

Homeless Intervention

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The point is not that there is no stable social world to know, but that knowledge of that world contributes to its unstable or mutable nature.

Anthony Giddens 1990

Magma – a paste composed of solid and liquid matter

Random House Dictionary 2006

Gothenburg is a place to which I travel, I do not live there. My connection to the city is foremost a community of people engaged in artistic research with the university as its pivotal point. On one occasion, a couple of years before joining the Intervention group, I came to eavesdrop the discussion on Södra Älvstranden. While working on a project connecting the gentrification of the waterfront to the million-housing suburbs in Malmö, I happened to hear the dominant social democratic politician in Gothenburg, Göran Johansson. In talking about his expectations for the Södra Älvstranden area, he claimed that the city of Gothenburg could afford a different planning process than simply a strictly commercial since it owned most, if not all, of the ground. At that time Henry Lefebvre heavily influenced me, and I was duly impressed: at last a politician that cared for a democratic production of space. After that I was again disconnected from the discussions.

It is fair to say that the context to the following text is sharing the disappointment and frustrations with those in the group that have been more closely involved in the planning process. They felt marginalized, kicked out, bereft of their hopes for and seemingly relevant expectations of making a difference. I sympathize with their engagement, but still: I could embrace the role as a passer-by in Gothenburg. Without any insight in previous decision-making processes in the planning of the city I just accept what I walk by as a fact. It seems easy and perhaps also attractive and privileged to stay with an anonymous, constantly moving and visual relationship to a city: the onlooker's *laissez faire*. This relation could continue indefinitely as long as I did not have to stop and ask for something essential – such as a place to live. Then it would be very hard for me to persuade the city in all its detailed particularities to abandon its anonymous visuality and start to answer to my needs. So, there is more than one thing missing in this picture.

In this essay I intend to tap into the process as I understood it, but from a position that remains a problem: homelessness. I am not blind to the existence of homeless people in the city, but I can not share their experience the way I share sentiments with my peers. To be more specific, I intend to discuss homelessness in a, if you like, homeless manner: setting up, testing and letting go of four ideas that I believe have an impact on their situation. The first thought figure identifies power with the capacity to “stretch”, or to halt, change in space over time. The second figure describes societal cohesion in terms of social contract to which not everybody is invited. The third figure finds a connection between identification with hierarchies and authoritarian practices. The fourth and final thought figure understands homelessness and people without property as a real challenge to the idea of the liberal subject.

I am working my way through this material without the intension of reaching a unifying conclusion – I will not be able to move into the ideas I present, to take cover in them and to furnish them as my ideological home. My intention is to look for real and potential practices that overlap and interconnect, institutional practices that I constantly make use of and that help me navigate through the everyday. My essay starts from an in-between, between planning processes and built space. As such it does not exert the power to do what is needed. What I really need is solidly democratic politics for housing that respect the individuals' right to self-definition. I need a housing politics that are creative in connecting collective resources to individual influence, and actively strives to include groups regularly defined out of the housing equation. Those steps could only be taken in an inclusive democratic process.

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The world and what I know about the world is in a state of continuous change: what does experience count for and who is the subject of that experience? I need, first of all, to make a distinction between different understandings of experience. On the one hand experience can be defined as a radically open physiological capacity, and, on the other hand, both experience and also memory could be seen as the result of socialization or social training within a historical order that in itself is conventional and historically constructed, and thus changeable. Pointing to the gap between these different conceptions of experience does not amount to supporting dualism. Rather, the world as I know it is, according to the philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis, formed as a magmatic social imaginary “based” on the indeterminate relation between the world as presented by the sensory apparatus and the world as a historically constructed

artifact. The sociologist Pierre Bourdieu called this reciprocal in-between *habitus*, another sociologist, Anthony Giddens, calls it *structuration*; a world both embodied as well as practiced, and a product of social conventions. Freedom and agency exist in that indeterminate distance between the world as an open reality and the world as social construction. I leave my experiences, as the produce of socialization, to be reflected by the institutional thought collectives. The concept of socially institutionalized experience suggests, in a reciprocal move, the opposite of magma: a stable world conveyed to me through recognizable and ideally unchangeable discourses. Institutions “lean on” nature in a complex way, so that what is understood as the natural world is only what is posited by society: sensual capacity “is so only by being *formed* and *transformed* in and through social institution”

*this formation-transformation is actual, figured-presentified in and through modifications of the sensible world: so that, finally, the very thing which is leaned on is altered by society by the very fact of this leaning on – which has strictly no equivalent in the physical world.*¹

Experience may be discussed using different terminologies in which I orient my conceptual framework through both my use of language and also my associations and interactions with people and the things I move around. Aesthetic experience is no doubt *institutionally coded* – thought patterns which draw on the suggestion – which is produced by art, and the artworld – that there is a stable, real reality to be found beyond the code: the “rock of sensation”, or, second best, an experience mediated by the artist that can be purchased and privatized by another individual. If reality is *constructed* – then the correlation between what is experienced and what is expressed is temporary and contingent. If experience and the subject itself is, as psychoanalysis argues, inserted in-between the individual and the collective, balances between being socially structured and being “merely individual facts”² – then in the final analysis, manifest action is never entirely reasoned. If experience is equivalent to reason then there is nothing extrinsic to following any flow, and passivity is the height to reach. If experience is made up of *a flock of sensual data*, which always follows the closest pied piper narration at hand – then there is no use fighting against the misuse of information. If experience is *situational* it cannot be abstracted from *politics* – I must appreciate the politics of sensuality and practice, made manifest in buildings and planning processes, and re-politicize all concepts provided by the thought collective. The experience “of history is not to consider it from the outside as a finished object in front of us”³; instead it is tangled up in the language and concepts created by institutions. A situated understanding of experience is engaged in projectively changing descriptive language and concepts, to compare their reciprocal workings dialectically – albeit without teleology – with a horizon of equality.

My position is that I need to follow experience all the way to the emergence of language enunciating-erasing the singular subject, but doing that does not supplant the need for an intervention into the present order of things on behalf of the homeless and other marginalized groups that must be *manifested at the same instant as it is enunciated*: an experience which is practiced. Institutions move at a slower pace. Experience, before it becomes socially codified, is indiscriminate and in a flux; it is magmatic and impossible to qualify in terms of (essentially or mimetically) “real” and “proper” (the right thing in the right place). It will even be hard to separate out who is having what experience:

1. Castoriadis (1987: 354)

2. Jameson (1977: 338)

3. Castoriadis (1997: 33)

whether it is me or a collective we – it is an example of privatization and commodification to separate and privilege one experience over another. It might be helpful and useful but nevertheless misleading to build a society in the image of a properly institutionalized experience. Not all stabilities and equilibriums are desirable.

Vested interests in spatial production and obsessed with normality, mainstream media conveniently produce fantasies and/or social imaginary in order to promote economically productive and historically “given” prerequisites to a self-reflective middle-class, caught up in the “privatization of experience”⁴. As a group, the middle class always fearing to become exposed to the experience of what is, then again, institutionally produced as experience: the uncanny position of the hurting individual, the outskirts of collective societal experience, the window shopping of life as it is supposedly lived. In short: what is feared is the experience in and of the *other* side of society. This is why I am looking at the homeless in relation Södra Älvstranden. I do not share or try to emulate their experience as individuals, but I do not think that I am all together severed from it, as though I were not connected with it at all. Castoriadis holds that “individuals and things are social creations – both in general and in the particular form that they take in any given society”⁵. Furthermore he argues that “[w]e are all, in the first place, walking complementary fragments of the institution of our society – its ‘total parts’”⁶. Even though the distribution of the negative experiences I am discussing here is socially coded, I find it interesting that experience must be dealt with in institutional categories such as “other”, “we”, “normal”, “different”, when all experience is possible to everyone: there are *socio-sensual facts* – to suffer injustice or an insulting treatment, to be identified as deviant by unsympathetic people, causes pain and that make us *social equals*. Socially institutionalized experience has taught me to turn away from and not listen to – or smell – the presence of certain people. I may think that I do not know much about homelessness, but I am knowledgeable enough to know what to avoid, and I am extremely good at picking up that which differs from what I consider normal. I know about difference, and I may reflect on my life as a volatile mixture of solid and fluid, but I accept practices only according to appropriate codes of institutionalized behavior; as if there are timeless universal rules defining the correct and incorrect, pertaining not to be the result of social construction and experience. These rules are culturally dominant. They clutter our streets with signposts, and any discourse from politics to fashion will try to clip on to them. The dominant culture looks for rules instead of people: it is not willingly accepting the burden of social magma.

How the concept of *socio-sensual facts* – not related to Durkheim’s “social facts” since socio-sensual facts are constructed and actual at the same time, affected by the social world – could make us social equals needs to be discussed more thoroughly, in particular since it could be misinterpreted as perpetuating the idea of a discretely delimited subject acting in a world discretely objective. An experience understood as socio-sensual facts indicate that the categories of “subject” and “world” both are social constructs, and that any delimitation between subject and world is conventional. Michel de Certeau has, in an unorthodox way, studied the role memory plays in the link between subjectivity, the built environment, time and the other. Memory arises “from the other (a circumstance)”⁷, and is involuntarily performed as an act of witnessing in connection to space. de Certeau’s concept of memory marks the fluctuating border between a conventional understanding of subject as “supported” or “reflected” by memory and the relationship to the subject as materialized other (or circumstance) in a given context. The subject is inscribed *through its*

4. Rustin (1982: 72)

5. Castoriadis (1997: 6)

6. Castoriadis (1997: 7)

7. Certeau (1984: 86)

foreignness no matter what the circumstances. It is not the subject that remembers itself, it is space that remembers the subject as difference and brings it into its domain: "this implantation is neither located nor determined by memory-knowledge"⁸.


The position of the socially other is unavoidably an uneasy one. I am not interested in investing the figure of the homeless with the distinguished features of the noble savage, the unfettered human, or representing them as to emulate the "man of sorrows", "one from whom men hide their face"⁹. I fear that *most* people share a part of an unworthy life in our present social and economical organization, without the right of self-definition. I am, with the term of Cornelius Castoriadis, all immersed in the magma of the social imaginary. Magma is a metaphor that suggests instability, volatile and destructive outbreaks, but also cooling down processes and the formation of layered new ground. As a metaphor for experience magma could be at risk of becoming a distanced: instead of marking out the possibilities for agency and change, it could be understood as "neutral" descriptive tool that is unable to discriminate between virtual and real, social construction and existence. Magma needs constantly to be supplemented by a discourse of equality that is fundamentally different from the liberal discourse on multiculturalism: its strength is pointing to the man-measured relation to the open-ended flow of sensual data.

In artistic research there is neither a necessarily disciplining object nor a disciplinary tradition. An artistic researcher deals with his or her experience, but does not know much: he or she is not defined as an expert in an academic sense. Artistic research is – and in this it is historically similar to other emergent fields – susceptible to self-reflexivity, different from artistic traditions which have historically been used in discussions intended to formulate social difference, a difference that becomes socially acceptable through being structurally similar to that which is criticized: art generating power from both social unapproachability, and conceptual paranoia. Art is a *significant* concept, but what it actually signifies remains perpetually undecided. The social structures of institutional recognition which define what is presented as art, cannot contain its significance – its magmatic force – either. Art institutions smooth out the hiatus between significance and signified, they even try to introduce art as essence, hence: paranoia. Artistic research is nurtured by the holes, **the** mismatches and the incompleteness: the primordial readiness to accept whatever is given and, transferred from tradition, a naïve willingness to look for that which seems satisfyingly final. Why naïve? Because artistic research could easily be appropriated as an exemplary knowledge production, combining the focus of high-end visual paradigm of neoliberal capitalism with the ease of academic credibility provided by institutional distance. Naïve because artistic research is also an institutional product – heralded and differentiated by institutional coercion and lock-in effects.

Applying artistic research methods to the city of Gothenburg, the reach of the visual will immediately spiral away from the instantly readable into the potentially knowable and changeable. It will become necessary to map the city as I see it in a set of dimensions that could be described as "lateral", "temporal", even "immanent". One quality of visual analysis is that intended and unintentional changes overlap. Structure and agency are interfolded; the planned and the self-regulated would be indistinguishable if it was not for the trappings of, in Bourdieu's sense, *distinction*: the depreciation of that what is produced locally in Gothenburg and intended for direct and local use. In the city space, changes in the name of stability and changes in the name of disrupting the dominant system coexist and continually fluctuate.

8. Certeau (1984: 86)

9. *Isaiah* 53-3

A dimly lit room, possibly a bedroom, with a bed and a lamp. The scene is dark and grainy, with a blueish tint. The text is overlaid on the scene.

fox 2000 pictures

Presents



The city map could be understood as the imprint or arrival of self-regulating processes and flows, distinction machines beyond social control. It could be seen from a singular vertex as in Descartes' vision of the planned city – an empty slate open to what is deemed an uniquely rational improvement; it could also be viewed as the battleground, a dialectical force field playing out conflicts between social classes. A city map could also, with Castoriadis, be seen as a description of an ever-undecided space that harbors a continuous

*creation of democracy and philosophy, both of which break up the closure of the hitherto prevailing instituted society and open up a space where the activities of thinking and of politics lead to putting again and again into question not only the given forms of the social institution and of the social representation of the world but the possible ground for any such forms.*¹⁰

Since artistic research is prone to speculation and to call for action when the *facts on the ground* are already established rather than to “point with the whole hand”, let us return to practice and do some laboratory work to see what we can find about a particular place at a given time – the afore mentioned *Södra Älvstranden* in Gothenburg – with the help of *four thought figures*.

Four Figures of Thought

The *first figure of thought* derives from the sociologist Anthony Giddens' description of power as the capacity for change, to be more precise: a stretching (alternatively – a cancellation) of the concepts of time and space by which the image of power insert itself. History amounts to a “time-space-distanciation in which time and space are progressively stretched”¹¹ by power that is always looking ahead, producing society *in the name of absentees*, always producing forward-looking space, through which individuals are produced and the immediacy of life is lost. The power to *stretch* is one key figure. Stretching is “equated with the existence of continuity, which, in turn, is closely related to routine”¹². Time itself cannot be “grasped, defined or specified”¹³, “Social systems have to be stretched across it, while it destroys its elements”¹⁴. Stretching can be perhaps boiled down to the power of presenting change as continuity. Our *Intervention* project, being outspokenly involved in the aftermath of a planning process at *Södra Älvstranden* in Gothenburg, must critically examine the ideas embedded, from the level of a single house to the space as a whole. In other words, to look into the power of stretching as it unfolds in space and touches on the intended “users”.

This thought figure of stretching is not far from Henri Lefebvre's idea of an ongoing *production of space*¹⁵, which he introduces in order to understand how the focus of the capitalist system gradually became less focused on the production of objects, and more on its implementation in spatial terms. This idea has possibly less to do with real estate, and perhaps more to do with the “turn”, the change of public space into a piecemeal space of persuasion – including the Internet – and a systemic appropriation, through branding, of general necessities such as clothes and food.

Without a discourse of equality, artistic research could be at risk of emerging as an agent of interdisciplinary and lateral stretching, which runs from a simulacrum of the high modernist credo “from art to politics” (aesthetics – or barbarism) via the declaration of the 1960s “from politics to art” (form follows agenda) to the current self-reflexive position: “art stretched to fit a superior position in the knowledge industry” (indefinitely academic).

10. Castoriadis (1997: 17)

11. Callinicos (1985: 150)

12. Elchardus (1996: 87)

13. Elchardus (1996: 93)

14. Elchardus (1996: 83)

15. Lefebvre (1991)

The structuration of all social systems occur in time-space, but also 'brackets' time-space relations; every social system in some way 'stretches' across time and space. Time-space distanciation refers to the modes in which such 'stretching' takes place or, to shift the metaphor slightly, how social systems are 'embedded' in time and space.¹⁶

The *second thought figure* derives from the philosopher Margaret Gilbert and her references to the theories of social contract, in particular is the ideas of “joint decision” and “political obligation” in understanding the outcome of a complex planning process. Within her framework, the agency to (positive) change and (needed) empowerment will only appear in and through a reciprocal relation of mutual and equal recognition. A central task of Gilbert’s argument is then to sort out the relations between the individual and the group. She seems to suggest that the subject does not have to relinquish its responsibility over the group, because a joint commitment must be reciprocal and interdependent before it works, in a simple and beautiful metaphor, like a “string that they hold taut between them”¹⁷:

As the parties to a joint commitment understand, they are individually committed in the sense that each individually has a commitment. Nonetheless, these commitments are seen to flow from the joint commitment.¹⁸

Joint commitment as a motivation for joint action is both rooted in and is also relative to the idea of having something in common. For as long as the “string” is respected and exists, so to speak, from both ends, there is something in common and the joint commitment keeps “flowing” from the string itself.

the parties to a joint decision “jointly accept” that such and such is to be done by one or more of them. Joint acceptance, in the relevant sense, requires what I call a ‘joint commitment’. There must be a joint commitment jointly to accept that such and such or, alternatively, to accept that such and such as a body. When there is a joint commitment between two or more parties, there is what I call a ‘plural subject’ or a (collective) ‘we’.¹⁹

A *third thought figure* relates to the *mark left on the everyday*, in particular on the built environment, by the belief in authority guiding the individual’s relation to the “other”. The dominant view of refugees, immigrants and homeless are, as the psychologist Alexandra Snellman has shown in her dissertation *Social hierarchies, prejudices and discrimination*, more related to hierarchies than prejudices. The thesis is that social dominance is related to the identification with “manly social behavior”, and, further, that a supportive view of and belief in hierarchies motivates the biased sanctioning of “others”.

Prejudice and discrimination based on ethnicity and gender influence the everyday lives of people all over the world. They affect our thinking about other people and ourselves, which in turn may give us different opportunities and different behaviours. Prejudice can be shown as an intergroup phenomenon that inhibits contacts between different social groups. Intergroup contacts and prejudice will also have different effects if the groups are equal in social and

16. Giddens (1981:4)

17. Gilbert (1993: 693)

18. Gilbert (1993: 693)

19. Gilbert (1993: 691)

*economic status or if they are on different levels in a social hierarchy. This is because social hierarchies make discrimination of subordinated groups possible.*²⁰

The *fourth and last* thought figure is adopted from Jeremy Waldron, a law professor at New York University, who in an essay inquired into “the underlying freedom of those who are condemned by poverty to walk the streets and sleep in the open”²¹. A *fundamental prerequisite for any person to practice his or her freedom is to be able to move freely through physical space*. To be free in any meaningful sense would also entail having access to his or her own place; a tenement. A fundamental idea in neoliberalism is that anything, let us say an apartment, has no value unless someone owns it. Ownership – which could be objects as under the regime of liberal capitalism, or commodified experience as under neoliberal capitalism – unites value and subjectivity: ownership grant the individual the lawful right to close the door or open it to anyone.

The liberal individual was the invention of the Enlightenment; the subject was a sovereign among sovereigns by birthright as an act of God, but the particular individual, in a world of individuals should, because of rational justification beyond the “whims” of desire, give up some of his/her powers to government, so that a society could be formed regulated by a contract – a compromise with “the just consent of the governed”²². What would be the ultimate rationality, beyond individualism, is not said outright. There is a perhaps liberating, perhaps pacifying lack of any measure beyond the general concepts of freedom, independence and liberty. In the neoliberal understanding of the subject, nothing of value could be created that is not economically viable. Value is a prescribed social measure; something (a commodity, a person) is worth what someone (the consumer) is willing to pay. Beyond this there is only irrationality and false pretense.

For the individual there can be no other attachments than a calculable economical rationality; whoever readily accepts personal gain as his or her measure upholds the predictability promised by the “image of a particular kind of unattached and unbiased neoliberal subject”²³. This is how the *possibility of consumption* in neoliberal governance is what makes us all equals. In an effort to interpret the neoliberal situation John Comaroff argues that the “diffuse concerns about cultural integrity and communal survival are vested in ‘private’ anxieties” and this is the reason why the fetus becomes the “neoliberal subject par excellence”²⁴. The subject is given and fixed in the liberal (and neoliberal) tradition: the relation between the subject and the other may, in both liberalism and neoliberalism be described as a zero-sum game; we communicate either by gaining or losing from this relationship.

Under neoliberalism both the national and the municipal government cease to be democratic and regress to 19th century forms of power distribution (where power is based on economic influence). The neoliberal state implements this distribution of power *under market definitions of progress and security*. Mobility, or in other words to travel with the torrential flow of goods and capital, is celebrated as a societal ideal. Just as the economical potential of 19th century railways was reflected in the popularity of the rollercoaster, inter-European flight tickets are now sold for the equivalent of a subway fare. Conversely, cities are planned and developed with the ideal of reducing or even stopping the mobility of certain groups – homeless, immigrants – that for varying general reasons are deemed to not be entitled to the city space on the same terms as everyone else. These limitations that enter into the planning processes are

20. Snellman, (2007: 7)

21. Waldron (1991)

22. *The Declaration of Independence*, 1776

23. Gökariksel and Mitchell (2005: 159)

24. Comaroff and Comaroff (2001: 16)

labeled and even marketed as “security” measures²⁵. The decisions that produce the unwanted are designed in the interest of land- and real estate owners. The underlying idea is that security creates loyal tenants and is beneficial in creating rent gaps.

As If To Conclude

Bringing these thought figures together I will not end up with one complete and unitary theory: what I see is rather the city as an image heavily invested by a political power, that creates “a string to hold taut”. This non-symmetrical set of strings – manifested in the production of space and through that the pre-accumulation of time – aims at reproducing clients as “voting hands”, whose political participation is both predetermined and limited. The string (or set of strings) in this power and institution-oriented version, is not intended to create a reciprocal situation where anyone is entitled to grab the other end, but it is stretched out to fix a specific subject according to the default delimitations of the liberal subject and the neoliberal economy. Power stretches out in the name of a *gift*, for instance from the Södra Älvstranden Corporation to the city of Gothenburg. The gift will reflect the sender’s will to create the receiving subjects and their self-definition.

Let us, for a moment, stay with the concept of the gift. There are gifts which are given in such a way that they appear from an undesignated point in time and space, just like the casual meeting with the other on a busy street displaces and changes thinking. This is the gift that, like memory in de Certeau’s sense, displaces the distinction between subject and object. The gift we are discussing here is related to an institutionally proscribed need, a need that is socially related to commodity. *The gift as commodity is an indispensable part of the market as the commodity presented delivers an insult as a gift*. Thus, the gift is directly related to money – by which you incarnate that which the commodity promises – as the defining measure of the value of a person.

The gift as commodity alleges that you, appearing as a value-seeking individual consumer, are lacking an “updated” understanding of the “eternal” social “laws”; that you are living in want. The insult of the commodity is presented to you in the shop windows in Gothenburg’s main mall *Nordstan*, or in the shop window of television commercials or in the torrents of junk mail, *as a gift*, as something through which you are given the opportunity to accept the help from the benevolent commodity producers to ameliorate yourself and your life. This commodified order of the gift could perhaps be described in terms of the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins as “negative reciprocity”²⁶. The mall as the site of gifting-as-insult is a typical environment in which the homeless spend time, since it provides some shelter but also, as a private space retains some public functions, such as for instance being a passage. I would argue that the homeless, in spite of being traumatized, are in no way *more* vulnerable to the socio-sensual facts than anyone else when it comes to commodity as gift. I would further argue that, historically, the gift from those in power in the form of a magnificent building project has been the most sophisticated and long-lived insults of all. When those in power in a dominant culture present a gift, then a specific use of the “utility” of the gift by the individual symbolizes a “unity” between giver and receiver, which can be expected as a reciprocal answer. The homeless have in this respect nothing to offer in return.

There are inhabitants that are never respected as subjects by those in power: since the homeless do not own property they cannot be considered as receivers.

25. Sahlins (2000)

26. Sahlins (1972)

They will remain, in an unembellished way, clients of the system. The homeless will be the “missing hands” because they are both prevented from, and also unable to take the string and become part of the fellowship of stretched power. Why? Because they cannot influence their own situation through changing it in practical terms, for example an address to receive a voting card and a place to keep it, nor are they able to change the perception that others have of them. What would a practical architectural solution to this problem look like? How could society, in the planning process for a new section of a city, plan for those who can be said to have decided to stay on its fringes, let alone to change the planning and consultation process from influence through property ownership to involve anyone because sharing a place socio-sensually entitles to rights and freedoms?

I suspect that the thought figures I have been laboring over describe a lacuna in the liberal subject; the subject who is given rights must be compared to a set of social conventions and norms and must be deemed qualified according to these norms to be qualified to receive these rights. There are also restricted areas and situations for subjects to receive that to which they are entitled. The current social normality denies dependence and weakness so that the economy may thrive on it: stretching immediate relations by way of the commodification of care. I am supposed to contribute to society in economic terms; only those who are too young or too old are exempt. If the contribution you make is not applicable to the current economical rationality or you refuse to contribute under coercive conditions, then you are in trouble. The social norms inform us to leave people alone in order to respect their individuality – let there be artists!, let there be homeless! – or to accept dependence and see the concept of the liberal subject come crashing down.

The right to self-definition is not to be confused with the possibility to be natural, normal or even genuine, etc. Seeing the world as an imaginary institution makes politics ever more needed; it is about being socially constructive, or in other words, accepting the synthetic and constructed as an actual reality. To define the self is to project self outside of the imaginary self – to accept the self as magma, a “composition of solid and liquid”. It entails a will to create oneself differently from what I always already am. This is an ongoing process, and the ever-present moment of fluidity is identical to a vulnerable openness to the world. The voices and strings extended by others keep me balancing on the edge of the void: the natural ways of behavior, the normality of the everyday and the sense that I, in the end, possess a solid core. Relying on social trappings such as these is really what makes me vulnerable to those who capitalize on existential insecurity, who are forcing me to look the other way and not see the magmatic nature of subjectivity reflected in the eyes of a homeless person: I am readily investing the other with socially conventional properties of the other, just to make me safe from the reality – it is a reflection of all.

Society condemns the homeless to an undefined and unlimited sentence because they remind me of the socialization schemes’ arbitrariness and brutality – it “privatizes” hardship as to avoid a discussion on structural violence: the taboo of neoliberalism. If I choose to think that homeless people have done no wrong, then I have to think about stretched power as structural violence, how this relates to the newly built environment, and the liberal subject: all which currently exists in a cul-de-sac.

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