



ON CULTURAL SELF-REFLECTION
THINKING THROUGH DERRIDA'S GIFT OF HOSPITALITY

TIMMY GRIMBERG

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
IN PHILOSOPHY

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION
ASSUMPTION UNIVERSITY OF THAILAND

JULY 2014

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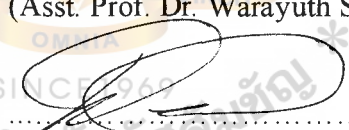


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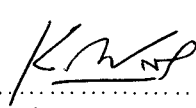
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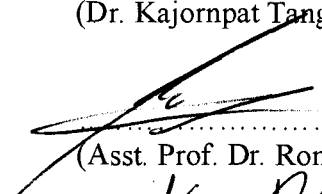
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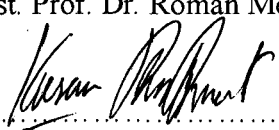
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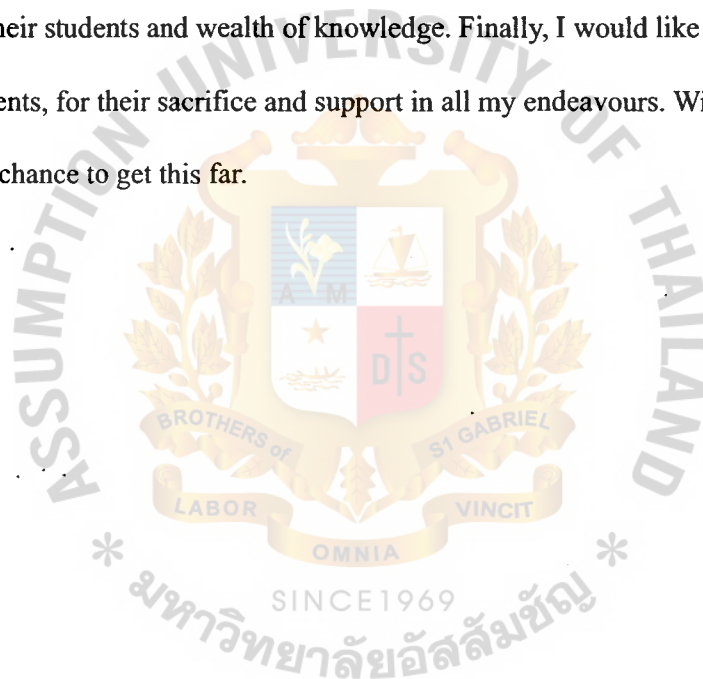
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Abstract

This paper examines questions regarding cultural identity through Derrida's deconstruction of hospitality and the gift. It will follow Caputo's unexamined claim of hospitality as having to become a 'gift beyond hospitality' to allow for a welcome of difference. First, this paper will examine Derrida's deconstruction of the concept of hospitality, and then it will link it to his deconstruction of the gift. Finally, it will try to see them in the context of cultural identity and examine implications for the upcoming ASEAN community which tries to promote itself as a community of diverse cultural differences..



Contents

	Page
Acknowledgement	ii
Abstract	iii
Contents	iv
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1: UNGROUNDED IN DIFFERENCE	
1.1: Language is Difference	3
1.3: Thinking Through <i>Differance</i>	5
1.4: Differance as Self-Interruption	13
CHAPTER 2: WELCOMING THE OTHER	
2.1: Kant's Hospitality	17
2.2: Kant's Categorical Imperative	21
2.3: Levinas, Alterity and the Other	23
2.4: Derrida's Ethics of Hospitality	26
CHAPTER 3: THE GIFT AND THE OTHER	
3.1: Hospitality as Gift	33
3.2: Mauss: Economics of Exchange	34
3.3: The Gift and the Movement of General Economy	37
3.4: Derrida on Bataille	41
3.5: Interrupting Economy: Derrida and the Gift	44
CHAPTER 4: HOSPITALITY, GIFT and CULTURAL IDENTITY	49
4.1: ASEAN Cultural Diversity	50

4.2 Summary	53
References	56
Autobiography	59



INTRODUCTION

To push against the boundaries of identity thinking ideas of hospitality and the gift have to be thought together in a welcome of cultural differences into ones life. Thus, for hospitality to truly happen the self has to engage in questions of cultural identity regarding oneself and others. How do we deal with cultural others? How can they inform a more open-ended exchange of identities? And how much are we to call into question the grounds of our own cultural identities?

The researchers investigation will be based upon John Caputo's claim that Derrida's deconstruction of hospitality really happens when it becomes "a gift beyond hospitality". Its main objective is to make sense of this claim by investigating the two corresponding concepts in it; that is, the concepts of hospitality as well as the gift. Neither Derrida nor Caputo have investigated this correspondence themselves. Furthermore, this research will relate the synthesis of both concepts to a deconstructive understanding of identity, as an identity which suspends itself to become more hospitable towards difference.

The first chapter will lay the foundations for understanding deconstruction and *differance* and how they imply a thinking of difference, or rather thinking through difference which is a thinking of the other. Here Derrida's earlier work on *differance* will allow for an understanding of his challenge to dualistic thinking, and how thinking influenced by Western metaphysics led to a marginalization of difference. This type of challenge reflects itself in his later ethical works in the notions of hospitality and gift.

Thus, the second chapter will investigate the concept of hospitality and how it is being deconstructed by Derrida. The researcher will point to Derrida's reference to *epoche* as self-interruption and how it implies a suspension of subjectivity which allows for an opening up of host and guest relations in movements of hospitality. Furthermore, Kant's categorical imperative will be discussed in its relation to unconditional hospitality, which Derrida proposes as a categorical imperative as such.

The third chapter will explore the concept of the gift and how Derrida deconstructs it to achieve another suspension of subjectivity. It will show that a gift, when deconstructed, resists demands of giving and taking by putting into question the self and its relations to others. This double suspension through gift and hospitality will give deeper meaning to Caputo's claim of hospitality as having to become a gift beyond hospitality.

Finally, this research will conclude in an understanding that the exchange of identities and cultural can be achieved through a deconstruction of the self. A deconstructed self suspends its own relation to itself and hence allows for a welcome of difference.

CHAPTER 1: UNGROUNDED IN DIFFERENCE

This chapter will give an account of Derrida's earlier philosophical project by explicating his concept or rather non-concept¹ of *différance* and how Derrida understood it to be a challenge to dualistic modes of thinking. This will lay the foundations to comprehending *différance* in its later ethical dimensions as found in his works on hospitality and the gift.

1.1 Language is Difference

Saussurian linguistics marks an important point of development in the thinking of Derrida. His work theorizes linguistic differences, that is, language as a system of difference. Ferdinand de Saussure was a Swiss 19th century linguist whose 'structural linguistics' presents a key moment in the development of structuralism and the subsequent poststructuralism. As a linguist, he made an important contribution to the 'linguistic turn' in philosophy, psychoanalysis (through Lacan), and semiotics.

For Saussure any linguistic system is made up of a signifier (word, sound) and signified (concept). John Sturrock explains:

"Saussure analysed the sign into its two components: a sound or acoustic component which he called *signifier* (*signifiant* in French), and a mental or conceptual component which he called the *signified* (*signifie*). [...] The signified is not a thing but the notion of a thing, what comes into the mind of the speaker or hearer when the appropriate signifier is uttered. The signifier thus constitutes the material aspect of language. [...] The signified is the mental aspect of language which we often deem to be immaterial, even though it is certain that within the brain a signified is also a neutral event. [...] no concept can be said to exist unless it has found expression, that is to say, been materialized, either inwardly as a thought or outwardly in speech - there can be no signified without signifier." (Sturrock, 1979, p.6)

¹ see page 11

Any linguistic sign is thus a combination of its material part, that is, a sound or visual element which is connected to a concept that makes it meaningful. Yet, he explains that linguistic signs are essentially arbitrary, that is, the link that connects a signifier to what it signifies is only conventional. As such, that a *tree* might be called so is not something inscribed in nature itself, but rather different linguistic systems might refer to the same thing under a different signifier (Germans would refer to a tree as *Baum*). The level of the signified is also one of arbitrariness. We are most likely to see this in works of translation where one language consists of different concepts that cannot be easily translated and explained into another. John Sturrock explains that

“there is nothing essential or self-contained about a given word; the word ‘rock’, let us take. That occupies a certain space, both phonetically and semantically. Phonetically it can only be defined by establishing what the limits of that space are: where the boundaries lie if it crosses which it changed from being the word ‘rock’ to being a different sign of the language – ‘ruck’, for instance, or ‘wreck’, which abut on it acoustically. Semantically, we can only delimit the meaning of the signifier ‘rock’ by differentiating it from other signs which abut on it semantically, such as ‘stone’, ‘boulder’, ‘cliff’. In short, without difference there can be no meaning.” (Sturrock, 1979, p. 10)

What we understand here is that signification always depends on difference. In fact, there cannot be meaning without difference. The word or concept ‘rock’ can never exist in itself, but it rather only becomes meaningful if it can be contrasted to something which is *not* a rock. A rock can only be a rock because it *is not* a tree, *not* a car, *not* a mountain etc. Again, the presence of a rock or word or concept is only possible through the absences which it suppresses. It is linguistic systems which enable and limit our understanding of the world. The important point is that, if our existence is made up of phenomenological and linguistic differences, how can self-contained and universalizing philosophical systems become possible? If there is only difference, then how

can philosophical thinking center around a metaphysical presence which marginalizes what is different, but yet is constituted by it?

1.2 Thinking Through *Différance*

German philosopher Martin Heidegger's tried to understand life out of life itself. As a critique of the subject-object dualism of Western metaphysics Heidegger developed his 'fundamental ontology'. Until Heidegger, metaphysics' enquired into the being of entities, yet what eluded it was the much more fundamental question of 'what is the being of the being that asks the question of being?'. How is it possible that we have any understanding at all? Again, for traditional metaphysics the question regarding the being of entities, as in Descartes, was that of finding ways to guarantee that our mental representations (ideas) which are differentiated with independent substantial reality (world of objects) are accurate (Hall, 1993, p. 129). It is through his fundamental ontology that Heidegger tried to challenge the subject-object divide between human beings and their ideas against the outside world.

Hence, another important aspect of Being is what Heidegger explains as 'understanding'. The idea of 'understanding' is closely related to the very existential notion of our 'thrownness' (*Geworfenheit*) into the world. We are born, that is, thrown into a world of culture which we merely inherited, yet cannot escape. Understanding is the choice among several possibilities we have when we project ourselves towards the future. These choices are, of course, culturally determined which is what Heidegger calls the facticity of *Dasein* (Hall, 1998, p. 137). Now being born into certain cultural circumstances has implications for the way we deal with our lives. Most people live their lives according to the ground that has been given by their

respective cultures. Whether one is German, American or Chinese the meaning of your existence is determined by your thrownness into a particular group and situations.

Heidegger here contents a further notion of the authenticity or inauthenticity of life. In order to live an authentic life one has to realize that the basic sense of ourselves and the world is ultimately groundless. By realizing that there are other worldviews or ways of being-in-the-world which make as much sense to others as mine to me, all understanding and projection loses its ultimate validity (Hall, 1998, p, 138). Yet, most people are incapable of accepting the groundlessness of existence. Their life projects become merely based on public decisions. There is no self-reflection and stepping back from the circumstances of ones existence. The inauthentic *Dasein* lives a public life that never questions itself and tries to seek only its own possibilities. This important aspect has to be kept in mind since Derrida's deconstruction of hospitality and gift can lead the self to a more self questioning way of living to undermine a misrepresentative approach to other cultures. Derrida's critique of Western metaphysics goes as follows:

“The history of metaphysics ... is the determination of Being as *presence* in all senses of this word. It could be shown that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated an invariable presence – *eidos*, *arche*, *telos*, *energeia*, *ousia* (essence, existence, substance, subject) *aletheia*, transcendentality, consciousness, God, man, and so forth.” (Derrida, 1978, p. 353)

Deconstruction serves as a critique of 'logocentrism', 'metaphysics of presence' or 'transcendental signifiers'. These universalizing signs are founded upon the suppression of marginalized ideas. Derrida's philosophy is one that deals with the structurality of language, hence the relation to Saussure. What he tries to uncover is how linguistically traditional philosophy has been built around certain structures of domination and then tries to give space the marginalized voices inherent in texts. His essay *Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the*

Human Sciences is probably one of his important theoretical works explaining his deconstructive project. In the mentioned essay he writes regarding the structure of the episteme of Western metaphysics:

“Nevertheless, up to the event which I wish to mark out and define, structure – or rather the structurality of structure – although it has always been at work, has always been neutralized or reduced, and this by a process giving it a center or of referring it to a point of presence, a fixed origin. The function of the center was not only to orient, balance, and organize the structure ... but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the *play* of the structure ... And even today the notion of a structure lacking any center represents the unthinkable itself” (Derrida, 1978, p. 352)

Traditional metaphysics has been developed upon the idea of a center which organizes the structure of knowledge. In Plato we can find this center most obviously in his ‘Theory of Forms’. The Form of the Good is the ultimate reality of life from which everything becomes meaningful and against which everything has to be defined. Therefore, it was the philosophers duty that his rational enquiry establishes ultimate truths, e.g. Justice, Beauty etc. This type of thinking cannot appreciate the diversity of perception and understanding. Rather, it seeks to marginalize and oppress differing views. Yet, for Derrida, neither one ought to become a center and structure of domination, a full Presence established on an unchallenged Truth. He further writes:

“The concept of the centered structure is in fact the concept of a play based on a fundamental ground, a play constituted on the basis of a fundamental mobility and a reassuring certitude, which itself is beyond the reach of play. And on the basis of this certitude anxiety can be mastered, for anxiety is invariably the result of a certain mode of being implicated in the game ...” (Derrida, 1978, p. 352).

What is important about the centered structure is that it gives assurance of truth and that it is a form of trying to master or even avoid anxiety. Anxiety is the mood par excellence which leads

one to the realization of the groundlessness of existence, and that there is in fact nothing which essentially has to dominate ones own being in the world and that there is no certainty.

This helps us to a better understanding of what *différance* will be trying to attempt.

Sturrock clarifies:

“Again, Derrida’s celebrated ‘deconstructions’ of the philosophical and other writings he has analysed, in which he brings to light the internal contradictions in seemingly perfectly coherent systems of thought, constitute a powerful attack on ordinary notions of authorship, identity, and selfhood, since they are a demonstration that, even when it is being used most consciously, language has power we cannot control.” (Sturrock, 1979, p. 14)

At the heart of deconstruction lies an attempt to unsettle philosophical or any sort of concepts by unravelling inherent linguistic and structural contradictions. As Sturrock explains, these are an attack on identity and selfhood. Deconstructed identity moves away from its stable foundations and ideas towards instability and tension. The meaning of concepts and identities as being fully present is suspended. Following Saussure’s line of thought any linguistic sign exists through purely relational differences, without overarching transcendental signification. Identity, becomes the unstable ground of difference and tension.

Différance which Derrida claims is “neither a *word* nor a *concept*” (Derrida, 1982, p.3), emphasizes a movement that resists the closures of identity and opens up a space for differences and the other. It creates a sense of uncertainty and undecidability which revolves around an aporetic thinking of the future. Yet, what does it mean for something to be aporetic? A literal translation of the noun *aporos* traces it back to Greek where it is constituted by the words ‘*a*’, meaning ‘without’ and ‘*poros*’ which means ‘passage’, hence meaning ‘without passage’. An *aporia* is often understood as “an irresolvable internal contradiction or logical disjunction in a

text, argument, or theory” (Oxford dictionary online). Michael Anker, in his *Aporetic Openings*, points us towards a further sense of the aporia. He explains the difference between two Greek words for ‘way’ and ‘passage’, *Odos* and *Poros*:

“The initial difference here shows itself to us by way of metaphor. *Odos*, as road or path, is created and paved on the stable ground of earth, while *poros* makes its way, its passage, through the instability of the moving waters. *Odos* paves its way on stable ground while *poros* makes its passage in the midst of the chaotic and unknown movements of the river or sea. As we can sense, *poros* makes a route or direction from within the ungrounded movement of continuous change. In this sense, *poros* creates a sense of temporary stability out of the context of instability, a sense of temporary order in the midst of disorder.” (Anker, 2006, p. 37)

This metaphor is quite illuminating. The non-passage and tension of the aporia is grounded on the instability of the *poros*. An aporia even further intensifies the chaos and dramatic movements of the sea. Not only is an aporia grounded on an unstable ground of the *poros*, the chaotic movements of the sea, which provide no clear direction in the struggle to navigate and make ones way towards the future, but more so, it is itself an internal contradiction and tension. In deconstructive terms, the aporia is the uncertainty of the signified as it makes its way through the rough seas of signifiers. Going through an aporia demands a certain openness for the unknown, for that which cannot be anticipated. Derrida explains the aporetic value of *différance* as

“a relation to what is to other, to what differs in the sense of alterity, and therefore to alterity, to the singularity of the other - *différance* also relates, and for this very reason, to what comes, to what happens in a way that is at one and the same time inappropriable, unexpected, and therefore urgent, unanticipatable: precipitation itself. The thinking of *différance* is therefore also a thinking of urgency, of what I can neither evade nor appropriate because it is other. The event, the singularity of the event, that’s what *différance* is all about.” (Derrida, 2007, p. 10)

Différance deals with the 'coming of the other'. It is the host who welcomes whoever or whatever may arrive.

If, as Derrida claims, *différance* is "neither word nor concept", then how are to understand it? Considering that it deals with a 'welcoming of the other', I find it more correct to understand *différance* not as an *is*, since that is what Derrida tried to escape, but rather as a *does*, a certain way of thinking, a *doing thinking*, which is grounded in the ethos of existence. In his essay *Différance*, Derrida refers to it as a "sameness which is not identical" (Derrida, 1982, p. 1) He explains:

"The verb 'to differ' [différer] seems to differ from itself. On the one hand, it indicates difference as distinction, inequality, or discernibility; on the other, it expresses the interposition of delay, the interval of a *spacing* and *temporalizing* that puts off until 'later' what is presently denied, the possible that is presently impossible. Sometimes the *different* and sometimes the *deferred* correspond [in French] to the verb 'to differ'" (Derrida, 1982, p.1).

The term *différance*, which differs from difference through an 'a' has yet the same pronunciation. Though different, in spoken language (French) they remain undifferentiated and impossible to differentiate. Not only does this term refer to the verb 'to differ' which, as he explains, implies difference and distinction, but it also refers to and is distinguished from the word 'to defer', which expresses delay. Now the application of the term *différance*, since it implies two differing and deferring conceptions remains tricky. Whenever we talk about *différance* as differing it differs from its sense of deferring while at the same time deferring the sense of deferment through difference. But if we talk about *différance* in the sense of deferring, we are deferring the differing difference. That is what he means by "that puts off until 'later' what is presently denied, the possible that is presently impossible." The two senses of *différance* always already exclude

and delay the other, yet they are inseparable. One of the terms will always be allowed to take on the center, or to become present (hence ‘logocentrism’, and ‘metaphysics of presence’), while suppressing the sense of the other, which remains absent and marginalized. To understand this is of crucial importance for our understanding of his work on ‘hospitality’ and how the ‘possible impossibility’ of marginalized otherness influences our ethical being-in-the-world. Another important sense which derives from *différance* is that of its non-identity. *Différance* is non-identical because it can never fully refer back to itself. It is never fully present, thus *différance* constitutes its very non-identity.

What is it that makes *différance*, this seemingly groundless always already shifting term so important for a philosophy of *différance* and its ethical implications on hospitality? Derrida writes:

“In the delineation of *différance* everything is strategic and adventurous. Strategic because no transcendent truth present outside the field of writing can govern theologically the totality of the field. Adventurous because this strategy is not a simple strategy in the sense that strategy orients tactics according to a final goal, a *telos* or theme of domination, a mastery and ultimate reappropriation of the development of the field. Finally, a strategy without finality [...]” (Derrida, 1982, p. 7).

Différance is a ‘strategy without finality’ which neither seeks a goal, a direction, nor tries to master the world or the other. Being without finality implies a certain openness towards what is to come. That means that whatever may come, may come the way it presents itself without being subordinated to a self struggling for certainty. As such, *différance* presents a radicalization of Heidegger’s project. Nevertheless, Derrida writes:

“Before being so radically and purposely the gesture of Heidegger, this gesture was also made by Nietzsche and Freud, both of whom, as is well known, and sometimes in very similar fashion, put consciousness into question in its assured certainty of itself.” (Derrida, 1982, p. 17).

Certainty is put to rest when thought is without finality. Different forces, a *différance* of forces, is allowed to come into play and unsettle notions that were taken for granted. Presences, when they are focused on, turn out to always be inhabited by absences. This is the lesson from *différance*, in which either difference or deferment always inhabit each other, yet they can never be thought together.

The aporetics of *différance* which deconstruct signs and concepts we take for granted, allow for an incoming of the suppressed other. *Différance* is a *thinking of the welcome*. It is an experience in which we set out for the other and experience the event of its arrival. Derrida writes that “the coming of the event is what we cannot and must never prevent, another name for future itself.” (Derrida, 1982, p. 11). *Différance* opens the doors of a future which is yet to be known. He further explains:

“If there were a horizon of expectation, if there were anticipation or programming, there would be neither event nor history.[...] In order for there to be event and history, there must be a ‘come’ that opens and addresses itself to someone, to someone else that I cannot and must not determine in advance, not as a subject, self, consciousness, nor even as animal, god, or person, man or woman, living or nonliving thing.”(Derrida, 1982, p. 11)

The other that is to come must enter from outside of our horizon of expectation. It must, in other words, enter from a realm of absences which has been hitherto denied or not yet existed within our consciousness. They must be “the possible that is presently impossible” (Derrida, 1982, p.1), a possible impossibility. The impossible is that which is presently denied, yet its possible is its possibility of arrival. This does not suggest that one should completely abandon any anticipation

and programmatization of future arrivals, if such a thing is even possible in the first place, but that there must remain a certain openness and pressure towards the unknown.

1.3 Différance as Self-Interruption

Another important influence on Derrida was the phenomenology of German philosopher Edmund Husserl. In an interview named “Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility”, Derrida explains his relation to Husserlian phenomenology, particularly to what is called *epoche*:

“Is it possible to interrupt yourself? That is what undecidability means and that is what my relation to Husserl is founded on, self-interruption. Levinas meant by this that it is in order to describe the things in themselves that we have to abandon the principle of intuition; [...] That is what is meant by self-interruption, which is another name for *différance*. Just as there would be no responsibility or decision without some self-interruption, neither would there be any hospitality; as master and host, the self, in welcoming the other, must interrupt or divide himself or herself. This division is the condition of hospitality.” (Derrida, 1999, p. 81)

It becomes clear that to further understand *différance* and how it influenced Derrida’s deconstruction of hospitality, we need to explicate Husserlian phenomenology.

For Derrida, *epoche* is the most important phenomenological influence on his thinking. Yet, what does it mean for *epoche* to be an act of self-interruption? And why does one need to interrupt him- (or her-)self? Here we have to distinguish between two types of attitudes that are emphasized in Husserlian phenomenology. The first attitude is the so called ‘natural attitude’. In daily living we stand in relation to things, situations or facts in the world around us. We ‘intend’ these, that is we directly engage them in several ways. This natural attitude might be described as a default perspective from which we start off in our worldly engagements. For example, we

might be giving water to plants in a garden. There we would be found to be caught up in a particular activity which is not being questioned. This is a state of immediate experience and relation. However, there is a second attitude which lifts itself above the viewpoints of ordinary life. Robert Sokolowski explains:

“But the phenomenological attitude is not like any of these. It is more radical and comprehensive. [...] The shift into the phenomenological attitude, however, is an ‘all or nothing’ kind of move, that disengages completely from the natural and focuses, in a reflective way, on everything in the natural attitude[...].” (Sokolowski, 2008, p. 47)

The phenomenological attitude is a suspension of our engagements with the world on level of consciousness. We move a step backwards, and contemplate our relation to the world and its manifestations, or rather, how they manifest themselves to us. This neutralization or suspension of our engagements which we now contemplate is called *epoche*. Sokolowski further writes: “When we enter into the phenomenological attitude, we suspend our beliefs, and we *bracket* the world and all the things in the world. We put the world and the things in it ‘into brackets’ or ‘into parenthesis.’” (Sokolowski, 2008, p. 49). *Epoche* is a contemplative attitude towards ourselves and the relation to the world, that is, we start looking *at*, what we normally look *through* (Sokolowski, 2008, p. 50). For Derrida, the phenomenological attitude or *epoche*, is of great importance for *différance* and hospitality. It allows us to scrutinize and critically self-reflect on our own commitments with the world. We interrupt ourselves, and thereby open ourselves up for something new to come. Understanding deconstruction as self-interruption will be crucial for a self-reflective ethos of hospitality and the gift.

It also is important to understand that for Derrida philosophy moves on two unstable grounds. Conceptual significations which we use to make sense of the world are inherently aporetic, that is, signifiers, as well as signifieds always stand in relation to difference and deferment. Bringing in Husserl gives Derrida's linguistics an ontological edge. From Husserl Derrida takes *epoche* as a possibility of self-interruption. We shift above our daily immediate engagements with the world and start contemplating and reflecting on these. This sort of contemplation allows for a critical openness towards the new. The theoretical background covered so far should thus give us a deeper understanding of deconstruction as a way, or rather non-way, which opens up a possibility of self-reflection. Hospitality, which will be explained in the next chapter, will have to be understood as an opening for cultural difference.



CHAPTER 2 - WELCOMING THE OTHER

In this chapter I will follow the thoughts of different thinkers that wrote in regards to hospitality and will end with Derrida's deconstruction of hospitality. This should bring us to a closer understanding hospitality but also on what deconstruction does and how it informs a new form of self-reflection and understanding, which I regard as necessary for life in a world of cultural difference.

John Caputo commenting on Derrida writes that "If you were intent on making deconstruction look respectable, it would not be a distortion to say that deconstruction is to be understood as a form of hospitality, that deconstruction *is* hospitality, which means the welcoming of the other." (Caputo, 1997, p. 109-110). To deconstruct thus means to open the doors of ones house, to welcome and allow entry to the stranger, that is, to make the stranger into a guest. Then what does it mean to deconstruct hospitality? Caputo explains: "The word 'hospitality' means to invite the 'stranger' (l'étranger), both on the personal level - how do I welcome the other into my home? - and on the level of the state - raising socio-political questions about refugees, immigrants, 'foreign' languages, minority ethnics groups, etc." (Caputo, 1997, p. 110)

The first part of this chapter will give an explanation of Immanuel Kant's understanding of hospitality and cosmopolitanism through his essay *Perpetual Peace*. This will allow us for a closer understanding of the socio-political level of hospitality and its questions regarding 'laws of the welcome'. Furthermore, we will also need to give an explanation of Kant's deontological ethics and how Derrida applies a categorical imperative to hospitality. The second part of this

chapter will deal with Levinas and his notion of ‘the Other’ and alterity, which will give us a grounding in understanding the personal level of hospitality.

Finally, the last part will then discuss Derrida’s writings on hospitality itself. How did he deconstruct it and how are we to understand it? This personal level of hospitality is the main focus of my research in general and will answer questions regarding identity and self-reflection when we encounter cultural others.

2.1 Kant’s Hospitality

The current chapter will work upon an understanding of deconstruction as hospitality. This is a crucial step for it allows us to grasp deconstruction on an ethical level with actual bearing on everyday life. Caputo distinguishes between two different levels of hospitality. The second one, the level of the state, is the one which will be discussed through Immanuel Kant’s writing on *Perpetual Peace*, which he links to what he calls ‘the right to hospitality’. There he establishes a connection between hospitality, cosmopolitanism and international law.

Kleingeld writes regarding Kant’s understanding of cosmopolitan right:

“He stresses that this is limited to a ‘right to hospitality.’ This term is easily misunderstood as meaning the right to be a guest. What Kant actually means is merely the right to present oneself and initiate contact with a foreign individual or state without being treated with hostility or violence. It remains the right of the visited party, however, to deny visitors entry, as long as this can be done without causing their death.” (Kleingeld, 2006, p. xx)

Why is cosmopolitan right important to Kant? In *Perpetual Peace* Kant theorizes the possibility of forming international relations, that is, relations between different states that would lead to a never-ending state of peace. He writes that: “For *peace* signifies the end to all hostilities, and

even merely adding the adjective *perpetual* to the term renders it a suspicious looking neoplasm.” (Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, 8:344) The Kantian project on hospitality is to be understood in legal terms that regulate the relation of host and guest. For him it is a ‘right’ of the stranger or *arrivant* to be treated according to certain conditions which guarantee his safety and exclude the application of violence. In the ‘Third Definitive Article Of Perpetual Peace’ he writes that ‘Cosmopolitan Right Shall Be Limited To The Conditions of Universal Hospitality’. He explains:

“[...] hospitality (a host’s conduct to his guest) means the right of the stranger not to be treated in a hostile manner by another upon his arrival on the other’s territory. If it can be done without causing his death, the stranger can be turned away, yet as long as the stranger behaves peacefully where he happens to be, his host may not treat him with hostility.” (Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, 8:358)

Hospitality in this sense is regarded as a form of preventing hostility by death through right. Strangers can move freely to different territories, that is, countries or nation-states which they are not natives of as long as the host’s grant them that right. This right is called ‘the right to visit’ (German: *Besuchsrecht*). As mentioned by Kant himself it links to an idea of laws governing territoriality, thus the ideas of ownership and property. What does he base the right to visit upon? It is a right

“to which all human beings have a claim, to present oneself to society by virtue of the right to common possession of the surface of the earth. Since it is the surface of a sphere, they cannot scatter themselves on it without limit, but they must rather ultimately tolerate one another as neighbors, and originally no one has more of a right to be at a given place on earth than anyone else.” Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, 8:358)

Visitation is a right that is given through ‘common possession of the surface of the earth’. The earth is a universal territory that belongs to all, but which is, of course, limited physically, hence

one should not be threatened when one is moving through different territories. In contemporary terms the idea of the surface of the earth as being a common possession can still be seen as an ideal which has not yet been achieved. Laws regulating the movements of people in this globalized world still seem tight, though slowly easing. For example, the right to visit a country is still dominated by concepts of identity and nation. Someone coming from Asia who wants to travel to Europe will face visa regulations that only allow entering a certain country under certain conditions. If the conditions proposed by the hosting country are not met, for example the financial situation of the visiting applicant, the right to visitation can be denied. Despite this, other examples of an opening up of territorial right can be countries that joined the European Union (EU). According to the Schengen treaty, citizens of countries that signed this treaty can move around freely without having to show their identities. According to law, they can even emigrate to other countries, settle down and start new lives. This is an example of what Kant would consider a cosmopolitan constitution. He writes:

“The right to hospitality, that is, the right of foreign arrivals, pertains, however, only to conditions of the possibility of *attempting* interaction with the old inhabitants. - In this way, remote parts of the world can establish relations peacefully with one another, relations which ultimately become regulated by public laws and can thus finally bring the human species ever close to a cosmopolitan constitution.” (Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, 8:358)

Cosmopolitan right and constitution is essential to establishing perpetual peace. He even notes that interaction between people from different territories has increased so far as to say that “the violation of right at any *one* place on the earth is felt in *all* places.” (Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, 8:360) Furthermore, Kant shows himself to be critical of certain imperialistic movements of his time, which clearly go against a cosmopolitan constitution:

“If one compares with this the *inhospitable* behavior of the civilized states in our part of the world, especially the commercial ones, the injustice that the latter show when *visiting* foreign lands and peoples (which to them is one and the same as *conquering* those lands and peoples) takes on terrifying proportions.” (Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, 8:358)

We should take notice of two terms which become central to Derrida’s project and which are frequently used by Kant: hospitality and hostility. Kantian hospitality is based up economic and political reasoning, upon certain laws and conditions which regulate the movement of peoples. This sort of reasoning will be critiqued by Derrida. He deduces two paradigms in Kant, that is, hospitality as ‘right of residence’ (*Gastrecht*), which is furthermore limited to ‘right of visitation’ (*Besuchsrecht*). Derrida finds these points debatable. He writes: “Hospitality signifies here *public nature* (*publicite*) of public space, as is always the case for the juridical in the Kantian sense; hospitality, whether public or private, is dependent on and controlled by the law and the state police” (Derrida, 2001, p. 22). Hospitality in the Kantian sense is conditional. Derrida then explains his endeavor:

“It is a question of knowing how to transform and improve the law, and of knowing if this improvement is possible within an historical space which takes place *between* the the Law of unconditional hospitality, offered *a priori* to every other, to all newcomers, *whoever* they may be, and *the* conditional laws of hospitality...” (Derrida, 2001, p, 22)

He makes a distinction between ‘the law of unconditional hospitality’ and “*the* conditional laws of hospitality” which would for example be the Kantian rights of residence or rights of visitation. In order for us to further understand how Derrida establishes this distinction, we first need to comprehend another element in Kantian philosophy, that is, the categorical imperative.

2.2 Kant's Categorical Imperative

Immanuel Kant's theory of ethics is based upon his works on theory of knowledge. There he makes an important distinction between the 'empirical', that is, what is based on experience from our practical daily lives, and the 'a priori', frameworks that come before experience, the rational part which dictates our actions. He writes that: "Logic cannot have any empirical part, i.e. a part in which the universal and necessary laws of thought would be based on grounds taken from experience;" (Solomon R., Martin C., Vaught W., 2009, p. 266). Furthermore, he writes that "... these metaphysics must be carefully purified of everything empirical" (Solomon R., Martin C., Vaught W., 2009, p. 264). Kantian morality tries to lead us to a rejection of the transcendental prior to the empirical, that is, a rejection of particular circumstances, cultures or societies in which one finds oneself and give. Following historical-cultural explanation is given by the authors of *Morality and the Good Life*:

"The Enlightenment was to a large extent the expression of a newly prospering and increasingly powerful middle class[...]. The members of the middle class were for the most part professionals - lawyers, doctors, teachers, clerks, bankers, businesspeople - and they held jobs in which they generally served the public. [...] Thus, they came to think of themselves as 'the universal class'. [...] The speakers of the Enlightenment ... made every attempt to break down class and national barriers to better governments and better business, attacking every belief that seemed to them to be an inefficient relic of the past as 'superstition' and rejecting everything provincial in favor of what was universal or 'cosmopolitan'." (Solomon R., Martin C., Vaught W., 2009, p. 266)

Kant of course was one of the foremost intellectuals of the Enlightenment, and given its tendency towards universality, we will more easily understand his and also Derrida's ethical position.

What Kant sought in his morality was a maxim that allowed one to act according to that which is 'good in itself' as a ground upon which one founds his acts. The maxim must be free of

personal inclinations, such as desires, instincts, emotions or ambitions and aims which are regarded as empirical facts. For example, if someone were to donate money to a street beggar out of a feeling of pity and sadness, then this could not be called a moral deed according to Kant. The donor would have merely acted out of emotion or desire, rather than having acted on purely rational grounds. This does of course not mean that a deed was not good, but it simply means that it was not moral. To act moral then means to make use of the categorical imperative, which can be regarded as a sort of intellectual test of whether one acted according to universal moral standards or not. This goes so far that Kant demands people to act out of duty to the universality of maxims, hence the naming of his ethics as 'deontological' from the Greek *deon*, meaning duty. He writes that

“everyone must admit that if a law is to have moral force, i.e. to be the basis of an obligation, it must carry with it absolute necessity; [...] therefore, the basis of obligation must not be sought in the nature of man, or in the circumstances in the world in which he is placed, but a priori in the conception of pure reason.” (Kant, *Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals*, p.4)

Morality is a purely intellectual exercise of reason. As a critique against utilitarian ethics he writes that “thus the moral worth of an action does not lie in the effect expected from it, nor in any principle of action which requires to borrow its motive from this expected effect” (Kant, *Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 13). The expected effects are to be rejected because they point us back to the empirical world, since any of the expected effect must seen as a hoped for circumstance.

The principle of the will, the categorical imperative as a maxim of action goes as follows:

“Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become

a universal law” (Solomon R., Martin C., Vaught W., 2009, p. 290). These categorical imperatives command without conditions, that is, they lift themselves above the ground of empirical reality towards universality. Furthermore, according to Kant, they must be obeyed for their own sake and not out of expected results, which as already mentioned would bring us back to the empirical. What we find here is a binary opposition established by Kant between the conditional and the unconditional. This the distinction we also find in Derrida’s conditional and unconditional hospitality. Simon Critchley explains in his foreword to Derrida’s *Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* that:

“[...] it is a question of the negotiation between the unconditional and the conditional, between the absolute and the relative, between the universal and the particular. [...] On the one hand, there is what Derrida calls an ‘unconditional purity’, which could be described in the Kantian sense of the Moral Law or the Levinasian sense of infinite responsibility. On the other hand, there is the order of pragmatic conditions, at once historical, legal, political, and quotidian[...]” (Derrida, 2001, xi).

It is a negotiation between the unconditional law of hospitality which is offered *a priori* to everyone and the conditional *laws* of hospitality, which are inscribed into the circumstances of practical, empirical life. Before going deeper into Derrida, I will now go on to explain another important thinker in his ethics of hospitality also mentioned by Simon Critchley.

2.3. Levinas, Alterity, and the Other

20th century French philosophy is marked by a dissatisfaction with philosophical “system-building” such as that of Kant and Hegel and tried to break free from the confines of system-thinking and identity. Among those thinkers was French philosopher Emanuel Levinas who had a profound influence on Derrida’s thought. Levinas’ philosophical contribution is best understood

as a critique of the Western philosophical tradition at large and its insistence on domination and mastery of what is 'Other' into the 'Same'. Therefore he writes about his magnum opus *Totality and Infinity* that "this book will present subjectivity as welcoming the Other, as hospitality" (Levinas, 1979, p. 27).

Simon Critchley confirms that

"Through a careful, immanent and systematic textual analysis, Derrida shows how the hospitality of welcome defines the various meanings given to ethics in Levinas's work. Derrida rightly argues that Levinas's *Totality and Infinity* can be read as an 'immense treatise on hospitality', where ethics is defined as a welcome to the other, as an unconditional hospitality." (Critchley, 2009, p. 274)

It deals with a way of thinking "which tries to gather all things around the mind, or self, of the thinker, and an externally oriented mode which attempts to penetrate into what is radically other than the mind that is thinking it" (Levinas, 1979, p.16). Obsession with sameness is what characterized Western philosophy so far, initiated by Plato and the search for his all-encompassing Ideas and the Good. He writes that "Western philosophy has most often been an ontology: a reduction of the other to the same by interposition of a middle and a neutral term that ensures the comprehension of being" (Levinas, 1979, p. 43). And he further refers that to the origin of Western philosophy:

"This primacy of the same was Socrates's teaching: to receive nothing of the Other but what is in me, as though from all eternity I was in possession of what comes to me from the outside - to receive nothing, or to be free" (Levinas, 1979, p. 43). In its attempt at totalization (hence the title of the book), Western thinking created a culture of violence towards what is other. It tried to suppress difference or alterity of everything on the outside and denied a welcome to the stranger. This is an attempt at remaking the world in one's own image. Instead of alterity, infinity and

ethics, we find sameness, totality and ontology. Levinas attempts to overturn this tradition by putting ethics in place of ontology. He explains:

“We name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other ethics. The strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions, is precisely accomplished as a calling into question of my spontaneity, as ethics. Metaphysics, transcendence, the welcoming of the other by the same, of the Other by me, is concretely produced as the calling into question of the same by the other, that is, as the ethics that accomplishes the critical essence of knowledge” (Levinas, 1979, p. 43)

This reduction of everything to the same is what he calls an ‘egology’. This so called egology suppresses hospitality towards the other *as* other. It imposes its own conditions on the receiving welcome to the other, which is thus not really other, but an image of the its own ego. What Levinas calls ethics, that is, the calling into question of the same leads us towards the infinity of alterity. There he further talks about ‘the Face’, a primordial encounter with an Other which stands prior to all theory, hence prioritizes ethics over ontology. Levinas writes that the way in which an other presents itself to him, exceeding the idea of the in him, he calls the Face (Levinas, 1979, p. 50). That means that “to approach the Other in conversation is to welcome his expression, in which at each instant he overflows the idea a thought would carry away from it. It is therefore to *receive* from the Other beyond the capacity of the I, which means exactly: to have the idea of infinity.” (Levinas, 1979, p. 51) A true welcome of the Other for Levinas is an excess and overflowing of alterity beyond the I’s own capacity. The ‘I’ must be suspended, or bracketed out to allow the infinity of difference to overwhelm it. For Levinasian hospitality as ethics before ontology, the I must give a welcome and open the door to the stranger, without even looking through the peephole to find out who is coming. This infinite welcome, which calls on my ethical responsibility, leads us further to Derrida’s unconditional hospitality.

2.4 Derrida's Ethics of Hospitality

Derrida writes in *Hostipitality*, that “not only is there a culture of hospitality, but there is no culture that is not a culture of hospitality[...]. Hospitality is culture itself.” (Derrida, 2002, p. 361). This is one among the other important aspect he assigns to hospitality which are important for this research, especially when seeing hospitality as a trajectory of cultural self-reflection. He furthermore considers the problem of hospitality as follows: “It is always about answering for a dwelling place, for one's identity, one's space, one's limits, for *ethos* as abode, habitation, house, hearth, family, home” (Of Hospitality, 2000, p. 149). What makes this discussion ethical is the semantic sense of *ethos* as dealing with ‘place of dwelling’, rather than dealing with a normative set of rules. Being defined as a philosophy of the ‘welcome of the other’, deconstruction is thus inherently ethical and as such always questions ones relation to difference. As Caputo explained deconstruction is to be understood as hospitality itself which allows a welcome to the other (Caputo, 1997, p. 109-110). He explained that ‘hospitality’ means inviting and welcoming stranger on two different levels. The first level is personal and asks ‘How can I welcome the other into my home?’ I understand this personal level in a more ontological and intersubjective sense. ‘Home’, in this sense, does not refer to a material object and concrete architecture, but rather to home as the ‘Self’ of subjective constitution or as the *ethos* of my existence. The question to be asked must thus be: How can I welcome other ‘selves’ into my ‘self’? How open am I to welcome other subjects? And how open am I towards the diversity of selves? Yet, how does this refer to the deconstructive question of hospitality? John Caputo reveals a deeper meaning of the idea of hospitality by explaining its etymology and showing an underlying paradox:

“The word ‘hospitality’ derives from the latin *hospes*, which is formed from *hostis*, which originally meant a ‘stranger’ and came to take on the meaning of the enemy or ‘hostile’ stranger (*hostiles*), + *pets* (*potis, potes, pòtential*), to have power [...] The *hospes* is someone who has the power to host someone, so that neither the alterity (*hostis*) of the stranger nor the power (*potential*) of the host is annulled by the hospitality. There is an essential ‘self-limitation’ built right into the idea of hospitality, which preserves the distance between one’s own and the stranger, between owning one’s own property and inviting the other into one’s home.” So, there is always a little hostility in all hosting and hospitality, constituting a certain ‘hostil/pitality’” (Caputo, 1997, p. 110)

From an etymological perspective hospitality, which always seems to connote something positive or good, is inseparably related to hostility, which we connote with danger. We are hostile in the sense that we have to limit access to our property, either in the sense of ‘self’ or ‘nation’ by taking over control. When it comes to the ‘subjective’ level of hospitality we take control by trying to master the other, whether person or idea, through our more than often calcified intellectual commitments and cultural traditions. We try to avoid being changed by the other by clinging to *our* worldview. Thus, for example, one would then reject different cultural or religious conceptions as false, or as inferior.

On the socio-political level, access to national property (‘the country’) is limited by laws.

Derrida explains that there is a collusion between traditional hospitality and power:

“Paradoxical and corrupting law: it depends on this constant collusion between traditional hospitality, hospitality in the ordinary sense, and power. This collusion is also power in its *finitude*, which is to say the necessity, for the host, for the one who receives, of choosing, electing, filtering, selecting their invitees, visitors, or guests, those to whom they decide to grant asylum, the right of visiting, or hospitality. No hospitality, in the classic sense, without sovereignty of oneself over one’s home, but since there is also no hospitality without finitude, sovereignty can only be exercised by filtering, choosing and thus by excluding and doing violence. Injustice, a certain

injustice, and even a certain perjury, begins right away, from the very threshold of the right to hospitality.” (Derrida, 2000, p. 55)

This can also be applied to the personal level of hospitality. In this sense the laws of my house are constituted by my cultural and personal traditions. Through the laws of my ‘cultural self’, the other is limited and being filtered out. My laws allow only for what they already dictate. They deny to be changed by the different and other. Yet, the possibility of hospitality is indissociably linked to its impossibility. Like *différance*, there is always a sense of tension and ambiguity built right into it. How can hospitality be a possible impossibility? Does not the very idea of something being possibly impossible sound like already sound like a possible impossibility, a mere play with words?

The problem of hospitality is built right into what grounds the very idea of hospitality, what makes hospitality possible in the first place. In order for someone to be a host, one has to be a host *of*, that is, one needs to own something which one can host. For if somebody did not own, how and on what grounds could this person host? To be hospitable thus means ‘to be enabled to host’ grounded on one’s sovereignty and property. The idea of sovereignty and property also implies the idea of maintenance, for someone needs to take care of his belongings. These are the responsibilities of ownership. The owner or host needs essential mastery over his property.

Derrida also writes that ‘a certain injustice’ is built right into the idea of hospitality. This injustice, which renders hospitality rather hostile, relates to the mastery of subjects, whether intersubjective or socio-political. At this point Derrida makes his distinction between two different kinds of hospitality. He writes that:

“It is as though hospitality were the impossible: as though the law of hospitality defined this very impossibility, hyperbolic hospitality, as though the categorical imperative of hospitality commanded that we transgress all the laws (in the plural) of hospitality, the conditions, the norms, the rights, the duties that are imposed on hosts and hostesses, on the men or women who give a welcome as well as the men or 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 unconditional welcome.” (Derrida, 2000, p. 76-77)

The unconditional welcome which transgresses the laws of hospitality, or in the Kantian sense, the empirical circumstances which are defined as conditions of treatment of the Other, is what Derrida also calls ‘the categorical imperative of hospitality’. We remember that for Kant’s ethics a categorical imperative allows us to be lifted above certain circumstances of social and cultural life towards universality and moral purity. Yet, Derrida is critical of Kant’s own execution of his project. For Derrida, Kant is not ‘pure’ or ‘universal’ enough. Derrida writes:

“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 the Kantian distinction ‘out of duty’. This unconditional law of hospitality, if such a thing is thinkable, would then be a law without imperative, without order or without duty. A law without law, in short For if I practice hospitality ‘out of 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” (Derrida, 2000, p. 81)

Here Derrida goes beyond Kant by explaining that his categorical imperative would be without imperative as such. He writes that unconditional hospitality is an act of giving beyond reciprocity (Derrida, 2000, p. 25), and that it must even be given before the other as a subject is being identified. His categorical imperative without imperative goes as follows:

“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 dead, male or female” (Derrida, 2000, p. 77)

One can of course question whether or not this imperative is really without imperative. Is not his demand to give a welcome to anyone before identification already an imperative? I would argue that it is correct to say that his categorical imperative follows the condition of an unconditional “yes”. Yet, it is without imperative in the sense that it does not define an imperative in a normative sense as a set of rules, but is left open. Derrida seems to be employing another aporia between unconditional and conditional welcome, which necessitates a thinking through the tension. This will once again allow the self to be open up from its calcified commitments. It allows us to transgress the conditions of life for a welcoming of alterity and difference as such by presenting non-dialectizable antinomies.

As already mentioned in the linguistic explanation of hospitality, there is an inherent sense of hostility, which is built into the idea of a ‘home’. The home and its conditions are what constitute the frontier, or walls, that limit the arrival. In order to offer a welcome the host must own a property onto which the stranger is to be welcomed. The welcome is thus also a question of sovereignty and ownership. The tension built into the hospitality-hostility aporia lies at the intersection of mastery and gift², which also has an aporia built into its semantic structure. A host must always ask himself: How much can I make a gift of property? And how much am I willing to *give up*? Unchallenged conditions of hospitality thus limit the gift. Why then does

²The gift played an important part in French philosophy, including Derrida whose deconstruction of the gift and its relation to hospitality will be explained in detail in the next chapter.

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Derrida develop his unconditional hospitality? Why do we need it? He explains: “It is not for speculative or ethical reasons that I am interested in unconditional hospitality, but in order to transform and understand what is going on in our world.” (1999, p. 70) Rather than being simply abstract, thinking through the aporia of hospitality has pragmatic effects on life. The difficulty of an unconditional welcome lies in the danger that might lurk in the stranger. Derrida realizes that a stranger might come and deprive the master of his home or even kill him. He thinks that

“for unconditional hospitality to take place you have to accept the risk of the other coming and destroying the place, initiating a revolution, stealing everything, or killing everyone. That is the risk of pure hospitality and pure gift, because pure gift might be terrible too. That is why exchange and controls try to make a distinction between good and evil” (Derrida, 2000, p. 17).

Nevertheless, Derrida doubts whether such a thing as unconditional hospitality even exists (Derrida, 2000, p.17). Hospitality is always limited by the laws that constitute it, and delegate powers of sovereignty. More so, to think through the aporia of hospitality means encountering a paralysis, some sort of undecidability. How do we have to act? What is my role under these circumstances? Paralysis is an important aspect of the ethical part of deconstruction. Derrida argues that without undecidability there would not even be a decision. To decide on something means to have gone through indecision and the point of considering conflicting views. He even goes so far as to argue that not knowing what to do is the very possibility of ethical and political decision. Against that, knowing what to do would be like the application of a program or rule (Derrida, 2000, p. 65). To think through action means to start from a point of insecurity and tension. This brings us back to the aporia of *différance*. Like *différance*, hospitality is a constant movement between hospitality and hostility which are both non-dialectizable, yet inseparable.

Another important point is that this aporetic experience is also the condition of responsibility, that is, of having to make a decision. John Caputo explains that hospitality really happens when one experiences, that is, one goes through this paralysis. He writes that

“hospitality really starts to happen when I push against the limit, this threshold, this paralysis, inviting hospitality to cross its own threshold and limit, its own self-limitation, to become a gift *beyond hospitality*. Thus, for hospitality to occur it is necessary for hospitality to go beyond hospitality” (Caputo, 1997, p. 111).

To go ‘beyond hospitality’ can be understood as movement or push towards unconditional hospitality. The host must be push against the limits of his home to become more welcoming, and less threatening. It is in this experience of instability and tension that a host sets out for the unknown stranger. Caputo explains: “For it is only that external tension and instability that keeps the idea of hospitality alive, open loose. If it is not beyond itself, it falls back into itself and becomes a bit of ungracious meanness, that is, hostile” (Caputo, 1997, p. 112). The aporetic ethics of hospitality allows for an opening up of the walls of one’s home, that is, they keep the self and its relation to the other open.

As already introduced in chapter 1, I would look to emphasize self-reflection through deconstructed hospitality. The inherent hospitality-hostility aporia leads to an opening up of the self, and one’s cultural conceptions towards the unknown and strange other. It is by not being ‘self-same’, but by being ‘self-different’ that one starts appreciating the different. The next chapter will deal with Derrida’s works on the gift and how they amplify my discussion of hospitality and self-reflection.

CHAPTER 3: THE GIFT AND THE OTHER

3.1 Hospitality as Gift

This chapter deals with hospitality and its relation to the gift, that is, hospitality as an act of giving something. The discussion of hospitality as gift aims at amplifying the self-reflective nature of the welcome of the stranger. It will furthermore allow us to understand why Derrida thought it to be important to break free from the exchange principle, that is, a relation to an other interested only in what it can receive from that other³. For Derrida, the act of giving is an important relation for he mentions it at different points in his deconstruction of hospitality. In an interview he explains the relation:

“Of course, it is obvious that hospitality is supposed to consist in giving something, offering something. In the conventional scene of hospitality, the guest gives something in gratitude. So there is this scene of gratitude among hosts and guests. In the same way that I have tried to show that the gift supposes break with reciprocity, exchange, economy and circular movement, I have also tried to demonstrate that hospitality implies such a break; that is, if I inscribe the gesture of hospitality within a circle in which the guest should give back to the host, then it is not hospitality, but conditional hospitality.” (Derrida, 1999, p. 69)

Hospitality is an act of giving that is related to reciprocity, hence enters an a circle of relationality, that is, the gift creates a bond between the giver and receiver. Yet, Derrida argues that for real hospitality and gift giving to occur there must a be break of reciprocity and exchange. The giver must no longer be given back. This was also the point of critique against Kant who insisted that acting ‘right’ had do be done out of duty, which for Derrida would no longer constitute an act beyond debt and economy (Derrida, 2000, p. 123).

³ In other words, a self-interested relation to others. This will be further explained through the chapter on Bataille.

As discussed in the previous chapter, for hospitality to happen, it needs to be pushed against its own limits, that is, it needs to become a gift beyond hospitality and economy.

In this chapter I will discuss the relation of hospitality to the gift by explaining its economic aspects and how they can be translated into an inter-subjective understanding of human existence. I will ask what Derrida means when he insists on hospitality as being a gift which breaks the circularity of debt and exchange? Furthermore, I will discuss and explain a lineage of earlier thinkers of the gift. Two thinkers are of importance for Derrida's thought on the gift: French anthropologist Marcel Mauss and his work *The Gift*, and George Bataille's *The Accursed Share*. The first subchapter will discuss Marcel Mauss who was an influential figure in anthropology and laid the grounds for extensive research on indigenous gift-giving practices. The second subchapter will discuss French philosopher George Bataille's idea of restricted and general economy which themselves were influenced by Mauss. Bataille's thinking on general economy will lead us closer to understanding of Derrida's hospitality and gift economics as important for intersubjectivity and sovereignty of self. The last subchapter will then be a discussion on Derrida's thought on the gift and what it means for hospitality to be a gift beyond economy. This will allow us to see deconstruction as an ethical enterprise concerned with the economics of cultural life.

3.2 Marcel Mauss: Economics of Exchange in the Gift

In his introduction to Marcel Mauss' *The Gift*, E.E. Evans-Pritchard writes that Mauss attempted to understand the social phenomenon of the gift in its 'totality':

“The exchanges of archaic societies which he examines are total social movements or activities. They are at the same times economic, juridical, moral, aesthetic, religious, mythological and socio-morphological phenomena. Their meaning can therefore only be grasped if they are viewed as a complex concrete reality.” (Mauss, 1966, p. vii)

What this tells us is that gift exchange in archaic societies was more than a simple gesture to be understood from a single perspective. Rather, it covered and included a variety of different aspects of social life. The ones that are important for our discussion are its intersubjective values and how they might inform an economics of cultural life. Evans Pritchard further explains that

“in case we should not reach the conclusion for ourselves, how much we have lost, whatever we may have otherwise gained, by the substitution of a rational economic system for a system in which exchange of goods was not a mechanical but a moral transaction, bringing about and maintaining human, personal, relationships between individuals and groups” (Mauss, 1966, p. ix).

The gift should be understood as a way of establishing and maintaining social relationships, hence the creation of a circle of exchange.

Mauss begins by explaining that gift-giving or the French word ‘*prestation*’ as it is called in the book, is not a disinterested and spontaneous process, but that is obligatory and interested. The generous offering of a gift is thus not an act of gratitude, but “formal pretence and social deception based on obligation and economic self-interest” (Mauss, 1966, p. 1). Mauss exemplifies the gift exchange in archaic societies through the potlatch, an exchange event in Native American societies. Translated into English Potlatch means ‘to nourish’ or ‘to consume’. Mauss explains that the most important mechanism of the Potlatch is its obligation to make return gift for gifts one has received (Mauss, 1966, p. 5). Furthermore, he explains that giving something also entails giving a part of oneself, that is, a gift is more than an inert object, but rather carries with it elements of mana, authority and wealth. This is an important aspect of the gift for my

further discussion. To give a gift means that one is not only giving an object that exists as detached from oneself, but rather one gives a part of what constitutes ones self. Not only is there the obligation to make return gifts for gifts received, there is also the obligation to receive them. Failing to accept a gift in those archaic societies meant that one (a tribe) rejected the establishment of a social relation, which could and would potentially lead to intertribal violence. Social life was rendered as a constant give-and-take. In a gift society one would essentially give up parts of ones spiritual or social identity in exchange for parts of someone else's identity.

Mauss explains a certainty ambiguity in the gift:

“The danger represented by the thing given or transmitted is possibly nowhere better expressed than in very ancient Germanic languages. This explains the double meaning of the word *Gift* as gift and poison. The theme of the fateful gift, the present or possession that turns into poison, is fundamental in Germanic folklore” (Mauss, 1966, p. 62).

The double meaning he points out is the difference in meaning between the German word *Gift* which means poison, and the English word gift which means gift or present. He mentions an excerpt from Germanic folklore in his work *Given Time*:

“Thou hast given presents
 But thou hast not given presents of love,
 Thou has not given of a benevolent heart;
 Thou hadst already been deprived of thy life,
 Had I but known the danger sooner.”⁴ (Mauss, 1966, p. 62)

⁴ Quotes as found in Mauss' work. Original source unknown

The gift as in the English sense of present thus no longer presents an act of benevolence and gratitude, but becomes an obligation which forced the recipient into a social relationship and economic return with interest of parts of his spiritual identity. Hence, the gift becomes poison as in German sense. Interestingly, the English and German word *Gift* are etymologically related, dating back to middle-high German of the middle ages. It possibly changed its meaning there in the German context as a sarcastic articulation of the obligation and ambiguity that it carried and still carries.

What is most important for Marcel Mauss' work on the gift was that it showed that the most basic economic activity of human societies was not the barter system in which goods were exchanged for other goods, but rather gift-exchange which served the establishment of social relations by giving up parts of one's spiritual or social identity. One gave up parts of one's mana and authority only to have the recipient's mana and authority returned. Gift-exchange thus constituted a loss of one's sovereignty, and the pushing of one's identity towards the establishment of a social relation. To give a gift, one has to open oneself up and welcome the other. We can already see the hospitality-hostility aporetic at work in Mauss' enterprise. A failing to give a gift, as part of a closure of one's self and the protection of one's sovereignty, would eventually lead to hostility. Mauss points us towards the necessity of giving *up*.

3.3 The Gift and the Movement of General Economy

Parisian philosopher George Bataille (1897-1962) and anthropologist Marcel Mauss bear not direct relationship, yet Bataille's works were strongly influenced by Mauss' essay on the gift.

What Bataille sought in his major work *The Accursed Share* was to conceive of a new form of

economic activity which could challenge capitalist exchange and its underlying utilitarian principle. Through Mauss' work on the gift there was hope for a non-utilitarian conception of social life which would bring humanity closer together. I will further argue that the discussion of general economy in Bataille leads us to an understanding of hospitality as self-reflection.

Mauss' discussion of the *potlatch* of Northwestern American tribes lead Bataille to develop a *general economy*, which came to be known as his most important philosophical contribution. Bataille's interest in the potlatch lied less in its function of social bonding and mutual obligation, that is its essence as establishment of social relation, but what rather interested him was the *potlatch* as a phenomenon of destruction and pure expenditure, that is, an unproductive phenomenon of total loss. Mauss explained that the potlatch was a phenomenon of reckless spending which also served the acquisition of prestige and social status. Besides the obligation to repay there was also pure destruction (Mauss, 1966, p. 40). Productive and non-productive expenditure are key terms in Bataille's work. His general economy is the development of a system in which not production, as is the primary aim of contemporary capitalist societies is the main goal, but expenditure as in the consumption of wealth and energies of life. As such, a general economy stands opposed to a restricted economy, which is the study of movement as if it were an isolatable system of operation with particular ends independent of other parts. A general economy conceives the elements of the world within a much larger framework, which sees them as interdependent. In *The Accursed Share* he explains that

“Economic activity merely generalizes the isolated situation; it restricts its objects to operations carried with a view to a limited end, that of economic man. It does not take into consideration a play of energy that no particular end limits: the play of *living matter in general*, energy is always in excess; the question is always posed in terms of extravagance. The choice is limited to how wealth is to be squandered. It is

to the *particular* living being, or to limited populations of living beings, that the problem of necessity presents itself” (Bataille, 1991, p. 23)

The general movement of economy is based upon an idea of excess energy or wealth, that is, every living organism on earth receives more energy than it actually needs. This excess energy which is not needed for the growth of the organism must then be lost *without profit* (Bataille, 1991, p. 21). In every organism resides an overabundance of energy which has to be used either unproductively or must be destroyed. This energy is what characterized the necessity of gift-giving events like the potlatch. A very central point for Bataille is that

“changing from the perspectives of *restrictive* economy to those of *general* economy actually accomplishes a Copernican transformation: a reversal of thinking- and of ethics. If a part of wealth (subject to rough estimate) is doomed to destruction or at least unproductive use without any possible profit, it is logical, even *inescapable*, to surrender commodities without return [...], the possibility of pursuing growth is itself subordinated to giving” (Bataille, 1991, p. 25).

By emphasizing gift-giving as an event of unproductive expenditure, Bataille exceeds Mauss' theorisation of the potlatch. The most basic movement in Bataille's general economy is a loss which cannot be accounted for, that is, a loss that cannot be *used*. Once we realize that there has to be loss, giving, rather than the selfish and self-interested accumulation of wealth, becomes a social imperative. Destruction of ones wealth and energy hence become an act of negating self-interested relations.

Sacrificing ones energies and wealth in unproductive expenditure and loss without return constitutes the characteristics of freedom and sovereignty within capitalist society. He writes that “the meaning of this profound freedom is given in destruction, whose essence is to consume profitlessly whatever might remain in the progression of useful works” (Bataille, 1991, p. 58). To be free and sovereign thus means that one is no longer restricted to the particular ends given in

restricted economies of life, but that one moves along the larger frameworks of general economy. “[...], the general movement of life is nevertheless accomplished beyond the demands of individuals. Selfishness is finally disappointed” (Bataille, 1991, p. 74). Bataille’s gifts without return suggest the possibility of a new ethics that suspends the self-interested activity of human beings who are first of all concerned with themselves. While a self-interested movement always seeks only its own possibilities, its negation becomes an act of sacrifice of what has to be sacrificed necessarily and can thus be given without return. Bataille here conceives of an overturning, or ‘Copernican transformation’ as he calls it, of prevalent social conceptions of life. His ethics encourages the destruction of one’s wealth and energies by giving it to others. It is a society of sovereign individuals that see interdependence and the need to share what they own. How are we to translate this into the intersubjective relation of hospitality? To be sovereign means to be giving up what belongs to oneself and be open for the incoming movement of what is other and different. Bataille’s general economy suggests an openness of our identities, which are no longer restricted by the comforts of their walls, but constantly welcome the other. One needs to sacrifice parts of oneself in the act of welcoming the different. The loss of one’s identity constitutes a movement towards general economy, where one no longer sees one’s particular ends, but rather interdependence. Thus, understanding interdependence which is so crucial for a world of difference, leads the self to a larger understanding of cultural life. The next chapter will deal with an essay by Derrida on Bataille. This will be a crucial link to our understanding of the gift.

3.4 Derrida on Bataille

In “From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism Without Reserve” (2010), Derrida discusses the Hegelian element in Bataille’s work. He writes that “all of Bataille’s concepts are Hegelian” (Derrida, 2010, p. 320). The first element he discusses deals with Hegel’s Master-Servant dialectics. Derrida explains that this lies at the center of Bataille’s Hegelianism, that is, the man who does not put his life at stake, but wants to conserve it, is the servant. To attain lordship one needs to raise oneself above life by looking at death. One puts one’s life at stake and thus attains freedom and recognition. One becomes a sovereign human being.

Derrida further argues that the Hegelian concept of *Aufhebung* (sublation) restricts the economy of life, hence belongs to a restricted economy. He writes: “Through this recourse to the *Aufhebung*, which conserves the stakes, remains in control of the play, limiting it and elaborating it by giving it form and meaning (*Die Arbeit ... bildet*), this economy of life restricts itself to conservation, to circulation and self-reproduction of meaning” (Derrida, 2010, p. 323) Each dialectical moment conserves part of what is at the same time exceeded. This represents a restriction for Derrida, for each encounter with something other would thus also be a limiting of what the self is able to give up of itself. One would merely reproduce what already constitutes one’s self. This would be what Levinas called an ‘egology’ in which the different is recreated in one’s own image. He writes that dialectics becomes “laughable when at the moment when it liberates itself by enslaving itself, when it starts to *work...*” (Derrida, 2010, p 323). This necessitates the need to exceed dialectics as an absolute recunciation of meaning and absolute risk of death. This is what Hegel called an *abstract negativity*, i.e. a negativity that neither takes place nor presents itself and so escapes dialectics and sublation. Escaping dialectics as a way of

entering into sovereignty is an important aspect for Derrida's philosophy of a gift beyond hospitality, for there we also deal with the suspension and sacrifice of meaning to allow for a welcome of the Other. He argues for a sovereignty which does not govern itself and "does not govern in general: it governs neither others, nor things, nor discourses in order to produce meaning" (Derrida, 2010, p. 334). Why would it not allow itself to govern anything? Once sovereignty makes something else subordinate to itself, it could be retaken by dialectics, hence being overturned from domination to slavery and dependence on its subordinate. Hence, the sovereign or host is no longer the dominating force, but also a servant to the servant, while the servant by making the host dependent upon him is also sovereign and host at the same time. This moment is recognized by Derrida also in his elaboration of a host-guest dialectic, inspired by Hegel's master-slave dialectic, in *Of Hospitality*. He writes:

"... as *if*, then, the stranger could save the master and liberate the power of his host; it's as *if* the master, *qua* master, were prisoner of his place and his power, of his ipseity, of his subjectivity (his subjectivity is hostage). So it is indeed the master, the one who invites, the inviting host, who becomes the hostage - and who really always has been. And the guest, the invited hostage, becomes the one who invites the one who invites, the master of the host. The guest becomes the host's host. The guest (hote) becomes the host (hote) of the host (hote). These substitutions make everyone into everyone else's hostage" (Derrida, 2000, p. 123-124)

The dialectics of hospitality is endangered by the becoming of a hostage. It is significant for the host to be able to give up his own subjectivity to escape being taken over and not making his own identity dependent upon the guest. Sovereignty through the suspension of meaning is something Derrida always attempted in his deconstructive writings. It is a form of dialectical writing with concepts

"in such a way that these concepts, through a certain twist, apparently obey their habitual laws; but they do so while relating themselves, at a certain point, to the

moment of sovereignty, to the absolute loss of their meaning, to expenditure without reserve, to what can no longer be called negativity or loss of meaning except on its philosophical side..." (Derrida, 2010, p. 339).

The loss of meaning is a bracketing or suspension of meaning without reserve. This is also what Bataille calls *general economy*. It is a breaking free of the restrictions of systems of knowledge, by entering a space of non-domination. To be sovereign means to suspend the relations one has to oneself and allow for non-dialectical relation. Non-meaning assures of nothing and gives "no certitude, no results, no profit. It is absolutely adventurous, is a chance and not a technique" (Derrida, 2010, p. 346). This has an important influence on hospitality. In the dialectics between host and guest everyone becomes everyone else's slave. Through our cultural understanding of hospitality, the host becomes a slave by the imposition of his cultural values on the guest. Yet, the guest becomes a master by making the host dependent on him through the former host's need for imposition, while the guest also remains a slave dependent on the welcome and its laws. To break away from the circle of dependence the host needs to become sovereign by suspending the laws of his welcome. Thus the host needs to break with his own cultural conceptions to allow a non-dependent welcome of the guest. He needs to give up and sacrifice his own cultural views and push against the limits of his welcome towards unconditionality.

The discussion of Bataille's influence through Hegel to Derrida allows us to understand Derrida's work on the economics of the gift in *Given Time* (1992). The suspension of meaning is a movement of dialectics which tries to escape dialectics and moment of negation. While for Derrida Hegelian *Aufhebung* belongs to restricted economy (Derrida, 2010, p. 348), to allow a

general economy to occur one must give oneself to uncertainty and chance. One needs to interrupt the economics and comforts of one's own culture.

3.5 Interrupting Economy of Life: Derrida and The Gift

What does it mean for us to interrupt our own cultural economies? This question will lead us to Derrida's writing on the gift. For Derrida, the gift relates to economy, which implies the ideas of exchange, circulation and return, thus a system of distribution. These ideas can be and should also be understood beyond financial economics. Therefore, we will attempt to translate them into an economics of cultural life. What is economy? Derrida explains that etymologically it refers to values of laws, that is, *nomos*, and also *oikos*, which means home or property. Economics could thus also be understood to refer to hospitality and the laws which constitute the home that can allow for a welcome. The host would then be the lawgiver and architect of the walls of his home.

For Derrida, if there is any gift (he always doubts its possibility), it should be that which also interrupts economy. He writes:

“But is not the gift, if there is any, also that which interrupts economy? That which in suspending economic calculation, no longer gives rise to exchange? That which opens the circle so as to defy reciprocity or symmetry, the common measure, and so as to turn aside the return in view of the no-return?” (Derrida, 1992, p. 7)

Derrida here reduces his discussion of the gift to capitalist notions of exchange and contract. This gift must thus interrupt the economy of exchange, it must stop with circulation, by no longer returning to the one who has given the gift. For the gift to be a gift, it must be “aneconomic”⁵.

⁵ This is a neologism created by Derrida from ‘a’ + ‘economic’, thus referring to something which acts non- or uneconomic by breaking a circle of exchange.

Nevertheless he recognizes the gift as an impossibility which is built right into its possibility. A possible gift is when someone gives something to someone else. But for there to have been given a gift

“there must be no reciprocity, return, exchange, counter-gift, or debt. If the other *gives me back* or *owes me* or has to give me back what I give to him or her, there will not have been a gift, whether this restitution is immediate or whether it is programmed by a complex calculation of long-term deferral of difference.” (Derrida, 1992, p. 12)

When it comes to suspending the return of a gift we face the important impossible possibility of the gift, that is, how do we prevent the gift from being returned to the point of its departure, since this movement involves an other? Derrida explains that the return of the gift has to do with its aporetic sense of being poisonous, which leads us back to Marcel Mauss' work explained earlier. He writes: “We know that as good, it can also be bad, poisonous (Gift, gift), and this from the moment the gift puts the other in debt, with the result that giving amounts to hurting, to doing harm...” (Derrida, 1992, p. 12). How does Derrida's conception of the gift differ from traditional anthropologies of the gift, like that of Mauss? He explains that he departs from this tradition by his insistence on the gift as interruption of system and symbols of gifts, in which counter-gifts are suspended in order for the gift to become gift and be given. He writes that it is necessary for a gift, if there is any, to not have been given back, having entered a contract, and not having indebted the other (Derrida, 1992, p. 13). Thus,

“the donee owes it to *himself* even not to give back, he *ought not owe*. [...] It is thus necessary, at the limit, that he not *recognize* the gift as gift. If he recognizes it *as* gift, it *appears to him as such*, if the present is present to him *as present*, this simple recognition suffices to annul the gift. Why? Because it gives back, in the place, let us say, of the thing itself, a symbolic equivalent.” (Derrida, 1992, p. 13)

The symbolic aspect of the gift is crucial to its giving rise to exchange. For there to be gift, it has to be recognized as a gift, which ultimately annuls itself as a gift. The one who receives the gift should therefore no longer recognize it as gift, so it no longer becomes a gift. But there is also the necessity of the one who gives the gift to no longer recognize its symbolic value as gift:

“But the one who gives it must not see it or know it either; otherwise he begins, at the threshold, as soon as he intends to give, to pay himself with a symbolic recognition, to praise himself, to approve of himself, to gratify himself, to congratulate himself, to give back to himself symbolically the value of what he thinks he has given or what he is preparing to give” (Derrida, 1992, p. 14).

Hence, a true gift can only be a gift which has been suspended in its meanings as gift by those involved in the circle of exchange. In short, the gift disappears as gift as soon as it is recognized as being a gift. Derrida then refers his insights to Marcel Mauss.

“One could go so far as to say that a work as monumental as Marcel Mauss’s *The Gift* speaks of everything but the gift: It deals with economy, exchange, contracts (*do u des*), it speaks of raising the stakes, sacrifice, gift *and* counter-gift - in short, everything that in the thing itself impels the gift *and* the annulment of the gift.” (Derrida, 1992, p. 24)

All the elements that Mauss discovered in the gift, hence do not really deal with the gift, but with its annulment. It was through Mauss that Derrida was reminded of the essentially binding, that is indebted and obligating, character of the gift.

Everything that takes part in a symbolic exchange annuls the gift. For there to be a genuine gift, there must be an absolute forgetfulness and a gift that no longer presents itself, according to Derrida. He argues that “for there to be gift, not only must the donor or donee not perceive the gift as such, have no consciousness of it, no memory, no recognition; he or she must also forget it right away ...” (Derrida, 1992, p. 16). His arguments towards forgetting and non-meaning can be seen in relation to the earlier discussion on subjectivity and sovereignty. To be

conscious of the gift means that there are subjects, naming and identifying themselves, involved in its recognition. Therefore, he talks of “frantic expenditure, without return, of a gift that forgets itself” (Derrida, 1992, p. 47). It is through the suspension of the relation to oneself in which one no longer recognizes oneself. This loss of identity then allows for an anonymous gift. Yet, the same must apply to the guest as recipient of a gift. He must no longer recognize himself or the laws which constitute his subjectivity as guest. By suspending subjectivity, the host becomes sovereign. His giving is no longer directed by the walls of his cultural home. It’s symbolic value becomes a space where one is pushed towards new borders of understanding. A gift can only exist between the wholly other, that is, an other that can no longer be reduced to the demands of the self. Caputo described this aporia of the gift as an “act of generosity, by a giving which gives beyond itself, which is a little blind and does not see where it is going” (Caputo, 1997, p. 112). The gift amplifies our discussion of hospitality by defining it as an act of giving, which gives beyond itself, and is blind to itself. To be blind to itself, the host must suspend with his self-relation as giver, that is, he must become a host anonymous to himself.*

Therefore, the host must not only recognize the guest as an other that can no longer be subsumed by his cultural understandings of the world, but he necessarily also needs to become an other to himself first. Regarding culture Derrida writes in *The Other Heading that*:

“...what is proper to a culture is not to be identical to itself. Not to not have an identity, but not to be able to identify itself, to be able to say ‘me’ or ‘we’; to be able to take the form of a subject only in the non-identity to itself or, if you prefer, only in the difference *with itself* [*avec soi*].” (Derrida, 1992, p. 9)

This accounts for individual members of a culture as well. The moment in which the host becomes a self-different other to himself opens the doors and allows for an unconditional

welcome to happen. One can only become an other by living in constant tension with oneself. It is in these moments of tension when the other enters one's home and transforms one's cultural understanding of the world.

Yet, to become an other to oneself should not be understood as an 'absolute forgetfulness' the way Derrida understands it. To suspend one's subjectivity rather constitutes a moment of existential insight, that is, the realization of the groundless ground of one's existence. To fully suspend one's self seems impossible, for the self always has to exist, even as the self that challenges its own constitution. Rather, the insight of one's groundless ground is the understanding that the starting point of one's self does not belong to oneself, but is rather part of a larger movement of selves that constantly interact. Hospitality is far more than events instituted by cultural traditions, but the constant give and take between individuals and their points of conclusion. The insight to our groundlessness opens up for cultural self-reflection, for one can no longer one's self for granted. The movement of the cultural self is not to be understood as a radical interruption, but rather as progressive change and opening up towards the diversity of selves and others. Hence, for hospitality to go beyond hospitality means to become a gift which suspends one's relation to oneself in the act of giving a welcome. To welcome cultural difference one has to be able to step away from one's own cultural conceptions and how they form one's understanding of the world.

This chapter explained in detailed the influences on Derrida's thinking of the gift. For him the gift is to be understood as a suspension, that is, a break with the host's own as well as the guest's subjectivity. It is not only a giving *of*, but also constitutes a giving *up* of yourself. It is an act of exchange that happens to a self unaware of its own cultural roots.

Chapter 4 - HOSPITALITY, GIFT AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

Why do we need to reflect on our own cultural existence? And why do we need to open up to cultural others? These questions led my analysis of hospitality in relation to the gift, that is, hospitality as a gift that is blind *to itself* and suspends the self. Seeing hospitality in light of a blinding gift allows us for a deconstructive challenge of subjectivity and identity. The blind giver, who is the host and subject of identity, is at momentary loss of his cultural identity. He waits and defers which gives space to a welcome of difference. Yet, we concluded that the loss of identity is not to be understood as an absolute forgetfulness of one's cultural existence, but rather that it is an existential insight into the groundlessness of our cultural being itself. We were born into a certain culture at a certain moment in history which influenced and shaped our lives. This should lead us to realize that our cultural life does not belong to us, but to the histories of cultures and how they change and shape within the flow of time. Our own cultural existences are arbitrary, that is, one just happened to have been born into a certain culture. This insight into our groundlessness should open ourselves up for cultural self-reflection through which we welcome the diversity of other cultures.

Welcoming the diversity of other cultures is of great importance for our lives in a globalized world which is marked by constant encounters with cultural others. Thus, cultural self-reflection should be one step towards more peaceful co-existence and social stability. Reflecting on your own cultural existence means being aware that it has no superior existential rights. Our own culture is as much a part of the constant movement of history as is the other. How and why does it matter for the world today?

4.1 ASEAN CULTURAL DIVERSITY

ASEAN, which stands for Association of Southeast Asian Nations, is a political and economic⁶ entity geographically located in Southeast Asia. This political entity exists since 1967 when the first five member nations⁷ decided to form an integrative unity to promote regional peace and create opportunities for political, economic and cultural exchange. In 2015 the Southeast Asian nations will come together to form the so called ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), thereby emphasizing a shift towards higher economic integration. According to ASEAN the goal of the AEC will be:

“The AEC is the realisation of the end goal of economic integration as espoused in the Vision 2020, which is based on a convergence of interests of ASEAN Member Countries to deepen and broaden economic integration through existing and new initiatives with clear timelines. In establishing the AEC, ASEAN shall act in accordance to the principles of an open, outward-looking, inclusive, and market-driven economy consistent with multilateral rules as well as adherence to rules-based systems for effective compliance and implementation of economic commitments.” (ASEAN)

One of the challenges of a successful AEC will be to establish regional peace and stability to make economic operations successful. ASEAN recognizes that in order to achieve peace one has to create awareness for the diversity of cultures, languages and religions that exist in Southeast Asia. According to the ‘ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Culture and Arts (AMCA)’ itself

“ASEAN is a region of immense and colourful cultural diversity, one that shares common historical threads. ASEAN Member States promote cooperation in culture to help build an ASEAN identity. They seek to promote ASEAN awareness and a sense of community, preserve and promote ASEAN cultural heritage, promote cultural creativity and industry, and engage with the community. ASEAN Leaders envision ASEAN as a

⁶ Not to be understood in the way we used the term “economy”, but rather in its business sense.

⁷ Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand

community of caring societies, conscious of its ties of history, aware of its cultural heritage and bound by a common regional identity.” (AMCA)

To achieve this aim of broader cultural awareness of the differences and diversity, of cultures, citizens of ASEAN will be needing to reflect on their own cultures and see them in light of the culture of others. Still, the economic aspects of ASEAN take on a more important role the upcoming community and it is against this background that cultural self-reflection should be understood. The main aim of ASEAN is economic development and thus the possibility of improved wealth and increased living standards for its citizens. It should be understood that it is improved financial circumstances will allow people to travel abroad to experience different cultures directly, as well as having different cultures coming into ones own country. To reflect on your own culture will thus only become possible against a background of the flow of financial capital.

So far this research has claimed that cultural self-reflection and the awareness of the fragility of ones cultural existence leads to a greater openness and welcome of the other in which one allows oneself to be transformed by the welcomed other. This is essentially a process of learning about ones self and the differences that exist in the world. To promote an ASEAN identity, ASEAN governments will have to create educational programmes that are blind to old nationalisms, but emphasize a region characterized by diversity, that is, *unprogrammatic* programs which do not fall back on themselves in a movement of self-identification, but which are programs demanding a certain openness and self-difference. Derrida points to a certain aporia in establishing a community which at once monopolizes around a center in order to create a community, but also attempts to maintain diversity and differences:

“Neither monopoly nor dispersion, therefore. This is, of course, an aporia, and we must not hide it from ourselves. I will even venture to say that ethics, politics, and responsibility, *if there are any*, will only ever have begun with the experience and experiment of the aporia. When the path is clear and given, when a certain knowledge opens up the way in advance, the decision is already made, it might as well be said that there is non to make: irresponsibly, and in good conscience, one simply applies or implements a program.”(Derrida, 1992, p.41)

One example of a *programmatic* program, that is, an attempt at monopolization of culture would be the case of Thailand⁸. The former Kingdom of Siam, has always been a confluence of different cultural groups such as Chinese, Khmer, Lao, Malay etc. Yet, this changed with the rise of “Thailand” as a nation-state in 1932 and thus a shift towards Central Thai culture as national guidance. The central Thai dialect and Buddhism as religious authority now became a center. This consequently led to a marginalization of cultural minorities (Croissant & Trinn, 2009, p. 30) of which today we still experience violent responses as in the case of Southern Thailand insurgents, but also in the perceived inferiority of Northeastern Thailand. For Southeast Asia to become a region of cultural diversity, peace and stability one should be wary with regards to rules and determinations on how to achieve its aims of unification while diversifying.

Finally, this research hopes to contribute to a growing awareness of the need to be more open by challenging the ossification of cultural identity in the individual and at social level. Peace begins with the individual and his or her’s reflection on identity. An individual that can understand its own culture in a more interculturally reflective way, allows for the possibility of greater cultural understanding.

⁸ Examples can be found in any ASEAN member nation

4.2 SUMMARY

This essay began with a discussion on the groundless grounds of our existence which laid the foundation for our understanding of hospitality. What we learned in the first chapter was that deconstruction is based upon *différance*, that is, an aporia of deferring differences which never allow themselves to be captured at once. More than being simply a linguistic play of words, this has existential bearing on life. I argued that *différance* is a ‘thinking of the welcome’ by putting into question our identities and selfhood. Through *différance* we come to realize that our identities are not as stable as we would like them to be. They are more like a ship navigating on a rough sea which constantly challenges the path we are taking. In this understanding of *différance* as existential caretaker, everything loses its ultimate validity, hence our need for cultural self-reflection. Cultures themselves are not static entities, but rather movements which always change with those who carry them further onto the sea of life. There is no certainty and finality in our cultural understanding and being in the world, therefore there is a necessity to discuss hospitality in cultural terms.

Derrida argued that self-interruption is another name for *différance* and that without self-interruption there would be no hospitality, hence the need for the self of the master and host to interrupt itself. The question of hospitality is a question of the home. Where do we belong to and how do we fit into this world of cultural differences. This essay led me to introduce Levinas’ thinking on totality and infinity as an important aspect of the welcome. Hitherto thinking has tried to remake the world in its own image, that is, it totalized the other and tried to suppress its difference. This is grounded in its certainty of itself, which I challenged in the first chapter. To be certain of yourself results from an understanding of the certainty of ones existence, which closes

and locks the doors of ones home and tries to keep the other out. This happens through the laws of my cultural self which limits and filters out influences from the outside. Derrida shows us that hospitality itself is an aporia limited by its play against its very own opposite, hostility. One can never be fully hospitable while not being hostile.

Therefore, Derrida calls for a pushing against the boundaries of ones home by what he calls 'unconditional hospitality', which acts as a categorial imperative. He proposes that one should say "yes" to everyone and everything without even asking the for identity. Pushing against the boundaries of my welcome and self-limitation means for the hospitality to become a gift beyond hospitality. It must overcome and open itself up for the infinity of the other. Thus, the second chapter discussed Derrida's hospitality as the movement which allows the self to challenge itself.

The third chapter amplified his discussion on hospitality once it was recognized as an act of giving beyond reciprocity or as a gift beyond hospitality. Why is the gift of such importance for my analysis of cultural self-reflection? Here the concept of sovereignty comes into play. Through Hegel, Derrida realizes that hospitality can only be free if one is no longer bound by oneself. Welcoming cultural differences is a movement of dialectics between master and guest which threatens both to become dependent slaves of each other. Therefore, Derrida uses aporetics to escape dialectics. It is of importance for the host to be able to give up his own subjectivity and not to make his identity dependent upon the guest. While with our discussion on hospitality we allow the self of the master to open itself up to difference, the gift wants to allow for its own and its guest's sovereignty. The circle of relation which binds host and guest can only be broken by the interruption of the comforts of one's own culture. The host must become an other to himself. Hence, to push the boundaries of the welcome we have to allow ourselves to become an other to

ourselves so that we can allow the other to come in without imposing our own cultural laws and traditions. This happens through the existential insight that our own cultural values cannot be taken for granted, but rather that hospitality defines a movement of selves that constantly interact. This allows the self to reflect upon its own traditions, while allowing other cultural values a welcome. The fourth chapter argued that self-reflection is of importance of the ASEAN community to promote peace and stability, while pursuing its aim creating a common cultural identity based upon diversity. Amid ongoing conflicts, the idea of cultural self-reflection should be on the agenda of creating a culturally open citizenship.



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Autobiography

The researcher was born in Germany to parents from different cultural backgrounds. After having spent 21 years at his place of birth he decided to set out into a world of differences. The last 6 years he spent in Thailand, where he got to learn the language, as well as gain a deeper understanding of his own cultural existence within a diverse world. It were these profound experiences which informed his project of a thinking of differences.



