

Socialising the Stranger: Hospitality as a Relational Reality.

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Abstract

Lifestyles are continually changing. Whilst eating away from the 'home' was traditionally predicated on need; the consumer in contemporary society is eating out more regularly and for an increasing variety of motivations. Thus the operationalisation of hospitality, historically located as central to the provision of food away from home has become increasingly contested. The realisation of hospitality was historically understood to be a function of its structural role as a socio-cultural construction within many culturally ascribed value systems. It was hospitality that enabled the socialisation of the stranger; the stranger defined by exoticism. However improved technologies have altered the Consumption landscape. The contemporary consumer (in western countries) is now no longer the stranger to be provided with hospitality, but a buyer of the materiality of hospitality; namely food, beverage, and the spaces of consumption.

There is ongoing debate as to the existence of hospitality within consumer society. As the products associated with hospitality, namely the meal, become increasingly enmeshed within the economic system, the existence of hospitality is called into question. Thus it has been suggested, the notion of hospitality may not in fact exist in a commercial form. It is this statement that is called into question as the central focus of this thesis.

This thesis presents an analysis based upon substantial secondary research carried out across a range of disciplines. The objective was to initiate a process of knowledge synthesis, whereby the episteme of hospitality would be advanced. By reviewing literature outside of the tourism and hospitality academy, the process enabled the questioning of accepted realities within that academy.

Through viewing a 'history' of hospitality across a range of disciplines, it is suggested that the notion of hospitality may be brought into existence subject to a number of criteria. These, it is proposed, do not limit hospitality to the non commercial domain, suggest that if enacted within these specific parameters, can be realised within the commercial environment. Many of the issues surrounding the performance of commercial hospitality are as a result of its reification. However, whilst the materiality of hospitality is recognised, it is hospitality as act, or way of being that ensures the potential for its realisation.

The provision and consumption of hospitality in the commercial domain is Problematic. However, if achieved the performance of hospitality is recognised as an agent of enchantment, and as such presents opportunities for mutually fulfilling experiences between social actors.