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# The Routledge Handbook of Hospitality Studies

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artist, mother, wife and friend; lost but never forgotten.



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## Hospitality and social ties

### An interdisciplinary reflexive journey for a psychology of hospitality

Marcia Maria Cappellano dos Santos, Olga Araujo Perazzolo, Siloe Pereira and Isabel Baptista

#### Key themes

- Hospitality/welcoming
- Social ties
- Identity and alterity
- Psychology of hospitality

There is no house or interior without a door and window.

(Jacques Derrida)

A brief foray into studies in the most diverse fields of knowledge, time and space is sufficient for coping with the wide range of relational practices that have been considered as illustrative of the hospitality phenomenon. At the same time it is possible to identify in those practices – political, ethical, social, cultural, commercial-economic, and legal, among others – what led scholars in philosophy, psychology and anthropology to include hospitality within their scope and investigative processes. Through these theoretical lenses hospitality is analysed, and transaction and reciprocity establish themselves as key features of the study of hospitality when present in actions taken by individuals placed at relational poles, reflecting welcoming cognitive-affective dispositions and desires from one another, and indicating potential for the establishment or strengthening of social ties. However, this does not exclude the possibility of the occurrence of eventual self-centred relationships of welcoming, opening space to situations of inhospitality and movements that can reflect, in the reverse direction, the weakening of social ties. It is interesting to remember that the Latin form *laqueus*, the etymological origin of the word ‘tie’, designates a slipknot, which unties easily. Thereby, the weaving of the tethers of social ties requires, as noted by Santos, ‘genuine relationships of acceptance, in which individuals recognize, interact and host each other, alternately transforming themselves into *the other*, directing their look to the *other’s* look’ (2014: 13).

With this understanding, the reflections that follow embark on the paths of psychology, psychoanalysis, philosophy, tourism and anthropology, with characteristic outlines and features of each of these areas, allowing, however, that approximations are built among them, since they are mainly sustained by the understanding of hospitality through and in the relationship with *the other*.

This reflexive journey is based on work that has been developed since 2009 by the Research Group Tourism: Human Development, Language and Educational Process, from the University of Caxias do Sul, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, in which hospitality has been the object of theoretical and methodological research in the intertwining of these areas.

### The processes of perception and interpretation of the other

From the perspective of psychological science, in seeking to understand the complex phenomenon of hospitality, possible contributions from different analytical biases are identified, even when taking those that focus on fundamentally intra-psychic aspects of individualistic tendencies, since the ties established with *the other*, individual and collective, are the essence of the human being. That being so, psychology is applied through the dynamics of ontogenetic and epistemic approaches in an effort to understand hospitality in a context that recognises the kaleidoscopic nature of human and social phenomena. In this sense, it may be said that psychology always considers *the other* and takes into account the plural constitution in the formation of the psychological universe. It does so by articulating representations of reality, socio-psychological tensions resulting from systemic interactions and the set of linguistic signs that weave together social ties. Two assumptions become relevant at the heart of such considerations: the first is that the individual constitutes and develops themselves in the relationship and through it; the second is that the relational interaction happens through hospitality, the effect of the dynamics of the welcoming. Thus, psychology is considered a *locus* of knowledge for hospitality and a possible field for research on the topic. Therefore, contributions from the fields of, among others, social, cognitive and systemic psychology, and from psychoanalysis become relevant.

In social psychology, three nodal themes that offer elements for understanding the phenomena operating in hospitality practices may be considered: social cognition, the formation and changing of attitudes, and group processes (Fiske *et al.*, 2010).

#### Social cognition

Social cognition refers to the phenomenon by which subjects process the information gathered from the environment, in the context of social relations, modelling their own behaviour from indicative perceptions of adequacy or inadequacy. Therefore, it assumes skills to identify socially relevant and expected behaviours, as well as the ability to adopt alternative behaviours in different contexts, including those involving cooperation and altruism, essential for living together in society and, hence, for building social ties (Adolphs, 2001; Emery and Clayton, 2009).

Also, as part of social cognition, the process of understanding our own mental states (emotions, needs, intentions, etc.) as well as other people's is an example of the intersection of knowledge involving neurobiological substrates and theoretical propositions that integrate studies with individuals and groups, in search of clarification of relational phenomena. The basic assumption is that neuro-cerebral mechanisms intervene in social reasoning through specialised structures of self-perception and perception of *the other* (Ferreira, 2010). Research in this area has been presented to explain common failures in social relations and hospitality practices in situations where social cognition is verified as impaired, such as with people with autism,

schizophrenia or poisoning by chemical substances, among other disorders (Heatherton and Wheatley, 2010). The progressive expansion of knowledge in the field of neuroscience, much of which consolidates theories that have long been formulated, before being considered evidence of biological preponderance based on behaviour, ratifies the integration of biological, psychological and social aspects in an inseparable combination of the constituent factors of human phenomena.

Social cognition also includes social perception. Studies on this subject indicate the tendency to make complex and extensive judgements about others, even when information is restricted and there is little objective data. In the process of knowing the other, we build a theory on how this person is, giving him/her characteristics, as it seems likely, from a store of 'personal knowledge' (Fiske and Taylor, 1991). Thus, social perception integrates the set of human skills in the service of relational demands and protection of self, so that a rapid evaluation of the other will influence decisively the welcoming or rejection, according to the expectation created by the behavioural characteristics of that other. From this angle, it is appropriate to consider, in the perception of the other, a significant margin of 'error' or perceptual and cognitive distortion, particularly given that, as a rule, these processes are beyond the control of the perceiver.

The primary perception of individuals, groups and institutions has a profound effect in establishing the quality of relationships in the process of mutual acceptance, in the installation or not of hospitality space. This process becomes even more complex when taking into account the tendency of people to meet the expectations of those who perceive them. By different means of communication, the perceiver builds their perception of the subject, and the way the subject is perceived corresponds to this perception. This logic applies to perceptions in a positive or negative valuation in relations between parents and children, in social relationships, among protagonists in the commercial field, in work processes, in the creation of political images and so forth. In addition, it would explain the different perceptions that every person has of themselves in different contexts, reflecting on successes and failures in building ties that approximate people and groups.

Given the importance of these factors for the quality of the composition of the social fabric, the effort being carried out in psychology to develop intervention methodologies to enhance skills and minimise preconception effects in the perception of the other is significant. Relevant interventions could contribute to the development of reflective processes of interaction, beyond training actions that tend to favour reinforcements that automate behaviour, which usually do not touch the psycho-affective essence of the formation of ideas about how the other is.

As an illustration of these methodologies, we will refer to the action research conducted in a community with tourism potential, located in the north-east region of Rio Grande do Sul state, Brazil. There, a skill was developed and implemented that mobilised intervention processes for hospitality and for collective involvement in actions focused on tourism (Perazzolo, Pereira, Santos and Ferreira, 2014). It is emphasised here that the narratives of the subjects that were part of representative segments of the community revealed, in the stage preceding the intervention, differences and internal conflicts, which indicated the commitment of the disposition for cooperation, for joint decisions and reflections, for the reception of people and for the cooperative planning of tourism development.

The methodological proposal had hospitality or welcoming as one of the founding elements of tourism. According to the researchers, the origin of tourism is 'the human drive (*trieb* in German) for knowledge, which Freud (1976a) called the epistemophilic drive' (Perazzolo, Pereira, Santos and Ferreira, 2014: 66). In other words, tourism comes from the human impulse to embark in the direction of new knowledge. So this is where welcoming is installed as a

relational phenomenon and a catalyst for learning, to the extent that 'it requires a willingness to get out of oneself, to create and transit through an area that is also of the other, that involves welcoming and being welcomed' (Perazzolo, Pereira, Santos and Ferreira, 2014: 68). This is, therefore, an essential condition for tourism to occur. In the same way, the subject who genuinely welcomes the other is also driven by the desire to know. Similarly, he/she would correspond to a tourist who does not move. It would be, in the words of the authors, a 'tourist of the other' (Perazzolo, Pereira, Santos and Ferreira, 2014: 68).

On the other hand, the process of intervention was guided by the theory of thought developed by Bion (1994), which provides an explanation of development by means of learning through experience, and through relationships. The heart of his conception of man is 'marked primarily by the mental growth from endless transformation processes leading to new patterns of thinking, which implies the involvement of the whole personality' (Perazzolo, Pereira, Santos and Ferreira, 2014: 71). From this perspective, discussions in systematised group meetings involved the strategy of intervention, in which the slippage of meaning occurred, increasing complexity of thinking, awareness to host the other within oneself and the development of collective relations based on mutual welcoming. Underlying this option, it was supposed that the construction of social projects in which tourism would stand out in the socio-economic profile of the community could be enhanced.

The results of the reflexive processes of interaction, described in detail in the research, stated, according to the researchers' terms, the occurrence of significant changes in the formulation of the concepts, but also in behavioural and affective spheres. The researchers emphasise that it can be assumed that 'the effective transformation of willingness to welcome requires that a trial time full of feelings may mediate the reflections and initiate enhancer behaviours of cooperative practices, which are motivated by the desire and commitment to welcome' (Perazzolo, Pereira, Santos and Ferreira, 2014: 74). These behaviours signal the strengthening of social ties of and in the community.

### Attitude formation and change

Another important concept in the examination of the conditions for welcoming and, therefore, of the constitution of hospitality is the concept of attitude, which consolidates the thinking, feeling and acting triad, and involves perception as well as behaviour. When an attitude is formed, it tends to become rooted and durable, making changes complicated, reflecting on the relational dimension (Fiske *et al.*, 2010). Thus, the form of thinking about a particular person, group or situation will reflect the way of feeling and behaving towards others. This phenomenon is also the basis of prejudice of any kind. Negative attitudes tend to cause behaviours marked for rejection, such as, for example, hostility to immigrants. In other words, a positive or negative attitude affects how people, tourists, buyers/sellers, brands and so forth are welcomed.

The theories about the tendency of the mind to seek constant balance, backed up by studies on cognitive consistency (Festinger, 1975), offer explanations about resistance to changing perceptions and attitudes. The maintenance of feelings and thoughts in relation to the other help people maintain a state of balance and constancy in order to obtain mental comfort. Breaking down established beliefs creates tensions that initiate processes for the restoration of homeostasis, organising new perceptions and attitudes, or causing psychological discomfort, such as mental pain (Bion, 1984). To avoid this discomfort, one tends to keep units of coherent and consistent ideas, feelings and behaviours, a process that could explain difficulties in making changes in the welcoming mood in personal, social and commercial areas, among others.

### Group processes

Another axis of interest of social psychology concerning group phenomena also requires some consideration. It should be noted that in this area, explanatory, conceptual and dynamic systems have long been built, theorising about the relations of interdependence of parties in a group context, constituting an organised, self-regulated and semi-permeable totality. The different lines approximate contributions, such as Kurt Lewin's field theory (1975), Maturana and Varela's systemic propositions (2002) and theoretical and practical systemic approaches of intervention with families and groups (Bowen, 1989). A group is, as a rule, designed as a unit, greater than the sum of its parts, with its own identity and culture, involved and constrained by a field that maintains cohesive members, making demands and behaviour mutually interdependent. This would explain the changes in behaviour of people in different groups (family, leisure, professional, religious, etc.), changes which derive from the game of internal and external forces, creating tensions that require constant adjustment in the search for balance.

The idea of hospitality at the level of the social group unit derives from these premises. A welcoming collective body is brought about by the subjective construction of ideas and representations shared by a group of people. This creates a unit with its own profile, whose characteristics have an impact on the nature of affections that set the tone for the relations and on behaviours that harmonise, or not, towards common goals. A collective body that welcomes itself and the other is constituted by means of cultural knowledge and circulating values, in the way it establishes exchanges, by how it takes and offers services that supply and keep alive the social body, and the management of resources, knowledge and exchanges that occur in the internal and external environment of the social body (Santos, Perazzolo and Pereira, 2014).

### Psycho-relational dimensions of hospitality

In addition to the extensive reading of hospitality that social psychology provides, the cognitive, systemic and psychoanalytical approaches also offer elements to build a *psychology of hospitality*. From the early days of psychology, several theories have pointed to the relational dimension as the core of human life. Since the development of psychoanalytic theory by Freud (1976a), it has been difficult to deny the importance of relationships in the origin and organisation of the psyche associated with social interactions. As proposed by Freud, the relational experiences of the first years of life are constitutive of the matrices of the further development and take place within a scenario where *the other* – via family ties and regulatory echoes of society – features with the *self* – the history of uniqueness. Representatives of the English, French and American schools of psychoanalysis ratify the importance of progressive differentiation *I-you*, and the insertion of the third, the *he*, in building the sense of social plurality – *we and they*.

In the English school, the character and identity formation of individuals occurs through the creation and settlement of an internal world by representation of people. This would occur through predictable relationships (such as those with the mother/caretakers in the early stages of life) and unpredictable relationships (like the interactions of chance that occur throughout life). Theorists such as Melanie Klein (1974) and Wilfred Bion (1984) are important representatives of this sociological model of the mind. Hospitality, from this perspective, would be the means of the constitution of the subject, to the extent that hosting and being hosted marks the essential dynamic of the construction of the subject, which, by nature, is plural.

With regard to the American school, there are the contributions of Kohut (1959), considered the precursor of the psychology of the *self*, as it is recognised in the universe of psychoanalysis.

The author outlines his understanding of man, paying particular attention to the processes of introspection and empathy, with an emphasis on lived experience, therefore moving beyond the *instinctivist* model developed by Freud. This means that, in human development, in the constitution of the *self*, a relationship matrix is presumed, a *self* in the world.

The French school, on the other hand, of which Jacques Lacan (1978) is an important representative, highlights the experience of absence and deprivation, originally lived in the triangular relationship (father, mother, son) and in paternal interdiction. The psychic inscription of the name of the father, in other words the acceptance of the speech that reflects the voice of the *great other* (echo of social speech), marks the constitution of the subject through the access to culture, setting the regulatory limits, enabling order and its maintenance in the social group.

It is in the centre of the experience of absence and deprivation that *the other*, the third, enters the psycho-relational dynamic, allowing the constitution, or not, of a structure capable of recognising what is different of the self and the relevance of social regulatory systems, of the laws of coexistence. From this perspective, the *other* is always the third, the one who breaks the primarily specular duality (which originates from the mother-child relationship), enabling the triangulation of psychic structure and giving meaning to the *I*, to the *you* and, finally, to the *he*, also in plural versions of the pronouns. In other words, without the *he*, the *you* is just a reflection of the *I*. This cutting experience – that is, the experience of the admission of a third party in the psycho-relational universe of subjects – is riddled by repression, as proposed by Freud (1976a). This process will generate the on-going discomfort of the abdication of the *trieb*, inducing subjects to find ways to adapt their demands to social norms and to move in search of desire, lost and forgotten in its primary form.

This would explain the human search for knowledge and would characterise the inspiration that activates the historical development of humankind and of societies. Without the experience of absence/deprivation, which installs the *he*, the *I* inhabits the space of the narcissism in which the *other* is disregarded. It is necessary to insert the *other*, the *great other* (the symbolic unfolding of the third, the culture), so that a distinct desire may be recognised and an effective and supportive relational system of hospitality and reciprocity established. In this process, the basis of the relationship and the construction of social ties would be sedimented. Lévi-Strauss (2009), in the field of anthropology, can also be referred to as a theorist who shares the idea that the deprivation experience, particularly the one concerning the incest prohibition, is marked by the passage of the state of nature to the state of cultural subject. That is to say that the individual is placed at the point of intersection between nature and culture.

It is noted that the social ties bind the individual to their culture, through listening to the speech of the *great other* and through the response that this process generates. This means that the nature of the ties changes according to the demands of each period, of each socio-relational niche in which the individuals are placed. Therefore, if the culture, according to contemporary thinkers, talks about the values of hyperconsumption, about the blindness to the emptiness and to the ephemeral (Lipovetsky, 2005), about the weakening or liquidity of human bonds (Bauman, 2004), about the spectacularisation of life (Debord, 1997), marks of these aspects tend to be inserted in the dynamics of the constitution of the social body. It will be highlighted that the scenario of hyper-individualisation indicates an obvious constraint in the disposition for the welcoming of *the other*, paradoxically intensifying the specular phenomenon in which the *I* and *the other* are, or need to be, equal. In this sense, hospitality may advertise itself as an inspiring paradigm of change in the systems of relations at the macrosocial level.

Another important dimension to be mentioned in the context of the contribution of psychology to the understanding of the hospitality phenomenon refers to reflections, which are situated on the border of evolutionary thought and ethology. In this space, the importance of

the relations can be recognised in the adaptive root of the species. The theory of fetalisation, or neoteny (originally proposed by Louis Bolk, 1926), proposes that the biological incompleteness, the phylogenetic opening of the species, explains the human need to be with like others, in a cooperative relationship of mutual care. This perspective harmonises with the idea of caring for the other as a human commitment (Heidegger, 1989; Levinas, 2004), although it is acknowledged that contrary answers, of rejection and aggression, integrate the set of human reactions to fear, to anger, to the need to adapt and to maintain living conditions.

Thus, in the history of the human species, taking care of the other in the survival process was intrinsically associated with the maintenance of relations and with mutual attention throughout life, unlike other hominids, who separated themselves from their groups of origin in sexual maturity, and this is probably why they are extinct (Lewin, 1999). The relationship fills the place left open by the overcoming of the idea of biological determinism, and constitutes the privileged way for the promotion of essential learning for human development, from birth to death. A man needs to learn almost everything, and that constant demand to know would explain the restless and gregarious nature as a dynamic axis of the constitution of the social subject; the development of skills for mutual welcoming, providing life, new and progressive knowledge, favoured conditions for the establishment of links that allow the insertion of the *other* inside the very man, inaugurating opening to the internal and external diversity. The known cases of wild children, supposedly raised in an animal environment and who did not laugh, speak or interact (Lévi-Strauss, 2009) when they were found, allow reflections on the importance of alterity in the construction of the *self* and of humanity as a product of human relationships. In reflections about the ways that human productions and thinking may take, the concept of rhizome (Deleuze and Guattari, 2010) has contributed to the understanding of the unpredictability of the developments and directions of these possible paths.

Regarding the importance of reciprocity in relationships, psychology studies on newborn competencies, even considering the limited repertoire of behaviours of an essentially biological base, indicate characteristics of propensity, which are innate for bonding. These studies reinforce the assumption that this is one of the most effective and necessary competencies for development. As Bowlby (1978) said, the human baby is born equipped with behavioural systems that provide the foundation for the later development of attachment or binding behaviour. The work of Bowlby, besides contributing in different ways to the theoretical structure on child development, inspired research on the civilising process, such as that developed by Elias and Scotson (1994). These assumptions indicate that human relationships are not options, but conditions of life, and these relations happen through hospitality.

Other relevant contributions to the understanding of mutual welcoming mechanisms come from studies that focus on primary bonds, characteristic of the mother-baby relationship, such as those by Winnicott (2006) and Bion (1984), which address the maternal ability to interpret demands and peculiarities of the newborn and give them the answers they need. This moment marks the beginning of the communication and interplay that will allow the baby to move forward in a relational dynamic that will occur throughout life. The competencies that rule the primary relationships – in which one of the protagonists of the asymmetric dialogue, the baby, demands to be listened to and answered on their needs, and the other, the mother, makes herself available and wishes to listen, to interpret and meet the identified needs – do not run out, therefore, in childhood or in maternal action. On the contrary, they are developed and may be transformed, depending on the circumstances, throughout life, in welcoming exchanges, when the protagonists may alternate at the poles of the relationship. In the context of a *psychology of hospitality*, therefore, it is considered that the need for care and for welcoming the other is, in theory, common to all individuals, as well as the ability and the desire to welcome. This reveals

the phenomenon that connects and transforms people and groups in different conditions of relational symmetry and synchrony (Perazzolo, Pereira and Santos, 2014).

Accordingly, the relations are likely to be characterised as (a) asymmetrical, when it is verified basic difference in the level of dependency (for example, son–mother, immigrant–native, student–teacher, etc.), (b) symmetrical, when there is, in principle, equivalence and ability to exchange demands in equal conditions (for example, the interrelationships occurring in the world of playfulness, cooperation, trade, etc.), or (c) asymmetrical, when self-centred demands prevail and deafen one or both poles of the relationship, and so the relation is not carried out.

With regards to the synchrony, it is considered that welcoming, facilitator of the hospitality phenomenon, may occur at a time when the relationship settles as a fact, making almost visible the ‘in between’ space, which is formed by the mutual action of welcoming. However, it may also occur before the meeting, when there is previous answering to the supposed needs of an individual or groups, a process that is easily understood in the commercial universe, when the actions preceding the reception of clients, for example, derive from the prior interpretation of their needs. The relation of welcoming may occur even after the meeting, when relational experiences alter the process of future welcoming (Perazzolo, Pereira and Santos 2014b).

The dynamics of hospitality, as it occurs in primary relations, assumes that the demands of the other are accepted, thought about and returned in the form of answers – or action – enhancing the process of identification, welcoming and transformation of mutual expectations in a continuous interplay. The conditions of being welcomed and welcoming alternate, in the relationship, and it is in this process that the ‘in between’ space of the hospitality is established. In essence, it is translated into an empathic exercise that requires abdication of previous assurances of the demands of the other and displacement of the very demands of the phenomenal centre of desire. This process features a relational unit envisaged by the recognition of the two poles, which may take the singular form, but also the form of a group, social or collective body. These views, as previously mentioned, form part of the concept of Welcoming Collective Body, a model developed by Santos, Perazzolo and Pereira (2014), which presents a theory of collective hospitality and a methodology of analysis of welcoming characteristics at institutional and social level. It refers to a

body that personifies the representation evoked by its name, which gives form and identity to the communities. The proposition, derived from studies about welcoming in four communities with tourist potential in the northeast of the state of Rio Grande do Sul/Br, rests on the understanding that the social body of a group/community is structured from the interconnection of at least three vertices: exchanges/services; knowledge/culture; managing organism. The layout of this triangulation defines the space in which the phenomenon of welcoming and the hospitality practices are organised and developed.

(Santos, Perazzolo, and Pereira, 2014: 55)

At this point, it is pertinent to consider that these approaches are in addition to other assumptions of a metaphysical nature. In the same way, they join the contributions of studies on biopsychic processes involving organic responses to the perception of the other, which recognise neurochemical flows that provide conditions for reciprocity (Shamay-Tsoory, 2011). It is worth taking into account the possibility of two primary destinations in a human approach: hospitality and inhospitality, or the rejection/refusal of the other – a process that is expressed by different manifestations of withdrawal and aggressiveness. The recognition of an opposite disposition to hospitality, as plausible and feasible as this, points out that the coexistence of both need to be considered when addressing the nature and challenges of relationships. In summary, a meeting would, then, have two possible outcomes: one, facilitator of successive approximations,

thinking development and mutual change through affective and cooperative ties; and two, facilitator of the withdrawal, due to the rejection and/or contempt for learning experiences that others may make available, or due to the defence against the perception of the risk for the *I/we, mine/ours*. The ambivalence, on the other hand, would mark the coexistence of both valences operating in the same relational dynamics. Thus, it may be said that as well as having the same etymological root, the words ‘hospitality’ and ‘inhospitality’ also have the psychological root, which feeds contradictory emotions such as love, hate or both in the complex relational plot.

Given these considerations, the understanding of the hospitality phenomenon may be expanded if the knowledge produced in the field of psychology in dialogue with assumptions, among others, of a philosophical, sociological and anthropological nature is taken into account. The theory of the Gift (Mauss, 2005), for example, that sustains the give–receive–return triad, does not exclude giving and not receiving in return. On the contrary, it increases the perspective of a human disposition to the other, founded in the early interactions that weave together the social ties. In the socio-economic context, scholars have already highlighted the need for a more comprehensive definition of hospitality. Statements, for example, that hospitality ‘may be conceived as a set of behaviours originating from the very base of society’ (Lashley and Morrison, 2004: 5) are compatible with the idea of an intrinsic demand, psychologically built for hospitality which embraces phenomena involving exchanges, learning experiences and also economic and social development.

This brief summary of contributions from psychological science confirms the complexity of the phenomenon of hospitality in the uniqueness/identity interplay and, at the same time, the configuration of an equally complex conceptual universe. These fields have contributed to ideational approaches and withdrawals that focus on the *I-other* contextualised in different dimensions, such as ethics, politics and the social. In this sense, the term ‘hospitality’ evokes an ancestral duty increasingly contemporary, associated with the welcoming practices of alterity that generate social ties, which, immediately, convoke a substantial reflection on the human condition. Thinking about what human beings should do involves, indeed, reflecting on what they are (Flahault, 2011). That is, what defines the nature of the human being, or yet, to what extent does the hospitality relationship affect the processes of personal development? What kinds of changes are caused in the consciousness of the individuals?

In adopting principles of an anthropology of alterity to Levinas’ matrix this type of question can be answered, sustaining the idea that hospitality is a structural feature of the human identity, which corresponds to what Francis Jacques (1982) designated as ‘relational subjectivity’. This position leads to the other side of the welcoming situation, to the experience of a ‘subjective rupture’ lived by the one who welcomes.

### Hospitality and personal identity

It is known that the knowledge produced in the social and human sciences in the last decades on the processes of human development provide the grounds for a relational humanism, which forces us to question the idea of a self-founder and self-sufficient subject. The concept of personal identity becomes inseparable from the concept of alterity, although the arguments tend to differ relatively to the definition of that *other* and, above all, to the place occupied in interpersonal relationships.

In this case, and in accordance with a Levinasian line of inspiration, the notion of hospitality is used to describe an interpersonal relationship linked to the primacy of alterity, defending that it is in the presence of the *other*, recognised and respected as a truly *other*, that the identity finds the secret of its temporal fecundity.

For Levinas (1988, 1990), the identity is the result of a historic construction that begins in the relation with the inhabited world, a world that is desirably enjoyed, appropriate and represented. It is important to emphasise this aspect, since a decisive demarcation in relation to the idealistic conceptions of identity is being questioned. By situating the process of personal achievement in the sensitive and pleasant connection with the inhabited world, Levinas refuses to reduce the person to subjectivity, defending a human identity in 'flesh and blood', rooted in a concrete world, and with which it establishes hospitality ties.

In this way, for Levinas, as Freud already proposed (1976b), 'the Self is not a being that always remains the same, but it is the one whose existence consists in identifying itself, rediscovering its identity through everything that happens to it' (1988: 24). That is how the *self* reveals itself to be identical in the course of time and through all its changes, even when, in dialogue with its intimate alterity, it has the illusion of being another one, a denied illusion, in a divisive way, in the 'face-to-face' situation – that is, before the testimony of radical alterity given by someone else.

In this sense, the real *other* is effectively another person, someone equally capable of inner life, which is to say, someone able to possess the world subjectively, to represent it and to communicate it. That is what the consciousness discovers when it welcomes the interpellation of another human being, someone who also has a face. On the face of every person, there are mysteriously unique marks of a personal identity, of another freedom, another story of life, and that is why 'we are always late to meet the other' (Levinas, 1990: 140). The wrinkles marking the face of the elderly, for example, indicate precisely the extent of our delay.

The obedience to the 'law of the face' becomes thus constitutive of the identity, explaining hospitality as an experience that largely transcends the simple reception of the strange. Hospitality happens when the reception 'gives way' to the entry of the new, thereby producing changes in the welcoming subject, no matter how risky this experience may prove to be. There is no true openness and exposure to the other without such dimension of risk being present.

In fact, the real risk to identity lies in the temptation of the person becoming retracted in themselves, with 'doors and windows closed' to the other and, thus, deprived of their vital stimulus. This closing logic leads to distortions in the process of formation of the identity, producing a subjectivity condition that is favourable to the expression of narcissistic identities and to the emergence of mixophobic social cultures. Instead, the hospitality experience, as a subjective welcoming of the alterity, serves to counter this tendency and to dissolve any illusion of self-sufficiency. A truly autonomous identity is an identity that lives the fullness of the interdependence condition; it is an identity capable of dealing with uncertainty and the unpredictable.

According to Derrida (1997), the total exposure to the unexpected defines pure or unconditional hospitality. By definition, hospitality contains in itself a latent threat of hostility. However, authentic hospitality begins precisely there, in the availability to welcome the other – the unknown, the strange, the unexpected – leaving any personal fear aside. Paradoxical as it may seem, the persistent subordination to the imperative of unconditional hospitality, in every historical circumstance, is what allows the practice of hospitality to materialise with all its regulations.

As Daniel Innerarity (2001) has observed, reality itself tends to behave like an 'autonomous guest' and often an inconvenient one. Welcoming with hospitality means opening up to the unknown and the unexpected, and this unexpected often manifests in the form of annoyance, disappointment and breakdown of expectations. On the basis of the process of identity construction, it is not the simple exercise of the will, but a vital and permanent tension between freedom and alterity, between intention and opposition, between security and risk. In this process, the intersubjective linking relations, intrinsically enigmatic, play a critical role.

An example of this tension in Levinas' argument (1988) is paternity. 'Paternity remains a self-identification, but also a distinction within identification – a structure unforeseeable in formal logic' (Levinas, 1988: 245). Children, at the same time 'ours' and 'not-ours', always come from beyond the possible and beyond the projects. As such, they establish a close relationship that is untranslatable in ordinary language, and that helps explain the meaning of personal fulfilment.

## Conclusions

The paths travelled so far come to reiterate not only the complexity of the hospitality phenomenon, but, or even because of that, the importance of the complementarity of different perceptions in the search for their understanding. It is in this sense that thinkers who emphasise aspects of the uniqueness of subjects in their relations of constitutive interdependence of identity and hospitality were called here to dialogue.

It was this understanding that directed the exercise carried out here, which systematises the contributions that came primarily from psychology, like those attributed to Freud, Bion, Kohut and Bowlby – which allow us to outline some grounds for what might be called a *psychology of hospitality*. This is a psychology that points to the recognition of the *other* as *one other*, in their uniqueness, which, when or if recognised, creates fertile ground for the chain of transformation of the *self* and the *other*, which characterises relational processes of welcoming. These same contributions refer to the dialogue with thinkers of the philosophical and anthropological universe, especially Levinas, Derrida and Lévi-Strauss, which allowed us to highlight the significant transforming potential originating from the exposure of the *self* to the *other*, when there is no previous knowledge, and from which one never gets away. This is the intrinsic relationship between identity and alterity, and between hospitality and development of social ties.

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# Hospitalities

## Circe writes back\*

Judith Still

### Key themes

- Animals
- Carol Ann Duffy
- Derrida
- Homer
- Sexual difference

A guest never forgets the host who had treated him kindly.

(Homer)

Homer's *Odyssey* is one of the key intertexts for thinking about hospitality in the Western world; hospitality has always, apparently, declined since the days of Homer.<sup>1</sup> Hospitality is particularly necessary in the aftermath of war, a time of travel, of exile, perhaps of home-coming. Different episodes in the *Odyssey* can be interpreted along a continuum from a hospitality of excess to bonds of mutual protection for chieftains or heads of household, bearing in mind that these rationally agreed compacts are sealed with feasting and gift exchange that always has the possibility of slipping into sacrificial superabundance. At the same time the details of the Homeric text are sufficiently complex and ambivalent to cover a range of failures of hospitality as well as hospitality itself.<sup>2</sup> The narrative of the home-coming Odysseus or Ulysses has been evoked in a wide range of contexts since the mythical bard Homer first sang of his experiences, and the re-tellings (including James Joyce's famous work) themselves get re-told and re-analysed. I would argue that the relationship between literature and philosophy as a shadowy duelling duo is always already inscribed in thinking about hospitality; philosophy pays attention to the ethical responsibility of the host, but literature is hospitable to different meanings – conjuring up the ambiguity of both host and guest.

In *Derrida and Hospitality* (Still, 2010), I focused not only on Odysseus as guest, but also on Telemachus as guest (and host), and the suitors as guests and hosts. I referenced the story of Circe