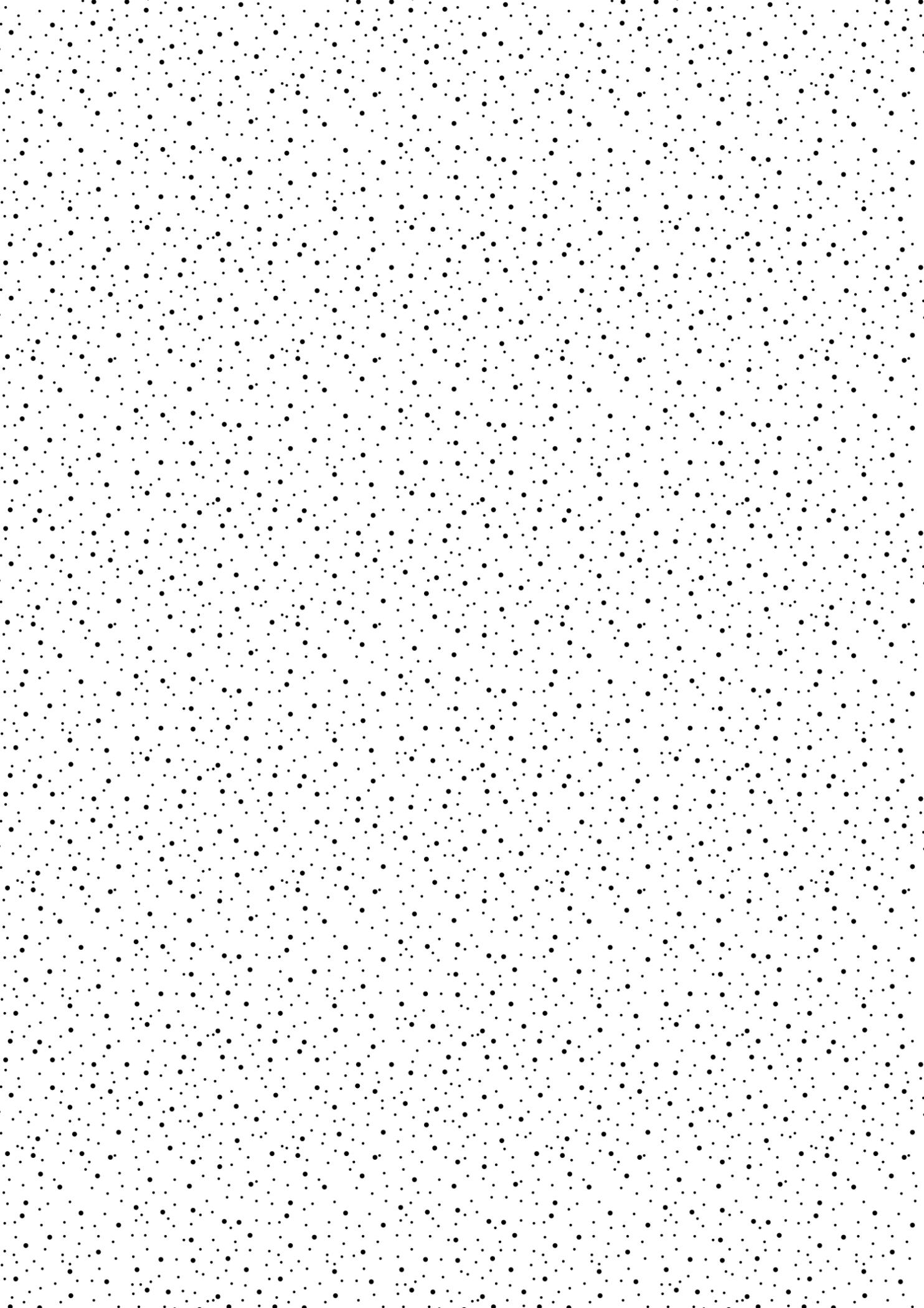


Designing Urban Inclusion

Metrolab Brussels MasterClass I



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(eds)



Metrolab series

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The qualities of hospitality and the concept of ‘inclusive city’

Joan Stavo-Debaugue

This short presentation will examine how hospitality can contribute to our understanding of urban environments as we strive for more ‘inclusive’ cities¹. ‘Hospitality’ refers here not only to a personal *virtue*, but more generally to a *quality* of environments, situations, contexts, ambiances², objects, spaces, buildings, institutions, or even more broadly the ‘world’ itself, as explained by John Dewey³:

‘All deliberate action of mind is in a way *an experiment with the world to see what it will stand for*, what it will promote and what frustrate. The world is tolerant and fairly hospitable. It permits and even encourages all sorts of experiments. But in the long run some are more welcomed and assimilated than others.’ (Dewey, 1919: 48-49)

We will attempt to present some of the most notable features of hospitality. To this end, we will outline a specific path: that by which one *comes* to a certain place, expecting to engage in certain activities, have a certain experience, contribute to creating something, or receive certain benefits (Stavo-Debaugue, 2017). All these functions have one thing in common: they can only *take place*⁴ if they are tied to an *appropriate* location. This means the environment must be adequately prepared and offer sufficient hospitality, in order for those who occupy and use it (passers-by, visitors, users, workers, residents) feel *welcome* and find what they

1 I would like to thank Pierre-Nicolas Oberhauser for his review and improvement of the initial translation of this text, originally written in French.

2 Reflecting on the notion of ‘ambiance’, Jean-Paul Thibaud reminds us that the Latin verb *ambire* suggests protection, as it initially ‘referred to the movement of both arms closing in a warm embrace’: a welcoming gesture if there ever was one (Thibaud, 2012: 157, translation ours)!

3 ‘In one of his essays on ‘valuation’, Dewey also based his understanding of affects on movements and feelings associated with greeting. He notes that ‘[t]here exist direct attitudes of an affective kind toward things’, and that ‘[t]he most fundamental of these attitudes are undoubtedly — taking biological considerations as well as more direct observations into account — appropriation, assimilation, on one hand, and exclusion, elimination, on the other hand.’ He goes on to add: ‘So conceived, “liking” might be generically defined as the act of welcoming, greeting; “disliking” as the act of spewing out, getting rid of. And in recognizing that an organism tends to take one or other of these two attitudes to every occurrence to which it reacts at all, we virtually include such acts as admitting, accepting, tolerating as fainter cases of greeting, and such acts as omitting, passing quickly by or over, etc., as fainter cases of expulsion.’ (Dewey, 1925: 85).

4 For insights on *taking place*, see Berger, 2016.

need to enable the experiences and activities for which they have come there, either on their own or as a group.

This approach of hospitality is therefore one in which organisms and environments are considered in conjunction⁵. Or rather, organisms are considered *with, amongst, and within* their environments, taking into account their mutual co-dependence, as put forward by John Dewey's pragmatist philosophy of experience as well as by Laurent Thévenot's pragmatic sociology of 'plural engagements'. Two quotes will serve to illustrate the emphasis placed on the environment in both these scholars' work. First, a (rhetorical) question from Dewey, in *Art as Experience*:

'For what ideal can man honestly entertain save the idea of an environment in which all things conspire to the perfecting and sustaining of the values occasionally and partially experienced?' (Dewey, 1934: 190)

Then, Thévenot's definition of the concept of 'engagement', which links the expression of human capacities in their full variety to the *ad hoc* preparation of the environment:

'The notion of engagement emphasizes that the human capacity at stake depends on the disposition of the material environment as well as of the person. Both the environment and the person have to be prepared accordingly to be enabled or empowered for such an engagement. Rather than focusing exclusively on the commitment of the subject, it relates confidence to dependence on a properly disposed environment: publicly validated conventional objects that accommodate the worth of the human being; normal functionality that sustains the capacity to fulfil an individual plan; familiar surroundings at hand that ensure personal ease in their handling; a refreshed and surprising environment that revives the curiosity for exploration.' (Thévenot, 2011: 48)

Keeping these perspectives in mind, the two points that follow may provide two cross-cutting insights:

- **Hospitality is not only a matter of openness.** Indeed, hospitality is not always — or not only — about crossing a threshold, tearing down a wall, or opening a border. Properly understood, hospitality is not only about removing physical or symbolic obstacles: it requires more than erasing divides, eliminating 'architectural barriers' (Sanchez, 2007), or relaxing requirements to access a given place. Since it can require moments, procedures and mechanisms of *closure* or forms of confinement, hospitality can hardly be described using the semantics of *openness* only.

⁵ These environments themselves can be qualified in many different ways and appear in various forms (Pattaroni, 2016).

- **Hospitality is not only about welcoming the distant foreigner.** The term 'hospitality' should be understood in its broadest sense. It does not refer only to situations and places that have the same etymology, e.g. 'hospital', 'hospice', 'hotel', 'host', etc. While hospitality concerns the care given to vulnerable people, and while it can also be relevant to situations of travel and displacement, it also comes into play in countless other occasions, related the close and familiar, but also to oneself.

Hospitality starts at home

I must emphasize that hospitality does not only deal with vulnerabilities, does not only concern foreigners or '*arrivants*'⁶. We also like to experience and give hospitality at home, by welcoming visitors and guests. Indeed, it is this first meaning of hospitality that Paul Ricœur saw as the very essence of hospitality: '*receive someone at one's home*' (Ricœur, 2006: 270). It is only when an environment becomes hospitable to our most personal uses and our most intimate habits (Thévenot, 1990) that we can truly feel 'at home'. We then enjoy the possibility to rely on the 'familiarity' of appropriate things (Thévenot, 1994), settling into the ease and convenience of 'inhabited' places (Breviglieri, 1999 ; 2012).

Still, we should also remember that home is not only a place to retreat and withdraw, to set oneself aside and apart. The capacity to offer hospitality to others than oneself is precisely what defines an environment as a 'home'. The actualization of this capacity to receive ratifies the appropriation of the place in the very movement of its opening to others. It shows that the place is truly inhabited. A resident of a Sonacotra hostel interviewed by Abdelmalek Sayad explained with regret that he wasn't allowed to invite people to his room, which therefore was so little his own and so far from having the qualities of a 'home'.

'I would love to invite you to my room and make you some coffee, a pot of tea; we would drink it together, but this is not allowed. You have come to see me at home — I gave you my address and explained where I live — , you have come, but I am not at home here. You aren't at home when you have to tell those who come to your door: "Let's go out to chat, to have a coffee, to eat." This is something I cannot understand.' (Sayad, 2006: 107)

Thus, if we recall that hospitality also refers to those benefits that come from the very fact of being 'at home', and by extension any place one really inhabits or with which one feels specially 'acquainted'⁷, we realize that hospitality is not only a matter of openness: it also requires various forms of closure and appropriation. This does not mean hospitality is only a feature of one's home: it should not be thought as a specificity of domestic environments, and instead be sought elsewhere and found in various forms outside home.

⁶ On the notion of '*arrivant*', see Derrida, 1993: 33.

⁷ 'Acquaintance always implies a little friendliness; a trace of re-knowing, of anticipatory welcome or dread of the trait to follow.' (Dewey, 1906: 108)

The paradoxical hospitality of urban public spaces

Urban sociology indeed taught us to see that a form of hospitality is very much at work in urban public spaces. They owe this qualification to their accessibility, to their openness to all comers, and to the opportunity for any city dweller 'to experience simple togetherness without common purpose' (Joseph, 2007: 117). Unlike the hospitality of 'home', the hospitality of urban public spaces is 'paradoxical'⁸ in more than one respect. It occurs in spaces characterized by movement and traffic, and is contingent upon the principle of 'generalized access'. As such, it is subject to four constraints: *mobility*, *density*, *diversity*, and a presumption of *equality*. In contrast with the domestic hospitality model, this form of hospitality does not rely on prior acquaintances. Such hospitality is given to passers-by, and 'by the way', without affection or phonation. While many 'gatherings' (in the Goffmanian sense of the term) take place in urban public spaces, city dwellers must nevertheless make every effort to leave the passage open to everyone and to guarantee mobility for all, by accommodating forms of coexistence that are at once flexible, circumstantial and furtive, in the midst of 'mutual strangeness'.

For the 'anonymous' people who live there together, this quality of 'accessibility' is achieved through the observance of 'civil inattention' (also called 'civil indifference' or 'polite inattention'), which the American sociologist Erving Goffman described as follows in *Behaviors in Public Space*:

'[...] one gives to another enough visual notice to demonstrate that one appreciates that the other is present (and that one admits openly to having seen him), while at the next moment withdrawing one's attention from him so as to express that he does not constitute a target of special curiosity or design.' (Goffman, 1966: 84)

This attentional regime consists in putting certain powers of the eye on standby and worrying about the fundamentally expressive dimension of the gaze, because 'the city dweller can only safeguard his capacity to meet [someone or something] by closing off his attention and gaze to a certain extent' (Joseph, 1984: 25).

This 'civil inattention' is more than a mere 'visual courtesy', and it does not consist solely in 'respecting other people's privacy and public presentation' (Tonnelat, 2016). French sociologist Isaac Joseph saw it as 'the effective form of the culture of hospitality in the city' (Joseph, 2007: 217). In other words, the prevalence of civil inattention would give urban public spaces an eminent quality of hospitality: by not being subject to 'inquisitive' stares, one could enjoy a 'right to indifference' while at the same time being exposed to the 'heterogeneity' of the city's 'populations'.

Several researchers have acknowledged this surprising quality of urban public spaces, in the United States as well as in French-speaking Europe. Describing the modern metropolis as 'a world of strangers' (Lofland, 1973), Lyn Lofland considered the 'public realm' to be 'the city's quintessential social

⁸ The hospitality of urban public spaces is also 'paradoxical' because it requires a relatively 'aterritorial' environment, this 'aterritoriality' being a guarantee of its 'accessibility'. It could open itself to anyone as it belongs to no one in particular and is not hogged by any specific social group (Joseph, 1984).

territory' because she believed it to be governed by a 'principle' of 'civility toward diversity' (Lofland, 1998: 9 & 28). While following in Lofland's footsteps, Isaac Joseph took a step further in highlighting the discreet and paradoxical welcome granted by the great metropolitan city to anyone, including the most deprived. As a matter of fact, he would readily summon Kant to promote the 'publicity' and 'hospitality' of urban public spaces, seeing them as a kind of practical modalisation — at street level, on the asphalt and between city dwellers — of the 'right to be a permanent visitor' and the 'right of oversight' that Kant had considered on a global scale in his grandiose *Perpetual Peace*.

Hospitality at the margins of citizenship

Kant's concerns regarding the possibility of pacifying relations between states and civilizing relationships between natives and foreigners also encourage us to remember that we should wish and expect hospitality from the political community as well. One is justified in judging it harshly when it fails to act hospitably, as in the case of demonstrations in support of the 'undocumented [*sans-papiers*]' and against the violence of 'arbitrary borders', perpetrated at the 'margins of citizenship' (Deleixhe, 2016). In the city, while carrying out their actions, the 'undocumented' often sought a display of hospitality, particularly in the taking-over and transformation of places that could welcome their struggle. Among the various forms of action taken by 'undocumented' collectives, there is one that has continuously granted them the possibility to speak publicly: *occupation*. Over the last twenty years, in France or Belgium, the struggle of the 'undocumented' has been punctuated by numerous occupations of churches or universities.

Although chosen for their symbolic significance, the occupied buildings also had practical virtues: once summarily prepared, they offered the (very relative) hospitality of their protective walls to the members of mobilized collectives, while offering a rallying base for new activists and a meeting place with 'supporters' and the media. That some sort of hospitality was indeed at play in such actions is highlighted by the fact that they usually resulted in *eviction*.

The hospitality of participatory devices

The topic of hospitality is clearly relevant at many different scales and in many different places, even when it is not explicitly emphasized and valued. A number of other examples demonstrate the significant breadth and cross-cutting nature of hospitality, its scope being too often obscured by the use of other categories. Consider for instance the experiments in 'urban democracy', led by municipal authorities or by civil society organizations. Understood as the capacity of institutions to open themselves up to their users and hear their grievances, the question of hospitality arises in many devices created in the wake of the 'urban policies' established over the past two decades. Such policies involve research and experiments into institutional processes designed to be more hospitable to the voices of 'ordinary citizens', who are invited to express themselves during meetings with experts on public policies or technical issues. This is a difficult task, and hospitality often ends up lacking... Those responsible for these devices are

in fact rarely inclined to welcome contributions that do not meet their expectations in terms of publicity formats and semiotic genres. Often condemned to ‘infelicitous speech-acts’ (Berger, 2012), ‘ordinary citizens’ then form only — and at best — a ‘phantom public’ (Berger, 2015) whose outbreaks and outbursts inevitably turn out to be *unwelcome*.

Inclusion, diversity, and... hospitality?

The fight against ‘discriminations’ (ethnic, racial, sexual, etc.) is often viewed from the perspective of ‘inclusion’ (and its opposites, ‘exclusion’ and ‘segregation’). But it also involves hospitality, and not just belonging. Admittedly, worrying about the problem of discrimination is tantamount to addressing shortcomings in the equal achievement of belonging, by tracking down inequalities of access to a set of realms and goods that ensure its enjoyment. As Jürgen Habermas once wrote, ‘exclusion from certain areas of social life demonstrates what discriminated persons are denied: unlimited social belonging’ (Habermas, 2003: 167).

Still, even if the main ‘realms of social life’ were cleared from all unfounded discriminatory obstacles, ‘social belonging’ would still not be ‘unlimited’, as it would be marred by various factors of inhospitality. Just as any community require its members to possess and use a number of abilities in order to attain the sort of belonging that characterizes it, skills and knowledge that are very unevenly distributed among persons are needed in order to take part in the various realms of social life. Those who do not possess these skills and knowledge face harsh judgments and obstacles that can have adverse effects on their integrity, especially when they also face discrimination⁹. In such cases, the issue is not only one of ‘distributive justice but also a matter of humiliation’ (Margalit, 1996: 15).

In professional environments and in commercial spaces — and more and more spaces are subjected to commercial rules — , we may also notice that the person discriminated against is the one *that isn’t received* and is therefore stopped in his momentum before even confronting the trials imposed by the market. The connection with hospitality is even more obvious, in these fields as in others, when the topic of discrimination is approached from the perspective of recognizing ‘diversity’. Indeed, raising the issue of ‘diversity’ often amounts to calling into question the inhospitality of various realms of social life — and of their physical environment as well — to a number of things, behaviors and deficiencies that turn out to be *unwelcome* and to require ‘reasonable accommodations’ in order to become acceptable.

Inclusive design and accessibility

In such cases, supported by the principles of ‘inclusive design’ (also called ‘universal design’ and ‘design for all’), hospitality requires the creation of spaces that will be considered ‘inclusive’ as long as they welcome the participation of anyone, regardless of their abilities. Provided it is implemented correctly and takes careful

9 It should also be noted that environments, buildings, equipment, and spatial organisations are sometimes significant sources of humiliation. A striking example is provided by the architecture that Isaac Joseph (1993: 397) called ‘sadistic’, referencing Mike Davis’ famous book on Los Angeles.

account of the environments and objects involved, the drive for hospitality that underlies this approach contributes to fulfilling promises of equal belonging. How? By ensuring that everyone is able to participate in a common world, exist in the same spaces, use similar equipment and get comparable benefits from it — despite what separates them in terms of ability and culture.

Many urban sociologists have easily adopted the notion of ‘inclusive design’ because it answers their concerns regarding urban public space planning, being based on the ‘principle of accessibility’ as well (Joseph, 1997). This can clearly be seen in the writings of researchers in ergonomics, a field specifically dedicated to such policies: ‘The goal of inclusive design is to design products that are accessible and usable to the maximum number of users without being stigmatizing or resorting to special aids and adaptation’ (Persad *et al.*, 2007). Concretely, the idea is to lower the sensory, cognitive and motor ‘demands’ of objects, equipments, and mechanisms, in order to make them easier to approach and use by users experiencing a situational disability¹⁰.

This genuine ‘politics of things’ certainly allows progress to be made. However, it is somewhat unfortunate that it focuses on one aspect of hospitality only, often reducing to an issue of accessibility, which is the public good promoted by inclusive design as well as its motto — a public good and a motto quite well-established as they have been backed by anti-discrimination laws, both in Europe and in the United States.

Still, proponents of the concept seem to suspect that a wider form of hospitality is at play. Indeed, they cannot but use the semantics of hospitality to convey the ins and outs of the ‘accessibility’ they are longing for. This is the case, for instance, of Jésus Sanchez or Viviane Folcher and Nicole Lompré. The former noted in 1992 that such accessibility policies entail ‘*rendering hospitable* to disabled people, minorities, and, ultimately, all individuals’ in ‘living environments such as schools, workplaces, urban areas’ (Sanchez, 1992: 129). The latter two wrote more recently about ‘the need for spaces, both material and symbolic, that *welcome in the true sense of the word* the diversity of people’s capacities and allow the development of equivalent powers to act when capacities differ’ (Folcher & Lompré, 2012: 108).

From the limits of inclusive design to a broader definition of hospitality

One of the merits of inclusive design, beyond the fact that it helps think more welcoming cities, is that it prompts us to see that ‘big cities require a lot from their residents’ and that ‘in this respect, they wear and burn them out’ (Breviglieri, 2013). However, designing urban environments that are *welcoming in the true sense of the word* requires a number of things. First, hospitality must be given a more demanding and broader meaning, beyond that of accessibility, which mainly deal with basic actions such as the ability to enter someplace, to move

10 This concept ‘conveys the idea that disability results from a discrepancy between a person’s individual abilities and the actions required by his or her physical and social environment’. Within such framework, disability ‘results from interacting with an environment that isn’t adapted to the abilities of everyone’ (Saby, 2012: 75, translation ours).

around without hindrance, to open a door, to activate a device, and so on. Hospitality, however, is about more than just access, and it must not be restricted to the threshold of urban spaces and buildings. The purpose of these space and buildings is to host, enable and ensure the coexistence of various activities, practical ‘engagements’ and complex experiences that go well beyond the basic actions that are currently covered by inclusive design.

As we have pointed out at the beginning of this brief presentation, a good way to assess the qualities of an urban environment and the various ways in which it is hospitable consists in following the ones who come there and relying on their experience. This allows for an in-depth analysis and evaluation of the multiple dimensions of hospitality. Accessibility is indeed one such dimension, but it isn’t the only issue that should be tackled. Let us now attempt to identify the various dimensions of hospitality.

The dimensions of hospitality

First of all, before one can experience an environment’s (lack of) accessibility, one must be curious about the place or attracted to it. This means the location must be inviting to visitors (by presenting what J. J. Gibson called ‘affordances’) and offer something to engage with. This implies that the environment be visible and understandable to potential visitors, so that they feel *welcome* and have an idea of the benefits they could do or receive there: one does not go and even avoid to places where one expects to feel *unwelcome*.

It is only then that the environment’s accessibility may be put to the test, not only during the fleeting moment when the threshold is crossed, but also regarding what the space allows and enables people to do. While much of hospitality is a matter of differences between various environments, researchers and scholars unfortunately tend to describe these differences only in spatial terms: they refer to territories, borders, walls, thresholds, etc. For instance, Yves Cusset refers to the ‘threshold’ (door, barrier, border) as ‘a minimal condition for the act of welcoming to be possible’. According to him, for the issue of hospitality to be raised, ‘the very existence of a threshold’ should be ‘acknowledged by the newcomer’: ‘if he willfully ignores the threshold in order to appropriate the place, he is an intruder; if he unintentionally ignores it, he is a passer-by who got lost rather than a newcomer’ (Cusset, 2016: 27).

Still, we should take this reflection a step further and look deeper into what makes for a hospitable environment. A number of questions arise: what does the environment allow in terms of deviations and explorations? What experiences, sensory impressions and affective attachments can it create? What does it contribute to creating in terms of common goods and individual benefits?

In other words, once the threshold has been crossed, whom and what is the environment or the building to host? Or in yet other words, what is its ‘capacity’, i.e. what can it contain? This aspect should be highlighted, as it is often neglected by those who examine hospitality only from the perspective of openness. It is undeniable that welcoming is about ‘openness’, and that ‘hospitality opens *itself*’, as Jacques Derrida liked to put it. But environments and buildings must be able to *receive* the ones who come there. If they don’t provide

anything to do so, hospitality cannot be said to exist. Offering hospitality doesn’t mean only ‘clearing the way [*laisser le passage*]’ for someone to pass through, although Derrida wrote as much.

It is not enough to ‘clear the way’ for the one who comes: he must also be received and looked after, which may involve having to contain him and being able to cope with him. This means hospitality hinges upon the dimensions, space, and volume of environments, but also upon the resistance and plasticity of the materials they are built of, which must be able to withstand [*encaisser*] what is coming — and those who are coming, since they sometimes arrive in crowds and *en masse*, and therefore in strength and as a collective force.

Hospitality has other dimensions still. Urban spaces must support people in their activities, by facilitating their stay — however short it may be — but also by ensuring they can find their way and move around freely. This conception of hospitality ties in with what Marc Breviglieri calls ‘habitability’, which ‘yearns for ease of movement, ease of gesture, convenience of space’ (Breviglieri, 2006: 92). In this sense, hospitality is also the quality shown by what ensures a stay, facilitates an activity and invites to stay. It also supports city dwellers by providing them with appropriate spaces and furnishings. This brings us back to Paul Ricœur, who associated hospitality with the concept of ‘inhabiting’, or rather ‘cohabiting’ or ‘living together’. According to him, hospitality should be defined as ‘the bringing together of the act and art of inhabiting. I insist on the term inhabiting, which is the human way of occupying Earth’s surface. It is living together’ (Ricœur, 1997).

Lastly, there is a protective dimension to hospitality, which once again might be overlooked by focusing on openness. We can illustrate this aspect by remembering ‘shelter cities’, of which Jacques Derrida was a proponent as a part of the *International Parliament of Writers*, a project that came to fruition during the Rushdie controversy. Cities taking part in this project committed themselves to opening their doors to persecuted intellectuals, artists, and writers. But would these cities truly have shown genuine hospitality if they hadn’t also *shut their doors* to those responsible for the persecutions? Since hospitality implies a form of protection and can also be an attribute of any environment that provides shelter, it can also demand some degree of closure and firmness¹¹. While Derrida noted this protective aspect in his analysis of the traditions that gave birth to the idea of ‘shelter cities’, he did not foresee all its implications:

‘We shall recognize in the Hebraic tradition, on the one hand, those cities which would welcome and protect those innocents who sought refuge from what the texts of that time call ‘bloody vengeance’. [...] In the medieval tradition, on the other hand, one can identify a certain sovereignty of the city: the city itself could determine the laws of hospitality, the articles of predetermined law, both plural and restrictive, with which they meant to condition the Great Law of Hospitality — an unconditional Law, both singular and universal, which ordered that the borders be open to each

¹¹ We are also reminded of the concept of ‘sanctuary cities’, which came back to the forefront of US politics with Donald Trump’s election. By declaring themselves as ‘sanctuary cities’, several municipalities have committed not to yield to Trump’s racist and xenophobic rhetoric. Concretely, it means that they pledged to *close themselves off* from federal government’s influence.

and every one, to every other, to all who might come, without question or without their even having to identify who they are or whence they came.' (Derrida, 2001: 17-18)

Derrida is overlooking the fact that the 'Great Law of Hospitality', while it orders 'that the borders be open to each and every one', also compels to close these same borders in order to protect refugees from their persecutors. But there is no need to call upon such a dramatic and topical example to fully grasp this specific dimension of hospitality. One should simply remember that a building's purpose is generally to protect its occupants and allow them to enjoy its insulating properties (thermal, sound, or visual), to give them a covered and closed space where they can take shelter. This shelter must however not become a prison that holds its occupants hostage by imposing them irremovable standards¹². Hospitality involves spaces that allow for spontaneous and innovative uses and don't produce any claustrophobic feelings. It involves freedom of exploration as much as protection.

12 See Marc Breviglieri's reflection on how children's exploration is constrained in the 'guaranteed city' (Breviglieri, 2015).

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