University of Minnesota Press

Chapter Title: Introduction: WELCOME AS RESISTANCE

Book Title: Arrested Welcome
Book Subtitle: Hospitality in Contemporary Art
Book Author(s): Irina Aristarkhova
Published by: University of Minnesota Press. (2020)
Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctv1220r8x.3

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at https://about.jstor.org/terms

This book is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). To view a copy of this license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/.

University of Minnesota Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Arrested Welcome*

This content downloaded from 58.97.216.197 on Thu, 05 Sep 2024 03:20:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Introduction

WELCOME AS RESISTANCE

Hattendorf and Mirikitani

On a chilly day in early 2001, Linda Hattendorf, a documentary filmmaker and editor, noticed a homeless man with a makeshift artist's table not far from her apartment building in lower Manhattan. Attracted at first by his drawings of large colorful cats, Hattendorf started chatting with him as one artist to another. In doing so she took the first step toward extending hospitality to a stranger: she noticed him.

The man's name was Jimmy Mirikitani. When he saw that Hattendorf had a professional-level camera, he asked her to film him. She agreed, and during the days that followed she looked for him on the streets near her apartment building and recorded their conversations and his drawing. Over the course of several interviews and hours of filming, Hattendorf learned about Mirikitani's life. This eighty-year-old Japanese American artist had been imprisoned in his youth at one of the internment camps where the U.S. government held Japanese Americans during World War II. Although he was born in the United States, he had also spent years in Nagasaki, Japan, where his family lived. (Some of his family members suffered and died after the atomic bombing of the city in 1945.) American officials had pressured Japanese Americans in the internment camps to sign papers renouncing their ties to Japan, and when Mirikitani refused to do so, his U.S. citizenship had been taken away.

Unable to get his life back on track after his release from the camp, and no longer an American citizen (he was "without papers"), Mirikitani suffered years of hardship and ended up living on the streets of New York. He was angry at his home country for treating him as the enemy, separating him from his family, and contributing to the deaths of his friends in the internment camp, who had loved his drawings.

Finding his story worthy of a wider audience, Hattendorf decided to make a documentary film about Mirikitani's life.[1] In the film, a gray-haired Mirikitani, surrounded by his meager possessions, shows his drawings of the camp. Hattendorf's camera documents his anger, his anguish, and the reactions on the faces of the people on the street who pass by him.

This content downloaded from 58.97.216.197 on Thu, 05 Sep 2024 03:20:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Hattendorf's time with Mirikitani transformed his strangeness into familiarity. She got to know who he was: his name, his history, the stories behind his drawings, and the reasons for his anger. *The Cats of Mirikitani* was released in 2006, five years after the filmmaker and the artist first met. Hattendorf had planned for the film to be strictly about Jimmy Mirikitani's life and artwork, and especially in the early part of the film, Linda Hattendorf's face is rarely seen. This makes sense, because the director of a film customarily stays behind the camera. The focus is supposed to be on the central character of the story (Mirikitani), and not on the director. *The Cats of Mirikitani* follows this convention at first, but then the story and the film itself take an unexpected turn.

We see Hattendorf leave her house on the morning of September 11, 2001. She is searching for Mirikitani, but her neighborhood in lower Manhattan is filling up with ash from the collapse of the World Trade Center's towers, and it is hard to see anything on the streets. Hattendorf speaks as she searches, and her voice is concerned. After months of chatting with Mirikitani on the street, hearing his story, Hattendorf no longer thinks of him as a stranger. He has become more than just the subject of her documentary—and now he needs her help.

Hattendorf finds Mirikitani in the corner of a nearby building. We can hear him coughing, but in the grayness of the frame, it is difficult to recognize him. What Hattendorf does next she will later describe in interviews as an "impulsive decision": she invites him to her apartment.

In the following few minutes of the film we join Mirikitani as he becomes, for the first time, a visitor to Hattendorf's apartment. We see how tiny the living space is, with the kitchen, where we later see her cook, in the same room where Hattendorf arranges a bed for her visitor, barely a few feet away. (As someone who grew up in a very small government-sponsored apartment in Moscow, I relate strongly to the ways in which Hattendorf's personal space shrinks with the addition of an eighty-year-old homeless man sleeping on a makeshift bed in her cramped home, and I appreciate how graciously she shows this in the film, for both of them.)

After the ash of 9/11 clears, Mirikitani does not go back to the streets of New York. Hattendorf's film connects his story to the current events playing out on her television, with her behind-the-camera commentary implying a parallel between the post-9/11 treatment of Muslim Americans and the treatment of Japanese Americans like Mirikitani during World War II. If Hattendorf had fears about inviting a homeless man into her house, she does not express them in

This content downloaded from 58.97.216.197 on Thu, 05 Sep 2024 03:20:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

the film. The film shows Mirikitani primarily in a good light. We see him drawing or singing Japanese songs while lying down in Hattendorf's living room. We watch as he plays with and talks to her cat, who "talks" back to him. At one point, he worries when she is late coming home at night. A man who a few short weeks earlier had lived on the streets is now staying up late, anxiously waiting for Hattendorf to return. When she arrives, he complains about her coming back "so late," and she responds by explaining to him that "it's okay for women today to spend time outside." He has become like a father figure, worried about her safety on the streets, which he does not see as welcoming.

The filmmaker gradually becomes more and more involved in Mirikitani's life. Over the next few months she helps him to reinstate his citizenship and apply for Social Security, and finally finds him his own apartment in public housing. She also reunites him with his family, finding his sister in California, a sister who thought her brother had died long ago. In a touching moment, Hattendorf passes the phone to Mirikitani so he can talk to his sister for the first time in decades. She also reconnects him with his niece, Janice, who was interned in another camp for Japanese Americans in Arizona. (She had become a poet, writing about the same painful past that we see in Mirikitani's drawings of the camps.) All of these actions require time and effort from Hattendorf, who goes to work every morning and comes back at night to the apartment where Mirikitani waits for her.

Because the film is meant to be about Mirikitani's life story, Hattendorf's camera continues to gloss over her role in his life while he is her guest, as if the director is wary of attracting too much attention to herself. In fact, the film is edited in such a way that we barely see Hattendorf in the frame until the very end. As a professional editor, she is particular about staying in the background. But no matter how hard she tries to direct our attention away from herself, Hattendorf becomes an active participant in her own film. It is no longer the story of a homeless man's sad life on the streets of New York, within the context of a geopolitical post–World War II tragedy updated through the lens of 9/11. It is the story of a homeless man whose life takes a dramatic turn when he finds a new home and a new lifelong friend.

Hattendorf was with Mirikitani when he passed away at the age of ninety-two on October 21, 2012, more than a decade after their first encounter. During the intervening years, which saw multiple exhibitions of Mirikitani's artwork and many Mirikitani family reunions, they remained friends.

This content downloaded from 58.97.216.197 on Thu, 05 Sep 2024 03:20:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

What is unveiled in real time, in front of our eyes, in *The Cats of Mirikitani* is Linda Hattendorf's hospitality and the transformation that it led to in her own life and, especially, in the life of this formerly homeless man. This point was not lost on audience members and critics when the film was finally released in 2006.[2] *The Cats of Mirikitani* received several awards, including the Audience Award at the Tribeca Film Festival, where it premiered. Although Hattendorf's plan was to focus on Jimmy Mirikitani's story and his drawings, audiences experienced the greatest catharsis from the way Mirikitani's life unfolded *after* her invitation to come and stay with her.[3]

During the recorded question-and-answer sessions after the screenings of the film at various venues, audience members often asked Hattendorf about her decision to invite a homeless man to stay with her. Many seemed to contemplate such a decision with hesitation and fear, and they expressed astonishment at Hattendorf's welcome. For viewers of the film, the built-up collective anxiety over how or whether to welcome total strangers who need that welcome the most is released through Hattendorf's welcome, as if her audience, vicariously, also invites a homeless man home. When I show *The Cats of Mirikitani* in a classroom, the students tell me they feel as if this film redeems them a little bit, too, as human beings, in a current climate of increased hostility and intolerance in their immediate lives—as if they are the ones who extend their welcome.

In praising the film, critics have confirmed its collective redemptive quality. Political science professor Michael J. Shapiro sees in the film a hope for how the process of filmmaking itself could become transformational. When awarding Hattendorf the Film Peace Prize at the 2007 Tromsø International Film Festival, Shapiro and other members of the festival jury (which included Rashid Masharawi, a Palestinian filmmaker from Gaza living in Paris, and Silje Ryvold, then a Norwegian student at the University of Tromsø) explained what they found so extraordinary about the documentary, noting that "Hattendorf's documentary project, which began as a result of some small sympathetic gestures, ended up as an extended generosity with universal implications."[4] In addition to telling us Mirikitani's life story prior to his meeting Hattendorf, the film has the universal appeal of contagious hospitality.

Hattendorf's discretion in showing her hosting in the film has been praised too. Film critic and editor Nell McClister highlights the self-effacing nature of Hattendorf's generosity: "Shadowing the narrative, more subtle even than the persistent, damning background murmur of war commentary from Hattendorf's

This content downloaded from 58.97.216.197 on Thu, 05 Sep 2024 03:20:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

TV, is the astonishing personal generosity of the filmmaker. Never permitted to edge into the limelight, her gentleness and her restraint stand as a beacon of warm mercy in the darkness."[5] Here, she is presented as an "ideal hostess." She does not claim her courage, her full labor of hospitality. She does not show us what it takes to decide and perform "small sympathetic gestures" and "astonishing personal generosity." Echoing one another, the members of the Tromsø jury and McClister seem to be both astonished at Hattendorf's actions (they seem to be asking themselves, "Would *we* invite in Mirikitani, a homeless man, even on 9/11?") and thankful for her "restraint" in not bringing too much attention to herself.[6]

Not all readings of this documentary and of what Hattendorf did have been so positive. When one has something that another person needs or does not have, the resulting inequality might make a welcoming gesture seem suspect. Once, after I gave a lecture discussing this documentary, a cultural theorist and filmmaker in the audience made a comment suggesting that Hattendorf had exploited Mirikitani for her own gain, to become a well-known filmmaker.[7] As a filmmaker, this person implied, Hattendorf had very little to lose and a lot to gain from inviting the artist in, especially after she had already decided to make a film about him. Another objection could be raised that not much risk was involved in her hosting a frail elderly man with whom she was already familiar. These are valid points, as valid as the fearful thoughts Hattendorf herself may have had after Mirikitani started to live with her at the apartment *(What have I done? How does this look? Am I safe? What was I thinking?),* and I will explore them further in this book.

However, I am making a case here that Hattendorf's act, her hard work of hospitality, should not be dismissed just because of its "happy ending." There is no need to rationalize Hattendorf's actions away as if they interfere with our own everyday decisions about homeless persons. Mirikitani would probably be the first to understand the cynicism about the promise of welcome, as we see him in the film being suspicious about the United States as a country, which has been an inhospitable place for him, robbing him of his youth, his family, and his professional life just because he was Japanese. He often said, "No need, no need," when rejecting offers to help restore his American citizenship. Understandably, he was angry and defensive because of previous bad experiences. But once he accepted Hattendorf's invitation, after coming to know her in the months prior to 9/11, he decided to trust her without knowing how it would end. The point I am

This content downloaded from 58.97.216.197 on Thu, 05 Sep 2024 03:20:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

making here is that neither Hattendorf nor Mirikitani knew for sure what would happen once they started living together in her small apartment. Most interpretations and judgments between hosts and guests are made post-factum—that is the nature of hospitality.

There is a scene in the film in which Mirikitani is sitting on his makeshift bed in Hattendorf's home, shortly before he is to leave for his own new apartment (which has been provided by social services). He has tears in his eyes, and, feeling shy about his emotions, he masks his tearfulness with a grumpy tone of voice. Why does Mirikitani cry? Why would a guest, a former homeless man, cry now, when he is finally getting his own place, at eighty years old? This is the incredible power of the film: it makes us feel his emotions, that he cries because of all that has happened to him, and because he will miss Hattendorf. The artist and the filmmaker have developed a genuine friendship. Though their experience together has not been easy on either of them, they have developed a deep understanding of each other. My writing acknowledges Hattendorf's hospitality and Mirikitani's life, his anger and tears, and one of the lessons I learned from this film is that the question of the filmmaker's motivation speaks as much to our own inner monologues, emotions, and anxieties when we pass by homeless persons as it does to her intentions.

The line between a good kind of gain (weaving one's own creative thread into the social fabric) and a bad kind of gain (manipulating others for exploitative purposes) cannot be identified in advance, before the hospitality event occurs. To emphasize once again: hosts and guests realize each other's intentions post-factum, from the effects of their actions in often unexpected or unpredictable circumstances. What is different in this case is the existence of the film, which serves as a lesson and a record, in addition to being a work about hospitality. The film enables its audience to learn from Hattendorf and Mirikitani's story. And Hattendorf, obviously, considered criticisms of her own position, too. I believe that is why she was ready to note that her decision to host Mirikitani was "impulsive," rather than calculated, prepared, and imagined in advance. She feared looking like she took advantage of her guest and his situation for her own gain. She clearly worried, as director and editor, and especially in postproduction, that it might look like the whole time Linda Hattendorf provided this homeless artist with a refuge her motivation was to make herself famous. I am glad this worry did not stop her from making the film.

My central concern in this book is the larger lesson in hospitality that artworks

This content downloaded from 58.97.216.197 on Thu, 05 Sep 2024 03:20:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

offer and enable—for example, how Hattendorf carefully considered whether or not to include in the film such scenes as that of Mirikitani tearing up, and that she did so despite the risk of being accused of exploiting her subject. In the last decade of his life, Mirikitani was reunited with his family members, whom Hattendorf found, and he traveled and exhibited his art, something he loved doing; he died, arguably, a much happier man than he had been before he met Hattendorf. Hattendorf's film points to the bigger political picture—the tragedy of what happened to Mirikitani in the first place and the injustice of how the United States treats some of its citizens, such as Japanese Americans during World War II and Muslim Americans post-9/11—but it also shows how her hospitality made possible a better outcome for Mirikitani, for this one person.

With her film's warm, inviting, albeit sometimes painful story, Hattendorf takes the rest of us to a place where decisions about hosting the homeless do not seem to be extraordinary. The film brings us into a place where we can tell ourselves: *Despite our fears and anxieties, if she can do it, surely we can do it, too.* What would stop us from following this film's inspirational lessons?

Hospitality and Its Discontents

The concept of hospitality, or the practice of welcoming others, has increasingly become a central concern, albeit a contested one, in academic, cultural, and public spheres. There is currently much political debate and philosophical reckoning surrounding requests for accommodation and the needs of others—strangers, immigrants, refugees, and the displaced—who might be hosted in homes and in communities. The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates conservatively that today close to sixty million people in the world can be classified as "displaced" by war, persecution, economic conditions, and natural disasters.[8] Debates concerning the refugee crisis in Europe and immigration law in the United States are the most current, and all-too-familiar, examples of responses to the needs of such displaced persons.

In the context of political declarations that "cosmopolitanism has failed" (a phrase repeated by many European leaders, especially on the political right), an insistence on practices of hospitality represents a radical path forward and a means of political resistance. In scholarship, hospitality has been presented not only as the conduct of oneself vis-à-vis one's guests but also as an ethical means of understanding and responding to a variety of others who do not neatly "belong."

This content downloaded from 58.97.216.197 on Thu, 05 Sep 2024 03:20:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

In European philosophy, Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida have critically discussed key philosophical and political texts and founding stories (mythological and religious) to open up hospitality's contemporary possibilities. In my previous writings, I have analyzed the theories of Derrida, who asserted the need for a critical reworking of the importance placed on unconditional hospitality as an ideal.[9] What does such "ideal" hospitality look like, without any conditions presented to guests and hosts? Fairy tales, religious writings, and other cultural foundational texts, passed from one generation to the next through socialization and education, are used as blueprints. Ancient stories of hospitality present the welcoming of strangers as proof of faith and/or proper conduct. Examples come from the Bible, in Matthew 25:40 ("Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me"), the Laws of Manu, and the Dharmasutras ("If there is no food, then a place on the floor, some water and straw, and a pleasant welcome—these are never wanting in a house of a good man. . . . A couple who acts this way wins a world without end").[10]

From individual, personal conduct, the ideal of hospitality extends to the community, to the nation, to "we, the people." An ideal of hospitality, indeed, also influenced the development of international law in post-Enlightenment Europe when it provided a foundation for Immanuel Kant's conceptualization of a cosmopolitan right to hospitality: citizens of various countries should be able to visit each other (hence, the notion of being granted a "visa") without harm, and with an expectation of tolerance.[11]

This ideal of hospitality, however, is not just some speculative notion that is removed from everyday life. For example, Emma Lazarus's poem "The New Colossus," inscribed on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty, could be seen as reflecting such an ideal, which is very much in the background of many conversations taking place around immigration policy in the United States today:

> Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
> With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
> Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
> A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
> Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
> Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
> Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
> The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.

This content downloaded from 58.97.216.197 on Thu, 05 Sep 2024 03:20:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

> "Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
> With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
> Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
> The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
> Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
> I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"[12]

This ideal implies that hospitality is challenging, and one needs to remind oneself that it lives up to its promise most when the circumstances in which it is practiced are not ordinary. Linda Hattendorf's gesture in this respect connects to Lazarus's call, and her film *The Cats of Mirikitani* is a testimony. But what I see in this film of those post-9/11 days, besides the political commentary, is how Hattendorf's decision to extend an invitation to Mirikitani, to welcome him into her small apartment, effectively makes her overall point. She shows her viewers that Lazarus's appeal on the Statue of Liberty is not a cause, as an ideal principle, but an effect, expressed through symbolic means of poetry and sculpture, of what happens in everyday situations.

It might seem that Lazarus's poem is falling on deaf ears today. However, this is not only because hostility or, at best, tolerance has prevailed over ideals of such unconditional welcome.[13] It is also because the traditions of hospitality, the stories and the ancient ideals, have themselves been implicated in and found to be complicit with more fundamental reasons behind the failures of hospitality to live up to its promise. Hospitality cannot be separated from the question of power: institutional, economic, national, and historical. Even in ancient texts, some people are welcomed much more than others, and some are seen as more worthy of welcome. How are people divided? The divisions in hospitality follow the patterns of disempowerment in societies. Women, the poor, members of lower classes or castes, religious and ethnic "others," sexual minorities, noncitizens, and nonhuman living beings (animals) are usually presented, if at all, as less worthy or not worthy of unconditional welcome. Though more recent philosophical discussions acknowledge that there are ongoing problems with hospitality traditions and definitions, they do not provide much of a path forward, away from essentialist, heteronormative, and harmful histories. That is why contemporary critiques of and alternatives to existing discriminatory cultures of hospitality are needed: hospitality itself needs to be challenged.

Women especially have been categorized as welcoming of others rather than

This content downloaded from 58.97.216.197 on Thu, 05 Sep 2024 03:20:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

worthy of welcome themselves. As a feminist scholar of hospitality, I have explored and critiqued how the categories of women, the maternal, and the feminine have been consistently presented as essentially, *naturally,* more hospitable than men, the paternal, and the masculine. In this system, femininity and hospitality are defined symbiotically and tautologically: femininity is welcoming because welcome is feminine. In "The New Colossus," Lazarus equates the country with the mother, employing the association between gender and hospitality.

In addition to my feminist theorizing of hospitality, in this book I engage with other critical approaches that come out of social justice movements, highlighting how various inequalities in hospitality relations have become intertwined and are sustained by those in power. In *The Cats of Mirikitani,* Linda Hattendorf is primarily interested in encouraging change on national and cultural levels, so that those who are defined as "others" (Japanese Americans during World War II, Muslim Americans in the post-9/11 period) are not targeted as a group unwelcomed in the country. These critical approaches to hospitality show how hospitality itself needs to be changed so it does not reproduce the hierarchies, exclusions, and stereotypical expectations of its past iterations.

These critical approaches also lead me, along with the artists discussed in this book, to be mindful of positionality and inherent inequalities that bear on a claim to welcome. First, it is important to recognize that individual welcoming acts do not solve big structural problems. Hattendorf does not pretend to solve the homelessness problem in the United States by inviting one homeless man into her apartment. But that does not mean that her act is not impactful for her audience. Her resulting friendship with Mirikitani and the changes in his life raise questions for her audience about what kind of people we (in this case, Americans) are. Second, the feminist research community has taught me and other white women that it is problematic to act out of the arrogant and presumptuous "white savior complex"—that is, assuming that people of color need help, thinking we know what kind of help they need, and, though not asked, providing "help" that in fact benefits mostly the white women involved. Hattendorf seemed mindful of the possibility that she would appear as a benevolent "savior" who made a film about a homeless man but in the end benefited mostly herself. And finally, fears and anxieties accompany hospitality situations. These fears include giving away too many resources, so that one no longer has enough for oneself and one's own family; risking one's personal safety; being taken advan-

This content downloaded from 58.97.216.197 on Thu, 05 Sep 2024 03:20:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

tage of; and not living up to cultural expectations as a host or a guest and hence being judged. Throughout this book I explore these fears and anxieties.

Stop Hosting Now!

To make the promise of hospitality come true for someone like Jimmy Mirikitani, Hattendorf had to put her fears and anxieties aside. So much could have gone wrong: Mirikitani could have had a health problem, including a mental illness; he could have killed her in her sleep (after all, he did show frustration); or he could have decided to go back to the streets of New York because he was afraid of her, or because he was unable to cope with sharing her apartment. And who would judge Hattendorf if she had decided not to let Mirikitani stay after the Manhattan air cleared, if she had asked him to leave at that time? After all, other people in the film, who called themselves Mirikitani's friends when he lived on the streets, did not invite him to their homes to live with them, choosing instead to buy him food or bring him warm blankets.

Beyond individuals' fears around extending and receiving hospitality, there is also community pressure to conform to certain notions and customs of welcome. Hospitality decisions might seem individual, but their impact is communal. As a result, the community often prescribes what kind of hospitality an individual should enact. The welcoming of a community member might be in conflict with the expectations of other members of the community. Power struggles take place among various community members about which hospitality "ideals" should win: majority, minority, traditional, new, and so on. One story that circulated in the news a few years ago presents an example of a community that interfered with an individual community member's decision to host homeless people at his house.

Unlike Linda Hattendorf, Greg Schiller of Elgin City, Illinois, lived in his own house, not in a small apartment. The winter of 2017–18 was especially cold, and Schiller feared the homeless people in the city square might freeze to death without shelter. Schiller is a white man of modest means, but like many Americans he lives in a house that can accommodate more people than just its inhabitants. When the temperature dropped below 15 degrees Fahrenheit, he invited homeless men to spend a night in his basement. He provided beds and hot meals to about ten people.[14]

This content downloaded from 58.97.216.197 on Thu, 05 Sep 2024 03:20:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

The city of Elgin's efforts to care for the local homeless population included a food pantry and homeless shelters, which were required by city code to have more fire exits than Schiller's basement provided. In fact, Elgin's code specifically prohibited the use of private homes as homeless shelters. After receiving a tip from one of Schiller's neighbors, city officials threatened to "condemn" Schiller's house if he continued to host the homeless. From the city's point of view, Schiller was inviting the homeless into his home (and not for the first time) without assuring their safety.[15]

Schiller had previously been involved with a ministry named for the above-mentioned biblical passage, the Matthew 25:40 Ministry. He had disagreed with some members of the ministry and had left it before another hosting session at his house took place. Thus, Schiller's hosting of homeless men involved him in disagreements with at least four different groups or individuals in his community: city officials; one or more of his neighbors or other citizens of Elgin; his former colleagues and friends at the ministry; and his former spouse, who also voiced her own issues with his hosting.[16]

The desire on the part of the larger community to stop Schiller's welcome stemmed primarily from concerns about safety regulations, which presumably had been enacted to ensure the well-being of the homeless men themselves. In the news media, Elgin officials were quoted as stating that they were worried about safety and were offended by the suggestion that they were not as concerned about the homeless as Schiller was. At the same time, at least one of them admitted that there might be not enough spaces for everyone in the city's homeless shelters, especially during those extremely cold nights.[17]

Then there is the question of whether others should be able to stop a person's—or an entire community's—hospitality. This is something that happens all the time, especially with those groups who are excluded from communal hospitality "ideals." The current debates around undocumented migrants demonstrate my point. Should national government be able to stop the welcome of specific communities—cities, individuals, religious communities—who decide to shelter undocumented migrants? Who should decide? How should resources be distributed? This is how the power structures of hospitality are mobilized and revealed: when an open conflict takes place about whom and how to welcome, it takes place between some individuals and other individuals, testing the power, commitment, and resolve of both sides. Other members of the community then

This content downloaded from 58.97.216.197 on Thu, 05 Sep 2024 03:20:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

align themselves with one side or the other according to their own views on and practices of hospitality.

Jeff Rowes, a senior lawyer with the Institute for Justice, headquartered in Arlington, Virginia, was quoted in the *New York Times* regarding Schiller's case. He defended Schiller's hosting as the constitutional right of an American citizen, stating that citizens enjoy a "right to rescue" those whose lives are in danger. He noted that homeless persons, too, have the constitutional right to "be free of government interference that endangers their lives."[18] This is an example of the dynamics of hosting and power. According to this logic, Schiller and the homeless men, as American citizens, have more rights to host and be hosted than do undocumented migrants or noncitizen residents like Jimmy Mirikitani. Lazarus's ideal of hospitality, however, does not make a distinction between citizens and noncitizens.

The questions surrounding hospitality are not going away, because the problem of what we do (however "we" is defined), as a community, is not going away. It is only getting worse, as a result of human-made and natural disasters. That is why Lazarus's poem, inscribed on the Statue of Liberty, reads today as radical as ever. Whose responsibility is it to enact the ideal of hosting? Should the responsibility fall to the government, with its agencies and bureaucracy, or to the individual citizen, or to charities, or to all or none of these? The examples of Hattendorf's and Schiller's hosting of homeless men show how the personal and the political are connected. As individual Americans, we constantly debate how hospitable or not our country needs to be. Today only a little more than 50 percent of Americans support Lazarus's ideal of welcoming refugees, and opinions on the topic are sharply divided along ideological lines.[19] Communities do not necessarily support welcoming actions. Across Europe, trials have been conducted in various countries as governments have sought to stop their own "Schillers" from providing shelter to refugees and immigrants.

In taking the actions that they did, both Hattendorf and Schiller followed what they were supposed to do, according to Lazarus's poem and other stories of ideal hospitality, but most people do not take such actions. Because their acts of hospitality were extraordinary, Hattendorf and Schiller transformed welcome into an act of defiance and resistance to violent hostility and indifferent tolerance. Hattendorf resisted the choice of doing nothing and defied many doubts in her own mind, I imagine, when making the documentary. She defied anxiety about welcoming a stranger, something she later acknowledged in answering

This content downloaded from 58.97.216.197 on Thu, 05 Sep 2024 03:20:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

questions from audiences (When did you decide to do it? Were you not afraid?). There are many reasons not to welcome strangers or seek their welcome, in real life and in the art that I discuss in this book. However, focusing on the topic of hospitality, I have also learned from artists who, like Hattendorf, show in various ways that welcome among strangers can be mobilized as a form of resistance to the hostilities that surround us and to signs of mere tolerance, which does not seem to be enough any longer (as when Kant, for example, defined hospitality as a right to "not being harmed" when in a foreign land).[20]

The Cats of Mirikitani also shows that when ethical decisions are made about who is worthy of our welcome and to what extent, those decisions are also lived through, and answered, step by step, aesthetically. The manifestation of who can afford to live with or without the welcome of others, or who feels entitled to welcome, is carried out through sensory, aesthetic means—what tone of voice to use, how to appear to another person in terms of clothing and greeting, what kind of food to offer or to accept, what constitutes a welcoming, sheltering, environment. *How* to approach a stranger, how to *appear* to that person—these questions constitute a hospitality scene. Welcoming is a *form* of embodiment shared with others. There are also expectations of the genre. As a creative person, as a documentary filmmaker, Hattendorf was supposed to set her role in the background: finding money, writing a story to tell, organizing everything, directing, editing. The focus of her film should be on her subject, Jimmy Mirikitani. But as I watch the film with my students, we are all glad that Hattendorf did not let either personal or professional doubts stop her. In creating the film, she transformed her welcome into an act of resistance that inspires her audience to rethink personal and national (in)hospitality. What is the role of contemporary art in this search for new forms of welcome?

Contemporary Art and Hospitality through a Feminist Lens

Since the twentieth century, the discussion around the role of art in society has resurfaced in many forms, building on old tropes. Most famously, Plato wanted to ban artists and other creative makers from his ideal state. He argued that rather than searching for, establishing, and defending justice, artists, at best, entertained the masses with dazzling beautiful forms and mimicry of real life; at worst, they spread falsehoods and illusions. Hence, artists are either harmless (in a "useless" way) or dangerous.[21] Would Plato, then, be happy that artists

This content downloaded from 58.97.216.197 on Thu, 05 Sep 2024 03:20:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

in the twentieth century invented art forms that were intended to have direct impacts on society by promoting justice? Would he describe Linda Hattendorf's documentary film as the kind of art that benefits the ideal state? After all, those who gave Hattendorf awards at film festivals said that the film renewed their hope for humanity.

There have always been artists who have sought to create socially engaged and justice-oriented works. Artists of the nineteenth-century Russian Peredvizhniki (Wanderers) movement used painting to bring attention to the social and economic ills of the Russian Empire. Instead of producing portraits of wealthy people and their estates, these artists depicted the hardship and poverty of serfs and indentured laborers. In the early twentieth century, around the time of the 1917 Russian Revolution, some Russian artists gave up painting altogether for new forms of creative expression, with the aim of serving a wider public; these forms included posters, film, graphic design, photography, public theater, and social organizing.[22] The twentieth century saw the meaning of art as creative and cultural practice widen, in terms of both forms of creative expression and artists' activist work as citizens and members of their communities. In the twenty-first century, in contemporary art, an individual artist might be involved in a variety of forms of art making, depending on the artist's intentions. The piece of an artwork immediately "visible" to the audience might be only a small part of the artist's practice. By writing about such artworks here, in addition to thinking through practices of hospitality, I hope to expand the audiences of the works in question, with the aim of enabling an understanding of entire projects whose specific multiyear, multimedia aspects might otherwise be lost, forgotten, or missed.[23]

Within the field of art theory and criticism more narrowly, recent debates have focused on the role of art in society, especially around discussions of "relational aesthetics" and "social practice" art forms. A number of scholars, curators, and artists (such as Nicolas Bourriaud, Lucy Lippard, Griselda Pollock, Grant H. Kester, Suzanne Lacy, the Raqs Media Collective, Rick Lowe, Claire Doherty, Amelia Jones, Tom Finkelpearl, Miwon Kwon, Nato Thompson, and Claire Bishop) have joined in extensive discussions of "relation" or "participation" in art practices.[24]

Critics and scholars who support forms of art practice that include social intervention and participation in the community at large see these new forms as carrying on the legacy of socially conscious activist art from the twentieth century. They consider the new forms to be a welcome departure from the insular

This content downloaded from 58.97.216.197 on Thu, 05 Sep 2024 03:20:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

commercial art world that is mostly supported by wealthy individuals and their galleries, in which artworks are collected as commodities, investments, or objects to own and admire. But art forms that seek social change and community participation have also been fiercely critiqued. The critics point out that when artists "patch" social problems with their individual actions, they are at best salving their own and the art world's conscience (along the lines of the "white savior complex" previously described); at worst, they are enabling the very unequal system they critique by ameliorating aspects of it rather than seeking the structural transformation of the whole. As a result, the systems of inequality, "patched" by artists, philanthropists, and volunteers, can carry on; they are not forced to become more equitable and just. Therefore, in the most critical part of this argument, such artists are not merely harmless, they are "dangerous" (to follow Plato's logic) to the larger project of social change.

Similar to the debates around hospitality described above, discussions of the social role of art become more focused when they include attention to differences in power and personal positionality. I introduce these concerns briefly here, since I explore them throughout the book. First, when the question of art's social role is raised, a distinction is usually made between art that is displayed in or takes place in museums/galleries/art spaces and art that exists outside those structures. Because the commercial art world is seen as less interested in social change and more in art as pleasing-the-eye commodity, within this critical framework art spaces are framed as "compromised," elitist, and serving the gazes and the needs of those in power (the wealthy, the privileged, and the institutions that support them and are supported by them). By this logic, artworks placed outside institutionalized art spaces have a better chance of intervening with existing power structures and challenging the status quo.

Second, all those involved in making and consuming contemporary art have their own personal backgrounds and are invested in issues that are closest to their own hearts, so to speak. Critics of social practice and relational aesthetics art point out that the artists are often disconnected from the very communities they want to serve or on whose behalf they attempt to speak. And even when they are current or former members of those less privileged communities, their desire to "do good" can be seen as patronizing and exploitative (done for their own careers), especially if the artists neglect to plan for sustained change. Apart from those critics who express general antipathy to these art forms based on their own personal preferences and professional interests and career invest-

This content downloaded from 58.97.216.197 on Thu, 05 Sep 2024 03:20:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

ments, there are also those who are interested in the topics that these art forms represent but acknowledge the dangers of artists' being exploitative and coming across as patronizing.

This book is a contribution to the growing scholarship on the topic of hospitality in contemporary art. An example of the recent interest in this topic is Lewis Hyde's *The Gift,* which has been an inspiration to many artists.[25] Other scholars have considered relations within the art world as hospitality relations among curators, artists, and audiences.[26] In the past decade several major exhibitions have been devoted to the topic of hospitality, including *Feast: Radical Hospitality in Contemporary Art,* at the Smart Museum, Chicago, and other venues (2012–14); and the Liverpool Biennial's *The Unexpected Guest* (2012). In these exhibitions and the artworks they have featured, the problematic of hospitality has been shown to be both contemporary and ancient, as artists, designers, and architects have presented their practices in a world that poses wider questions of intimacy, generosity, refuge giving, and cross-cultural engagement in an era of social media and global markets of all kinds. The two collections that have been published as a direct result of these exhibitions—namely, Stephanie Smith's *Feast: Radical Hospitality in Contemporary Art* and Sally Tallant and Paul Domela's *The Unexpected Guest: Art, Writing, and Thinking on Hospitality*—are important to my own study, as I build on their research and curatorial efforts.[27]

Despite the fact that I find many of the critical arguments and counterarguments expressed in these earlier publications very persuasive in their consideration of whether artists should seek social change at all (and, if so, in what ways), at the same time, I share Grant Kester's views about "the unrelenting purism that drives a certain kind of theoretical reflection" that is far removed from the "pragmatic demands of artists working in social movements here and now."[28] The same kind of purist arguments can plague theoretical discussions about which hospitality is more "ideal," "pure," and "uncorrupted" by inequalities. There is no such hospitality. But that does not mean that welcome is powerless and meaningless. When hospitality is defined in theory as "all or nothing," in practice that usually means "nothing." Artists, also, do not work in a vacuum. In addition to artists' own creative community and the art world, governments and citizens, just like Plato, often try to influence or directly interfere in decisions about what kinds of art get to be supported and promoted and what kinds are discouraged or even destroyed.

In this book I provide my own feminist reading of practices of hospitality in

This content downloaded from 58.97.216.197 on Thu, 05 Sep 2024 03:20:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

contemporary art. What does this mean? It means that I analyze both hospitality and artworks from a point of view that is mindful of the above-mentioned questions of power. In addition to gender, as I have described, I pay attention to categories that play a significant role in contemporary debates around power and hospitality, such as those of national origin, ethnicity, race, and class. I show how specific and international art practices around hospitality complicate existing configurations of inequalities of welcome and the categories on which they are based. To respond to criticisms that stress divisions between the gallery and the real world in contemporary art, in specific contexts of particular artworks, I focus, where appropriate, on how being in a gallery need not be limiting, but rather can enable an artist to experiment with new forms of welcome; I also show what happens when the same or other artists take their projects outside, into the "real world."

In the chapters that follow, I examine individual artworks by eight international artists, works of different durations and executed in a variety of media and materials, for their instantiation of and explicit intent in hospitality practices. I have chosen artists who consider hospitality to be one of their primary interests, rather than a tangential concern, in their art projects. Artworks by Ana Prvački, Faith Wilding, Lee Mingwei, Kathy High, Mithu Sen, Pippa Bacca, Silvia Moro, and Ken Aptekar, together with films by Linda Hattendorf and Joël Curtz, constitute my principal case studies, though I also refer secondarily to other works. The artists whose works I discuss have systematically engaged critical topics around hospitality and have exhibited their works in major venues around the world, but they have not previously been brought together in a way that foregrounds the productive synergies and tensions between them. I address how these artists and their works relate to and challenge ideas on hospitality that have long existed in the culture at large (in folklore and religious texts) and, in the background, in philosophy (Immanuel Kant, Emmanuel Levinas, and Jacques Derrida) and related scholarship and critical writing in contemporary art and culture. I conducted my primary research at exhibitions and in libraries. I also visited artists' studios, and in some cases I followed several iterations of an art project and participated in some of those iterations. When possible, I interviewed the artists about their intentions and motivations. I also observed and interviewed audience members who interacted with the art and participated in it. Where appropriate and important, I include personal contextual information in my discussion to show how the subjective position of the audience (myself included) affects the reception of a work.

This content downloaded from 58.97.216.197 on Thu, 05 Sep 2024 03:20:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

I theorize hospitality by learning from selected art projects, addressing the failures of various cultures of hospitality on the one hand and showing the promise of new scenarios and potential paths forward on the other. Like Schiller and Hattendorf, the artists discussed in this book challenge how hospitality is practiced in their communities; their various approaches include offering hospitality to unusual guests, such as nonhuman living beings (transgenic rats), and seeking hospitality in unusual places, such as someone else's home or a car; revealing the mechanics of hospitality, showing that we are not born "welcoming" but rather are trained and socialized to be hospitable or hostile; and not following prescribed gender roles of hosts and guests, when women refuse to wait for their guests and men perfect their cooking, serving, and hosting. Also, some of the artists invite or accept invitations from not only those whom they already know and trust but mostly from strangers, thereby enabling their audiences and my readers to consider the limits and limitations of their own welcome.

One major lesson from these works is their challenge to the seemingly insurmountable dichotomy between "structural solutions" and "personal actions." In the oppositional view, personal action will never be enough, and that causes anxiety around individual impact and responsibility. But what if one wants to get personally involved? Is there a place for artists to practice hospitality thoughtfully and critically, as part of their creative practice? For example, when considering Linda Hattendorf's gesture of inviting Mirikitani into her apartment, audience members compare themselves to her and contemplate whether there might ever be a good way to welcome a homeless person into one's life. Hattendorf's documentary enables such responses and conversations.

Each of the following chapters is devoted to one artist or project, offering a level of detail that is not feasible in an art historical or critical survey. I engage with these works and their hospitality practices based on a comparative feminist approach that I have developed over the course of my decade-long engagement with the concept of hospitality as a feminist theorist.[29] I show that in contemporary art, hospitality is not just facilitated and celebrated or dismissed as a failure, it is also transformed and put to the test by creative makers who are well aware of the theoretical and political debates surrounding this notion.

Chapter 1, "Reclaimed Civility: Ana Prvački," addresses critical issues surrounding etiquette and civility as crucial and controversial elements of hospitality. I analyze *The Greeting Committee Reports . . .*, a project by Serbian-born installation and performance artist Ana Prvački. As part of her work for the *documenta 13* exhibition in Kassel, Germany, in 2012, Prvački (with the help

This content downloaded from 58.97.216.197 on Thu, 05 Sep 2024 03:20:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

of professional etiquette consultants) trained more than eight hundred exhibition staff members in etiquette and civility. Borderline inappropriate and deeply provocative, Prvački's work in etiquette studies, in addition to civility training, consists of short professionally produced videos on how to respond to awkward situations; these were shown on public television during the exhibition (in place of commercials). The work, as it tries to teach how to be welcoming and prepare oneself for the arrival of guests, creates uneasiness and demonstrates the profound anxiety caused by hospitality practices as one prepares to serve and be "always ready" as a good (communist) citizen-in-becoming (hence the title, *The Greeting Committee Reports . . .*). In this chapter, I seek to unsettle an easy critical dismissal of civility on political grounds; I argue, as have bell hooks and David Farrell Krell, that there is more to civility and etiquette as it figures in Prvački's work.

Chapter 2, "Undoing Waiting: Faith Wilding," asks who our guests are and how and why we wait for them. I analyze American artist Faith Wilding's famous performance *Waiting* (Womanhouse, California Institute of the Arts, 1972) and her refusal to remake it forty-five years later, resulting in the performance *Wait-With* (*WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution,* Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and other venues, 2007–8), as an example of the costs to what Levinas and Derrida describe as a feminine being who is essentially welcoming because of passive waiting for the (male) Other. I also raise feminist questions about possible differentiations among various kinds of waiting. Here I engage with Jane Blocker's reading of *Waiting* through Roland Barthes's *A Lover's Discourse* and Fatima Mernissi's *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood.*

In chapter 3, "The Man Who Welcomes: Lee Mingwei," I address the extensive body of creative work by contemporary Taiwanese American artist Lee Mingwei and examine his aesthetics of hospitality in detail. Among other issues, I ponder why many people, on first experiencing Lee's work, assume that he is a female artist. I focus primarily on three of Lee's works: *The Sleeping Project, The Dining Project,* and *The Living Room.* The last of these has become a permanent "living room" in the new wing of Boston's Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, designed by Renzo Piano in collaboration with Lee. In Lee's work, the amount and quality of resources, such as food and its presentation or a room and its design, together with the demeanor and caring of the host, reveal aesthetic concerns of welcome as inherently connected to the ethics of welcome. I show how Lee challenges previous hospitality traditions by presenting a model of a welcoming man.

This content downloaded from 58.97.216.197 on Thu, 05 Sep 2024 03:20:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Moving to saying yes in welcoming all living beings, chapter 4, "Hosting the Animal: Kathy High," raises the question of whether welcoming nonhuman living beings needs to be ethically and aesthetically problematized as even desirable. Focusing on American bioartist Kathy High's project *Embracing Animal,* I explore what can be conceived as the anthropological limits of hospitality. High hosted transgenic rats in her house and also in a gallery as part of the influential exhibition *Becoming Animal* at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art in 2005. The rats she chose had undergone gene modification so that they could develop human autoimmune diseases (such as the one High has) and be used to test medications that High and others suffering from such diseases could potentially benefit from. Based on High's work, I engage ideas about hosting the animal in the Jain philosophy of nonharm to consider what the arrival of an animal—such as a sick transgenic rat—means in practice.

In chapter 5, "Welcome Withdrawn: Mithu Sen," I ask what happens when a hospitality situation does not go as planned, and host and guests test each other's welcome, prompting anxiety but also raising new possibilities. Mithu Sen's artworks *It's Good to Be Queen* (Bose Pacia Gallery, Chelsea, New York, 2006) and, to a lesser extent, *I Have Only One Language; It Is Not Mine* (Kochi-Muziris Biennale, 2014–15) and *UNhome* (18th Street Arts Center, Los Angeles, 2017) serve as my case studies. Sen shows her work globally and is interested in questions of radical hospitality and crossing borders/boundaries, and her work lends itself to a discussion of the precariousness of working and living outside one's own community and an analysis of the larger context of what it means to welcome when a host or guest withdraws a common language, or even withdraws an invitation and his or her presence. Together with an exploration of Sushmita Chatterjee's reading of Mithu Sen as a postcolonial feminist, I show how Sen's works, global in contexts and audiences while intimate in scale, negotiate the anxieties of hospitality.

Chapter 6, "A Leap of Faith: Pippa Bacca and Silvia Moro," raises critical questions about inequality and power and demonstrates what is at stake in art practices of hospitality that cross the boundary between the gallery and the outside world as well as national boundaries. I begin my inquiry with an analysis of the tragic story of the artist Pippa Bacca (Giuseppina Pasqualino di Marineo). Bacca, with another artist, Silvia Moro, hitchhiked in white bridal dresses from a gallery in Milan to a gallery in Israel as part of their *Brides on Tour* art project in 2008. Bacca was killed by one of the drivers who offered her a ride in Turkey.

This content downloaded from 58.97.216.197 on Thu, 05 Sep 2024 03:20:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

I discuss suggestions that she was naive in embarking on this artistic project and even neocolonial in her sense of entitlement in expecting to be welcomed as a white European woman. I explore these questions based on how Bacca's story is depicted in the documentary film *La Mariée (The Bride),* by Joël Curtz. Bacca's decisions, I show, were based on and espoused a promise of nondiscrimination among drivers, a point on which she and her art project partner, Moro, disagreed. This disagreement between the two women forms the central part of my discussion about the tension and inherent contradictions of hospitality that this work and the tragedy highlight. I also discuss creative tributes to Bacca and *Brides on Tour* that have since been offered in Turkey and elsewhere.

In the book's Conclusion, "Hospitality Now: Ken Aptekar," I show how the stakes of demanding hospitality are often very high (a question of life and death), even when they do not seem so at first. My case study here is the 2017 exhibition by Ken Aptekar *Nachbarn/Neighbours* at the St. Annen-Museum in the northern German city of Lübeck. Aptekar's work showed how a simple gesture of leaving a basket of food for neighbors in need might become a symbol of humanity's future in the current climate of immigration panic in many communities. By bringing together contemporary Lübeck neighbors to consider the story of one Jewish family, the Carlebachs, who perished in the Holocaust, Aptekar hoped to create a possibility for a different kind of welcome. Through a discussion of this work, I develop important concluding arguments that are relevant to this entire book; they concern the role of gratitude in hospitality and how the roles of the guest and host and the practices of hospitality need to change in the contemporary world if the ideals of welcome are ever to fulfill their promise.

In this book I am interested in a set of questions that seek to go beyond specific disciplinary debates about the ideal works or theories of art of welcome and its place in society. I want to open up the question of creative hospitality practices as contributing to larger debates of our times and at our proverbial kitchen tables. This book shows that hospitality, whether collectively or individually, can be as much a political choice as an aesthetic or ethical one in times when the world and communities are becoming even more divided into "us" and "them," with growing hostility toward "them." My focus is on lessons that contemporary artists teach us about the potential of hospitality.

This content downloaded from 58.97.216.197 on Thu, 05 Sep 2024 03:20:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms