



# Hospitality and eroticism

Hazel Andrews

*Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure,  
Liverpool John Moores University, Liverpool, UK*

Les Roberts

*Schools of Architecture/Politics & Communication Studies,  
The University of Liverpool, Liverpool, UK, and*

Tom Selwyn

*Department of Business and Service Sector, International Institute of Culture,  
Tourism and Development, London Metropolitan University, London, UK*

Hospitality and  
eroticism

247

Received December 2006  
Revised January 2007  
Accepted April 2007

## Abstract

**Purpose** – This paper aims to provoke discussion and reflection on the role of the erotic in the cultivation of spaces of hospitality, and to provide a theoretical consideration of the structural similarities of hospitality and eroticism.

**Design/methodology/approach** – With reference to classical studies as well as debates in the social science literature, the paper starts by examining some of the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings to hospitality and eroticism. It then develops this analysis by considering examples drawn from ethnographic studies of “traditional” hospitality settings as well as of commercial hospitality environments of charter tourism.

**Findings** – The main outcome of the discussion is to demonstrate the structural relations between hospitality and eroticism. By situating the analysis within a broad theoretical and ethnographic context, it is shown that the erotic has historically functioned as a socially-binding and communicative mode of social intercourse that, while undermined by the demands of a market-based culture of commercial hospitality, is also able to flourish within these same adverse conditions.

**Research limitations/implications** – This paper invites further research into the connections between hospitality and eroticism in settings similar to and different from those described in the paper. A fuller ethnographic study of the relationship between the two is needed, as well as an exploration of more theoretical perspectives on hospitality drawn from the social science literature.

**Practical implications** – By highlighting the socially binding role of eroticism in the structuring of host-guest relations, the paper draws on and contributes to a broader politics of love and sensuality that will inform critical reflections on commercial and market-driven hospitality practices.

**Originality/value** – This paper provides an original insight into the interrelationship between hospitality and eroticism. It further illuminates previous writings on both subjects but particularly that of eroticism and is supported by empirical data. It is of particular interest to those studying hospitality from a social science perspective.

**Keywords** Hospitality, Eroticism, Love, Stranger, Transformation, Danger, Divinity, Senses

**Paper type** Research paper



## Introduction

This paper discusses hospitality and eroticism in order to stimulate reflection on the nature of each and the relationship of one to the other. Part of what follows points up, in general terms, some of the continuities between the two. A slightly greater part concerns the role of eroticism in the cultivation of spaces of hospitality. We frame our analysis part

---

theoretically, part philosophically, and part ethnographically. The early, and larger, part of the paper considers meanings of, and relationships between, hospitality and eroticism in the classical and “traditional” worlds. Following work by a number of sociologists and other social scientists concerned with the fate of eroticism in the modern and post-modern world, we also seek, in the latter part of the paper, to comment on recent developments and transformations in the meanings and functions of the erotic in one commercial setting (enabling brief general reflections on the place of the erotic in market societies such as our own). Here, in ways that echo many of the conclusions of the sociological literature referred to, eroticism appears at first sight to have cut loose from its classical and traditional moorings altogether. But, whilst seeking to illustrate ethnographically how this is actually manifest on the ground in a particular ethnographic setting, we also argue that even in this highly commercial context there is still evidence of a kind of sociable “eroticism of the everyday” that has effectively resisted the depredations of the market.

The organization of the paper is as follows. We start by framing the subject of hospitality and eroticism theoretically. We then consider the two principal terms philosophically, using Plato’s *Symposium* and Homer’s *Odyssey* to do so. The third section is mainly ethnographic and takes the lead from Pitt-Rivers’ (1977) articulation of the two themes. We use two ethnographic examples, one from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the other from India to consolidate our views of hospitality and eroticism in traditional settings. Fourthly, we use ethnographic material from a study of charter tourism in the Spanish Island of Mallorca to follow the lines of thought about the fate of both hospitality and eroticism in contexts of high commercialism. We conclude by drawing some of the threads together.

### **Theoretical framing**

#### *First principles*

Hospitality and eroticism share several structural and functional properties. Both are grounded in fields of physical relations shaped and defined by social, as well as moral and cultural structures (Selwyn, 2007). Being shaped by ideas about social and physical solidarity and order, both involve multi-stranded relationships between physical bodies and social boundaries. As Gero (2003) states, whilst “feasts present an occasion to experience a commonality, like other practices that help forge new social relations, one learns these lessons with the body, underscored by sensuousness”. Feasting resembles sex in its participation in the establishment of a new social order: “something that must be undertaken in the flesh and experienced in the person” (p. 287).

Furthermore, both hospitality and eroticism are attended by danger and divinity. For example, there is always a danger that a guest will turn out to be an enemy or stranger unable or unwilling to be transformed into a friend. In such a case the “fragile equilibrium” (between hosts and guests) that “the fine art of hospitality” is designed to contain and transform is “destabilised” (Friese, 2004, p. 70). Furthermore, as Hocart (1952, originally 1927) observed, the idea of guests being touched by the divine if not actually being divinities themselves (sometimes in disguise) was one routinely adopted by the ancients. There are elements of danger in the erotic too. By definition, for example, eroticism thrives on the borders of the acceptable and unacceptable, taste and distaste, passion and order. Indeed, eroticism becomes itself, precisely, by its ability not only to contain these antimonies simultaneously but also to test and stretch the borders almost – but never completely – to breaking point. On this issue Jusdanis (1987, p. 97) argues that, in his erotic poems, the Egyptian poet Cavafy stresses the close kinship of

---

eroticism and transgression, advocating that poetry and eroticism positively require dissent from social norms. We would certainly agree that poetry and other forms of imaginative writing required, as it were, regular visits to the borders of the taken for granted world and its moral strictures. And yet Cavafy also observes that art, aestheticism, and eroticism all exist on the edge of acceptability. We can take from this that the danger lies in the possibility that a border will actually be breached – in which case what started as erotic might simply de-compose into something distasteful, pornographic, and/or boring, the last named arguably the principal enemy of the erotic. As for the relation between the erotic and the divine, early discussions about the nature of eroticism were, of course, conducted (as in the *Symposium*) by way of reflections on the nature of Eros, personification, and god, of love who, emerging from chaos was instrumental in bringing order and harmony to the cosmos.

A number of writers in the field of eroticism follow Paz (1993) in linking the erotic with sex and love in a triangular relationship. In this formulation the erotic appears as belonging to the sphere of the cultural and aesthetic, love to feelings, and sex to desire. Featherstone (1999, p. 1) follows this line of thought by quoting Bauman's (1999) observation that "eroticism is the cultural processing of sex". Along the same lines, in her study of the iconography of a collection of highly sexually explicit pre-Columbian Peruvian earthen pots, Gero (2004, p. 19) observes:

Ritual expression of enactments of sex are embedded in wider social structures: like feasting, dancing, and drinking the deeply human sex response is conditioned by a cultural context to serve cultural ends and, in turn, to reproduce that cultural context.

We would like to make the obvious rider to this: namely that cultural and social reproduction necessarily also involves constant transformations over time. Individual persons and the social collectivities (such as kinship groups) to which they belong are inevitably caught up in constantly renewing processes of alliance formation, structural evolution, reproduction, splitting, the forging of new alliances, and so on *ad infinitum*.

What role does eroticism play in this scheme of things? To draw on Gero (2004) again:

The effectiveness of sex in symbolic life as an activity that is displayed iconographically, emerges not only because its viewers know what it means but also because they know how it feels, and the feelings are powerful and blissful, ecstatic (moving) the bounded self into a universe of feeling, connecting to the divine.

In other words, the sphere of the erotic is one that, touched by the sense of the sacred and outside ordinary time, space, and quotidian social structure, provides us with a reservoir of deep feelings to use in the service of social and physical transformations (all of which may be quite familiar to students of rites of passage). In suggesting that in entering a field of specifically sexual feelings, we enter a world that, in Gero's (2004) words, is:

A vital source of shared meanings: joking, shaming, blaming, pairing, individuating.

Heightened feelings, therefore, obviously, attend and define erotic practices. Hospitality too involves the generation of heightened feelings amongst both hosts and guests. Pre-eminently, both hospitality and the erotic are thus concerned with the use and deployment of the senses – including taste, smell, touch, sound, sight, and awareness of temperature. It is not surprising, therefore, that substances such as food, perfume, special clothing, along with particular kinds of music, decorative objects (including lights), and heat (cold is seldom associated with either hospitality or eroticism) should

play significant roles in commensal gatherings and on erotic occasions as symbolic instruments designed to test and re-draw boundaries, including that between the physical and the social. In short, heightened awareness of physicality and sensuality is an essential prerequisite to the transformations of existing social arrangements that acts of hospitality and erotic practices seek to make. We will look at this more closely below in relation to two hospitality rituals associated with traditional marriage ceremonies.

Our “first principles” thus locate the erotic within an aesthetic, cultural, and expressive sphere of human activity that (following Paz, 1993) is attached in a triangular relationship to a sphere of feelings (in which love is found) and one of desire (including sexual desire). They also look to the realm of hospitality and the heightened feelings, routinely including “erotic” ones, to be found therein as means to engender the senses of both social solidarity and transformation that acts of hospitality seek to promote.

We may now move from these relatively a-historical and a-geographical generalisations to more contextualised sociological studies of eroticism in contemporary society (always bearing in mind, of course, our overall aim of bringing eroticism into the discussion of hospitality).

#### *Eroticism and the market*

Eros, reduced to pure “sex” has become a commodity; a mere “thing” to be bought and sold, or rather, man himself becomes a commodity (Pope Benedict XVI, BBC, 2006).

Democratic capitalist society has applied the impersonal laws of the market and the technology of mass production to erotic life (Paz, 1993, p. 147).

The opening quotation above is an extract from the first encyclical delivered by the present Pope, arguing here that the erotic has been reduced in contemporary capitalist society to mere sex and that one of the consequences has been that something has been lost to human kind through the pressures of economic forces. Other writers have conceived of this loss in terms of a rupture with the natural order of things. For example, an argument advanced by Marcuse (1987) with particular reference to the erotic is that natural or instinctual ways of being in the world are sublimated to the point that people in capitalist society become disengaged from their “near senses” of smell and touch. For Marcuse, these senses are more associated with pleasure and sexual activities than the “far senses” of the oral and the visual. According to him, modern society represses pleasure. “The free gratification of man’s instinctual needs is incompatible with civilized society: renunciation and delay in satisfaction are the prerequisites of progress” (Marcuse, 1987, p. 3). Thus, from childhood, the libido is repressed in a way that effectively collapses the relation between individual desire and socially constructed expressions of the erotic (that might be found, for example, in the kind of ritual settings we describe shortly) into one. What is left is unconscious (and sublimated) individual desire. It is this that becomes the driving force of capitalist society. As he puts it: “The societal authority is absorbed into the ‘conscience’ and into the unconscious of the individual and works as his own desire, morality, and fulfillment” (Marcuse, 1987, p. 46). This is a development to be explained by the fact that, as an economic system, capitalism requires people to surrender control of themselves and become subject to the market: a fact that steers minds away from the dangerous thought that they could be autonomous and gain satisfaction from practices and relationships outside the net of market forces. For Marcuse (1987, p. 100) “the high standard of living in the domain of the great

---

corporations is *restrictive* in a concrete sociological sense: the goods and services that individuals buy control their needs and petrifies their faculties”.

The argument put forward by Marcuse in some ways echoes the approach taken to eroticism by Bataille (1957). He too argues that it is society or the cultural that thwart the immediate satisfaction of desires. For Bataille, work acts to repress impulses or natural urges, offering instead the promise of a later reward. Society, and particularly Christianity, has made sexual behaviour a hidden activity with associated prohibitions on nudity or exposures of flesh that might generate erotic feelings. “Underlying eroticism” he argues, “is the feeling of something bursting: of the violence accompanying an explosion” (1957, p. 93). Such a stance is consistent with Bataille’s view of the body being the seat of emotional and sexual passions which could in certain circumstances lead on to protests against the rationalisation and bureaucratic regulation associated with capitalism.

Giddens (1992, p. 202) has argued that the erotic, as a field of communication in which feelings and emotions are transmitted, has been taken out of the hands of individuals and kinship groups by institutions that seek to curb its articulation outside the rational and bureaucratised frameworks associated with the advancement of capitalism. According to him the overall effect is to limit the autonomy of individuals and to create a greater sense of dependency on those institutions that assume the task of shaping social relations (along, we might add, with economic and political relations too).

In short, the argument by these and other writers turns on a view of the market that sees it working to repress pleasure and sexual feelings, to sublimate them, and to encourage their re-emergence (suitably tamed and transformed) in the desire to work for future, rather than immediate, reward. At the same time, the now hidden sexual feelings are, so to speak, “given back” in the shape of individual sexual desire, by the commercial corporations that articulate the system as a whole. Such feelings are here constrained only by conscience (not to mention police and the law) rather than within family, kinship, class, or other socio-ideological structural frameworks.

We will come back to these arguments later on. For now we would say that whilst we feel sympathetic to some of the intellectual and analytical claims and implications of these writers, we would like to insist on the possibility that, even now, there are actual and identifiable counter flows, opportunities for resistance, and continuing possibilities of cultivating an “erotic of the everyday” by individual persons and groups who might appear at first sight terminally subject to seemingly all conquering market forces and the processes of rationalisation that go with them.

### Philosophical framing

So far we have made some generalisations about the nature and kinship of hospitality and eroticism and briefly reported on a selection of more or less well-known views on the relation between eroticism and the market. The remainder of the paper is designed to approach these ideas from another angle and work our way towards three ethnographic readings from which vantage point we will make some final observations. We will thus step back to the beginning (or, at least, one beginning) to consider the *Symposium* and the *Odyssey*.

Plato’s (1951) *Symposium* is based on the reflections and conversations about the nature of love and the god Eros between guests at a meal in the house of Agathon in Athens. Since a substantial part of our paper concerns the social basis of eroticism it is worth pointing out at the outset that the Greek word *symposion* means, narrowly, “drinking together” and, more broadly, “being together” and that this is fundamental to

any understanding not only of the *Symposium* itself (Geier, 2002, p. 23) but, in our view, the nature of the erotic itself.

According to the guests at the banquet, love and the erotic have the following intersecting qualities.

First, according to Phaedrus, love is primordial and autochthonous (he quotes Hesiod to the effect that out of chaos was born the earth and then love). As the oldest of the gods, the primary function of Eros was to bring order to the chaos. Thereafter it was love that set the course of orderly life on earth.

Other guests took up the idea of love and the erotic being the foundation for order from a variety of slightly different angles. Pausanias, for example, stressed the dual aspects of love, one physical (base) the other “heavenly” and “noble” the implication being that true love necessarily contains both aspects. We may put this in a slightly different way, namely that whilst love is assuredly associated with the physical desire of one individual for another individual, it comes fully into itself when this physical desire is placed within a framework of a care for the other that, in turn, is rooted in an understanding of how the other will fare in the social world. Thus, according to Pausanias the physical desire of an older man for his boy/lover is truly loving when it is accompanied by a concern by the former for the wellbeing of the latter’s intelligence and moral excellence as he moves through the social world. For Aristophanes the orderly nature of the erotic stems from the overarching quest for unity that individuals have for their (literal) “other halves”: erotic feelings being based on the fundamental desire for the re-unification of the halves of the primordial mythological creatures split in two by Zeus. The point made by both Pausanias and Aristophanes here is the propensity of the erotic to lead to bringing together, unification, and establishment/re-establishment of orderly relationships. This approach was supported by the medical doctor Eryximachus who observed that “the desire and the pursuit of integrity and union is that (which) we all love”.

At this point the question of pleasure and enjoyment enters the picture. For Aristophanes these sentiments (which we might choose to term “sexual” – in whatever actual physical form they might come to be expressed) derive precisely from the sense of encountering unity. We may notice, in passing, and recalling that for Aristophanes primordial creatures took three forms – male/male, female/female, and male/female – that it would be perfectly possible for unity to be encountered between two males or two females just as much as one male and one female. Love, fashioned from a quest for order and unity and based on both base desire and noble disposition, could thus be found (for Aristophanes at any rate) in relations between partners of the same sex just as much as between partners of different sexes.

There are two further insights we would like to draw from the *Symposium* on the nature of love and the erotic: both are central to our later arguments. The first is Socrates’s insistence that love derives from awareness by a person of what he or she lacks – and the potential to fill this lack in the course of a loving relationship. The emphasis here is clearly not only so much on the unity stressed by the others but also on completeness. As Socrates says “the desiring thing desires what it is lacking or does not desire unless it is lacking”. The second comes from the reflections of the host, Agathon, on the nature of the erotic. “Love” he reflects, “is young, tender, and soft . . . the most moist and liquid of all divinities . . . a manifestation of the liquid and flowing symmetry of his (i.e. love’s) form”.

The *Symposium* thus suggests that love and the erotic (which in the figure of Eros are undistinguishable – a point that we would like to stress throughout the paper) start from a

---

desire for unity and completeness predicated on a sense of social and ethical order. That these philosophical foundations are expressed in the context of an encounter between the host and his guests on the occasion of a meal is, for present purposes, highly significant because it places the erotic centre stage in a space in which hospitality is given and received. The sense of the erotic being “moist” and of “fluid form” in Agathon’s terms, will be worked out in later parts of the paper. Sufficient to say at this point that fluidity, first cousin to flexibility, adaptability, spontaneity, is, we would argue on anthropological first principles, precisely what order lacks but which it thus desires. We know from such passage rites as those associated with birth, marriage, and death that social order needs continuously to refresh itself. In this sense, it depends in a fundamental way on change and periods of disorder (as all passage rites stress). The metaphor of the erotic as the moist or liquid handmaiden of such social renewal seems entirely fitting.

Turning to the *Odyssey*, Homer’s epic poem recounting Odysseus’ long homecoming journey from Troy to Ithaca and his beloved Penelope, what is particularly noteworthy in the present context is the rich narrative detail afforded to the home and domestic environment, and the observance (and inversion) of the sacred laws of hospitality that govern host-guest relations (*xenia*) in the Homeric moral universe. Taking each of these points in turn, we wish to highlight, on the one hand, the sensuousness of the Homeric hospitality setting that is evidenced in the poem, and, on the other, the framework of theoxeny within which much of the host-guest encounters in *The Odyssey* take place, and from which certain erotic associations and extrapolations may be drawn.

In structural terms, “home” as van den Abbeele (1992, p. xix) has observed, is a place that can only truly be known at the price of its being lost. Narratives and metaphors of travel thus typically have an ideological function in that they secure and reinforce the positing of an *oikos*, or *domus* (the Latin translation of *oikos*) – a privileged point of departure and eventual return (van den Abbeele, 1992, p. xix). In this regard *The Odyssey* is no exception: the *oikonomia* (law of the household), insofar as it is coterminous with the prevailing laws of hospitality (Derrida, 2000a, p. 4), places Ithaca structurally and thematically at the centre of the narrative. Accordingly, despite being known more popularly as a tale of travel and adventure, it should be noted that, of *The Odyssey*’s 24 books, only eight depict the actual wanderings of Odysseus and his men, the remainder taking place almost exclusively within the familial *domus* of Ithaca and its environs.

Driven by his unwavering love for Penelope, Odysseus’ quest for home and identity unfolds against the backdrop of a subversion of the Homeric laws of hospitality in the form of the suitors’ appropriation, in his absence, of Odysseus’ palace. By deviating from the conventions of the Homeric hospitality scene, the suitors come to preside over a household in which the sacred and ritual dimension that would otherwise frame the hospitality setting is noticeably absent: practices of libation and sacrifice, for example, are reduced to merely “drinking” and “feasting”, their consumption characterised in terms of “outrageous excess” (Reece, 1993, p. 173). Similarly, declarations of covetous intent towards Penelope are marked not so much by a ritual formality of seduction, but rather by the “clamorous” demands for her sexual attention (Homer, 1980, pp. 9-10). The de-coupling of these desires and practices from the wider moral universe – a development that bears certain comparisons with contemporary examples from the hospitality industry, as we discuss below – stands in stark contrast to the socially-embedded and embodied conventions of Homeric hospitality.

---

In Reece's (1993) study of these conventions, he identifies several recurrent motifs of hospitality that structure the various host-guest encounters that occur throughout the epic. What these conventions in part reveal is the sensuous, tactile and essentially transformative nature of the experience of hospitality evoked by the Homeric guest. For example, the description given of Telemachus' visit to the palace of Menelaus to seek news of his father (Odysseus), provides a good illustration of two of the central motifs: that of the bath and the feast; the latter typically given over to rich and often elaborate description of the food preparation and the service provided to the guests:

The guests themselves, escorted onto the stately palace, were filled with wonder at what they saw in the monarch's house; for a radiance like that of sun or moon filled the high halls of King Menelaus. When they had both gazed their fill, they went to the polished baths to bathe. They were washed by maids, were anointed with oil, and had tunics and woollen cloaks put around them; then they took their seats beside Menelaus the son of Atreus. Another maid brought water in a fine golden jug and poured it over their hands for washing, holding a silver basin below; then she drew up a polished table by them. The trusted housekeeper came and put bread where they could reach it; she had many kinds of food as well, and gave ungrudgingly of her store (Homer, 1980, p. 36).

Commenting on the lavish attention given to everyday objects and actions – the warm beds and perfumed baths, the wine vessels and silverware, the eating and drinking, the beautiful architecture, the pleasures of the after dinner entertainment – Johnston (2004) highlights the fundamental importance of the home in the *Odyssey* in terms of establishing the very centre of what makes life meaningful and worth living; a sacred and embodied space in which one is invited to celebrate “the wealth of cozy human eroticism in everyday life”.

Having banished the suitors, it is only after the homecoming Odysseus has shed his disguise as a beggar and been bathed, anointed and clothed in attire befitting his true status that he is able to resume his identity as master of the house; a transformation, moreover, which is only fully complete upon his reclamation of the marital bedroom located in the “innermost part of the house”; a spatial and symbolic progression which connotes both the re-consummation of his marriage to Penelope and his elevation from beggar to guest to master (Reece, 1993, p. 35).

Although Odysseus himself is not afforded divine status, his return to Ithaca (which is in effect sponsored by the gods) takes on the form of a theoxeny (Reece, 1993, p. 182; Kearns, 1982; Thompson, 1958). This brings us, briefly, to another of the hospitality conventions that merits some consideration: that of identification.

As with the other examples, the questioning and revelation of the guest's identity assumes an elaborate and almost ritualistic formality, with etiquette typically demanding that the stranger withhold his or her identity until after the meal (Reece, 1993, p. 25). Of course, the unknown status of the Homeric stranger does not preclude the possibility that s/he may in fact be a god or other divine entity come to test the hospitality of the host (a test which, in contrast to Telemachus' hospitable reception of the goddess Athena in book 1, the suitors unequivocally fail). This framework of theoxeny, and the ritually protracted nature of the stranger's anonymity, injects a certain alterity into the host-guest relationship that potentially destabilises its fragile equilibrium. The danger attached to the visitation of a divine guest – and the crossing of physical, symbolic and corporeal thresholds of identity and selfhood – is one which carries clear erotic overtones, as more recent literary studies of hospitality and eroticism, such as Klossowski's (1971) *Roberte Ce Soir*, or, more darkly, Potter's (1978) *Brimstone and Treacle* so richly demonstrate (Derrida, 2000a, b).

---

What, then, do Plato and Homer tell us about eroticism, hospitality, and the interweaving of the two? The former grounds both within a setting in which individual love, desire, and pleasure find themselves flowering within a social, cultural, and moral universe underpinned by a fundamental drive for unity and completeness. The latter places the erotic within a context of domestic hospitality. In this view both eroticism and hospitality are found pre-eminently in the home – which itself stands as microcosm of the larger order of things. Here, we find, precisely, an “eroticism of the everyday” that, once again, places the individual within a social context symbolically evoked by an orderly relationship between sexual desire, aesthetic stimulation, and the love between the protagonists.

### **Anthropological framing**

#### *The divinity of the guest and the nature of hospitality*

The two anthropologists responsible for launching anthropological analyses of hospitality, Hocart (1952) and Pitt-Rivers (1977) both took their initial inspiration from the Greek classics.

In his “The divinity of the guest” Hocart explored the relationships between hosts, guests, and strangers. Observing that they had a single term for all three, Hocart reminded us that the ancient Greeks believed that strangers were accompanied by Zeus and thus tinged with divinity. Pitt-Rivers’ essay on hospitality and the politics of sex in the Mediterranean was written as part of his field research in a Spanish village, clearly with the *Odyssey* in mind. For him both hospitality and eroticism started at the boundary of order and disorder, the former “imposing order through an appeal to the sacred and replacing conflict with reciprocal honor” (Pitt-Rivers, 1977, p. 107).

#### *Hospitality in marriage ceremonies: lessons from UAE and India*

Two ethnographic case studies concerned with the interplay between hospitality and eroticism, both concerned with marriage rituals and the practices of hospitality that attends them, are Kanafani’s (1983) account of marriage feasts in the UAE and Selwyn’s (1981) analysis of Hindu marriage rites in rural central India. Both follow the school of thought established by Pitt-Rivers.

Kanafani (1983) discusses the *fualah* (feasting) ritual in the UAE in terms of the ways in which it brings to the fore relationships between senses of smell, touch, and taste. The *fualah* is central to the hospitality tradition in the UAE and is built around bodily rituals constructed to engage the company of hosts and guests in heightened olfactory, gustatory, and tactile experiences. The author explains how these articulate the social and spatial relationships of those present at the feast. Kanafani describes how individual women compose their own particular mixtures of scents, and how the senses in which perfume, along with bodily decorations and the food itself, are part of an aesthetic landscape in which both pleasure and purity are present in complementary relationships. She further observes that the “socialising odours” are part of an olfactory system into which also fit odors associated with sexual relations between husband and wife. As she puts it “the wife’s aesthetic skill” (in her composition of odors and colors) “is an attempt to safeguard the marriage and to reinforce ties of the family” (1983, p. 93). Kanafani’s work thus places the physical body at the core of the construction of the sensual and, at times, erotic landscapes in which hospitality occurs.

Selwyn (1981) describes the rites associated with Hindu marriage ceremonies as these are performed in a village in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh. The aim

of the analysis is to show how the relationship between “wife-takers” and “wife-givers” (that is to say between the agnatically defined kin group who actually and ritually “receives” the bride, on the one hand, and the family/kin group who “gives” her, on the other) is linked at a metaphorical and symbolic level to the relationships between high and low castes, and between men and women. He argues that men, high castes, and wife-givers are made symbolically to appear as if they belonged to a conceptual set that appears superior to another set consisting of women, low castes, and wife-takers. One of the striking achievements of the ritual is to make this relationship seem a necessary and inevitable part of the process of social (and sexual) reproduction.

The extended series of activities (most of which involve the giving and taking of food) that, over several days and nights over a period of weeks make up the totality of the marriage rites, take place either in the house of the bride (in a setting of rituals of hospitality given by the bride’s family to that of the groom) or the house of the groom (where the grooms family offer hospitality to the family of the bride). One consistent thematic thread running through most if not all the complex series of individual rituals, expressed variously in terms (for example) of the passage from raw to cooked food, temperature shifts from cool to hot and back again, the literal tying together of the clothes of bride and groom and their circumambulation around a flame, the throwing of rice by the groom into the bride’s lap, and so on, is their sexually charged symbolic structure and sense of the erotic.

There is a fairly clear line of thought that links classical views of hospitality and the erotic to these ethnographic considerations. One feature of the ethnographies is the skillful symbolic deployment of objects such as food, clothing, perfume, and decorations, in filling the spaces of hospitality with heightened feelings, including erotic ones, that animate the flowering of senses of individual pleasure, domestic well-being, and social satisfaction.

#### *Charter tourism and the return of the suitors*

We come now to consider hospitality and eroticism within the explicitly modern and commercial world of charter tourism in the Mallorcan tourist resorts of Palmanova and Magaluf.

Both resorts are fuelled with intense feelings and a highly charged sexual atmosphere. In the case of Magaluf the intensity is heightened by a sense of confined spatiality and enclosure brought about by the physical layout of the resort (Andrews, 2006). Further, the temporal framework of the package holiday of usually no more than two weeks exerts pressure to do and feel as much as possible in a relatively short period of time. This sense of urgency is symbolically portrayed in video images of people cramming their mouths with food that are played in many of the café-bars. The emphasis on alimentary excess is further embodied in consumption of the apparently ever-flowing supply of alcohol and food – the “eat as much as you like” offers in hotel restaurants - and the emphasis on alcoholic excess in the bar crawls organized by the tour operators.

In addition, there is a heightened awareness of the body in terms of function and appearance which is intimately linked to a magnification of sexual sensibilities. This means that many of the activities undertaken by tourists are underlain by sexual titillation. Thus, games played as both part of hotel entertainment and during bar crawls include, for example, one about “sexual positions” or a demonstration of some form of sexual knowledge. The focus on sex is also manifest in the numerous displays of pornographic images throughout the resorts ranging from completely naked women to depictions that make suggestions of mixed-gendered group sex. Other references to sexual intercourse are

---

made through the display in shops: of, for example, giant condoms, carrot shaped vibrators, ashtrays and ring holders depicting penises and breasts. The combination of confined space, commoditisation and fetishisation of sexualised aspects of the body take us seemingly far away from any idea of a cozy eroticism of the everyday.

The majority of tourists visiting Palmanova and Magaluf are British. They undertake their holidays as part of a package tour organized by one of the leading British tour operators. The role of the tour operator is not simply to provide the holiday by organizing transport and accommodation, but, once in the resort, to mediate, as far as possible, the tourists' experiences for economic gain. For example, as Andrews (2000, p. 241) contends, "the motives behind welcome meetings are governed by a desire to facilitate a commercial transaction rather than a warm friendly gesture". This mediation is both aided and abetted in a struggle of control with other facilitators (for example, hotel entertainers, café-bar DJs) over the actions of the tourists. This is sometimes as part of a mutually beneficial financial relationship, but at other times is the result of competition between interested parties in attempts to dominate the activities and places in which the tourists participate. This element of control extends to the erotic sphere.

According to some theorists the separation of sexual pleasure and erotic feelings from reproduction has marked the decisive shift in the trajectory of the erotic, bringing it out of the domestic realm into the market place. But, having brought it out, sexual desire then needs, as Bauman (1999, p. 21) has argued "outside, authoritative and resourceful powers to contain it within acceptable limits". The experience of the package holiday maker in Magaluf and Palamanova affords an ideal ground in which eroticism is at once both promoted and highlighted, on the one hand, and manipulated and controlled on the other. After all, the reputation of Magaluf as "Shagaluf" promotes ideas of multiple sexual encounters. We are in a world in which, according to Bauman (1999, p. 21):

Eroticism is self-sufficient. The freedom to seek sexual delights for their own sake, has risen to the level of cultural norm ... Being an eroticism "with no strings attached" untied, unbridled, let loose – the postmodern eroticism is free to enter and leave any association of convenience, but also an easy prey to forces eager to exploit its seductive powers.

In short, the tourist in Magaluf finds him or herself in a world where hospitality and the erotic seem to have been detached from their moral underpinnings and where the erotic appears in some respects like a commodity. In this form it becomes, as Bauman suggests, "easy prey" for the appropriation, by the market's latter-day "suitors" in a purely instrumental way that has at its heart the desires of the individual and the satisfaction of the needs of the market.

On the streets of Magaluf and Palmanova disembedded eroticism and hospitality are part of a tourist menu of instant gratification, and self-satisfaction. At the same time, there is a need for such potentially anarchic dispositions to be controlled: a fundamental ambivalence that is signaled and embodied in some of the activities in which they participate. One feature of hotel entertainment, for example, is a game involving male contestants having sangria poured down their throats until they can swallow no more, a challenge to kiss as many people in the audience as possible within 45 seconds, and then a demand that they show constraint by gurgling water whilst in the process of singing a nursery rhyme.

Although the game is proffered as a form of entertainment and enjoyment it also serves to define the basis of social relations in the resort. The acquisition of kisses, for example, does not allow for the development of relationships, or the acquisition of any depth of

knowledge of the other. Sex, intimacy, and the erotic seem powerfully present and the emphasis on speed does not allow for their meaningful cultivation. What the game does (legitimated by the laughter that accompanies it) is to reward rapidity, lack of knowledge and the transitory nature of the relationships associated with the experience of being on holiday. The pouring of sangria down someone's throat is literally "in their face" and brutal. It works against any development of the erotic. Although these practices may conceivably be looked upon in terms of Bakhtin (1984) notions of the carnivalesque, in this instance laughter becomes a device that wraps or disguises the viciousness of what the tourists are being offered. This seems far removed from the type of warm and cozy sociability of the hospitality settings we considered earlier or, indeed, any version of an eroticism of the everyday. In the competition played in the hotel the life-giving affectivity of Eros and the unconditional nature of love are absent. All that seems to matter is how fast and how much. Sensual enjoyment is missing. Unlike the world evoked by Telemachus' oil or the *fualah's* perfumes, the association of force and drinking to excess speaks of the opposite: a disregard for the care of the body and a lack of the ability to savor and linger over the possible sensual enjoyment of drinking a glass of sangria.

And yet we would be unhappy to leave it there. The instrumentality of the hospitality and eroticism in the resorts discussed thus far seems to place them both within a landscape in which they have simply been appropriated and put to use by the market. However, despite this apparent triumph of the demands of a market-led culture there is evidence of the socially binding and communicative modes of both hospitality and eroticism. Some everyday practices and social rhythms at play within the resorts speak of a counter tendency to the overarching commercial nature of the experience. For example, couples sit tenderly holding hands in the midst of the audience for hotel entertainment, apparently uninterested in engaging in or with the wider context. Furthermore, many of the café-bars/nightclubs hold dancing nights in which a tourist (and observer) can expect to encounter a depth of sociability that reminds us of earlier contexts. Although people enter a particular establishment in their discrete unit as friends, couples or families, dancing brings everyone together. People move and sway together to the beat of the same rhythm. This is an experience (common throughout the two resorts) that seems to give rise to a sense of shared understanding and community that is embodied in the dancing movements. As Crouch (2002, pp. 213-4) says: "making particular dance movements . . . [is] part of a repertoire of social engagement and friendship".

There are no conditions set to joining in and it appears underpinned by a desire for unity as those dancing encourage the involvement on the dance floor of those not participating. The freedom and flow associated with dancing and the building of social relationships or reaffirmation of them has resonance with the imitative rites of Australian Aborigines described by Durkheim. He asserts that ceremonies in which the totem animal – Kangaroo, Emu, etc. – is imitated in movement "does not limit itself to expressing this kinship; *it makes it or remakes it*" (Durkheim, 1976, p. 358, emphasis added). In addition the ease of movement and fluidity of the body associated with dancing, as it is practiced in the resorts, is in contrast to the control that the playing of the game as part of the hotel entertainment demands. Rather, it is the embodiment of a naturalness or flow in the establishment of social relations more generally. As a way of building social relations it operates at both a broad level amongst strangers as well as at a more localised level within the family. For example, fathers dance with their young daughters as they carry them around the dance floor in a mock waltz.

---

What dancing also does, as a fluid movement of the body, is point to that adaptability and spontaneity referred to by Agathon in *The Symposium*. In this respect order is united with flexibility, adaptability and creativity and the social order is refreshed and re-anchored to a moral and ethical framework.

To summarize, there are concerted efforts in the two resorts by the tourism and hospitality industries to build the framework in which social relations are to be made and further to control and constrain those relationships whilst at the same time promoting ideas of unfettered, instant and self-gratification. However, simultaneously there are flows and movements through and across the boundaries of the commercial structure that use the heightened sense of hospitality and eroticism as socially creative and binding mechanisms outside of the modalities of the market.

### Conclusion

Eroticism may, of course, be considered from a variety of angles. Our own focus has been largely upon its social role, viewing it as we have done through lenses framed by a concern with its relation to hospitality. As one would both hope and expect, however, there are interweaving and interpenetrating motifs that link our own reflections with those made from other perspectives. Indeed, it helps to sharpen the lines of argument presented here if we approach them by way of brief references to two discussions of the subject with different (though, we would argue, neighboring) points of departure from our own.

In her classic examination of asceticism and eroticism in the mythology of the Hindu god Shiva, O'Flaherty (1973) speaks of the "pendulum of extremes" found in the mythical narratives that surround the god. How, for example, is one to resolve the apparent contradiction between living in the world and enjoying the pleasures of life, on the one hand, and freeing the spirit through worldly renunciation, on the other? For O'Flaherty, the way Hindu mythology embraces this and comparable quandaries is not, as western thought might, to insist on a compromise or synthesis of opposites, but rather (to use a chemical analogy) to "resolve the conflicting elements into a suspension rather than a solution" (pp. 314-18).

The notion of suspension has a musical reference as well as a chemical one. Thus, in Downes' (2006) discussion of the erotic in the work of various romantic and modern composers, he draws our attention to such musical techniques in Wagner as the "characteristic dissonance found at the top of each melodic wave" which serves to depict (in *Tristan und Isolde*) "the hero's mythic-erotic encounter with young women". Here, we encounter "further dissonance through a suspended melodic pitch (which) reinvigorates the harmony with erotic yearning, destabilization, and a hint of peril" (Downes, 2006, p. 92).

We follow closely the spirit of the observations by O'Flaherty and Downes, despite our differing points of focus. Using their mythological and musical eyes and ears it makes considerable sense to view much traditional hospitality, suggestively exemplified here by ethnographic references to two acts of hospitality accompanying marriage rites, as moments of suspension between one social and physical formation and another.

The notion of suspension, having as it does a number of different if overlapping meanings, provides us with the means to conclude this essay. There are three points.

In "The law of hospitality" Pitt-Rivers (1977, p. 107) declares that:

The law of hospitality is founded upon ambivalence. It imposes order through an appeal to the sacred, makes the unknown knowable, and replaces conflict by reciprocal honor. It does not eliminate the conflict altogether but places it in abeyance and prohibits its expression.

This idea of placing conflict in abeyance – that is suspending it – provokes the thought that the idea of suspension is a powerful one to attach to eroticism and hospitality. Speaking sexually and musically, our own argument has been that, in its classical and traditional forms, the erotic is to be found at and in those moments (which could, as the Hindu ascetic knows, be maintained for some time) of sexual suspense and harmonic dissonance before orgasm and harmonic resolution take place. We have followed Pitt-Rivers in viewing hospitality as being pre-eminently concerned with ordering and re-ordering – converting enemies to allies, non-kin to kin, and so forth. Thus, it is clear that any single act of hospitality is necessarily underpinned by elements of structural suspension until it has successfully run its course.

Secondly, the hospitality on offer in the hotels and bars of Magaluf seems, at first sight, to be at variance with the classical and/or traditional conceptions of the erotic and hospitality as we have considered them here. Not much, if anything, seems “suspended” here (except, of course, the sublimated senses of pleasure and sexual desire described by those sociologists, supported by the Pope, who see the market as harbinger of the death of the erotic.) On second sight, however, perhaps all that Magaluf actually offers is a temporary break in the shape of brief fantasies of potentially unlimited sexual availability. As such not much of a challenge is really mounted to the prevailing and repressive demands of an overall system running on the fuel of sublimated short-term pleasures in favor of the imagined longer-term satisfactions deriving from ownership of the products of the market. Perhaps, Magaluf serves the market rather than challenges it.

But, thirdly, there is a much more interesting sense in which the term suspension is an apposite one with which to conclude. We have attempted to argue that whilst the market induced intensity of physical and social intercourse in Magaluf seems to turn both hospitality and eroticism on their heads, currents of opposition and potential resistance may be discerned. Offers by tour promoters of the kinds of instant availability we have described of everything, including sex, food, and drink, may symbolically and routinely be turned away by the tender holding of hands in the midst of a frenzied game of alcoholic over-consumption or in the fluidity and sociability of the dance floor. In this context, we recall the remarkable occasion when an all night rave was held at the largest disco in Magaluf. All the profits were donated to the Municipality of Calvia (of which Magaluf is a part) to contribute to a fighting fund to repair the extensive damage done to the neighboring national park following a fire that had destroyed many trees there. It was commonly said that the fire was started by agents of property developers who were piqued at the refusal by the council’s planning authorities to grant permission to develop in the park. The atmosphere on the dance floor was electric as moving pictures of the fire were flashed on its interior walls. On this occasion the eroticism of the dance floor became linked directly to an enthusiastic and essentially political expression of revulsion with the dominance of the market and its principles. Here, the “pendulum of extremes” was felt by the dancers to have swung way beyond any acceptable boundary. That year the deputy mayor of Calvia described the relation between those who sought to preserve the public spaces of the municipality in the face of those who would turn them all into their own private domains as a “war”.

We have followed those sociologists discussed earlier in this piece in their insistence that eroticism and sexual disposition are intimately related to forms of political economy. In so doing we may suggest that there is another conflict taking place in those parts of the municipality we have discussed here. Activities in Magaluf’s spaces of hospitality do not,

---

in Pitt-Rivers' formulation, eliminate the conflict: they merely suspend it. The conflict is between truly erotic possibilities on the one hand (with all their social, political, and ethical implications) and the sexual and political prospects deriving from the appeals of Magaluf's tour operators, on the other. Its resolution might be less clear-cut than we might have imagined.

## References

- Andrews, H. (2000), "Consuming hospitality on holiday", in Lashley, C. and Morrison, A. (Eds), *Search of Hospitality: Theoretical Perspectives and Debates*, Butterworth Heineman, Oxford.
- Andrews, H. (2006), "Consuming pleasures: package tourists in Mallorca", in Meethan, K., Anderson, A. and Miles, S. (Eds), *Tourism, Consumption and Representation*, Cab International, Wallingford.
- Bakhtin, M. (1984), *Rabelais and his World*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN.
- Bataille, G. (1957), *Eroticism*, Marion Boyars, London.
- Bauman, Z. (1999), "On postmodern uses of sex", in Featherstone, M. (Ed.), *Love and Eroticism*, Sage, London, pp. 19-23.
- BBC (2006), "Pope gives views on modern love", available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4645428.stm> (accessed 27 January 2006).
- Crouch, D. (2002), "Surrounded by place: embodied encounters", in Coleman, S. and Crang, M. (Eds), *Tourism between Place and Performance*, Berghahn, Oxford.
- Derrida, J. (2000a), "Hostipitality", *Angelaki*, Vol. 5 No. 3, pp. 3-18.
- Derrida, J. (2000b), *Of Hospitality*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA.
- Downes, S. (2006), *The Muse as Eros*, Gower, Aldershot.
- Durkheim, E. (1976), *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, George Allen and Unwin, London.
- Featherstone, M. (Ed.) (1999), *Love and Eroticism*, Sage, London.
- Friese, H. (2004), "Spaces of hospitality", *Angelaki*, Vol. 9 No. 2, pp. 67-79.
- Geier, A. (2002), *Plato's Erotic Thought: The Tree of the Unknown*, University of Rochester Press, Rochester, NY.
- Gero, J. (2003), "Feasting and the practice of stately manners", in Bray, T.L. (Ed.), *The Archaeology and Politics of Food and Feasting in Early States and Empires*, Kluwer Academic Press, New York, NY.
- Gero, J. (2004), "Sex pots of ancient Peru: post-gender reflections", in Oestigaard, T., Anfinset, N. and Saitersdal, T. (Eds), *Combining the Past and the Present: Archaeological Perspectives on Society*, Hadrian Books, Oxford.
- Giddens, A. (1992), *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*, Polity, Cambridge.
- Hocart, A.M. (1952), "The divinity of the guest", *The Life-Giving Myth and Other Essays*, Methuen, London, pp. 78-86, originally 1927.
- Homer (1980), *The Odyssey*, Oxford University Press, Oxford (trans. Walter Shewring).
- Johnston, I. (2004), "Lecture on the Odyssey", available at: [www.mala.bc.ca/~johnstoi/introses/Homer.htm](http://www.mala.bc.ca/~johnstoi/introses/Homer.htm) (accessed 19 October 2005).
- Jusdanis, G. (1987), *The Poetics of Cavafy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.
- Kanafani, A.S. (1983), *Aesthetics and Ritual in the United Arab Emirates*, American University Press, Beirut.

- Kearns, E. (1982), "The return of Odysseus: a Homeric theoxeny", *Classical Quarterly (NS)*, Vol. 32 No. 1, pp. 2-8.
- Klossowski, P. (1971), *Roberte Ce Soir and the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes*, Calder and Boyars, London (trans. Austryn Wainhouse).
- Marcuse, H. (1987), *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, Ark, London.
- O'Flaherty, W.D. (1973), *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Siva*, Oxford University Press, London.
- Paz, O. (1993), *The Double Flame: Essays on Love and Eroticism*, Harvill, London.
- Pitt-Rivers, J. (1977), *The Fate of Shechem or the Politics of Sex*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Plato (1951), *The Symposium*, Penguin, Harmondsworth (trans. Walter Hamilton).
- Potter, D. (1978), *Brimstone and Treacle*, Eyre Methuen, London.
- Reece, S. (1993), *The Stranger's Welcome: Oral Theory and the Aesthetics of the Homeric Hospitality Scene*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, MI.
- Selwyn, T. (1981), "Images of reproduction: an analysis of a Hindu marriage ceremony", *Man (NS)*, Vol. 14, pp. 684-98.
- Selwyn, T. (2007), *Sie Unser Gast. Kulturaustausch: Zeitschrift fur internationale perspektiven*, ABC, Berlin, pp. 60-1.
- Thompson, S. (1958), *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN.
- van den Abbeele, G. (1992), *Travel as Metaphor*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN.

### About the authors

Hazel Andrews is a Senior Lecturer in Tourism and Leisure in the Centre for Tourism Consumer and Food Studies, Liverpool John Moores University. She has a masters in International Tourism Policy and her doctoral thesis was an ethnographic study of British charter tourists to Mallorca. She is interested in constructions, representations and consumption practices relating to identities, with particular focus on space, the body and food and drink cultures. Hazel Andrews is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: H.J.Andrews@ljmu.ac.uk

Les Roberts is a cultural geographer and theorist whose work examines the broad intersection between ideas of space, place and mobility, particularly in relation to film. His doctoral research examined historical and contemporary spaces of travel and migration in European film, and has formed the basis of a number of publications. He is currently working as a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Liverpool on the AHRC-funded interdisciplinary project *City in Film: Liverpool's Urban Landscape and the Moving Image*.

Tom Selwyn is a Professor of Anthropology, specialising in tourism and hospitality, at London Metropolitan University. He presently directs a European Commission TEMPUS programme in pilgrimage, tourism, and the cultural industries at the University of Bethlehem, Palestine, for a consortium of universities in the UK, Malta, and Finland. He is widely published in the area of tourism, hospitality, landscape, imagery, and the anthropology of coastal zones. He was on the co-ordinating group of the recently completed EC MED-VOICES programme in the Mediterranean region, his main geographical research interests being in the Eastern Mediterranean. He is honorary librarian and council member of the royal anthropological institute.