

Hospitalities:
A Review of *The Conditions of Hospitality: Ethics, Politics, and Aesthetics on the Threshold of the Possible*, Edited by Thomas Claviez, New York: Fordham University Press, 2013, 213 pages

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As Benveniste reminded us, the Indo-European foundations of ‘hospitality’ are ambivalent as they ultimately combine both the guest to be welcomed and the master of the house who can impose his will as a despot and thus turn into an enemy (Latin *hostis*) – an ambivalence still recorded for example in the French word *hôte*: at once the guest and the host. The threshold where hospitality should take place becomes a dialectical border where a politics of inclusion/exclusion is inevitably at stake. Derrida coined the notion of ‘absolute hospitality’ in order to radicalize the necessity of welcoming the other in the name of an unconditional ‘politics of hospitality’, at a time when Europe was increasingly widening its borders and raising questions about the necessity for its limits to be safeguarded by new border policies.

Starting from a conference held in Norway, in September 2008, Thomas Claviez’s edited book *The Conditions of Hospitality: Ethics, Politics, and Aesthetics on the Threshold of the Possible* displays a full array of fields influenced by Derrida’s work on conditional/ unconditional hospitality and gathers essays structured, as the subtitle already indicates, into three parts that cross boundaries or thresholds from the ethics to the politics and the aesthetics of hospitality. The book develops the concept in line with contemporary conditions and through the lens of philosophical, anthropological, political and theoretical concerns, all tied together by a brilliant introduction, “‘Taking Place’: Conditional/Unconditional Hospitality’ which repeatedly acknowledges either the im/possibility or the impossibility of ‘unconditional’ hospitality while being committed to the possibility of its future arrival.

The volume starts with an insightful article, ‘Hospitality– Under Compassion and Violence’, written by Anne Dufourmantelle, French psychoanalyst, philosopher and respondent to the joint dialogue with Jacques Derrida in the volume *Of Hospitality*. She returns to Derrida’s approach on hospitality not as a private gesture, but as a universal experience rather than a concept (17). For Dufourmantelle, hospitality opens a space of thinking, since to reason means ‘to invite, to offer a shelter to the other within ourselves, the other as the possibility to be(come) ourselves’ (14). The author embraces Derrida’s concept of ‘hostipitality’ and is convinced by his demonstration that the law of “‘unconditional hospitality” cannot be turned into a policy, because as such it would be utterly radical’ (15). She believes that the moment unconditional hospitality turns into civil law that comes with its rules and regulations, it creates something which would be desirable, that she calls a ‘common space’ (15). Hospitality is likewise ‘the

precondition of life', as the very beginning of life in a mother's womb testifies. Nonetheless, the moment a child is born or, in Heideggerian terms 'thrown into life', death 'looms', making hospitality 'an act of trespassing' and placing it 'rooted in the experience of death, of letting go' things we have once loved or attained (17). For Dufourmantelle, hospitality can be regarded also as an instant of grace, from *Kairos* which means 'the right moment', and the only way to reach unconditional hospitality is under conditions of both 'compassion and violence' (23).

For Derrida, an act of hospitality could be poetic, insofar as it re-invents the very conception and practice of 'hospitality' in the name of a justice or a democracy to come, leading to a new ethics of alterity (alterities) in a renewed, liberated sense of 'community'. In his essay, 'Transcending Transcendence, or *Transcendances: Limping toward a Radical Concept of Hospitality*', Thomas Claviez proposes a way of practising hospitality: searching for *transcendances*, a concept that 'does not ascribe transcendence to the Derridian "concept" of difference', but comprises the 'near' of transcendence, one which is thought in different terms 'from what "is"', whilst also acquiring 'a spatio-temporal quality' (30). Claviez claims that transcendence seems not to team up with universalism. Showing that Derrida pronounced the categorical imperative of hospitality by which we respond affirmatively to the one who 'turns up before any determination, before any anticipation, before any identification', be it a male or female foreigner, an immigrant, an invited or uninvited guest coming from another country or not, any other creature of live or dead thing an animal, or divine creature, a living or a dead thing¹, the author gives examples of Derridian transcendence of 'the realm of the human proper' as well as 'the realm of the political' (27) as related to the ethics of Emmanuel Levinas developed in his philosophical works such as *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*. Claviez's thesis is that if Levinas's assumption that the Other transcends us in innumerable ways, Levinas's ethics is 'in its very hyperbole, an alternative and viable critique of liberalism' (30). In consideration of Derrida's equation of hospitality with culture, Claviez brings his attention to bear on culture as a gift stripped of its economic values. Thus, Claviez preserves the tradition of sheer 'aneconomy' established by French thinkers like Blanchot and Derrida that the gift can be seen only a posteriori and that it 'puts the other as guest in the role of the useless' (34). Hence, the concepts of 'proper' and 'property' collide with what 'belongs' to someone, 'and what is thus the (imperative) property' one needs 'in order to offer "proper" hospitality' (35), a hospitality that needs to be offered to anybody in total independence to who or what the guest is. The 'uselessness' and 'purposelessness' in pecuniary terms can be a threat to capitalism and imposing the other as sublime 'contradicts and escapes the instrumental reason of bio-power' (35), something that, according to Slavoj Žižek, was actually done via Levinas's ethics. Žižek's *Real* (as big Other) shows that Levinas's face-to-face ethics can become at any point a Trojan horse since the neighbour's face may sometimes be monstrous, in the sense that Kant had given to 'monstrosity' in his *Critique of Judgment*. Under such circumstances, 'if monstrosity resides in between the categories of human, animal, and divine creatures, between the living and the dead' in Derrida's acceptation, it lies in the 'very "unidentifiableness", before any identification and determination', as both Derrida and Žižek had figured (37).

¹ See Jacques Derrida, in Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 77.

Transcending transcendence or *transdifferance* reminds us that unconditional hospitality toward the other can wound the one who offers it, making known to us a way to limp ‘toward a radical concept of hospitality that dispenses with a dialectical economy of reciprocity’ and the recognition of ‘multiple transcendences moving and tearing left and right, veering us off a fixed track, and maybe making us go in circles—even in our own homes’ (41).

The distinguished French philosopher Luce Irigaray’s contention in ‘Toward Mutual Hospitality’ is that whilst in feminine cultures hospitality raises no issue, in cultures of masculine origins, walls are built, codes are established and ‘perspectives related to “a living economy”’ (42) are imposed. Irigaray opts for creating a new culture in order to be capable of practising hospitality and coexistence and not as ‘a more or less imposed integration of the other into our culture’ (43), a thing that can be done via ‘a space of our own’ where to meet the other, a space that we need to remain faithful to, because there is no longer a space or place that points out a natural belonging (to a gender, for example), nor an origin (44). A space where the other is met, irrespective of his/her gender, nation, culture or race, can be modelled from the best examples of hospitality that nature offered: the mother’s placenta where the relation between the mother and her child begins and without which neither the woman nor the foetus can survive. Called the ‘spatial third’ and placed outside the category of gender, an organ that our culture has not asked for, this place produced in the woman for the child (boy or girl), the Greek *gignestai*, was often ‘misjudged and even destroyed’ (45) by a culture according to which boundaries were laid down and laws were issued to separate the child from the mother. Under such circumstances, to offer hospitality to the other means to be able to perceive the limits of our world that needs to be opened to make room for a beyond. When offering hospitality to someone of a different culture, the host needs to be able to open his/her horizon towards the Other, while remaining capable of turning back to it, taking the risk of changing at the very moment of meeting the other (51). This leads to the necessity ‘to remain two’ who are different, which signifies opening one’s world and return to an original home, a home ‘forgotten in the elaboration of customs, laws, political and cultural orders that are not in continuity with our real identity’ (52). Irigaray suggests opening towards a transcendence of our actual state of being, ‘a transcendence respectful toward our self-affection and shareable by the whole of humanity, without any hierarchy, domination, or subjection between humans’ (54).

Starting from the awareness that hospitality denotes, above all, the welcoming of an ‘Other’ or foreigner, Pheng Cheah wonders in ‘To Open: Hospitality and Alienation’ what new perspectives Derrida’s gesture of calling hospitality ‘a name or an example of deconstruction’² brings to the comprehension of the exigent social, ethical, and political issues raised by the increasing flows of people in contemporary globalization (58). Displaying the ‘radical inhospitable’ world that capitalism has created (62), because it prevents people from being at home with themselves (63), Cheah contends that Marxian hospitality is ‘limitless’, since the entire world has been made part of the process of humanity’s self-actualization (64). In addition to Marx’s ‘rejection of the capitalist determination of the proper in terms of the calculative reason of accumulation and exchange’, Hannah Arendt, the German-born political theorist whose work dealt with

² Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael B. Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 364.

the nature of power, democracy and totalitarianism, invoked instrumentality as leading to inhospitality (70). Without referring also to Derrida's concept of 'hostipitality', which could have represented another theoretical ground and a good starting point of his debate, Cheah enumerates the four 'salient features of absolute hospitality' which are:

- (1) hospitality is 'fundamentally inhuman' (72);
- (2) in spite of its attribute of openness, 'its urgency or exigency is not the unconditional force of universal human reason' (72);
- (3) 'absolute hospitality implies the radical alienation of the host' rather than overcoming this alienation;
- (4) 'absolute hospitality is impracticable' (73).

The author concludes that the 'primal scene' of hospitality relates to capital flows and only secondarily to people (79). Cheah's inference is that to think of pure hospitality in radical terms one needs to remake the world turning its back to capitalist globalization (80).

Thomas Hylland Eriksen's 'Frictions of Hospitality and the Promise of Cosmopolitanism' analyses cosmopolitanism and its effects on hospitality with ample examples from anthropology. His discussion around Mauss's seminal work on various mechanics and ideologies of gift exchange invokes the obligations to give, to receive and to return a gift. Examples follow and they illustrate both disgraceful hosts and disgraceful guests from history: King Carl XIV Johan of Sweden and Norway (1763-1844) who was an immigrant looking in vain for his people's gift of love or Bill Clinton who, when visiting Bangladesh refused any gift from his hosts, bringing in his host's house everything he (as a guest) would have needed, including his bathing water. Beyond different cultural stereotypes (Westerners seen as cold, immoral, arrogant, Muslims regarded as undemocratic, illiberal, sexist), there are also linguistic stereotypes capable of generating inhospitality; as Eriksen discloses, during the Gulf War, whilst the Americans were presented as national heroes ('lion-hearted, professional, heroic, daring, loyal, resolute, brave'), the Iraqi soldiers were discriminated and called 'brainwashed, paper tigers, cowardly, desperate, bastards from Bagdad, mad dogs, unscrupulous, fanatical' (89). The status of the world nowadays is 'exile, flows, intensified contacts, creolization, hybridization and all forms of mixing' and such a world cannot help hospitality since 'boundaries are absolute' and higher walls are being built every day, as can be seen from the instability of territorial power in contemporary society (if under the pressure of an economic force like Microsoft or a religious one like al-Qaeda) (91).

Giving more examples of hostile gestures and 'coldness and distance between natives and newcomers' and returning to Mauss's assumption that we need to accept a gift and to reciprocate when we are given something, Eriksen remains faithful to the idea that hospitality needs to be reciprocal and that as the guest is not asked for anything, this might be a form of inhospitality. His conclusion is that cosmopolitanism may degenerate into 'both liberalism and indifference' (93).

Bonnie Honig's 'Proximity and Paradox: Law and Politics in the New Europe' discusses Seyla Benhabib's *Another Complaint*, a book that pressed upon the readers the need to support international tribunals (94) after realising there were no appropriate institutions with which to try Adolf Eichmann in 1961. In the light of these events that reflection what Arendt called 'the banality of evil', Honig expresses her concern about

genocide, starting and ending on Benhabib's study which is tied to the hope that divisions of multicultural politics may become less intractable if they are judged 'by the way of the universal norms that condemn genocide' (95). Honig's claim is that those who invoke the right to hospitality are placed inexorably in 'an ambiguous and undecidable terrain marked by both hospitality and hostility' (97). One angle from which this opposition could become clearer is via Arendt's 'famous call for the right to have rights' (97), yet placing such a right under international institutions does not necessarily ensure the unconditionality of hospitality, as can be observed by the 'non-permeable borders' around the states that are part of the European Union, lived by a whole apparatus of police officers and 'a xenophobic public that legalists disavow at their peril' (98). Benhabib suggests that the paradoxes of democratic legitimacy are, on the one hand, between liberalism (universal human rights) and democracy understood as Republican sovereignty, and, on the other, as a 'paradox of bounded communities' (101). The call of the neighbour must therefore be of concern to 'an agonistic cosmopolitics' that needs not only to remain open, but also 'committed to the perpetual generation of new sites of action in concert on behalf of worlds not yet built or on behalf of those still emergent and in need of activist support and sustenance' (110).

Ulrich Pram Gad's 'Conditions of Hospitality or Defence of Identity? Writers in Need of Refuge – A Case of Denmark's "Muslim Relations"' is a case study applied to the Danish society. The author makes configurations of the politics of hospitality, based on an excellent dissection of two bills passed by the Danish Parliament, *Folketinget*, which seemingly shows the opening of the borders to writers who in their countries felt either persecuted or threatened, but in fact promotes a very cynical policy by which refuge is offered only to writers who expressed something that was unacceptable where they lived. This sort of hospitality is far from being unconditional, as attested by the Declaration on recognition of the fundamental values of the Danish society (111) that these writers have to sign to get the asylum they ask for. The discourse itself on 'Muslim relations' proves to be 'troubling linguistic terrain' (111). According to government terminology, the writers to whom hospitality is offered or granted are not 'persecuted writers', but authors 'whose freedom of expression is infringed upon in their homeland' (116). In addition, Danish officials make lists of vices that Muslims have and enumerate what Muslims are likely to do: They would violate Danish laws, they would not respect the freedom and personal integrity of the individual, they would disrespect women, freedom of expression and religion, they would discriminate a different colour or race, they would threaten other religions or sexual orientations, or disrespect and oppress girls in particular to make sure that they will grow as incapable of making decisions on their own, they would support acts of terrorism and would show no commitment to the Danish society or democracy (117). Under such conditions, with such an emphasis on the antithesis between the good (the Danish) and the bad (Muslims) (118), hospitality, after all, happens on 'a terrain saturated with fears and strategies of defence' (122).

The last part of the book concentrates on the aesthetics of hospitality and commences with Mireille Rosello's 'Conviviality and Pilgrimage: Hospitality as Interruptive Practice'. The author returns to the moment she first thought of considering immigration as a 'facet' of hospitality (127), in which continents are hosts and immigrants, guests. The two examples that she uses in order to show that the paradigm of hospitality prevents her from idealizing it as an 'instrument against anti-immigrant rhetoric' (128) are the 2005 film *Saint-Jacques la Mecque* (*Santiago de Compostela*-

Mecca) by Coline Serrau and the theoretical model of conviviality proposed by Paul Gilroy in his 2004 *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?*, which, implicitly establishes connections between conviviality and hospitality, since they both involve ‘various forms of cohabitation, contact, and exchange between people who must articulate new definitions of their space, their territory, and their home’ (131). Furthermore, Gilroy includes conviviality into hospitality due to ‘togetherness rather than sameness or belonging’ (132). Serrau’s film shows a group of people who, in spite of being tied together biologically, racially, culturally, turn out to be complete strangers who need to learn the rules of hospitality in order to be able to live together. The characters embark on an initiatory journey during which they ‘must learn how to share not only their sleeping quarters but also their values, their history’ (137). The purpose of the film director is precisely to show that ‘conviviality occurs simultaneously to the emergence of a rewriting of history that involves both an account of the colonial past and an integration of several stands of historical narrative’ (138). Gilroy’s narrative does not focus on the space in which conviviality needs to occur, but rather on the time when several of its forms need to appear.

Nikos Papastergiadis’s ‘Hospitality and the Zombification of the Other’ sets off on an extremely tantalising issue, the impossibility to recognize the enemy. Papastergiadis invokes Gayatri Spivak’s observation that after 9/11, suicide bombers look exactly like ‘normal’ graduate students, a principle that demonstrates that the old image of the Cyclops ready to eat the guest at the table is completely altered in contemporary society. In the light of this discovery, as well as on the basis of Derrida’s stress on the impossibility of unconditional hospitality, Papastergiadis makes use of the term ‘zombie’ which is a ‘reflection of the tendency to not only dehumanize the other but also of the withdrawal of the space of hospitality’ (146). Furthermore, he deliberates that in our contemporary society, where major changes have appeared at both the level of the economic production and ‘the mechanism for disseminating cultural values’, the zombification of the other not only links the servant/master dialectic to a ‘spectral entity’, but also ‘draws upon a spectral symbolic economy’ (148). Indeed, the zombification theory is valid if we bear in mind Derrida’s definition of the spectre:

an unnameable or almost unnameable thing: something, between something and someone, anyone or anything, some thing, ‘this thing’ but this thing and not any other, this thing that looks at us, that concerns us [*qui nous regarde*], comes to defy semantics as much as ontology, psychoanalysis as much as philosophy.³

Moreover, such a theory is strengthened by Papastergiadis’s examples of people who no longer identify themselves with persons, but with ‘mad dogs’ (as an anonymous boy from the housing estates in the Northern suburbs of Paris confessed to an English journalist). Such people were called by the Minister of Interior and later on by the French President Nicolas Sarkozy ‘animals’ (149), we cannot but admit that. Papastergiadis’s argument draws also on Agamben’s finding that ‘the sovereign— by extending the state of exception infinitely— has greater power to decide the conditions upon which the law can be suspended, and thereby to exclude people from the right of being a subject under law’ (151-2). One of ‘the most chilling’ instance comes from

³ Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, intr. Magnus, Bernd, Cullenberg, Stephen (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 6.

Primo Levi's description of the inhabitant whom he called ironically the 'Muslim', as a figure who no longer belonged to 'the world of men in any way'. As Agamben had established, this poor creature obtained such a status only from 'the sovereign's monopoly on power' (152). Trying to find a way out of the world of the spectral others, whether called 'mad dogs', 'ghost prisoners', 'zombie refugees' or 'wogs that turned the cogs' (153), Papastergiadis concludes that whilst 'the migrant-as-wog featured as a stigmatic figure in the nation-building narrative, the wog zombie languishes in, but then erupts as the ultimate threat to, the nation' (153-4), as also clarified by a recent novel such as Christos Tsiolkas's *Dead Europe* and by postcolonial literature in general, where 'the appearance of zombies has been linked to the sudden upheaval of social structures, collapse of traditional forms of moral authority, and the rapid collisions between different worldviews such as colonialism, industrialization, and the Great Wars' (155). After the 2005 riots in Paris, Nico Squiglia, an immigrant activist, affirmed 'I am a migrant. I do not want to integrate. I want to be who I am' was considered 'a threat to the national demand for solidarity' (158) and invokes 'the zombification of the state' (159), but also comes to strengthen Derrida's conviction that the diaspora remains 'at home', when migrating, yet into the other's home. However, the movement in the direction of what Žižek identified as the need for 'an alternative approach toward the understanding of the universal rights of the human subject in the context of cross-cultural communication and global mobilities' asks for a new kind of language that would rearticulate what to be human means, a thing also pointed out repeatedly by Judith Butler in her 'Competing Universalities' (164).

The law of hospitality belongs to the master of the household, to the place that can be called 'house', 'hotel', 'hospital', 'hospice', and that could be extended to 'family', 'city', 'nation', as well as to 'language'. While recognizing that much intellectual focus and conceptual sharpness of the book was gained from one unifying language (English) it must be emphasized that, also abiding Derrida's celebrated deconstructive *mot d'ordre: plus d'une langue*, that a final paper approaching the laws of hospitality in terms of language and the welcoming and inscription of the language of the other in translation is the best way to benefit from a more hospitable interconnectedness between and among many areas of expertise. In this context, Paola Zaccaria's 'The Art and Poetics of Translation as Hospitality', attempts to deconstruct notions that 'started resounding inside and around' her (170): 'escape', 'exile', '(e)migration', 'expatriation', 'dislocation', 'exodus', 'diaspora', 'asylum'. Years of 'incessant questioning' around such notions revealed to the author that 'it is impossible to trace or place, in a clear-cut, finite manner, the terminological and material boundaries around these words and conditions, which exude rupture and agency, which evoke mourning and resurrection, and which indicate farewells that already yearn for and invoke welcomes' (170).

Having in mind Derrida's naming hospitality 'an art and a poetics'⁴, she comes back to the claim of her own book *La lingua che ospita (The Hospitable Tongue, 2000)* that poetry and art 'envision courageous political perspectives much earlier than political thought and politics itself' (171) in spite of the fact that politics and sometimes philosophy and ethics ignore the subtlety of idea expressed in art. Consequently, Zaccaria deals with the triad hospitality as art, poetics and poetry. She takes the translator 'into an intercultural transnational/ transitional/ relational space that is not exactly identifiable with his or her own native parameters: the process and practice of

⁴ Derrida, *Rogues*, 67.

translation teaches the hospitable translator not to rely completely on his original language, culture, and norms, not to rely on nation(ality) as such' (172). Drawing on Mireille Rosello's *Postcolonial Hospitality: The Immigrant as Guest* (2001) and Derrida's dialogue with Anne Dufourmantelle in *Of Hospitality*, where the philosopher invoked the guest's need to ask for hospitality in a language which is not his/her own, but one imposed on him by the host, Zaccaria establishes the threshold of the process of translation in 'the penalty for noncompliance being the impossibility to represent oneself symbolically resulting in powerlessness, lack of agency, and control', as well as in the inequalities related to matters of economy, social position, race and gender (174).

Examples which are at hand for Zaccaria are Canetti's *The Tongue Set Free* which confirms the way one's own natural tongue becomes illegitimate (176) or Gloria Anzaldúa's *This Bridge We Call Home* (2002). The author makes a necessary and minute (if hardly original) analysis of the common roots of hospitality as Benveniste disclosed in his *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes*, where it was suggested that hospitality and hostility come from the name of the host, who is both 'the one who can shelter and can attack'. Zaccaria also draws on Michael Cronin's *Translation and Identity* to conclude that 'the aporia governing the notion of hospitality can be found at the heart of translation practices as well' (183).

It is somehow surprising that Zaccaria's essay does not mention even in passing Walter Benjamin's epoch-making essay 'The Task of the Translator' that laid the foundation for the theme of hospitality in translation. Benjamin had shown how the translator needed to extend his own language towards the limits of a 'pure language' (*reine Sprache*) to accommodate the source language. On the other hand, Paul Ricoeur revealed that translation had to open towards the Other and defined the notion of 'linguistic hospitality' as 'the pleasure of dwelling in the other's language' balanced that 'of receiving the foreign word at home, in one's own welcoming house'.⁵

Thomas Claviez's volume undertakes the following main re-inventions: It places itself at the intersection of a plurality of disciplines in order to compare discourses and critical constructions, it re-examines some of the intricate national and cultural paradigms of hospitality that have prevailed especially across Europe and thus contributed to shaping its own present (self-)image, as well as how these operate politically.

Bearing in mind the politico-linguistic ideologies which ruled many nations' constructions of identity, Thomas Claviez's edited book as a whole offers for debate whether Europe today has successfully come to terms with a deep-rooted ideological heritage of hospitality. The book proves to be valuable to researchers, students and teachers in the field of Hospitality Studies and is a substantial contribution to our understanding of the extent to which 'conditions' of hospitality emerged as a new academic field in the twenty-first century.

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⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *On Translation*, trans. Eillen Brennan, intr. Richard Kearney (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 10.

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