

Living Without a Home: An Intersectional Research-Creation on Homelessness in Switzerland

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19th European Research Conference

University of Applied Sciences and
Arts Western Switzerland, HES-SO,
Fribourg, Switzerland

18th and 19th September, 2025
Utrecht, Netherlands

1

« Le film fait maison »
-> The Home made film

Funded Research project:

Non-take up of emergency shelters by homeless people: constructing an emic knowledge using on-board cameras

Swiss National Science Fondation (SNSF) - SPARK (n° 221042), 2024

Research team:

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Objectives

1. Make visible housing insecurity (women, undocumented, LGBTQIA+)
2. Question knowledge production:
 - > Fieldwork relations (power)
 - > Methods used

2

Dominant narratives

Homelessness = lone man in public space

Erases diversity of situations

Shapes research & policies

Our project → *decentering the narrative*

3

Swiss Contet (french speaking part)

- Homelessness as a public policy issue:
 - Recognized for less than 10 years, even in the most advanced cantons
 - Very little quantitative data → not seen as a major social problem
 - **Data fragmented** due to federalist system (cantonal sovereignty)
 - **Few qualitative studies**, but field expanding with methodological debates
- Highly fragmented landscape:
 - Differences between cantons and even municipalities
 - **No dedicated shelters** for women or LGBTQIA+ people
 - In certain cantons → **emergency shelters are paid**
 - Networks operate in silos (domestic violence, child protection, justice of the peace, etc.)
- Structural factors:
 - Private housing market with little state intervention
 - Highly unequal labor market
- Gender dimension:
 - Contrary to normative images of Switzerland, violence against women is a major political and social issue
 - Lack of reliable statistics on femicides, still rarely recognized as such

4

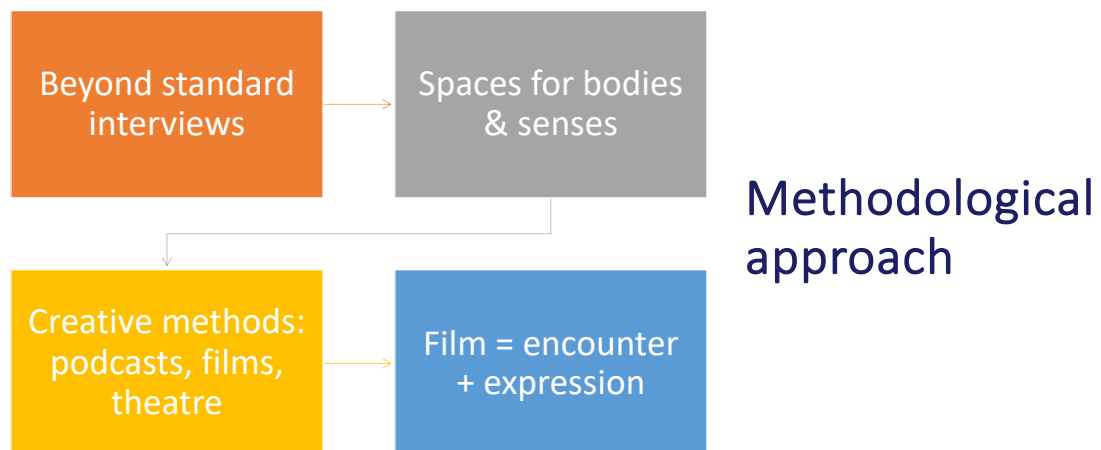
Theoretical framework

Intersectional feminism → multiple inequalities
(Crenshaw, 1991; Hill Collins, 1990; Bilge, 2009)

State anthropology → institutions produce exclusion
(Scott, 1976; Gupta, 2012; Das & Poole, 2004)

Research-creation → sensitive, aesthetic, collaborative
(Chapman, 2019; Manning & Massumi, 2014)

5



6



The project



Each person is invited to make a short film lasting 8 to 10 minutes on the subject of housing. The questions addressed to all filmmakers are as follows: What does housing mean to you? What does “home” mean to you? In your daily life, what situations, places, people, and objects are meaningful in the experience of homelessness? What aspect of your experience do you want to highlight and show to the public? Why is it important for you?

7



The nature of films

The format of the films is open (fiction, documentary, filmed testimony, filmed diary, essay). They may or may not include speech. This may be subjective, conveying the testimony of the filmmaker, or it may be that of other people. The film may also be a purely visual, sensory work, showing the places, objects, and landscapes of the habitat.



8

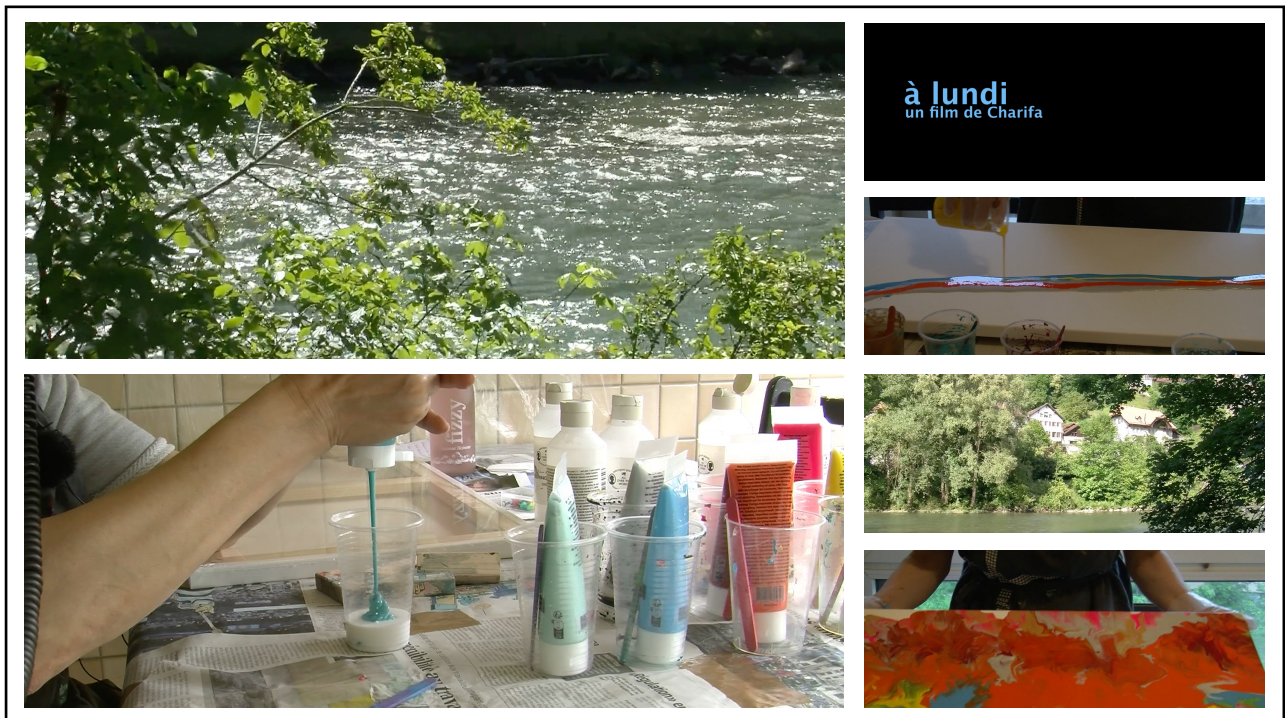
Research process

1. Legal & technical training workshops
2. Footages by concerned people themselves
3. Dialogue on representation & narrative choices
4. Editing by a professional
5. Discussions
6. New editing

Images:

- Document homelessness from within
- Show how participants interpret there own experiences

9



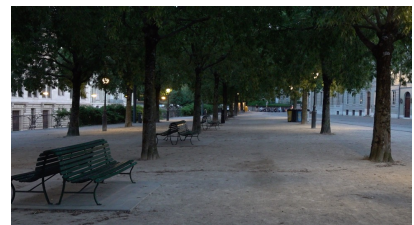
10

à lundi
un film de Charifa

2024, 9 min

Inside of an apartment and the banks of a river in French-speaking Switzerland, *À lundi* follows Charifa in her search for refuge and expression. In an apartment, she sets up her camera, prepares her brushes, and transforms the kitchen table into a studio, describing painting as an escape “to paradise.” Then, camera in hand, she addresses a filmed letter to the researchers and to the public, speaking of the home as a place of happiness and refuge, but also as a space threatened by the precariousness of her residence status. *À lundi* thus weaves an intimate and political narrative, where daily gestures and images of nature become a claim to dignity and stability.

11



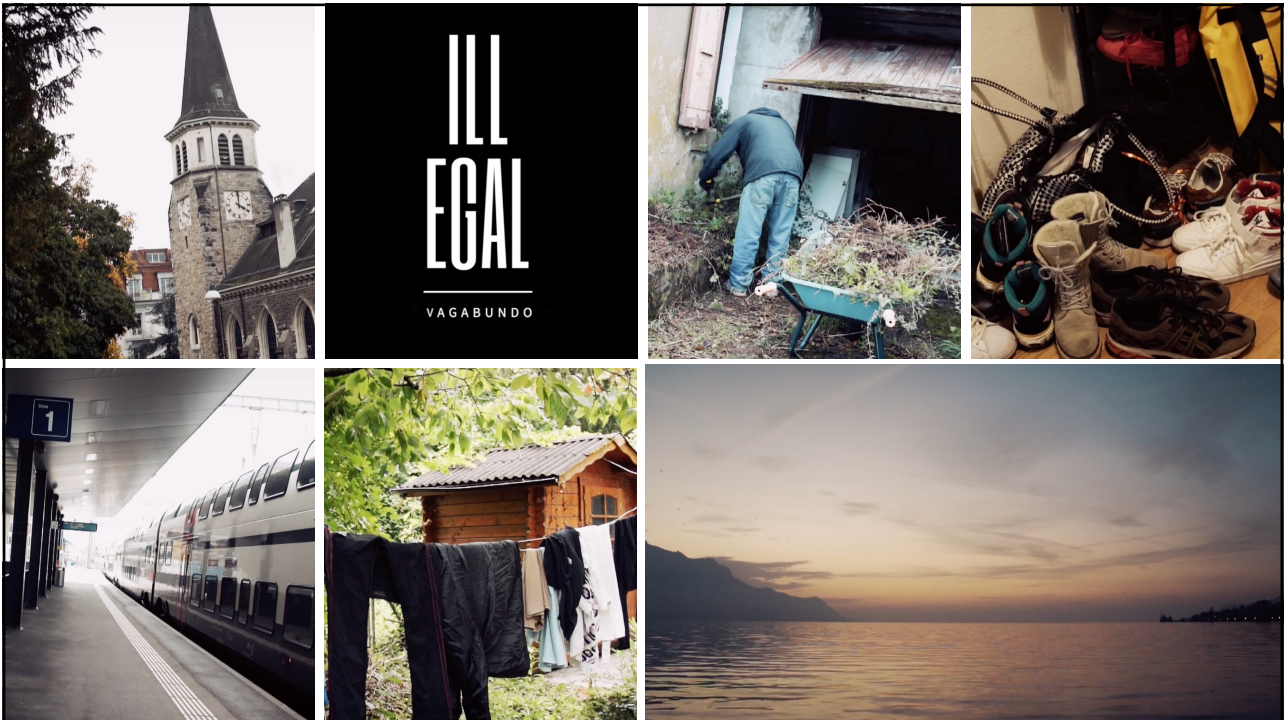
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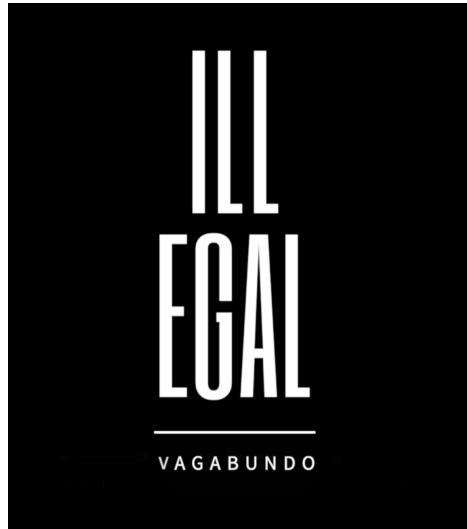
2024, 8 min

Le Banc retraces the journey of a young man forced to live on the street after being rejected by his family and community because of his homosexuality. The camera follows a walk through the parks and streets of Geneva, where benches become both refuge and symbol of exclusion. In voiceover, Raphaël tells his story: clandestine love, expulsion, nights spent outside seeking safety under streetlamps, and finally the decisive encounter with an association that enabled him to find a roof. Carried by simple images and an intimate narration, the film condenses into a single symbolic day the experience of precariousness and survival, and ends with laughter—a fragile yet determined sign of resistance

13



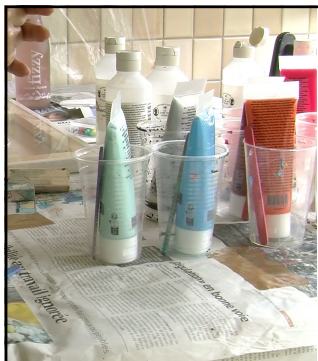
14



2024, 22 min

From Vallorbe to Lausanne, *Illégal* retraces the fragmented journey of an undocumented man in Switzerland. Each new place he passes through is presented as a “first home,” underscoring the impossibility of settling down durably. The film interweaves personal memories, the collective memory of struggles (church occupations, militant mobilizations, the “standing parliament”), and visual metaphors that speak both of exclusion and of solidarity. The voiceover alternates between autobiographical narrative and third-person testimony, lending the text a quasi-incantatory dimension. The film culminates in a critique of legal categories: “I am illegal... if you remove the ‘i’, I become legal.” It ends at dusk, on the lakeshore, with a song addressed to the audience: “The life of an asylum seeker is a hard life. If you’re not in it, you won’t know anything.” The final appeal directly questions Swiss society: “Where are you, my friends? Where is humanity?”

15



à lundi
un film de Charifa



**ILL
EGAL**

VAGABUNDO



LE BANC
UN FILM DE RAPHAËL

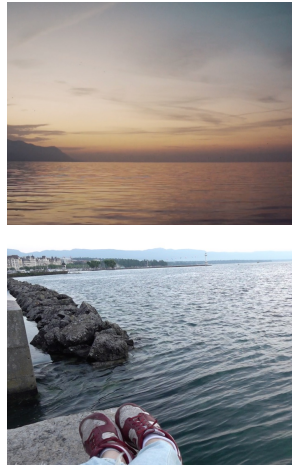
From Testimony to Address: Resistant Subjectivities

- A sensitive & political cartography of homelessness in French-speaking Switzerland
- Common logic: narrating lived experience through voice and images
- Four transversal dimensions: **Territories – Voice – Address – Care**

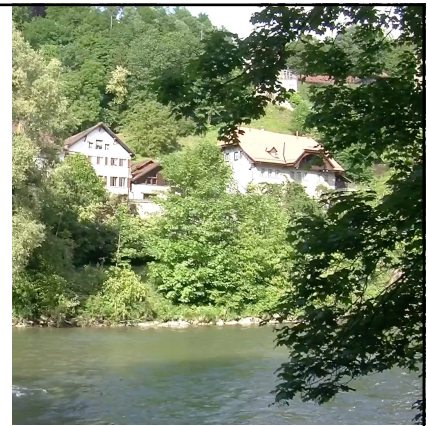
16

Territories

- Media focus = most visible, extreme forms of homelessness
- Films deconstruct this logic → show diffuse, long-term precariousness
- Homelessness = multiple modes of accommodation:
 - state-run, associative, militant
 - squats, precarious housing, street life
- Chosen images: places of respite, attachment, sociability, mobilization



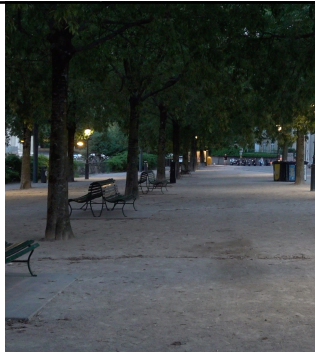
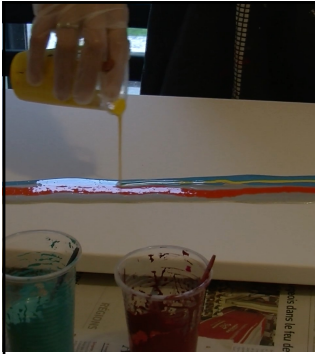
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Examples of Territories

- Raphaël's **bench** → both exclusion and attachment
- Vagabundo's **meals & churches** → sociability and mobilization
- Charifa's **river** → a place of replenishment

18



Voice

- No anonymization techniques used in the media, such as blurring bodies. Here, it is the directors who decide what can and should be shown. But this leads to a lot of discussion about what can be shown and the risk of being recognized or identified.
- Modes of voice: direct testimony, metonymy, fragments
- Voice = central documentary tool, with varied styles of recording
- Not victimizing → instead affirming **resistant subjectivities**



19



Political Discourse

- Voice links **individual** → **collective experience**
- Address expands scope: not only personal but societal
- Examples of address:
 - Charifa → filmed letter to researchers
 - Raphaël → message to youth & society (against homophobia)
 - Vagabundo → appeal to "Swiss friends" for recognition
- Echoes Rancière: redistribution of what is visible & audible

20

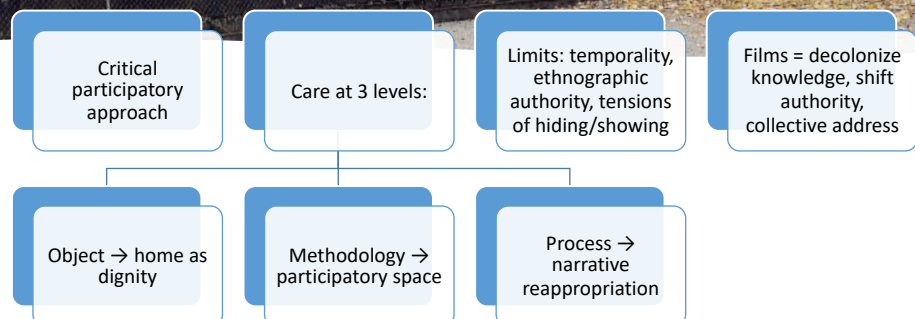
Care

- Beyond institutional care → self-care & mutual care
- Practices of care as **resistance**:
 - Painting (Charifa)
 - Loving (Raphaël)
 - Gardening (Vagabundo)
- Housing = more than material shelter: belonging, recognition, security
- Resonance with feminist analyses (Hooks, 2000; Tronto, 1993) & Butler's precarious lives (2004)
- Individual practices linked to **collective dynamics** (undocumented, LGBTQIA+, migrant struggles)



21

Conclusion



22

Next Steps

- Film screenings & premieres
- New project → theatre as methodology

<https://anthroposensible.wordpress.com/>

Thank you
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