

Academic Hospitality as a 'Plastic' Praxis of Academic Resistance

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Research Domains

Academic practice, work, careers and cultures (AP)

Abstract

This paper outlines the concept 'academic hospitality' as a 'plastic' concept and explores its potential as a praxis of university resistance. 'Academic hospitality', as formulated by Phipps and Barnett (2007) suggests that hospitality in the academic context can take many forms – linguistic, epistemic and more. It opens up for the thinking of hospitality as an academic praxis that can potentially “enable the flourishing of the academy again” by the welcoming of *difference*. This is also a central element in the concept 'plasticity', which is Catherine Malabou's (2005) ontological principle which sees all entities as recognisable as themselves yet in a constant state of change and interaction. Academic hospitality is an attitude towards difference, plasticity is a name for difference itself. This combination of concepts allows us to rethink the academic and the academy as 'plastic' forms, free to change and respond to change, and therefore to resist.

Full paper

Introduction

This paper is a conceptual exploration. It starts out from a concept of praxis – 'academic hospitality' (Phipps & Barnett, 2007) – and extends it by engaging it with a concept of ontology – 'plasticity' (Malabou, 2005). 'Academic hospitality' represents a situational attitude and answers the question “what should our stance be in the face of academic difference?”. 'Plasticity' represents an ontological (non-)principle and answers the question “what could be an answer to the question ‘what is difference?’”. The question of resistance is meaningless without a notion of difference; the question is how we conceptualise and wield our resistive potential. 'Plastic academic hospitality' represents an answer to this question.

Academic Hospitality

The concept 'academic hospitality' outlines a conceptual framework for the hospitality that is necessary for academic collaboration (Phipps & Barnett, 2007). Academic hospitality represents an openness to difference and a structure of two modes and four forms of hospitality. In either the 'guest' or 'host' modality, hospitality takes the form of material, epistemological, linguistic and touristic form. In its material form, guests and hosts negotiate the invitation (or rejection), reception and working conditions

of a visiting academic. Epistemological hospitality involves an openness to and understanding of differences in academic disciplines, that is, ideas and practices. Linguistic hospitality encompasses the difficulties inherent to linguistic difference and translation, for instance English as the academic 'lingua franca' which is someone's mother tongue but not all. Touristic hospitality comes into vision when the travelling academic is more or less comfortable with their stay, whether the stay is at a hotel or in a differing academic discipline.

Furthermore, the article sketches modalities for the enactment of academic hospitality: Celebratory, communicative, and critical. When engaging in academic hospitality, what should be celebrated, communicated, and criticised, what should be avoided, how should it be done, and what are the risks and benefit to it? 'Academic hospitality' is in this sense a name for a complex set of attitudes and questions towards the enactment and thinking of difference in an academic setting. As we have seen, this set entails questioning the identity of the collaborating academic and the differentiating factors of all of the entities involved – material constitutions but also conceptual and theoretical identities and identifications. The concept 'academic hospitality' can in that sense not escape ontology. By tying it to the ontological concept 'plasticity' I suggest that a new sense of resistance can arise.

Plasticity

One of the main features of Catherine Malabou's concept 'plasticity' is precisely that of resistance. Differing from 'flexibility', plasticity implies the possibility for change but never without consequence. First developed as a means for re-engaging with Hegel after his dismissive French post-WW2 reception, 'plasticity' was her new ontological concept that encompassed temporality, dialectics, and the three 'plastic' features of form: the donation, reception, and loss of form (Malabou, 2005). In the provocative work *What Should We do with Our Brain?* (2008), Malabou acknowledged the philosophical repercussions of plasticity as a neurobiological concept which displaced any previous notion of the brain (body) as static and unchanging. What Malabou recognised as the paradigm of plasticity (Malabou, 2010) was already there, with implications not only for our figuration of the human but also for the way we think interaction and change.

Central to Malabou's plasticity is the threefold feature of form mentioned above: donation, reception, loss. Fundamentally, 'form' – here in its metaphysical sense, represented by Aristotle onwards, dismissed by Derrida – stands in a constant tension between providing shape to itself, being changed by some other force, and the potential for disappearing (Malabou, 2005). This tension is fundamentally the play of resistances. The three features are complementary and different, and this difference is what causes and upholds the potential for and enactment of resistance. This, I suggest, can help us reframe the collaborative praxis of 'academic hospitality' as a form of plastic resistance.

Plastic Academic Hospitality

Academic hospitality implies the meeting of people in spite of or because of their difference, but in light of 'plasticity' the notion of academic hospitality could be considered meetings between individual academics, but also between academic *forms*. Understood according to the ontology of plasticity, academic hospitality could be seen as a web of praxes enacted by disciplines, Universities, research groups, nationalities and so on. Considered in this sense, 'plastic academic hospitality' invites individual researchers as well as smaller and larger groups to rally around important and common issues. Our difference is what provides unity, if we are hospitable to it.

References

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