

Acknowledging, recognising and responding to one another: ordinary hospitality in the café

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Abstract: In places of hospitality, hosts and guests encounter one another in, and through, visiting the place of the host, under principles of offering welcome. Clive Barnett drew on the ideas of the philosopher, Stanley Cavell, to develop those of Derrida and Levinas and, in this article, we ground Barnett's theorising of hospitality in the routine work of café service. For staff and customers, the ethics of hospitality is in the response to the other as more than their service identity, it is in their responsiveness to one another and their acknowledgement. From video-recordings of café service in the UK, we describe the assessment of experience, the sharing of plans, the use of proprieties and improprieties in pursuing intimacy. We re-examine what happens around recognition and misrecognition of identities which are based on the public appearances of customers and staff. Each of these are ways of people in public places pursuing or avoiding revealing more of who they are for one another

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Hospitality and acknowledgement

Accordingly, responsibility would be understood as being formed in a mode of responsiveness to claims for acknowledgement (of pain, or suffering, distress, etc.) rather than mere recognition (as the same as you, or as wholly different from you). (Barnett 2005: 19)

Via their staff members' daily accomplishments, places of hospitality provide or deprive us of welcome through more than whether they recognise us or not, what they recognise us as and the ways in which we become someone there. Following an ethics of hospitality, cafes ought to receive one and all, regardless of identity, and, as part of receiving, be ready to respond to the pleasures and sufferings, public and private, brought to them there. When the café staff are responsive to a customer as more than a customer, it is part of expressing care for the other. Conversely, customers, as guests, in pursuing an ethics of hospitality should go beyond responding to the staff as only staff members, finding them, in return, to be someone.

Our aim in this article is, firstly, to recover the work of café staff and customers in becoming hosts and guests in the conversation of hospitality, to adapt a term from the philosopher Stanley Cavell (2005). A conversation of hospitality in which human geographers have brought perhaps too much attention to distance and proximity around welcome and its denial (Darling 2011; 2018). Secondly, we seek to examine the ethics of hospitality extended to, and returned by, customers as guests who expect, hope for and analyse their welcome in places of hospitality (Bell 2007). From Barnett's (2005) and Dikec's (2002) work on the ethics of hospitality, we adopt their concern with how we understand hosts and guests, and their claims upon one another. We reconsider their ideas in the conversational encounters within the institution of the café, which is one of the public places where hosts and guests relate to one another in welcoming anyone and welcoming someone. Equally, how in, and as, café encounters, staff and customers recognise and misrecognise, where misrecognitions may be morally wrong while correct in other ways. Hospitality is bound up with recognising and misrecognising others in the responsiveness to their claim for acknowledgement. Where theories of the ethics of hospitality have gathered around the visitation of the migrant as the unexpected guest, our interest is in the arrival of the customer as the expected guest. Acknowledging their concerns and their pleasures as what it is to affirm them, though inescapably too in terms of their standing with us, and us with them (Cavell 1994).

In hotels, shops and cafés, it is the routine work of staff at their service counters to deal with any customer that arrives, to gradually establish, or fail to, in forms of address and interests, who the customer is beyond being merely a customer (Aparna and Schapendonk 2020). It is the more, or less, everyday task of customers to establish who they are for this place and their desire to pursue or avoid sociability (Tunçer & Laurier 2025). In this article, we will examine how hospitable talk which could be used on anyone, becomes tailored to and builds the customer as someone.

Establishing anyone as someone is worked through in the sharing, or not, of personal experiences, plans, proprieties and improprieties, where each of these may reveal a customer's desire to become more, or less, acquainted, to pursue or avoid revealing their private selves and raise those same stakes for staff members, differentially via their relations as host and guest. In their encounter in the café, customers and staff members are "revealing their orientation to what constitutes an appropriate topical disclosure given the character of their social relationships" (Pillet-Shore 2018: 232), and equally what is an appropriate character disclosure given the topic of their conversation.

The occasion of welcome which we'll consider is the closing of the visit. One might want to say that the moment of arrival is surely the primary moment to examine how welcoming happens. In one sense, yes, yet it is only the beginning: welcome does not end there nor is it established there because it is only minimally and initially responsive. Secondly, the order of service varies within and across different cafés and different place and, in the café which we'll examine, the opening is usually brief. And finally, the ending of a café visit is where a customer has the rights, through their experience of their visit, to say how well they were hosted. It is a part of the visit, as we shall see, where each party having had time with one another, begins or avoids recognising and acknowledging each other as someone.

Places of conversation, hospitality and commerce

While once unexpectedly ignored by human geography and other social sciences, over the last quarter of a century, cafés have become central to our inquiries as places that constitute: civil society (Oldenberg 1999), sociability (Tjora 2013), multi-culture (Jones et al 2015), conviviality (Laurier 2006), crowds (Author A 2008), ex-urban divides (Luger and Schwarze (2021) and, as in this article, hospitality (Bell 2007; Lugosi 2009). Cafés are a major sector of the hospitality industry, one which has continued to thrive, and they are understood, in almost all places, as sites for offering and receiving hospitality (Ferreira 2017). Their organisation and practices for producing hospitality vary from place to place (Canolli 2022; Cowan 1991). Their welcome is extended to their anticipated visitors which are, of course, mainly their customers, though there are other kinds of visitors known and welcomed by cafés (D'Antoni & De Stefani 2022).

There will come a point in café encounters, where, the customers, having been acknowledged as someone, should themselves begin to recognise their host as someone in (or out of) turn. There are a handful of studies in geography which have described how is it that both host and guest begin to treat the other as a someone or not, engage or not, recognise them or not, and how this conversational encounter is bound up with the joint production of hospitality. One prime example is Darling's (2011) study of a drop-in centre which was a site for the serving of hot drinks and biscuits. In showing us the joint production of hospitality, he describes the users of the space as 'active and visible partners' (2011: 409), moreover, one asylum seeker takes their role a step further in becoming the host, by serving the tea to other asylum seekers.

In geography, David Bell and Peter Lugosi led the way into thinking about and examining hospitality in commercial settings. In response to theories and studies of hospitality being centred on the reception of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants, Bell asked us to consider that:

“the ways of relating that are practised in bars, cafés, restaurants, clubs and pubs should be seen as potentially productive of an ethics of conviviality that revitalizes urban living. The encounters in those spaces should, therefore, be reinstalled in discussions of the ethics and politics of hospitality.” (Bell 2007: 12)

Bell underlined the need to understand commercial sites of hospitality as at the heart of sustaining the civil life of cities, towns and villages. In understanding hospitality in part through its labour conditions, Bell described how these sociable and commercial places are ripe for critical inquiry into an entrepreneurial governance that pursues strategies of gentrification and new forms of worker exploitation. Responding to Bell's reorientation of the crossing points of commerce and hospitality, Lugosi (2009) argued that hospitality studies have tended to ignore the central part that the customer plays in constituting places as hospitable or inhospitable and it is through customers encountering other customers that 'hospitable spaces are brought to life'

(Lugosi 2008:148; Tunçer and Laurier 2025). As we explore in the encounters documented later, it is not only the staff's work to be responsive to the other; it is also the customer's work to be responsive to the staff members.

The idea of welcome was reconsidered by Paul Lynch (2017) in a study of inner monologues from students around the multiple sites and assemblage of hospitality, where he asked us to pay equal attention to non-welcome. In places where there are absences of welcome, he warned of the feelings of alienation and dehumanisation that emerge from “a lack of recognition of the participant's individuality” (2017: 180). It is against Lynch's backdrop of the damage to lives done by the absence or minimisation of a person's individuality that we reexamine recognition and misrecognition via social categorising practices, what recognisings are used for and what happens around them in practices of hospitality. We take these earlier inquiries into hospitality further in this article, by examining the *in situ* and *in vivo* approach of hosts and customers in conversation with one another. In other words, we want to describe hospitality ethnomethodologically in its accomplishment, then and there, with no time out, living places in which what, and who, we are recognised as, is an accountable matter. As we shall see, because the ethics of hospitality is shown and found in its accomplishment, it is as peppered by infelicities as felicities, in responding to quiet inferences, by misrecognising as much as recognising, through which invitations and claims are ventured to and upon one another.

In our study, we begin to make specific and re-examine Barnett's (2005) elaboration of the centrality of responsiveness in hospitality. Barnett's responsiveness, in our study, is in how staff and customers pursue, avoid, miss, mistake and acknowledge (or not) one another's pleasures, sufferings and more. In these café conversations, we examine the constitution of hospitality in the shifting from welcoming anyone to talking to someone, which, while part of the work of being hospitable, potentially travel from one another's public appearances to their private selves and, in so doing, there is the pursuit of accepting or avoiding becoming acquainted with one another. It is where the host's commercial interest interconnects with sociability, even as it threatens and risks instrumentalising it.

Ordinary Hospitality

In the encounters which we explore in this paper, we are seeking to return the craving for generality in theories of hospitality in geography to the rough ground of ordinary hospitality (Moi 2017). When we say 'ordinary', we most commonly think of it as a domain of study and so equivalent to everyday life and the mundane (Gill et al 2022). The ordinary of ordinary language philosophy and ethnomethodology and conversation analysis is more than that—it is a place of departure and return from theoretical work in geography (Bodden 2023; Cavell 1976; Moi 2017). What ordinary hospitality might be we can begin to appreciate in Barnett's (2005) re-examination of hospitality in ideas from Levinas and Derrida. For us it serves as a central inspiration for our thinking. The idea of the ordinary is still more clearly expounded in Barnett's major work on justice (Barnett 2017). It is a sense of the ordinary that is at the heart of ethnomethodological and conversation analytic studies inside geography and outside of it, that pursue re-specifying theory through studies of everyday but also workplace, scientific practices and more (Laurier & Bodden 2020; Bodden 2023). During ethnomethodological investigations, theoretical problems, as metaphysical departures from ordinary practices, are returned to places where they feature as an identifying problem in the practices of members of those settings (Lynch 1992).

In helping us to understand the ethics of hospitality, Barnett argues that post-structural theories of othering which are based around “tropes of here and there, inclusion and exclusion, presence

and absence, in-place and out-of-place” (2005: 7) become stuck in logics of suppression and exclusion. In ordinary hospitality we find an opening up toward otherness, Barnett asks us to consider the approach of others, where, who we are for them, emerges ‘in a temporized relation of responsiveness to the surprise of otherness’ (2005: 18). Others approach hosts as expected and unexpected guests, the work of hospitality is in finding a path from accepting them as anybody to recognising them as ‘a Somebody’:

“In order to be hospitable, hospitality requires that a guest be greeted, addressed, named as a singular individual. As Naas (2003: 159) puts it, hospitality requires that the guest be welcomed as a Somebody, not as a serialized nobody. Hospitality requires that one not be indifferent to one's guest.” (Barnett 2005:16)

Barnett identified that hospitality has (at least) two moral problems of encounter to deal with which are at their sharpest when a guest is unexpected. The unexpected guest who is the starkest, emerging from the geopolitical, is the refugee. One ethical problem for the host is that of unconditional welcome and, the second is around recognising who the other is, thereby beginning to establish and draw upon criteria for an ethics of hospitality. Barnett (2005) responds to the understandable tendency to attribute the lack of care for others in terms of distance, by showing instead the importance of temporality in the approach of others and the responses of *both* host and guest (see also Dikeç 2002).

In Barnett’s uptake by subsequent geographical works on hospitality, what has often been misunderstood is that Barnett was sharply critical of approaches to hospitality that, firstly, continue to fixate on space and on institutions (such as cafés) and, secondly, remain focused on the centrality of an idea of identity which is based on the exclusion of others. Barnett, by contrast, had asked us to turn our attention toward understanding the temporalities of care in responding to visitors, where having a concern with timing allows us to understand hospitality in one another’s approaching and retreating. It is in his concern with responses, as they unfold in time, that we find deep affinities between Barnett’s ideas and, firstly, ethnomethodology and conversation analysis’s abiding concern with our responsiveness toward one another’s speech and timing, and, secondly, ethnomethodology and conversation analysis’s sense of institutions and structures as outcomes and criteria rather than determinants of speaking to one another.

Influenced by Cavell’s (1976) work in ordinary language philosophy, Barnett writes of the limits of epistemics in the ethics of relating to one another. Our ethical concerns should be with the acknowledgement (or lack, or the quality of it) which emerges in response to the knowledge which we share. It is not enough to know who the other is, or, to know what they know or what they are feeling. In the scenes of hospitality imagined in Barnett’s writing, his attention is primarily toward our response to the suffering of refugees. Yet hospitality requires a wider set of acknowledgements of the knowledges and experiences of visitors. Cafés are sites where hosts and visitors routinely acquire knowledge about one another, about what we can talk about, while also being the place where we share our sufferings and our pleasures and, in so doing, reveal or hide more or less of who we are for one another in relationships of care or indifference.

Ethnomethodological Studies of Hospitality and Service Encounters

In re-examining hospitality as the practical problem of staff and customers in the café, we are continuing a long tradition of ethnomethodological work on the encountering of others in public places. A tradition which is deeply geographical in its concerns with the organisation of encounters in urban and public spaces (Lee & Watson 1993; De Stefani & Mondada 2018).

While persons in public are open to inspection and recognition, not all elements of their person are. In fact, we have a shared understanding of what features of one another's appearance are inspectable and recognisable (Lee & Watson 1993; Schegloff 1979). Our hearable talk, clothing, luggage, make-up, hair colour, gait, gestures, tattoos and more, are resources which are publicly available and culturally sensitive, or insensitive, for making sense of us as members of public space and for our appearing in, and as, members of particular places, be that as locals, deviants, students, office-workers, tourists, protestors, dog-owners etc., in the many and varied possibilities that life in cities, towns and villages offers us. These inspectables are how we show ourselves as anyone and someone, as passing, belonging, grouping, individualising, exoticising and, as we will hear later, 'sticking out like a sore thumb'. For staff involved in customer service and hospitality, they are the resources which are available for making inferences about us, to move from welcoming us, to treating us as someone (Llewellyn & Hindmarsh 2013). On the other hand, when staff try to recognise a customer as someone, they also risk misrecognising, whether that be by mistake, accident or without excuse.

Ethnomethodological studies of the spaces of service encounters have been overlooked by geographers, even as they range so widely from retail to business-to-business, to shoe repair shops, to market places and so on (Clark & Pinch 1995; Fox and Heinemann 2015; Llewellyn & Hindmarsh 2013; Traverso 2001). In this article we have a more specific space of service in mind: the humble, and ever-present counter or bar in the café. It is a recurrent, common and near ubiquitous site for openings, selecting products, serving, paying and closing encounters (De Stefani 2019; Richardson 2013; Mondada et al. 2023). Our activity of interest, there, is closings and what has been called, in studies of service encounters: small talk, relationship work, inference work etc. (Hindmarsh & Llewellyn 2013; Huma et al 2019; Tunçer & Laurier 2025). From the ethics of hospitality set out by Barnett (2005), we know that the categories of host and guest shape who should do what for whom. In these studies, hospitality is re-specified as the lived work of members of particular places which have distinct accountabilities and moralities. For café hosts, what is distinctive to an ethics of hospitality, compared to talk show hosts (Thornborrow 2001), friend's home hosts (Beal & Traverso 2010) or hosting family dinners (Butler & Fitzgerald 2010) are the paired categories of staff and customer. Although these are omnirelevant, as we shall see, there are other social categories generated by relationships to place – students, tourists and regulars. Yet there is more than those categories at play, in each having the potential to become more of who they are for one another, to become more, or less intimate.

The architecture of the café arranges the readily available operative categories of staff and customer, separating them in space and having the two parties face each other on two allocated sides across the counter (Mondada et al. 2023). As Barnett (2006:16) puts it, 'thresholds are the very scenes for the drama of responsiveness, hospitality and responsibility'. Thresholds, central to theories of hospitality, are inquired into by geographers most commonly, in the form of state borders. The state border certainly is a site and occasion for offering or with-holding welcome. There are many more thresholds: realisable in doorways (Beal & Traverso 2010; Tunçer & Licoppe 2018), reception desks (Llewellyn & Hindmarsh 2013) and, in this article, café counters. Thresholds, with or without architectural features, are practically realised in times of arrival but also of departure. Hospitality, too often considered in the practices and occasions of welcome, is as much in how hosts and guests leave one another, and production of a sense that returning is desired by both parties.

At the threshold of departing the café, a routine part of the order of service is an experience-check made by staff members (e.g. "how was everything?") and, where there is time available, these experience-checks are followed up by small-talk initiators. In response to experience-checks, customers provide assessments. Studies in conversation analysis have examined how we

commonly use personal-state inquiries to pursue, provide and avoid how things are with one another, e.g., the commonly used “how are you” + “fine” (Pillet-Shore 2018; Schegloff 1986). In other words, saying how things with you are, and responding to those states, involve sharing and receiving experiences, personal states, improprieties and laughter, and in an ethic of hospitality and of care, they move us toward acknowledging one another’s struggles, pleasures, triumphs and more (Barnett 2005).

At the closing of a café visit, the experience-check produces the host and guest: it is the customers’ experience and their personal state as guests, not the staff member’s as host. Alongside examining how experience-checks feature in hospitality, we will examine the routine inquiries which are open to anyone to answer, and the subsequent small talk using hearable common topics (the weather) and registering inspectables (clothing, features of environment) that pursue, or avoid, acknowledging the café customers and staff as someone (Benwell & McCreddie 2016; Iversen et al. 2022) and the pursuit of intimacy through improprieties (Jefferson et al. 1987). In describing these ordinary practices of hospitality we are grounding and respecifying Barnett’s ethics of hospitality in, and through, particular events and encounters.

Materials and methods

Our approach to recording and analysing video recordings of cafés arises out of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (for a detailed explanation, see Heath et al. 2010). Its relationship to empirical materials and their generalisation, representativeness and theorising is perhaps best pictured as the inverse of the dominant approach in the social sciences including human geography (Garfinkel 2002; Laurier & Bodden 2020). Here, we can offer for a very brief overview of this distinctive response to empirical materials. The materials are used to help re-specify and reground the departures that arise from the temptation to generalise with theory (Moi 2017). The materials are there to discover and describe orderliness, reasoning, accountability and ethics in, and of, particular worlds where we are responsive to them and acknowledge them. It asks of us to take people’s perspectives non-ironically and re-enter the first-time-through character of events as they are happening to them and not with the benefit of teleology (or hindsight as we might also put it). Conversation analysis uses collections of interactional events, as we have done in our analysis, yet with an unusual purpose. Indeed, the very presence of collections means that it is easy for those unfamiliar with conversation analysis to confuse them with the use of data collections in other kinds of approaches, to stand as representatives of generalities. Whereas collections in conversation analysis and ethnomethodology are better conceived of as having a dual purpose in both finding the methods by which people produce places while also helping us in recognising and understanding the identifying particulars, what Garfinkel (2002) called the ‘haecceities’, in each case.

The British café in this study mainly uses table service, where customer orders are taken at the table, with payment at the end of the visit, either at the table or at the counter. Both sites of payment are commonly used in the café. Our recordings were from two cameras with opposing perspectives behind and in front of the counter. A microphone and audio recording device were placed on the counter itself. Formal approval for data collection and analysis was given by the research project’s university ethics committee. The gaining of consent for recording was through an up-front warning process rather than retrospective consent. Ahead of the recording, informed-consent was given by the café staff. Customers’ informed-consent was gained via posters placed at the café entrance in the 2 weeks before recording, followed up by leaflets on each table with project information and instructions on how to have their recordings deleted from the material, should they wish (for further reflections on consent, see Philo and Laurier

2021). No personal identification data was collected. Audible identifications were pseudonymized in transcription. The material presented in this paper arose from us examining a collection of 55 clips of payment which we selected initially for episodes of small talk. The materials were examined in data sessions over a two-year period beginning with comparative analysis with small talk in social work phonecalls (see Iversen et al. 2022) and ending with multiple close analyses of the smaller collection of fragments presented in this paper. We present the encounters using graphic transcripts for foregrounding the visual and spatial organisation of the setting (Laurier 2023).

Countering

In this section we will turn toward what we have learnt about hospitality from examining the endings of café visits. It may seem initially puzzling that we are examining the ending of the visit. Why? Because welcoming continues beyond customers arriving and placing orders and hospitality goes beyond welcoming. Equally importantly, in this café conversation was generally more extensive when customers were departing because of the time spent waiting for bills to be totalled, checked, divided and paid, it became a ripe occasion for small talk.

In our findings we will describe what happens around: (1) pursuing and sharing the experiences of the customers, (2) small talk which recognises the customer as a more specific social category, as, then, someone, (3) customers revealing more of themselves during the encounter and the acknowledgement of otherness in the café. The first form of host talk which we will analyse is ‘how was X?’, queries which put the host’s hospitality at stake even as they also open a path toward the customer revealing more of who they are in their tastes, experiences and more. We then examine the departure-related inquiries e.g. ‘what are you up to...?’ which are similarly available as steps toward revealing personal-plans. Future-activity-inquiries work toward treating people as having interests – and so they are part of progressing toward, or away from, displaying and recognising identities even as they are made public, how we are hiding and/or failing to recognise who each other is. Finally, we examine noticings of the inspectable features of one another, our public appearance, made by either staff or customers as part of the practices of recognising one another, which lead to, or avoid, pursuing intimacy with one another.

Pursuing and sharing customer experiences

As we have noted in our introduction, following the ethics of unconditional hospitality hosts extend their welcome to anyone, be they an expected or unexpected guest. In this section and the last section, we will examine staff members inviting a customer to assess and potentially share their experience through asking variants on ‘how was x’. ‘How was’ questions in service work are, firstly, commonly used to open the conversation around payment, secondly, they are a minimal recognition of the other and, thirdly, they are checking on the customer’s experience by inviting an assessment. They belong to staff members, who have the rights to ask them and are analysable as a feature of the host’s work of hospitality. We will begin with a typical experience-check by a staff member, at the point of payment. In transcript 1, the customer has walked up to the counter, the staff member behind the counter says “hiya” and then:



Transcript 1: How was everything

In asking 'how was everything for you', the staff member is making a routine service inquiry into the customer's experience. The customer provides a high-grade assessment prefaced with a marker of its experiential qualities in the 'aw'. The exclamatory 'god' continues the remarkably positive experience for her. Having displayed such a positive assessment of her experience she then laughs. The laughter shows her awareness of the high praise not simply as high praise but as invitation to the staff to encourage her to account for what was so great that the staff did not accept and so then laughing it off even as she also acknowledges the hospitality which she has received (on laughter's place in refused invitations, see Jefferson et, al 1987).

Returning to the staff's inquiry 'how was everything for you', drawing on the critiques of the commodification of hospitality, we might want to dismiss it as scripted rather than an authentic inquiry. It is a question that staff are trained to ask, they say it multiple times daily and it is one that is askable to any customer. What dismissing it as scripted misses is they very work of the staff in delivering it each time. In this time through, the staff member uses 'everything' which is designedly open around what the customer is invited to assess. It is hearable as either the whole experience of their time in the café or, equally, as an invitation to select any element of their time in the café to be assessed positively, neutrally or negatively. Whatever way, it also allows for minimal responses, compared to, for example, 'how was the coffee?' whose specificity targets a part of the café's provision in ways that provide us with a sense that the staff have a genuine interest in whether the coffee was notably good or bad or is itself already part of recognising a known customer (De Stefani 2019). As for the response, the customer's is anything but neutral, not only does she provide an emphatically positive assessment, she prefigures sharing an account of her assessment. She is revealing her willingness to go beyond the minimal response and to initiate small talk (Tunçer & Laurier 2025). The staff member's initial response accepts the assessment, yet he doesn't pursue it further, perhaps because he does not want to, or, more likely because he is busy processing her payment.

Checking on the experience of the customer is recognisably part of a host's work in relation to a customer as a guest that has spent time with them. Assessments provide the possibility of accounts which move toward identifying what was 'amazing' or 'lovely' (Schegloff 1986). Experience-checks do not shift out of what any customer could be asked, nor do assessments depart from what any customer could reply. 'How was X' queries and assessments show a concern with the experience, cultural norms around providing and receiving hospitality as the collaborative production of hospitality (Lugosi 2009). While in these short sequences of talk neither party need recognise nor display their identity, personality, activities etc., even in this brief encounter we begin to have a sense of how one begins to show their desire to go further than the minimal components of the order of service, even if it is one that the staff member does not to pursue.

Recognition & misrecognition

In accomplishing hospitality, small talk is one of the central resources used by staff members and customers to move toward each party becoming someone and its value in doing all manner of institutional and communal work is largely overlooked by the social sciences (Benwell & McCreaddie 2016; Iversen et al. 2022; Tunçer & Laurier 2025). By initiating small-talk, parties are moving toward establishing themselves as host and guests concerned with hospitality as a way of relating. The host's work is in beginning to show (or not), and to find (or not), an interest in their customers. Organised by the pairing of their host-guest categories, customers initiate small talk through a different set of inquiries: 'just you working today?', or, registering an inspectable feature of the café (D'Antoni & De Stefani 2022).

For staff perhaps more than customers, future-activity questions are an always available small-talk-initiator. Customers' departures make next-activities relevant whereas staff are usually continuing the same activity. While staff need not draw upon the inspectable features of a customer in order to generate small talk, they regularly do, because they provide resources for that staff to make inferences about a customer's current activities and, inter-relatedly, their identity (Hänggi 2022). In responding to small talk about their inspectables, a customer has the discretion to be more, or less, expansive and thereby show their willingness to be categorised as someone other than just a customer. For the staff member in categorising the other party, they display or fail to display an attentiveness to the inspectable features of the customer.

In the following fragment, the staff member has just handed the customer their receipt and their change, thereby completing the payment sequence. In continuing the encounter, they use a small-talk initiator.



Transcript 2: Have you got a busy day ahead

“Have you got a busy day ahead” can be responded to as an inquiry into a future personal state and/or an activity (Pillet-Shore 2018). By the staff using the category-resonant description ‘busy

day' it shows inferences around the identity of the customer as doing work of some kind, relatedly, of their identity as someone employed and a local (Llewellyn & Hindmarsh 2013; Stokoe 2012). On the basis of the customer's inspectables, the staff member is trying to recognise more of who she is and venturing what category of activity the customer might be doing next. To venture a recognition of her as a worker is to show an interest in the customer in their identifiable features, even if it is misrecognition, it shows that she is interested in the customer and willing to engage in small talk. There are more resources drawn upon by the staff in their recognition: it is a weekday, the customer's departure coincides with the end of British work lunchbreaks (e.g. around 2pm).

In responding, the customer has options to be more, or less, expansive and thereby show their willingness to reveal more of themselves. In beginning with an "uhm" the customer is marking that hers might not be the expected reply. First, she reveals a personal state 'very relaxed' which *is* an expected response to inquiries about states of busy-ness and quietness. Following that, conversely, her response reveals, to the staff member, not just that she misrecognised the customer as someone that she is not, but also reveals a relevant aspect of her identity – tourist – that aside from correcting the recognition of her as a local, also accounts for not having a busy day. Via categorising themselves as a tourist, they have a relationship to the cafe which shapes an array of expectations toward them: their activities; knowledge of the city, weather etc., not to mention, their patterns of potential return to the café. Moreover, it shapes each party's understanding of what would constitute hospitality.

With tourist as a categorisation, the staff member builds on it, with a relevant activity ("a nice wee wander about", panel 4). At this point their small talk could end, but the customer extends it with the weather as a second recognisable small-talk-initiator: "I hope it doesn't rain too much though". Talking about the weather is so seldom just talking about the weather, not least because it easily becomes part of the local production of institutional work (Iversen et al. 2022). Weather calls upon staff knowledge of what to do and where to go in the city, in response to rain. The staff member, as host, provides a delicately indelicate suggestion of an alternative, drinking a day time whiskey in a bar, should it rain. Her leaning toward the customer (Panel 6), emphasising the pursuit of intimacy in her suggestion, which is venturing into the customer's private drinking preferences (e.g. a taste for whiskey rather than a cup of tea). Her suggestion of a whiskey is not perhaps the recognition or misrecognition of the customer as a daytime drinker, because whiskey is an expected category of drink for tourist's to try while visiting Edinburgh. It marks more, too, as the welcome of a national culture for a guest.

Acknowledging our otherness

In the previous section we examined how, by way of the staff member and customer initiating small talk, they begin to recognise the other party as someone, and, how, in responding, the other reveals (or avoids revealing) relevant aspects of their identity (Benwell & McCreddie 2016; Iversen et al. 2022). Moreover, we began to consider recognitions and misrecognition in the work of hospitality. In examining the next fragment we consider a different kind of misrecognition and a different way it is used to pursue intimacy. The customers are finding themselves to be recognisable as, what hospitality theory would call, the unexpected guest, which raises the question of whether they are welcome or not (Barnett 2005).

On this day of the recording, graduation ceremonies were taking place at the university nearby and the café is busy with groups of smartly dressed students and their families. The ceremonies will become relevant later as the basis for the staff member's identification of the customers.

Two customers are paying for their group, with the customer on the left typing in his PIN (panels 1 to 3). The customer on the right, leaning on the counter, reads aloud an item from the menu on the wall behind the staff member. The customer is noticing a feature of the café as a small-talk initiator during the time which paying is projected to take.



Transcript 3: Do we stick out like a sore thumb

In noticing “chicken and ginger broth” on the wall menu (panel 1), the right-side customer (R) does not venture a stance toward the soup in terms of, for example, their personal taste as to whether they like or dislike chicken. Left as a bare registering, it is available for the staff member to provide further information or an assessment of the soup. As it happens, she does respond with a positive assessment: “it’s a good’un” (panel 2), in overlap with R’s self-continuation and matching positive assessment, which he restarts shortly after: ‘that sounds good’. R and the staff member affiliate around a positive assessment of the food served in the café as a joint production (Sacks, 1992, vol. II: 57). While they have affiliated around the soup, we can note that neither party goes on to reveal more of their personal tastes by, for example, informing the other that ginger is their favourite flavour.

The staff member, for her part, responds by offering her own small-talk-initiator which passes back the domain of knowledge and experience to the customers: “so graduations today I take it” (panel 4). Graduation is a topic which should allow the customers, so categorised, as relatives or friends of graduating students to provide more, or less, extensive small talk and reveal more, or less, about themselves. On the basis of the day’s events, their party at the table and their visual appearance by age and dress, she is categorising them as someone other than and more than just a customer. It is up to them now as to whether they travel further down the path of disclosing who they are. As part of hospitality’s work she is picking a topic which, if her analysis of their public appearances is right, is not just a matter which they can expand upon but of which they can be proud – being parents of, by that criterion, successful children.

As before, mistakes are ever-present for the staff member in trying to identify the customers as somebody through their public appearances (see the sensitivities around age in Llewellyn 2015).

There is more to the staff's actions to consider on this occasion. The question (which might alternately be a registering about their appearances) about graduation is tilted toward confirmation via 'I take it'. The turn-ending 'I take it' treats 'graduation' as less of a guess and more of an obvious matter about them. Misrecognition can be a correct identification on the basis of anyone's publicly available public appearances, yet it is one which selects one available category generated by their appearances to identify them as a welcome, unwelcome other or worse (Lynch 2017). Recognising someone in a place as, for example, 'a Chinese student' where other relevant categorisations are available, is a routine way of producing hearably, if also deniably, sexist, racist and other X-ist talk (Whitehead & Stokoe 2015; Author A 2021). In this case, it is a correct recognition of the customers as parents of graduates. Identifications of someone as X are examined by those so identified, in terms of what they are doing to them or to other persons present. In street entertainment, performers use analysably deliberate and often insulting misrecognitions of passers-by recurrently as an artful part of their performance (Smith 2016). Here the identification is hearably not to alienate nor entertain, it is tied to the pursuit of hospitality, of showing an interest in and getting to know the customer as more than a customer. It is not incidental then that it succeeds in generating further small talk and, beyond the transcript, moves on to their plans for the day.

Yet R's question shows their own analysis of who is expected in this café: 'do we stick out like a sore thumb?' (panel 6). The prefacing laughter and the proverbial response mark their comment as an impropriety and an invitation to intimacy (Jefferson et al. 1987). Even though the laughter invites joining in, the staff don't laugh. What is it that has left this as laughter not to be followed? To laugh at their obtrusiveness by their difference from the café crowd, would risk not simply understanding their joke as an analysis of their misfitting but to agree with its correctness. Instead, the staff member stumbles a little in justifying their recognition on the basis of the time-based criterion: 'No: it's just- that this week is the week' (panel 6). They did not 'stick out', she identified them by a calendar device: graduation in the nearby university.

While customers have the café environment to notice, staff members have a distinct set of inspectables which are available via the appearances of the person and their group which also converge with certain social norms (appearing young versus old in Llewellyn & Hindmarsh 2013). The public characteristics of a host-guest distribution of knowledge, ownership rights and more, are at play. On one side, the host's place is publicly available for noticings, assessments and, on the other, the guests have their appearances and their time of day, week and the wider calendar of public events. A public space is thereby convened around the infrastructure of the café and its routines of social interaction and, here, as Barnett proposes on how a public emerges, it is in surpassing the customer-staff interactions toward 'an unknown addressee' (Barnett 2008: 416). In terms of the tests of an ethic of hospitality, writ large in the refugee and the nation state, it is writ small around customers finding themselves 'an unanticipated arrival' (Barnett 2005: 13). A visitation without an invitation, as Barnett went on to describe it.

Maintaining our standing

In the previous fragment of a service encounter we described how the staff used inspectable features of the customer to try and show their willingness to continue small talk. In this next section we will consider a customer revealing themselves to be already known as someone, after which they pursue and maintain relationships with the staff. For café regulars, as D'Antoni & De Stefani (2022) have shown "mutual sighting and the ensuing greeting sequences are the locus where reciprocal recognition and familiarity are displayed (or claimed)" (2022: 85). Before the conversation in transcript 4(a), the first staff member in panel 1 ("St") provided no such sighting

nor greeting. The customer had been waiting for a while behind another customer. Responding to his long wait, the staff member had adroitly begun talking to him while she was still sorting out the tip and receipts from the previous customer.



Transcript 4(a): Lovely as always

The customer responds to the staff member's inquiry with a slight stumble in his first few syllables, though with the assessment clearly hearable: "ah w- lovely as always of course" (panel 1). It is an expected positive assessment that is hearable as a no-problem and potentially topic-closing assessment, were it not that he continues and adds: "as always", where we hear, not that meals are always lovely at the café, we hear him as claiming his experience as a café regular (D'Antoni & De Stefani 2022). Perhaps there is more that is hearable in 'as always' as itself a response to not being recognised now. It shows a pattern of regular, yet not daily, visiting, where his non-recognition is expected and a matter which he is willing to raise in order to establish himself as a regular. His self-categorising is made even more explicit in the subsequent expansion: "which is why we keep coming back and back" and note the timing here with the second staff member (S2) arriving (panel 4). It is not just that the customer is revealing himself as a regular, he is making a claim more explicitly to be one while building a sense of the extension of time involved. For any regular they can and do pursue, or avoid, making themselves recognisable and claiming the rights with that go with it, and here the regular is claiming a distinct relationship to this place (Laurier 2013).

What is hearable in her first response ("G- great", panel 2) is her recognition of the positive experience of the customer. In her next turn, the staff member acknowledges and appreciates the positive assessment and the report of return visits "Aw I'm glad" (panel 5) though she still does not display further recognition. This service problem is common enough in places of commercial hospitality. The customer is a regular and they, of course, know they are. The staff member, on the other hand, has potentially never met this customer, or too infrequently. Moreover, there are customers who, by design, or by lack of desire, or lack of responsiveness, are not memorable which minimises their subsequent recognisability as a known customer. We, like the staff

member, are finding out that this is not so with this customer. In his first few turns of talk he has already made himself identifiable as a regular, if unknown to this particular staff member, and so is making a claim upon the ethics of hospitality as a particular kind of guest. His self-identification as a regular pre-empts the staff member from starting the pursuit of small talk as a way of showing an interest in him in the ways in which they would for unacquainted customers.

The customer's pursuit of a greater claim to be welcomed by the café and their establishment of themselves as a regular, becomes more apparent when he continues his talk with the newly arrived staff member (S2, panel 6). S2 had visually greeted the regular (panel 6), thereby recognising him as a known customer, with no more than a gaze and a quick head nod. The customer had already seen S2 while talking to the first staff member and, presumably, recognised him, though without greeting him visually, because, at that point, S2 was busy drinking (panel 4). The regular had sustained their looking at S2 (panels 4 to 6) while talking to the first staff member, until receiving a visual greeting from him. In sustaining their look, S2's drinking is there to be seen and so to provide an inspectable for the regular. With time to formulate the drinking, which he is witnessing, the regular offers a witty misrecognition of the activity: 'that you on the gin as well I'm so pleased' (panel 6) which brings S2 directly into the conversation.



Transcript 4(b): hold the glass

The misrecognition, itself, is a safe tease because while it teases the second staff member it has no obvious analysable consequences for the first staff member (on 'safe compliments' see Sacks Lecture, Winter 1969, 1992) yet nevertheless serves as a sideways invitation to intimacy for them. To begin to describe its teasing, it is using an intended and recognisable miscategorisation of S2's drinking as an illicit activity and of them as a regular drinker ('on the gin', not 'drinking gin'). There is more to the analysis built into the teasing: the noticing of the drinking recognises the work as hard enough to make you thirsty and stressful enough that you might end up 'on the gin'. As we have already examined, the customer's wit is warranted by the customer's rights as a regular while also continuing to reveal more of who they are to the first staff member (Haakana 2011). To make amusing remarks about, and with, the staff is to pursue becoming memorable and recognisable. It accomplishes more, in terms of our concern with hospitality and

recognition, it establishes that the customer is attentive to the staff, their labour and their openness to further talk.

The joke about the staff risks not being gotten, misunderstood or not laughed at by way of declining its invitation to intimacy (Jefferson et al. 1987). Rather than reject it or ignore it, the staff members show their acceptance of his joke. S2 aligns with it: “yeah (.) always” (panels 7&8). As a co-recipient of the wit of the customer, the first staff member laughs in-between at the gin joke. Silence would mark them declining the invitation to affiliate with the customer. The customer begins a gestural account of their tease, showing how the joke on gin was based on their registering they way that the second staff member was leaning backwards while holding his glass (panel 9). The exaggerated re-enactment becomes a compliment around sophistication – “there’s only one way to hold a glass” (panel 10). What is artfully created by the customer through this move from tease to safe compliment, is for the staff member to feel appreciated and noticed

In what is happening here we witness the maintenance of hospitality and its deepening by the regular. They have instructed an unacquainted staff member in their belonging to the hospitality-relevant-category as someone for them, as a regular. They have an existing relationship to this café which brings with it an expected familiarity, even if not from the first staff member. This encounter helps us understand hospitality as itself emerging from the guest because they also have a relationship and set of rights to make this café a place of hospitality (Tunçer & Laurier 2025). We begin to understand how in extending and deepening hospitality, staff members themselves are recognised and appreciated by customers, both as particular persons rather than as anyone.

Conclusion: From recognition to responsiveness

Hospitality as engagement: not simply a duality of the guest and the host; the guest is as hospitable as the host in that he/she is in engagement with the host while the host recognizes the specificities of the guest. (Dikeç 2002: 236)

In this article we have sought to return to existing studies of commercial hospitality, drawing more closely on, and contributing to, Barnett’s (2005) elaboration of a Cavellian sense of an ethics of hospitality as responsiveness. We have sought to add to the work of other geographers and scholars of hospitality in moving away from Derrida’s aporias of unconditional welcome and the related imposition of conditions of welcome, toward engaging with the other ‘as a sensibility’ (Gill et al. 2022: 125). We have begun to show that hospitality is, less a matter of spaces of welcome and unwelcome, than of what happens in being receptive to others and how “public acknowledgement of the claims of others are worked up and maintained” (Barnett 2005: 20). In our re-specification of Barnett’s reading of theories of the ethics of hospitality, we have grounded his reading in the particular conversations of café staff and customers, in part because Barnett’s theorising remained circling around migrants, refugees and citizenship, despite his aim to look at the ‘temporality of intersubjective relations’ (Barnett 2005: 6).

We have described the approaches of hosts, and of guests, in what more happens by examining what happens beyond hosts welcoming guests with talk that could be made with any customer. As we have seen, establishing who each other are, requires departing from the order of service into small talk, talk which is always more than it appears to be, exactly because it is also an invitation to become someone and requires considerable tact or thundering bluntness to reject its quiet but persistent invitation. In their conversational turns of speaking and hearing, the staff and

customers dance along the familiar pathways of small talk and thereby create the steps toward or away from becoming acquainted, from anyone to someone known vaguely or well. Steps that are responsive (or not) to the claims of the other.

Where Barnett asked us to consider the temporalizing of response in hospitality, we have pursued this in examining the guest and host as approaching one another (though also holding a distance and departing) through the duration of their conversation. In considering the local practices of assessing experience; of noticing inspectables; of teasings as invitations to hospitality and of laughter in its immediacy or delay, we have connected ethnomethodological geographies with geographies of hospitality (Bell 2007; Lugosi 2009; Lynch 2017). The ethnomethodological spirit is in resisting the craving toward generalisation which sometimes besets theory-building in hospitality. It is shown here in our thinking through empirical materials and orienting to the problems that arise in particular cases (Moi 2017).

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