaping the apparent selective uninhabitability of the city (Simone, 2016). At the same time, this ambivalent condition is mostly reflected in such public and accessible border areas where refugees, people on the move and unhoused people find shelters to set up their refuge. Bridges, infrastructures, and wastelands are turned from public areas into shelters, subverting in some ways what right to space entitles, deconstructing the monist dimensions of legal and illegal, accessible and inaccessible or "us" and "them" that such separations create both in the urban ground and collective imaginaries.

The border as a weak project of imperfect dwelling

This paper looks at the border as an attempt to rethink paradigms of planning that stem from the recognition of plural lives and plural urban spaces that coexist in the western contemporary city and have not sufficiently been made visible and legitimate. Porte de la Chapelle raises questions about the deep-seated connections and ancestral lineages formed by displacement in urban areas. It demonstrates the strong correlation between the placeless status of people seeking asylum, people on the move, and the spaces they are compelled to inhabit.

This condition is enhanced spatially by places characterised by the massive presence of infrastructures, ambiguous boundaries, undefined wastelands, and marginality resulting from displacement, epitomising the blurry threshold between accessibility, legality, private and public.

It represents the spatial manifestations of the enduring state on hold that displaced persons embody. At the same time, Porte de la Chapelle forms part of an assemblage of makeshift shelters within the city, challenging its norms, identity, and apparent uninhabitability, and establishing new forms of legitimacy through displacement. Against the negligence of states, new patterns of space reproduction emerge, supporting informal practices of resistance, embracing the voids, the marginal and the unfinished.

The acts of solidarity in Porte de la Chapelle are architectures in transit, lifelines (Boano and Bianchetti, 2022) that create new spaces of maintenance and coexistence among vulnerable lives kept marginal at borders (Fig.8).

They are not solutions of reception, yet they allow one to "live

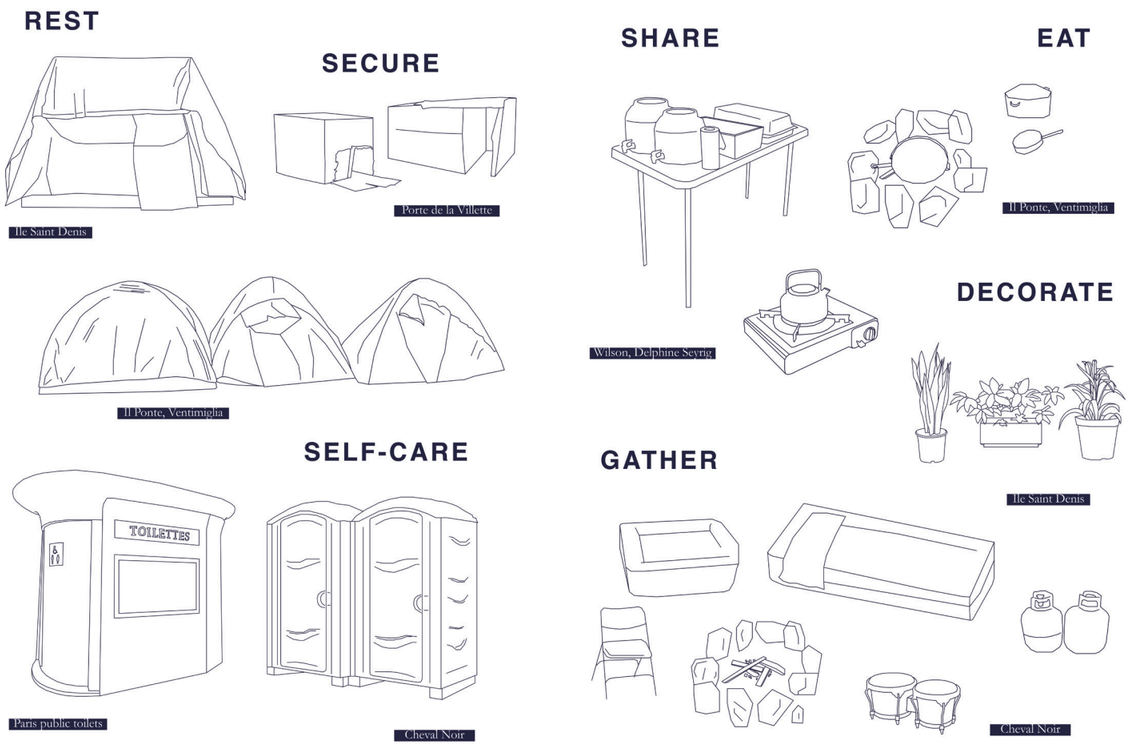


Fig.8 - Makeshift dispositifs of inhabitation across camps, squats, and informal shelters, observed and analysed in Greater Paris and at the French-Italian border (S. Mastromarino, 2022).

with the trouble" (Haraway, 2016) and guarantee the endurance of rejected lives in transit. This paper is not a direct critique of current planning agendas along Paris' borders, nor does it claim to depict possible solutions of reception in the territory under investigation, although it stems from a clear political standpoint.

By showing the ongoing dynamics of holding and the subsequent network of solidarity, the makeshift inhabiting at borders suggests a critical paradigm shift in the built environment, towards the protection of minor (Boano, 2021) and autonomous voices and the preservation of their ongoing state of latency.

Postcolonial scholarship points out how life on earth is undergoing processes of 'extraction' and 'exhaustion' that produce "frontier bodies" (Mbembe, 2020), of 'expulsions' by contributing to the generation of "choking subjects" (Tazzioli, 2021), "shattered zones" (Stoler, 2022) and wasted populations (Armiero, 2022).

Marginalised people and ecosystems are being constantly displaced or removed from the possibility of a future, making life inextricably intertwined with the promise of death, police and disappearance: the impossibility of inhabitation (Boano, 2021; Boano and Astolfo, 2020).

Porte de la Chapelle, and more widely the whole Parisian Périphérique and the makeshift inhabitations that have proliferated around it, make clear how borders enact simultaneously ambivalent dynamics of exclusion and inclusion that control marginalised bodies yet permit some degrees of protection and existence.

This situation calls for the development of new diagnostic mechanisms as well as new design gestures to confront injustices and to imagine unthinkable futures and different ways of living.

This requires asserting that design is conjugated in the gerund, not in the past nor in the future, but in an indefinite verbal mode that indicates an ongoing process, an operative time, but inoperative intentionality.

Paraphrasing Agamben, only by seeking this form of a project without end can we disable the dispositif of the project.

For Agamben, resistance to violence is not another "violence", rather, "it is a violence that denies the self as it denies the other; it awakens a consciousness of the death of the self, even as it visits death from the other" (Agamben, 2009).

The deactivation of such a "marking" of violence implies a rethinking of the relationship between potential and actual, the affirmation of ongoing production and, finally, the construction of an ontology of modality through the notion of inoperative practice. What is rendered inoperative is an action towards a function, in order to open to new uses and forms that do not abolish the old, but rather display it in an unstable continuity.

Such an action, that "returns to the potentiality in the form of inoperativeness and ineffectiveness" (Agamben, 2011; 251) is the way to deactivate the inherited violence of exclusion.

Such a project requires both to understand and to reconstruct the threshold, materially and conceptually. It urges rethinking the threshold that surrounds the makeshift camps and informal inhabitation not only in its spatial and territorial configuration at the border, but also in the opaque and ambivalent significance between what is outside and inside, legal and illegal, or us and them.

Looking at these thresholds enables us to encompass the possibility of potentially enclosing or opening them, guaranteeing the opaque space, or making these practices visible; equally, decide whether to keep people apart or elaborate strategies of living together. Based on that, the project of the border is an infrastructure that rejects overdetermination, as it would be a system of control, but rather supports relations and axialities among different potential and multiple scenarios. It is not inexistent, thin, or ephemeral; it is not a temporal urbanism, or a tactical move, it is rather a minor infrastructure that refuses to conceive spaces and the people inhabiting them, but still allows some degree of protection.

The search for an inoperative project for urban and architectural design is in fact the search for a minor voice, to counter the nature of urban and architectural design as operational, practical, masculine, concrete, tangible, and problem-solving oriented action. The search for a minor project (Boano, 2021) is not to be confused with contemplative quietism detached from reality in its scholarly academic version, or of banal disciplinary neglect; rather, it is to be located as a paradox of practice, situated in praxis as other than poiesis, which does not produce something other than itself.

It is an interrupted, inferred, inward-oriented design action – not because it is dysfunctional or destructive, but because from the beginning it is devoid of any telos, any task. Not a counter-hegemonic project – another major language – another historical project or a renewed humanistic discourse or a new manifesto of action, but rather Bartleby's powerful "I prefer not to" voice (Melville, 2021). Thus, the inoperative project is not exhausted, it remains in potency; a potential that, instead of passing into reality, remains pure potential. Despite and precisely because of its precariousness and elusiveness, the minor project sustains not the space as such but the space of variation, difference (Di Campli and Bianchetti, 2019), rendering the mainstream and formal arrogance inoperative.

To think of such a project as inoperative is thus to put the minor critique of the present back at the centre, resisting, and reversing the arrogant anticipation of what is yet to come. Minor is an adjective that qualifies an action, a tone. Resistant and at the same time immanent.

Resistant to the request to abandon thought, and theoretical criticism in order to throw oneself into a concrete doing, but also immanent in giving back a propositional flexion, not only destructive; to become a proposal, vision and 'non-projecting imagination' (Glissant, 1997). Based on these assumptions and the experiences of continuous deconstruction and reconstruction of borders by the makeshift dwelling by people on the move, the minor project looks at such practices and builds a counter-narrative. It restores the power of autonomy and the legitimacy of imperfectly inhabiting and resisting. As such, disabled from its own productivity, it reaffirms the centrality of destitute possibility.

In earlier works, the minor project had been reinterpreted by looking at the acts of resistance and subversion operated by supporting actors and people on the move (Mastromarino, 2022).

Thus, makeshift camps, dispersed tents, itinerant distributions, squats, or other informal spaces of reception served to identify material and social infrastructures at borders. The inoperative project has its origins from the recollection of these practices as makeshift dispositifs to rest, gather, self-care and collective care, and shared boundaries. Consequently, interactions with the local network of support highlight possible scenarios of coexistence: maraudes, outreach and close contact with people on the move are crucial to decipher the conceptual prospects of such a project.

The minor project here is unfolding existing dynamics of resistance, claiming new identities, autonomies, and imperfect modes of inhabitation. It refuses overdetermination and is therefore weak, fragile, constantly reconstructing uses and interactions. Dispositifs to gather, eat, rest, and protect as temporary and ephemeral dwellings built and managed with the network of assistance may represent an abacus of makeshift tools that attempt at enhancing protection, degrees of coexistence and transit in the camps, in the host communities or in the territories of transit, of which the Parisian Périphérique is an essential example.

They promote new modes of inhabitation that could be transient and ephemeral, movable and adaptable to spaces, and concurrently produce new uses and legacies. They serve as a setting for a plurality of spaces where practices of the makeshift, support and hostility converge and seek recognition in the wider urban theory, determining new platforms of an imperfect, transient weak and ambivalent infrastructure of holding.

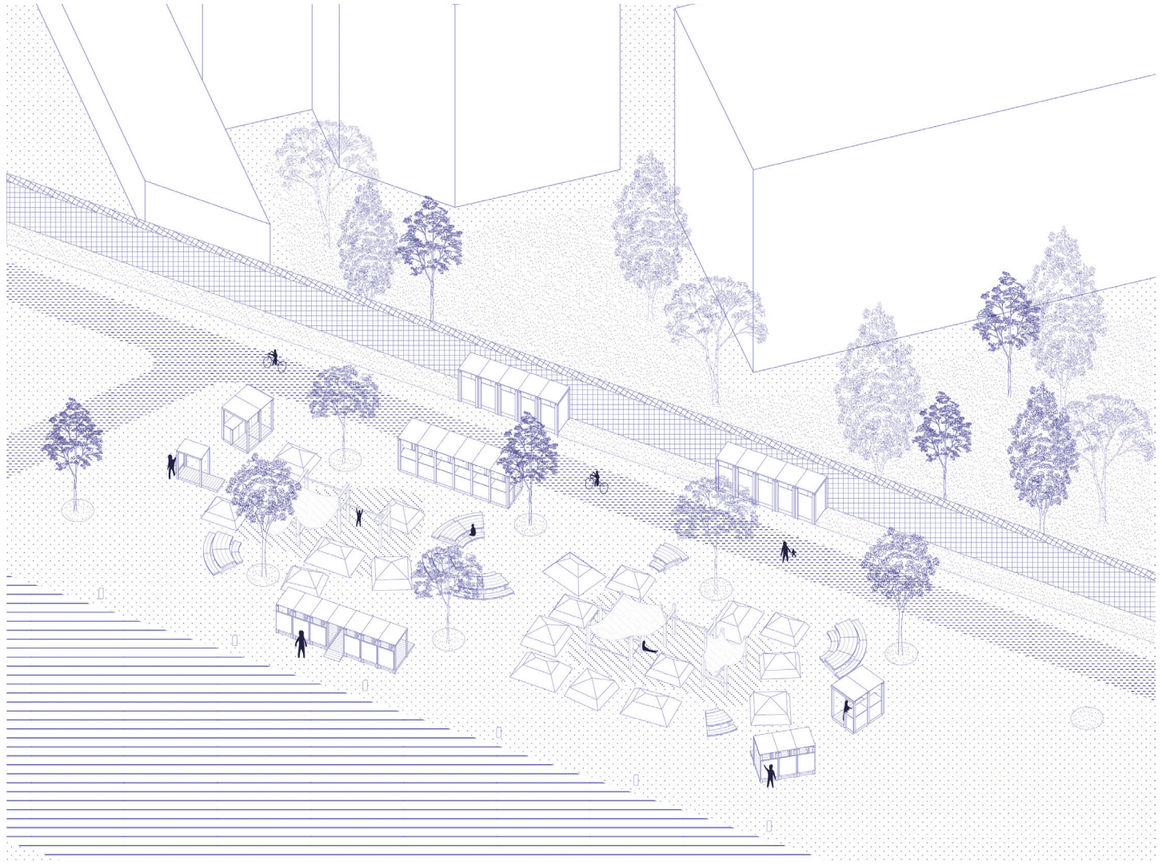


Fig.9 - Proposal of makeshift dispositifs of protection and assistance in the camps along the Périphérique (S. Mastromarino, 2022).

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NOTES

1. Among the major evacuations: on 7th of July 2017, more than 2.700 people were evacuated from camps along the *Boulevard Ney*; on 18th of August 2017, some 2.500 people evacuated and displaced; on the 7th of November 2019, around 3.000 people evacuated from the Avenue Wilson.

2. *Maraude* is the French term used among activists and volunteers to define food distributions and outreach to people on the move and unhoused people in cities. Based on volunteer support with the association Solidarité Migrants Wilson, maraudes are usually divided in itinerant or fixed (maraudes à pieds/pointes fixes) and involve food distributions, tents and clothes when needed, as well as outreach and information.

3. This study is part of the thesis research "Inhabiting spaces of holding" (Mastromarino, 2022), morphed in a collective research with Camillo Boano, framed around the Lifelines project at the Polytechnic University of Turin (Boano and Bianchetti, 2022).

4. In mid-April 2023, Solidarité Migrants Wilson denounced the police violence towards volunteers and people on the move during distributions in Porte de la Chapelle. According to them, violence is progressively increasing along the "requalification" of Porte de la Chapelle and Saint-Denis. On the 26th of April 2023, an extensive eviction of almost 500 people on the move was conducted on Île-Saint-Denis to evacuate the Unibéton squat, situated a few steps from a forthcoming Olympic village.

5. These are makeshift camps that have been analysed by the authors between September 2021 and September 2022. Delphine Seyrig (evacuated in December 2021 and January 2022) was a makeshift camp of about 200 people at the border between Pantin and Paris. Cheval Noir (evacuated in May 2022) settled between Pantin and Bobigny. Porte d'Aubervilliers comprised a dispersed system of makeshift dwellings between Paris and Aubervilliers. La Marseillaise (evacuated in June 2022) was a makeshift camp on a wasteland at the Paris/Pantin border.