

CULTIVATING ACADEMIC IMAGINATION IN (AND THROUGH) HOSPITALITY

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Lugosi, P. (2016) Cultivating academic imagination in (and through) hospitality. *Hospitality and Society*, 6 (3), 217-221, DOI: 10.1386/hosp.6.3.217_2.

It is always pleasantly surprising to find inspiration in unexpected places. Working in multi-disciplinary areas, meeting with colleagues from different fields and appreciating the importance of listening has presented countless opportunities to find new ideas and to stretch my imagination regarding the limits of my interests. However, I am also repeatedly astonished by the boundaries that colleagues choose to impose on how they engage with other concepts, methods and people. Two recent events in particular reminded me of these performed boundaries: both involved academic mailing lists and similar patterns of behaviours.

In the first incident an early-career researcher posted a call for papers for the 2016 interdisciplinary Critical Hospitality Studies Symposium to a 'dark-tourism' mailing list (i.e. tourism activities and sites associated with suffering and/or death). Apparently a number of people unsubscribed from the list shortly after the call for papers was posted. Statisticians may warn us: correlations should not be taken as evidence of causation. Nevertheless, the list moderator announced to the remaining subscribers that he felt the post had 'no relevance whatsoever to the membership [of the group]' and 'consequently, [he had] removed [the poster's] membership from this list.'

In a similar incident, a well-established colleague announced a hospitality-focused seminar on a widely used tourism-centric mailing list. Another colleague, adopting a combative tone, challenged the appropriateness of publicising the event on an international tourism forum, whilst also questioning the connection to tourism more generally, stating that 'a link to the relevance of tourism would be in order, wouldn't it?'

Admittedly the symposium call for papers and the seminar abstract did not engage extensively with tourism (or dark tourism in the case of the former).¹ It is also possible to understand that in the first incident the moderator felt that the requests to unsubscribe threatened the sustainability of 'his list'. However, this list does not receive many postings – most often 1-2 conference calls in a month, and there are frequently months when no-one posts to the list. Unlike other mailing lists, there are usually no exchanges or extended debates on this forum. One may question the intellectual commitment of people to the subject area and the 'community' if they disengaged with the (relatively quiet) forum after just one conference post. Nevertheless, both these incidents raised similar and more fundamental questions: why ask these questions or raise objections, and why do it in these ways?

¹ Ong's review of the Symposium in this issue of *Hospitality and Society* summarises the themes in the call for papers.

In both cases some colleagues felt compelled to challenge what seemed to be unnecessarily aggressive assertions of intellectual territoriality. Subsequent posts to the lists questioned the dismissiveness of the original responses, and the boundaries exhibited by some of the colleagues. In the dark-tourism case, the moderator's reaction actually provoked some lively debate on the forum and prompted at least one member to register for the Symposium because the incident helped him to connect his work to dark tourism and hospitality. Ong reviews the Critical Hospitality Studies Symposium in this issue of *Hospitality & Society*.

Importantly, apart from highlighting the inherent masculinity in how some colleagues felt they needed to perform academia and academic debate, these hostile reactions also pointed to some colleagues' unwillingness or inability to appreciate new and seemingly disruptive perspectives within 'their' field. It was pointed out to the moderator in the first incident that the previous issue of *Hospitality & Society* contained a paper entitled 'Dark hospitality', which was concerned with people who choose to end their lives in hotels (Hay, 2015). Dark tourism themes were also explored in Wilson's (2016) study of post-disaster hospitality in Christchurch, which can also be found in this journal. We cannot expect colleagues to be familiar with all the new literature in a rapidly growing field, but there are some points of reflection regarding how we choose to enact or perform academia, and also how we react to what may at first seem disruptive or not directly relevant. This brings me back to my opening point regarding the value of inspiration found in unusual places

In December 2015 I attended a talk by a representative of the Disney Corporation. Regardless of the critical attitudes that some commentators adopt towards 'McDisneyization' or Disney as a cultural institution (cf. Bryman 1999; Holbrook 2001; Ritzer and Liska 1997), the experience offered several stimulating ideas that are pertinent to our academic practices. The speaker discussed techniques they used to help foster innovation and creativity. He made participants play out two conversational scenarios, which involved different linguistic practices. Working in twos, one of the pairs had to pitch fictional project ideas to their partner. In the first scenario, the partner was instructed to always begin her or his response with 'No, because...'. In the second scenario they repeated the exercise, but the partner was instructed to always begin their responses with the words 'Yes, and...'. The first approach curtailed, challenged and attempted to redirect the conversation as the 'listener' sought to impose their worldviews. The second approach sought to embrace the suggestions; and, more importantly, encouraged the partner to enhance points by adding to them.

This simple linguistic exercise provided, for me at least, some thought-provoking points of reflection concerning how as colleagues we receive and 'accommodate' new, unconventional ideas. The willingness to open up to the 'strange' outsider, to welcome something that may seem disruptive, in this case, seemingly 'foreign' thinking, reflect key principles of hospitality. Academia is often enacted (and encountered) as inhospitable attempts at asserting distinction, territory and superiority (cf. Lugosi 2009; Phipps and Barnett 2007; Skokic, Lynch and Morrison 2016;). Opening up and accepting risk does not mean we stop expecting something from new, challenging concepts. Just like the realities of hospitality, new ideas are not to be embraced unconditionally. Nor should this mean colleagues stop scrutinising – abandoning practices of questioning in favour of politeness. Nevertheless, these experiences should challenge us to reflect critically on how we 'do' academia – as respectful, dialogic practice. The desire to (re)create academia through constructive acts of accommodation can be thought of as one of the defining characteristics

of this journal. This is a hospitable academic space, enacted by the authors, editors, reviewers and the readers. The challenges associated with strange encounters (or encounters with strangeness), and the willingness to welcome difference repeatedly emerge within our pages. Importantly, however, rather than treating these as inherent threats, we are challenged to receive them as opportunities to confront the extraordinary, imagine the possibilities and to enrich through creative incorporation.

In the current issue, Heimtun takes us on a journey exploring the experiences of guides leading Northern Lights tours in Norway. The Northern Lights, like provocative ideas, have the capacity to stimulate, inspire and create awe. But the lights can also be elusive: their presence and appearance are determined 'atmospheric' conditions outside of human control. Tourist-guests arriving in this inhospitable landscape with unrealistic expectations, and those unwilling to endure the hardships associated with experiencing the Northern Lights can be left disappointed. Heimtun explores the diverse interactional challenges and performative routines of the 'host' guides who have to negotiate the inherent unpredictability and ambiguity surrounding the experience. In doing so she helps us comprehend the complex dimensions of emotional labour required for acts of host(ess)ing, whilst also helping the readers appreciate the different forms of human and non-human agency entangled in experiences of nature.

The ethics of uneasy encounters with the strange (non-human) 'other' are also themes in Kakoliris's discussion of Derrida and D. H. Lawrence's poem 'Snake'. In the poem, a man encounters a snake at a watering hole, which provokes him to assess whether the creature is a threat. Eventually the man throws a piece of wood at the snake, but is then filled with a mixture of admiration for the creature, guilt prompted by his inhospitality, and self-doubt because he did not have the strength of character to kill the animal, despite his fearful instincts. Kakoliris, like Derrida (2009) before him, deconstructs the poem to reveal the provocative questions it raises for our encounters with the world, particularly the non-human: i.e. animals, plants etc. Their discussions posit that we are acculturated to fear the strange other and to assert our property rights through masculine acts of aggression. Yet, the ethics and enactments of hospitality challenge us to resist hostility and contemplate surrendering our notions of self-interest, our instincts of fear and our engrained need to dominate in such encounters. Moreover, the literary explorations of hospitality themes provoke us to redefine our value systems in extending hospitality beyond our human encounters. Again, the notions of hospitality explored by Kakoliris and Derrida encourage broader reflection on our (learned) attitudes and behaviours towards the world around us.

Strange encounters and the entanglements of human and non-human interactions are also themes in Byrne's research on the role of food-related practices in residential centres in Ireland. For Byrne, the table has numerous metaphorical and practical functions in the lives of children housed in residential accommodation. Commensal rhythms and rituals help to enact notions of safety, 'normalcy' and care; the table is also a mutual place of sociality. However, an alternative reading is of food and eating practices, at and around the table, as forms of disciplining. As Lugosi (2014) notes, organisations often use food and hospitality-related practices to enchant, inscribe and potentially to control. Byrne highlights the inherent tensions in hospitality and food-related practices: they are simultaneously reifications of care, which strive to provide wellbeing, but they are also everyday enactments of state attempts to discipline and create, in Byrne's words, 'healthy, socially skilled citizens'. Importantly, Byrne's work also recognises children's agency as they resist

attempts to ascribe status and exercise power through their interpretation and selective (dis)engagement with food and eating practices.

If we are able to cultivate imagination, the strange encounters in our academic and non-academic lives continue to reveal the varied instructiveness of hospitality: exploring it drives us to better understand the ethics and implications of broader social practices, including socially embedded and often problematic assertions of power. More importantly, a willingness to open up to hospitality, with all its risks, helps us to challenge culturally fermented assumptions regarding human and non-human 'others'. The growing literature attests to the desire, among some academics at least, to explore the concept of hospitality creatively. However, it remains to be seen how many of our colleagues are willing (or perhaps even able) to be hospitable when encountering new, potentially disruptive forms of inspiration.

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