
ASYLUM AS HOSPITALITY: RELISTENING TO DERRIDA

M a j a B j e l i c a

Welcoming Derrida

The central reference of this article is the French philosopher Jacques Derrida¹ who often directly referred to the topics of asylum, refugeeism, acceptance of difference and acceptance of the other in his texts on hospitality.² By repeated analysis and careful relistening of his thoughts, one can recognize their immense topicality and modernity nowadays

¹ Jacques Derrida is known primarily as one of the most prominent representatives of deconstructionism who was dealing with a wide range of topics that were generally both contemporary and topical. When he passed away in 2004, Derrida left a rich collection of monographs, articles and lectures which are still being read and quoted today in many fields of science, especially humanities and social sciences.

² The author's texts on hospitality have left an impact, which is clearly seen from a number of texts that emanate from or rely on his thoughts (e.g. Mireille Rosello, *Postcolonial Hospitality: The Immigrant as Guest* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); Richard Kearney and Kascha Semonovitch, eds., *Phenomenologies of the Stranger: Between Hostility and Hospitality* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011); Thomas Claviez, ed., *The Conditions of Hospitality: Ethics, Politics, and Aesthetics on the Threshold of the Possible* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013); Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014)). The work that hospitality researchers most often refer to is *Of Hospitality* (2000), however, Derrida refers to the topic of hospitality also in other works, for example, *Hostipitality* (2000; 2002), *The Politics of Friendship* (2005), *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* (1999), *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (2001), *Monolingualism of the Other: Or the Prosthesis of Origin* (1998) and others (cf. Simon Morgan Wortham, *The Derrida Dictionary* (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), 71–73). His ideas on hospitality can be traced back to the 1978 edition of the monograph titled *Writing and Difference*, in particular analysing and interpreting the thoughts of Emmanuel Levinas, but not exclusively (see Jacques Derrida, "Hostipitality," in *Acts of Religion*, Jacques Derrida (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 356). The range of Levinas' influence on Derrida is evident from the fact that, following Levinas' death, more and more explicit attention was devoted to contemplating on hospitality, starting from 1995 when he focused his work on studying hospitality in Levinas' work; in January 1996 he gave at least two lectures on hospitality, that were published in the book *Of Hospitality*; and in 1997 hospitality was the focal point of at least five seminars that were published later in a journal and an edited volume.

when the number of asylum seekers is increasing from day to day, especially in European countries.

Discussing hospitality, Derrida³ is aware that the questions remain open, his aim is predominantly to situate and integrate these issues in order to raise awareness and explain the importance of their mystery: its fundamental irreverence lies in the relation between the ethics of hospitality (i.e. ethics as hospitality) and the law or the politics of hospitality (e.g. French asylum policy). Regarding the question of whether, on the basis of ethics of hospitality, we can form a law or a policy beyond the familiar existence within a state, a society or a nation, Derrida claims that it presents a serious, difficult, but on the other hand canonical question. He also assumes there is no direct continuity between one and the other side of hospitality and that deduction from one to the other is impossible. However, “*the impossible*” is not denoted as a defeat but rather as an opportunity and a demand for a different orientation of the law and politics. In such discontinuity, Derrida establishes “the possibility of another speech, of a decision and a responsibility (...), where decisions must be made and responsibility, as we say, taken, without the assurance of an ontological foundation.”⁴

Returning to the conditions of responsibility and decision-making, it would thus be placed somewhere between ethics and law, politics, where also the questions regarding the right to asylum and the duty to offer asylum arise. These questions need to be repeatedly readdressed, searching for new possibilities of responding to them.

Hospitality between Ethics and Politics

Derrida’s philosophical thought makes a key contribution to understanding the need for new expositions of understanding asylum based on hospitality, in particular on the basis of the fact that the author’s discussion is equipped with discursive means that move the research of hospitality from the field of migration and politics to the field of ethics.

³ Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999), 19 ff.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

Derrida clearly presents how hospitality is placed between ethics and politics in his work *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, where he distinguishes two perceptions of hospitality considering two philosophers, namely, Immanuel Kant and Emmanuel Levinas. The significance of this distinction and understanding of this difference in his time, and even for the present, was highlighted with the following words:

Our task here is simply – between Kant and Levinas – to sharpen the difference that matters today more than ever with regard to this right of refuge and all the most urgent matters of our time, everywhere that (...) millions of “undocumented immigrants,” of “homeless,” call out for another international law, another border politics, another humanitarian politics, indeed a humanitarian commitment that effectively operates beyond the interests of Nation-States.⁵

Immanuel Kant gives hospitality a key role in the field of international cosmopolitan law as it is supposed to be everyone’s right to visit. Although his ideas have significantly influenced the development of cosmopolitan philosophical insights, it was only the work of Jacques Derrida that defined Kant’s hospitality as conditional and thus non-actual, since the author, in comparison with Emmanuel Levinas’ notion of hospitality, denotes it as essentially deficient. Levinas is the author who considers ethics as the first of philosophies and directly connects ethics with hospitality as a fundamental attitude to the fellow human being. Every person should accept the other, accept the call of his or her face, answer to it affirmatively. Responsibility for the other is supposedly constitutive for everyone. It is responsibility what makes everyone human: welcoming the other. In many of his texts, Derrida summarizes Levinas’ thoughts, but at the same time he critically analyses and compares it with Kant’s perception of hospitality. Thus, by comparing and deconstructing the two concepts, Derrida explains the aporetic characteristics of hospitality, which essentially determines the latter: what is conditioned with laws and restrictions cannot be the “real” hospitality, the one that could justify the ethics of human activity. The latter could only be founded on the absolute, unconditional hospitality represented by the ever-present “yes” to everyone in every meeting. However, this

⁵ Ibid., 101.

kind of hospitality is practically impossible, since the danger of unconditional acceptance of the enemy is always implicit.

Let us note parenthetically that a quasi-synonym for “unconditional,” the Kantian expression of “categorical imperative” is not unproblematic; we will keep it with some reservations, under erasure, if you like, or under *epoche*. For to be what it “must” be, hospitality must not pay a debt or be governed by a duty: it is gracious and “must” not open itself to the guest (invited or visitor), either “conforming to duty” or even, to use Kantian distinction again, “out of duty.” This unconditional law of hospitality, if such a thing is thinkable, would then be a law without imperative, without order and without duty. A law without law, in short. For if I practice hospitality “out of duty” (and not only “in conforming with duty”), this hospitality of paying up is no longer an absolute hospitality, it is no longer graciously offered beyond debt and economy, offered to the other, a hospitality invented for the singularity of the new arrival, of the unexpected visitor.⁶

Regarding the unexpected visitor, Derrida mentions the Law of Hospitality which was topical in sovereign medieval towns, asking people to open the door to anyone, including a foreigner, to every newcomer, without checking where they come from and who they are. It is at this point that the author recognizes “cosmopolitan (*cosmopolitique*) tradition common to a certain Greek stoicism and a Pauline Christianity,”⁷ which is, according to the author, inexplicitly summarised by Immanuel Kant in the text titled “Perpetual Peace”⁸ and especially in the “Third Definitive Article of a Perpetual Peace,” for which Derrida says it deals with or addresses all hospitality issues: historical, ethical, juridical, political and economic.⁹ The third article is addressed by the following statement: “Cosmopolitan Right shall be limited to Conditions of Universal Hospitality.”¹⁰ This sentence already contains the question of the

⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 81, 83.

⁷ Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, trans. Mark Dooley and Michael Hughes (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 18–19.

⁸ Immanuel Kant, “Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch,” in *Political Writings*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 93–115.

⁹ Jacques Derrida, “Hospitality,” trans. Barry Stocker and Forbes Morlock, *Angelaki: Journal of the theoretical humanities* 5, no. 3 (2000): 3–18.

¹⁰ Kant, “Perpetual Peace,” 117.

relationship between unconditional hospitality and the conditions of hospitality,¹¹ as it speaks of “conditions of universal hospitality.”¹² Derrida observes that Kant in “the law of cosmopolitanism” does not refer “to the conditions of universal hospitality only,”¹³ which at first glance establishes cosmopolitanism as common and boundless. Derrida warns though that, after all, it was only limited to the right to visit and, at the same time, to the public domain of the state.¹⁴

Derrida¹⁵ deals with a longer section of Kant’s text, commenting on the possibilities of its realization and determining its topicality for the period of the end of the 20th century: Kant says that a foreigner may exceptionally be rejected by the host, but only if this rejection does not pose a death threat to the foreigner. Derrida remarks that France does not comply with that, since the country rejects even the foreigners whose return to their homeland would mean their inevitable death, either for political or health reasons (many people diagnosed with AIDS were coming to France for treatment). Furthermore, as a condition of hospitality, Kant refers to the right to visit, not to stay – Derrida concludes that a contract would be required between countries if they were to speak about the right to abode. “Everything – and this is what cosmopolitanism means – is subject to an inter-state conditionality.

¹¹ It is interesting how Derrida observes that Kant at the very beginning of his explanation of the aforementioned article replaces the word hospitality (*Hospitalität* in German) with the word *Wirtbarkeit*. (Kant, “Perpetual Peace,” 69) The word *Wirt*, the root of the word *Wirtbarkeit*, in German means both a master, an owner and at the same time a host, and Derrida (“Hostipitality,” 4) emphasizes that this word dominates the entire lexicon of economy, in German *Wirtschaft–Wirtlich* (hospitable), *Wirthaus* (guesthouse) – also economy, that is, *oikonomie*, the law of a household in which the master is the one (in the house, in the company, in the country) who determines the conditions of hospitality, of welcome. In this sense, the law of hospitality could be formalized as a law of a household that is sustainable as long as the master remains the master, thus enabling and conditioning the right to hospitality that a foreigner enjoys and is thus treated in a friendly manner.

¹² Hospitality is also one of the two terms that Kant himself emphasizes in this sentence, the other being “Cosmopolitan Right,” which suggests that this part of eternal peace is not in the field of morality or politics but in the field of rights, more precisely the rights of citizens as state subjects, even if part of some cosmopolitan country; it is therefore the field of international law.

¹³ Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism*, 20.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 20–22.

¹⁵ Derrida, “Hostipitality.”

Hence, there is no hospitality for people who are not citizens.”¹⁶ Hannah Arendt highlights this problem in connection with the decline of European national states, leaving behind a huge number of people with no citizenship and thus without any rights.¹⁷ In this Derrida recognizes a special challenge of our time – the establishment of “a hospitality which would be more than cosmopolitical, which would go beyond strictly cosmopolitical conditions, those which imply state authority and state legislation.”¹⁸

While seeking for the possibilities for this kind of hospitality, Derrida¹⁹ presents acceptance as a synonym to welcome, quoting Levinas: “To approach the Other in conversation is to welcome his expression (...) It is therefore to *receive* from the Other beyond the capacity of the I, which means exactly: to have the idea of infinity.”²⁰ Hence the idea that intelligence can be interpreted as a hospitable welcome breaks the tradition of perceiving reason as exclusively active – acceptance, receiving, is, according to the philosophical tradition, usually perceived as passive. Here the possibility of interrupting with the stability of dichotomies between passive and active is present. Reason itself is acceptance, the reason being primarily sensitivity: “Reason itself is a welcome inasmuch as it welcomes the idea of infinity – and the welcome is rational.”²¹

Derrida recognises the idea of infinity precisely in Levinas’ rhetorical figure of the door, which we are supposed to open completely for the Other and could symbolize an opening to the exterior, the identification of reason in learning, in the desire to learn and the search for new possibilities, however, the door is by no means a symbol of absolute passivity or omission of reason. Learning therefore enters through the door, just as the Other; the discourse, the ethical relationship – comes from the outside, it presents absolute knowledge, however, constitutive

¹⁶ Ibid., 16 n. 11.

¹⁷ Cf. Hannah Arendt, “The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man,” in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego, New York and London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1973), 267–302.

¹⁸ Derrida, “Hostipitality,” 16 n. 11.

¹⁹ Derrida, *Adieu*.

²⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. A. Lingis (Den Haag, Boston and London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979), 51.

²¹ Derrida, *Adieu*, 26.

but without compromising the sovereignty of reason, since the latter is always the attitude of acceptance. Infinity of learning and acceptance, and ungraspability of the whole should not be an obstacle in giving hospitality.

Derrida's Call to Cosmopolitans

Derrida explicitly presents different ways of a reasonable and accepting search as well as learning about the possibilities of receiving the external, the Other in the essay titled *Cosmopolites de tous les pays, encore un effort!* Derrida wrote this address in 1996 as a message to the participants of the first congress of cities of refuge.²² Naturally, the text is very specific, since it was intended for a particular audience and a particular event, but on the basis of his title it is possible to say that the author planned it more widely and dedicated it to "all cosmopolitans." The essay relates primarily to the then and still very current issue regarding the right to asylum and the possibility of universal hospitality. In the introduction, the author questions the notion of cosmopolitanism and whether cosmopolitanism can be the real basis of forming the "cities of refuge" which were initiated by the International Parliament of Writers with the purpose to offer refuge and asylum to writers who were expelled from their homeland. It seems that the author expresses some kind of scepticism towards this possibility, as in the long period of various forms of cosmopolitanism and cosmopolitan thinking, there has still not been any such realization. The initiative advocates the establishment of the Charter and the International Agency for Cities of Refuge, which, according to Derrida, should pave the ground for cosmopolitan thinking to become more open to all the different and new rather than to linger on the existing cosmopolitan chapters of international law, thus "make an audacious call for a genuine innovation in the history of the right to asylum or the duty to hospitality."²³

²² Derrida wrote it after the initiative from the International Parliament of Writers Council of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, where a congress was organized that the author could not attend, nevertheless, he managed to contribute his opinion on cities of refuge in the aforementioned essay.

²³ Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism*, 4.

The described call for opening the cities of refuge resembles “new cosmopolitanism,” says Derrida.²⁴ The cities of refuge are supposed to be autonomous, independent both from the state they are in and from one another, but they are interconnected in accordance with the forms of solidarity, the invention of which, on the basis of theoretical and critical reflection, is inseparable from practical initiatives, presenting the future task of the parliament of writers and the cities of refuge.

Whether it be the foreigner in general, the immigrant, the exiled, the deported, the stateless or the displaced person (the task being as much to distinguish prudently between these categories as is possible), we would ask these new cities of refuge to reorient the politics of the state. We would ask them to transform and reform the modalities of membership by which the city (*cit *) belongs to the state, as in a developing Europe or in international juridical structures still dominated by the inviolable rule of state sovereignty – an intangible rule, or one at least supposed such, which is becoming increasingly precarious and problematic nonetheless.²⁵

It can be understood that the author presents new forms of cosmopolitanism as a possible means for obtaining the autonomy of the city, which is supposed to be crucial for providing asylum to those in need of shelter. In many cases, it questions the traditional conventions, in this case most explicitly “inviolability” of the state as a sovereign entity, underlining at the same time the complexity of their exceeding and many difficult issues that arise when implementing the project of the cities of refuge. The latter cannot and must not, by any means, be based on the principle of state sovereignty, if they are to be intended for asylum. The author explicitly explains the meaning of the cities of refuge, their purpose and orientation, and, above all, places the concept of hospitality as their essence that needs to be given meaning, considering the modern circumstances. Regarding the call for the cities of refuge, the members of the parliament

have been eager to propose simultaneously, beyond the old word, an original concept of hospitality, of the duty (*devoir*) of hospitality, and of the right (*droit*) to hospitality. What then would such a concept be? How might it be

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

adapted to the pressing urgencies which summon and overwhelm us? How might it respond to unprecedented tragedies and injunctions which serve to constrain and hinder it?²⁶

Further in his text, Derrida gives name to the described project or the “new charter of hospitality,” “new ethics” and “new cosmopolitics”²⁷ and would like to schematically depict the characteristics of the charter as well as the context of its establishment. He stresses inconceivable violence, which was present around the world at the time of writing the address, terrorism, institutional crimes that force the inhabitants of these areas to flee and search for the shelter. Referring to the words of Hannah Arendt in her text “The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man,” where the author addresses the history of minorities and recognizes two major blows to the minorities in the period between the two world wars, namely, the absence of the right to asylum in certain written laws and at the same time a mass arrival of refugees to European countries. Derrida wonders:

How can the right to asylum be redefined and developed without repatriation and without naturalisation? Could the City, equipped with new rights and greater sovereignty, open up new horizons of possibility previously undreamt of by international state law? (...) This is not to suggest that we ought to restore an essentially classical concept of the city by giving it new attributes and powers; neither would it be simply a matter of endowing the old subject we call “the city” with new predicates. No, we are dreaming of another concept, of another set of rights for the city, of another politics of the city. (...) If the name and the identity of something like the city still has a meaning, could it, when dealing with the related questions of hospitality and refuge, elevate itself above nation-states or at least free itself from them (*s'affranchir*), in order to become, to coin a phrase in a new and novel way, a free city (*une ville franche*)?²⁸

Derrida puts all of his hopes into this “other politics of the city,” that is, new, free political incentives, especially on the basis of his disbelief that “the world politics” or international law could do something to ensure hospitality and asylum at the time of criminal prosecution. In a

²⁶ Ibid., 5.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 7–9.

way, he points out that even “hospitable states” are usually not open, or have “never been ‘ethical’ *stricto sensu* – in the sense of the moral law or the law of the land (*séjour*) – (*ethos*), or, indeed, the law of hospitality”.²⁹ They are open for their own benefit, citing the example of France in the 1960s, when immigrants were “hospitably” welcomed due to the decline in fertility in France at that time and / or the economic need for (low-cost) workforce. Such hospitality is governed by “the demographico-economic interest – that is, the interest of the nation-state that regulates asylum.”³⁰

It is interesting enough that Derrida boldly refers to the issue of European borders, which are being abolished within the European countries, but are at the same time strengthened on its exterior, which makes Europe less and less hospitable. Derrida emphasises the rhetoric of “immigration control” is frequently noted, with key characteristic being to distinguish between political escape and economic migration, which is abstract and inconsistent, even hypocritical and perverted, as it allows for the avoidance of granting asylum in almost every case. “The discourse on the refugee, asylum or hospitality, thus risks becoming nothing but pure rhetorical alibis.”³¹

The author also speaks of the so-called “violations of hospitality,” which labels as criminals all those who would, in any way, help or offer hospitality to people “whose papers are not in order” and for which there is a danger of being labelled as an “act of terrorism.” He also mentions the problem of sending refugees back to their homelands where their own state prosecutes them and the status of the police, which increasingly sets the laws instead of only implementing them, and because it enforces violence, which is “faceless” and “formless” as recapped according to Walter Benjamin, it is without responsibility.³²

Derrida concludes his address to the Congress with a summary of his vision and the purpose of the cities of refuge, which is the search for the progress in law between the Law of unconditional hospitality, which provides hospitality to everyone regardless who they are, and be-

²⁹ Ibid., 10.

³⁰ Ibid., 12.

³¹ Ibid., 13.

³² Ibid., 13–16.

tween the general laws or the legal right to hospitality. He believes that this kind of progress can be found precisely through experience and trials in such cities of refuge. “I also imagine the experience of cities of refuge as giving rise to a place (*lieu*) for reflection – for reflection on the questions of asylum and hospitality – and for a new order of law and a democracy to come to be put to the test (*expérimentation*).”³³ In the last lines of the address, he also offers the possibility that “some other” idea of cosmopolitanism either has not yet arrived or has not yet been recognized.

Jacques Derrida, who passed away one and a half decades ago, and had written the analysed essay twenty years before his death, summarized the issues that are nowadays everything but non-topical – and while writing the address, he surely did not imagine that the “limitation of immigration” would get even more aggravated. By laying down his hopes for the option of hospitality and expanding the possibility of offering asylum for “a different policy of cities of refuge” Derrida strongly doubts that state and international institutions could do something in this area. He chooses to explore the new “*cosmopolitics*,” which would try to offer space for hospitality to become universal, thus enabling the introduction of asylum policies, the reflection on such policies and experimental testing.

Derrida is thus looking for an advancement in asylum policy in the space between the law of universal hospitality and general laws, and his method in finding the “right path” is predominantly the experience and the experiment that are to be linked with recognizing hospitality in playfulness, fluidity, uncertainty and fondness for different experiences gained through welcoming, accepting, receiving and reflection.

“*Hostipitality*”: Risk and Pervertibility of Hospitality

Derrida’s insight into the semantics and etymology of the words *acceptation* and *acceptation* is significant, as he says they belong to the discourse of hospitality.³⁴ Both words are supposed to derive from the

³³ Ibid., 23.

³⁴ Derrida, “Hostipitality.”

Latin word *acceptio*, which encompasses the meaning of both acceptance and perception, since it represents the act of receiving and welcoming. *Accepto* means “being accustomed to receiving” which is almost synonymous with *recipio* which implies recurring acceptance or returning acceptance. The word for receiving, *accepto*, derives from the word to take, that is *accipio*. Through this process, Derrida shows that in addition to the need to repeat, that is, the law of iterability, in the heart of every law of hospitality there is a double postulate of giving and taking, giving and perceiving, in repetitions, renewals, continuations:

Yes, yes, you are welcome. Hospitality gives and takes more than once in its own home. It gives, it offers, it holds out, but what it gives, offers, holds out, is the greeting which comprehends and makes or lets come into one’s home, folding the foreign other into the internal law of the host,³⁵

who dictates his or her language of understanding, perception of hospitality. The perception of words is also the concept, *Begriff*, grasping, which indicates how taking is performed, it assumes the meaning of the word when delivering its meaning.

In the text titled “Hostipitality” Derrida draws attention to the common Latin source of words for hospitality (e.g. the English word *hospitality* and the German *Hospitalität*) and the difficulties arising from this source. Namely, the Latin word for the guest, *hostis*, carries its own contradiction and the possibility of the parasite characteristics of its contradiction, hostility. Another article on hospitality by Jacques Derrida can be found under the title “Hostipitality”, namely in the collection of works by the same author titled *Acts of Religion*,³⁶ where hospitality is associated with forgiveness and friendship, humour and transcendence.³⁷ One can agree with the editor of the volume, Gil Anidjar, who

³⁵ Ibid., 7.

³⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, ed. and introd. Gil Anidjar (New York and London: Routledge, 2002).

³⁷ The aforementioned text deals with four selected lectures from the Hospitality Conferences held by Derrida in Paris and the United States of America, from January to May 1997. The dates of each lecture (the last one was held on May 7th 1997) preceded the seminar in Istanbul (May 9th and 10th, 1997) bearing the same title, “Hostipitality”, and it is possible that the texts are interconnected – in some ways, certain aspects of hospitality that have been taught by Derrida for several months are summarized in the Istanbul lecture, but the latter is not extensive enough to summarize all the contents of the lectures. The editor of the collected texts within

in his introduction claims that Derrida and his neologism *hostipitality*, that is, a combination of two opposing words in English language (*hostility* and *hospitality*), raises a radically new way of questioning the subject of hospitality.³⁸ Such subject is not only a guest, but also a foreigner, a hostage, a visitor, a saviour.

Derrida³⁹ touches upon the significance of the invitation, which should be precisely what determines conditional hospitality, as it involves the expectation of the guest and the reception of the latter in his or her home. At the same time, the author points out that the invitation should be distinguished from the visit, since the latter does not assume the former: the visitor is not necessarily an invited guest. The visitor can come anytime, at any moment – so in a religious and ethical sense a visit is referred to as the arrival of the other whom no one expects. Thus, it is possible to distinguish between conditional and unconditional hospitality from the distinction between an invitation and a visit.

[I]f I accept the coming of the other, the arriving [*arrivance*] of the other who could come at any moment without asking my opinion and who could come with the best or worst of intentions: a visitation could be an invasion by the worst. Unconditional hospitality must remain open without horizon of expectation, without anticipation, to any surprise visitation.⁴⁰

The author concludes that the master's waiting at the door for someone to arrive is basically an expectation without a horizon of expectations, given that anyone can come. And it is precisely that anyone who is accepted as a liberator. He draws attention to the possible change of positions of the master as a guest in his home, as the host fulfils his or her hospitality only when he or she is invited into his or her own house by his or her guest, that is when the host receives hospitality from his or her own guest. In this way, the person who invited is invited; and the

Derrida's *Acts of Religion*, Gil Anidjar, emphasizes that the presented texts are very pedagogically coloured, as they offer direct insight into Derrida's classroom while revealing the process of the constructing texts that takes place in the background before the publication process. Some of the content that Derrida reveals in these lectures can be found in a more structured form in his monographs and other publications. As the editor reminds, these lectures can also be placed on the field of comparative religious science. (See Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, 356–357)

³⁸ Ibid., 356.

³⁹ Derrida, "Hostipitality," 17 n. 17.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

one who invites may become (or must become?) the hostage of the invited one. A more detailed overview of logic, economics and the politics of the hostages would be needed, Derrida also notes, but even the etymological insight into the origin of the word is sufficient to connect it with hospitality, since the word for the hostages (*otage*) comes from the word *hoste*, *oste*; in addition, it reveals the importance of a guarantee, insurance (from the word *obses*, a military hostage), which leads the author to the conclusion that the hostage is an insurance for the other, located in a certain space. Levinas' understanding of the hostages, which is supposed to represent the beginning of ethical responsibility, is also introduced here, precisely in the sense of hostage situation.

In the context of etymological study of hospitality, Derrida⁴¹ relies on the scientific work of Émile Benveniste entitled *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes*,⁴² in which the author focuses on social phenomena and the related lexicon. One of the institutes explored by the linguist is also hospitality which stems from the basic word from Latin, *hospes*, which is defined as a combination of two words, *hostis* and *potis*, meaning "guest master." Derrida's adoption of Benveniste's semantic interpretation of hospitality denotes the whole author's thought on hospitality, even when it directs it to comparison with other thinkers, such as Levinas.

Derrida⁴³ follows Benveniste's explanation of the semantic chain of the two terms that make up the word *hospes*, beginning with the term *potis*, which in the Sanskrit offers the root for two words, namely "master" and "husband" where the meaning changes according to a different ending. Derrida is not surprised by this and says that the master – the host is the one who offers hospitality as the master of the house and the wife, which is essential for the *oikonomic* logic that governs the Indo-European history of hospitality. Regarding the Greek word *posis*, which means "husband," "spouse," Derrida points out that also "fiancé," "lover," that Benveniste distinguishes from the word *depostes*, which is supposed to mean power or domination. Derrida regrets that Benveniste

⁴¹ Ibid., 13 ff.

⁴² Émile Benveniste, *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1969).

⁴³ Derrida, "Hostipitality."

does not offer a semantic insight into the Slavic lexicon of hospitality, which is supposed to enter the French word formation, that is, the word “*hospodar*” which means “prince,” and can also be a “master.” In addition, Derrida points out some sort of paradox of hospitality, which can also be seen through the offered semantic interpretation, especially with regard to the fact that hospitality is derived from the master, the host, who has the right to create generally applicable laws of hospitality.

It does not seem to me that I am able to open up or offer hospitality, however generous, (...) without reaffirming: this is mine, I am at home, you are welcome in my home, without any implication of “make yourself at home” but on condition that you observe the rules of hospitality by respecting the being-at-home of my home, the being-itself of what I am. There is almost an axiom of self-limitation or self-contradiction in the law of hospitality. As a reaffirmation of mastery and being oneself in one’s own home, from the outset hospitality limits itself at its very beginning, it remains forever on the threshold of itself, it governs the threshold – and hence it forbids in some way even what it seems to allow to cross the threshold to pass across it. It becomes the threshold. This is why we do not know what it is, and why we cannot know. Once we know it, we no longer know it, what it properly is, what the threshold of its identity is.⁴⁴

Derrida also focuses on the question of the foreigner for which he says that the question of the foreigner is not actually a question about him, about the foreigner, but it is the foreigner’s question.⁴⁵ Thus, the foreigner can be the one who first asks a question, and at the same time he or she can be the one to whom the first question is addressed. At the same time, the question that comes from the foreigner who utters it as the first question upon arrival, can be addressed to the receiving party who is thus put under question.

Regarding the treatment of the question of the foreigner, Derrida also relies on Benveniste’s analysis of Greek hospitality,⁴⁶ which was supposedly characterized by the fact that it was not only offered to a foreigner (*xenos*) but also to his family and the descendants. This kind of agreement, thus extending its validity to the descendants enables the

⁴⁴ Ibid., 14.

⁴⁵ Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 3ff.

⁴⁶ Benveniste, *Le vocabulaire*, 94.

foreigner to remain as such – a foreigner, not a citizen with full rights belonging to the new environment. In addition, such an agreement also presupposed the fact that the foreigner has a name that is not anonymous, and thus also responsible for his or her actions. Interestingly, according to Benveniste, a foreigner, *xenos*, has entered into the contract, *xenia*, making the foreigner part of it at the time of arrival on a foreign territory, a foreign society. Without this contract, the foreigner does not exist and cannot be perceived beyond or outside this pact. Derrida highlights another paradox of such reciprocal hospitality, which, in addition to rights, also grants duties, since name, on one hand, allows such a contract of hospitality; on the other, it restricts and prohibits it since hospitality cannot be offered to just about anyone by this logic regardless the name, and cannot be offered to the “absolute other.” Derrida concludes that the law of hospitality is always paradoxical, and its pervertibility, violation is inevitable:

absolute hospitality requires that I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner (provided with family name, with the social status of being foreigner, etc.) but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I *give place* to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names. The law of absolute hospitality commands a break with hospitality by right, with law or justice as rights.⁴⁷

Therefore, Derrida understands the question of the foreigner as the question of questions: is hence hospitality constitutive of (re)questioning the foreigner on his arrival? Is it more caring to ask or not to ask? Does perhaps hospitality begin with an unquestionable welcome even before introduction, or is hospitality bestowed primarily to the name, the subject? Thus, the issue of hospitality can also be understood as the question of questions. However, the nature of those questions whose content is usually well defined, is questionable, which makes it impossible for a newcomer to introduce himself or herself, but they can only grant an answer to those who ask.

⁴⁷ Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 25.

Also interesting is Derrida's comment using the metaphor of door,⁴⁸ which at the same time enables and inhibits hospitality: if there are doors, somebody has the key and therefore acts as a master and determines the conditions of hospitality; if there is no door, hospitality cannot be offered at all. However, he warns that when hospitality "gets stuck" at the doorstep, on its own threshold, within its phenomena and essentially in itself, this does not mean that hospitality does not exist:

I am not claiming that hospitality is this double bind or this aporetic contradiction and that therefore wherever hospitality is, there is no hospitality. No, I am saying that this apparently aporetic paralysis on the threshold "is" (I put "is" in quotation marks or, if you prefer, under erasure) what must be overcome (it is the impossibility which must be overcome where it is possible to become impossible. It is necessary to do the impossible. If there is hospitality, the impossible must be done), this "is" being in order that, beyond hospitality, hospitality may come to pass. Hospitality can only take place beyond hospitality, in deciding to let it come, overcoming the hospitality that paralyzes itself on the threshold which it is.⁴⁹

In this sense, Derrida claims that we do not know what hospitality is, since it waits on the doorstep for the possibility beyond itself. Thus, it is argued that hospitality is transient primarily from the point of view of the future, that it is not present now, it is always upcoming. It is in the "not yet." At the same time, the author emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between the other and the foreigner, as well as the need to understand the implications and consequences of the described "impossibility as a condition for opportunity," that is, the common origin from the word *hostis*, which at the same time means both the host and the enemy, and also shows the common (etymological) source of hospitality and hatred.

In connection with the foreigner being "captured" in the contract, Derrida⁵⁰ asserts the "foreigner" is perceived in the prescribed field of ethics or ethos, objective morality, especially in the context of Hegel's philosophy of law in the context of the trinity of family, civil society and the state. He also warns that today's society is changing, especially

⁴⁸ Derrida, "Hospitality," 14.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Derrida, *Of Hospitality*.

with the possibility of the invasion of the “foreign” in ways that, according to the described understanding of the foreign, are not conventional. The author directly stresses the telephone, the internet, the fax, which bring “foreign information” in the safe areas of the community. How to distinguish between hostile and acceptable? How to re-define thresholds of homes, societies that are related to hospitality? If the state uses censorship, control, ban, even if only in the public areas, any element of hospitality is interrupted, if not destroyed.⁵¹ “The perversion and pervertibility of this law (which is also a law of hospitality) is that one can become virtually xenophobic in order to protect or claim to protect one’s own hospitality, the own home that makes possible one’s own hospitality.”⁵²

The desire to be the masters of our own home, turns the acceptance of those who do not bow to our own conditions of hospitality as hostile ones, as they turn us hostages in our own homes. The law of hospitality is namely so paradoxical and corrupt at the same time, as the exchange between unconditional hospitality and power play intertwine in its implementation. There is no hospitality without sovereignty, but any choice or exclusion of a guest is already considered violence against the newcomer. It is possible to say that injustice begins at the threshold of the right of hospitality granted (to foreigners) by the state with laws that are increasingly invading the private sphere, which, on the basis of certain parameters, enable distinguishing between hospitality and parasitism. Thus, the ethics of hospitality can always be recognized as paradoxical, a priori limited and contradictory.

Striving for *The Impossible*

Consolidating the restriction of hospitality, its definitive determination, is essentially a violent contradiction, which is applicable to hospitality precisely by the law of hospitality. As such, this law is the law of space, the law of preserving identity (of the master), the preservation of the truth of the authority, which sets “being-oneself in one’s own

⁵¹ Ibid., 51.

⁵² Ibid., 53.

home” as the condition for gift and hospitality.⁵³ This is the principle (Derrida calls it *aporia*) of constitution and self-deconstruction or implosion of the concept of hospitality.

Hospitality is a self-contradictory concept and experience which can only self-destruct (put otherwise, produce itself as impossible, only be possible on the condition of its impossibility) or protect itself from itself, auto-immunize itself in some way, which is to say, deconstruct itself – precisely – in being put into practice.⁵⁴

Derrida embarks on the unfolding of contradictions in which he always finds himself when trying to talk about hospitality or trying to thematise it phenomenologically, speculatively, theoretically or philosophically, and every time he also offers hospitality. On one hand, he recognizes the existence, presence and tendency of a culture of hospitality, which is about the willingness to accept, being apparent from the welcoming apparatus of every culture – Derrida even claims that no culture would be a culture if it were not a culture of hospitality. He concludes: “Hospitality therefore presupposes waiting, the horizon of awaiting and the preparation of welcoming: *from life to death*.”⁵⁵ On the other hand, hospitality also requires readiness for unpreparedness, readiness to be overwhelmed, surprised. If hospitality is offered out of habit, following a predisposition, according to character, then there is no merit for hospitality, nor there is any acceptance of the other as other. Even if hospitality is offered out of duty, we cannot talk about hospitality, as acceptance can only be performed without “having to,” only in this way it is possible to say “yes” to an absolutely unpredictable unknown.

Hospitality needs to be incomprehensible; it owes itself to be ungraspable, not only for the sake of maintaining its own openness, but also for the fact that each concept in hospitality opens its own opposite, thus establishing the same contradictory attitude of hospitality as it becomes hospitable to the other that ceases to be that. Thus, it is possible to realize how hospitality allows the exit from the classical dialectics of

⁵³ Derrida, “Hospitality,” 4.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁵ Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, 361.

negativity. “Hospitality – if there is any – must, would have to, open itself to an other that is not mine, my *hôte*, my other, not even my neighbor or my brother”.⁵⁶ With this kind of conceptualization, the concepts are established, or better, are highlighted from the ordinary order, therefore, the experience of hospitality can be labelled as a possibility of hospitality, as an experience of the impossible.

Hospitality – this is a name or an example of deconstruction. (...) Hospitality is the deconstruction of the at-home; deconstruction is hospitality to the other, to the other than oneself, the other than ‘its other,’ to an other who is beyond any ‘its other’.⁵⁷

Just as the other is shown beyond the otherness of something or someone, so is the ethics that is established beyond politics, but still within it.⁵⁸

We do not know what hospitality is. Not yet.

Not yet, but will we ever know? Is it a question of knowledge and of time?⁵⁹

Derrida connects such a contradictory declaration with achrony or basic anachronism, especially on the basis of the “not yet” statement, which suggests a different experience, another dimension of space and time. So, it is not that “we do not know what hospitality is,” as we will know it tomorrow or eventually, but it concerns some other “not yet” of other two reasons. The first one is that when we talk about the system of rights, international law, a political system (for example as Kant), which determines the conditions of hospitality, we talk about the ideal to which we strive, the regulatory idea that is the principle of cosmopolitics. The history of this declaration shows that we are not yet achieving this ideal, that is, the ideal that would be beyond the universal right of a European citizen, and we understand that it is to be sought in the future.

Another reason for the “not yet” understanding of hospitality is the dimension of the future of the latter: what is yet to come, what has been called to come, called with hospitality. Hospitality maintains the

⁵⁶ Ibid., 363.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 364.

⁵⁸ See Derrida, “Hospitality.”

⁵⁹ Ibid., 6.

essential relationship with what is open, with what has been called to come. According to Derrida,⁶⁰ we still do not know what hospitality is because we do not yet know who or what will arrive. The experience of hospitality comes from the future, from being present at the arrival, from the “not yet” crossing of the threshold: calling the other, inviting, enabling the arrival, good arrival, acceptance, greetings, mutual greetings as an expression of welcome. “What is called hospitality, which we do not yet know, is what is called.”⁶¹ Each call assumes the approach: with the welcome call we invite the newcomer to enter and finish his or her arrival, which means that the welcome call is also the act of naming the newcomer a guest.

It is the aporias that enable the experience of hospitality (and what can be denoted as paradoxical) and also establish the possibility of responsibility of hospitality, as hospitality would not even have the option of arriving and welcoming otherwise. At the beginning of one of the seminars on hospitality, Derrida questions whether it is possible to reach any conclusion in the discussion on hospitality without encountering any of the aporias, without actually thinking of “*the impossible*.”

It is though hospitality were the impossible, as though the law of hospitality defined this very impossibility, as if it were only possible to transgress it, as though *the* law of the absolute, unconditional, hyperbolic hospitality, as though the categorical imperative of hospitality commanded that we transgress all the laws (in the plural) of hospitality, namely, the conditions, the norms, the rights and the duties that are imposed on hosts and hostesses, on the men and women who give a welcome as well as the men and women who receive it. And vice versa, it is as though the laws (plural) of hospitality, in marking limits, powers, rights, and duties, consisted in challenging and transgressing the law of hospitality, the one that would command that the ‘new arrival’ be offered an unconditional welcome.⁶²

⁶⁰ Ibid., 11.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 75, 77.

The Desire for Unconditional Hospitality

In spite of uncertainties and open questions, however, Derrida clearly expresses his propensity for unconditional hospitality, which is supposed to be non-discriminatory not only for people, but for all beings and things, namely, everything that arises:

Let us say yes *to who or what turns up*, before any determination, before any anticipation, before any *identification*, whether or not it has to do with a foreigner, an immigrant, an invited guest, or an unexpected visitor, whether or not the new arrival is the citizen of another country, a human, animal, or divine creature, a living or dead thing, male or female.⁶³

Nevertheless, as long as hospitality is enabled on the basis of national laws, Derrida warns that it will always be limited. "Hospitality is due to the foreigner, certainly, but remains like the law, conditional, and thus conditioned in its dependence on the unconditionality that is the basis of the law."⁶⁴

"[H]ospitality is infinite or it is not at all; it is granted upon the welcoming of the idea of infinity, and thus of the unconditional," says Derrida.⁶⁵ He establishes that hospitality assumes "radical separation" as experience of the alterity of the other, as a relation to the other."⁶⁶ The possibilities of accepting the idea of infinity are named intentionality, perception, presumably demonstrated as attention to speech, a welcome to a new face, hospitality, but certainly not thematization. What is interesting is the opposite view, as Derrida notes that thematization, "*the impossible*" of hospitality, presupposes the latter, moreover, it also presupposes the welcome, the intentionality and the face. For intentionality, he claims, is conditioned precisely by accepting a face which we call hospitality. Regarding the mentioned reciprocity, the author calls for the clarification of hospitality through the phenomenology of intentionality, which nevertheless renounces thematization where necessary. Such a mutation, a paradoxical heterogeneity, was introduced

⁶³ Ibid., 77.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 71.

⁶⁵ Derrida, *Adieu*, 48.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 46.

into phenomenology by the ethics of hospitality. Without understanding the meaning of “interruption of the self” that is, the interruption of selfhood with selfhood as the other, one cannot understand hospitality, claims Derrida.⁶⁷

[I]ntentionality opens, from its own threshold, in its most general structure, as hospitality, as welcoming of the face, as an ethic of hospitality, and, thus, as ethics in general. For hospitality is not simply some region of ethics, let alone (...) the name of a problem in law or politics: it is ethicity itself, the whole and the principle of ethics.⁶⁸

The discourse of aporetics of hospitality either leads to the conclusion that hospitality is always conditioned, never unconditional, and thus not necessarily ethical, which justifies the abandonment of any persistence in the ethics of hospitality, or it presents a challenge for further discussion and exploration of the possibility of realizing exactly “*the impossible*,” the realization of unconditional hospitality which would lead to ethical coexistence.

If we do not know what hospitality is, it is because this thing which is not something is not an object of knowledge, nor in the mode of being-present, unless it is that of the law of the should-be or obligation, the law of hospitality, the imperative of which seems moreover contradictory or paradoxical.⁶⁹

In order to secure the future of humankind, the gesture of renouncing the absolute and the domination is necessary, a gesture that turns reason into hospitality. It is necessary to invent a different logic, to listen to other, different speeches, thoughts and actions. It must be ascertained how to communicate without destroying values, oneself or the other.

Is it not precisely the ethics of hospitality that enables learning while accepting the unknowable, the infinite, the incomprehensible? Is it really radical and hyperbolic because of its unconditionality? This seems to be the case until it is labelled as radical in a political sense, where unconditional hospitality implies an explicit threat to an individual and / or society, however, this threat is always only potential. And yes, the

⁶⁷ Ibid., 52.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 50.

⁶⁹ Derrida, “Hostipitality,” 10.

ethics of hospitality can be also named hyperbole, insofar as it strives to go beyond the existing limited definitions of hospitality, since it is possible through the aspiration to the “beyond,” away from the known, to accept and recognize transcendence. It is possible to say, that the ethics of hospitality has to be a hyperbole.

Hospitality, if there is such a thing, is not only an experience in the most enigmatic sense of the word, which appeals to an act and an intention beyond the thing, the object, or present being, but is also intentional experience which proceeds beyond knowledge toward the other as absolute stranger, as unknown, where I know that I know nothing of him (...). It is doubtless necessary to know all that can be known of hospitality, and there is much to know; it is certainly necessary to bring this knowledge to the highest and fullest consciousness possible, but it is also necessary to know that hospitality gives itself, and gives itself to thought beyond knowledge.⁷⁰

The Final Commitment to Hospitality

Even Derrida himself, after all, despite persisting in advocating “*the impossible*” perspective of hospitality, strives for the unconditional “yes.” One of the most expressive excerpts which especially intimately addresses the reader is the section where Derrida directly connects hospitality and ethics which are, in his words, basically inalienable, inseparable.

“To cultivate an ethic of hospitality” – is such an expression not tautologous? Despite all the tensions or contradictions which distinguish it, and despite all the perversions that can befall it, one cannot speak of cultivating an ethic of hospitality. Hospitality is culture itself and not simply one ethic amongst others. Insofar as it has to do with the *ethos*, that is, the residence, one’s home, the familiar place of dwelling, inasmuch as it is a manner of being there, the manner in which we relate to ourselves and to others, to others as our own or as foreigners, *ethics is hospitality*; ethics is so thoroughly coextensive with the experience of hospitality.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Ibid., 8.

⁷¹ Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism*, 16–17.

Ethics therefore is hospitality. From the aforementioned Derrida's reflection, one needs to emphasize the author's integration of ethics, hospitality and culture based on the fact that all three can be cultivated, or that all three of them are certainly cultivated already just by being, by existing. From this it can also be assumed that their existence as cultivation is foremost a certain tendency and activity that keeps them in constant movement, in breathing.

Ethical action, respect for the other as coexistence is always a kind of acceptance, affirmation, a welcome for the other. Thus, the hospitality that is an appropriate foundation for ethics can, according to Derrida even immanently, be perceived as a dynamic intersubjective relationship based on mutual acceptance and responsibility. The fact that this is a relationship between a guest and a host indicates the asymmetry of a hospitable relationship, which does not preclude its reciprocity and does not prove its unidirectionality. In a hospitable relationship the host does not assume all the responsibility for this relationship, responsibility is also assumed by the guest: it is the responsibility of accepting the hospitality offered.

Derrida undermines the ontological foundation of asylum which is known as being conditioned by state policies and thus achievable only in the pursuit of the established processes of identification and adaptation, assimilation. Doing so, he offers an opportunity to understand the importance of the desire to find ways for new foundations, which, arising from hospitality as "*the impossible*," would lead to diverse openings in search of new, ethical asylum policies, intentionally oriented toward welcoming, even unconditionally, of the unknown, the upcoming.

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