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Reading Hospitality Mutually

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Abstract

This article addresses debates in geography regarding the nature and significance of hospitality. Despite increasingly *inhospitable* policy landscapes across the Global North, grassroots hospitality initiatives stubbornly persist, including various global travel-based initiatives and networks. Drawing from research with these travel networks, we argue that hospitality is fundamentally based on a pervasive, mutualistic sociality in a multitude of forms. Such initiatives, and hospitality more generally, can be better understood in terms of their relationship to these wider mutualities. We therefore use Peter Kropotkin's anarchist-geographic concept of mutual aid – in conversation with Jacques Derrida and other thinkers – to reimagine hospitality as 'mutual hospitableness'; systemic, spatio-temporally expansive, and underpinned by a conception of self that is constituted through, and gains its vitality from, intertwinement with the other.

Key words

Anarchism, hospitality, Kropotkin, mutual aid, travel

Recent years have seen a popular and academic reawakening of interest in hospitality in a world increasingly characterised by exclusion. New economic forms have also emerged, rooted in sharing and collaboratively distributing resources in ways that appear anathema to these growing anxieties concerning otherness. This paper contributes to understanding this emergent tension, and navigating more equitable ways through it, by investigating how hospitality intersects with other collaborative practices, and in doing so, revisiting what it means to be hospitable. We do this through a re-reading of Peter Kropotkin's (2009a) theory of *mutual aid*, alongside empirical research on hospitality practices among long-term travellers and their hosts, which illustrates the mutuality of hospitable relations.

The empirical material investigates a diverse group whose sociospatial contexts – as globally dispersed and mobile strangers – may typically inhibit the practice of hospitality.

Nevertheless, the research finds that these long-term, low-budget travellers and hosts cooperate and self-organise globally through multiple, interlinking mutualities. Thus, rather than view hospitality as individual choice in a specific place and time, the proposed notion of 'mutual hospitableness' decentres the reference point of the autonomous self and the present, refocusing on the embedded, systemic intersubjectivity and spatio-temporal expansiveness of mutual aid. Paraphrasing Gibson-Graham's call to "read for difference" (2008: 623-625), we propose that scholars *read for mutuality*.

The article consists of the following sections. First, we outline some key issues in geography regarding hospitality, before introducing Kropotkin's theory of mutual aid alongside broader

anarchist perspectives. Kropotkin's ideas are then brought into conversation with theoretical underpinnings of existing hospitality scholarship. This discussion traces connections and contrasts between Kropotkin and Derridean thinking on hospitality through the work of Emmanuel Levinas and Simon Critchley. Finally, we read for mutuality through ethnography and interviews with participants in a range of grassroots hospitality-based, non-monetised travel networks.

Hospitality: lived practices and politics

Judith Still (2010: 1-2) identifies three reasons why debates over hospitality have (re-)emerged in the last decade: the growing mobility of people across borders and the diversity and encounters this has engendered; the increased accessibility of philosophical writings that post-date World War II but pre-date the present-day resurgent xenophobia; and the expansion of the 'hospitality industry' through tourism. While hospitality research has broadened far beyond its traditional position as a tourism-oriented field of study (Lynch et al, 2011), the term nonetheless comes with a sense of travel, mobility and the unknown: the guest necessarily arrives from elsewhere. Thus, amidst the dominance of for-profit hospitality in tourism, there has been a boom in the last fifteen years in non-commodified or 'more-than-capitalist' hospitality initiatives among travellers (e.g. Bialski, 2012; Germann Molz, 2007; O'Regan, 2012).

Alternative travel networks, practices, and initiatives – most notably Couch-Surfing – represent some of the most established and extensive so-called ‘sharing economies’; forms of collaborative management and distribution of resources for common or shared use (Bradley, 2014). While commodified sharing economies (e.g. AirBnB) have recently gained prominence in the Global North, those forms of “collaborative consumption” (Belk, 2014) remain the minority in terms of sharing in general, which is largely informal and unarticulated (e.g. White, 2009). Alongside critiques of the commercial sharing economy's tendency to monetise non-financial relationships (e.g. Bialski, 2017), the notion of 'sharing' is being questioned as a relevant term for encompassing the mutualistic forms of sociality that take place through such practices (Arnould and Rose, 2016).

Systemic considerations have weighed heavily on scholars' minds in recent years, with a growing empirical emphasis on hospitality's political-economic (Kravva, 2014), geopolitical (Craggs, 2014), colonial (Höckert, 2015) and policy (Darling, 2010) dimensions. Moreover, awareness of how communal relationships and practices become recuperated by capital is indicative of a growing recognition across the social sciences of an everyday, often-unarticulated politics that underpins wider-scale dynamics – an issue that has not gone unnoticed in studies of hospitable encounters and relationships (e.g. Kingsbury, 2011). Viewing the political as something experienced through intimate spaces and socialities can therefore help to refocus on hospitality as a lived, messy, and vital practice (Veijola et al, 2014). Parallel work in feminist geographies has engaged with what Askins (2014: 476) and others call “quiet politics”, concerning the “more-than-implicit” care, support, and mutuality

that operate beyond the register of 'formal' politics but are nonetheless infused with politicised currents.

What emerges is a refocusing on the intersections of hospitality's everyday and institutional/systemic dimensions. As a practice all societies share, its banality has allowed hospitality to be commodified, yet it remains a pervasive dimension of everyday life. This way in which hospitality operates across different registers and scales is an important element of its contemporary manifestations.

Mutual aid and hospitable worlds

Building on themes discussed above, we argue that the notion of mutual aid may help scholars make sense of how hospitality operates as a quotidian, pervasive social institution. Published in 1902 by the anarchist geographer Peter Kropotkin, the book *Mutual Aid* (2009a) was a pivotal piece of evolutionary scholarship that pushed back against the dubious claims of Social Darwinists – most notoriously, Thomas Huxley (Kinna, 1992) – who used Darwinian theory to valorise competition as an individualistic project of 'survival of the fittest'. Thereby, Social Darwinists sought to justify the 'natural' legitimacy of racism, colonialism, capitalism and other forms of domination. Kropotkin's counter-message was simple:

The animal species, in which individual struggle has been reduced to its narrowest limits, and the practice of mutual aid has attained the greatest development, are invariably the most numerous, the most prosperous, and the most open to further progress. (2009a: 229)

These findings made major steps in nuancing Darwin, documenting the collaborative mechanisms of evolution in non-human societies (Dugatkin, 2011). However, Kropotkin was primarily concerned with demonstrating “the immense part which [mutual aid] plays in the evolution of... *human societies*” (2009a: 231, emphasis added). Tracing a long trajectory from prehistory to his contemporary period, Kropotkin identified everyday co-operation as a powerful counter-narrative to orthodox accounts of history that documented only the powerful and their conflicts.

A precise definition of mutual aid is elusive, perhaps owing to the diversity of practices which it encompasses; from swarm behaviour among Siberian birds to caring practices in London’s 19th Century slums, via Khoikhoi tribal justice in south-western Africa, Buryate clan structure in the Mongolian Steppe, and Europe’s mediaeval craft guilds, among many others. We can, however, identify several core characteristics. The first is its *mutual* nature, as distinct from the related term, *reciprocal*. These are often used interchangeably, yet their etymology suggests subtle yet fundamental differences. Reciprocity derives from the Middle French term *reciproque*, a combination of Latin terms ‘re’ (back) and ‘pro’ (toward), emphasising the ‘back-and-forth’ dimension of exchanging valued things or acts between

individuals (Godefroy, 1895: 499). Mutuality is also Latin in origin (*mutuus*), but its use in Middle French (*mutüel*; from which, like reciprocity, the English is derived) refers more closely to the relationship that exchange produces – of objects, sentiments, emotions or values being held and circulated *in common* or *together* (Godefroy, 1895: 188).

Etymological distinctions between reciprocity and mutuality take us only so far, however. Beyond language, there is an important distinction regarding the place of self and other in the two relations. Martin Buber'sⁱ (1970) discussion of 'modes of being' – namely, I-it and I-Thou – is especially relevant. He argues that reciprocity (I-it) is an act *on* an other, whereas mutuality (I-thou) is an act *with* them. Although reciprocation can be prompted by care or solidarity, the other remains a passive receiver of my act. Conversely, although mutuality may often function reciprocally, it does not distinguish between self and other – it is a confluence of multiple subjects, and the outcome is qualitatively distinct from what participants could have achieved separately. This distinction between acting-on and acting-with is central to understanding how reciprocity and mutuality differ in Kropotkinian thought, since it signals in mutuality a communal dimension that reciprocity does not inherently possess. Indeed, in his unfinished work, *Ethics*, Kropotkin foreshadows Buber's ideas published a year later: "Modern science [...] has taught... that without the whole the "ego" is nothing; that our 'I' cannot even come to a self-definition without the 'thou'." (Kropotkin, 2006: 12-13).

By focusing on the communal dimensions of exchange, mutuality asks us specifically to be mindful of the sociality that is constituted by the circulation of value. Indeed, a characteristic of Kropotkin's work is the emphasis he places not necessarily on the aid given by one individual/group to another but the *generalised* relations of mutuality which societies inherit and reproduce. Verter explains:

[Kropotkin's] idea of dependency should not be reduced to the reciprocity of interdependence. While it may be true from an outside perspective that all of our social contributions [appear to] balance each other out, what is important is that... I realise how indebted I am to the rest of humanity (2013: 106).

Cumulatively, mutual relationships are communal, systemic, and constituted *with* the other. This contrasts with reciprocal relations which are principally discrete individuals acting *on* one another. Of course, reciprocity is often manifested collaboratively and in diverse forms (e.g. Bowlby, 2011), but mutuality points to a distinct process of feeding into a wider, socialised web of interrelations beyond a series of discrete reciprocal exchanges. Put simply, "mutuality... signals a relationship of shared sociality" which "is not altruistic but socially 'interested'" (Arnould and Rose, 2016: 76).

A second principle of mutual aid is its affirmative approach to relations with the other.

Kropotkin's narrative of history sought to demonstrate that most mistrust or fear of others

stemmed principally not from their otherness *per se* but from the social structures in particular spatio-temporal contexts. For example, he outlined in detail how the emergence of European Enlightenment imaginaries, centralisation of coercive rule, financialisation, and social polarisation ushered in a period of rapid disintegration of mutual aid institutions (Kropotkin, 2009a: chapter 6). Viewing social change partly through struggles over mutuality positions mutual aid as a systemic social institution and, by the same account, reframes the other as someone who has not always been, and need not be, a threat. Although my limited knowledge of the other may remain a source of anxiety, I remain surrounded by powerful, socially-embedded support networks if my hospitality causes me harm. Again, while mutuality operates partly through a 'return' from individuals' contribution to mutual systems, its distinctiveness lies in the communalisation of those returns; in Buber's sense, acting *with* the other rather than *on* them. This collectivisation of social goods through mutual aid is reflected in wider anarchist writings that foreground intersubjectivity as the foundational element of societies. This is not an appeal to some universally positive 'human nature', but the communal safeguarding that collectivity offers against the violences of asymmetrical power relations (e.g. class, patriarchy, the state) (e.g. Bakunin n.d.; Gelderloos, 2010).

Third, Kropotkin argues that within mutual aid lies a symbiotic relationship between individual freedom and sociality. As Adams (2012: 165) notes, for Kropotkin, the dynamic relationship between individual liberty and collective cooperation "lay at the core of what it meant to be human". Rather than prioritise one over the other, Kropotkin argues that they are co-constitutive, whereby collective mutual support safeguards individuals' capacity to

exercise liberty, and vice versa. Thus, “the practice of mutual aid and its successive developments have created the very conditions of life in which man [sic.] was enabled to develop his arts, knowledge, and intelligence” (Kropotkin, 2009a: 231).

Within the dominant vision of a Hobbesian social contract, the liberty of the individual is *limited* by the nominally ‘collective’ security of the state (e.g. welfare, policing, infrastructure) under the shadow of its threat of violence; similarly, it may appear that the collectivity of mutual aid is anathema to the liberty sought by anarchists. It is important, therefore, to emphasise how anarchist conceptions of liberty differ from liberal-statist ones. The coercive structures of hierarchically-organised societies do indeed limit freedoms; conversely, the dependency of individuals on one another – the co-responsibility of mutual aid manifested in everyday life operating within, beyond and despite these structures – is seen by anarchists as a necessary foundation for genuine liberty. Put simply, “I am not truly free... except when my freedom and rights are confirmed and approved in the freedom and rights of all” (Bakunin in Malatesta 2001: 30). An anarchist vision of liberty is not, therefore, the capacity for an individual to act as they wish, but liberation from oppressive structures and relations – a liberation that must necessarily be collective. Whereas a liberal conception of an autonomous self underpins arguments for the ‘freedom’ of private property ownership, anarchist subjectivity is rooted in a necessary ‘un-ownability’ since it is always becoming in relation to others. An anarchist conception of liberty is therefore inherently and always-already mutual, rooted in “the legacy inherited from an infinity of others” (Verter 2010: 73).

Mutual Aid has not evaded critique, however. An unfortunate reflection of his era, Kropotkin's language counterposes 'savages' and 'civilisation' in a surprisingly binaristic manner. What appears to be a linearity – even coloniality – in his conception of social 'progress' in *Mutual Aid*, though, obscures a perspective that was explicitly anti-colonial and anti-racist. Echoing Adams' (2015: 81) description of Kropotkin's "serpentine" view of progress, Ferretti (2017: 12-15) has recently outlined how Kropotkin mobilised scientific methods and language of his time to *undermine* the linear logics of coloniality.

Another common critique concerns what appears to be an overwhelmingly positive conception of human nature, and an attempt to construct a dubious naturalistic linearity between non-human animal survival strategies and mutualistic dynamics of human societies. It is certainly true that Kropotkin overemphasises this connection, yet we must consider *Mutual Aid's* historically-specific goals; namely, to counteract the dangerous use of Darwinism to justify competitive individualism, white supremacy, colonialism and unfettered capitalism through a far more dubious naturalistic linearity. In his study of this critique, Adams (2012), again, outlines how Kropotkin's wider body of work indicates substantially less deterministic understandings.

Perhaps the biggest challenge in using Kropotkin's work to understand hospitality is the relatively thin conceptual framework for his enormous empirical analysis. Ferretti (2017) argues Kropotkin's efforts to minimise complex conceptual structures in his work was partly an effort to undermine the sense of metaphysical superiority sought by his academic

contemporaries, using “[a]narchy as an antimetaphysical method” (2017: 13). An affront to Enlightenment modernity’s abstracted frameworks, geometrical patterns and logical ‘sleights of hand’, Kropotkin’s writing is grounded principally in lived relationalities. Nevertheless, through Kropotkin’s wider body of work and other anarchists’ writings, it has been possible in this section to outline key building-blocks of mutual aid.

Mutuality challenges much hospitality literature by accounting for the multiplicity of vectors that intersect through acts of welcome. The act may occur as a discrete moment but it emerges from, and contributes to, a collectivity that cannot be fully articulated through binaries of self/other, host/guest, or inside/outside. Hospitality is therefore one of a diversity of mutualities – care, kinship, solidarity, and so on – that cannot be disentangled because they augment one another. Mutuality connects immanent negotiations in the *here-and-now* to a wider range of social practices, institutions and norms, moving beyond reciprocity by emphasising not the economy of exchange but the multi-directional communalising relationships constituted through it.

Towards a more-than-sovereign hospitality?

Empirical work rightly understands hospitality as an everyday practice with large-scale political implications. Kropotkin, likewise, situates mutual aid in this same nexus. In this section, mutual aid is brought into conversation with the philosophy underpinning contemporary hospitality scholarship, which principally builds on the work of Jacques

Derrida (2000a; 2000b; 2001; cf., for e.g. Barnett, 2005; Dikeç, 2002; Jackson and Jones, 2014; O’Gorman, 2007). Derrida interrogates the tension between the universal imperative to be hospitable and its lived modalities by exploring the relations and immanent negotiations that are constituted and contested through welcome. This distinction between the conditional and unconditional is a central problematic for Derrida, embodying the tensions between the universal principle of welcoming all and the multiple factors that limit this impulse in practice. A key factor is the condition of not-knowing, in which the provider of hospitality can only act with partial knowledge of the stranger, the other who is not known. Derrida (1997: 112) argues that “I do not know what is coming, what is to come, what calls for hospitality, or what hospitality is called”, embedding a sense of uncertainty into the heart of hospitality.

Another element of Derrida's thought is the host’s propriety, as master of a domain. For the guest, “the crossing of the threshold always remains a transgressive step” (Derrida, 2000a: 75), since it requires the host to permit access to their space, resources, or emotional energies. Yet, in granting permission, hospitality as a universal categorical imperative renders itself impossible. Derrida articulates this as “aporia”, an irreconcilable contradiction in which conditionality and unconditionality “both imply and exclude each other, simultaneously” (ibid: 81). This aporia is “both the constitution and the implosion of the concept of hospitality” (Derrida, 2000b: 5). The host has bordering power and sovereign ownership of real or symbolic territory, providing or withholding hospitality under non-negotiable terms. Conversely, the stranger poses a transgressive, disruptive threat to this sovereignty. This conception of the host-guest relation positions each ultimately acting *on*

the other. As Sara Ahmed (2000) adds, the propriety of a host towards a stranger has the effect of reifying unequal power relations between the two due to the host's power to define 'strange-ness'. It is this epistemological domination and erasure against which decolonial perspectives – including anarchist perspectives (e.g. Ramnath, 2011) – have sought alternative epistemic foundations for difference and otherness by decentering the reference point around which knowledge and subjectivity is produced (e.g. Anzaldúa, 1987; Battiste, 2000). Who defines the stranger, and who has the right to welcome, is bound up with ownership of property or territory – and the notion of exclusive 'ownership' is well-documented as a colonial-statist invention of modernity (e.g. Gombay, 2017; Proudhon, 2011). As such, in light of decolonial demands for sovereignty over stolen lands, we cannot overlook sovereignty as a *principle of refusal* in the face of dominating powers – as distinct from Eurocentric state sovereignty or the liberal conception of the autonomous sovereign subject.

The relationship with the other therefore underpins any account of hospitality. How we understand this relationship is central in shaping the political substance of hospitality in practice. Emmanuel Levinas' phenomenological writings on the origins of ethics were a major influence on Derrida, and provide nuances and challenges to Kropotkin's mutual aid. The Derridean *aporia* of hospitality – its ultimate, self-defeating impossibility – draws on Levinas' view of ethics as an ultimately unattainable demand placed on us prior to the formation of subjectivity, ego, or conscious selfhood. Since "[t]he relationship with exteriority is 'prior' to the act that would effect it" (Levinas, 1996: 90), neither *sacrifice* nor *self-interest* embedded in liberal notions of individual freedom can fully account for the

nature or origin of ethics or politics. Here, the unarticulated, pre-conscious ethical 'demand' that the other places on the self brings Kropotkin's mutual aid into sharper focus: people do not simply help each other instrumentally, nor solely from conscious sentiments of love or care, but from shared impulses ontologically prior to subjectivity itself, and therefore also prior to (Eurocentric modernity's conception of) sovereignty. Levinas and Kropotkin would likely agree that mutual hospitableness originates beyond the realm of conscious rationality, far removed from the classical liberal account rooted in individual autonomy and property (Verter, 2010), even if often articulated through Buber's (1970) I-It relation. There are clearly differences, though: for Levinas, it is the metaphorical 'face' of the other that motivates us to act; for Kropotkin, mutual aid is a material, evolutionary impulse linked to survival.

Important, too, is the role of what Kropotkin might call *utopia*. The face of the other, for Levinas, calls us to act in ways that are unachievable, and this sense of failure or frustration is compounded by the imaginary 'substitution' of oneself for the other that makes ethical acts possible (Bernasconi, 2002; Levinas, 1996). Within an anarchist imaginary, it is precisely this unattainability that spurs us to act on, and prefigure, worlds just beyond our grasp – embedding relations and structures of envisioned futures in the present (Ince, 2012).

Nevertheless, for both Kropotkin and Levinas, their parallel conclusions reflect a similar understanding of the self as always-already co-constituted with the other – indeed, *all* others, in *all* times, and *all* places. Here, despite the apparent unilateral power of the host in welcoming and defining the 'stranger', the self as a sovereign entity is questioned, be it host or guest. Hospitality as a representation of the self, and of spatial and social control of the

other, unravels; this sense of an autonomous, whole individual, operating reciprocally with others on the register of Buber's (1970) I-It relation, is destabilised as the existence of others renders us not simply autonomous but "heteronomous" (Critchley, 2007). Derrida (2001: 7-23) and those influenced by his framework (e.g. Barnett, 2005: 10-14) have sought to deconstruct the wholeness of this sovereign self, but Kropotkin's mutuality takes this further by making explicit the connections between individual acts and communal social relations through mutual aid.

Simon Critchley, in his anarchist-inspired philosophy, refers to this connection as *hetero-affectivity*, a "meta-political ethical moment" (2007: 119) in which political manifestation operates in tension with an "infinitely demanding" – and ultimately unattainable – Levinasian ethics rooted in the co-constitution of selves and others. However, "[a]lthough ethics and politics can be analytically distinguished..., [there is] no simple deduction from ethics as the relation to the other to politics as a relation to all others" (Critchley, 2007: 120). This is because, as Kropotkin (2006) recognised, such linearity obscures the complex relations of lived experience. Indeed, wider anarchist thinking echoes Kropotkin, particularly through *prefiguration*, at once an ethical act (a principle governing individual action) and a political one (manifested collectively). This prefigurative utopianism of anarchism does not seek an *end-point*; rather, it functions as a *horizon* that creates a processual vision grounded in everyday practice – infinitely demanding, in Critchley's terms, but infinitely applied, too. What we see, then, is a point of connection between Kropotkin's mutuality and Derrida's hospitality – via Levinas and Critchley – through the figure of the other and their destabilisation of what we commonly assume to be individual sovereignty.

Kropotkin's (2009b) investigation into the origins of the modern state is useful in addressing how this philosophical position functions collectively. He identifies the Roman Empire and the 'barbarians' that lived in its shadow as representing two relationally-constituted logics of power. The former represents state power *par excellence*, resting on 'rational' command structures of centrally-organised, sovereign authority, with an atomised individual citizen as its fundamental unit. Conversely, the latter is a decidedly more heteronomous field of decentralised groupings, societies, clans and kinshipsⁱⁱ, primarily "united... by the possession in common of the land" (2009b: 10). Kropotkin implicitly makes an important point here, since these different logics of power are bound up with different conceptions of self-other relationships. This is reflected more recently by Clare et al. (2017) who deploy the terms *poder* (sovereign power over) and *potencia* (popular power to) to very similar ends: the perceived sovereignty of (state) territories, they argue, is a complex meshwork of multiple forms of power, operating relationally with one another.

Complimenting these ideas, Bulley (2015) argues that Derridean understandings of the self imply a somewhat binaristic notion of sovereignty and hospitality, which contradicts empirical evidence. Using the extra-territorial spaces of refugee camps as a case study, Bulley argues:

To examine how the power of hospitality operates..., we must look... beyond the threshold moment of sovereign decision [...]. Doing so reveals the

different technologies and tactics of power which are used to govern the identities, agency and movement of displaced people. (2015: 194)

Hospitable relations involve non-binary relations of multiple, intersecting actors, among whom exist further webs of power relations (Bulley, 2015: 194-196). Essentially, hospitality does not conform to the classical liberal image of a singular, autonomous sovereign; a point corroborated, implicitly, in geography itself (e.g. Kingsbury, 2011; Ramadan, 2008). Bulley calls not for a wholesale rejection of Derrida but for a continuation of Derrida's search for “[b]etter’ forms of hospitality” (2015: 198) that offer more nuanced images of the self and related spatial binaries. Instead, we must seek heteronomous, unsettled understandings of the selves and others that constitute hospitable relationships, operating beyond the binary of autonomous hosts and guests.

In assuming hospitality as an interaction between ‘opposite’ sovereign subjects, we may not fully appreciate the social and spatial embeddedness of hospitality, and the interdependence of the multiple actors and relations that constitute it. Possibilities for understanding association with unknown others as *affirmative* – an important dimension of scholarship on encounters of difference (Wilson, 2016) – are also undermined by this opposition. A more porous conception of the (not-so-sovereign) self might help us refocus on multidirectional relationalities and co-productions of hospitable space by a range of actors.

A reworking of self and other also involves revisiting the temporalities of hospitality, since the others with whom my subjectivity is entwined do not necessarily inhabit the present. Our understanding of how hospitable spaces and subjectivities are constituted must accommodate how actors anticipate, plan, enact, recall and reflect on hospitable moments, incorporating multiple pasts, presents, and futures. For Dikeç et al. not only does hospitality take place *in* time but also it is generative *of* time, such that “[t]ime’ is what the arrival of the other opens up. It is what is given in the process of welcoming the other” (2009: 11). The moment of hospitality, then, endures in memories, materialities and other residues. Derrida also notes how hospitality is “not yet”; an ideal that “maintain[s] an essential relation” with worlds to come (2000b: 10-11). The stranger is understood on the basis of origin rather than destination or, as Derrida describes it, “birth rather than death” (2000b: 14). In discussing Oedipus’ patricide Derrida hints at the role of the past: “Theseus takes pity on the blind man. He has not forgotten, he says, that he too ‘grew up as a foreigner’” (2000a: 43). The temporal element of hospitality may therefore be an anticipated future encounter, or remembered past encounter, in which host/guest roles and relations may be configured differently or inverted.

Nevertheless, hospitality tends to be presented as *reciprocal*, in which actors act *on* one another (Buber, 1970), with an individualised expectation of a return on the host’s ‘investment’ by the guest. This is important and well-documented (e.g. Lynch et al., 2011; Germann Molz, 2007; Hellwig et al., 2017), but, as Kropotkin emphasised, and as empirical sections explain, focusing on reciprocity alone obscures hospitality’s relationships to a web of other mutualities that operate beyond the logics of reciprocity and indicate a more

communal sense of acting *with* others across such mutualities. The reference point of the urgent present is important, yet it is equally important to incorporate into hospitality various non-present presences. This is a question of epistemology, in which “[t]he negation of other realities and experiences manifests itself through [a] construction that derives a supposedly universal reality from the specific form that conceives it” (Barrera and Ince, 2016: 65).

As such, understanding hospitality’s urgency of *here-and-now* requires an appreciation of other relations elsewhere and elsewhen in constituting the present and our present selves; identifying hospitality’s persistence in systemic, collective, mutual relationalities is crucial. It is this wider space of mutual possibility – in the spectral presence of other times and places – that is considered in later sections of this article. This thinking may signal an important development in how we look at, and for, hospitality; as much a collective, pervasive phenomenon as an immediate, individual call to action. As Verter (2010) reminds us, following Kropotkin (2009a), this should not only be seen as reciprocal *quid pro quo* exchange but also a communal dependence of all selves on all others, both proximate and distant in space and time. While we are rightly warned of the impossibility of fulfilling this recognition in practice (Critchley, 2007; Derrida, 2000b; Levinas, 1999), by positioning hospitality within wider networks and practices of mutuality – as mutual hospitableness – we may begin to decentre the here-and-now in our imaginaries of what hospitality is and does.

Mutual hospitableness in practice: global voluntary exchange networks

So far, we have argued that to grasp a fuller understanding of hospitality, we must attend to the entwinement of selfhood and otherness in multiple spaces and times, and that Kropotkin's anarchist notion of mutual aid helps us do this. By *reading for mutuality*, we can better identify the significance and dynamics of hospitality within broader social relations. we now read for mutuality empirically, through a study of mutual hospitableness in practice. This is based on ethnographic fieldwork and 59 semi-structured interviews with hosts and travellers in voluntary exchange networks. These networks produce global, non-financial economies through free participation in various forms of hospitality among strangers.

Table 1 provides an indicative selection of networks encountered and/or participated in during a 22-month period of research across Europe and Asia, not including the broader, informal mutualities also evident among and beyond them. Although generally more concentrated among certain regions (Europe, the Americas and Oceania) and, problematically, certain demographics (often young, moderately well educated, and ethnically European), given their global-scale organisation they provide an interesting study of the multiple, often contested ways that hospitality can operate mutually across expanses of space and time.

Table 1: global voluntary exchange networks – examples

HOSPITALITY TYPE	NAME	SPECIAL INTEREST	STRUCTURE / OWNERSHIP	FUNCTIONS
ACCOMMODATION	CouchSurfing	-	Private company (formerly a collective)	Connecting host and guest, discussion forums, groups
	Warm Showers	Long-distance cycling	Self-managed collective	Connecting host and guest, discussion forums
	BeWelcome	-	Self-managed collective	Connecting host and guest, discussion forums, groups
LABOUR EXCHANGE / HOMESTAY	World-Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF)	Farming, ecology	Self-managed federation	Connecting host and guest, skill-sharing
	Help Exchange	-	Private company	Connecting host and guest
	Workaway	-	Private company	Connecting host and guest
TRANSPORT	HitchWiki	Hitchhiking	Wiki-based	Knowledge co-production, discussion forums

As part of a broader project on non-financial economies among long-term travellers, interviews were secured through ‘organic’ networking and snowballing during ethnographic fieldwork. Interviews were largely one-on-one, semi-structured conversations for one to two hours, and fieldwork initially focused on CouchSurfing and WWOOF as gateways to other networks. All interviewees had sufficient grasp of English for the interviews to be

conducted in English, meaning that there were some national and class exclusions.

However, the ethnography produced more 'experiential' data, which, without resources for translation, mitigated some exclusions. In all cases, we explained the research and its focus. Only one individual (a British man) refused an interview, and no individuals were outwardly negative towards the research, although some were indifferent. Gender balance among interviewees was near-equal (31 women, 28 men).

With most initiatives focusing on hospitality exchange, or having strong hospitable elements, there was some positive bias among interviewees. Two elements limited this effect. First, interviews encouraged participants to be critical of their practices and networks. Second, ethnographic fieldwork functioned as a counterbalance to interviews, allowing for cross-checking and other narratives and concerns to emerge. Indeed, through this, interviewees and interviewers alike confronted their own identities, privileges, oppressions and biases. As other publications from this project discuss, highly critical insights emerged (Ince, 2015; 2016).

In the following sections, we analyse the lived dimensions of hospitality within these travel-based networks. We first discuss participants' personal experiences of mutual hospitableness, before analysing the structures through which hospitality is distributed and organised. By considering personal and organisational dimensions, the research cross-references individual and collective factors.

Hospitality, lived mutually

Hospitality is woven into the fabric of networks studied. Adriana – a hitchhiker, CouchSurfer and WWOOF volunteer in Turkey – notes that this is not a series of isolated events but a “generous system, or system of generosity” (March 2012). Contributing new or different knowledges, resources or help into a generalised, mobile pool is where mutuality emerges in this system. Anna, a Polish hitchhiker and CouchSurfing host, elaborates: “I was taking from people for, like, two years. I was only [couch-]surfing so I would always rely on their hospitality... What I was given, now I want to give back to *my* guests” (October 2012, original emphasis). Anna emphasises how her giving back is not necessarily a direct, reciprocal relationship of giving to the people who hosted her previously; rather, it is a mutualistic giving *forward* to the broader ‘system’ of CouchSurfing. Contrary to the impulse to charge an individual for providing ‘services’, Anna explains that it is “amazing, really [...] [I]t’s not like ‘for free’, but it’s like you give something, right? From your heart.” Anna does not affirm her autonomy as a discrete ethical subject; what she gives is somehow part of her body to the wider collectivity. She disturbs that sense of autonomy, invoking, in Critchley’s (2007) terms, a hetero-affective impulse to act mutually and an effort to operate in a register of Buber’s I-Thou (1970). This is a common theme across the networks studied.

Raj (May 2014), a CouchSurfing host from South Africa, rationalises his participation through a past experience of informal hospitality:

[E]ven if it's outside CouchSurfing, you go down a street and there's a backpacker, you say "hey man, if you need a place to stay the night, come and stay over". [I was in] India, on a bus one evening at 11pm, a young doctor said to me "man, don't head towards the border tonight..., stay at my house, and move on tomorrow".

Contrary to Raj's intention to continue to the border *now*, the doctor's "move on tomorrow" represented less a coercive order to get out than an invitation to slow down. He adds, appreciatively: "it creates different memories", alluding to a qualitatively distinct temporal landscape created by hospitality that invokes a mutual response. Informal hospitality is an especially strong current among CouchSurfing and other accommodation-focused hospitality networks, where several interviewees acknowledged that hospitality is "one of the oldest rules in the world" (Yves, November 2012).

Face-to-face interactions are fundamental to mutual hospitableness. For instance, hitchhiker gatherings and CouchSurfing events are important convergence spaces for knowledge exchange, whereby "you meet other travellers, you share what you've done, you make plans to do something else" (Laura, March 2012). Hosts such as Dorothy (August 2012) see CouchSurfing social gatherings as "space[s] for learning, in terms of what's a good thing to do, and who's a good person to stay with, or where to avoid [...]. I've also helped people." In these spaces, travellers, who are almost invariably strangers, do not simply

exchange information reciprocally, but circulate it in multiple directions, interpreting, filtering, and cross-fertilising from one network or geographical context to another.

Mutual hospitableness therefore operates beyond free accommodation alone. Daisy, a WWOOF participant from the USA, frames mutual welcome in wider terms:

[My partner and I] share that vision also, of providing something for the people who are interested in helping out if we did have... some project that benefits from having that mutual exchange – because we're not rich, but um, we would wholeheartedly want to provide abundance in some other way.

(September 2011)

Daisy's desire to pay forward the hospitality she has received, articulated in generalised terms of "provid[ing] abundance", reflects other comments by participants, both referring to spaces outside of those intended for hospitality and generalised, or communalised, forms of "abundance". Here, hospitality becomes entwined with a wider spectrum of mutualities. Henry, a Workaway participant and hitchhiker from the USA, reflects Kropotkin's view that mutual aid is connected to deeply-embedded human instincts beyond both politics and ethics, across social contexts:

[W]hen it comes down to it most people are just regular people and they don't want to, like, rob you or whatever – if anything they want to just help you... I think it's a universal thing that we all have. It's like, we see someone crying or suffering, we want to help. (March 2012)

Hence, mutual aid encompasses but also extends beyond hospitality, producing spaces of unexpected support. The interconnectedness underlying Henry's words bears strong resemblance to the Levinasian 'face', a representation of the other's co-constitution with the self and signifier from which ethical impulses emerge (Levinas, 1999). Importantly, following Kropotkin, Henry's response to emotional need is not emotionally charged, but simply a "universal" impulse to *help*.

This impulse is reflected by Andrew (December 2012), who notes that CouchSurfing is an "honest and giving community", emphasising its communal and ongoing nature. As a sedentary host for mobile CouchSurfers, Andrew views his hospitality within a longer-term culture of sharing that he had participated in, on and off, for several years. However, this is despite experiences of some guests' poor etiquette and one host making unwanted sexual advances. Having never asked a guest to leave, Andrew is unusual among CouchSurfing hosts, and in these moments a more Derridean sense of propriety emerges among hosts. His insistence on continuing to host, however, reflects a wider tendency among participants to continue involvement in the face of tiny but real risks of bodily or emotional harm, and larger chances of minor conflicts (Ince, 2015). These include poor living conditions,

mismatching expectations, petty theft, unreliable or rude hosts/guests, and a very small number of more significant (often gendered) incidents.

Most participants had some negative experiences, yet they persisted; partly for financial reasons, partly due to a belief that self-regulation of the system was usually robust (see Bialski and Batorski, 2009; Germann Molz, 2014), and partly due to an overriding belief in the positive impacts of such initiatives. Unpleasant incidents or encounters often led to adaptations in how individuals participated, but lifecourse changes (e.g. jobs, illness, pregnancy) were the most common reasons for interruption. For example, Amanda states that family problems would be the main reason she would stop hosting WWOOF volunteers “because I don’t think that’s fair on anybody” (October 2011). Mutual aid, notes Kropotkin (2009a), cannot completely prevent moments of oppression or violence – not even in post-revolutionary worlds described elsewhere (e.g. Kropotkin, 2015) – but minimises risks associated with them. This impossibility, in Levinas’ terms, is the infinity of the others to whom we are always-already responsible, and is why anarchism’s conception of prefiguration is often imagined as leading toward a horizon, not along a path.

Despite the unpredictability of host-guest relations, instances of giving or cooking food and drink for hosts are common, representing more recognisably Derridean hospitality, not “being bad guests and just showing up” (Abraham, September 2011). It is therefore important to recognise that reciprocity endures within mutual aid networks. As discussed, the distinction lies in how mutuality is oriented toward collectivised systems of exchange –

of “acting-with” – whereas reciprocity describes the exchange itself on an individual level. This reciprocity is disrupted in practice by guests regularly providing help to other guests, and hosts to other hosts, remotely and in person. This disrupts the sense of a straightforward bilateral obligation to reciprocate between guest and host, and destabilises outside/inside binary imaginaries (Bulley, 2015). Instead, multiple interdependencies are woven through one another – most intensively in place but also across space. Examples include bring-and-share ‘potluck’ dinners, and circulation of best practices among hosts. Zac, a CouchSurfing host and hitchhiker from New Zealand, provides a typical example of inter-guest hospitableness:

[During Ramadan,] my other [Couch]surfers who were Muslim... were getting up at 4 o’clock to eat before daybreak. This girl had to get to the train station by 5 o’clock, so at 4 o’clock he gave her a ride down there on the motorcycle.
(August 2012)

As such, hospitality viewed within wider systems of mutual aid has multiple lines of flight. Evidence indicates that despite a perceived “‘self-limitation’ built right into the idea of hospitality” (Derrida, 1997: 110), hospitality understood mutually can augment the self through the imprints that association leaves on us. Greta, a WWOOF and HelpX host from Germany, notes “everybody brings their own stories, their own atmosphere” (October 2012). She explains how these atmospheres affect her children through various mutualities:

[Y]ou play with the kids, you read with them as well, and that is one part of... the community, you know: the kids need you because you are different from us, and each other is different.

If we take seriously the Levinasian pre-conscious co-constitution of self and other, and particularly the anarchist conception of communality *enhancing* rather than limiting liberty, this imprint – even in negative or stressful situations – is as much a self-*expansion* as a “self-limitation” (Derrida, 1997: 110). Such expansion has temporal longevity and spatial reach, as illustrated above by participants ‘paying forward’ actions to create new connections with others, in other places, times, and ways. There is therefore a wider, more endemic dimension to hospitality; a *mutual hospitableness* that is non-binary, spatio-temporally expansive, and self-reinforcing across time and space despite the potential for conflict. At an interpersonal scale it may sometimes operate reciprocally or instrumentally, as an “I-It” relation, but collectivity is built into the wider system. The question that follows is how this mutual hospitableness is organised – especially at a global scale.

Organising mutual hospitableness globally

Various organisational and spatial strategies are deployed in voluntary exchange networks to produce mutual hospitableness. Central to this ‘architecture’ are online networks around internet hubs. These can be seen, following Germann Molz (2013), as structures for rendering hospitable spaces of encounter at a distance, facilitating both knowledge

exchange and mobility, and a certain moral economy. Websites operate as organisational spaces in which participants manage hospitality and wider mutual aid practices remotely, and as forums for circulating knowledge and information. Anna's narrative of how she began hitchhiking illustrates how websites create opportunities for networking:

[T]here is a website for hitchhikers in Poland [...]. I saw a post of some girl, [but] she was actually looking for a guy because it's more safe [...] So then she told me there was another guy who had contacted her as well, and that was [who became my hitchhiking partner]. (October 2012)

Through contacting one person online, Anna gained access to another who became a long-term companion. This online encounter facilitated mutual aid between anonymous strangers who may never meet, and the effect on Anna's relationship to broader networks of mutual hospitality "was pretty big". This anonymity and distance can operate beyond pure reciprocity, since there is no obligation to reciprocate except through generalised practices of providing advice or support to others in the future. Moreover, this anonymous mutual aid complicates the domination and definition of the 'stranger' by the 'host' (Ahmed 2000) since both parties are strangers, simultaneously. This giving of often-anonymous help across global spaces thus echoes Kropotkin's (2009a: 23) rejection of the idea that mutual aid emerges from interpersonal bonds (e.g. love); instead, it is rooted in wider collectivities reproduced through practice.

Another element of online organisation and coordination is social media and other websites that are not specifically hospitality-focused. Conversely, some voluntary exchange network sites (e.g. HitchWiki, BeWelcome) are also spaces for non-travel mutual aid, whereby participants collaborate remotely on a site's design, coding, content, and translation. Users also mobilise hospitality websites for events, petitions, giving away unwanted belongings, social networking, and longer-term housing arrangements. The digital 'archive' created by online interaction leaves traces of past help given and received in the form of messages, comments, and links, accumulating over time and enduring in the present. In this context, Derrida's Oedipus does not simply remember that he "grew up as a foreigner"; he has a record (if fragmentary) of when he gave and received help – both to, and as, a foreigner.

Exchange of information, ideas, and knowledge is a key part of how hospitality integrates with wider mutual aid practices. This can happen via the internet, but much remains face-to-face. Yves notes: "[N]obody waited for the internet to create a travellers' network. I remember my first trips when I had no internet and I was just exchanging tips and details with my fellow travellers" (November 2012). In labour exchange networks (e.g. WWOOF, Workaway), it is common for volunteers to share knowledge and skills learned from previous hosts with their current host. Some guests also share professional expertise (e.g. carpentry, horticulture, web design) with hosts and other guests. These practices not only exhibit mutual aid but also constitute the making and remaking of networks over time. Circulations of knowledge do not constitute organisational structures themselves, but their interlocking relationalities can and do. Thus, read mutually, hospitality incorporates a complex temporality, in which answering to immediate needs is not only triggered by

individual impulses there and then, but also bolstered by 'slower' forms of socialised welcoming, giving, and sharing.

Most initiatives have formalised structures. WWOOF, one of the largestⁱⁱⁱ networks, is a federation of 72 affiliates, with an incubator for developing new affiliates in other states/regions. Individual affiliates co-ordinate administration, set local membership fees, and share best practice. Other self-managed initiatives have managing collectives with formal policies and procedures, whereas most for-profit sites involve traditional capitalist workplace relations. Organised modes of networking are not separate from informal hospitality; as we have seen, interviewees link experiences of spontaneous hospitality to their decision to participate in formalised initiatives, and vice versa. These causal links demonstrate how mutual hospitableness is shaped by factors beyond organisations' spatial and temporal reach, but the mutuality of voluntary exchange networks is far from random or *ad hoc*; rather, it is organised, crafted, and reflected on. The spatial strategies of participants are generally oriented towards maximising the possibilities for people to give and receive future hospitality through this system, and organisational structures have evolved to facilitate this.

Most voluntary exchange networks are broadly anti-hierarchical and decentralised. Nevertheless, this does not mean that they operate without exclusions. The prevalence of Global North and broadly young, culturally middle class demographics are indicative of this, as is the explosive growth of for-profit websites seeking to capitalise on the milieu. The

accommodation exchange site BeWelcome grew notably after CouchSurfing registered as a business in 2011 (BeVolunteer, 2013), indicating how self-managed organisational forms can adapt to changing environments – a dynamic that Kropotkin (2009a) identified and discussed throughout *Mutual Aid*. Despite this adaptability, the centralisation created by websites remains an infrastructural risk. For example, site crashes and upgrades can lead to loss of information, wiping the digital archive of its mutual traces. Risk can also become politicised: the 2011 partial takeover of CouchSurfing by venture capitalists was highly controversial among participants. Such ‘enclosure’ by capital is well documented across the emerging sharing economy (e.g. Richardson, 2015), and broader digital and knowledge economies (Bauwens, 2009), whereby open-access practices are simultaneously communal and mechanisms through which immaterial labour is commodified (Carlone, 2013). This, as O’Dwyer (2013) argues, is linked to state-enforced private ownership of network infrastructure and the power these businesses gain through renting access to initiatives like CouchSurfing. The near-monopoly that CouchSurfing had developed in the field of accommodation exchange meant unhappy participants felt somewhat forced to use it. Yves explains: “[The founders] realised that it was easy to make a lot of money from CouchSurfing. [...] I want to go to BeWelcome, but I’m still using CouchSurfing for a while because I’ve been travelling quite fast” (November 2012).

In such situations, the political sensibilities of participants conflict with the practicalities of maximising mutual hospitableness. Thus – especially considering the dramatic rise of AirBnB – the encroachment of capital on free hospitality sites poses risks to mutual networks and exposes their vulnerabilities. This potential for enclosure was predicted by Kropotkin

(2009a), whose positioning of mutuality as a way of understanding social change traced relational struggles between 'barbarian' and 'Roman' logics of power. What Kropotkin had not accommodated for was the mediating role of technology in both the facilitation and disruption of mutual aid.

In these empirical sections, we have seen how mutual hospitableness is manifested through multiple formal and informal channels and relations. The *aporia* of the call to welcome all is neither understood nor practiced simply as an individual responsibility but also as a collectivised generality that extends beyond the realm of hospitality alone and into other forms of mutual aid. Participants – especially hosts – often note that it can be challenging, tiring and sometimes risky, yet they present it not as self-sacrifice or burden, but as *ordinary*. As Gillian, a WWOOF volunteer, noted, “we’re just here living, you know..., [t]here’s nothing profound about it” (September 2011). This everyday, unspectacular dimension of mutual aid is what Critchley (2007) might call its hetero-affectivity, materialising infinitely demanding concerns for a generalised other in everyday interdependencies which are ontologically prior to, but intimately entwined with, politics and ethics. Material realities of enacting this within a global system of strangers circulating through a capitalist economy are contradictory and challenging, but this interplay between universal, communistic impulses and their situated manifestations, is precisely the pivot of Kropotkin’s thought.

Conclusions

Through reading for mutuality, empirical material shows how hospitality can be recast as part of a mutually-reinforcing process of paying forward welcome, alongside care, support and help, across diverse geographies and temporalities. This research considers relatively privileged groups, but it is nonetheless an informative case study of how mutualities can operate globally among dispersed and mobile populations. The article generates four challenges to current understandings of hospitality. First, rather than establishing a fixed dichotomy of self and other, anarchist conceptions of mutual aid foreground another power of welcoming, where the self is always-already co-constituted with the other and, crucially, is *augmented through association*. The “rigorous delimitation of thresholds and frontiers” between the host’s domain and the outside world (Derrida, 2000: 48-49) is therefore only part of the story, and the empirical material shows the multidirectional and non-linear dimensions of hospitality in practice. Second, following this, mutuality helps us explore the interplay of multiple temporal fields: distant pasts, the urgency of the present, and unknown futures intersect through material and digital architectures of memory, hope, anxiety, risk, prefiguration and anticipation. Reading for mutuality indicates that hospitality is not only constituted by urgent, individual impulses in the here-and-now but also crafted, self-managed, and pooled over time.

Third, mutual aid calls for greater emphasis on wider-scale, socialised dimensions of hospitality. This points towards plural spatialities of hospitality that trouble territorialities and delimitations of inside/outside and hospitality/not-hospitality. Instead, the immediate reference point of the host-guest interaction is integrated by Kropotkin’s thinking into a

meshwork of differently-configured moments that connect hospitality with other mutualities. The networks studied show how different mutual aid practices cross-fertilise and intersect, even if they are often manifested reciprocally and not always smoothly. Thus, a more collectivised economy of hospitality emerges, indicating not only the pervasiveness of mutual aid but also its potential for bringing hospitality into wider spheres of political praxis.

Finally, then, reimagining hospitality through mutuality asks us to address the politics of hospitality anew. For example, Dikeç et al (2009) argue persuasively for a reintegration of hospitality into political debates around multiculturalism and migration in the Global North. While the case study presented here is decidedly removed from these questions, it nonetheless illustrates how global networks produce and stabilise relations of mutual aid among strangers across space and time, and demonstrates a need for similar research in other contexts. By recognising how hospitality operates in practice as part of a broader range of mutualities, we might rethink and practice hospitality not as individualised charity for strangers defined oppressively (Ahmed, 2000), but as communal solidarity among strangers defined *mutually*. The mutual nature of solidarity (Featherstone, 2013) unsettles hospitality, and therefore may help us to trouble the sovereign violence that can underpin welcome. This paper has sought to reinvigorate and adapt Kropotkin's ideas to critically build upon theorisations of hospitality; orienting these possibilities towards social change may be a significant next step.

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ⁱ Buber was a friend of the anarchist Gustav Landauer and his political stance had often flirted with anarchism.

ⁱⁱ Patriarchal oppressions certainly operated among these societies, however Kropotkin (2009b: 8) also notes the family unit first appeared long after more communal clan and tribe structures.

ⁱⁱⁱ From the author's analysis of publicly-available information online, there are approximately 10,500 WWOOF farms globally.