Landas 26:1 (2012) 17–36

THE DEEPENING DIGITAL DIVIDE AND THE CONCEPT OF HOSPITALITY

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Introduction: Providing the Context

Our present day society has been characterized as information and network based. "The concept of the *information society* is a *substantial* characterization of societies in which information increasingly is the primary means and product of all processes. The concept of network society is a formal characterization emphasizing a particular social (infra)structure and organization of contemporary society."[1] One may say that developed countries possess more of the characteristics of being an information and network society than do developing countries.

The Information Society

An information society relies heavily, for its functioning and survival, on processed information brought about by information and communication technologies (ITC). Information then becomes

[1]Jan A. G. M van Dikj, *The Deepening Divide: Inequality in the Information Society* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2005), 133.

a primary good.[2] This means that for a person to participate well in society, a certain level of acquisition of information is necessary. The truth, however, is that not all gain the same level of information or knowledge in our society. Furthermore, in this kind of society, information has become leverage for productivity and power. This implies that having greater access to digitalized information results in wielding more power and leads to efficient production processes that effect increased and superior output. On the level of individual appropriation of digitalized information/knowledge, "[s]ome individuals have better mental skills to deal with the processing [of] data than others." Thus, "[d]ifferential skills may lead to rising skill premiums"[3] that cause income inequalities. "Information technology and digital skills may play a role in current income polarization, as they may lead to higher and more valuable skills for some employees and lower and less valuable skills for others."[4] In terms of group appropriation of information/data/knowledge from the new media, some groups have more available social and cultural resources to process information, thereby giving them a significant advantage over others who do not have the same material resources. This is also compounded by the fact that one's social position (membership in a household, business, nation, etc.) will also determine access to information. In other words, while there is an information overload on the Internet, not everyone has access to it. Only those who are in certain advantageous positions of society can avail the most of this crucial information. Hence, this makes digitalized information a positional good. "Existing positions and their information opportunities enable people to gain all kinds of resources and obtain (even) better positions."[5] The key point to

[2]van Dikj, *The Deepening Divide*. He writes: "Primary goods are goods that are so essential for the survival and self-respect of individuals that they can not be exchanged for goods. Rights, freedoms, life chances, and a particular basic level of income are the most familiar examples of nonmaterial primary goods."

[3]van Dikj, *The Deepening Divide*, 143.

[4]van Dikj, *The Deepening Divide*, 143.

[5]van Dikj, *The Deepening Divide*, 143.

realize when talking about social equality and inequality in relation to the information society is this: one's possession of information/knowledge alone does not per se lead to equality or inequality. Rather, possession of it must be coupled with one's strategic position in society to determine control and power which eventually leads to the binary division of the haves and the have-nots of the digital world.

The Network Society

Social positioning can be assessed by the social network a *netizen* belongs to.

> Certain positions in social and media networks increasingly establish a person's power in society …. In social networks, one finds "stars" or "centers" as well as people who are isolated or hold peripheral positions. In media networks, there are people who design, fill, and control broadcasting, telecommunication, and computer networks and people who, more or less, only use them.[6]

While the concept of the information society deals with the changing substances of activities and processes in contemporary developed societies, the idea of network society relates to the "changing organizational forms and (infra)structures of these societies."[7] Both, however, are related concepts and reinforce one another. In other words, the latter refers to the social and organizational forms and structures that are responsible for the qualitative and quantitative shifts that are responsible for configuring the information society.

Networks have some "equalizing properties." For one, they create and facilitate the cheapest, widest and the most rapid way of connecting people across vast distances of time and space/place. The Internet is the best example of this. For another, its so-called flat structure generates more reciprocity and complementarity among its actors rather than a top-down, bureaucratic and unequal structure as is the case

[6]van Dikj, *The Deepening Divide*, 145.

[7]van Dikj, *The Deepening Divide*, 146.

with hierarchies and markets, respectively. Networks allow a "wider dispersion of information, contacts, goods, services and resources in general that is beneficial to many."[8]

However, there are also elements of networks that promote social inequality. If the primary aim is "to extend the environment to find new contacts, sources of information, resources, jobs and the like or to extend a particular division of labor …,[9]" then in a network, there are those who are included and/or excluded depending on one's contribution to it. There is, therefore, a lot of selection and screening as to who will be invited to the network. Membership is thus provisional. Weak links are always threatened with being cut off from the network once they become useless.

> This is rather different from traditional social communities and organizations, in which the weak are carried along by the strong in some kind of solidarity … the weak remain visible, and they have their own role to play, even if it is only the role of the village idiot … the network society tends to be a harsh, individualized typed of society, as compared to relatively united traditional and mass societies ….[10]

In addition, "[a]ctors in networks try to vary their contacts, relationships, and information sources to acquire better opportunities of selection for survival."[11] Hence, the degree of one's role varies depending on the benefit one gives. This means that not all actors in the network have the same degree of connection to the center. The weaker ones are merely accessories to potential linkages, while the core or star actors in the network tend to protect their own position and interests.

> The larger and more extended the network becomes, the more positions are spread across central and peripheral spaces and places. They are divided among the hubs (the proverbial "spiders in the net") and the terminal fringes of the network. Consequently, all existing categorical inequalities in our society concerning employers and managers, and

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[8]van Dikj, *The Deepening Divide*, 146.

[9]van Dikj, *The Deepening Divide*, 148.

[10]van Dikj, *The Deepening Divide*, 149.

[11]van Dikj, *The Deepening Divide*, 149.

> executive personnel, males and females, majorities and minorities, citizens and migrants, and others are reproduced in unequal network positions and relations.[12]

This may lead to the formation of a new class of people called the *infocrats in an infocracy*. They are the super techies who are capable of centralizing resources into centers or hubs. As a consequence, this may create an opportunity for hoarding by those who are closest to the information. Since they have crucial information, they have a greater chance to avail of opportunities and services. This is further exacerbated by the fact that access to opportunities also depends on who has the fastest and most powerful means of web connection. Moreover, those who have the most recent computer applications, systems and programs, and the skills to operate them, will also have better opportunities in work, education and social life. So we may say that

> … having a particular position in social and media networks defines one's position in society. Having no access to these networks means absolute exclusion. Obtaining a more or less central position inside networks entails relative exclusion; that is benefitting more or less from resources exchanged and participating more or less in decisions made. The structure of social and media networks has properties that are capable of extending and reducing equality. They support equality through extended connectivity and a relatively flat distribution and control. However, they reduce it through highly selective membership practices and requirements of participation.[13]

The Deepening Digital Divide

What I have presented are some of the findings that Jan A. G. M van Dijk provides in his book *The Deepening Divide: Inequality in the Information Society*. In effect, all of these observations boil down to his main thesis: "possession and control of resources in society affect the distribution (whether equal or unequal) of access to the new media (computer/internet); corollary to this is the view that one's position

[12]van Dikj, *The Deepening Divide*, 151.

[13]van Dikj, *The Deepening Divide*, 160.

in society galvanizes one's control and access to the new media." Put differently, those who have the most means of access and resources to avail of the new media will be the socially advantaged class while those who have the least access (e.g., physically, motivationally, skills-wise) will be the most disadvantaged. This social reality produces what he calls social inequality or the so-called Matthew Effect, to use the term coined by the sociologist Robert Merton. The latter implies that to those who have more, more still will be given. Put succinctly, the rich will get richer with the availability of the new media technology. As van Dijk puts it, "those who already have a head start in possessing particular resources benefit more from a new resource than those who are behind and already have some disadvantage."[14] Whether in terms of physical access or skills access, "the social class with high income, high education, high level of occupation, and full employment; the ethnic majority in a country, and the generation with the highest learning potential (the younger generation)—was the first to take advantage of the new technology."[15] For van Dijk, this demonstrates the source of a deepening digital divide that causes social inequality. The idea that a group's control of the means of production or social resources means control of society is not a novel idea. This idea, however, gains more relevance as the new forms of media (digital technology) become decisive in all facets of life. Viewed from this perspective, the digital divide is not only a technological problem (in terms of physical access to it) but a social problem as well. The digital divide, in other words, cannot be remedied by simply providing computers for all. Rather, it entails a certain reorganization of society to make it more socially inclusive. The logical question then to ask is how do we bring about social inclusion, rather than social exclusion, in an information and network society? To this issue we now turn.

Derrida and the Question of Hospitality

In the book titled *Of Hospitality*, Derrida writes:

[14]van Dikj, *The Deepening Divide*, 125.

[15]van Dikj, *The Deepening Divide*, 125.

> Does hospitality consist in interrogating the new arrival? Does it begin with the question addressed to the newcomer … what is your name? Tell me your name, what should I call you, I who am calling on you, I who want to call you by your name? What am I going to call you? … Or else does hospitality begin with the unquestioning welcome, in a double effacement, the effacement of the question and the name?[16]

Quoted above is a key to understanding Derrida's notion of hospitality. Hence, in this short exposition, this key passage will be further elucidated in order to provide a framework for dealing with the question of social inclusion in an information and network society.

Of Hospitality

Jacques Derrida, however, raises a formidable challenge to the logic of hospitality as it is understood and practiced. He brings to a focal point the "performative contradiction" or *aporia* apparent in it.[17] For him, the hospitality conundrum is articulated as follows: "as we offer hospitality (its possibility) its conditions of impossibility [sip] in." As it were, a deconstruction takes place.[18] As hospitability is being defined and practiced in concrete ways, its very existence and essence are brought into question. Succinctly expressed, in the gesture of hospitality, one is always made to ask if such an enthusiastic offer of hospitality is authentic or not. This paradox is what Derrida sought to explain.

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[16]Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*, trans. Rachel Bowldy (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 27–28. Henceforth referred to as *Of Hospitality*.

[17]See Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 65; also Jacques Derrida, "Hospitality," trans. Barry Stocker with Forbes Morlock, *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 5:3 (December 2000): 4. Henceforth referred to as "Hospitality."

[18]Derrida writes: "Hospitality is a self-contradictory concept and experience which can only self-destruct [put otherwise, produce itself as impossible, only be possible on the condition of its impossibility] or protect itself from itself, auto-immunize itself in some way, which is to say, deconstruct itself—precisely—in being put into practice." See Derrida, "Hospitality," 5.

An Antimony

Derrida then directs our attention to an underlying essential antinomy that makes up the general concept of hospitality. He argues that this antinomy needs to be constantly negotiated, and so he explains the internal dynamics in hospitality in the following way:

> … there would be an antinomy, an insoluble antinomy, a non-dialectizable antinomy between, on the one hand, the law of unlimited hospitality …, and on the other hand, the laws (in the plural), those rights and duties that are always conditioned and conditional …[19]

A sharp distinction is made between the *law* of hospitality and the *laws* of hospitality.[20] The former brings about unconditional and unlimited hospitality. The latter offer conditional and limited forms of hospitality. While the law of hospitality eschews juridical imperatives from its discourse, the laws of hospitality court the language of rights, duties and obligation.

The Hyperbolic Demands of the Law of Hospitality

On the one hand, we discern the daunting requirements for unconditional/absolute hospitality. Derrida stipulates these requirements:

> … absolute hospitality requires that I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner …, but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I give place to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names. The law of absolute hospitality commands a break with hospitality

[19]Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 77. See also 135, 148–149.

[20]Derrida speaks about the two regimes that constitute hospitality, i.e., "the unconditional or hyperbolical on the one hand, and the conditional and juridico-political, even the ethical, on the other." See *Of Hospitality*, 135–137.

> by right, with law or justice as rights. Just hospitality breaks with hospitality by right …[21]

One already senses the "hyperbole" that this kind of hospitality involves.[22] One is even tempted to ask about the viability of this form of hospitality in actual terms.

Hospitality of a "Modest" Kind

On the other hand, we discover more practicable and controllable prerequisites for conditional hospitality. Conditional hospitality involves duties and obligations enshrined in our laws and ethical systems. Derrida locates them in the "Greco-Roman tradition and even the Judeo-Christian one, by all of law and all philosophy of law up to Kant and Hegel in particular, across the family, civil society, and the State."[23] While this kind of hospitality is a welcome development and a necessary step toward hospitality, for Derrida, the "juridicality involved in Kant's discourse" makes Kant's offer still very conditional, conditioned by the host, not constituting a radical break from the regime of rights and obligations.[24]

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[21]Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 25.

[22]Derrida sometimes refers to unconditional or absolute hospitality as hyperbolical hospitality. See *Of Hospitality*, 135.

[23]Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 77.

[24]See Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 70–72, where he explains the implications of the Kantian view. He opines: "Does this mean that the Kantian host therefore treats the one who is staying with him as a foreigner? Yes and no. He treats him as a human being, but he sets up his relationship to the one who is in his house as a matter of the law, in the same way as he also does the relationships linking him to murderers, the police, or judges. From the point of view of the law, the guest, even when he is well received, is first of all a foreigner, he must remain a foreigner. Hospitality is due to the foreigner, certainly, but remains, like the law, conditional, and thus conditioned in its dependence on the unconditionality that is the basis of the law."

A Paradoxical Law

When these regimes of hospitality, in a manner of speaking, fuse horizons, the relationship becomes not only problematic and paradoxical but even vicious. He contends that

> [t]he law of hospitality, the express law that governs the general concept of hospitality, appears as a paradoxical law, pervertible or perverting. It seems to dictate that absolute hospitality should break with the law of hospitality as right or duty, with the "pact" of hospitality.[25]

Derrida then seems to drive a wedge between the two regimes, implying a radical separation of one from the other. Put differently, Derrida steers away from a legal or juridical frame of reference on hospitality. Most of the time, however, he insists on a continuous need for negotiation between these interweaving forms of hospitality. This is so that gestures of hospitality are refined and purified to their purest forms or, at least, so that expressions of hospitality appropriate the more ideal or pristine form. For him, they (two regimes of hospitality) are interlaced and constitutive of one another. They make up two faces of one coin or, better still, the relationship may be compared to a double-edged sword reality.

The *law* of hospitality needs to be contextualized for concreteness and relevance, while the *laws* of hospitality have to be constantly open to the horizon of the former in order to be more encompassing and daring. Hence, the paradox lies in the law of hospitality "forced" to don the garb of "rights and obligations" in order to exist and become concrete, but the process endangers and violates its very nature, so what Derrida proposes is a playful balance of this double imperative. Concisely expressed, the "impossible"/unconditional hospitality is marked by a horizon of continuous openness. This safeguards hospitality from being confined to or hijacked by encumbering legal narratives that hamper its potential for pure perfection. Oscillation then, between both poles, allows one to test the degree and depth of responsible hospitality that one can offer to a guest or stranger. Derrida, commenting on this relationship, maintains the following idea:

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[25]Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 25.

> But even while keeping itself above the laws of hospitality, the unconditional law of hospitality needs the laws, it requires them. This demand is constitutive. It wouldn't be effectively unconditional, the law, if it didn't have to become effective, concrete, determined, if that were not its being as having-to-be. It would risk being abstract, utopian, illusory, and so turning over into its opposite. In order to be what it is, the law thus needs the laws, which, however, deny it, or at any rate threaten it, sometimes corrupt or pervert it. And must always be able to do this.[26]

In short, a tug-of-war occurs between these extreme poles to test each other's limits and strength. The relationship is such, for the law of hospitality and the laws of hospitality, that both are irreducible and indissociable from one another. It may be said then that Derrida's concern is not simply the shift from the language of rights and obligation to the language of "excess" and pure gift. For him, it is actually pushing the limits of hospitality that is at issue. More will be said about this later.

Hospitality as a Pure Gift

As pure gift, absolute hospitality requires sheer gratuity on the part of the host. Derrida ascertains this when he said "[f]or to be what it 'must' be, hospitality must not pay a debt, or be governed by a duty: it is gracious …."[27] For if hospitality is done "out of duty" and expects something in return from the visitor, then "it is no longer graciously offered beyond debt and economy."[28] Hence, if it were a question of duty, it would violate the logic of the utter gratuitousness of the gift.

Elsewhere, he similarly reflects on its utter gratuity and broaches the danger of losing it (giftedness) as soon as the host projects, unto his guests, familiarizing legal and judicial categories. He posts the questions as follows:

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[26]Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 79.

[27]Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 83.

[28]Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 83.

> Does one give hospitality to a subject? To an identifiable subject? To a subject identifiable by name? To a legal subject? Or is hospitality *rendered,* is it *given* to the other before they are identified, even before they are (posited as or supposed to be) a subject, legal subject and subject nameable by their family name, etc.?[29]

Therefore, imposition of expectations and creating a "quid pro quo" situation (something done in exchange for something else or merely returning a favor) with the guest subverts the logic of absolute hospitality. An attitude of "unquestioning welcome" is what is advocated by Derrida.

The Insecure Host

Insecurity causes the host to adopt convenient mental and physical scaffoldings like notions of family, nation, citizenship or language. As mentioned already, this violates the very being of the guest/foreigner because of the non-recognition of his/her distinctiveness and uniqueness. Compelling a guest to speak the language of the host, as a pre-condition for being invited, is accordingly the first violation of hospitality because it assimilates and co-opts the guest to the culture of the host, thus disregarding his/her heritage.[30]

On another level, labels and designations demarcate boundaries and put constraints on hospitality. This "act of naming" not only assures the host that his guest respects the rule of law, and subjects himself or herself to it,[31] but more importantly reassures the host that he is still the "master of the house" and, as such, is the one who is in command and in power (despotic sovereignty and the virile mastery

[29]Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 27.

[30]Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 15–16.

[31]"In telling me what your name is, responding to this request, you are responding on your own behalf, you are responsible before the law and before your hosts, you are subject in law." See Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 27.

of the master)[32] when he allows the visitor into the comforts of his home. Derrida expounds on this:

> ... that the host, he who offers hospitality, must be the master in his house, he (male in the first instance) must be assured of his sovereignty over the space and goods he offers or opens to the other as stranger. This seems both the law of laws of hospitality and common sense in our culture. It does not seem to me that I am able to open up or offer hospitality, however generous, even in order to be generous, without reaffirming: this is mine, I am at home, you are welcome in my home, without any implication of "make yourself at home" but on condition that you observe the rules of hospitality by respecting the being-at-home of my home, the being-itself of what I am.[33]

As soon as the host perceives encroachment on his sovereignty, he begins to consider the guest a nuisance, a parasite[34] or "an undesirable foreigner, and virtually as an enemy.[35]" Here hospitality becomes hostility.[36]

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[32]Derrida describes the sense of power that reassures the host that he is still in control in the following way: "I want to be master at home *(ipse, potis, potens,* head of house, we have seen all that), to be able to receive whomever I like there. Anyone who encroaches on my 'at home,' on my ipseity, on my power of hos-pitality, on my sovereignty as host, I start to regard as an undesirable foreigner, and virtually as an enemy. This other becomes a hostile subject, and I risk becoming their hostage." The notion of hostage here is understood as an encroachment on the host's sovereignty and not in a positive sense that will be discussed later in relation to the view of Levinas. See Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 54. See also "Hospitality," 15.

[33]Derrida, "Hospitality," 14.

[34]A guest is considered a parasite when he or she does not have the legal protection accorded to him or her by the State as a foreigner. A parasite is "illegitimate, clandestine, liable to expulsion or arrest" by virtue of the fact that he/she does not have the right to hospitality. See Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 59.

[35]Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 53–54.

[36]According to Derrida, the Latin word for *hostis,* which means guest or stranger, can, etymologically, also take the meaning of an enemy. The interplay of usage is significant for Derrida because, in the shift of meaning, he calls our

A "Terrifying" Gift

While a pure gift, absolute hospitality nonetheless is terrifying because of its "unimaginable demands." Derrida argues that "[i]t may be terrible because the newcomer may be a good person, or may be the devil; but if you exclude the possibility that the newcomer is coming to destroy your house—if you want to control this and exclude in advance this possibility—there is no hospitality."[37] When control and calculation set in, these are manifested in strict immigration controls, locked doors or security systems to screen and weed out undesirable aliens or visitors. Unconditional hospitality as a gratuitous gift, for Derrida, requires the host "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 a pure gift might be terrible too."[38]

The images of door-less houses and borderless states inform the ethos of unconditional hospitality. These images stand in stark contrast to the images of locked doors, secured keys and protected thresholds accompanying conditional hospitality. Commenting on this, Derrida notes:

> … [t]o take up the figure of the door, for there to be hospitality, there must be a door. But if there is a door, there is no longer hospitality. There is no hospitable house. There is no house without doors and windows. But as soon as there are a door and windows, it means that someone has the key to them and consequently controls the conditions of hospitality. There must be a threshold. But if there is a threshold, there is no longer hospitality.[39]

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attention to the fact that hospitality can take the form of hostility, meaning a guest (hostis) can be considered a hostile enemy (hotis). See "Hospitality," 15.

[37]Derrida, "Hospitality, Justice …," 71.

[38]Derrida, "Hospitality, Justice …," 71.

[39]Derrida, "Hospitality," 14.

Paralysis or Openness

Because absolute hospitality is terrifying, it may lead to paralysis which immobilizes the host. When paralysis takes hold, protectionist attitudes such as xenophobia, ethnocentrism and the perpetuation of a nationalist agenda gain ground. With absolute hospitality, however, fortified walls of security must come crumbling down. Confronted with a "door-less" and "wall-less" situation, the host feels vulnerable, powerless and anxious. The fear of the unknown and the distressing thought of the imminent danger that lurks in the background cause the host to freeze at the threshold. For Derrida, the antidote to this kind of paralysis is not erecting and constructing more defences but the unconditional embrace and welcome of the stranger. With the doors gone, the host can now, with open arms, let the uninvited visitor enter his unprotected space or turf. We therefore find Derrida pushing the agenda of pure hospitality to the extreme.[40] He argues his case in the following way:

> … I am saying that this apparently aporetic paralysis on the threshold "is" … what must be overcome …. If there is hospitality, the impossible must be done …, this "is" being in order that, beyond hospitality, hospitality may come to pass. Hospitality can only take place beyond hospitality, in deciding to let it come, overcoming the hospitality that paralyzes itself on the threshold which it is.[41]

The Element of Surprise

Absolute hospitality brings pleasant surprises to the host and may even lead to his "conversion" and awakening as he encounters the unexpected visitor. In light of this, Derrida distinguishes the concept of *visitation* from *invitation*. "In visitation there is no door. Anyone can come at any time and can come in without needing a key for the door. There are no customs checks with a visitation. But there are customs

[40]See Derrida, "Hospitality, Justice …," 70.

[41]Derrida, "Hospitality," 14.

and police checks with an invitation."[42] Thus, selection and filtering of invitees occur in invitation.

Likewise, this element of surprise comes out in his concepts of *messianism* and *messianicity*.[43] *Messianism* is like conditional hospitality because it projects certain ideals on the "other" so that they conform to one's expectations of them. "When imagining the coming of the Messiah the host attributes a new kind of origin and centrism to a divine other and assumes the latter suits their imaginative picture."[44] The other's "otherness" then dissipates in the empowering shadow of the host. Unlike *messianism*, *messianicity* lets the other or messiah be. Like unconditional hospitality, one has no *a priori* expectations of the other. It is open to unexpected surprises, brought about by the encounter with the uninvited other, taken from his/her otherness or difference. *Messianicity* is not limited only to the religious context but may "apply to a friend, someone culturally different, a parent, a child; where the issue arises of whether we are capable of recognizing them, of respecting their difference, and of how we may be surprised by them."[45]

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[42]Derrida, "Hospitality," 14.

[43]In his interview, Derrida expounds on these themes:

> I try to dissociate the concept of this pure hospitality from the concept of "invitation". If you are the guest and I invite you, if I am expecting you and am prepared to meet you, then this implies that there is no surprise, everything is in order. For pure hospitality or a pure gift to occur, however, there must be an absolute surprise. The other, like the Messiah, must arrive whenever he or she wants. She may even not arrive. I would oppose, therefore, the traditional and religious concept of "visitation" to "invitation": visitation implies the arrival of someone who is not expected, who can show up at any time. If I am unconditionally hospitable I should welcome the visitation, not the invited guest, but the visitor. I must be unprepared or prepared to be unprepared, for the unexpected arrival of any other. (See "Hospitality, Justice …," 70)

[44]See Kevin O'Gorman, "Jacques Derrida's Philosophy of Hospitality," *The Hospitality Review* 8:4 (October 2006): 53.

[45]See O'Gorman, "Jacques Derrida's Philosophy of Hospitality," 53.

Being "Hostaged" by the Wholly Other

It is in the visitation and messianicity that the host experiences being "hostaged" by his/her guest in the comfort of his/her home. Hostage here is not understood in a negative sense as being captured (hostage taking) by a criminal or terrorist demanding a ransom. Rather, "being hostaged" in this context pertains to the discourse of Emmanuel Levinas. Accordingly for Levinas, "… the exercise of ethical responsibility begins where I am and must be the hostage of the other, delivered passively to the other before being delivered to myself …."[46]

Hence, in this "hostage" situation, a process of reversal takes place. The host becomes the guest of his own house and the guest becomes the host. It is the guest who makes the host feel at ease and at home. As the host is confronted with the face of the other and allows the guest to be who he is, the host takes on the perspective of the other and is able to respect and speak with the other on equal terms. "[I]t is through the condition of being a hostage …," "that there can be pity, compassion, pardon and proximity in the world …."[47]

The face of the truly *Other* guest, therefore, summons us to transformation and conversion. It is an interruption of the self.[48] The guest teaches us something about our insecurities and finitude as contextual human beings. Thus, it is by looking beyond the self and letting our secured world be disturbed, by the presence of the other, that we salvage ourselves from our bigotry, narrow-mindedness and chauvinism. These life-alterations come about when real hospitality takes place. Derrida thus explains the task that a host must perform in a condition of pure hospitality:

> … the master of this house, the master in his own home, the host, can only accomplish his task as host, that is, hospitality, in becoming

[46]Derrida, "Hospitality," 9.

[47]Derrida, "Hospitality," 9.

[48]See Mark W. Westmoreland, "Interruptions: Derrida and Hospitality," *Kritike* 2:1 (June 2008): 1–10.

> invited by the other into his home, in being welcomed by him whom he welcomes, in receiving the hospitality he gives.[49]

In an unexpected turn of events, it is now the visitor that makes the host truly at home.[50] Derrida writes:

> The Laws of Hospitality, one which describes the contradiction in the essence of the hostess, the other, a conclusion, which tells of the final reversal of the roles of host and guest [*de l'hôte et de l'hôte*], of the inviting *hôte* as host (the master in his own home) and the invited *hôte* as guest, of the inviting and the invited, … of the becoming-invited, if you like, of the one inviting. The one inviting becomes almost the hostage of the one invited, of the guest [*hôte*], the hostage of the one he receives, the one who keeps him at home.[51]

Conclusion: Theology of Hospitality and its Logic of Pure Excess

The information and network society, as we have seen, produces outcasts and cast-aways simply because of their inability to access, catch up with, and enjoy the supposed benefits of this form of society. For us who are found in the center, these cast-aways of the network society are a consequence of our attempts, whether intentional or unintentional, to protect our virtual space and digital turf. In the language of Derrida, they are the unexpected guests who knock on the center and hubs of our network society. The question is: will we let them in or will we let them fade away as we further weave our social networks? Going back to Derrida's notion of hospitality, one might be tempted, upon reading his notion of pure and unconditional hospitality, to easily dismiss it on the grounds of being unrealistic and

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[49]Derrida, "Hospitality," 9.

[50]The French word *hôte* may take two meanings: it can mean both host and guest. For Derrida, this distinction is important to express the "hostage" taking experience that happens when a host becomes infinitely open in welcoming the guest. Cf. footnote 39.

[51]Derrida, "Hospitality," 9.

unworkable, in both political and ethical terms. It also negates logical thought or even sane reasoning in its attitude of sheer openness and embrace of the stranger, notwithstanding the danger that he or she might bring with him or her. Who, in his or her proper senses, would welcome a potential murderer or terrorist into his or her home? Or who would want to share a table with one who is different and a "suspicious-looking" stranger? Logic dictates that the master of the house should guard his or her house vigilantly and screen out those who are perceived as threats to the security and peace of the household. But Derrida would consider this very cautious stance towards a visitor as a mockery of the real meaning of hospitality, and here lies precisely the importance of Derrida's notion of unconditional hospitality in its transcendence or logic of pure excess, for it forces us to closely consider our ideas and expressions of hospitality and dares us to transcend or go beyond calculative, limited and legalistic forms of hospitality. It compels us to offer ever greater and more generous hospitality, even to the point of confronting our self-preserving convictions and beliefs. In other words, his idea of pure hospitality keeps the hope alive, in our hearts, that a better world is still possible, especially in the treatment of strangers or visitors. The notion of absolute hospitality also safeguards the reverence given to the wholly *other* considered as gift rather than an unwanted alien or visitor. Even the total stranger, according to Derrida, can bring about surprising transformation in the encounter process. Indeed, Derrida's pure hospitality is a dangerous notion. But the dangerous and the different have a way of forcing reality to come to its proper senses, for, as Derrida argues,

> [w]ithout this thought of pure hospitality … we would not even have the idea of the other, of the alterity of the other, that is someone who enters into our lives without being [sic] been invited. We would not even have the idea of love or of "living together (vivre ensemble)" with the other in a way that is not a part of some totality or "ensemble."[52]

Aptly expressed, without this thought (pure hospitality) we would not even have the perspective to correct our conditional and limited offer of hospitality.

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[52]Derrida, "Hospitality," 129.

At this point, we have not even broached the idea of a hospitable God who is the host of all, especially the marginalized of society. Nor have we mentioned Jesus of Nazareth whose praxis has made God's offer of hospitality concrete and realizable. Derrida's idea of gratuitous hospitality is, I think, a philosophical equivalent to what we have always believed and thought theologically about Jesus' *Abba*. As we continue to theologize on the impact of the new media and the digital world, and as we, as our conference theme suggests, "cast our nets" into this novel reality, let us be reminded that perhaps the nets we cast lead to entanglements and entrapments rather than to the sheer offer of God's hospitality, especially to those on the disadvantaged side of the deepening digital divide.