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The street is also a place to live: homeless people and the symbolism of "refuge"

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A rua também é lugar para morar: moradores de rua e o simbolismo do “refúgio”

RESUMO
O estudo do espaço urbano transcende normas e planos urbanísticos, focando o cotidiano dos moradores de rua e a redefinição do conceito de espaço público, cujo direito requer uma abordagem humanizada, reconhecendo a vida privada dos moradores de rua em locais públicos, onde suas necessidades e intimidades são expostas. O objetivo desta pesquisa é ter um olhar crítico sobre as estruturas sociais que negligenciam a presença dos moradores de rua, e seu direito ao espaço público. A rua é um habitat, que ao ter o espaço apropriado, transforma-se na representação de suas casas. Os moradores de rua constituem uma sociedade própria, com suas normas e cultura, e vivem de forma precária pela condição de desigualdade socioeconômica, cujos fatores causam problemas familiares, desemprego e a perda de moradia, acarretando a situação de rua, que gera grande vulnerabilidade social. Por uma análise metodológica empírica e uma interpretação heurística a compreensão do refúgio ampliará o conceito do espaço urbano, questionando o sentido de público e privado, enquanto possível revisão para políticas públicas. A abordagem teórica esta embasada na antropologia do imaginário (Gilbert Durand), na experimentação do maginário (Yves Durand), em estruturas míticas, e em conceitos de psicologia analítica. O trabalho é de relevância por se tratar de uma outra maneira de pesquisar o espaço urbano, pelo viés da antropologia do imaginário, sendo que o que se espera é a contribuição para outras leituras e outras formas de pensar a relação e a importância dos cidadãos para efeito de planejamento e projetos urbanos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: moradores de rua; espaço público; antropologia do imaginário.

The street is also a place to live: homeless people and the symbolism of "refuge"

ABSTRACT

The study of urban space transcends norms and urban planning, focusing on the daily lives of homeless individuals and the redefinition of the concept of public space. This right necessitates a humanized approach that acknowledges the private lives of the homeless in public spaces, where their needs and intimacies are exposed. The aim of this research is to critically examine the social structures that neglect the presence of homeless individuals and their right to public space. The street becomes their habitat, which, when appropriated, transforms into a representation of their homes. Homeless individuals form their own society with distinct norms and culture, living precariously due to socioeconomic inequalities. These inequalities stem from factors such as family issues, unemployment, and loss of housing, leading to homelessness and significant social vulnerability. Through an empirical methodological analysis and heuristic interpretation, the understanding of refuge broadens the concept of urban space, questioning the boundaries between public and private as a potential revision for public policies. The theoretical framework is grounded in the anthropology of the imaginary (Gilbert Durand), the experimentation of the imaginary (Yves Durand), mythical structures, and concepts from analytical psychology. This work is significant as it offers an alternative way to study urban space through the lens of the anthropology of the imaginary. It is expected to contribute to new interpretations and approaches to understanding the relationship and importance of citizens in urban planning and project development.

KEYWORDS: Homeless, public space, anthropology of the imaginary

La calle también es un lugar para vivir: personas sin hogar y el simbolismo del “refugio”

RESUMEN
El estudio del espacio urbano trasciende las normas y planes urbanísticos, enfocándose en el cotidiano de las personas en situación de calle y en la redefinición del concepto de espacio público, cuyo derecho requiere un enfoque humanizado que reconozca la vida privada de estas personas en espacios públicos, donde sus necesidades e intimidades son expuestas. El objetivo de esta investigación es ofrecer una mirada crítica sobre las estructuras sociales que desatienden la presencia de las personas en situación de calle y su derecho al espacio público. La calle es un hábitat que, al ser apropiado, se transforma en la representación de sus hogares. Las personas en situación de calle constituyen una sociedad propia, con sus normas y cultura, y viven de forma precaria debido a las condiciones de desigualdad socioeconómica, cuyos

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factores causantes incluyen problemas familiares, desempleo y la pérdida de vivienda, desembocando en la situación de calle, que genera una gran vulnerabilidad social. A través de un análisis metodológico empírico y una interpretación heurística, la comprensión del refugio ampliará el concepto de espacio urbano, cuestionando el sentido de lo público y lo privado como una posible revisión para las políticas públicas. El enfoque teórico se fundamenta en la antropología del imaginario (Gilbert Durand), la experimentación del imaginario (Yves Durand), las estructuras míticas y conceptos de la psicología analítica. Este trabajo es relevante por abordar una manera diferente de investigar el espacio urbano, desde la perspectiva de la antropología del imaginario, con la expectativa de contribuir a otras lecturas y formas de pensar la relación y la importancia de los ciudadanos en el marco de la planificación y los proyectos urbanos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: personas en situación de calle; espacio público, antropología de lo imaginario

1. INTRODUCTION

To think about the city is to envision a place where all inhabitants have a home, however modest it may be. This concept has often been reduced to the analysis of physical aspects of housing as observable data and as a principle for ensuring safe housing, as advocated by Sustainable Development Goal number 11. The meaning of dwelling, however, is often overlooked, as is the symbolism of "refuge," which evokes a sense of safety and protection. Safety is not merely being in a sheltered environment protected from the weather and daily urban violence. It also means being psychologically adapted to the environment where one lives and the social group to which one belongs. Safety encompasses being treated equitably, in addition to having a place to live. Thus, safe housing must serve as a refuge in the broadest sense of the term and its most comprehensive symbolic dimension.

Not everyone in the city has a place to call home. So, how should the idea of "refuge" be understood? Some people live "out there"—on city streets, highways, or wandering through the world. These are the individuals whose experiences are most relevant to defining the symbolic representation of refuge. It is essential to consider that people living "out there" dwell under open skies in urban spaces, without roofs or physical protection against weather conditions or violent actions from others. These individuals exist in a constant state of urban and social vulnerability.

In São Paulo alone, there are a significant number of people in street situations, totaling 53,853 individuals registered in the Cadastro Único (Unified Registry) and referred to as PSR (Persons in Street Situations). Inclusion in the registry requires a CPF (Individual Taxpayer Registry) and a birth certificate, documents that many individuals in street situations lack. Nationwide, 23% of this population are nearly invisible—they have not been registered in a notary office and lack a birth certificate. The complexity of this population becomes evident.

When contemplating the concept of refuge as a place of protection, the image that often comes to mind is a closed, secure space. However, refuge is not always enclosed. It is, above all, a place distant from life's hardships and the dangers of the world. In some cases, it may be a protective golden enclosure, such as the one Siddhartha's father sought to create for him. The young Brahmin lived in an illusory world until a rare moment when he glimpsed the inequality and poverty of the world through the ascetics passing through the city. This realization incited him to

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leave his golden nest. Siddhartha (Hesse, 2019) began his journey to find his refuge. A place devoid of problems and isolated from all dangers can become monotonous, evoking the desire to escape.

When one flees from an isolated place devoid of challenges and differences, one encounters life and a new cosmic order and recognizes or defines the notion of place. The extremely sheltered place from which one originates may, in some cases, come to be rejected or denied, as if its memory were a theft of the right to live, and the refuge an existential anguish—thus, a negative place. Siddhartha fled extreme paternal protection to encounter life's miseries and the world's dangers and to find and follow his path to self-discovery. Despite imperfections, his true refuge was revealed to him under the shade of a fig tree at the moment of his enlightenment. Siddhartha's example shows that places are open to interpretation and understanding and never possess a definitive meaning. The ambiguity of perception between place and its interpretation depends on the observer's depth of insight. In this sense, refuge can be either negative or positive, welcoming or destructive. This duality also applies to the vision of the city, which can simultaneously be both welcoming and destructive.

The overly ordered city was an entropic space destined for destruction. Siddhartha's escape led him into another city—from one refuge to another—which allowed him to uncover the paths of the world as trajectories. On these paths, he found other refuges, such as the fig tree. The wanderer's cosmic paths represent their refuge. Urban space, as a representation of refuge and in its vastness as a cosmos, reclaims the sense of mundus and transforms into a space shaped by the trajectories of its homeless inhabitants. Unlike Siddhartha, these individuals do not achieve enlightenment but fulfill their destinies of vicissitudes, unaccounted for by any governing body or institution within their realities—free from imposed behavioral standards or correctional models. From the wanderings of enlightenment to those of seeking protection from urban violence, the street becomes a space of experiences and psychosocial transformations.

Reflecting on the concept of refuge and its relationship to homeless individuals necessitates an approach that goes beyond a superficial analysis of urban spaces, considering these individuals' psychological, social, and symbolic dynamics. This study employs an interdisciplinary perspective integrating the anthropology of imagination, sociology, and psychosociology to provide a more nuanced understanding of the experiences of those inhabiting the streets, enabling a critical and comprehensive analysis of the complex interactions between urban spaces and the subjectivities of homeless individuals.

This study adopts the anthropological perspective of Gilbert Durand's (1989) Anthropology of the Imagination, complemented by Yves Durand's (1988) psychosociological exploration of the imaginary, emphasizing both the positive and negative values of "refuge" for individuals and social groups. The methodology also draws on bibliographic and theoretical reviews, complemented by empirical research. This is consistent with the epistemological stance that all human knowledge derives, directly or indirectly, from external or internal sensory experience (Japiassu, 1991, p. 79). A hermeneutic approach is applied to interpret the data's mythical and symbolic dimensions.

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The methodological procedures were intrinsically linked to researchers' daily lives, during which observations of the homeless population and their use of urban spaces were made while traversing the city.

The theoretical and practical reflections of this study were grounded in contributions from several authors. Gilbert Durand provided a foundation for the idea of refuge within the imaginary dimensions of cultural conception. Yves Durand explored the psychological dimensions of "refuge," emphasizing its positive and negative values for individuals and social groups. Michel Foucault's expanded concept of panopticism—derived from Jeremy Bentham's proposal—was used to frame surveillance and control, while Marc Augé's discussion of non-places in hypermodernity offered another critical lens. These theoretical contributions underpinned and justified the analysis of urban spaces and their utilization by the homeless population.

2. THE "OUTSIDE" OF CITIES

The space that escapes understanding and urban projects and plans is the focus of interest as the subject of study for this article because it operates independently of urban order, norms, and legislation, as well as urban chaos. The space created by the footsteps of passersby, and especially by those of homeless individuals, challenges the notion of public goods and the public use of urban space (Stoffels, 1977). Considering that the city belongs to and is for everyone, what is postulated here is the right to public space.

For the homeless, the sense of protection and shelter is not found in shelters, which offer them a bath, a meal, and a bed—temporary accommodations that ultimately replicate the structure of correctional institutions, such as prisons or even asylums. These institutions always aim to achieve a "docile and useful" social reintegration for their inhabitants. The concern of such institutions is merely assistentialist.

The use of public space as a citizen's right—and, consequently, the right of the homeless—must be humanized. This is a challenging proposal for urban planners, who must conceive of the public as a dimension of the private, that is, as a hybrid space between the public and the private. Homeless people live their private lives in public spaces. All of their few belongings, their intimacies, and their desires are constantly on display. If they are not seen, it is because the "normal and dignified" citizen, who belongs to a group of people navigating a single urban itinerary throughout their lives—from home to work, from work to home—averts their gaze to avoid confronting this misery. Thus, the privacy of homeless people depends on the denial by the "normal man." Even though this denial morally and ethically distances this social discomfort, the presence of the homeless remains striking. It is not the other side of the coin, as that represents the process of social negation, but rather the coin spinning in a game of chance.

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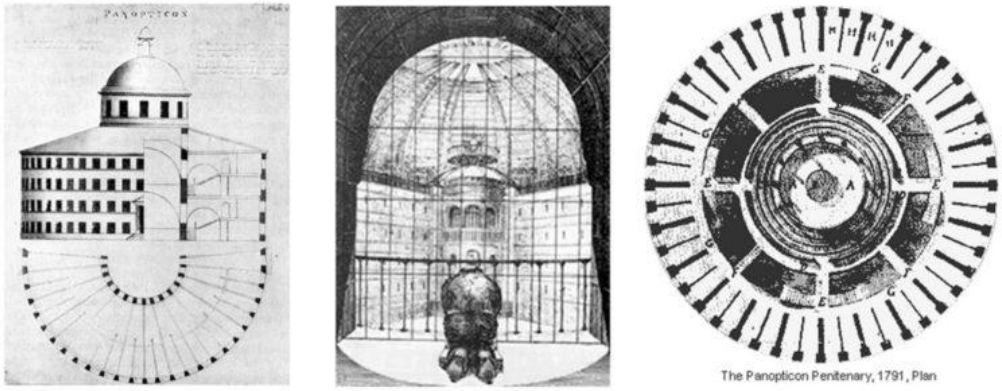
The denial experienced by homeless people makes them increasingly present, causing institutionalized society to adopt a panoptic [1] gaze (Foucault, 1987) upon them. The paradigm of panopticism is no longer about safeguarding the city from the plague, nor is it the architectural ideal for Bentham's[2] penitentiary model, in which one surveils many with the aid of light that crosses the cells, exposing the shadows of the detainees and inducing "in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault, 1987, p. 166). Today, panopticism has permeated society, defining "power relations with the everyday lives of men" (ibid., pp. 169-170), as it is no longer merely a dreamlike building. "It is the diagram of a mechanism of power brought to its ideal form; its functioning, abstracted from any obstacle, resistance, or wear, can be well represented as a pure architectural and optical system: it is, in reality, a figure of political technology that can and must be detached from any specific use" (ibid., p. 170).

Figure 1 - Panopticon. Le Panoptique. Jeremy Bentham, 1780 (1791).



Source: Fernández, 2008

This power mechanism, based on visibility, allows the "normal" citizen or institutionalized individual to turn homeless people into "ghosts" that must be kept at a distance. The homeless become urban ghosts, dragging the chains of political incompetence and social neglect—their existence should not trouble the tax-paying citizen. For urban planners, the primary concern often revolves around urbanizing slums or communities, transforming their spaces, or demolishing them

[1] The concept of panopticism, which encompasses strategies of surveillance, power, and control, was materialized in the figure of the Panopticon, a spatial structure conceived by the philosopher Jeremy Bentham based on the factory models of the late 18th century. The Panopticon, described by Bentham in Le Panoptique (1780), extended the logic of control exercised over industrial workers to penitentiary centers, establishing a kind of invisible omniscience directed at its target population. As such, it became the most emblematic and widely adopted model within architectures of control.

[2] Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) was an English philosopher and jurist and one of the last Enlightenment thinkers to develop a system of moral philosophy with a practical focus, aiming to address the social issues of his time. His proposals combined philosophy, social reform, and systematic organization.

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to build social housing with minimal living space. Humanizing the so-called “shanties” is not part of master plan proposals; a humanized public space that allows for urban wandering and provides rest for the homeless is not even considered.

It is essential to remember that the street, besides being a residence, is also a source of livelihood for those who live there. Homeless individuals turn public spaces into their homes, making the street their habitat and scavenging their lives from the waste of institutionalized society (Stoffels, 1977). Without being repetitive, it must also be said that street dwellers form a society of their own, with statutes, norms, habits, culture, ethics, and morals that define and give meaning to the group, none of which need to be written in any compendium or manual. The term "homeless people" encompasses various segments with heterogeneous characteristics. These segments are defined:

> (...) primarily by the time spent on the streets and the degree of integration each individual has with this reality of life.
>
> Thus, while the professional beggar, the wanderer, the alcoholic, and the physically or mentally disabled might generally represent those traditionally living on the streets—having been excluded (or having chosen) this form of survival permanently—other groups can be added who have been in this situation for a shorter time, often consisting of victims of unemployment and recession. These new groups might, however, only be temporarily in this situation as they survive through activities associated with the informal economy. Among them are some cardboard collectors, street vendors, market loaders, car attendants, odd-job workers, construction day laborers, various beggars, and so on.
>
> A final subgroup could also be characterized as consisting of newly arrived migrants and individuals or families recently unemployed or evicted. (…) These individuals often turn to public and charitable organizations for assistance. (…) Many, however, end up spending more time in a state of helplessness, and living on the streets and engaging in marginal activities becomes their reality, their only means of survival."
>
> (Simões Junior, 1992, p. 18-19, translated by the authors).

As pointed out by Simões Júnior, the segments of homeless people serve to organize his observations, but also to group them in an operational registration system. However, what is perceived about this homeless population is that between exclusion and choice, there is a segment that can eventually recover its social situation, and that would be temporarily on the streets: the street workers. It must be taken into account that, when losing their social condition, what remains is the street for living, working, and dwelling, and the main cause is socioeconomic inequality, which exposes the most vulnerable population to risk.

There have been no profound changes in the causes that lead a person to the streets. “The main reasons cited for the situation of homelessness were family problems (44%), followed by unemployment (39%), alcoholism and/or drug use (29%), and loss of housing (23%)” (MDHC, 2023, p. 34). In 2023, according to the Street Population Report from the Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship (MDHC), there were 54,812 people living on the streets in São Paulo. The street exposes people to a significant fragility, with violence being the most alarming factor. Between 2015 and 2022, 4,007 acts of violence against people in situations of homelessness were reported.

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On the streets, addiction worsens in an unconscious and scatological manner, seeking "salvation" in the forgetting of a painful past, until it fades away completely, when the homeless person loses their own identity. Without knowledge of their past, they live in constant risk in the present. No longer being "anything" – because they are socially ignored; and when remembered, they serve as a ladder for the salvation of the good souls who help them – the homeless live and die incognito; what remains of their presence is no more than numbers in the identification registry of the Forensic Medical Institute (IML), placed on their graves – just to remember the homeless people who were killed in São Paulo in August 2004 (Hebmüller, 2004) and buried in the Dom Bosco Cemetery, in Perus.

The existence of homeless people is a typically urban phenomenon. Since ancient times, there have been records of people living on alms and inhabiting the streets, and it seems that the reason has always been very similar: the loss of possession or place of residence due to expropriation that privileges the private over the public; it is the exodus of the dispossessed to the cities, creating groups of beggars and urban wanderers. During the Middle Ages, begging became professionalized, often encouraged by the Church, which saw total detachment from material goods and land, and the humiliation of begging, as a path to the perfection of the Soul. The mendicant orders emerged in this period – around the 12th century. The most famous example of detachment from material goods is that of Saint Francis of Assisi, who gathered around him a group of beggars, founding the Franciscan order.

During the Industrial period, the migration from rural areas to cities, which were progressing amidst the smoke and chimneys of factories, intensified. The dream of a better life was a mere illusion. Rural migrants did not meet the prerequisites of factory workers, they were not skilled labor, and consequently, they did not know how to operate the machines. This caused an "overcrowding" in the cities, which did not absorb these migrants, pushing them to the peripheries, to the boundary between the countryside and the city. This population began to live in subhuman conditions, in a degraded area where diseases proliferated due to lack of hygiene, constituting a population of destitute people surviving on odd jobs and alms. It was during this period that the first social support laws were created, and at the same time, industrial society prevented any form of political organization from this population because they formed a reserve labor force that could always provide services that did not require specialization in factories, at very low costs – it was the lumpenproletariat that was forming. Of course, whole families from this population ended up on the streets due to eviction, primarily.

These two moments, marked as significant in the origin of homeless people, serve to illustrate the similarities of the causes, regardless of the time or reason. There will always be a sense of expropriation of the private that causes the transformation of the public. Living on the streets is transforming the meaning of urban space, giving it characteristics and functions of the domestic, private domain in a public place, turning it into a home. The intimacy of the home now happens before the inhabitants of the city, in public, transforming urban space into a private place. From the private to the public and vice versa, urban space is flexible, having its organizational and bureaucratic structure subverted by the basic need to inhabit.

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The public space privatized by the homeless depends on some characteristics of the concept of refuge; the first is the sense of protection, of safety, to rest, to find a place to sleep in peace and have one's physical integrity preserved. These places will be the preferred "spots" for the homeless; especially if the sense of protection also includes protection from the weather, is near water sources, facilitates access to food, and provides the opportunity for a source of income.

What can be highlighted as defining elements of the "spots" are safety – marquees, awnings, lobbies of commercial buildings, under viaducts, niches – and water. Since the homeless must sleep in public spaces, protection against violence is ensured by maximum exposure, secured by intense pedestrian traffic, strong lighting, and, above all, by the group. There seems to be something primordial, archetypal in this behavior, if we consider, in digression, that the concept of refuge is the need for protection and comfort for the construction of culture, being, and for maintaining life, as something inherent to humans. Since the beginning of civilization, even when nomadism prevailed, refuge has always been a space of protection and exchange of experiences. It was under the aegis of protection that humans built and represented their cultural symbols and understood the meaning of the outside, as a place of danger and threats, and the inside, as comfort and protection. This perception placed humans in contact with themselves and with others and allowed the birth of culture. In the first moment of nomadism, the sense of refuge may have been found in the group itself, in a search for protection and survival. The group would gather for hunting, for battle, and to shelter from the dark and threatening night. Caves and shelters, combined with fire that unraveled the mysteries of darkness, allowed primitive man to remain "inside" longer and record his cultural symbols on walls, bones, etc. Social interaction allowed for the exchange of experiences, creating culture and sharing tasks; the group organized itself, and the refuge took on the archetypal form of a circle. From the circle around the fire to the spatial forms of human settlements, the uterine protection unconsciously emerged.

The archetypal characteristic of uterine protection refers to the Nocturnal Regime of images and the Mystical structure whose archetypes "attributes" – adjectives – are: deep, calm, warm, intimate, hidden; and the "verbal" schemas: confuse, possess, descend, penetrate, as Gilbert Durand (1989) shows. In this sense, the city, which originally had a nearly circular form, even having a square representation in Rome, is the space of welcome and protection because, at its origin, it was surrounded by walls. The space of the city before its foundation was consecrated through ritual – the city's space was mythical and lived daily.

In this ordered space, life unfolded in a calm and continuous rhythm, except for times of battle. The city welcomed, revealing the danger of chaos and nature. Even though the existence of homeless people is ancient, urban space has never been as hostile to them as it was after industrialization into the contemporary world. At night, the walls protected people from beasts, but not always from other humans. Cities were representations of the cosmos, always idealized, even when buildings were more important than urban space, as in the medieval period. For modernity, the sense of the city does not differ much, or does not differ at all, from the original meaning; what changed was the direction of interpretation, or rather, the depth of interpretation. The symbolic dimension was lost in the perception of the signifier, in mere formal representation.

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The myth underlies this interpretation. It is, therefore, seeking this other dimension that the representation of refuge for homeless people will be understood.

As already mentioned, the conditioning that leads someone to the streets always has the sense of a fall in their socioeconomic position. The mythical-mystical universe, as explained by Yves Durand (1988, p. 77), is a place of rest, balance, and harmony where the character's life takes place, a place where existential difficulties disappear, and the character's action is the contemplation of the nature inside the refuge, or dreaming of ancient memories. The organization of space is the basis of the mystical universe; however, the character does not live a peaceful life forever. Insecurity can occur in two ways: "from the refuge itself or when its function of protection is lost because it has been destroyed or simply threatened" or "also from nature when it is negatively valued and becomes an unsafe space full of multiple dangers" (Durand, 1988, p. 79).

These aspects that disturb the peace of living spaces have already been pointed out as dangerous aspects for homeless people; what must be emphasized is that the potentiated danger transforms urban space into a negative mystical universe. The homeless do not live in peace... if death is a companion to every human being, for the homeless, it is a constant presence, in much greater imminence – it is always part of the environment in which they live. Time for the homeless is not a time of hope, but a time of mere survival. A time in which they await their own death, more than life. The homeless live under the aegis of a vengeful Cronos. For all these reasons, the group is the main refuge, and the alcohol, the one that provides relief and unites the group; thus, it is the glue of a sociability of the excluded.

The atavistic relationships of homeless people with the city increasingly take us deeper into the mystical universe of these individuals, showing us more and more the connection between the homeless and the Mother Goddess. If water creates the world, the earth protects living beings. The primitive man – who protected himself by forming groups, taking refuge in caves around the fire – survives as an archetype in humans, and reveals itself in the homeless, while the city acquires its feminine dimension of protection and shelter; there is no hole, recess, tunnel, or sewage system that is not potentially a place to take refuge – a cave, a grotto. The grotto or the holes in the structures of viaducts or bridges is a place always present because it represents the absence, even if for a brief moment, of an uninhabitable and hostile world that allows the forgetting of life as a lost battle.

The "urban grottos" are exactly the size of the needs of the homeless. If lucky, some of these holes reach a reasonable size, sheltering entire families, protecting them – "the grotto is the original, metavital refuge, the model of all refuges. It is the return to the earth, to the mother, to the 'maternal bosom'" (Amourous, 1970, p. 228). In light of this representation of refuge for the homeless and the feminine dimension of the city, we can think about urban space from a psychoanalytic perspective because:

> The concavity (...) is, first and foremost, the female organ. Every cavity is sexually determined, and even the cavity of the ear does not escape this representation. Therefore, the psychoanalyst is perfectly correct in showing that there is a semantic path

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ISSN 2966-2931 Suporte Online / Online Support - ISSN 1980-0827 Suporte CD-ROM / CD-ROM Support
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> from the breast to the chalice. One of the first markers of this semantic journey is formed by the set of cave-house, habitat and container, shelter and attic, strictly linked to the maternal tomb, whether the tomb is reduced to a cave, as for the ancient Jews or in Cro-Magnon, or constructed as a dwelling, a necropolis, as in Egypt and Mexico (...) Yet the image of the cave carries an ambivalence. In every "marvelous grotto" there remains a little of the "dreadful cave." The romantic desire for inversion is necessary to consider the grotto as a refuge, as a symbol of the initial paradise. This desire for inversion of the usual meaning of the grotto would be due to simultaneously ontogenetic and phylogenetic influences: the trauma of birth would spontaneously lead the primitive to flee from the world of fearsome and hostile risks to take refuge in the cavernous substitute of the mother's womb (Durand, 1989, p. 167).

In the total or partial loss of their identities, homeless people do not realize that the search for refuge in the holes of the city, which transform into house-caves, is more than a physical refuge – it is a psychological refuge. This semantic aspect of the dwelling shows that between the microcosm of the body and the cosmos, there is an intermediate stage, a mesocosm, which is the house, the home, whose representations are dear to psychologists and psychoanalysts. Therefore, losing one's place of residence is perhaps the worst situation a human being can go through; it is for this reason that homeless people try, at any cost, to reconstitute the image of home. It is enough to walk through the streets of large cities to perceive the representation of private spaces, configuring living rooms, kitchens, bedrooms, etc., in a transformation and humanization of public spaces. On General Olímpio da Silveira Avenue, under the "Minhocão" in São Paulo, it was common to see the reconstitution of "living rooms" made with old sofas and armchairs with homeless people sitting and talking, while further ahead, the day's meal, perhaps the only one, was prepared in a paint can, improvising a stove amid heavy traffic. At another point, the living room extended into a bedroom made with cardboard, old mattresses, and tattered blankets. The separation of rooms or living spaces was made by the structural pillars of the elevated Costa e Silva – popularly known as "Minhocão" – with the curbs serving as corridors. Today, in this location, it is no longer the same, as a special bus line now occupies the space.

In their search for refuge, people on the streets resort to the most unusual solutions: holes in large structures, tree houses, or even hiding places in sewers are synonymous with refuge. When the houses are not in the trees, they are tents made from plastic bags or cardboard shacks built in the shade of tree canopies. The tree, as we know, belongs to a synthetic microcosm whose vegetal symbolism refers both to the cyclical characteristic and to its verticality, which allows progressive fantasy. The tree that blooms is the tree of Jesse, the Buddha's consciousness emerged under the tree, giving this vegetal element the messianic dimension of symbolism; its verticality can represent the cosmos, the "imago-mundi." This is not the tree being spoken of here. The tree being referenced is the one that offers shade as a constant presence of night, transforming into an intermediate world, outside of time. This tree deepens the forgetfulness of the homeless and reinforces the condition of a being living on the borderline, in a space that is neither public nor private. The tree deepens the distance the homeless have beyond the limits.

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The tree that serves as refuge in the confusing urban space is strongly linked to the earth. It is neither an initiatory post uniting the three worlds nor the representation of the ship that protects and shelters the navigators. It is linked to chthonic elements and to water, as chaos, and also to death, when it serves for execution or sacrifice, as exemplified by the fig tree that served as a gallows for Judas or as depicted by Goya in "The Disasters of War."

The tree that shelters the homeless resembles the trunk the castaway clings to in order to save himself from the turbulence of the waters. By providing an intermediate space, the tree distances misfortune and wards off bad omens, allowing those who take refuge beneath it to live, even if precariously, in another dimension of misery – perhaps a more romantic one – in apparent peace, as if the bucolic life were emerging in all its strength. It was in this way that two families lived under trees at one of the exits to the Marginal Tietê, or the other families along the wall of the Tietê Rowing Club. There was something very interesting in these families' reconstitution of the home space. The construction that served as a house to protect people was made precariously from cardboard, plastic, and some wood, and was very small; however, the doghouses were all made of well-crafted wood, carefully finished. The dog seems to be the link between these people who have already lost almost everything, including their dignity, and the human condition. The dog is the animal that always accompanies the homeless person. The closeness between man and animal is perhaps another characteristic that refers to the archetypes of primitive man – the Asian wolf, the ancestor of the dog as we know it today.

For an organization of concepts, a return to thought is necessary. What denotes the life of homeless people as belonging to a mystical, mythical universe of a negative kind are the most visible elements of this existential condition. The first item is the fall from a socioeconomic condition that causes a sudden change in the individual's life. This change is not represented by a euphemized descent; it is a dynamic trajectory – a schème – that transforms the individual's life and places them in a completely new and distressing situation – "beginning and/or end, life and/or death, the fall thus designates the totality of the existential digression of human anguish" (Durand, 1988, p. 50). The man falls into the city, into urban space, in a sequence of pains, without pleasure. The city becomes seen and lived under its negative aspects. The previously pleasurable space – for work and leisure – transforms into a space of escape. Places that were once open and permitted are now all forbidden.

Refuge can be considered the second item because, after losing their condition, the individual seeks protection, any type of protection; and of all the dimensions of refuge pointed out by Gilbert Durand (1989), the most representative is the existential metaphor – the escape from the anguish of Time and Death – as Yves Durand (1988) exposes – loneliness, prayer, escape, alcohol, drugs, and even death are often described as "refuge."

Other items that can be noted and that reinforce the mystical universe, even though versatile and appearing in any universe, are: fire that cooks food, produces heat, and brings people together in indispensable social intimacy; water, as the primordial representation of the world, of the chaotic origin of everything, can, by isomorphism, represent urban space, bringing it even closer to its feminine characteristics. In this hostile, nocturnal space of urban chaos, the homeless

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find their life and their universe – the city is simultaneously the world and the world, the city. The primordial water, which is urban space, demonstrates all its gloomy and funerary aspect, which, for the homeless, is often a journey without return; the urban magma transforms into fatality, confusing continent and content, and showing the negative aspect of the Mother-Goddess. Given this, it can be said that the urban space hides its physical representation, the city, under the veil of Maya – from the city of Siddhartha to the city of the homeless – recalling that the veil is associated with water. Water, as an element of subsistence and hygiene, reinforces the "dirty" aspects that its symbolism hides. The occasional bath to remove dirt from the body further emphasizes the aspects of life by exposing the abject condition of this human being, in particular. The fall is marked even in bodily care.

Finally, the animal appears as solace, as a reinforcement of a human condition; but paradoxically, it shows the "dog's life" that these unfortunate people lead. The relationship between the homeless and animals has already been pointed out as an archaism because the animal "is a spontaneous abstraction, the object of a symbolic assimilation, as shown by the universality and plurality of its presence both in a civilized consciousness and in a primitive mentality" (Durand, 1989, p. 52). The animal is also a symbol of death; an inseparable companion of these individuals, who live in a constant state of social fragility. The dog, which accompanies them, also symbolizes Hecate, the Black Moon, deepening the nocturnal aspect of femininity and referring to the mystical universe, because more than the bared throat, it is the force of "swallowing" the child by the mother herself; the city swallowing its children, stealing their lives, taking their identity, turning them into nothing – reintegrating them into the primordial, profound chaos, always a fall.

It seems that the homeless live under the strong presence of Hecate, who appeared at one of the crossroads of their lives, leading them astray and diverting them from their paths. Harding (1985) says that Hecate is the Queen of Ghosts, always accompanied by dogs, and is "the goddess of storms, destructions, and the terrors of the night" (1985, p. 160). This lunar goddess commands both external and internal creation and disturbances, being responsible for madness – a situation that pushes the individual deeper into human misery, while at the same time saving them, stealing their awareness and knowledge of their true situation. Hecate is not entirely evil; she only offers a deep darkness as life for her "ghosts," as a condition of an obscure being... of being nothing.

3. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The construction of refuge for homeless people is always an unexpected situation; anything can serve as protection against imminent danger, similar to Marc Augé's (1994) concept of non-places – public spaces that are non-identity-forming, non-relational, and non-historical; spaces that do not function as anthropological places where users resemble each other through a contractual relationship, such as airports, bus stations, subway stations, supermarkets, etc. In

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these spaces of contractual relationships, homeless people not only protect themselves, rest, and maintain hygiene, but also gather information about shelters, food, etc.

In this context, even though it is a space of solitude and similarities, the bus station, as an example of a non-place, is a space of communication that functions as an information hub. No matter how solitary a homeless person may be, they always turn to these locations in search of various types of information; “as non-places are traversed, they are measured in units of time… they live in the present” (Augé, 1994, p. 95); non-places are spaces of communication. Another type of refuge previously mentioned is the group, which refers to the notion of a horde, privatizing the public space in a reversal of urban values, always in search of comfort.

There are also, as a reconstruction of the lost refuge, the spaces of urban infrastructure such as holes in boxes or pillars of bridges and viaducts, squares, sewers, and sewage pipes. Finally, as a representation of refuge, we have the pilgrimage of homeless people, the movement from one end of the city to the other to find a friend, have a drink, or simply to walk as a destination. They constantly walk to escape danger, fear, loneliness, and oblivion, and in walking, they find protection. They perhaps find the safest refuge. They protect themselves from people and the elements. Many, in winter, sleep during the day in the sun and walk at night to protect themselves and avoid dying from the cold.

The walking of the homeless is more than a transhumance; it is a "transmigration" through public space, constantly unveiling its mysteries, revealing what the city hides from the "normal" citizens; it is a reification of place. The walking of Hécate’s ghosts restores the human dimension of the city, in a constant process of reunions with friends of misfortune or as a survival situation. The movement of homeless individuals humanizes the impersonal paths of citizens who live from and for work, sanctifying public routes in a hierophany of urban space. Perhaps these children of Hécate resemble the holy men of India who, in a moment of enlightenment, abandon their families and homes, becoming beggars and wanderers.

Homeless individuals link the physical city to the idealized urban space through the paths they create with their walking, stitching together with the thread of exclusion the dimensions of the city that planners fail to unite. They unite the planned with the chaotic in a reconstruction of the "sacred" totality of urban space, revealing another dimension of space as if they were priests in the sanctification of the land; and just to remind Durand (1995), homeless individuals in their pilgrimage resemble the cobbler who joins the delicate upper with the rough sole.

With the union of the real with the ideal, of the built with the conceptual, in a symbolic reconstruction of urban space, it is possible to say that the homeless person is more than the "cobbler"; they represent the "factic" dimension of exclusion – only they reconstitute the totality of the city's space, allowing or facilitating a symbolic invasion; Durand says, "the art of teaching in the art of the cobbler consists in always considering the emergence of the real as a duality, and when we speak of totality, we imply the role of alterity that exists in identity" (1995, p. 23); the homeless person is the one who shows society the alterity of their identity, our Other – unheimlich – as Freud describes, so familiar and yet frightening.

The most striking image of refuge for the homeless is displacement, pilgrimage, existential exodus, in a recurrence of the Wanderer complex (Carvalho, 2000) in search of the soul, identity, and humanity lost in socioeconomic downfall; they transform urban space, but the destination traced by their soul will only be possible with total annihilation, with complete oblivion, with the return to absolute refuge, to the nurturing womb of Mother Earth, the tomb. The homeless person is a nocturnal being, whose traveling companion is their shadow, society's shadow, the shadow of the dark moon... their universe of living is their place of dwelling, the street; because, after all, one also dwells on the street.

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