

# Chapter One

## Introduction: Re-envisioning the Homeless City

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### Introduction

*the 'extermination' scenario is never far from the surface of the homeless experience ... Constrained to exist in public spaces, the homeless are constant targets of regulation, criminalization, expulsion, and erasure.*

(Randall Amster, *Patterns of Exclusion*, 2003: 214)

*'Now, do you want your food? 'Cos it's cooked with love.' Because it's cooked with love, that's what she said. ... It's like – how can I put it ... it's genuine. Do you understand? ... They care ... I mean, they don't get paid, they volunteer to do it ... [and] they do cook their food with love.*

(Andy, 38, homeless service user speaking of the volunteers at St Barnabas Day Centre, Wimpster)

'Love' is not a word one comes across very often in writings on homelessness. In academic accounts at least, the talk is more usually of 'exclusion', 'banishment', 'annihilation' (Mitchell, 1997: 311) or 'extermination' (Amster, 2003: 214; Mitchell, 2003: 81). Indeed, thanks mainly to the writings of Mike Davis, Neil Smith, Don Mitchell and a handful of other scholars working mostly in a North American context (see, for example, Davis, 1990, 1999; Smith, 1992, 1996a, b, 1998, 2001; Sorkin, 1992; Matieu, 1993; Dangshat, 1997; Mitchell, 1997, 2001, 2003, 2005; Metraux, 1999; Arapoglau, 2004; Coleman, 2004; Herbert & Brown, 2006; Blomley & Klodowsky, 2007a, b, c), critical narratives of homelessness have become increasingly dystopic in recent years, inextricably tangled up in ideas about neoliberal politics and the geographies of social control. In a spectacular triumph of structure over agency, and of the general over the specific, it would appear that homeless people everywhere are being swept up and out of the prime spaces of the city, victims both of a seemingly insatiable appetite

for high-value commodification of urban landscapes and imagery, and of a recidivist re-imagination of the norms of citizenship rights and welfare, criminality and social justice.

Such accounts are framed by a very particular reading of the geographies of homelessness – based around the streets – and a very particular logic, of social control. In this book we pose some significant questions about this characterization of the ‘homeless city’, seeking to extend our readings of both the geographies and politics of urban homelessness. To be clear, we do not deny that the past ten to fifteen years have seen the emergence of an increasingly punitive approach to the ‘management’ of urban homelessness. Evidence of such an approach – including new by-laws that restrict homeless people’s access to prime, public space, business improvement districts, Controlled Drinking Zones, or Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) – is all around us, whether we look in Britain, Germany, Greece, the United States, Canada or New Zealand (Mitchell, 1998a, b; Collins & Blomley, 2003; Laurenson & Collins, 2007; Doherty et al., 2008; Johnsen & Fitzpatrick, 2010). But we do want to issue a caution lest this approach becomes the only frame through which discussions of urban homelessness can proceed. As a small number of academics are beginning to recognize (Johnsen et al., 2005a; Laurenson and Collins, 2006; DeVerteuil et al., 2009; Johnsen & Fitzpatrick, 2010) and people like Andy (quoted above) have long known, there are other spaces (of the soup kitchen, day centre or hostel) and other logics (of compassion and care) we must take account of when mapping the ‘homeless city’.

Rather than the streets, the current book is therefore mostly focused upon these other spaces. But we identify such spaces as an example of wider currents in the contemporary city, currents that speak less of containment and control than of compassion and care and – more particularly – of a growing rapprochement between secular and religious approaches to urban politics and welfare (see also Beaumont, 2008; Beaumont & Dias, 2008; Wills et al., 2009a). In contrast to the assumed divide between public secularism and private religion, these broadly ‘postsecular’ service spaces – of the night shelter, hostel, day centre and soup run – represent spaces of praxis in which secular and faith motivation collude in new forms of ethical citizenship that run counter to, and sometimes actively resist, more familiar models of social control. In this way, we argue for a more complex understanding of the ways in which homelessness is governed, paving the way for a characterization of homelessness that pays more attention to the agency of homeless people themselves, to the complexity of homeless geographies, and to the construction and peopling of those spaces of homelessness in which homeless people experience a range of relationships that include compassion and care – even love – as well as regulation, containment and control.

In this chapter we set out the wider context of these arguments with a brief summary and critique of recent writings on urban homelessness

framed by variations of the ‘revanchism’ thesis, before moving on, in chapter 2, to set out an alternative framework through which recent developments in the ‘homeless city’ can be explored. The chapter also introduces the project from which the material we make use of was drawn, and provides a brief overview of the structure of the book.

## Homelessness and Revanchism

The framing of homelessness within an apparently ‘punitive turn’ in urban policy and politics (DeVerteuil et al., 2009) has been sparked by a series of attempts by scholars in North America to use homelessness as *the* exemplar of how urban policy from the late twentieth century onwards has willfully marginalized the visible poor. Drawing inspiration from economic and political geographies of global as well as urban change, attention has been directed to the increasingly bipolar nature of the contemporary city, within which islands of extreme wealth, power and influence are interspersed with places characterized by deprivation, exclusion and a lack of self-determination. These landscapes of power (Zukin 1991) are being exacerbated by the uneven distribution of benefits from globalization – with those able to benefit from the new technologies and mobilities of a globalizing age capitalizing on their enhanced power to overcome space to their own advantage; and those who are disempowered by the unevenness of globalized economies tending instead to become socially and spatially incarcerated (Graham & Marvin, 2001). Geopolitical reorganization is giving obvious spatial manifestation to this bipolar distribution of power. As Swyngedouw and Kaika (2003: 6) explain:

The powerful ... are now able to insulate themselves in hermetically sealed enclaves, where gated communities and sophisticated modes of surveillance are the order of the day ... in the closely surveilled spaces of leisure and mass consumption malls and in their suburban housing estates. Concurrently, the rich and powerful can decant and steer the poor into clearly demarcated zones in the city, where implicit and explicit forms of social and bodily control keep them in place.

The picture here, then, is of a ‘militarization’ (Davis, 1990) of urban space in which the physical form and shape of the city reflects the uneven and polarizing power relations of the age – space is being reordered to suit the desires of the powerful, who are increasingly able to use politico-legal and cultural means to ‘decant’ the poor out of prime urban zones required for the furtherance of urban redevelopment.

This increasingly orthodox and sweeping picture of urban change does of course beg a number of important questions. Who are the powerful elites

who are doing the 'steering', and the marginalized downtrodden who are being 'steered'? What spaces are being 'decanted' from and into, and does this spatiality differ from city to city? What powers are being used to give precise spatial expression to political bipolarity? To what extent are such processes the unthinking outcome of processes of 'progress', or the result of the malignant and malevolent purposefulness of actors, organizations and systems geared to achieve power and wealth whatever the cost? Where in this picture is the resistance to such processes, either from the marginalized themselves or from within wider society?

Some of these questions have been taken up in formative accounts of geographical bipolarization and – more specifically – the changing geographies of homelessness, in particular in US cities. Beginning in Los Angeles, for example, in *Cities of Quartz* (1990), Mike Davis painted a picture of 'Fortress LA', demonstrating how a fear of crime and disorder became mapped onto the otherness of marginalized people such as the homeless – a process aided and abetted by tightly controlled media representations of social and spatial geographies of fear in the city. As a result, the built environment of Los Angeles became represented as a 'carceral city', with a cartography of fortified residential enclaves and marginal no-go spaces, and heavily policed and culturally purified shopping malls and public spaces. According to Davis, homeless people in early 1990s Los Angeles were increasingly disciplined by policies of exclusion and containment, and he charts the measures used to expel and exclude homeless people from areas in and adjacent to Downtown – including more vigorous policing, and the deployment of defensive city architectures (such as sprinkler systems used to repel rough sleepers and panhandlers as well as to nourish vegetation). As a result, Los Angeles' homeless were apparently either increasingly hemmed into a shrinking skid row, or reduced to an existence of 'urban Bedouins' (Davis, 1990: 236) – wandering fugitives fleeing from official policing and culturally sadistic repression.

Not coincidentally, perhaps, the welfare services so vital to homeless and other poor people gained very little attention in these overarching narratives of urban bipolarization. Where they did appear, service-providers tended to be characterized either as the unwitting handmaidens of a punitive state, or as groups of people principally interested in 'moral serving' (Allahyari, 2000) – responding to charitable impulses that are self-serving and identity-building rather than constitutive of any progressive response to the plight of homeless people. Thus, groundbreaking studies of the service-dependent ghetto (Dear & Wolch, 1987, 1994; Rowe & Wolch, 1990), for example, many of them also conducted in Los Angeles, demonstrated the regulatory force by which the marginal spaces of the city (the 'stem', or 'skid row') were brought into being and became filled with homeless people, and how the location of these services tended in turn to shape the wider geographies of the homeless city itself (Wolch et al., 1993; see also Takahashi, 1996),

as homeless people's day-to-day routines develop around the service nodes that provide a source of the material and, to a lesser extent, emotional sustenance and support necessary to make the adjustment from 'housed' to 'homeless' (Rowe & Wolch, 1990).

The more general picture provided by such studies, then, was of an era of 'malign neglect' (Wolch & Dear, 1993), an era in which homeless people came to be increasingly ghettoized into designated marginal spaces even as their mobility within and through prime city spaces became ever more restricted. Such narratives began to change somewhat with Smith's tour de force *The New Urban Frontier*, published in 1996. Based on his reading of developments in New York, Smith sought to connect up evidence of the increasingly punitive interventions taken against homeless people in New York City with gentrification – drawing the two together through the concept of the *revanchist* city. If the Los Angeles narrative was one of containment, Smith's emphasis on *revanche* (revenge) invoked a vengeful reassertion of power over, and overt criminalization of, marginalized groups in the city. Gentrification, he argued, increasingly requires a bold public defence of its progress based on a 'frontier' sensibility by which hostile neighbourhoods can be regenerated, cleansed and re-imagined according to middle-class values. Such a defence inherently involves a policy regime that both reclaims and defends prime city spaces from the devaluing presence of marginalized people, especially homeless people. Indeed, as MacLeod (2002) argues, gentrification requires the inculcation of 'acceptable' patterns of behaviour commensurate with the requirements of free-flowing commerce and the political and cultural aesthetics of new urban lifestyles, such that 'the new urban glamour zones conceal a brutalizing demarcation of winners and losers, included and excluded' (p. 604).

Smith's vision of a 'revanchist city' thus goes somewhat beyond the bipolar differentiation of wealth and poverty outlined above. Instead it insists that the winners are becoming increasingly vicious in the defence of their privilege:

The benign neglect of the 'other half' ... has been superseded by a more active viciousness that attempts to criminalise a whole range of 'behaviour', individually defined, and to blame the failure of post-1968 urban policy on the population it was supposed to assist. (Smith, 1996a: 227)

Smith's intervention has shaped much of the subsequent interest in urban homelessness. The practices and techniques of regulating homeless people he drew attention to have become objects of fascination, whether the (apparently) overpowering coalitions of local businesses, developers and city governments that have led the fight against homeless people (rather than homelessness); the new technologies of surveillance used to detect, measure, punish and prevent the incursion of 'unacceptable' behaviours of homelessness in prime spaces of the city; or the media campaigns that have

sought to manage public opinion and to defend the commercial necessity and ethical legitimacy of attempts to clear homeless people from the streets (see, for example, Matieu, 1993; Dangshat, 1997; Coleman, 2004).

Strangely, with some notable exceptions (Takahashi, 1996; Mitchell, 1997), there has been rather less emphasis on what exactly it is about homeless people that inspires such overt antipathy, especially given that as a social group they exert little social power and pose little direct economic, political or physical threat to the dominant culture. Indeed, as Amster (2003: 196) suggests, 'The threat is more one of perception than reality, more of a societal pre-emptive strike against an as-yet-unborn threat that originates from within the dominant culture itself, but finds concrete expression in some abject, powerless element of society.' If Amster is right, then perhaps this unborn threat is in fact lodged in the potential for more politically progressive and ethically motivated responses to the injustices and exclusions faced by homeless people. Yet such responses receive very little airtime in the revanchist thesis, presumably on the grounds that they can (apparently) easily be mapped on to the idea that any kind of charitable response merely reinforces the structural status quo, and are therefore inevitably incorporated into ideologies of revanchism.

This failure to consider other responses to the problems of homelessness notwithstanding, Smith's portrayal of the 'revanchist city' helped to establish a narrative of urban homelessness that quickly assumed the power of conventional wisdom. Within this narrative, homeless people were understood as being caught in a pincer movement that was leading to the effective collapse of spaces of homelessness in the city: subject to both a proliferating range of local state measures and zero-tolerance policing techniques designed to clear them from prime city spaces on the one hand, and pushed back into 'skid row' districts that were themselves increasingly falling victim to urban 'regeneration' and gentrification on the other hand.

For Don Mitchell (1997, 2001) this dual attack represents nothing less than an attempt to annihilate the spaces of homelessness in the city, and thus in fact to annihilate homeless people themselves – who cannot exist if there is no space for them to exist in. Accordingly, for Mitchell (1997), urban revanchism is understood to have resulted in the emergence of the *postjustice* city, in which urban poverty has become criminalized, and questions of social justice and redistribution usurped by questions of how best to simply make homeless people disappear from view.

Mitchell's concept of the postjustice city expands on the logic of revanchism outlined by Smith in a number of ways (see DeVerteuil et al., 2009). First, the earlier emphasis on gentrification is widened to recognize broader attempts by city managers to provide appropriate local conditions for the attraction of international capital. Urban political regimes preoccupied by the need to present an appropriately positive image of the city for global investors and tourists have introduced a raft of anti-homeless ordinances in

order to cleanse prime public spaces by banishing homeless people to the unseen margins of the city. This is not simply a vengeful claiming of the urban prize by successful elites, but part of the creation of ‘sustainable’ conditions for global success. Second, Mitchell provides a much wider portfolio of examples than does Smith, to show how many US cities – even those with previously liberal local administrations – have adopted similar systems of policing and regulating homeless people. As a result, he is able to develop a more generalized and potent critique of the ways in which the annihilation of homeless space is leading to a changing conception of urban citizenship more generally – in ways that see the exclusion of homeless people constructed not only as necessary but as just and good. Put simply, the rights of homeless people, he argues, simply do not register in the same ways as the rights of shoppers or middle-class residents, denying homeless people the citizenship that would give them sovereignty over their own actions. Third, Mitchell (2003) begins to address the role that local service providers play in the logic of the postjustice city – arguing, in a manner reminiscent of earlier work on Los Angeles, that initiatives like the Matrix outreach programme in San Francisco (designed to entice people off the streets and find them places in shelters provided by local voluntary organizations) need be understood as doing little more than legitimating – if not indeed actively complicit in – attempts by city authorities, business and the police to sweep homeless people from the streets.

## Questioning the Revanchist Orthodoxy

Recent reviews reveal the influence that Smith’s idea of urban revanchism, and Mitchell’s concept of the postjustice city, have had in shaping understandings of the geographies of urban homelessness (see, for example, DeVerteuil et al., 2009). Like DeVerteuil et al. and others (see, for example, Laurenson & Collins, 2006, 2007; Johnsen & Fitzpatrick, 2010), however, we are concerned that the current orthodoxy may lead to what will at best be an incomplete and at worst an inaccurate portrayal of homelessness in the city. There are three main components to this concern.

First, while the revanchist model emphasizes the regulatory control of the spaces in which homeless people dwell and move, it often remains silent about attempts by homeless people to negotiate, or resist, such regulation. As Lees (1998) argues, the street is a complex space that tells a variety of stories, and one crucial narrative must surely be that of how homeless people themselves exercise autonomy within the wider constraints of social and cultural regulation. For example, Ruddick (1990, 1996) has drawn attention to a vision of homeless people as *social subjects* who both create themselves, and are created, in and through the evolving spaces and politics of the city – and contrasts the apparent victimization and annihilation of

homeless people with their tenacity and ability to cope with the change going on around them. She points, in particular, to the capacity of homeless people to deploy a range of place-making devices that enhance the processes and practices of coping, with these tactics – to use de Certeau's (1984) terms – enabling them to overrule the predispositions and assigned meanings of space, and to transform the environment for unintended purposes. There are two important logics at work here. Most obviously, for Ruddick homeless people cannot and should not be regarded as political or cultural dupes, understood only as compliant or survivalist within the punitive socio-spatial order. Instead, within limits, they exercise choices and draw on enabling knowledges as well as on individual or collective creativity and capability. They form complex social networks, sometimes involving peer group cooperation, and there is evidence that the potential cohesion of shared territory, identity and defence can be a strongly positive experience (see also Rowe & Wolch, 1990; Wagner, 1993; Winchester & Costello, 1995; Duneier, 1999). Moreover, the continuing presence of homeless people in cities characterized by the regulatory and disciplinary codes of urban revanchism cannot adequately be understood simply in terms of socially constructed stigmata of deviancy and criminality. Instead, there is also a sense that the presence of homeless people among the power, wealth and leisure-orientation of prime urban spaces can undercut the very ideology of the revanchist/post-industrial/postjustice city itself (Mair, 1986).

Understood in these terms, recognizing the tactical agency of homeless people thus transcends the notion of mere survival, in the expression both of alternative social networks and of alternative political ideologies in the city. Indeed, we have argued elsewhere (Cloke et al., 2008) that overemphasis on the punitive geographies of the city cloaks a whole series of alternative cartographies of urban homelessness. Such cartographies need to embrace the ways in which homeless people journey not only to meet basic survival needs but also to earn money or to seek restful pauses in their daily practices, sometimes gathering communally, sometimes seeking solitude (see Cooper, 2001). Furthermore, such routines of movement and pause are intimately associated not only with the wider geographies of service provision and the continuum of prime and marginal space, but also with a practical knowledge of the micro-architectures of the city (Crang, 2000). They allow for the possibility of counter-inscription – of tracing over the formal understandings of city space and registering alternative signs and markers. They also point to the affective worlds of homeless people, as they co-constitute places of care, generosity, hope, charity, fun and anger both in the better-known spaces of homelessness and in those spaces that homeless people bring into being as 'homeless places' through practices of reinscription. These *human* geographies of homelessness need to be put to work alongside more regulationist understandings to offer a more complex understanding of homelessness and the city.



The second area of concern relates to the danger that a revanchist model might somehow be thought of as universally applicable. In fact, the available evidence suggests that both homelessness and recent responses to homelessness, and wider trends in urbanization and urban politics, take different forms in different countries. For example, as May (2009) has shown, both the scale and characteristics of the homeless population differs considerably in different national contexts; Swanson's (2007) research on the regulation of begging in Quito, Ecuador, argues for a particular 'twist' on revanchism characterized by an overt racial element to regulatory practices; MacLeod's (2002) study of the effects of gentrification in Glasgow notes a *selective* appropriation of a (US) revanchist political repertoire; and Slater's (2004) analysis in the Canadian context concludes that gentrification is neither revanchist or emancipatory, but that its outcomes remain highly dependent on contextual factors.

In fact, in the British context there is ample evidence of transatlantic policy transfer in the homelessness field. Thus, just as the nineteenth century saw the export of anti-vagrancy legislation from Britain to the United States (Cresswell, 2001), for example, so the late twentieth/early twenty-first centuries saw the importation into Britain from the USA of a number of technologies and techniques designed to 'manage' a problematic 'street culture' – the primary subjects of which, even if not always the originally intended targets, have been street homeless people. Such technologies include, but are not restricted to, variations of zero-tolerance policing, making begging a 'recordable offence', the 'designing out' of certain street activities, the introduction of 'diverted giving schemes', and the introduction of Designated Public Places Orders (to restrict the consumption of alcohol in public places) and of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (Johnsen & Fitzpatrick, 2007, 2010).

Yet crucially, even if central and local government approaches to homelessness have undoubtedly become more targeted around issues of enforcement, containment and control in Britain in recent years, as we argue in chapter 2 these measures have been accompanied by programmes that are much less easily characterized as 'revanchist' – most notably, perhaps, the British government's *Rough Sleepers Initiative* and *Homelessness Action Programme*, which were designed to provide additional financial support to the voluntary sector agencies offering care and accommodation to street homeless people (May et al., 2005). In other words, and belying any universal approach to the management of homelessness, at the national level there is considerable variation both in problems of homelessness and in the responses those problems engender (see also Marr, 1997; Alcock & Craig, 2001; Huber & Stephens, 2001; von Mahs, 2005; Fitzpatrick & Stephens, 2007).

Similarly, at the local level it has been recognized that the imposition of anti-homeless measures is far more prevalent in some cities (notably, those with a heavy reliance upon the financial and creative industries, tourism and the convention trade) than in others (May, 2009). As we show in chapters 7

and 8, both the form and extent of welfare provision for homeless people also differ from place to place, with widespread variations in the servicing activities of local government, the availability of finance for third sector service activity, the local cultural signification of homelessness and the historic presence of caring institutions as part of the local urban scene.

Indeed, and forming the basis of our third concern about the revanchist framework, such a framework signally fails to capture the obvious importance of welfare services for homeless people. In some ways, of course, an infrastructure of poor-quality and sometimes unprofessional shelters and hostels, usually in the marginal spaces of the city, seems to be entirely compatible with overarching theses of control and containment. These services are the necessary containers into which homeless people can be swept up, thus preventing their unwanted presence in the prime areas of the city. They provide outlets for the expression of liberal or sentimentalist ideology, presenting opportunities for volunteers to feel good about themselves while upholding the underlying political structures of bipolarization. They even open out potential opportunities for the religious to proselytize to a captive audience. In these and other respects, they seem to reflect a close-knitted incorporation of third sector resources into the revanchist logic, thereby becoming objects of critique as part of that logic.

This account sounds like a caricature, and it is. Any reasonable exploration of the motivation, ethical codes and performative traits of the professionals and volunteers involved in providing services to homeless people is likely to uncover alternative ideas to those suggested by vicious revanchism. We do not seek here to present a romanticized version of these service environments, many of which lack adequate standards of security and comfort. Neither do we ignore the possibilities that serving homeless people provides for helping to build self-interested or self-absorbed charitable identities and subjectivities. But we do argue that it is a very considerable, and inaccurate, reductive leap to assume that providing welfare services for homeless people can only be understood in these terms. Instead, we recognize these service spaces as demonstrative of deep-seated and powerful forces of charity and care (Link et al., 1995; May, 2009) in which there is a genuine ethical expression of going-beyond-the-self, of caring about and caring for the victims of neoliberal excess.

In fact, we would argue that rather than within a revanchist framework, any analysis of current responses to homelessness is better conducted within the frame of neoliberalization, and in particular the shift from roll-back to roll-out neoliberalism (Peck & Tickell, 2002) unfolding in recent years (for an elaboration of this argument see chapter 2, and May et al., 2005). At one level such a suggestion is hardly surprising – not least, since Smith (1998: 10) himself has characterized revanchism as the ‘the ugly cultural politics of neoliberal globalisation’. More specifically, however, we would argue that scholars of homelessness need to pay far more attention to the recent

reworking of social welfare (Fyfe, 2005; Milligan & Conradson, 2006), including welfare provision for homeless people (May et al., 2005; Buckingham, 2009), along neoliberal lines and the effects of this reworking on homeless people and services.

In contrast to work proceeding under the revanchist or postjustice banner, the need here is therefore to trace the interconnections between the more punitive technologies of containment and control that are the subject of the more familiar accounts of the homeless city, neoliberal governmentality, and the processes by which welfare organizations and individuals (homeless people, members of the housed public, welfare professionals and service agency volunteers alike) become 'incorporated' in changing constructions of citizenship and subjectivity. In the British case, attention needs to be turned to the recent hollowing out of the welfare state, and the subsequent rolling out of neoliberal ideas and practices that contextualize the development of policies, partnerships and practices designed to deal with issues of homelessness.

In tracing changing responses to homelessness in Britain over recent years, however, we also argue that conventional understandings of neoliberal governance need to accommodate two crucial dissonances: first, the good intentions of government, which are not necessarily swallowed up entirely by the demands of neoliberal governing; and, second, the potential for resistance to neoliberal governance by organizations and individuals wishing to serve and care for homeless people. In the latter case, rather than assuming that such organizations and individuals will necessarily be incorporated into quasi-governmental resignation to the ideologies of neoliberalism, we question whether they represent a potential nexus for resistance to such ideologies – either practising alternative values from inside the system of governance, or fashioning spaces of resilient care in opposition to the joined-up orthodoxies of such governance (see also Larner & Craig, 2005; Carey et al., 2009).

Indeed, rather than automatically understanding homeless services as implicated in revanchism, we might begin to understand them as sites of potential resistance to revanchism. Sparke (2008) urges us to explore resistance in terms of the messy middle grounds where there is a mediation of control and opposition, structure and agency, incorporation and alternative-ness. The provision of welfare services for homeless people represents one such messy middle ground: romanticized, yet often in practice deeply unromantic; easily dismissed as merely upholding the status quo, yet powered by an urge to do something about the injustice of that status quo; a cog in the revanchist engine, yet engineered and operated by people for whom revenge is the last thing on their mind. Katz (2004) has usefully differentiated between ideas of resistance, reworking and resilience as different parts of a multifaceted vocabulary of opposition to the impacts of globalization. Here, she incorporates respectively an oppositional consciousness that achieves emancipatory objectives (resistance), an impact on the organization of power

relations if not their polarized distribution (reworking), and an enabling of survival in circumstances that do not allow changes to the causes that dictate survival (resilience). This nuanced exposition of what it is to ‘resist’ helps us to look at participation in providing services for homeless people in a progressive light. Rather than a simple incorporated involvement in neoliberal state practices fuelled by punitive revanchist ideologies, participation may involve a more complex attempt to engage in an oppositional politics of resilience and even reworking in the face of these ideologies.

We seek here to explore the confluence of these various ideas in practice, charting the changing politics of homelessness within a neoliberal phase of governance in Britain. We trace potential interconnections between techniques and governmentalities of neoliberalism and the punitive regulation of homeless people, especially in terms of spatial processes of control, containment and ‘sweeping up’. At the same time, however, we are interested in assessing the ways in which specific geographical or political factors have emerged both nationally and locally in Britain to shape responses to homelessness, and the particular ideological, motivational or contextual factors that have shaped these particularities. As the state has embraced partnership with third sector agencies in the pursuance of its policies, we interrogate the possibilities for these partners to act as more than merely incorporated neogovernmental stooges, engaging in forms of care and charity that could be interpreted in terms of resistance rather than revanchism. It is also important to understand the role played by third sector service providers that – whether by choice or different forms of incompatibility – operate outside the boundaries of partnership with government, and may even be pursuing goals that are contrary to the ideology and techniques of the current neoliberal regime. And, in so doing, we also want to leave space in our conceptual framework for questions of agency: the agency of homeless people – charting the way in which their actions shape the contours of the homeless city – but also of the professionals and volunteers who provide accommodation and care to homeless people in a fully peopled (welfare) state.

## **The Homeless Places Project**

The material presented in this book is drawn from a research project that ran from June 2001 to March 2004. Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, the Homeless Places Project examined the provision and governance of emergency services (night shelters, ‘direct access’ hostels, day centres and soup runs) for single homeless people in Britain.\* Driven by a

\* In discussions of homelessness in England distinctions are necessarily drawn between the ‘statutory’ and ‘non-statutory’ homeless, a distinction first made in relation to the 1977 Housing (Homeless Persons) Act and upheld in all subsequent revisions to the Act. The former refers to

desire to explore the geographical specificity of responses to homelessness, the project first constructed a map of national provision (with postal surveys of some 212 night shelters and hostels, 164 day centres and 63 soup runs across England, Wales and Scotland) before focusing upon the provision and use of such services in seven contrasting towns and cities in England, here referred to as: Benington, a large city in the south-west of England; Castlebridge, a small market town in southern England; Crossfield, an agricultural centre and market town in central England; Sandstown, a declining seaside resort in northern England; Steeltown, a large, manufacturing city in north-east England; Wimpster, a cathedral city in the west of England; and Winton, a small town in the far south-west of England. Precisely because, as outlined above, discussions of homelessness and of the 'homeless city' have tended to be shaped by developments in a small number of larger cities (most notably, perhaps, New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco and, to a lesser extent, London) a decision was made to explore experiences of homelessness beyond the metropolitan core, with research conducted in a number of smaller towns and rural areas. While appearing to stretch the concept of the 'homeless city' somewhat, as we demonstrate in chapters 7 and 8, much of what we often consider to be 'urban homelessness' has its roots in rural areas – as homeless people travel to the city from places further afield; or indeed, leave the city for the countryside. In this sense, urban and rural homelessness are connected by a range of movements – both geographical (the movements of homeless people themselves) and conceptual (as rural homelessness often only becomes rendered visible, and thus categorized as 'homelessness', when homeless people begin to congregate in urban centres) (see Cloke et al., 2002). At the same time, because we were concerned with the governance of homelessness, we also felt it important to explore not only the 'home spaces' (Peck & Tickell, 2002) but also the 'extremities' of neoliberal welfare restructuring – so as to gain a keener understanding of the ways in which such restructuring unfolds, often very unevenly, across different types of social space. Thus, case study research was conducted in towns and cities of different sizes across England – ranging

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those to whom the local state has a statutory duty of care, namely the provision of accommodation: people with dependants or those otherwise found in 'priority need' (by virtue of age or ill-health, for example), who have not made themselves 'intentionally' homeless and who are legally entitled to public welfare provision. In contrast, the non-statutory homeless have no such right to either emergency or more permanent accommodation and are mainly dependent upon non-statutory organizations for emergency shelter. Because historically the majority (though by no means all) of the non-statutory homeless population have been single, it has become commonplace to refer to this group as single homeless people (Pleace et al., 1997). Those sleeping rough on the streets or living in night shelters and 'direct access' hostels (i.e. people experiencing some form of 'street homelessness' and whose experiences are examined here) are almost always part of the single homeless population. 'Direct access' hostels refer to those hostels that accept people directly from the streets without the need for a referral by another agency.

from a city of some 380,000 people to a small, market town of a little over three thousand – chosen so as to capture places of both relatively ‘high’ and relatively ‘low’ service provision (as revealed by the national survey of service providers).

The postal surveys sought to establish a basic picture of the nature and extent of emergency provision for homeless people – providing information on the kinds of organizations engaged in welfare services for homeless people, the nature of the services they provided, funding arrangements, staffing procedures and so on – together with an indication of the ethical motivations, or ‘mission’, of these organizations (see chapter 2). Work in each of the case studies then proceeded through a combination of participant observation (outlined below) and semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 131 representatives of these services – including project managers (39), paid staff (29), volunteers (26) and a range of key informants (local authority housing officials, city centre management operatives, street outreach teams, police officers, volunteer bureau workers etc.) (37) – together with some 90 homeless people. Interviews with homeless respondents were supplemented by a further 160 or so less formal conversations with service users emerging out of the period of participant observation, and a further 17 semi-structured interviews conducted in support of the auto-photography work (see below).

*Project manager* interviews focused primarily on the history, ethos, structure and position of each project within the local service network. Interviews with *paid and volunteer staff* considered motivations for working in the sector, career paths and histories of volunteering, satisfactions and challenges, and views on the level and form of service provision in their area. *Service user* interviews were frequently more free-flowing but typically examined individuals’ homeless life histories, mobility paths, experience of services within and outside the local area, and broader experience of an area’s ‘homeless scene’. Finally, interviews with *key informants* revolved around what we have termed the ‘archaeology’ of service provision in their area (including an account of services that had closed), the composition of the single homeless population, local geographies of rough sleeping, begging and street drinking, and local initiatives aimed at combating homelessness. Interviews were conducted in hostels and day centres and on the streets, as well as in the homes of volunteers and the workplaces of key informants. Most were conducted privately, though group interviews were held when interviewees expressed such a preference, or where private interview facilities were unavailable. Interviews ranged in length from 20 minutes to three hours. Where permission was given, interviews were tape recorded, transcribed verbatim and coded according to analytical themes.

One of the authors (Sarah) also engaged in an extensive period of overt participant observation in 18 night shelters, day centres and soup runs throughout the fieldwork period – sometimes working as a volunteer,

sometimes simply 'hanging out' with service users. Though time consuming, such work proved vital in establishing relationships of trust with service users, who can otherwise be wary of talking with 'outsiders', in facilitating interviews with people with chaotic lifestyles, and in order to observe the dynamics shaping different service environments. Notes relating to the informal discussions with staff and services users, and on the dynamics of these spaces, emerging through the participant observation process were used to triangulate other forms of data.

Finally, 17 of our homeless respondents in two different case study areas (urban and rural) agreed to participate in an auto-photography exercise using disposable cameras to produce a record of their experiences of homelessness. Participants were given a set of prints to keep, and interviewed about their choice of images. Though also time-consuming, and difficult to arrange, the photo diaries provided very significant insight into homeless people's negotiation of spaces that would have been inappropriate or unsafe for members of the research team to access – for example, squats – and new understandings of apparently already 'known' spaces of homelessness such as day centres and hostels (for further discussion of this part of the project see Johnsen et al., 2008).

A selection of these images is included in chapters 3, 5 and 6. Their inclusion has less to do with simply 'illustrating' the various spaces of homelessness explored herein, than with providing a further mode of expression through which the people we talked with might 'witness' their experiences of homelessness in ways that are less constrained by the presuppositions and prejudices that to some extent always shape the conduct of research interviews and the selection and presentation of material from such interviews. Indeed, and as we hope will become clear, while some of the images selected for inclusion obviously reinforce the arguments being made at different points of the book, elsewhere they provide what might be termed a 'counter-narrative': providing readers with quite different 'views' of the spaces of homelessness described by other respondents and thus – we hope – drawing attention to the always multiple and contested nature of those spaces and of our, and our respondents', understandings of them.

Working from the information provided by service agencies in the national survey of provision, the characteristics of service users broadly matched the wider demographics of street homeless people in Britain (outside of the main metropolitan areas) (see Briheim-Crockall et al., 2008). That is, while the age of respondents varied from people as young as 19 to people in their late fifties, the majority of respondents were aged between 25 and 45 years of age, and all but one identified themselves as White British. Within this apparently otherwise relatively homogeneous group, however, people recounted widely varying histories of homelessness, ranging from those who had only recently gone on to the streets to those with a long history of rough sleeping and hostel use, and those whose homeless histories are better

described as 'episodic' (May, 2000a). Not surprisingly, perhaps, these different groups tended to describe quite different experiences of life on the streets and of homeless service spaces, with these differences cross cut in complex ways by other positionalities; for example, a person's position in each of the main subgroups (variously labelled 'pissheads', 'smackheads' and 'straightheads' in street nomenclature) within the homeless population identified by our respondents, each of which tend to make use of different parts of the city, and – where possible – different service spaces (see chapters 3 to 6).

More obviously, perhaps, in line with the wider demographics of Britain's street homeless population, male respondents outnumbered female respondents by almost four to one (with 71 male respondents and 19 women). The homeless men and women we talked with also tended to articulate quite different cartographies of homelessness: in their movements around the city and the geographies of rough sleeping, for example (see chapter 3); in the likelihood of either group turning to key homeless services such as soup runs, day centres, and hostels; and in their experience of these service spaces (chapters 4 to 6).

While sensitive to such differences, we are also wary of overdetermining them. Though homelessness is quite clearly a gendered experience (Smith, 1999), there is a need to avoid an essentialist reading of the difference that gender makes. For example, it has been suggested that street homelessness is largely a male preserve (Higate, 2000a, b), with homeless women tending either to avoid the streets altogether (by remaining in (abusive) domestic relationships, for example) or to retreat into the shadows of the street homeless 'scene' (Wardhaugh, 1999). As we have argued elsewhere (May et al., 2007), it is in fact possible to trace a wide variety of experiences of homelessness among street homeless women: ranging from those who attempt to distance themselves from the broader street homeless population and 'street scene' for fear of the violence that often permeates that scene (sleeping rough in suburban rather than central city locations, or in hard to find spaces within the central city, for example, and rarely making use of emergency services); to those who are highly visible and obviously 'marked' as 'homeless' (sleeping rough in mixed sex groups in the central city, or assuming a key role in local street drinking 'schools', for example). Rather than essentialize, or treat the gendering of homelessness as a separate phenomenon, we have instead attempted to weave a sensitivity to the difference that gender makes to people's experiences of homelessness (and the experiences of the volunteers and paid staff who work in homeless services) throughout the main substantive chapters of the book. In so doing, we recount the sometimes quite different experiences of the streets and of homeless services articulated by homeless men and women, drawing attention to the difference that a person's gender seems to make to those experiences, without overdetermining them.



Of course, a project that puts homeless people – and the paid staff and volunteers providing homeless services – firmly at its centre raises a number of complex ethical issues. Again, we have already discussed these at some length elsewhere (Cloke et al., 2000a, 2003a; Johnsen et al., 2008; Johnsen, 2010) and do not have the space here to revisit these arguments in any great detail. But three such issues are worth reiterating. First, we would argue that the need to more fully (and critically) engage with the details of homelessness policy and provision is as much an ethical as a conceptual imperative. This was no more evident than when one of our homeless interviewees responded to our rather abstract explanation of the purposes of our research (couched in terms of its contribution to academic debates around urban homelessness) with: ‘What the fuck’s the point of that?!’ (Cloke et al., 2003a). The desire to critically engage with, and contribute to, questions of social policy as well as academic debate, and to produce research that might have some real and positive value to the subjects of that research, is hardly unique. While there is a long history of ‘action research’ in the social sciences, the past few years have also seen a growing (if more narrowly focused) debate concerning geography’s ‘relevance’ (Johnsen, 2010). It is, however, both surprising and – for us – a cause of real concern that these debates would seem to have had little impact on the nature of the research into the geographies of homelessness. As we have already suggested, too much of this research continues to proceed at a relatively high level of abstraction, with only a narrow engagement with the concrete changes shaping homeless people’s lives (notably, those concerning changes to the regulation of public space, rather than welfare service provision) and with little or no discussion, via a field-based methodology, with the subjects of that research – namely, homeless people themselves.

Second, the kinds of ethnographic methods deployed here raise a number of issues around research design and supervision. Most obviously, perhaps, working in homeless service spaces faces the researcher with (some of) the dangers and distress that permeate such environments (see, for example, the account of St James’ night shelter in chapter 6). That is, it confronts the researcher with issues with which homeless people, and homeless service providers, must deal on a day-to-day basis. Some such dangers can be avoided through careful research design, and the use of particular methodological techniques. As we noted above, one reason to turn to auto-photography was that it granted the research team access to spaces – such as squats – that we felt it would have been unsafe (and, with respect of people’s privacy, inappropriate) to enter. When working in day centres and night shelters, we adopted the strategies employed by the volunteers and paid staff in those services to minimize the threats they sometimes face: going to and from a night shelter in the company of others, sitting near the door in interview rooms or undertaking interviews with service users within plain sight of (other) staff wherever possible, for example. The emotional strain that working

with vulnerable people can produce – when one can find oneself listening to tales of great suffering – is hardly restricted to those working with street homeless people. But it is certainly difficult to ‘design out’ – indeed it would in many ways be counterproductive to do so, if only because such stories are sometimes a vital part of the issues under examination. For our own part, the emotional work involved in such research necessitated a careful and consistent process of research supervision, in which the main field researcher (Sarah) had the opportunity to regularly ‘debrief’ with another member of the research team. When working as a volunteer in such services, Sarah also participated in staff handover and incident debriefing meetings.

Third, and again we would argue that this is (or should be) an aim of any ethnographic work, it is vital that the subjects of such research are presented ‘in the round’; as fully fleshed subjects in their own right, with all the messy and (sometimes) uncomfortable understandings, attitudes and practices that real people often articulate. Here, for example, we hope we have presented the volunteers who staff Britain’s homeless services as neither paragons of virtue nor patronizing do-gooders, but ‘ordinary’ people engaged in transforming an ordinary ethics of care into an ‘extraordinary’ sense of ethical commitment to the other; and people who, even in the midst of such acts of kindness, sometimes articulate views of those they are serving which are anything but progressive. Likewise, we hope we have avoided the all too common tendency in some recent writings on homelessness to present homeless people as passive victims of forces beyond their control and/or as the standard bearers of resistance to a revanchist politics; that is, as convenient ciphers around which to build a wider critique of gentrification, public space law and so on (DeVerteuil et al., 2009). Such moves, it seems to us, strip homeless people not only of their agency, but also of their humanity. The hope, then, is that we have neither romanticized nor stigmatized homeless people, but given proper voice to the complex and often contradictory emotions, experiences, understandings and actions that homeless people too, and homeless people’s lives, articulate.

At a more mundane level, it is also important to give some indication of the basic ethical protocols followed in this research. For example, information sheets were sent to all organizations involved in the research. While the principles behind interview protocol were consistent, the actual procedure for conducting interviews with homeless service users were adapted to accord with the wishes of individual respondents and project managers. Permission to publish photographs and (anonymized) information derived from interview transcripts was obtained from all participants, and all names (of individuals, service organizations and places) have been changed.

Finally, it is important to recognize the timing of the research reported here. Given the long lead times of academic publishing, it is of course always difficult for academic research to be as timely as its authors might like – especially in a field such as this, which is prone to what Peck (2001a) has

referred to as a ‘speeding up’ of policy development and transfer. Nonetheless, and as we acknowledged earlier, this book has had an unusually long gestation period. Much of the primary research on which the book draws was conducted in 2001–2, a period in which the government’s Homelessness Action Programme (HAP) was drawing to a close and local authorities and voluntary sector service providers alike were gearing up for the introduction of a new system of funding for supported accommodation services (Supporting People) and beginning to formulate the then soon to be introduced Local Homelessness Strategies (LHSs) – in which local authorities in England were, for the first time, required to set out their plans to meet the needs of single homeless people within their jurisdiction. With the phasing out of the central government funded HAP, and the introduction of LHSs, the governance of homelessness in Britain thus underwent (yet) further reorganization – as local authorities began to play a more direct role in determining the nature of any response to homelessness in their local areas; albeit within the limits set out by central government guidelines and funding streams (on the rescaling of homeless governance see May et al. 2005). Further reorganization has happened since, with the emergence, from 2005, of regional homelessness and supporting people strategies and with the launch, in 2008, of the Communities and Local Government’s *No One Left Out* initiative (CLG, 2008a). Pledging to provide £200 million to its partners in the voluntary sector and local government, the initiative seeks to pick up where the Homelessness Action Programme left off – reducing levels of rough sleeping in England (to zero in some cases) by 2012, through a familiar toolkit of voluntary sector/local and central government ‘partnerships’ working according to a set of action plans and targets set by the centre.

However, in the current context at least, perhaps the most important aspect of the *No One Left Out* initiative is that it demonstrates how little has actually changed with regard to the core characteristics of British single homelessness policy over the past decade or so (though see chapter 2). Or, to put it more accurately, the key elements of the system of governance put in place by New Labour in an attempt to ‘manage’ the problem of single homelessness a little over a decade ago – deploying the resources of (selected) voluntary sector organizations to meet centrally determined targets on the reduction of rough sleeping, with central government funding streamed via local authorities who are themselves tightly constrained by central government ‘codes of guidance’ – have remained remarkably consistent since they were first introduced by the then Rough Sleepers Unit and rolled out in the government’s Homelessness Action Programme (1999–2002). In this sense, while the names of some of the programmes and relevant government departments may have changed since we embarked upon this research, we believe that the arguments made here remain a pertinent reading of British single homelessness policy – because we have focused upon the deeper lying (slower moving and still persistent) logic of those policies rather than only

their surface manifestation. Indeed, the research may provide a particularly valuable reading of this broader system of governance precisely because of the time at which it was conducted – a time when this system was new, and thus those responsible for enacting it (local and central government officials, voluntary sector organizations and homeless people) were highly reflective about its roots, current characteristics and likely future.

## The Structure of the Book

In the remainder of this book we present detailed accounts of the conceptual and material spaces of homelessness that form the basis of our re-envisioning of the homeless city. Chapter 2 charts two conceptual landscapes from which this re-envisioning emerges. First, we take an interest in different facets of *neoliberalism* that are important to a fuller understanding of recent responses to homelessness: the mundane and everyday *techniques* by which neoliberalism constitutes itself in different spaces and social networks; the creation of different kinds of acting subjects, and in particular *homeless subjectivities*, regulated and enabled under neoliberalism; and the changing *processes* and *practices* of actually existing neoliberalism that serve to reconstruct the technologies and subjectivities of welfare provision and social exclusion. Second, we explore the possibilities inherent in the concept of *postsecularism* – exploring the idea that recent years have seen a reshaping of the supposedly binary relationships between secular publics and private religions and suggesting that the provision of services for homeless people represents one such arena in which a rapprochement of secular and faith-based ethical motivations is forging new forms of collaborative ethical praxis, and new geographies of compassion and care, in the city.

In chapter 3, we focus on homeless people's own accounts of the homeless city to demonstrate the importance of emotion and affect in the lives of homeless people and to trace the deposits of such emotions and affects on and in the homeless city. By drawing attention to the creative deployment of managing impressions, the performance of particular discursive roles and the pre-discursive and emotional aspects of homeless people's lives, we aim to restore to homeless people not only a stronger sense of agency but also a crucial sense of humanity so often missing in accounts of urban homelessness.

In chapters 4, 5 and 6 we turn our attention to the various service spaces in which homeless people spend so much of their time, presenting a detailed reading of Britain's soup runs (chapter 4), day centres (chapter 5) and night shelters and hostels (chapter 6). Methodologically the chapters are structured around the accounts of both service users and providers – giving voice to the homeless people that make use of such services but also to the staff and volunteers providing them. Conceptually, we trace the complex dynamics

of these spaces, the ethical frames that underpin and are brought into being therein, and homeless people's experiences of them.

In chapters 7 and 8 the focus shifts from an examination of these homeless spaces to an examination of contrasting 'homeless places', charting the geographical unevenness of contemporary homeless service provision. Drawing on our research in Benington and Steeltown, chapter 7 suggests a raft of historical, political and organizational reasons why different patterns of service provision emerge in different cities and the interconnections between service *provision* and service *consumption*. We argue that such unevenness leads to culturally significant and locally specific homeless 'scenes' – scenes that are both acknowledged and experienced by homeless people, and are performed in material and affective ways in the complex cartographies they generate in the urban spaces concerned. Though rural areas are popularly disconnected from the politics and representations of homelessness, by way of contrast chapter 8 explores the production and consumption of very different homeless services and scenes in four very different rural areas. Here, we chart some of the connections between urban and rural homelessness, but also offer a more nuanced account of the multiple geographies of homelessness in a varied rural space. Drawing these issues together, chapter 9 offers some broader thoughts on the role of the voluntary sector and of volunteers in providing for homeless people, and on revanchism, neoliberalism and postsecularism in the homeless city.