

SEMINAR “ON HOSPITALITY”. Grigri Pixel October 2019.

*"Le visage de l'autre (...) me révèle à moi-même".
Fanon, 2005 (in Mbembe, 2018)*

*“Casa nostra és casa vostra,
si és que hi ha cases d'algú”.
Jaume Sisa 1975*

By the time World War II ended, there were seven walls or fences in the world that prevented people moving between territories. Nowadays, while the Trumps and Salvinis of the day try to make America or Italy great again and threaten to build a wall between Mexico and the United States or prevent rescue ships from docking at their ports, criminalising the taking in of people with the complicity of the entire European international community, which pays countries to aggressively protect their borders - countries that are at war and lack the most basic humanitarian guarantees - we have seventy-seven walls and fences in the world, most of them erected after September 11, 2001.

But these physical walls and fences have their equivalents on a practical and discursive, ideological level. While in the general political sphere there has been a return to the most essentialist identarian movements, independence movements are proliferating on an international scale and the extreme xenophobic and racist right wing is re-emerging, defending national unity by reinforcing borders and using the impoverished migrant foreigner as a scapegoat for all manner of structural problems. On a local scale, in our cities, other socio-economic frontiers are appearing, with direct and unequal repercussions on human beings.

In the case of Madrid, there is a clear North-South border which, depending on the neighbourhood a person lives in, implies a difference of up to ten years in their life expectancy. This figure is conditioned by their annual income, which in the neighbourhood that boasts the highest life expectancy is more than double (€52,600) that of the neighbourhood with the lowest (20,885€). Difficulties in gaining access to housing, and the rise in the price of rent - which has increased by 49% in Catalonia and 27% in Madrid over the last four years - are also causing forced relocations to the inner city or even expulsions to surrounding areas.

In this context of a crisis that is not only migratory, rather one of how Nation States are responding to the natural act of migrating and moving around the world, something that has always occurred throughout history, and at a moment when lives are being put into permanent circulation in order to achieve their maximum capitalisation, through increasing precarity and eviction from our most

intimate spaces and times, the 2019 edition of Grigri Pixel wants to explore in a collective way the possibilities that exist within the city of Madrid, and within the Barrio de las Letras (Literary Quarter), where MediaLab Prado is located, for the reactivation and recovery of physical and social spaces that make possible the mutual recognition and creation of a “common world” between those who inhabit it, regardless of the length or duration of their stay, in order to turn them, even if only for a moment, into places of welcome in which to feel part of a community, to feel like “neighbours”.

In order to do this, we propose as the cornerstone of our workshops and reflections **the practice of hospitality and the figure of neighbours (in a community)** as a collective subject whose potential resides in the act of “becoming a neighbour” in a territory, sharing it, inhabiting it, defining it and breathing life into it through practice and a common present, no matter where you come from. Through **a multiple collaboration between Medialab Prado, SERCADE and the Neighbour’s Association of the Barrio de las Letras (Literary Quarter)**, we want to pose a series of common questions and a programme of actions, workshops and seminars which, throughout the year (last May and June, with a series of workshops in SERCADE and the conversation between Marina Garcés y Felwine Sarr) and now, in October (with the construction workshop and the seminar), will help us to partially answer them and will bring us a little closer to our objective. That is why although this framework text is the distilled fruit of previous encounters and reflections, it is nevertheless a work in progress: right now is a good time to compile and synthesise the multiple voices and lectures that have accompanied us, but it is there waiting to be put back into circulation, while it is challenged, answered, displaced and improved with the voices of those who are now coming on board.

The framework of hospitality and welcoming gestures are very useful for us when working in common urban spaces, because they demand that we open (ourselves) up and that we give space and a place to someone we don’t yet know, to the unknown, the seemingly different, foreign and strange, yet bearing the promise of a transformative encounter. Or a disruptive one, at the very least.

Hospitality, then, is not only the practice of welcoming in a foreigner, but rather all who are different, outsiders, those who emerge on the margins of a society or on the limits of our thoughts. There where, up to now, the possible ended.

That is why, starting from an initial trust with no guarantees (we don’t know what will come of the encounter), hospitality helps us to increase the possibilities, to identify our own borders, limits, hierarchies, prejudices, assumptions and fears, to interrogate them, question them, try to penetrate them, to grow and to open ourselves up, not without difficulties, to a mutual learning and to (self) knowledge through the questioning and displacement of our own respective starting points: not only geographical, but also in terms of our points of view and our privileges.

The practice of hospitality is demanding: it entails the acceptance of “intrusions” and assuming certain sacrifices and highly opportune “discomforts”. The first of these, the main one, is that of being open to affecting and to be affected in order to step out of oneself, out of ourselves, and out of what we considered to be our safe space. Also at the level of thought and identity. An encounter with others holds the promise of change and transformation: of ourselves, our communities and common worlds.

This encounter and learning WITH another person and FROM another person works as a play of mirrors that sheds light on dark and unknown areas within ourselves. So, recognising the other person, someone different, also means recognising myself in them. That is why “the host who welcomes people in, who believes that he or she is the owner of the places, is in fact a guest welcomed into their own home”, as Derrida would say. Or rather: “It is not about integrating the other person, it’s about estranging ourselves”, as Marina Garcés suggested.

What operates as “foreign”, as something strange and different to us?

What is “the other” in our current context and moment?

Which are the “starting points” -prejudices, assumptions, fears- that, as individuals, communities or public institutions, we need to revise, estrange and displace?

In the sameness and the closing of all kinds of borders we run the risk of becoming isolated and drowning for lack of exteriority, newness, nourishment (of all kinds) and difference. Paradoxically, the fear of others and the unknown, so frequently capitalised as a tool for hatred, provokes that closure, expulsion and isolation which entails the risk of destroying oneself (through starvation a lack of fresh air) and the fixed and static identity that one seeks to preserve. However, all beings -human and non-human- live in radical interdependence, and we are drawn to the exterior from a vulnerability and openness that permeates and constitutes us, that connects us to the rest. This porosity and constitutive openness is how dangers slip in, but it’s also what saves and nourishes us, it’s where we grow and broaden our horizons, it’s where we reinvent our self-concept. The “cosmopolitan imagination”, Delanty dixit (2006), thrives in environments in which an opening between oneself, other people and the world is possible.

Felwine Sarr pointed out that hospitality practices are practices of care for that vulnerability that permeates us and for the temporal fragility that affects us at a given moment due to the fact of having lost, due to displacement and migration, the social body that once supported and sheltered us. Hence, this fragile life and this loss of the social body are not something exclusive to someone who arrives somewhere, rather we are all susceptible to fragility, to precariousness and to being stripped of our support and networks at a given moment.

Even more so in a context of intensive commercialisation of lives, times, spaces and cities. We are all potentially expellable (from our homes, jobs, cities, countries). So that “other” who has been

taken in could well be “me”. It is “us”. From this experience of interdependence and overcoming of individualities, what I do to others, I do to myself.

If the distance between me and the others is reduced, if the distinction between the I and others becomes diluted and a plural “us” emerges, then hospitality leads us to the construction of communities, of common worlds and houses without a master... “si es que hi ha cases d’algú”, as Sisa sang.

What makes us fragile and threatens us? How to welcome someone “on their way” while we are on the move?

How to facilitate in the specific -neighbourhoods and cities- that openness that connects us with others?

What prevents or hinders it?

The hospitality that frames the 2019 Grigri Pixel seeks to be a cosmopolitan practice which takes freedom of movement for granted and makes us equal in the right to be different and to access, transit, be and stay somewhere. But taking us in and giving (us) a place is not only about giving and receiving a physical and geographic space, to having a roof over our heads; it’s also about being able to transit and inhabit for a time common identities and welcoming and inclusive inter-subjective places, which are “home” - made from shared experiences, bodies, memories, imaginaries...-. To create a common place (for ourselves) and to feel that we belong: to start from oneself in order to step out of oneself and become (ourselves) others.

If the feeling of otherness and estrangement from others is not progressively reduced, if we don’t get closer to one another until we reach a common “us”, then we take the risk of falling into an infinite notion of otherness, Sarr reminded us. Until when is the other going to continue to be the other? How much time has to pass until they can stop being a “migrant”? Or does the fact that I migrated at a certain moment turn me into an eternal migrant?

Taking someone in is not just giving my roof to another person and being kind to them, taking them in, it’s a matter of recognising each other as equals in our differences and giving US, in plural, the time and space, the opportunity to become closer to one another, to learn how to live together, and to jointly decide the ways of life that will shape our common world. Activating other conditions of existence among us all and for us all, in order to create communities that sustain us, is the purpose of hospitality. Marina Garcés invited us to conjugate at the same time the verbs ARRIVE + TAKE IN + DECIDE in order to politically articulate the practices of hospitality.

Perhaps then we will be able to co-create common worlds, not based on nationalities and Nation States, but rather on “communities of the living”, as Felwine Sarr pointed out. Communities whose common denominator is not one’s origin (always random and selective) but the common destiny that is shared by all beings -human and non-human- that co-exist in one and the same ecosystem: house, neighbourhood, city, world...

What living conditions do we need to found communities based on destiny and not on origin?

How do we routinely generate welcoming spaces and hospitable neighbourhoods... but also plural and inclusive collective identities?

How can we turn the neighbourhood or the city into a common “home”?

Hosting implies making gestures and ethical practices. As in Celtiberian culture, where tesserae - bronze plates with zoomorphic shapes or intertwined hands made up of two complementary pieces that fit together and were given to each of the parties involved - were used to seal a commitment or a pact of friendship for the exercise of rights, benefits, permits or mutual obligations, often in relation to the use of land.. And thus, without the need to appealing to a superior morality or to an external regulatory State, through the tesserae of hospitality they materialised a mutual, horizontal, singular, specific, located, ethical and one-on-one recognition.

Hospitality, however, cannot be a virtue or an ethical gesture at an individual level, a favour from one person to another. That is not enough. When the act of taking in is criminalised and Nation States do not offer hospitable answers, we are obliged to do more than the laws themselves. But we must aspire to move from individual favours and gestures to the construction of a collective political subject and to the construction of legal devices that make it possible to transcend individuality and become secure conditions so that anyone can have the right to arrive, to take in and to be taken in, and to decide collectively with guarantees.

If ethical gestures are insufficient, then we need to recover the political dimension of hospitality, to go beyond welfare actions that, according to Garcés, are limited to increasing a margin and picking up a series of lives, but without allowing them to become political subjects and a decisive part of the community. Understanding hospitality as a political practice implies being aware of the limits of the host communities and their codes in order to be able to question, challenge and transgress them, until we can reshape them and define them in common, together with those who until now were “the others”. Do we dare? Are we willing to allow others to also decide how we live? Garcés asked us.

Because of this, giving (us) a place and taking in also means giving (us) opportunities and trust, reaching out a hand and taking care of ourselves, being predisposed to and being affected by others, counting on one another... until we become an “us”. From the moment we share the present in the same territory and ecosystem, until we become neighbours: to become neighbours by the mere fact of neighbouring and recognising one another, regardless of our origin, identities or how long we have been here, but just because we share a common territorialised destiny. To become neighbours (in a block of flats, a neighbourhood, a city...) just because of the fact of arriving, transiting, inhabiting and (re)creating one and the same place in singular ways while they affect us and we decide common territorial questions. Thus, with this 2019 edition of Grigri Pixel, we ask ourselves:

How can we escalate this political practice of hospitality and of becoming neighbours in a neighbourhood and city dimension?

¿How can we facilitate neighbourhood processes in a specific territory, such as the Barrio de las Letras (Literary Quarter), permeated by the tension between transit and permanence, and in a glocal context in which exclusion, hierarchies of mobility, inequalities and borders proliferate?