

The space of hospitality. Activism, art, architecture and urbanism in Rome

El espacio de la hospitalidad. Activismo, arte, arquitectura y urbanismo a Roma

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Abstract

The article approaches the theme of the concrete utopias produced by hospitality from the point of view of architecture and the city, identifying, particularly in Rome, political, artistic and academic experiences that are concretely constructing that space already highlighted by linguists, philosophers and anthropologists: hospitality as a threshold capable of transforming the foreigner into a guest. In architectural space, that threshold is a theatrical machine capable of reversing roles, of constructing that limbo that suspends and makes property boundaries opaque, that allows ambiguities and ambivalence, that confuses opposing figures such as certain and uncertain, nomadic and sedentary, domestic and institutional, formal and informal, legal and illegal. In urban space, the threshold is extended, becomes visible and public thanks to certain political and artistic experiences that have created places capable of giving guests the power to host in turn. In Rome, the occupations of the housing struggle movements have produced intercultural condominiums as viable alternatives to the institutional welcome systems and to the housing emergency; artistic and academic researchers have identified urban strategies and policies producing imagery and projects for a hospitable city. Finally, a project, Porto Fluviale RecHouse, drawn up jointly by the administration and the housing struggle movement, and currently being implemented - proposes a model of urban intervention based on hospitality.

Resumen

El artículo aborda el tema de las utopías concretas que produce la hospitalidad desde el punto de vista de la arquitectura y la ciudad, identificando, particularmente en Roma, experiencias políticas, artísticas y académicas que están construyendo concretamente ese espacio ya destacado por lingüistas, filósofos y antropólogos: la hospitalidad como umbral capaz de transformar al extranjero en huésped. En el espacio arquitectónico, ese umbral es una máquina teatral capaz de invertir los roles, de construir ese limbo que suspende y opaca los límites de la propiedad, que permite ambigüedades y ambivalencias, que confunde figuras opuestas como lo cierto y lo incierto, lo nómada y lo sedentario, lo doméstico y lo institucional, formales e informales, legales e ilegales. En el espacio urbano, el umbral se amplía, se hace visible y público gracias a ciertas experiencias políticas y artísticas que han creado lugares capaces de otorgar a los huéspedes el poder de acoger a su vez. En Roma, las ocupaciones de los movimientos de lucha por la vivienda han producido condominios interculturales como alternativas viables a los sistemas institucionales de acogida y a la emergencia habitacional. Investigadores artísticos y académicos han identificado estrategias y políticas urbanas que producen imaginarios y proyectos de ciudad hospitalaria. Finalmente, un proyecto, Porto Fluviale RecHouse, elaborado conjuntamente por la administración y el movimiento de lucha por la vivienda, y actualmente en ejecución, propone un modelo de intervención urbana basado en la hospitalidad.

Keywords: concrete utopia; hospitality; Rome; migrants; housing struggle.

Palabras clave: utopía concreta; hospitalidad; Roma; migrantes; lucha por la vivienda.

“Il faut distinguer les utopistes des utopiens, autrement dit l’utopie abstraite de l’utopie concrète [...]. La pensée utopiste explore l’impossible; la pensée utopienne dégage le possible”.

(Henri Lefebvre, 1961)

Introduction

The article deals with the spatial dimension of hospitality, taking as a reference some architectural, urban and artistic projects built in the city of Rome. These projects are characterized by exploring and proposing alternative hospitality solutions to those offered by the institutional welcoming system. The first part of the text focuses on exposing the genealogy of the concept and practice of hospitality by bringing up its mythical rather than historical aspects, on which the central theoretical argument is built.¹ Under this perspective, the article approaches the projects proposed by artists, architects, academics and activists of the housing struggle in Rome, highlighting their qualities to promote collective appropriations, understood as alternatives to the commodified forms and the state machinery of welcoming. The discourses, aesthetic practices and urban solutions generated by these politically engaged collectives could also be understood as alternative social spaces allied to the movements of struggle, and which, therefore, acquire a connotation of "concrete utopias" (Lefebvre, 1961). These experiences constructed as concrete utopias offer a spatial dimension of hospitality radically different from that existing in institutional welcome centers. They are inventions that have managed to conquer their space and survive among the folds of the system, remaining in their otherness and without allowing themselves to be homologated. In other words, a true production of space, in Lefebvre's terms. Recovering the author's words: "we must distinguish between utopists and utopians, in other words between abstract utopias and concrete utopias [...] Utopists thinking explores the impossible; utopian thought unleashes the possible". The quote by Lefebvre that Jean Clarence Lambert puts at the opening of his book on the nomadic city of Constant's New Babylon, divides the radical avant-gardes on one side and the housing struggle movements on the other (Lambert, 1997, p.7). While the "abstract utopias" of Superstudio and Archigram explored the impossible in the discipline of architecture without actually changing anything in reality, many "concrete utopias" experimented in the protest movements and in the squats from the 1970s to the present day, allowed the *possible* to be unleashed in realities we are living in today. Lefebvre's sentence builds a dam between those who delight in dreaming abstract thought from those who commit their lives to building a new world, inhabiting this planet in alternative ways. What follows is an attempt to explore the space of hospitality as a generator of concrete utopias.

¹ It is important to clarify that the focus of the article contributes to the debate on the spatial dimension of hospitality. It is completely beyond its scope to propose a reconstruction of the anthropological literature on hospitality, nor on the relationship between hospitality and the specific field of migration and asylum reception (Candea and Da Col, 2012; Herzfeld, 1987; Pitt-Rivers, 1977; Rivière 2000; Rozakou, 2012; Shryock, 2022). In this way, the article responds to the theme of this monograph, exploring the space of hospitality as a generator of "concrete utopias" (Lefebvre, 1961).

The space of hospitality

Unlike some words such as solidarity, charity or activism, the word hospitality needs concrete space to enact. In hospitality, intangible and material values are exchanged. We share intimacy, food, stories but also a real piece of space that permits the acts of sharing. Hospitality is about the dwelling that we are willing to share with the guest, and we host if we have a physical space to share. Moreover, hospitality needs a very little space, just what occupies a human body, a space that can be produced from almost nothing, found where previously there was no imagined unused space. It is instantaneous creation of a good that we didn't even know we had. A space that anyone can create from nothing. This is perhaps why hospitality is sacred in all archaic cultures: those who don't host will receive the divine punishment, and this concerns not only those who have a surplus of space, but anyone who possesses at least a very little, thus everyone indiscriminately. Since it's not just matter of quantity, it is interesting to question the qualities of the space of hospitality and what kinds of concrete spaces hospitality produces.

Let's start with etymology. A lot of academics have pointed out that hospitality is “the transformation place of the *stranger* into a *guest*” (Agier, 2018, p. 17), and that in Latin language the ambivalence of the word hospitality arises precisely in the transition from *hostis* (enemy, foreigner) to *hospes* (host and guest). The word *hospes* in many neo-Latin languages, such as the Italian *ospite* and the French *hôte*, is an ambivalent word indicating both the one who *hosts* and the one who *is hosted*, that is, the two roles that the English language separates into *host* and *guest*. For this reason, to underline the ambivalence, from now on we will use sometimes the Latin word *hospes* and not one of the two in English. The word *hospes* (host, guest) derives from the Latin *hostis* (enemy, hostile) and from the power of hosting of the *hostipotis*, a word composed of *hōstis* (stranger) and *pōtis* (lord, master, power), that means the *stranger-master*, from which finally derives the word *hos-pes*, *the guest-master* (Benveniste, 1973; Derrida, 2021; Curi, 2015).

Emile Benveniste argues that in the languages of northern Europe the opposite happened, and thus that is from the word ‘guest’ that the word ‘enemy’ derived: “Among the expressions common to the prehistoric vocabulary of the European languages it is of special interest: *hōstis* in Latin corresponds to *gasts* of Gothic and to *gostī*, of Old Slavonic, which also presents *gos-podī* ‘master’, formed like *hospes*. But the meaning of Gothic *gasts* and Old Slavic *gostī* is ‘guest’, whereas that of Latin *hōstis* is ‘enemy’. To explain the connexion between ‘guest’ and ‘enemy’ it is usually supposed that both derived their meaning from ‘stranger’, a sense which is still attested in Latin. The notion ‘favorable stranger’ developed to ‘guest’; that of ‘hostile stranger’ to ‘enemy’” (Benveniste, 1973, p. 75).

The Greek language, as the Latin language does, describes hospitality as a relationship of reciprocity, a symmetrical exchange between equals, who may both find themselves in the condition of demanding or offering each other hospitality. The word *xenos* indicates the exiled stranger transformed into a guest through *xenia* (ξενία), a system of binding and reciprocal rules, which involves also an exchange of gifts: the *xenia dora*, based on giving and receiving something that has no economic value, such as the small portable objects that in the Roman world were the *tesserae hospitalis*, double sculptures where the names of the two contracting parties were engraved. The result is a very special pact, the *xenoisyne*, the friendship born through hospitality, which involves in future generations not only the two *hospes* but their entire lineages.

The *xenos* is thus the friend of a foreign country, the one who could be a potential enemy, but who is instead bound by a sacred pact overseen by the gods, protected directly by *Jupiter Xenius* or *Zeus Hospitalier* ready to punish those who transgress the rules (Schéerer, 1993). In the *Odyssey*, considered by many to be a treatise on hospitality, there are eighteen instances in which *xenia*, both male and female, is honored, practiced, denied, violated, and finally avenged through symbolic punishment: the bow that Odysseus uses to kill the suitors was a hospitality gift received from Phaedimus. Similarly, in the Judeo-Christian world, the laws of hospitality were considered sacred to Lord, and the Bible often reminds us that hospitality is a duty, because every host is always a guest of the Lord in a land where no one is the owner (Giacomini, 2019). So, in archaic Mediterranean cultures, under the guise of the wanderer knocking at the door, there could always be hidden a god, an angel or the Lord himself: hosting was not a choice but a duty.

Jacques Derrida, starting from the concept of “universal hospitality” (*die Allgemeine Hospitaalität*) of Emmanuel Kant, arrived to define “the duty of unconditional hospitality” (Derrida, 2021, p. 37). The rituals of archaic *xenia* in fact required a series of rules: that the guest be unannounced and appear unexpectedly; that there be silence in the initial phase when the guest is invited to wash and feed himself, and it is not asked to speak and reveal whether he speaks Greek or not; that there be no identification, neither his name nor his geographical origins are initially asked, it’s up to the host to break the silence and tell the story first. For Derrida, there is only hospitality if it is absolute, sacred, non-economic and apolitical, free of all computation and considerations of convenience, an ethics beyond laws and politics: “hospitality is unconditional and without limits or it is not (...) it is a gift without restitution, without re-appropriation (...) it is offered, it is given to the other before he qualifies, before he becomes a subject of law and can be named with his surname”. As a gift, the act of hospitality eludes cost-benefit calculations and enters the sphere of what is “inappropriate”, it challenges the identities and ownership itself (Derrida and Dufourmantelle, 2014, p. 51). But if the archaic law of hospitality was sacred and unconditional, the laws of hospitalities in the constitution of the sovereignty were no longer so. Over the time in fact, the anonymous *xenia* becomes the recognition of cultural and linguistic identity, separating the *xenos* from the *barbaros* who, not speaking the Greek language, does not have the same rights as the citizen of the *polis*, just as in the Roman world the *hospes* was separated from the *peregrinus* who could not access the rights of the *civitas*. In the transition from the individual-domestic sphere to the public-institutional one, certain conditions begin to appear: hospitality and welcoming begin to blur.

Michel Agier argues that being a relational practice, it can only be “conditioned” by power relations, political circumstances and social contexts. It is a gift of space, time and money that starts a concatenation of obligations and conditions: “hospitality has progressively moved away from society to be delegated to the state and dissolved in the latter's tasks, replaced by asylum and refugee rights. (...) It will therefore be necessary to describe under what conditions and in what concrete forms a domestic (in my home), communal (in my group) and municipal (in my country, in my city) hospitality unfolds” (Agier, 2018, p. 62). Agier follows on the analysis of many cases where the domestic sphere extends, through the associative world, to the community sphere and how these one often supersedes municipal or sovereign state duties and laws, to the point of becoming acts of courageous civic disobedience. It therefore becomes urgent to understand the difference between hospitality and welcoming, and thus between

unconditional and conditional hosting, that choose the strangers to host. Welcoming, which in Italian is *accogliere* and in French *accueillir*, comes from the Latin *ad + colligere* (to bind together, gather, harvest) an agricultural term indicating the choice not to take all the fruit, but to select the ripe ones and divide them into different boxes according to categories (Giacomini, 2019, p. 25). Thus, we have moved from hospitality to welcoming, which is a deliberately univocal and asymmetrical action that no longer needs to build the sacred and ambivalent threshold of *hospes* reciprocity.

Let's now turn back to that "place of the transformation of the stranger into a guest", which is also a three-dimensional portion of space and concerns architecture and the city. Hospitality produces concrete space, transforms private into shared space, it constructs passages between inside and outside, "from the domestic scale to the national borders" (Bulley, 2015, p. 188). We can define it as the construction of an *hospes* threshold where we suspend and mix some spatial categories such as public and private, nomadic and sedentary, space of going and space of being, likewise the two words "host" and "guest". The image of the wanderer knocking at the door shows an initial division between external and internal space but also a production of a new hybrid space, straddling interior and exterior, where everything begins to blur in the ambivalence of hospitality. The boundary between inside and outside is not merely the door, but what lies behind and in front of that door. In other words, it is not a defined line as a border, but rather a frontier, a space itself, a thickness without precise limits, a threshold in becoming (Zanini, 1997; Stavrides, 2011). In the archaic storytelling of the *Odyssey* and the Bible, hospitality starts building its space under the outer canvas covering the entrance of a nomadic tent, under the shade of the courtyard tree, in the arcaded veranda where the entrance opens, in the farmyard where the banquet takes place, in the living room of the community host-master. Although it is unexpected, the guest is always foreseen by architecture, everyone knows where to accommodate someone at home when the need arises. Depending on the possibilities this place will be the tent next to ours, the guest room, the children's room, the home office, the sofa bed in the living room, the carpet in the hallway. In the transition from public to private space, the unexpected stranger accesses gradually to more familiar common spaces, rarely reaching the intimate space of the hosts' bedroom. Even in the Homeric scenes we can observe that, once the stranger is transformed into a guest, the host offers him a space near the entrance and far from the familiar bedrooms. The place of the host will not be in the sleeping area but rather in the living area, in a visible space, controllable from the common rooms, as if the outer threshold somehow extends inside the house. Hospitality produces a hybrid place, exactly like the words whose meanings seemed deliberately confused: *hospes* that hosts and *hospes* that is hosted, the enemy that becomes friend, the reciprocity of giving and receiving. The host-master pretends—sometimes at the limits of hypocrisy—even that he is no longer the host (make yourself at home) and confuses himself into the guest in a space of representation where everyone plays with the other's mask. The architecture of hospitality is that theatrical machine table to invert, to confuse, to suspend and to make opaque the boundaries of properties and the roles². The same architectural rules of domestic hospitality should

² It is necessary to emphasize that it is beyond the scope of this article to problematize hospitality as an inseparable part of the ritual of the gift that has been treated as an unequal and hierarchical relationship in anthropology (Mauss, 1971). The artistic, architectural and spatial practices that the article presents as concrete utopias are understood as tools for the radical transformation of the exchanges legitimized in capitalist society. The situationist inspiration of concrete utopia (Vaneigem, 2008), leads the debate of the gift in this direction: "The pure situationist gift is presented as a transgressive form of reciprocity: taking

nowadays extend to the urban scale, but they have been forgotten since immemorial time. Every city should have a set of urban *hospes* thresholds, central places visible in downtown and not hidden in the faraway suburbs like the refugee centers, houses in relation to public space where exchange the gift of hospitality, where the nomadic storytellers could bring the world to the banquet of sedentary citizens.

The art of hospitality

In the last few years, various artists and architects have developed a relational approach, producing innovative experiences related to hospitality. In times of wars, forced rejections, selection of human beings according to the ever-changing criteria of the institutional welcoming machines, it is increasingly difficult to act out that “unconditional hospitality” of the archaic world, which sometimes take place in an individual space, a family house, a community or associative place, but finds enormous difficulties in an institutional setting. Nevertheless, various artistic experiences attempt to construct concrete *hospes* thresholds able to confound the boundaries of the institutions. In a recent publication, some artists, architects and philosophers argued together about the *generative and fertilizing power of the host*. According with the text *Children of Compost* (Haraway, 2019, pp. 151-194), with a word pun they composed the title of the volume *Comp(h)ost. Interspecies Imaginaries*: “compost requires an interspecies collaboration between microorganisms and human beings, whose intervention ensures, by stirring the soil, the presence of oxygen. This formless compost therefore needs an external agent that triggers reactions and relations, like the very notion of hospitality, which if not acted upon remains an empty concept” (Comisso et al., 2021, p. 11). Inside the book we find some experiences on producing concrete hospitable spaces, among them the two project *Al-Madhafah / The Living Room* by Sandi Hilal in Sweden and the practice of *Stalker / NoWorking* in Rome, triggered by artists and architects together with native and foreign *hospes*. Spaces where hospitality is acted out in a visible and symmetrical way, straddling the domestic and the public, creating unusual thresholds between individual, associative and institutional hospitality. These experiences challenge the paternalistic approach and the power of the *hosti-potis* or else the stranger-master, the institutional welcoming system, and the supposed asymmetrical roles between the host and the guest. So far, we've been talking about a host-master who has the power to give hospitality or hostility to the stranger knocking at his door, to choose where and for how long the relationship of hospitality will take place.

In 2016, in Boden, Sweden, a few kilometres from the Arctic Circle, artist Sandi Hilal together with a Syrian refugee couple, Yasmeen Mahmoud and Ibrahim Muhammad Haj Abdulla, created *Al-Madhafah / The Living Room*, a space dedicated to the right of guests to exercise their power of hosting, reversing the roles of host and guest. Sandi Hilal, who studied architecture in Italy and then co-founded the DAAR group in Palestine with Alessandro Petti, talks about her condition as an eternal guest in Europe, and how this condition changed her viewpoint on Derrida's unconditional hospitality. Her experience shows how in the real world those who are hosts, if they don't leave on time, change their position to that of a resident alien who perpetually will

something in exchange for nothing (‘stealing’) to give it to someone else. In that sense, the exchange of gifts is not only presented as a possible alternative, but as a direct attack on the exchange of commodities, and on the institution of property, a revolutionary weapon” (Sansi, 2014, p. 26).

be perceived as something else: "Who has the right to host? Who is asked to behave as the perfect host? How can we analyze the power to host as a way of making visible and claiming to exercise their agency?" (Hilal, 2021, p. 163). According to Hilal, the sensation of being an eternal guest ends when the guest finally has the right to host, and with a space where enact the power of hosting in a visible and semi-public way, constructing a threshold between the domestic and the institutional. Hilal won a call of the Swedish agency Staten Konstrad, to conceive a public art project in Boden, a military town recently converted into a refugee center. Here she met Yasmeeen and Ibrahim, who had already arrived some time before, who proudly invited her and the institution representatives to their home. They told her that "outside their guest room (in Arabic *Al-Madhafah*, living room means exactly guest room) they felt invisible, represented only by a number in refugee statistics, while inside that room they suddenly became visible" (Hilal, 2021, p. 169). It is from this encounter that *Al-Madhafah /The Living Room* take place: the ground floor of the refugee center's building has been entirely renovated, creating an open space by demolishing all internal walls and opening large windows to the outside. The act of hospitality is thus made visible and public, showing the possibility for all the hosts to become guests, both with each other and with their Swedish or foreign neighbors, as well as with representatives. The institutions supporting the art project also stipulates —not without problems— that this space will be under the responsibility of Yasmeeen and not of a municipal employee. If up to now we have said that hospitality was the transformation of the stranger into a guest, we now understand that the true symmetry of hospitality is definitively accomplished with the transformation of the guest into host. The *hospes threshold* can be built also through relational architecture (Decolonizing Architecture, 2016).

The second experience is the *NoWorking* space opened in Rome since 2016 by Stalker, an artistic practice that works on the theme of hospitality since the mid-1990s. In 1999 indeed, together with a group of Kurdish refugees, Stalker occupied an abandoned building and set up *Ararat*, a sort of House of the Kurds in Exile, that hosted thousands of refugees in a totally independent and self-managed way. *Ararat* is a two-floor building of the former slaughterhouse of Rome, it has a large kitchen, a library and several rooms where many activities take place, but moreover it opens onto a large public courtyard. This is an ideal threshold between the domestic and the public, an open square for cultural and political initiatives such as the feast of the Newroz, the New Year's Day of the Persian and Anatolia culture. The relationship between *Ararat* and the institutions is still informal, and even though more than twenty-five thousand refugees have passed through it without weighing on the state coffers, after twenty-three years *Ararat* is still not legalized but tolerated. Around 2016, with the last big wave of refugee, Stalker started working on Rome's foundation myths related to hospitality, reactivating the mythological and cyclical arrival of the strangers, who regenerate the city by inhabiting the ruins and then hide in the wild region of Latium (Romito, 2021, p. 129). Those researches produced several public actions such as *Xeneide, the gift of the Other. Myths, practices and poetics of hospitality*, dedicated to the myth of Aeneas, interpreted as a war refugee who flees from the burning city of Troy and, crossing the Mediterranean lands on the Italic shores to found Rome, mixing his foreign blood with the native ones. Walking on the steps of Aenea, Stalker discovered the *Planetary Citizenship Stele*, containing the Latin text of the lost *Constitutio Antonina* of 212 A.D., which allowed all wanderers the right to move anywhere in the entire empire, by direct route and without hindrance. Moreover, the place that most embodies Stalker's idea of hospitality is the *NoWorking*, its headquarters managed by Giulia Fiocca and Lorenzo

Romito, that directly overlooks the public street, often invading it with convivial banquets. As we can read on its website *NoWorking* is “a convivial space-time of art, where to give rise to the possibility of acting in the present a possible future. It is a space of discovery, care and hospitality, of oneself, of others and of the world. (...) of dis-education from the behavior, relationships and thoughts colonized in us by contemporaneity” (NoWorking, 2020). It is a sort of laboratory-house with a large kitchen always ready for the arrival of the unexpected guest and a long table where the archaic rules of *xenia* are practiced. Here everybody learns the importance to ask for first 'where are you going' instead of asking 'where did you come from'. Through the constant presence of Morteza Kalegi, the *NoWorking* is today also an important reference point for young Afghans who fled the country after the Taliban reconquest. Recently, the Herat School in Exile has found a home here as “a space for relations between Rome and Herat, between those who give and those who seek refuge. (...) An art space dedicated to the meeting between artists, intellectuals and students arriving in these days from Afghanistan and Rome, where artistic traditions now reduced to silence in Afghanistan, including the ancient tradition of Herat miniatures, can be kept alive” (Scuola di Herat, 2021).

What is important to underline in the experiences of *Al-Madhafah / The Living Space*, *Ararat* and *NoWorking* is that, although there are different relationships with institutions, all the spaces are self-managed by the guests, and that no institution would have succeeded in the same challenge without the relational capacity of the artists: they are domestic spaces like the Houses and not collection boxes like the Centers or the Camps. The approach, the convivial atmosphere, the community artistic practices, the use of space, the diverse people who pass through them, together with the architecture and the relationship with the public space, all together these elements have succeeded in constructing the space and the rules necessary for hospitality to take place. They are domestic and urban thresholds, interior spaces visible from the outside and opening onto public spaces, places that are able of reactivating that role of semi-public and semi-private spaces of the archaic guest-master's house. And what is most striking is that we —the presumed hosts— don't feel really at home, but on a strange *hospes threshold* where the reversal between guest and host is in a continuous becoming.

Hospitality and the fight for housing in Rome

In Rome over the last twenty years, the phenomenon of the resurgence of the housing struggle movements, common to other European cities, has had exceptional dimensions and modalities. The movement —now called for the “right to dwell” and not only “right to the house”— intercepted the flow of migrants and produced a metropolitan network of housing occupations that are close to Lefebvre's idea of “concrete utopia” that we discussed at the beginning. The occupied buildings host more than ten thousand people in more than one hundred large properties, and the movements claim that they have saved abandoned buildings from property speculation (De Finis and Di Noto, 2018). The encounter with precarious workers, students and migrant families from Latin America, Africa and Eastern Europe has produced unusual and innovative intercultural housing models. In the conviction that 'no one is illegal', the movements have even welcomed people without documents or rights, the so-called “economic migrants” or just clandestine, making possible not only the realization of the archaic unconditional hospitality without recognition, but also that reversal between

guest and host that allows the guest to take back the power to host. Finding themselves in the same economic and existential circumstances and conditions of illegality as occupants, enabled that reciprocity whereby everyone feels like a guest and host at the same time. These new intercultural condominiums develop innovative forms of co-housing, bringing together the different forms of emergency housing while responding to the need for temporary housing for people in transit.

Unlike the institutional reception system, which splits into categories strangers according to origin or rights, and spatializes them into different homogeneous and hermetic habitats, in occupations everyone is brought into contact and hybridized. The people who live there do not only belong to the housing emergency category, on waiting lists for social housing for years, but also to those who have different life plans and desires and are not provided for housing policies: refugees and asylum seekers who have been expelled from the institutional welcome system; those who have not had time to acquire legal status; the so-called “dublinated” whom Europe sends back to Italy because of the Dublin Treaty; the economic migrants in transit, who prefer not to be registered in Italy and try to reach northern Europe; and the many who have built relationships and jobs in Italy but are forced to be clandestine because their countries don’t grant them asylum (Cacciotti, 2020). Not least, the occupations were the first to include the Roma in the babel of cultures arriving from all over the world, and to end the undeclared apartheid against this minority, that has always been excluded not only by institutions but also by antagonism within the movement. After much initial resistance due to mutual prejudices, today there are Roma in various occupations and they are no longer considered as *Roma occupants*, just occupants like everyone else. Moreover, occupations also host other forms of non-residential urban life that would not easily find space in the neoliberal city. In fact, in many cases they have a 'residential-private' part on the upper floors and a 'social-public' part at street level.

Here they become visible and permeable, offering services and spaces for meetings, concerts, social taverns, carpentry and cycle workshops, sports spaces, involving not only the world of associations and possible local allies, but also the institutional world of culture such as universities and contemporary art projects. The three main movements in Rome —BPM, Coordination and Action— started very special Museums related to hospitality. In the occupation of *Metropoliz the mestizo city* squatted by BPM-Metropolitan Precarious Blocs, a strange museum called MAAM Museum of the Other and the Elsewhere of Metropoliz was born more than ten years ago. It is a sort of inhabited museum that has attracted hundreds of street artists, including those in the international star system, to defend the occupation and mix social flows that would otherwise never have crossed each other. On the lower floors of Action's occupation in Via Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Spin Time Lab was born, containing common spaces such as the tavern and the auditorium, the headquarters of the underground night orchestra and of the national magazine *Scomodo* (Uncomfortable) edited by radical students. Here Stalker together with other associations created the MAD'Ò-Museum of the Act of Hospitality —born from a collaboration with the French collective Perou-Pôle d'Exploration des Ressources Urbaines— that proposed to nominate the Act of Hospitality as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity acknowledged by UNESCO, and has started to collect and document those acts of spontaneous hospitality offered to migrants often as acts of civil disobedience (PEROU, 2018).

The roman network of occupations, notwithstanding enormous difficulties and internal contradictions, and often acting illegally, is creating a concrete model of a

hospitable, inclusive and intergenerational city, where another culture and another vision of the world can be produced, a model of responsible self-management and reciprocal hospitality that is really difficult to reproduce in the context of institutional welcoming.

CIRCO, Casa Irrinunciabile per la Ricreazione Civica e l'Ospitalità

In the autumn of 2017, having experienced the hospitable-housing practices of the occupations and the hospitable-artistic practices of Stalker, the Department of Architecture of Rome Tre University started a research and teaching project called CIRCO³, a public proposal of hosting policies for the city of Rome and beyond. CIRCO is an acronym for *Casa Irrinunciabile per la Ricreazione Civica e l'Ospitalità* (non-renounceable house for civic recreation and hospitality), and aims to position itself in the interstice between the domestic and the institutional, the legal and the illegal, the formal and the informal, trying to remain as faithful as possible to unconditional hospitality, without ignoring the imposed contradictions of institutional conditions. It is an attempt to scale at the urban level the *threshold* that hospitality needs in order to renew itself, pushing the institutions to experiment in innovative spaces where the transformation of the foreigner into a guest is conceived as a fertilizing opportunity for the city itself. The project makes explicit reference to housing occupations and artistic practices: occupations both for the strategy of reusing abandoned or underused housing stock and for the ability to formulate a housing policy where institutions are failing; the artistic practices for their ability to construct that spatial threshold, capable of reactivating the rites and myths of archaic hospitality, by bringing creative confusion into institutional interstices. In short, the project consists in transforming the disused heritage in Rome —the ruins of the contemporary age— into a metropolitan network of intercultural and institutional condominiums based on Hospitality. The acronym is explicitly a reference to the circus' imaginary, to the nomad world that brings to the city an unreal and magical atmosphere, totally alien to the sedentary city. An itinerant universe that installs itself in the waste land of the city and that includes and displays extraneous and different characters such as the dwarf, the clown, the canon woman. The circus is the nomad proud of its diversity, wearing an architecture unlike any other, mobile and colorful like a gypsy's skirt. It is the socially acceptable nomad, the different one among us that is nevertheless familiar to us, it is the threshold of the encounter with the Other of which we feel an archaic need. It is non-renounceable, indomitable, irreducible, it is that contradiction that is increasingly needed: a place capable of showing its otherness, its potential conflict, its provocative charge, transformed into regenerative, stimulating, innovative energies. Without passively submitting to the conditions of state or municipal hospitality, CIRCO wants to be a norm-generating architecture, a network of places for continuous experimentation, that instead of being subjected to rules is proposing new rules for everyone.

The first step of the CIRCO Laboratory was the production of a set of public mappings: the map of institutional welcoming, the map of occupations and the resistant city, and the map of abandoned and underused properties where the CIRCO project

³ The CIRCO project aims to revalue nomadism within the city and is inspired by Constant's New Babylon. It would be a reedition of the same, since it does not seek to be the project of a professional architect, but a project that is made from below, with the participation of the inhabitants (Apolonio, 2021).

could be achieved. The map of welcoming includes the institutional systems, those of both secular and religious volunteers, and the informal systems of activism and associations such as Baobab Experience, just to name the most important. The map of abandoned buildings, called city waste, is divided according to different categories: military barracks, railway sheds, cinemas, theatres, schools, sports facilities, health facilities, church property, disused factories. Slowly the map was filled with constellations of points of different sizes, some more peripheral, others decidedly central; there are more than two hundred buildings. Subsequently, the research went on to identify the potential inhabitants of a CIRCO, realizing that, together with the inhabitants already present in the occupations, a vast amount of different people could co-habit, increasing and hybridizing the socio-cultural *mixité*: the elderly, students from abroad, expats, seasonal workers, young precarious workers, artists, activists, social volunteers, up to tourists interested in staying in a strange social guesthouse where they could make their skills available. Lastly, the research went on to design a number of *circuses* with the students, exploring and wasting time in the urban contexts, talking with the people, finding the real stakeholders and co-designing the phases when they could be active, and moreover the economic feasibility and the social benefits that can be produced through social forms of solidarity economy.

Finally, the CIRCO proposes an alternative policy to the current welcome system, a place where the transformation of the stranger into a guest takes the form of a playful and circus atmosphere, a threshold where host and guests host each other, living together and mutually exchanging their cultures as precious gifts, a place where we are all strangers and all guests. (Laboratorio Circo, 2021).

Porto Fluviale RecHouse

Under the impetus of the fight for housing movements', of the imaginaries and experiences produced by artistic practices and academic research, institutions have recently been given an opportunity to experiment with a prototype of a hospitable space at the urban level, starting with a housing occupation⁴. The opportunity was a call for tenders on Housing Quality by the Ministry of Infrastructure addressed to Italian municipalities, to which the Capitoline Administration, led by Mayor Virginia Raggi, decided to respond in an innovative way, obtaining in, July 2021, eleven million euros, entirely from public funds. This is an urban regeneration project that envisages the "participatory recovery of the artistic and social heritage" of Porto Fluviale, a former military barracks occupied since 2003 by the *Coordinamento Cittadino Lotta per la Casa*, with the official aim of "recovering a listed building, giving new functions to a disused building without land consumption and in a perspective of sustainability and densification; increasing the social housing stock; reducing the housing emergency within a process of social integration of a housing occupation; providing the neighborhood with a new public space; using innovative management methods; activating a participatory process; increasing the social mixité intended as an antidote to the gentrification processes in the area and enhancing social proximity between heterogeneous groups" (Roma Capitale, 2021, p.13). The project was signed by the occupiers, a considerable number of institutional stakeholders including three

⁴ The particularity of the Porto Fluviale project stands out for the fact that it has made it possible for those who lived in the heritage building before it was recovered to continue to live there after the urban regeneration process. For more details on the project see: Careri et al. (2022).

ministries, three universities, the three levels of regional, municipal and city administrations, and fifteen local associations interested in being involved in the process. Porto Fluviale is a well-known building in the city, it is considered a monument by both the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and the housing struggle movements, a famous icon with mural paintings by the street artist Blu, that has made the building well-known worldwide. It is owned by the Ministry of Defense and has been listed by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage as an industrial heritage asset of historical and artistic interest. What is interesting is that all these institutions have agreed on a project that includes the recovery and construction of new Public Residential Housing to be allocated to the current illegal occupants and the recovery of the existing socio-cultural spaces on the ground floor that will be reassigned to the workshops that currently use it. Regarding Blu's mural painting on the face of the building—which is not only featured in the most important international street art publications, but has become a sort of living monument and visual landmark for the entire neighborhood—in consultation with the author, the inhabitants and the Architectural Superintendence, a decision was made to remove it and restore the original façade. A new mural will be considered for the interior spaces such as stairways and distribution corridors, but according to Blu, this will only happen when all the families have a new home in the building. As for the residential aspect of the project, fifty-six households from thirteen different nationalities live in the occupation, the majority from Latin America, the Maghreb, Eastern Europe and Italy. More than sixty children were born and raised here, they have attended local schools and are now fully integrated into the neighborhood. The municipality admitted that this community, while the bearer of urban conflicts, has developed new and innovative forms of intercultural coexistence also by opening its courtyard to the neighborhood and offering cultural activities and social services. The process of inclusion, in the transition from squatters to public housing beneficiaries, aims to put an end to a long-standing conflict, and involves carrying out an official census of families, followed by a Special Public Housing call reserved for them, that will verify the possession of the requirements necessary to qualify for public housing, and assign the new houses in the renovated building. In addition, a shift system is planned for the successive construction phases that will allow residents to remain in the building throughout the duration of the works.

The most interesting part in terms of the architecture of hospitality concerns the ground floor with its public spaces and socio-cultural activities, which is currently only accessible through a doorway or the Tea Room that acts as a filter between inside and outside. It was precisely the observation of this space that helped understand how to conceive the threshold: the basis for the design of the relationship between the building and the city. For many years, the outside world was perceived as dangerous and hostile and the building remained closed like a fortress forced to defend itself against the constant threat of eviction. But then a process of opening began where the stranger, now the landlord, opened the door to the city outside by offering hospitality. Every step taken in the opening process was discussed at length and then approved by assembly, the occupations are in fact like islands of a parallel sovereignty governed by the assembly where the rules of the state do not apply. The first step was to turn the inner car park into a common courtyard: a production of semi-public space for the community that has produced playgrounds for children, a football pitch for teenagers, a volleyball court for adults, a barbecue area and facilities to support the events sometimes also provided by the outside world of local associations (Pisano, 2011). But the turning point came in 2010 with the opening of a Tea Room directly on the street, a visible, permeable,

well-maintained space, also frequented by people who had begun to understand a world often far removed from their bourgeois imaginations: the threshold of hospitality, that machine where the hostile enemy is transformed into a hospitable friend, but in the reverse sense, like in the artistic practices and in the occupations that we have seen before. The tea room is not a simple place like so many in the neighborhood, here you immediately realize that you are entering a place with a community management, almost family-like, a living room of a house. Here the rules are archaic, the guest is unexpected and there is no recognition other than a political allegiance to an anti-fascist world. Of fundamental importance from the point of view of space, is that the Tea Room communicates with the street but also with the courtyard, it is therefore a filter space, a threshold that penetrates intimacy, where foreigners who have gained more trust can enter and participate in the life of the intercultural condominium. The increasing degrees of confidence gained allow knowledge to penetrate more and more spaces and build more and more relationships, until you feel you have earned the trust that makes you feel like a desired guest. It was through the door of the Tea Room that the group of professors and researchers from the CIRCO Laboratory first entered. Over the past ten years, they have shared various artistic and university training actions with the students and the inhabitants in the courtyard, producing a seaport imagery of flying and swinging boats, as well as painting the entrance of the building as a threshold to another possible world. When the PINQuA call for proposals was issued, the process of participation and co-design was initiated by the students together with the most active members of the community, a process that led to winning the call. In the project, the inner courtyard will continue to be a place to celebrate political initiatives and the festivities of different world cultures, and on the proposal of the 8th Municipality of Rome it will be transformed into a public square offering additional activities that are currently absent in the neighborhood: a Km0 weekly market; an office for female victims of violence; an integrated inter-generational space with a playroom and services for the elderly; spaces for remote learning, coding and digital transfer, and a study room in collaboration with Roma Tre University open 24/7.

Currently, the transformation project is in the start-up phase and after the political changes in local government it is encountering increasing political resistance, and not only from traditionally conservative parties. If it will be achieved without distortions, it will have a great innovative influence on future urban policies on emergency housing and the institutional welcoming of migrants. Rome is in fact still a city of ruins, full of empty buildings, scraps of the real estate processes and services never opened, abandoned or perpetually in the pipeline, and wasted lives. The right-to-dwell-the-city movements have indicated a concrete way forward and future administrations should follow it. Porto Fluviale is already a CIRCO today, and if its legalization does not turn into its political devitalization, if the struggle and the proposal continue to push in this direction, this project can be considered as the beginning of a new city re-founded on hospitality. Given the institutional context where it is always difficult to create an ambiguous threshold between formal and informal, legal and illegal, the issue of unconditional hospitality remains unresolved. But in a united community that has experienced twenty years of occupation, composed of ex-guests transformed into new hosts, who can say that it is not resolvable? Cities need threshold spaces on an urban scale, grey zones controlled and guaranteed by the voluntary world and the antagonist protest movement capable of taking on that unconditional and disobedient hospitality, which as in ancient times is offered to unexpected strangers, let's call them economic or illegal migrants, without asking for identification.

Conclusion

The natural movement of peoples has produced the complex systems of cultural rules that are the bedrock of hospitality. The wandering peoples crossing continents have invented architecture and the city, by offering and asking for hospitality. Nomadism and hospitality have shaped the way we live much more than we think and can still help us change our way of life, transforming our cities. By creatively mixing sedentary living with nomadic hospitality, we can reactivate the disused housing stock and re-establish the institutional welcome system. Learning from the informal practices of cohabitation and reciprocity encountered in housing occupations, we can produce normogenerative institutional thresholds where living and hosting become urban, artistic, social and cultural experiments. Building sites where people live and host in the conviction that not only is housing an inalienable right, but we also have a right to the city. Returning to Lefebvre's initial sentence, we are convinced that it is not utopist but utopian to think that once again the sedentary city can meet the nomadic, becoming a hospitable city in which ruins are again and again regenerated by people passing through and knocking on our doors, because no one is illegal.

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