Relational solidarity on the Streets: Shared Vulnerability in Face-to-face Encounters

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Abstract

In a context of increased precarity and inequality, this paper focuses on 'outreach' activities – the sharing of resources and support, time and conversation – between volunteers and homeless people in Lyon, France. Based on participant observation data over 18 months, with 18 Non-Profit-Organisations (NPOs), the focus lies on the face-to-face dialogic encounters between volunteers and homeless people. The first contribution highlights the centrality of vulnerability to social relations, and its possibilities to shift and challenge existing assumptions and categories of 'the vulnerable'. By taking a processual view of dialogic organising in action, we argue that vulnerability is not fixed and static, but is co-created in interaction as a shared, two-way vulnerability that allows openness between one and the other, or it can be shut down through the creation of boundaries and blocks to connection. The second contribution bridges Levinas' emphasis on vulnerability being central to relationship with Bakhtin's dialogism. Prompted by Bakhtin's critique of monological discourse that categorises, and gives a fixed retrospective account, we explore the dialogic in relational dynamics on the streets. We argue that reading Levinas in relation to Bakhtin's dialogism allows us to open up a space for perceiving different voices, in dialogue, working through the challenges and possibilities of coming into relation with and recognition of each other.

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Introduction

The rise in precarity and inequality following the 2008 financial crisis (Cingano, 2014), along with migration and housing crises, has led to a continuous global increase in homelessness. The 'spatial fix' of capital, driven by neoliberalism, financialization and privatization can render individuals and groups subject to the extremities of vulnerability, literally achieving what Harvey (2003) describes as "accumulation by dispossession". Along with the need of migrant populations to move around for work, and the vulnerability of those who have no access to land or other means of production, those who experience mental illness, redundancy or casualised jobs in the platform economy can be tipped into homelessness. In this political economic context, solidarity with people living on the street, practised on the streets, becomes a social necessity. Therefore, the paper is based on ethnographic data collected over 18 months, focusing on 'outreach' activities – the sharing of resources and support, time and conversation – with homeless people on the streets of Lyon, France.

This paper shares the concern of recent papers in organisation studies which seek to better understand the development of solidaristic relations as key to collective action for change (e.g. Wickström, Lund, Meriläinen, Sørensen, Vachhani, & Pullen, 2021; Fleischmann, Holck, Liu, Muhr & Murgia, 2022; Smolović Jones, Winchester & Clarke, 2021). Existing literature portrays solidarity as an evolving, often conflictual process (Vachhani, 2020; Smolović Jones et al., 2021), grounded in affect (Vachhani & Pullen, 2019; Baxter, 2021) and communal bodily co-presence (Fotaki, 2022; Reinecke, 2018). We extend this by examining the micro-level processes of dialogic interactions between homeless people and volunteers, that are modest, unglamorous, everyday activities which "often leave little representational traces" (Horton & Kraftl, 2009:21). Shotter argues that much analysis of organisations proceeds on the basis of "retrospective, finalized, monological" discourse (2010:270). In contrast, the approach to dialogic organising we take in this paper recognises the "experienced complexities, uncertainties, changing tensions, the vague but unique nature of one's living circumstances, the felt shifts in one's understandings as one moves around in one's surroundings" (*ibid*). This is organising in process. Following this perspective, we define dialogic organising as an active process in which dialogue is not merely a precursor to or an adjunct to action, but constitutes the action itself. In this light, dialogic encounters represent the *in-between*, the points of connection or disconnection in the relations between volunteers and homeless people, shaping relational solidarity on the streets. Therefore, we ask: *in a context of inherent difference and inequality, what are the possibilities and dynamics of relational solidarity through dialogic interactions?*

In focusing on the dialogic interactions, it is crucial to challenge fixed perceptions of homelessness. Homeless people do not constitute a different 'sort' of people, are not fixed in these situations throughout their lives and anyone may experience circumstances leading to homelessness. Yet interactions between volunteers and homeless people are inevitably across differences – across different power relations, differential access to material resources, and across different social valuations. These differences risk reinforcing stereotypes, such as the 'good citizen' who works and has a fixed abode, versus the 'down and out'. Indeed, the phrase 'down and out' expresses two aspects of the marginalisation encompassed in the category 'homeless people' – they are at the same time *outside* of the usual social norms, and they become perceived, consciously or unconsciously, as *inferior*. Because of how these differences are perceived, outreach with homeless people can be often dismissed as 'charity', as 'doing good' perpetuating power imbalances rather than fostering solidarity. Indeed, we have been interested to see that at times when presenting this research, other

academics have sought to (re)define (from their own position outside the relationship) the outreach work as charity rather than as solidarity or activism. 'Charity' is perceived as the opposite of solidaristic action, due to an assumption of the fixity of the different positions between 'volunteers' and 'homeless people', which excludes the possibility of 'solidarity' with its primary assumptions of shared interests or collective action (Laitinen & Pessi, 2015). By bringing a dialogic perspective, we are able to look at the interactions on the ground that fix or unfix people in these categories, opening up or closing down the possibilities for solidaristic relations. To explore these dynamics, we draw on Bakhtin's view of dialogue as foundational to human relations, based on the affirmation of openness to otherness, and as the basis of potentiality for new relations and movements for change.

A small number of recent studies have particularly pointed to the significance of vulnerability within the formation of solidaristic relations (e.g. Fotaki, 2022; Mandalaki & Fotaki, 2020; Smolović Jones et al., 2021). These form part of a nascent literature in organisation studies on vulnerability (e.g. Corlett, Mavin & Beech, 2019; Cutcher, Riach & Tyler, 2022; Johansson & Wickstrom, 2023; Bancou, 2024), particularly influenced by Judith Butler's work (2004; 2016). Butler recognises vulnerability as inherent to the interdependencies that we share as fragile humans in a precarious world; this shared vulnerability can further be a source of resistance and agency. In the dialogic face-to-face encounters that we explore, *both* volunteers *and* homeless people are exposed to vulnerability. The volunteers face the uncertain conditions of the streets which homeless people experience every day, but both volunteers and homeless people also face less recognised vulnerabilities: to share their experiences, their spaces and themselves. To better analyse the interplay of shared vulnerabilities in these interactions, we turn to Levinas' view of the relationship with the other as inherently involving vulnerability, proximity and hospitality, that yet can be blocked by the 'thematization' or objectification of the other.

Our paper provides two main contributions. The first offers a processual view of dialogic organising in relation to solidarity-in-action. We argue that vulnerability is not fixed and static, but is enacted and embodied in interaction. It can be co-created as a shared, two-way vulnerability that allows openness between one and the other, or it can be shut down through the creation of boundaries and blocks to vulnerability. In doing this we discuss how vulnerability is an important element in practising dialogic organising, where dialogue is opened, produced, actively engaged in, and sometimes rejected by voices rarely heard and often silenced, both in life and in social science knowledge. The second contribution brings Bakhtin's dialogism into encounter with Levinas' relational ethics. Both Bakhtin and Levinas recognise the centrality of the radical alterity of the other. However, Levinas' emphasis on the non-reciprocity of the ethical relation can unintentionally shut down analysis of the significance of interaction where the parties (in this case, homeless person and volunteer) are both self *and* other at different points in the encounter. A Bakhtinian dialogical approach provides a way of understanding Levinas' radical openness to the other within relational dynamics.

In the next section we outline connections between literature on relational solidarity and vulnerability, and then develop our conversation between Levinas and Bakhtin. We then explain our methods and present the analysis of the fieldwork, closing with a discussion of what dialogic organising through shared vulnerability contributes to understanding relations of solidarity in practice.

Vulnerability and dialogic organising

Relational solidarity and shared vulnerability: developing connections

In the context of contemporary economic, environmental, and political crises it is not surprising that organisation studies has turned attention to how organisational arrangements and social relations can produce or constrain social change. The concept of social solidarity – the ties that bind people – has come to the fore, with work which seeks to define and map what constitutes solidarity (e.g. Scholz, 2015; Laitinen & Pessi, 2015). However, there has also been recognition that attempts to classify solidarity can write out the "malleability and multiple meanings of solidarity" (Fotaki, 2022:296) and abstract them from solidaristic relations on the ground. For example, Buchter (2022) discusses how initiatives framed as 'solidaristic' can end up reinforcing the perception of recipients as needy and different, through essentialising their characteristics. Laitinen and Pessi (2015:2) distinguish solidarity as "we-thinking", compared to egocentric "I-thinking", or to altruistic, charitable "thou-thinking". I/we/thou thinking imposes a definition from outside, fixing what does and does not constitute solidarity (cf. Muhr, 2008). Drawing boundaries and making categories is inherently political, so any abstract definition of 'solidarity' risks losing sight of the relational dynamics through which solidaristic action can be achieved. It also assumes that solidarity requires a prior, fixed orientation towards collectivity, which writes out the processual and often conflictual social relations of solidaristic action (cf. Vachhani, 2020; Reinecke, 2018). Thus, studies of solidarity can end up with what Bakhtin (1984) describes as a monologic text, where only one point of view is represented, dominated by the author's own narrative.

In contrast, relational approaches to solidarity-in-action take a processual view. Solidarity is not solely found in formal, recognisable politics, organisations or movements, but situated and embodied in relationships (Fotaki, 2022). This resonates with notions of 'quiet politics', such as Askins' (2014) study of a refugee befriending project. Challenging the assumption that the initiative was a uni-directional act of charity reproducing asymmetrical relations that maintain the refugee/befriender in fixed positions, she explores how the relationships changed as they developed, as participants reciprocally opened up to and responded to each other's experiences. Care, compassion and understanding transformed the encounters for *both* 'refugee' *and* 'local resident'. As she notes: "This politics crucially must recognise that encounters between different groups can draw upon and reiterate socially constructed difference, but *they also have the potential to shift how we see and feel about our others*" (2014:473 emphasis added).

Relational approaches show solidarity as a complex intersubjective process where connections and disconnections are forged and broken between people. For example, Schwabenland and Hirst (2022) show solidarity as an accomplishment that does not rely on prior shared identities, whilst Vachhani and Pullen (2019), and Baxter (2021) argue that affect provides a ground for the impetus to mobilise through empathy. However, they also show how solidarity is precariously achieved in relation to dissonance, tensions and vulnerabilities. Several studies recognise the transformational possibilities of communal bodily co-presence, such as Reinecke's (2018) exploration of the relations between activists and homeless people in the Occupy London movement. Similarly, Fotaki (2022) shows that the immediate confrontation of local people with the deprivations experienced by refugees arriving in Greece prompted a sense of active compassionate solidarity. However, both studies recognise how relational solidarity is open to challenge and changes from inside the relationship (conflicting values and ways of living in Occupy London) and from outside (external political and economic pressures in Greece). These are important insights, garnered from ethnographic observation and participation, conversations and interviews. We build on this, but take a closer step into the dynamics of relational solidarity in process, by analysing the dialogic interactions between homeless people and volunteers on the streets.

A number of studies on relational solidarity have recognised the social significance of vulnerability (e.g. Fotaki, 2022; Corlett et al., 2019; Cutcher et al., 2022; Johansson & Wickstrom, 2022), both as part of the construction of binary categories and as something to be creatively resisted. However, used normatively in management and organisation studies, the idea of 'vulnerability' has been positioned to denote the problematic and weak, seen as a risk to be managed or a negative aspect of interpersonal relations. As Bracke (2016: 59) argues, resilience has been venerated whilst "neoliberal subjectivity is built on a denial of vulnerability, which is deemed shameful, and on a disidentification with dependence, need, and other kinds of vulnerability". It is perhaps not surprising then that there has been relatively little research until recently in organisation studies which focuses on vulnerability as an inherent part of social relations, and as having the potential to challenge and change them.

The different approach to vulnerability taken in recent studies is stimulated by Butler's writings (2004; 2016), themselves inspired by Levinas' work which we will take up in the following section. Butler's work contrasts vulnerability as imposed as an external category to the recognition of the vulnerability that we all share as fragile humans in a precarious world. In being defined from outside as 'vulnerable', people are put into a subject position where they are deemed to need protection and therefore seen as passive, requiring external agency to counter their vulnerability. Thus, vulnerability becomes reified, and categories become fixed, in a way that resonates with the monological definitions of solidarity we discussed above. Vulnerability can also be externally imposed through unequal access to political and economic resources, these differential opportunities themselves frequently produced through fixed social classifications. The vulnerability we all share is frequently disavowed, leading to a damaging self-centredness, a sovereignty of the self which loses out on the potential for openness to the other (2016:14). Key to recognising the significance of vulnerability, is that vulnerability does not just relate to harm and loss, but also to the connections or disconnections between people.

Whilst Butler's work recognises that definitional power creates binary categories of vulnerable/invulnerable, it goes further to link vulnerability with resistance and agency. This perspective is taken up by Cutcher et al. (2022) who look at resistance to discourses that position ageing workers as vulnerable; by Corlett et al. (2019) discussing how managerial vulnerabilities could be reframed within a more positive identity; and Plester, Kim, Sayers & Carroll (2022) showing how women researchers mobilised experiences of vulnerability in the field to enable them to write and act differently.

These studies focus on the relation of vulnerability to the subject position(ing) of the individual *self*. However, other studies explore how recognition of vulnerability opens up the relation with the *other*. For example, Johansson and Wickstrom (2022) see the experience of vulnerability as creating the potential for an ethics of care, whilst Rhodes and Carlsen (2018) explore how recognising the researcher's vulnerability and the alterity of research participants can decentre the primacy of the researcher's knowledge and avoid treating the other as a research 'object'. There is in these studies the seeds of an approach to shared vulnerability that we develop in this paper: a vulnerability that is co-constituted and recognised in the *in-between*, in the dialogic relations between one and another.

Thus, taking a different approach to vulnerability can allow us to think of "vulnerability as a radical openness toward surprising possibilities" (Hirsch, 2016: 81), one in which vulnerability might "cease to be a curse and would instead constitute the very ground for modes of solidarity" (Butler, Gambetti & Sabsay, 2016:x). In the next section we build upon the literature we have discussed above, locating

this within a conversation between the work of Bakhtin and Levinas, in order to bring the two perspectives of dialogic organising and shared vulnerability together in relation to solidaristic action.

Developing a dialogic approach to vulnerability: bringing together Bakhtin and Levinas

In this section we develop a conversation between Bakhtin's perspective that dialogue is fundamental to human relations, and Levinas' view that vulnerability is at the heart of the response of infinite responsibility for the other, the place where a relationship can be opened up. Although there has been some discussion in the humanities which brings together Levinas and Bakhtin (Nealon, 1997; Gardiner, 1996; Murray, 2000), within organisation studies their work has been deployed within separate debates: Bakhtin's work has contributed to analysing organisations as polyphonic (e.g. Belova, King & Sliwa, 2008; Shotter, 2008) and in developing processual and narrative perspectives on organising (e.g. Helin, 2015; Jabri, Adrian & Boje, 2008); whilst Levinas' work has been predominantly linked to the development of an organisational relational ethics (e.g. Rhodes 2020; 2023). In this paper we instead focus on Levinas' view of the relationship with the other as inherently involving vulnerability, proximity and hospitality. Below we bring together aspects of their work which speak to the problem of how social relations of solidarity and connection are opened up or closed down.

Dialogue for Bakhtin is an essential aspect of being human (1984: 187). It is the basis of our relationship with other social subjects, but also of self-formation. Whereas many social theories rest on the assumption that a pre-existing subject is socialised through language, for Bakhtin the "'self' is dialogic, a relation…'self' can never be a self-sufficient construct" (Holquist, 2002: 19). The dialogic 'event' involves "co-existing, co-being, shared existence or being with another" (1984: 6): the relation of openness to the other, who remains distinct and different from oneself. This other is crucially to be affirmed as "someone else's 'I' not as an object but as another subject" (1984: 11). This resonates with Levinas' radical ethics of the other, who is recognised in their specificity and uniqueness. For Levinas, this ethical relation with the other comes before subjectivity, ontology or agency. The face of the other calls forth a response of infinite responsibility for the other – not as a matter of choice, but by the very fact of the other.

For Levinas, the openness of response to the other is based upon vulnerability. Vulnerability is not a limit, but the place where a relationship can be opened up. As Levinas sees it, it is in the encounter with the other where vulnerability – 'denudation'[i] (1972: 104) - presents itself as our common trait, as, in the face of the other, we recognise both their nakedness, their extreme vulnerability, and, crucially, our own. Concretely, in face-to-face dialogue, this encounter with otherness occurs in a laying bare and sharing of vulnerability. Studying dialogic encounters shows shifting relations, including the movement of vulnerability between different participants.

For Bakhtin and Levinas, the recognition of the intrinsic alterity of the other is essential. For Levinas the response to this radical alterity of the other is necessarily asymmetrical: "For Levinas ethics is avowedly non-reciprocal in that it expects nothing in return. This is an ethics of generosity; of 'being for the other'" (Rhodes & Westwood, 2016: 237). Many commentators have struggled with Levinas' rejection of reciprocity in practice (Tatransky, 2008) since it seems to limit the possibilities of the relationship between the one and the other. Rhodes and Badham (2018: 77) explain that for Levinas this is a rejection based on socio-economic exchange: "once one is generous in the hope of reciprocity, that relation no longer arises from generosity but from the commercial relation" (Levinas, 1986: 213). However, Nealon (1997) argues that Bakhtin's concept of dialogue allows us to envisage a reciprocal encounter between different and non-substitutable voices that is not based on market-

type relations of outcomes, but on the heterogeneity of situated, historically and socially located voices (heteroglossia). Dialogue, for Bakhtin, is not abstract or solely intra-individual, but of its time and place, shaped by and part of its social and historical context. Dialogues are not a sequence of monologues, but a crossing of different embodied voices intersecting one another, creating a 'polyphony'. Dialogism, understood polyphonically, allows the comprehension of "organisational practice as a multi-centred, non-linear and intersubjective activity" (Belova et al., 2008: 494). The movement of dialogue also produces a movement or change in the people involved, which can lead to the "unanticipated, unexpected, or surprising" (Shotter, 2010: 273). Thus, Bakhtinian dialogue is open-ended and unending (Zavala, 1991: 78), with a potentiality that speaks to the possibilities of developing solidaristic relations within the encounter between the one and the other.

Both Bakhtin and Levinas recognise the double-edged nature of language: it is both the means of the encounter with the other, but also a limitation to it (Rhodes, 2020: 4). In recognition of this, Bakhtin contrasts dialogue to monological language which speaks only from the position of one, authorial and authoritative consciousness, leaving no room for the voice of the other. Levinas distinguishes between 'the said' and 'saying' which resonates with Bakhtin's distinction between monologism and dialogism. The 'said' refers to forms of language which denote and designate, which fix people and relations into solidified meanings and positions, turning them "into a 'something'" (1974/1998:37). In this, Levinas distinguishes between treating the other as an object, as representative of a category or 'theme', or as one to dialogue with, an 'interlocutor' (1969: 195).

Bringing Levinas' work on vulnerability at the heart of openness in the relation with the other, together with the dynamic and relational that comes from a Bakhtinian dialogic perspective, provides us with a different way of looking at face-to-face encounters between volunteers and homeless people and the potential for solidaristic action across social and material differences.

Research Method: becoming active and receiving a 'lesson from the other'

As the number of homeless people in Europe is constantly growing[ii], France has witnessed a 50% increase in its homeless population since 2001[iii], becoming increasingly visible in public spaces. As Lyon, one of France's biggest cities, is close to the Alps and the Italian border, it is a strategic place for migrants who pass through before reaching the rest of France. It has a dense network of national and local Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs) dealing with homelessness, some of which meet every two or three months in a Collective to coordinate their actions. Each NPO has a different way of organising outreach work, depending on their resources and values (some prioritize food distribution, others focus on building a relationship). They either set up a distribution station in a public space for homeless people to visit, or go directly to them, in their sleeping or begging places.

Lucie undertook an ethnography of 18 of these NPOs between February 2018 and July 2019 and again in 2020, over 18 months. Before starting the fieldwork, Lucie had completed a year of volunteer work in a shelter for homeless people that provides shared accommodation with young professionals. In March 2018, she joined the Collective of NPOs as a representative of this shelter, and participated in five meetings. This involvement gave her legitimacy and knowledge in the eyes of the NPOs, making it easier for her to gain access as a volunteer-observer. Not only did this experience allow her to meet highly vulnerable people, with whom she otherwise would not have had contact as a privileged white woman, but it also made her to realize that volunteering/solidarity relationships are complex. This lived perspective guided the themes that are developed in this paper.

To gain an immersive and embodied understanding of the volunteers' street work and their interactions with homeless people, Lucie engaged closely with the field through ethnographic

methods. The in-situ approach rested upon embodied engagement; where the researcher could touch closely what it meant to be a volunteer and to a lesser extent, the reality of homelessness. By adopting this approach, she was able to capture nuanced aspects of the encounters - dialogues, practices, gestures, and emotions - that might have been overlooked had she relied solely on volunteer interviews. The fieldwork consisted of 31 participant observations (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1998) during outreach activities of 18 NPOs, amounting to a total of 132 hours of participant observations and 200 pages of typed notes (see table 1, in appendix). Notes were taken on a phone during outreach and debriefings with volunteers. The aim was to be open to the range of encounters, situations, and experiences within the outreach events, rather than to impose a pre-determined schema. These observations included a wide range of details: names, appearance and bodily practices of volunteers and people met, the dialogue in every interaction, the weather, the atmosphere, street names, the researcher's emotions, and so on. Immediately after observations, voice memos were made to detail the evening as closely as possible and were re-written in the following days. By immersing herself in the daily realities of these NPOs, Lucie came to see that solidarity relationships between volunteers and homeless people were far from unidirectional. Instead, they were dynamic and reciprocal, gradually woven over time.

Since the objective was to participate fully as a volunteer, Lucie was whole-heartedly involved in the outreach, as an 'observant participant' (Moeran, 2009): sometimes she stood back during observations to see how the volunteers behaved, which was easier during distributions when she could leave the post to observe the evening. However, when she was on outreach, it was more difficult to be in the background. She didn't enjoy the passive observer role. She later realised that she sometimes transferred practices she learned in one NPO to another situation, such as behaving more respectfully by shaking hands and sitting next to the homeless person or avoiding waking them up. It was sometimes difficult to take a step back; for example, to simply give a sandwich and leave, as some of the volunteers did, when she would have preferred to spend more time and engage in a real conversation with the homeless person. She tried to conduct research as best she could in the interaction with the homeless person, learning his or her story, listening, understanding, laughing, and sharing the moment. By entering the field as a full participant volunteer, she received a 'lesson from the other' (Levinas, 1969) - from both homeless people and volunteers; in other words, she fully engaged "in relationships that are embodied, responsive and affective, rather than just rational and knowing" (Rhodes & Carlsen, 2018:11).

Conducting research 'on' marginalized and precarious individuals raises fundamental ethical questions (Thanem, 2012) such as reinforcing power inequality and disclosure. Homeless people perceived Lucie as a volunteer like any other, not a researcher. She chose not to explain her approach to them, partly because of lack of time amidst outreach activity, and so as not to further unbalance the relationship by making it one of researcher/objects of research (Cortambert, 2022). Interviews were not conducted with homeless people and conversations were normal discussions between volunteer and homeless person. The names of participants and the NPOs (except well-known NPOs) have been changed. It has to be acknowledged that there is no possible way to avoid the power relationship inherent in research, but Lucie endeavoured to work in the spirit of Levinas' responsibility for the other, and for the inter-human embodied encounter (Rhodes & Carlsen, 2018). The fieldwork that is discussed below is inspired by the dialogic encounters, specifically presented as vignettes to preserve the interaction, and therefore the voices of all participants, as far as possible (Reay et al., 2019). In illustrating the fluidity of the interactions and locating them within their physical and social contexts, it also seeks to avoid what Shotter (2010: 271, 270) has described as the problems of "decontextualised utterances", which reify through presenting a retrospective fixity. These

interactions were neither easy nor without risks: Lucie experienced this fieldwork as a strong, exhausting, emotionally gripping and sometimes even spiritual experience.

After the fieldwork, Lucie took over a month to rewrite her ethnographic notes allowing her to take a step back from what happened during fieldwork and bring the narrative to life. During this process, it became clear that outreach work was more a two-way interaction between volunteers and homeless people rather than a top-down relationship. There was a level of surprise in this that comes out of lived encounters (Bakhtin, 1984; Shotter, 2010). Therefore, in writing up the data, Lucie tried to tell the scenes as vividly as possible; in an 'evocative' way (Bochner & Ellis, 2016) by giving the actors a voice and presenting them in dialogue, rather than from her point of view as an omniscient narrator. This dialogical presentation remains as close to the interaction itself as possible, bringing actors to life and inviting readers to grasp what is happening in the interaction as if they were there. Following this, both authors discussed the data together. Putting a microscope on volunteers' practices towards beneficiaries, we realised in detail that so-called solidarity practices could be ambiguous. Thinking of these interactions as complex, sometimes balanced and sometimes unbalanced, led us to try to think of solidarity relationships not as a one-way process but as a two-way exchange. Karen had an outsider's view of these different interactions, and so through our own dialogues about the interactions, we were able to choose vignettes that could illustrate what was at stake: both the recognition of the other's vulnerability, and those that showed how fragile and difficult these interactions sometimes are, and the movements of the dialogue. Analysing these themes through Bakhtin's dialogism helped us to better understand some of the dynamics taking place in the encounters, but it was reflecting on Levinas' perspective on vulnerability, that gave us an insight into what we thought the encounters turned upon: sometimes a shared, two-way openness and recognition, and at other times a more self-contained closure. The final process of selection of the vignettes, then, involved both authors bringing together those examples thematically significant from the fieldwork experience (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 2007; Pratt, Sonenshein & Feldman, 2022: 225) as re-read through Bakhtin's and Levinas' lens, accompanied by reflexivity between the data and the theory. The vignettes are selected to be representative of the opportunities and struggles of dialogic engagements in a rich and credible way. However, we are keenly aware that there is no analysis or research which does not pass through the subjectivities and choices of the researchers, and to claim otherwise would be disingenuous (Stanley & Wise, 2002).

In the following section we present first how polyphonic dialogues are produced through recognition of another's vulnerability; second, we show how the encounter with the other is fragile and uncertain through self-enclosed actions, and third we highlight the complexities of different vulnerabilities and how they relate to responsibilities towards multiple others (Levinas, 1998), along with the potentiality of movement towards a recognition of shared vulnerability through the process of dialogue.

Findings: Vulnerability in dialogic encounters

Shared recognition and vulnerability in dialogue

This section describes how face-to-face encounters between volunteers and homeless people took place, in the evenings, in the freezing winter night or the dark alleys of a summer night. These dialogues ranged from seconds to lengthy conversations, during which the homeless person might feel the need to confide their life story, chat about the weather or crack jokes about politics. Whatever the topic, these interactions are far from pointless: whilst they may be accompanied by material assistance - food or a blanket - they serve to break the person's solitude and separation from others, they make connections.

The following example relates to the encounter with Molène:

> During a debrief at the Capucins bar, Paul and Céline reflected on the evening:
> "It was quite fluid, the interaction was easy, the people were willing to talk, they were not in an alcoholic condition" says Paul.
> Paul, Céline and I [Lucie] enjoyed the exchange with Molène, who rarely opened up but shared his story after I asked about his name. He explained it came from an island in Brittany, where he lived as a child, at the very end of Finistère, next to Ouessant. His father had died when he was a boy, and his mother, unable to support him and his siblings, sent him to a children's centre. When he was 13, he ran away from the centre, ending up on the streets.
> Then he joined the army, at 18. He stayed for 5 years.
> "And then I made two kids, that's not nothing, I'm quite proud of it."
>
> It was a touching moment that moved all of us; a deep exchange, where we had the impression that Molène had shared something precious with us. We all agreed it felt like a precious gift from Molène.
>
> **Fieldnotes, 2018-11-12**

Lucie was also touched by the kindness of another homeless person, as she recounts in the following passage:

> In Ainay, a chic neighbourhood of Lyon, I [Lucie] met Patrick, who is sitting under the porch.
> I sympathise with Patrick while Elise and Franck (*the other volunteers with me*) make a package for him.
> Patrick tells me that he's been in the neighbourhood for 5 years.
> "It's nice, the neighbourhood is quite calm!" I told him.
> "Oh yes, it's certainly very quiet! ... Do you want a cigarette?" Patrick offers me, handing me a packet.
> "It's nice of you, but I quit smoking a few months ago and I'm trying not to start again!"
> "It was a man who gave me the packet. He found it on the floor."
> We continue the discussion, talking about everything and nothing.
>
> **Fieldnotes, 2019-07-17**

These moments of face-to-face encounters are gifts that homeless people offer to the volunteers: by being available and exchanging conversation with the volunteers, by telling their life story, they share part of themselves with the other, allowing themselves to be vulnerable. These occasions are by no means automatic, as evidenced by the encounter with Molène, who did not normally open up about his life. Neither is Patrick's generosity in offering Lucie a cigarette common: one actually might expect the opposite and that volunteers would be the ones offering him something.

Although these exchanges are not representative of all encounters, Lucie has experienced these meetings as genuine two-way encounters with a certain equality. Dialogic engagements are possible when homeless people are fully actors and stakeholders in the dialogue, and without their voluntary participation these moments would not take place. Homeless people welcome volunteers into their 'homes', where they sleep: those spaces which they have appropriated (Lefebvre, 1991) within public space. In the following situation, it is Paul and Sylvie who show inclusion towards the volunteers:

> We head to Galeries Lafayette, Cours Vuitton.

> Philippe parks the truck - it's 1am, and I'm exhausted from this intense outreach.
> Suddenly I see a couple waving to us from the terrace of the Part Dieu building. They come down to meet us. It feels honestly like visiting someone's home.
> It's Paul and Sylvie, a couple who met on the streets and even got married. They are regulars who know the Red Cross volunteers well. They welcome us as if we were friends stopping by.
>
> **Fieldnotes, 2018-06-25**

In this encounter, homeless people welcoming volunteers reverses the usual order of hospitality that presupposes possession of a home. It opens up a different space, both materially and socially. In this it resonates with Derrida's description of Levinas' work as an "ethics of hospitality" (1999: 19), where Levinas sees hospitality as the welcome or openness given to the other, to the 'stranger', and also as a capacity to receive (Derrida, 1999: 27). For Levinas, this call to hospitality does not come from a position of possession, of being a host who has power over a guest. Instead, we see this embodied relation of hospitality to the other through simple encounters of proximity on the streets: Paul and Sylvie come to the volunteers; volunteers and homeless people sit together on the ground sharing experiences of different lives lived; or in the offering of a cigarette from a homeless man and a sharing of food and clothes from the volunteers, which express a shared recognition of the body's basic needs, missing from the lack of encounter and recognition by those who just pass by homeless people on the street, keeping their physical and social distance.

When homeless people have known certain volunteers for a long time and see them regularly from week to week, a relationship of trust builds over time. For example, 'Grandpa' Alim was well known by the volunteers for a long time, and because he was particularly kind and endearing, the volunteers kiss him on the cheeks *('faire la bise')*, expressing a closeness and equality in the relationship:

> We got back in the truck and Léa, a volunteer, drove to Saxe Gambetta to see Grandpa Alim.
> 'Papy Alim' is one of the NPO's regulars and is much appreciated by volunteers. On the way, Léa mentioned that he has almost always lived on the street and is rather solitary. At 76 years old, he receives special treatment: Léa tells us he is the only person on the street who kisses the volunteers.
> We then spot Grandpa Alim waiting for us at a crossroads. He's well dressed: a jacket, a turtleneck, he's clean-shaven; you wouldn't think he is homeless.
> Immediately Papy Alim kisses Léa and asks about former volunteers, about what they are doing.
> Alim: 'Who was on tour last week? I didn't see you!'
> Léa: 'We didn't tour last week; we were moving to another building.'
>
> **Fieldnotes, 2019-09-27**

While 'touring' with the same NPO almost two years after this outreach, and visiting the new building, Lucie discovered a photo hanging on the wall. She immediately recognised Grandpa Alim and asked for news about him. She was told he had passed away one month before.

These practices by homeless people of genuine interest in the volunteers they know, such as offering a cigarette or asking the volunteers for news, reflect a two-way relationship, where the homeless person goes beyond the position of 'recipient' of 'help'. It is possible to be in dialogue, in the sense that the homeless people also care for the volunteers: they are responding to the face of the other of the volunteers.

> Medhi approaches two homeless people on a bench to ask if they need water or a sandwich. Their reaction surprises me:
> 'But you're always here, all the time! When are you due a holiday?' says one, laughing.
> 'If I win the lottery, I'll buy you a vacation!' adds the other.
> I [Lucie] felt that they showed genuine compassion for these volunteers – perhaps a way to rebalance the relationship of giver and receiver?
> After accepting the sandwiches, they ended the exchange by wishing us 'good luck for the future'.
>
> **Fieldnotes, 2019-07-09**

Homeless people often shift attention away from themselves by asking questions of volunteers they know and see regularly. They show interest in the volunteer, placing themselves on an equal level in the interaction. Some check in with volunteers: 'What about Marie-José? We no longer see her' or notice the NPO's absence: 'We didn't see you last week!'. To conclude, these dialogic engagements imply two-way encounters where the givers and carers are not necessarily volunteers as we might expect; homeless people genuinely ask about missing volunteers, welcome them in their 'home', open up about their life stories and joke with them.

Monologic encounters and blocked vulnerability

However, face-to-face encounters, with exposure to shared vulnerability, can be challenging and hampered by obstacles: fear and disgust from volunteers, rejection by a homeless person, or a volunteer's desire to dominate the interaction. These challenges highlight the dynamic and uncertain nature of encounters, where infinite responsibility for the other is arduous and demanding (Levinas 1972). As well as recognizing the points in the dialogic flow when vulnerability and openness allow for the building of solidarity, there needs to be a recognition of the ways in which vulnerability is curtailed, the openness to the other is closed off. If vulnerability for Levinas requires a 'denudation' (1972:104) and an openness to the otherness of the other, then there are occasions when the dialogic process between self and other is stopped dead through self-enclosed and self-referential response and language.

Sometimes the face of the other is obscured by viewing them as a category or an object. In some of the volunteers' discussions about outreach work, this was an inevitable part of the process of trying to make sense of and rationalise their experiences: behaviour was explained or coped with through reducing the other to a 'theme' (Levinas, 1969). Lucie often received such 'fixed' and monological accounts (Shotter, 2010) from volunteers, contrasting with the dialogic encounters discussed above. Sometimes there is mistrust for certain groups, such as some migrant populations. For example, when entering a migrants' camp, Lucie observed a volunteer react with disgust and fear, worrying that people in the squat would rush to collect the distributed items:

> *'Be careful, they'll throw themselves on the bags! Don't let them put their hand in the bag as they take everything, we'll first go see the people in the other tunnel.'*

In this encounter, the use of the word 'they' indicates how the individual, unique 'face' of this person is lumped together into the category of 'the homeless', and contrasts with the interactions with Molène (above) and the Corsican (below). This resonates with Levinas' (1974/1998) discussion of the 'Said', where the person becomes an object, and the unique alterity of the other is lost.

This process can also occur through physical distancing or the enactment of symbolic thematization (often unconsciously, as in the next example). Sometimes volunteers adopt 'protective' behaviours through fear or disgust, often generated by a homeless person's smell or the dirtiness of their pets.

Volunteers put in place mechanisms to distance themselves, to step back, as a 'filter' between themselves and the other. For example, some volunteers have the constant habit of cleaning their hands with hydro-alcoholic solution after meeting homeless people (before hand-sanitizing became common in the covid pandemic). On one occasion, a volunteer sanitized his hands in front of the homeless people he had just engaged with. It appeared a form of carelessness on the part of the volunteer, who did not realise that this gesture might upset people. However, the body 'speaks', enacting an embodied form of categorising and objectifying the other person, by marking out their difference from him – and his *indifference* to the face of the other.

In these cases, shared vulnerability is negated. In some instances, the vulnerability of the other is not recognised or responded to. In others, volunteers are not able to be vulnerable – they need to protect or distance themselves. For instance, volunteers are often advised to maintain emotional distance and avoid forming personal attachments with homeless individuals. Lucie experienced this when she was warned not to establish close ties with those she encountered:

Jean-Paul: 'It's difficult, but you can quickly fall into the danger of making friends… Getting caught up…'
(Dominique [interjecting]: 'getting attached').
Jean-Paul: 'That's what happened with some of our volunteers… When you make too many ties with a homeless person, it's difficult.'
Dominique: 'Everyone loses. On both sides.'
Jean-Paul: 'It always ends badly.'
Dominique: 'From my experience, it's because there is so much hope. On one side, you are full of hope, on the other, selfishness - self-centredness I would say, because 'I have the power to help'. But we don't have the power to provide housing. So you take a big slap in the face and beneficiaries even more'

Fieldnotes, 2018-06-25

Through this discussion, Dominique also recognizes that there is the potential for a form of domination in the encounter. The discussion about not getting too close to homeless people starts off by sounding as if it is rejection of the other, but then moves through the recognition of the problem of being self-centred or abusing the power of being volunteers. Moreover, the encounter of shared vulnerabilities can also be undermined by self-centred or self-enclosed actions or words. Lucie found the following situation difficult to observe:

Mounir [a volunteer] asks Fouad [a homeless person] how he is and if he wants a sandwich. Then Mélodie, a little 6-year-old girl in a blue dress, the daughter of another volunteer, walks up to give him a sandwich.

Suddenly Fouad burst into tears, saying it's been 8 years since he has seen his children. He tells Mélodie she's beautiful and kisses her.
I [Lucie] felt embarrassed and sorry for him. Through tears, he says to Mélodie 's mother:
'Don't bring a little girl in like that!'
'Yes, I will! She must come!' the mother responds, supported by other volunteers.
I couldn't understand why she wanted her 6-year-old daughter there. I think she strongly believed it was good for the homeless people.

In this case, the volunteer imposed her own needs and ideas onto the encounter. While she could not have predicted how bringing her daughter would affect Fouad, her response to his distress lacked empathy or understanding, prioritizing her desire to have her daughter there over its impact on him. In doing so, she (unconsciously, we assume) reinforced her own power in the social relationship whilst simultaneously undermining the possibility of encounter and solidarity by failing to remain open to the alterity of the other – of Fouad's own situation and grief.

In some cases, a relationship of domination can form when a volunteer insists on offering help that the recipient does not want or assumes they know better what a homeless person needs. For example, Cécile, an outreach volunteer, spent considerable time finding temporary accommodation for a homeless man, only to be disappointed when he refused her offer. Acting alone, Cécile is convinced she knows what is best and wants the man to accept it, disregarding his freedom of choice and action. Some volunteers adopt a 'saviour' role by wanting to help, ultimately fixing the homeless individuals into the category of vulnerable and dependant on their agency. Similarly, it is comparable to pedestrians who refuse to give money to homeless people, to ensure they don't buy any alcohol or drugs, and prefer to give them food without asking what the person actually needs or wants. This denies homeless people's power of agency. These encounters differ from those described in the first section, where recognition and openness to shared vulnerability foster solidarity. Here, volunteers' experience of vulnerability (e.g. fear, disgust) is shut down, and actions are taken to reassert power over homeless people. In these ways volunteers unconsciously deny their own vulnerability, yet reinforce the homeless person's vulnerability, fixing them into the category of needing help.

Dialogic shifting of vulnerabilities, and movement towards responsibility for multiple others

Dialogues and encounters between volunteers and homeless people do not always go smoothly. However, not all of these end in a blocked relationship and a closed response to the other. Sometimes, either within the interaction between homeless person and volunteer, or between volunteers after the encounter, there is movement from a closed response to the other towards a greater openness to encompass differences or recognise shared responsibility for others. Sometimes there are irritations, altercations and disputes. But in some encounters, the participants – homeless person or volunteer - manage to change the tone of the conversation by using humour, or by sharing their own vulnerability, thus temporarily rebalancing a materially unequal relationship. We relate the interaction between Romain, a volunteer and the Corsican, a man who was sleeping outside at the time (whose name we do not know):

During foot outreach with the NPO 'the Solidarity Seagull', we stop at a sheltered passage of a shopping mall, where many homeless people spend the winter. We join Yvon, who sleeps there, and another man, who we don't know.
This man, well-dressed and lying on the floor with a guitar, calls out to Romain [a volunteer]:
'Romain, wouldn't you like to buy a 10 € pack of tobacco for us? We'd split it and be happy to have it for the night!'
Romain hesitates, then refuses. An awkward silence follows.
The man, with a slightly aggressive tone, asks:
'How are you? What do you do when you come home warm?'
Romain replies that he is going to walk around.

> 'Where are you from?' asks the man in a provocative tone.
> 'Guess?' Romain responds.
> 'Not from the south.'
> 'Oh, glad to hear that!' Romain jokes.
> 'In my opinion you're from between Brittany and Lyon.'
> Romain laughs, 'The rest of France then! It's not big at all!'
> And then everyone else laughs, easing the tension.
> It immediately changed the social relationship in the discussion between the two.
> The conversation shifts, and Romain confides about his bad day, missing his train stop, and his career struggles. That he had been bad at school and now he is working. Then he asks the man:
> 'What about you, what are you doing?'
> The man shares that he has a 3-year-old daughter and a Hungarian girlfriend. We then talk about Hungary, Corsica, and Lyon for an hour.
>
> **Fieldnotes, 2019-27-01**

In this case, the 'Corsican', who occasionally sleeps on the street, is aggressive towards Romain. Romain reacts by avoiding antagonism, instead using humour and self-disclosure to establish dialogue. By sharing vulnerable experiences—missing his train, struggling in school—the conversation evolves into a more relational form.

In this dialogue the conversation starts with the fixity of positioning Romain as a volunteer, as someone who provides resources for 'the homeless', playing on this by asking him to buy some tobacco for them. At first it appears that Romain is silenced by this positioning, which identifies him as a particular sort of subject, which claims knowledge of him. Then the dialogue opens up. The Corsican first seems to respond to the face of the other by asking how Romain is, then undermines this by again positioning him in the identity of a volunteer who has a warm home, and is thus the opposite of the people on the street. But as the dialogue progresses, it moves from the initial fixity of positions of volunteer and homeless person, as both respond to the alterity of the other: Romain has had a bad day, the Corsican is far from home and family. The dialogue moves from the fixity of 'the said' (Levinas, 1974/1998) which categorises, designates and professes knowledge of the other, towards 'saying', the interchange which allows for change, for movement, for response. As Shotter (2010) comments, dialogue has the propensity for the unexpected, for surprise. Here humour and self-disclosure take the interaction into a relationality which does not seem possible at the outset.

This has resonance with an idea to which Bakhtin often returns, that the dialogic position is one which allows for the indeterminacy and "*unpredeterminable*" nature of the relation with the other, and stands against the tendency towards the "reifying devaluation" (1984: 61, 62) of contemporary life. The movement can also occur in discussions among volunteers, where they shift from shock or irritation to an awareness of responsibility for the other. In terms of the vulnerability of moving out of one's own 'shelter', in both material and experiential terms, this exposure characterized the volunteers' embodied experience of working on the streets. Exceptionally, volunteers may be attacked during outreach action, which can be particularly difficult for volunteers to experience. This happened to Lucie who was pushed against the bag of shoes she was handing out. Volunteers also witness violence outside their own experiences, such as homeless individuals injecting heroin. During a debrief session, Pauline and Mathieu describe one such scene:

> Our outreach work ends, as always, at the Capucin bar for a beer and debrief. We had spent time in Bellecour chatting with several homeless people around their makeshift sofas.
>
> 'It was quite embarrassing' says Pauline.
>
> 'Yes, I was really uncomfortable watching them ', adds Mathieu.
>
> I [Lucie] don't understand their reaction until Mathieu explains:
>
> 'Nouna, Zinouti and Tonton were actually injecting themselves at the back, on the couch.'
>
> 'It gave me the creeps… Watching them prick themselves right in front of us - It's not nice. They could have waited until we left,' says Pauline.
>
> 'It's insane, isn't it?' adds Mathieu.
>
> After a pause, he continues:
>
> 'We should see if it's possible for them to inject under more hygienic conditions, with sterile kits.'
>
> **Fieldnotes, 2019- 06-02**

This example illustrates how Pauline and Mathieu initially felt vulnerable about the situation. However, through the process of their discussion, Mathieu moves towards a feeling of responsibility for the other. He progresses from a response of shock and upset towards the drug-taking in front of them, towards considering how conditions might be alleviated for the other. Their brief dialogue speaks of movement from indifference towards those who are different from them (drug taking and homeless people), towards a recognition of the other that encompasses all these differences (Levinas, 1974/1998:89).

Finally, volunteers can move from the fear of the others to recognition of responsibility for *multiple* others. The fear of the other, which can bring a sense of vulnerability, and which can reduce them to a representative of a category rather than a person, can be amplified in situations where volunteers go to disbanded squats where people find themselves displaced and homeless. In one case, four Red Cross volunteers were outnumbered by 100 homeless people, creating an uncertain situation with potential safety issues:

> During the debriefing, Dominique says:
>
> "There were four of us, and we no longer have the strength, techniques, or professionalism for this kind of action, okay? That's why, when I counted the cars, I was very scared—though I regretted it later because everything went well. But I couldn't help it. We are focused on volunteer safety first, as the Red Cross values its volunteers greatly."
>
> **Fieldnotes, 2018-06-25**

The ongoing dialogic process during the debriefing reveals that Dominique rethinks the situation and regrets her initial response. On reflection, she realizes that reducing the other to a number undermined the relational aspect of outreach, though she justifies it by prioritizing the safety of her fellow volunteers. In this brief dialogic process, we see the complexities of responsibility and openness to others when there are multiple others to be considered, each having different needs. Who should Dominique be predominantly thinking about? The relationship with the homeless person or with the other volunteers? It is ultimately an impossible bind.

Discussion

In this paper we have explored dialogic organising on the streets, in a context that is fundamentally focused on the immediacy of dialogue between those in different structural social situations and positions. Responding to our research question, we explored how relational solidarity on the streets can be produced through dialogic interactions – we highlighted different situations where vulnerability is shared, blocked and when dialogues evolve from a blocked vulnerability to a shared one. In the first situation, when there is a genuinely open face-to-face encounter between a homeless person and volunteer, homeless people are fully actors and stakeholders in the dialogue. They care for volunteers, offer a cigarette or ask for news; they are responding to the face of the other of the volunteer and go beyond the position of 'recipient' of 'help'. This is a situation of a two-way dialogic interaction. However, in the second case, this face-to-face encounter can be difficult and hampered by all kinds of obstacles: fear and disgust on the part of volunteers; the rejection of an encounter by a homeless person; a volunteer's desire to impose him or herself on the relationship with a homeless person. These are occasions when the dialogic process between self and other is stopped dead through self-enclosed and self-referential response and language – in other words, they become monologic encounters. In these cases, shared vulnerability is negated. At times, the volunteers are not able to be vulnerable – they feel the need to protect or distance themselves. In some situations, the vulnerability of the other is not recognised or responded to, and in others, the homeless other is fixed and reinforced within the category of 'the vulnerable'. But there are also some situations, as the last sub-section shows, which give us hope and show how dialogic interactions are dynamic and leave room for the unexpected. Our analysis shows that when dialogue is difficult between volunteers and beneficiaries, it can move from the fixity of 'the said' which categorises, designates and professes knowledge of the other, towards 'saying', the interchange which allows for change, for movement, for response. And so, through dialogue, a relationship of solidarity can surprisingly emerge when it was a priori blocked. The movement can also occur within a discussion between volunteers about homeless people, who can move from a state of vulnerability to an awareness of responsibility for the other. Finally, volunteers can move from the fear of the other to a complex situation where responsibility for multiple others with different needs is in tension in the interaction.

Our findings reveal how vulnerability in dialogue and radical openness to the other enable relational solidarity. Sharing vulnerability contributes to the creation of face-to-face encounters, which includes the recognition of the other's human condition. By exposing our own vulnerable selves, mutual solidarity emerges, based on radical acceptance of the other's otherness despite differences. Shared vulnerability becomes an opportunity for encounter. Our findings thus support other studies which highlight the importance of recognition (Tyler, 2019) in relational encounters and in fostering solidarity (Schwabenland & Hirst, 2022; Fotaki, 2022). They also develop the literature showing vulnerability as central to social relations (e.g. Cutcher at al., 2022; Johansson & Wickstrom, 2022), and as opening the possibilities for change (Butler, 2016). We emphasise how mutual recognition of the possibility of being wounded, reflected in the etymology of 'vulnerable', implies a reciprocal relationality between volunteers and homeless people and helps build relations of solidarity.

However, our findings also show that when the other is 'fixed' into the category of 'being vulnerable', of being a homeless person who needs help or to be saved, which shores up the feeling of invulnerability of the volunteer, then relational solidarity is blocked. Or if the volunteer feels that only they are vulnerable and threatened, in comparison to the possibility of violence or being overwhelmed by the differences of the homeless other, then this also blocks relational solidarity, as

the volunteer can see the other as representing a category, rather than as another human. This 'thematization' is a reduction of the other to a theme or category, distorting or eradicating their otherness. Levinas opposes thematization to 'hospitality': welcoming and openness to the other. For Levinas, 'saying' is the here and now dialogic encounter with another human being. Vulnerability, or "exposure to the other", is at the heart of 'saying'. The language that Levinas (1974/1998: 48,49) uses to express shared vulnerability: of 'hospitality' given freely to the other, whilst leaving the 'shelter' of one's own 'defences', particularly speaks to the situations shared in the encounters by homeless people and volunteers. One has to move out of the 'home' of oneself, to the "place offered to the stranger" (Derrida, 1999: 68) which provides refuge and 'hospitality' to the other.

Thus, our findings demonstrate the power of recognising shared vulnerability and its potential to transform social relations through the possibility of dialogue to produce change and the unexpected. When dialogue is at an impasse, blocked by aggression or fear of the other, the recognition of shared vulnerability allows the other to step out of a dominant position and provoke a movement in dialogue. Understanding solidarity as a relational and dynamic process means not fixing people in categories of 'helpers' or 'recipients of help', when solidarity runs the risk of reducing the other to a categorisation in which we remind them of their dependence or show them our pity (Buchter, 2022). This dialogical relationality allows us to step out of these categories. It implies movement and response between volunteers and homeless people, where they give, care, show hospitality and make humour - *on both sides*.

Within this paper, our first contribution has been to develop the nascent recognition within organisation studies of the significance of vulnerability to social relations and solidarity (Fotaki, 2022). Specifically, our attention has been on the importance of shared vulnerability within these encounters. Vulnerability has so often been seen as a weakness to be overcome or managed, but here we analyse vulnerability as being a key turning point within dialogic organising, as a point in which self opens to other. Levinas (1972) characterises the relationship of vulnerability as one of discomfort and disturbance, of being jolted out of one's self-same identity, the 'denudation' that occurs in exposure to the alterity of the other. On the streets, we see how this vulnerability leads to moments of connection, where differences and inequalities give way to a relation which recognises and responds to the other. In these encounters it is possible for *both* volunteer *and* homeless person to be the 'self' who responds to the 'other', outside fixed categories.

Conversely, we also look at points where dialogic organising is shut down (sometimes temporarily) in the dialogic flow through a closure into the self-same, a self-protection which excludes the other. We do not analyse this with a view to judgement – as we have shown, there can be very clear rationales and need for this self-protection. These points highlight the tension between the infinite ethical demand of relationality and the practical limitations of enacting them in social and interpersonal contexts. Thus, we see dialogic organising for solidarity in public spaces as the lived interplay between the shared vulnerability that allows a relationality of self-and-other, along with dynamics which deny vulnerability and openness.

The existing literature on vulnerability in organisation studies predominantly focuses on the effects of being defined as 'vulnerable' on the individual subject position, and the possibilities for challenging this through resistance (Cutcher et al., 2022) and activism. In this paper we have looked at how vulnerability is offered and shared in the *in-between*, the dialogue, that passes between and across

interactions. This is a shared vulnerability that does not stop with the singular subject position, but opens up relationship, and therefore the possibilities of social change. The analysis of the encounters on the streets shows it takes both parties to the dialogue to share in vulnerability for the relationship to be opened up. In this opening up, different relations become possible than those pre-supposed by the fixed categories into which volunteers and homeless people have been placed by the 'hailing' of subject positions in relations of power (Butler, 2004). Rather than members of one group – homeless people - being defined as 'vulnerable' and therefore requiring help from others, or members of the other group – volunteers – being defined as those who give help to the vulnerable, those categorisations can be challenged through shared dialogue.

Our second contribution has been to develop an approach to dialogic organising which brings Bakhtin's dialogism into conversation with Levinas' ethical relation with the other. Within organisation studies, work drawing on Levinas (Rhodes, 2020; 2023; Muhr, 2008) and that using Bakhtin (Shotter, 2008; Belova et al., 2008) have maintained different routes and priorities. In this paper we show there is a fruitful conversation to be had between Levinas and Bakhtin that speaks to relational dynamics in organising. Prompted by Bakhtin's (1984) critique of monological discourse that categorises, speaks from one dominant perspective, and gives a fixed retrospective account, we have sought to explore the dialogic in order to see relational dynamics in the making on the streets.

Our analysis reveals that dialogical encounters in voluntary outreach work are marked by both openness and fragility. We found that these encounters are shaped by a dynamic interplay of ethical responsibility and practical constraints, where volunteers and homeless individuals alternately navigate moments of recognition and disconnection. This duality underscores how dialogical engagement is not given but a process that requires continuous negotiation, shaped by the embodied realities of participants and the structural contexts of the interaction. Importantly, these findings point to the complex ethics of solidarity relationships, which are neither purely altruistic nor unidirectional but involve mutual vulnerability and the potential for shared understanding.

It is possible to organize conditions that foster encounters based on dialogical relationality. For example, food or clothing distributions in the street are less conducive to dialogical exchanges, as they are often focused on managing large crowds and ensuring the safety of the distribution, where abuses can sometimes occur. In contrast, non-distributive outreach, which prioritizes direct interaction with homeless individuals, offers a more favourable framework for dialogical relationality. Beyond the encounter itself, organizations can enhance the conditions for such exchanges both beforehand and afterward. In preparation, this might involve training and educating volunteers about the realities of homelessness, helping them fully welcome individuals in their humanity and with empathy for the challenges they face on the street. Afterward, organizations can offer debriefing moments to allow volunteers to unload heavy emotions and reflect on factors that might hinder encounters (fear, disgust, protective reflexes). This is how dialogical relationality can be organized. It also implies that the organization itself must adopt a posture of "hospitality," characterized by openness and a proactive movement toward otherness.

We are conscious, of course, of the challenges in relating Levinas and Bakhtin to specific organisational situations. Levinas' insistence that the ethical response to the other is prior to ontology and subjectivity makes it demanding to directly apply his ideas to the conduct of lived organizational and relational dynamics. His work on the infinite alterity and responsibility for the other, and the

unanswerability of meeting that demand, renders his ethics an impossibility that is aimed for but not reached. As our study demonstrates, volunteers can move from the fear of the other to navigating complex interactions where responsibility for multiple others – such as other volunteers with different needs - is in tension. By looking at this dialogically, we can understand these moments not as fixed failures to encounter the face of the other, but as part of a dynamic and relational process. Responsibility shifts and adapts within these interactions, as individuals must respond not only to the homeless person but also to the safety and wellbeing of their fellow volunteers. We would argue that reading Levinas in relation to Bakhtin's work on dialogism allows us to open up a space for perceiving different voices, in dialogue with each other, working through the challenges and possibilities of coming into relation with and recognition of each other. Thus, Bakhtin's perspective helps us to ground Levinasian ethics in practical, relational contexts, allowing us to understand relations within organisations as "comprised of contested ethical demands from both the other and the other others" (Rhodes, 2023: 507). In this way, Bakhtin makes Levinas' ethics less idealistic and more applicable to the lived realities of organizations.

Conclusions

This paper has explored relational solidarity, through shared vulnerability in dialogic encounters, in the specific situation of outreach with homeless people. We conclude with three reflections on the significance of this.

First, we have looked at dialogic organising on the streets, in the evenings, in the interstices between formal organisations. At one level NPOs co-ordinate and organise the redistribution of resources, but it is within the embodied and dialogic encounters that we observe the possibilities and constraints for relational solidarity. By 'seeing', recognising a homeless person not solely as 'the other' to the volunteer's 'self', but by turning this relation around to see also the homeless person as the 'self' to the volunteer as 'other' we are able to challenge the fixed categories of the 'vulnerable', of 'the other' which are commonly imposed on these relations (cf. Butler et al., 2016). The positioning of the homeless person as socially and materially 'down' and 'out' is called into question through the shared vulnerability of the dialogic encounter. Social change needs this recognition of the self-hood, the person-hood and the agency of the homeless person (and of other marginalised voices). We encourage the pursuit of research that considers a dialogic organising in which the assumptions in the dialogue are challenged and the pre-designated categories of people can be transformed. Future research could examine how dialogic organising operates in other forms of solidarity, such as activist networks supporting migrants or groups advocating for systemic social change, and also potentially to research marginalised voices within organisational contexts.

Second, stemming from this, we have considered how a conversation between Bakhtin and Levinas might be fruitful for organisation studies. For example, work on relational ethics drawing on Levinas within organisation studies has recognised the difficulty in operationalising his perspective beyond the face-to-face dyad. Levinas (1998) himself considers the responsibility to all the "other others" that leads to an impossible situation of how we can compare the demands of multiple unique others. By taking a Bakhtinian dialogic approach, the problems of these competing claims and relations can be seen in the encounters between volunteers and homeless people in our fieldwork, showing the complexities of relational solidarity in action. We would tentatively suggest that a dialogic approach

provides a possible way of working through some of the difficulties of operationalising Levinas' thinking in relation to reciprocity and justice (Tatransky, 2008; Rhodes, 2020).

Finally, in the introduction we noted how some academic colleagues defined the outreach activities as 'charity'. In reflecting on this we think it is relevant to ask of ourselves as academics: what sort of dialogic organising are we engaging in when we define something in a particular way? What existing assumptions and values do we either maintain or challenge by our own dialogic practices? Can we share in the vulnerability of not always being the ones to know and to define (Rhodes & Carlsen, 2018)? For as Levinas says (2003: 64) "intellectual sincerity, veracity, already refers to vulnerability, is founded on it". We hope that by giving a glimpse into the complexity of such interactions, we have indicated that rather than how they are categorised, it is what happens in the utterances, the *in-between* of the dialogues, that is unexpected and contains the potential for solidaristic hope and change.

Acknowledgments

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Appendix

Table 1. Characterization of the data collected by NPO

	Name of the NPO	Data
1	The hostel	2 observations in a gymnasium during the cold weather plan (6h)
2	115	1 observation (1h),
3	Mission Régionale d'Information sur l'Exclusion	2 observations (10h)
4	Encircling	1 observation (3h)
5	Give and Act Without Stopping (GAWS)	2 observations (6h)
6	Lyon's Bees	1 observation (3h)
7	Emergency Social Assistance (ESA)	5 observations (35h)
8	The Helping Hand	2 observations (12h)
9	Together to Eat	1 observation (3h)
10	The Heart Bus	1 observation (4h)
11	Vesticamion	1 observation (6h)
12	Talk to Us	2 observations (8h)
13	Reaching Out	2 observations (8h)
14	If I am Hungry	1 observation (3h)
15	Secours Catholique (Young Caritas)	2 observations (6h)
16	The Solidarity Seagull	3 observations (9h)
17	The Red Cross	1 observation (6h)
18	Lyon Centre	1 observation (3h)
	Collective of NPOs	*5 meetings observed (10h)*
TOTAL		**31 observations (132h) + 5 meetings (10h)**

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[i] We use our own translation here to denote 'denudation' rather than the usual translation to 'nude'.

[ii] According to FEANTSA homelessness has risen in every European country except Finland in the last 10 years.

[iii] According to a 2012 report by INSEE, the French national statistics bureau.

Biographies

Lucie Cortambert is an Associate Professor at the Catholic University of Lyon (Ucly), where she teaches sustainable strategy and the social and solidarity economy (SSE). Her teaching and research explore how individuals and organizations respond to social and environmental challenges through alternative organizational practices. Her research focuses on how organizations produce solidarity, with particular attention to the spatial and embodied dimensions of volunteer work and the development of circular business models.

Karen Dale is professor of Organisation Studies at Lancaster University. Her research on organizational embodiment, spatiality and materiality has been published in leading journals and books including *Anatomising Embodiment and Organisation Theory* (Palgrave), The *Spaces of Organisation and the Organisation of Space: Power, Identity and Materiality at Work* with Gibson Burrell (Palgrave), and *Organizational Space and Beyond: The Significance of Henri Lefebvre for Organization Studies* with Sytze Kingma and Varda Wasserman (Routledge). She is currently researching the productive body in contemporary work; shared embodiment in the fitness industry; and exploring human–more-than-human relations, particularly with plant life.