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Review essay

From food, work and organization to the study of hospitality and organization: reconsidering the special issue of *Human Relations*, 61: 7 (2008)

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In 2008, Rob Briner and Andrew Sturdy edited a special issue of the *Human Relations* journal on food, work and organization. However, even from the initial call for papers it was clear that the special issue was, potentially, going to be about more than food, and contributors were invited to consider a number of associated topics including drinking, smoking, dieting, fasting and even shopping (*Human Relations* 2006). The diversity of topics connected to the food theme was reaffirmed in Briner and Sturdy's choice of articles and in their editorial introduction, where they highlighted that contributions were concerned with 'food and *food related issues* in and around organisational life' (Briner and Sturdy 2008: 909, emphasis added). Given the special issue's broad scope, readers might expect some engagement with or even acknowledgement of hospitality, but it is noticeably absent from the editorial and the five articles. Even the word 'hospitality' appears in only one of the articles (see Driver 2008: 916), and it is merely included in a list of organizations from which the study's participants were drawn. However, a close reading of the articles highlights that it would be beneficial to reconsider their arguments *alongside* and *through* notions of hospitality. This review thus aims to re-examine this special issue and identify important hospitality themes in each of the five articles. My intention is not to undermine the contributions of individual works, or the special issue; rather, I seek to demonstrate how specific lines of inquiry emerging in the articles are relevant to, and can be enhanced by, concepts of hospitality. By doing so I seek to demonstrate how studies of work and organizations can benefit by drawing on hospitality studies, while also illustrating how the *Hospitality & Society* journal can be a space where synergies between scholars from different intellectual communities can be developed.

The first article in the special issue, by Driver (2008), draws on the stories from 35 participants who were asked to write non-fictional accounts about their experiences of food in organizations. She subjected these narratives to five forms of analysis: empirical, hermeneutic, critical, postmodern and psychoanalytical, and discusses the emerging themes from each of these perspectives. Among the issues she explores are the way food is used as a form of motivation, for example in meetings or as part of training events, how food is used as a form of reward, which also helps to construct the organization as a caring entity. Moreover, she argues that rituals of food preparation and consumption are used to build ties that bind, thus reinforcing group coherence and identity, while also articulating boundaries, hierarchies, regulatory regimes

and forms of discipline. Reading respondents' quotes and Driver's analysis highlights how the interactions she considers, using the ambiguous concept of 'food related' activities, are enactments of hospitality, and thus should be interpreted using concepts from hospitality. Drawing on Lashley et al. (2007) and Lugosi (2008), hospitality can be thought of as interactive activities involving transactions, either on their own or in combination, of food, drink, intoxicants, including tobacco and legal or illegal drugs, offers of safety and engaging and entertaining social intercourse. As Dikeç (2002) argues, these transactions are gestures of inclusion – attempts to create shared symbolic and physical spaces, in which boundaries may be lowered, albeit temporarily. Transactional acts by management and co-workers attempt to collapse the divide between colleagues and to reconstruct the organization as a hospitable space. However, Driver's respondents also illustrate another key dimension of such hospitable spaces and relationships: the obligations to participate and to reciprocate. Transactions serve to mobilize *asymmetric hospitalities* (Lugosi 2009), where relationships are not between individuals who give and receive, but between individuals and broader, more ambiguous, entities – in this case the organization and the various groupings within them.

Similar notions of coherence, interdependency and obligatory ties are highlighted by Cunha et al.'s article (2008). Their piece offers a broad review of work considering the relationship between food and organization, which they split into four types: food as a biological necessity, food and social reproduction, food and system design, and food production as a source of metaphors for systematic critique. Some of the areas they consider, for example, the influence of food production on societies, are outside this review's interest. However, Cunha et al. (2008), like Driver (2008), repeatedly stress the importance of organizations providing food, both on a mundane everyday basis, but also as part of special events, to promote internal cohesion among staff, and also to build positive relationships with external agencies. Again, it is possible to argue that food is one part of these transactions, but that the broader and more significant issue is how hospitable gestures and the instrumental deployment of hospitality create obligations and reaffirms specific power relations. As Derrida and Dufourmantelle (2000) and Lashley et al. (2007) argued, gestures of hospitality may appear altruistic; and pure, ideal notions of hospitality may be considered selfless acts of inclusive giving; but transactions within organizational contexts are always conditional and mobilize reciprocity. Appreciating these organizational phenomena through the lens of hospitality thus helps to define them more broadly and also helps researchers conceptualize the ongoing dynamics of the relationships between individuals.

Cunha et al.'s review (2008) of different contexts of interaction may also be interpreted using the spatial approaches to hospitality that operate at various scales and levels of interaction. For example, Di Domenico and Lynch (2007) and Lugosi (2008, 2009) explore, in various contexts, how the design of specific spaces facilitates the construction of particular moments of hospitality. Cunha et al. (2008) highlight the importance of the water cooler and similar informal micro-ecologies of interaction, which raises further questions about the management and organization of space in facilitating hospitable interactions. At a slightly different scale, Cunha et al. (2008) also consider bars where employees gather to drink outside work, and the historical and contemporary role of coffee shops as spaces of social interaction where people work, conduct business

meetings and where information is disseminated. Particular organizational phenomena, in specific venues, are part of broader ecologies or geographies of hospitality. Hosting, 'guesting' and all that they entail (see, for example, Lashley et al. 2007; Bell 2007) connects disparate spaces through flows of various sorts of capital (social, cultural, economic, etc.). People, places and relationships are thus transformed, through hospitality, into vast, networked, hybrid organizations that blend the formality of work with the informality of leisure.

The fourth article, by Brewis and Grey, is a curious choice for a special issue on food: it examines the regulation of smoking in society, with particular reference to smoking at work. Brewis and Grey argue that the ban on smoking and the gradual positioning of smoking as a deviant act in society can be understood as emerging from a moral discourse rather than because of medical evidence. In their editorial introduction, Briner and Sturdy acknowledge the absence of food and justify the article's inclusion only by saying it is 'related more broadly to oral consumption' (Briner and Sturdy 2008: 910). This article also relates least to the notion of hospitality; nevertheless, two recurring themes in Brewis and Grey's discussion are related to and can be understood through concepts from hospitality studies. Firstly, examining the processes of exclusion faced by smokers reflects attempts by management to not only define the hospitableness of organization, but also those individuals for whom it is and for those whom it is not, i.e. smokers. Secondly, an issue they raise is the potential for smokers to create alternative hospitable spaces, which operate outside of, and, to some extent, in resistance to the exclusionary discourse of organizations. Brewis and Grey (2008) also question whether the exclusion of certain groups may disrupt social capital because certain interactions between smokers and non-smokers cannot take place, but it is also relevant to ask whether the construction of alternative, hospitable spaces of interaction between smokers may actually engender the creation of new forms of solidarity and social capital. Again, focusing on the hospitableness or inhospitableness of certain workplace rules and rituals offers a number of opportunities for the study of organizations. Firstly, it enables us to think more broadly about the implications of specific interactional outcomes; and, secondly, it directs the focus of analysis on the gestures of inclusion/exclusion that facilitate particular interactional outcomes.

Parker's article (2008) takes the Mafia and eating as its focus of interest. Drawing largely on film representations of organized crime, he argues that the preparation, provision and, more importantly, the consumption of food are central to the organization of the Mafiosi. Again, returning to the hospitality-related themes explored by others in this special issue, Parker (2008) demonstrates how meals amongst members of the Mafia help to blur the boundary between family and business, thus creating and reinforcing deep, ongoing bonds that enable the Mafia to operate as a particular sort of intimate organizational entity. These aspects of the Mafia's production of hospitality relates to the material and social dimensions highlighted earlier in discussions of the contributions by Driver (2008) and Cunha et al. (2008), but Parker's analysis also shows how it relates to hospitality's philosophical dimensions. The offer of shelter is fundamental to the principles of hospitality, and it is interesting that Parker stresses that members of crime groups are often killed either after or during meals. 'It was only after the company of men had broken

bread together that the violence that followed could mean what it was intended to mean' (Parker 2008: 999). The Mafia is an all-encompassing institution, so the link between eating and assassination demonstrates how people who were at once intimately connected are totally excluded. Murder during or after a meal is an amplified act of symbolic violence, partly because individuals are brutally killed but also because these acts overtly shatter the principles at the core of any hospitable transaction. Conceptualizing the Mafia's modus operandi through hospitality thus helps us to understand them at a functional and philosophical level.

In the final article, Flores-Pereira et al. (2008) adopt an embodied approach to understanding organizational culture. They argue that culture is experiential, perceived and produced through embodied performance, rather than being either a representational or even symbolic act. They draw on ethnographic description of drinking rituals among the employees of a book store and demonstrate how people, during particular moments, express hostility towards underperforming colleagues and resist attempts to control behaviour. As with Driver's respondents, Flores-Pereira et al.'s data (2008) suggests that transactions of hospitality create spaces that enable the construction of shared expressions or experiences of culture. Moreover, as Sherringham and Daruwalla (2007) and Lugosi (2008, 2009) argue, these transactions of hospitality also help to create liminal spaces in which transgressions are possible and alternative values and norms are created. These liminal dimensions of hospitality reinforce the themes and future research questions to emerge from Brewis and Grey's article (2008) concerning how disrupted and reconfigured social capital may emerge through hospitality that blurs the divide between leisure and organizational life.

The articles in Briner and Sturdy's special issue are, in their words, a 'first attempt to pull together a wide range of ideas about, and approaches to, food, work and organization' (Briner and Sturdy 2008: 910). However, it is clear that themes and issues concerning hospitality are inseparable from their contributors' work; and, more importantly, hospitality has a potentially significant role in future studies of organizations. Therefore, as I noted at the outset, this review should not be seen as an attempt to highlight flaws in the contributions; instead, it has aimed to bridge existing divides between academics researching work and organizations and those concerned with hospitality in its broadest sense. The challenge is to move from using hospitality organizations as contexts for the study of human relations to using concepts from hospitality studies to better understand organizations.

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