

The following three selections from *Vidas descontadas* (*Discounted Lives*; La oveja roja 2025) are translations of the original selections shared by the authors. Note that translation from Spanish here was done in collaboration between the Mapping Absence team and DeepL.

## Hospital, Shelter (*refugio*), and Overlapping Waits

Ignacio Irazuzta

Monterrey, 18 February 2022

Almost everyone knows about the people who live under the bridge on Gonzalitos Avenue, in front of the Hospital and Faculty of Medicine of the Autonomous University of Nuevo León, in Monterrey, because they live in the surrounding area and, above all, because they travel through that part of the city. Many of the city's two million vehicles pass near, or over, this shelter (*refugio*) under the bridge.

For many of Monterrey's residents, we imagine this place as an extension of the hospital. We understand that relatives of hospitalized patients spend the night and live there, that it is a kind of annex to the hospital's waiting rooms, which we picture as overflowing or not quite suited to long waits. But after an initial visit and conversation with someone here, I learned that it brings together many people who are homeless. It is as if the status of being a patient's family member legitimizes the existence of this visible and open shelter with a cloak of "good misfortune," making its daily rhythms—in all their dynamism—possible, with the acquiescence of the police; with multiple forms of charity from churches, businesses, and other civil organizations that distribute food among the local people; with various food stands; between bus stops, in front of traffic lights, etc.

Hospital, wait, bridge, major avenue, lives in transit, and city are some of the elements that make up this liminal landscape of overflowing shelters, a place of multiple connections and lives exposed to the elements and overlapping waits.



## Blanket

Carolina Kobelinsky

Paris, 25 February 2022

Yesterday, I was in my old Parisian neighborhood, just passing through on my way to a meeting. Walking up Rue de Belleville, I heard someone call out, “Madame Carole.” I turned around, and there was Ali. A huge smile revealed that his teeth—the ones he still has—are in better shape than they used to be, when he couldn’t even open his mouth because of the pain. As always, he was wearing black pants with frayed hems, old sneakers, a black jacket with yellow print, hood up. And his shopping bag.

I couldn’t guess Ali’s age. He is from sub-Saharan Africa, but I don’t know where exactly; I never asked. I know he has been in France for years, that he lived in Amiens for a while, and that he came to Paris when he heard there were places “where there are lots of Africans,” thinking that perhaps that would facilitate access to the basics, “a roof, a bathroom, food.” Perhaps even papers. I suspect that this happened towards the end of 2015 or 2016. I met him at the beginning of lockdown, when we exchanged a few words outside the neighborhood bakery. And that’s where he spent most of the pandemic, asking for help “to pay for a night in a hotel,” “to eat a kebab,” “to have a coffee.” Shortly after meeting him, I realized that every morning, upon arriving in the neighborhood, he would leave his shopping bag with Céline, the blue-eyed lady at the fancy produce shop, and that he would pick it up around six, on his way to the hotel, the public showers, or the stairs of a subway station where he would spend the night. When the produce shop changed managers last year, Ali decided to keep his bag on him at all times.

Chatting yesterday as we walked to the kebab shop, Ali opened the bag to show me how wet his blanket was. It had rained a lot in the days before, and it still hadn’t dried. The bag contained only that, a blanket, HIS blanket. I suddenly had flashes of the discussion the other day in which Gatti or María, I can’t remember (maybe both?), mentioned UNICEF’s advertisement about blankets. The blanket almost as an extension of his body, a kind of shield to cover himself, protect himself, defend himself. Perhaps a minimal form of shelter (*refugio*).

## Body-Pigeon-Being

Gabriel Gatti

Paris, 17 April 2023

We agreed to explore the 18th arrondissement of Paris, strolling through neighborhoods that would give us the chance to see what we wanted to see, which is what you don't normally see. We wandered under the metro tracks running above this part of Paris. It's interesting to see how many shelters (*refugios*) have been sprung up under the tracks. Many singular lives exist in these spaces.

When that covered walkway was about to end, and our stroll was winding down, we arrived at what I recognized as the square we had passed through a few days earlier when Eli, Ainara, and I went to Les Buttes Chaumont park. During that bright-Saturday-afternoon family outing, I took a photo of the square because I was surprised to see two piles of clothes in the middle with no one around, though it was surrounded by pigeons pecking around for food. I used the photo to illustrate a flash (*cata*) I sent to María, and I was struck by the fact that the program I'm writing this with, OneNote, interpreted it, with that keen eye proper to Silicon Valley, as "an urban square with people." There were no people, just pigeons.

Today, there were people, or rather someone or something, on each of the two piles of clothes. On the leftmost pile, someone was lying down, sleeping. On the rightmost pile, someone was moving around, pants down, extremely dirty, swaying from side to side in a kind of dance, without much sense, without seeming to be doing anything with a purpose.

I don't know what it was.

I interpreted it as a man, Carolina as a woman. And OneNote as pigeons. I think we were all right, and that's where the problem lies: in the difficulty of accurately registering that body that moves in this senseless way, and that we don't know how or where to place. It's so extreme that it isn't even unpleasant.

I turn again to Google Maps, looking for help in tracking the photographic history of that corner: In November 2022, those bodies were already there, confused among pigeons and passersby. In other words, those two beings have been on that busy corner of Paris for at least half a year, at a crossroads that leads cars, bicycles, and people to crowded neighborhoods and roads full of vehicles, next to the St. Martin canal, on the fast track to hipsterization. What a breakdown of the city's sensible record.

