

The Rules above the Bed: Academic Language and Learning as Hospitality



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The contemporary university as hospitality

“... all people with the desire and capability to attend university have the opportunity to do so, and succeed in their studies, regardless of their background.”

(Department of Education and Training 2017)

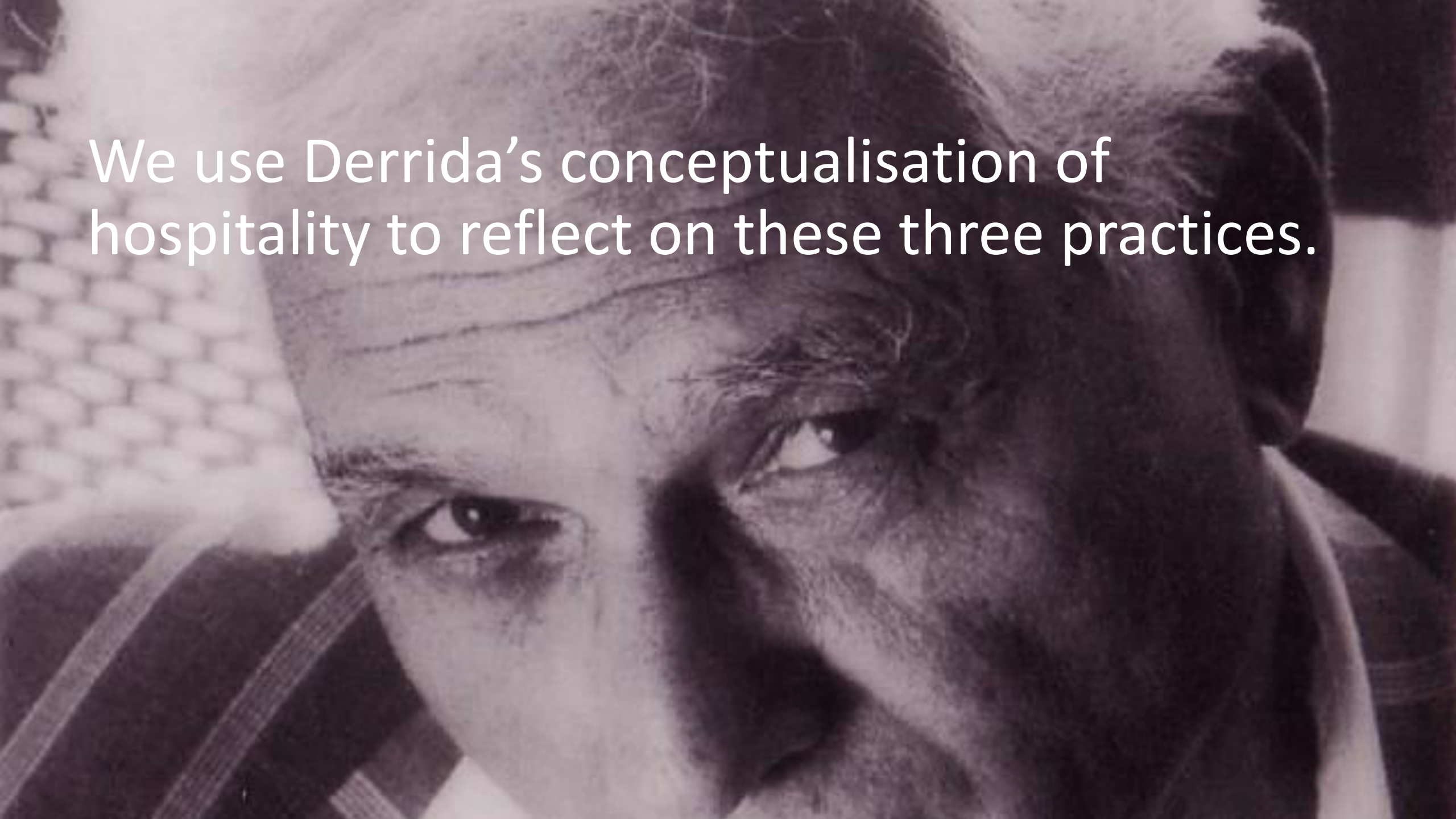
ALL as hospitality

Academic Language and Learning (ALL) is positioned as a key site extending the welcome of the University, with its practitioners framed as benevolent hosts.

Practices include

- identifying students-at-risk through conducting pre-entry language assessment and monitoring student progress
- conducting one-to-one appointments
- team-teaching in targeted programs

We use Derrida's conceptualisation of hospitality to reflect on these three practices.



Derrida on hospitality

- Hospitality as uncovering power relationships
- Conditional vs unconditional or absolute hospitality (Aporia)
- Hospitality as ethics
- Hospitality as opening to the unforeseeable

A black metal gate with a white sign that reads "MANAGEMENT RESERVES THE RIGHT TO REFUSE ENTRY". The gate is closed, and the sign is attached to it. The background shows a brick wall and some foliage.

MANAGEMENT
RESERVES THE RIGHT
TO REFUSE ENTRY

Power

“No hospitality ... without sovereignty of oneself over one's home, ... sovereignty can only be exercised by filtering, choosing, and thus by excluding and doing violence.”

The guest/foreigner has the power to emerge as a trespasser, a parasite or parricide, posing a threat to the host or putting his/her very existence into question.

Conditional hospitality

Conditional hospitality means that the master of the house has a duty to offer Hospitality but the right to dictate its conditions.

Reciprocally, the guest/foreigner has a right to hospitality but obligations to the host.

Conditional hospitality indicates the conditions or rules of hospitality that are actually practiced.

Unconditional hospitality

Unconditional hospitality requires the host to welcome the foreigner without any conditions or expectations.

It completely and unquestioningly opens the space of hospitality, without limits or reserve, to an absolute, unforeseeable, unrecognisable, unknowable foreigner.

(Dufourmantelle & Derrida 2005)

Unconditional hospitality is an absolute openness which is impossible to implement.

(Bulley 2015)

Aporia

Conditional and unconditional hospitality are heterogeneous but mutually dependent and constitutive, revealing an impassable aporia or paradox.

Conditional hospitality imposes terms and conditions that ground unconditional hospitality and render it practical and empirical.

(Bulley 2015)

Without conditional hospitality, unconditional hospitality risks being “abstract, utopian, illusory.”

(Derrida & Dufourmantelle 2000, p. 79)

Aporia

Unconditional hospitality is necessary for conditional hospitality “to invent the best arrangements, the least bad conditions, the most just legislation.”

(Derrida and Düttmann, cited in Germann Molz & Gibson 2016)

Without unconditional hospitality, conditional hospitality would be reduced to mere calculation and threatens with control and hostility.

Unconditional hospitality thus plays a critical role in unsettling and undermining accepted existing conditions of opening up to the other.

(Cheah 2013)

Hospitality as ethics

“Insofar as it has to do with ... one’s home, the familiar place of dwelling, inasmuch as it is a manner of being there, the manner in which we relate to ourselves and to others, to others as our own or as foreigners, ethics is hospitality.”

(Derrida 2001, pp. 16-17)

Hospitality as ethics

Judgement

“It is when ‘I do not know the right rule’ that the ethical question arises.”

(Raffoul 2008, p. 285)

Relation with other

Hospitality “constitutes and is constituted by our relation with the other. How we welcome the other is thus a decision that defines the very nature of the ethical relation.”

(Bulley 2015, p.185)

Relation with self

“Since we come into a world already inhabited by others, the unexpected visitation of the other also puts our being-at-home into question, or even worse, our very right to be. It is a question of whether our being is justified, or whether it is not already “the usurpation of somebody else’s place.”

(Langmann 2010, p.341)

Hospitality as opening to the unforeseeable

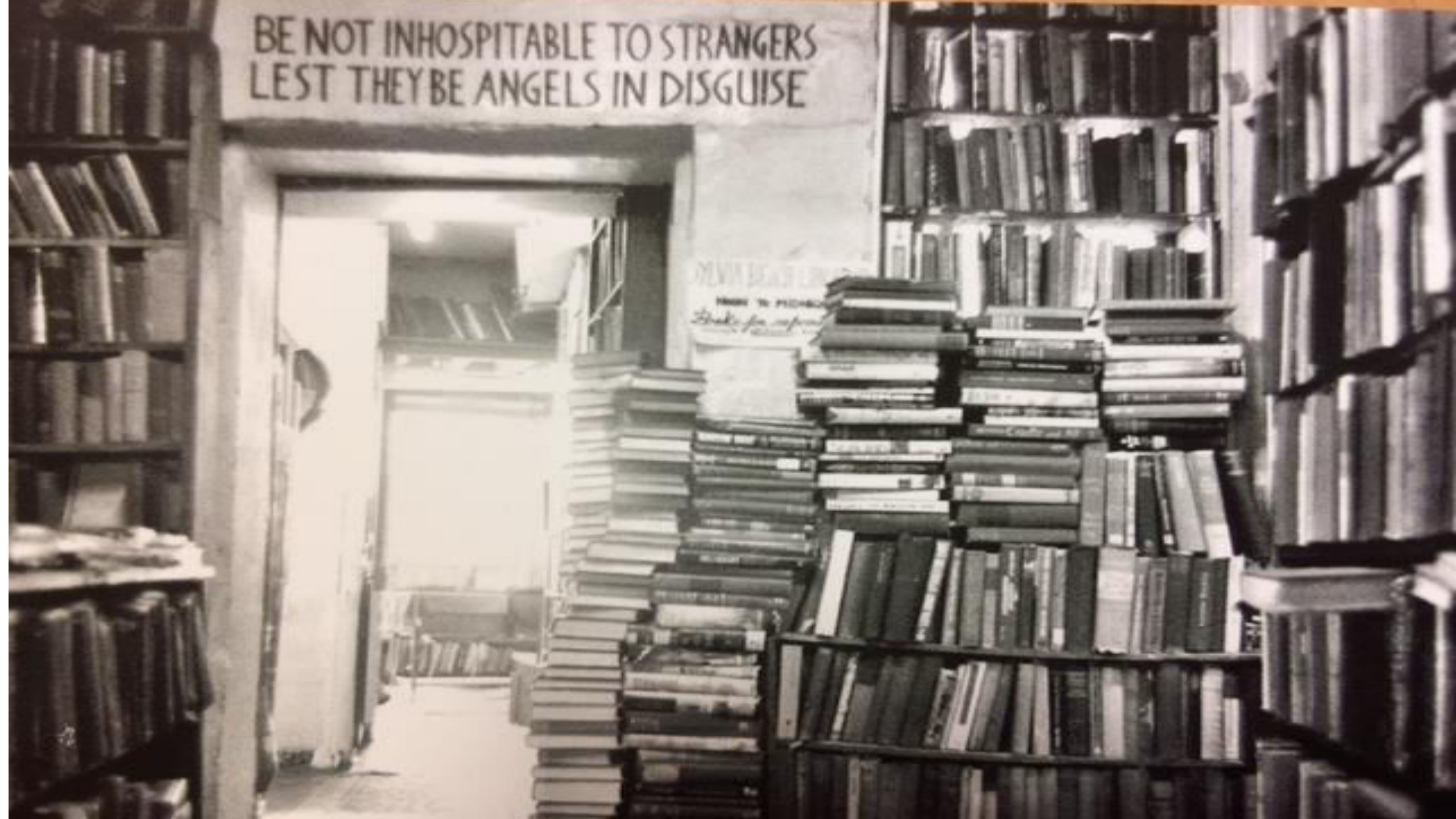
Because hospitality is ethics with no pre-determined answers, it opens us up to the unforeseeable.

Each time we welcome the foreigner, we are presented with a “crisis of choice” in opening to the possibility of the arrival of the new.

(Langmann 2010, p.343)

Hospitality prevents us from foreclosing new and alternative possibilities.

BE NOT INHOSPITABLE TO STRANGERS
LEST THEY BE ANGELS IN DISGUISE



Identifying students at risk

ALL identifying students at risk and providing them with help seem important features of offering hospitality

Power relations

- the right to collect identifying information: ALL as masters of the ELP provision space
- PELA: The violence of asking students to speak our language
- labelling the 'student-at-risk': The violence of naming

Identifying students at risk

Asking a foreigner's name is never an innocent question. It can be used to make foreigners:

“subjects in law, to be questioned and liable, to have crimes imputed to them, to be held responsible, to be equipped with nameable identities, and proper names.”

(Derrida and Dufourmantelle, 2000, p. 23)

Identifying students at risk

Privileging conditional as opposed to unconditional hospitality

ALL practitioners enter into the realms of power hierarchies, calculation, and the exercising of control.

ALL hospitality increasingly privileges conditions and ignores absolute hospitality

It risks becoming "a police inquisition, a blacklist or a [...] border control"

(Derrida 2005, p. 7)

Identifying students at risk

Foreclosing the possibility of the unforeseeable and the new

Such conditions of identification and labelling

- risk 'fixing' or delimiting the student's subjectivity and the unknowable they bring
- restrict our ability to think, imagine, and make claims to alternative relations with students, practices, and ways of encountering difference and the new

One-to-one appointments

Undervalued as inefficient, conventional and under technologized but still popular with students

Using Derrida's notion of hospitality, students in one-to-one appointments exist as invited guests within the dominant cultural identity

The invitation or the welcoming gesture at once establishes the sovereignty of the ALL practitioner and serves to inhibit transgressions on the part of the guest

One-to-one appointments

Opportunities for individual human contact, for freer, in-depth and 'unforeseeable' hospitality to the unknown other.

Hospitality is defined as the “ethical demand of the heterogeneous”, “an art and poetics” it must be “so inventive, adjusted to the other....that each experience of hospitality must invent a new language.”

(Langmann 2010, p. 339)

ALL hospitality in team teaching

ALL welcoming diverse students by integrating academic literacies teaching into core subject units.

Ambiguous power relationship between the discipline host and the ALL guest on the one hand, ALL is “the strange guest within the dominant cultural identity.”
(Langmann 2010, p. 337)

On the other hand, ALL can put “the parricide question”, contesting the rules that are governing teaching and learning practices.

(Derrida & Dufourmantelle 2000, p. 5)

As the tolerated "guest", ALL addresses “the very limit [of hospitality] beyond which the other is no longer welcome.”
(Langmann 2010, p. 337)

ALL hospitality in team teaching

Ambiguous power relationship between the ALL host and the student guest

While ALL is a guest in the discipline, students perceive ALL as another 'sovereign' or 'host' who has the power to control and limit their trespassing.

The task of ALL is to impose the conditions set by the discipline / university in regards to what constitutes academic success in the discipline.

Students have to ask “for hospitality in a language which by definition is not [their] own, the one imposed on [them] by the master of the house.”

(Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000, p. 15)

ALL hospitality in team teaching

To offer hospitality “it [is] necessary to start from the dislocation of the shelterless, the homeless ...Perhaps only the one who endures the experience of being deprived of a home can offer hospitality.”

(Derrida & Dufourmantelle 2000, p. 56)

“Hospitality is an experience beyond knowledge and categorization, an ethical sensitivity or responsiveness directed to the other as the absolute stranger of whom nothing is known.”

(Derrida, cited in Langmann 2011, p. 341)

Our roles of host and guest could not be organized or planned; they only happened, “disturbing and altering the field of social life.”

(Langmann 2010, p. 342)

What we are proposing here is not an abandonment of all the practices that we have adopted. Nor are we vilifying ALL practitioners.

Rather, what we are proposing is for the question of hospitality to constantly unsettle us. For it to be a question that puts us constantly in tension, constantly in the aporia between the conditions of hospitality that we have adopted and the imperative of unconditional hospitality.

This being at the threshold of hospitality, at its paradox, forces us to go beyond facile answers or simple choices. It recognizes the inherent undecidability behind every choice we make but demands of us an ethical response or making a judgement based on our considerations.

Typical of his anti-normative approach, Derrida refuses dictating which judgement or decision to choose. A judgement “cannot be ultimately calculated in advance and thus prefabricated (and thus prescriptive, universal and applicable over time and across all contexts). Having to decide ... means having to account, or to be absolutely responsible, for how and to whom we respond” (Anderson, 2015, p.56).

Finally, because it has no pre-determined answers, the question of hospitality is a question which prevents us from foreclosing new and alternative possibilities. It is thus an affirming question which opens up the possibility of imagining radically new ALL practices; the ‘coming-into-the world’ of the unique and unforeseen in students (Biesta 2016); and ethical ways of encountering difference.

Postscript



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