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Journal of Phenomenology and Hermeneutics

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Attention and Hospitality

An Attempt at a Socio-Phenomenological Definition of the Relationships Between Asylum Seekers and "Helpers"

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Abstract

The essay is a philosophical reflection carried out by way of a sociological investigation. The goal is to understand what role attention plays in the everyday life of asylum seekers, from its pathological aspects that affect their identity to the attention that they give to others or that they receive from others, which revives their responsivity. Perpetually stimulated by the state accommodation centers for asylum seekers (reception systems) and their life as asylum seekers, the capacity to direct

their attention becomes jeopardized. But when intersubjective relationships open up a common sphere, attention is revived and can be directed again: new responses are possible. On the basis of phenomenological descriptions coming from fieldwork, I characterize this inter-attention (between asylum seekers and "helpers") as a particular mode of hospitality. From this, I conclude by sketching an ethics of attention.

Keywords: attention, hospitality, Bernhard Waldenfels, asylum seekers, applied phenomenology.

Pozornost in gostoljubje. Poskus socio-fenomenološke definicije odnosov med iskalci azila in »pomočniki«

Povzetek

Prispevek predstavlja filozofsko refleksijo, izpeljano s pomočjo sociološke raziskave. Z njo skušamo razumeti, kakšno vlogo igra pozornost v vsakdanjem življenju iskalcev azila, od njenih patoloških vidikov, kakršni zadevajo njihovo identiteto, do pozornosti, ki jo dajejo drugim ali jo od drugih prejemajo, kar oživlja njihovo responzivnost. S tem ko državni nastanitveni centri (sprejemni sistemi) in njihovo življenje sámo iskalce azila neprenehoma stimulirajo, postaja njihova sposobnost usmerjanja pozornosti bolj in bolj ogrožena. Toda: če intersubjektivni odnosi razprejo skupno okrožje, pozornost oživi in jo je mogoče spet usmerjati: možni so novi odgovori. Na temelju fenomenoloških deskripcij, kakršne izhajajo iz terenskega dela, to vmesno pozornost (med iskalci azila in »pomočniki«) okarakteriziram kot poseben modus gostoljubja. Prispevek zaključim z orisom etike pozornosti.

Ključne besede: pozornost, gostoljubje, Bernhard Waldenfels, iskalci azila, uporabna fenomenologija.

Introduction

Since the so-called "migrant crisis" of 2015, numerous authors[1] have explored the concept of hospitality, contributing to a "theoretical revival" (Boudou 2017, 18) of this idea. Faced with the inhospitality of states (Agier 2021)—which itself is not a new phenomenon (Noiriel 1991; Fassin *et al.* 1997)—and problems of hospitality revealed by this "crisis," it now seems urgent to conceive of a world that is open to the *étranger*.[2] Among this constellation of authors who attempt to "rethink" hospitality, define it, examine its concrete practices, or demonstrate its political necessity, I propose a new approach. My goal is not to construct a general theory of hospitality (Deleixhe 2016; Boudou 2017; Stavo-Debauge 2017) nor to demonstrate how the aid activities of welcomers are characteristic of a private hospitality that opposes public inhospitality (Agier 2021, Gourdeau 2019, and Ristic 2020, among many others). My objective is rather to attempt to define the characteristics of the relationships between asylum seekers and "helpers" *when they go well* (my study is limited to volunteers and social workers, excluding the doctors,

1 Joan Stavo-Debauge offers a fairly comprehensive overview in his review of Agier 2021 (published in French in 2018). See Stavo-Debauge 2020a.

2 *Translator's note:* In this text, Aulanier plays with the polysemy of the word *étranger* in French, sometimes to designate migrants, sometimes the phenomenological concept of *Fremd*, inherited from Waldenfels. *Etranger* has several possible English translations including *stranger*, *alien*, *other*, or *foreigner*. Multiple of these translations are used throughout this text, in an effort to avoid flattening the nuanced meanings highlighted by Aulanier.

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lawyers, etc., who also populate the domain of asylum).[3] These relationships are often described, in public discourse and by the people involved, through the mode of hospitality: as a sort of charitable gift from the welcomers who "open up" to the welcomed. While hospitality is a natural framework for analysis when private citizens host asylum seekers in their homes (Gerbier-Aublanc 2018; Deleixhe 2018; Gerbier-Aublanc and Masson Diez 2019), the use of the concept is less directly evident when examining interactions between migrants and "helpers" more broadly. Not all of these interactions, even those involving aid or assistance, can necessarily be categorized as hospitality.[4] I introduce the concept of attention (*Aufmerksamkeit*) in an effort to describe in greater detail the relationships between asylum seekers and helpers. I move beyond a view of openness that does not take into account the hosts' ability to contain or *encaisser*—in the words of sociologist Joan Stavo-Debauge (2009 and 2017)—the arrival of foreigners.[5] Hospitality will not be cast aside during this analysis, as the concept remains central to the definition of the link between the *own* and the *alien*. This text therefore aims to use the concept of attention to clarify the meaning of hospitality.

What is it about these relationships that "does good by opening the mind," as one asylum seeker aptly put it? Is it possible, in drawing from field observations, to provide the first elements of an ethics of attention as a mode of hospitality? These two overarching questions form the backbone of this article, which is part of an interdisciplinary research project that pairs empirical sociological research on the *Lebenswelt* of asylum seekers (Aulanier 2021b and 2021c) with

3 I intentionally rely on a rather vague definition of "helpers." For this analysis, I do not examine how specific, precisely defined categories of professionals or volunteers helped asylum seekers feel better and revive their responsivity. Rather, I start from situations that I interpreted as allowing such revival. My observations largely concerned volunteers and social workers, but I use the term "helpers" in a broad sense to leave open the possibility of identifying such situations in other interactions.

4 Such interactions, which provide aid, but do not constitute hospitality, will not be discussed here. Take, for example, assistance that is strictly legal or medical, whose circumstances or consequences do not contribute to the asylum seeker's sense of belonging to a community.

5 *Translator's note*: Sociologist Joan Stavo-Debauge developed the concept of *encaissement* (lit. "to enclose" or "to encase") to describe the welcomer's ability to support, take into account, contain, and receive what happens (to them).

philosophical reflection on the modalities of a "healthy" relationship with the alien, in line with the German phenomenologist Bernhard Waldenfels (Aulanier 2020 and 2021a). The aim here is to bring together these two lines of inquiry, which, while not totally unrelated, are seldom in direct conversation with one another.

My approach will center on the present event [l'évènement en train de se faire]. My reflections, following Waldenfels, are based on the fact that the alien *is* there; it is therefore not a question of investigating the reasons for their arrival or the best way to deal with them. Rather, I aim to understand *what happens* when these interactions go well.[6] First, as an introduction, I summarize the current situation for asylum seekers in Europe, demonstrating that one primary problem is the alienation of their attention. Then, I describe four scenes that demonstrate what happens between asylum seekers and "helpers." Through these scenes, I will demonstrate that the fact that these relations *do good* is linked to what can be understood as "happy attention" ["attention heureuse"] (cf. Moinat, 2010) that opposes the pathologies of attention engendered by the asylum system. I aim to show that this form of attention, by reviving responsiveness (Waldenfels 1994, 2001, 2011, and 2015), leads to a common sphere, which, because it belongs to no one, is hospitable. Finally, I conclude with several suggestions for a responsive ethics of attention that is based, not on top-down morality, but, drawing from phenomenology, on the reality that the alien is there and that human relationships are taking place.

1. Pathologies of attention

The present philosophical reflection is based on sociological fieldwork that was conducted over the course of many years in France and Germany. Day after day, I followed asylum seekers on their daily routines, attended their appointments with social workers and volunteers, and went with them to meetings and other gatherings organized by associations. In addition to this

6 This aim is based, in part, on my view that sufficient work exists that focuses on what happens when these interactions go poorly (including my own …), as well as the idea that it is not beside the point to know a bit more about positive moments, in order to reflect on ways to improve the situation.

prolonged immersion in their daily life and numerous informal conversations conducted over time, I conducted in-depth interviews with around thirty asylum seekers and ten social workers and volunteers. This study, like others before it,[7] reveals the difficult living conditions of asylum seekers in Europe. Notably, my research shows how the conditions, under which asylum seekers are received by the state, affect their responsivity, causing pathologies of attention. In particular, the loss of control over time and space and the absence of the possibility of establishing a new home for oneself, even temporarily, are at the root of these pathologies. I have detailed elsewhere (Aulanier 2021c) the ways in which the time spent in the asylum procedure affects the ability of asylum seekers to respond to their situation.[8] Here, I present a brief summary of my findings.

The imposed waiting translates into a loss of hope that then provokes difficulties of attention. Attention, perpetually drawn to a distressing and uncertain future as well as to a materially difficult present, cannot be directed towards an intentionally *desired* direction. Asylum seekers relentlessly refer to these "thoughts" and, sometimes, "bad thoughts" that plague them and cannot be redirected to anything else. Their attention is not only drawn in this direction, but it also cannot turn anywhere else. The double-event of attention, drawn and directed in one gesture (Waldenfels 2004 and 2010), is split apart, along with the asylum seeker's sense of self. It is not a matter of *an* event, however traumatic, changing the asylum seeker. The period of the asylum process is not in and of itself a *turning point* (Hughes 1971) or a biographical event (Leclerc-Olive 1997). Rather, it is the repetition of calls (*Requêtes*, *Widerfahrnisse*, *Aufforderungen*) that remind one of the waiting, without it being possible for the asylum seeker to respond by stepping outside of the period of waiting. This repetition affects one's hopefulness. As Camara insightfully explains, "when you lose hope, your self-confidence goes with it. So, it gets worse and worse:

7 See Aulanier 2021b and 2021c for a complete bibliography on the current situation for asylum seekers.

8 Without taking into account difficulties related to language, which are central to challenges in making sense of what happens to us. See more on this subject in texts from the ANR LIMINAL program, for example Saglio-Yatzimirsky et Galitzine-Loumpet 2022.

it's a struggle." (*Interview, April 2019.*) Without even minimal self-confidence, it is difficult to pay enough attention to others for interactions to engage in a common sphere; it is difficult to contribute enough of oneself to nurture this common sphere.

I propose the concept of alienated attention to describe this experience of asylum seekers. I borrow this expression from Frédéric Moinat, who explains that alienated attention characterizes situations, in which "*passivity and activity are dissociated and pushed to the extreme*" (Moinat 2010, 57). Drawing on Simone Weil's research with factory workers, the philosopher explains that the attention of these workers is on the one hand "subject to passive interruptions," such as abnormal machine noise, and on the other hand to the "order of the factory." Everything the senses perceive is immediately referred to the social order of the factory, causing the worker to think of nothing else and remain passive. But, if they want to keep their job, on which they depend, they must continue to be attentive. In alienated attention, therefore, there remains an element of activity that manifests "by a considerable effort of attention." The worker must thus invest "*voluntarily and with considerable psychic energy*" (2010, 57) in the accomplishment of their task, and do so continuously. "Therefore, alienated attention is paradoxically characterized by extreme passivity on one side and extreme activity on the other," concludes Moinat. Asylum seekers are placed in a similar situation. On the one hand, they are in a social situation that can be understood as a policy of waiting, where the only thing to do is wait for the institution to respond. The impossibility of projecting oneself into the future as long as the administrative situation is unstable leads to considerable passivity. On the other hand, asylum seekers must perpetually invest in their lives as asylum seekers. They must think about what they need to do, both in order to survive as well as in order to obtain refugee status in the future. It is therefore hard to think about anything else, and time is quickly consumed almost entirely by these concerns. This is exhausting, causing the slightest movement to require a major effort. Sleep, the only refuge, is also affected. The perpetual effort of attention that comes and goes constantly prevents one from falling asleep. In addition to the pressure of waiting, being haunted (Stavo-Debauge 2012b) by a denied asylum application also alienates attention. Fassin and Kobelinsky (2012, 465) explain:

> […] refugee status is truly vital for the claimants, both since possessing it provides access to social rights whereas being deprived of it can threaten their very existence. The possibility of denial has a paralyzing effect, all the more so as the asylum seeker's life is at stake, and they may not necessarily understand the institution's decision or the criteria it is based on.

The precarious living conditions and the loss of power over space are not insignificant when it comes to difficulties escaping these efforts of attention, difficulties that follow the self everywhere, at every moment. Without stable accommodations that serve as a *home*, even in the broadest sense of the word, and without a place that is even minimally "inhabitable" (Breviglieri 2006a and 2006b; Stavo-Debauge 2017), it is difficult to stay active, to successfully direct one's attention at something, and to escape this alienation of attention. It is not solely the length of the asylum procedure as a whole that is affected. Every moment of every day relates back to the administrative situation. Like the worker described by Weil, who sees their entire environment and all of their thoughts oriented solely towards the work at hand, towards the machines to be operated, the asylum seeker sees their entire everyday life colonized by the asylum process. Experience becomes distorted by a tsunami of pathos that inhibits response. The body reacts by crying, by remaining prostrate at the bus stop, by becoming agitated, by lying in bed for hours waiting for better days to come. The "struggle" mentioned above by an asylum seeker also manifests itself in the body, which suffers from a perception of uselessness, a feeling of not mattering, of not being able to contribute to the community. The absence of an "inhabitable" space reinforces this sentiment, especially as absence of a home makes it impossible to know how to organize one's life. The asylum seeker lives in the passive, in the mode of undergoing: this recalls "the provisional and the absence of choice" (Laacher 2013, 135). Thus, asylum seekers are unable to make sense of the unfamiliar calls that affect them, unable to assign meaning and develop rules to reconstruct a responsive repertoire. Rather, these calls get bogged down in the body: the process of transforming pathos into meaning fails (Waldenfels 2015, 22).

Phenomenologically, "the awakening [l'éveil] of attention corresponds to a dynamic of the constitution of meaning. […] This constitution of meaning,

where the initiative does not unilaterally come down to either the subject or the world, but to both at the same time, is described by Husserl in *passive Synthesis* as a 'constitutive duet'." (Moinat 2010, 46.) In other words, attention does not start with me. Waldenfels (2004) goes further by focusing on response: the awakening of attention is a *response* to a *pathos* that strikes us. This is a departure from the understanding of a core subject affected by the world; the self emerges by responding, by becoming attentive to the calls that strike it. The social world plays an important role in this emergence of the self through response, because our experience is constructed by complex systems of norms, which Waldenfels, inspired by Foucault, calls "orders." In this case, the order of asylum is made up of dozens of overlapping norms: residence requirements, mandatory institutional appointments, preparation of life stories, complicated laws for finding work, etc. The entirety of the asylum seeker's experience is therefore defined by the order of asylum. This constraint is so strong that it draws all attention back to *the social role of asylum seeker*. In other words, meaning making fails in the face of the difficulties of the order of asylum. Pathos no longer transforms into meaning. In this case, the subject says that they "are no longer themselves." They do not recognize themselves. Moussa explains this to me:

> Lately, I'm either sad and do nothing, or I freak out, I even threw my bike into the Deûle… I'd never have done that before—that's not me, Audran, but I'm so stuck, when I did it, I couldn't help it, it was the anger, the problems. I still don't understand why I did that—now I have to buy a new bike, if not I can't deliver anymore [he works for Uber Eats]. (*Interview, May 2019.*)

We are dealing here with a "response block" (Waldenfels 2015, 23) or with reflex-responses that are inappropriate, or, in any case, unwanted. Action stems directly from the *waiting*-self, without the *respondent*-self truly having a say. Identity is then torn apart, one pole becomes omnipresent at the expense of the other. The order of asylum opens attention only onto itself, in isolation; as soon as asylum seekers' attention is awakened, vocative interpellation transforms into a subject to be dealt with in the third person, like an administrative file to be processed: all *inter*-attention is prevented.

The following section thus builds upon this observation: the European reception system is characterized by pathologies of attention among asylum seekers.[9] This raises the question: what, within the margins of reception, can revive attention?

2. What is happening. Scenes between asylum seekers and "helpers"

The asylum application period, therefore, generates an attention that can no longer be intentionally directed; the double movement of attention—drawn/directed in the same gesture—splits apart. Attention is so drawn, in so many different ways, that the self can no longer resist, that it can no longer *contain* [*encaisse*] (Stavo-Debauge 2012a). With no more response, attention is no longer directed. Or, rather, it is *too* well directed, by the reception system, towards a major preoccupation: receiving/not receiving papers. The enduring uncertainty ends up getting in the way of all action and often leads to a fear of losing one's mind (Saglio-Yatzimirsky 2018, 110–126). The particular form of waiting imposed on asylum seekers at official reception spaces augments this uncertainty (Kobelinsky 2010). Far from facilitating a hospitable shift, which would allow a living-*with* the host and no longer simply living *in their space*, these places accentuate a sense of dependency and infantilization.

While there is no cause for celebration, I propose to describe four scenes depicting possibilities for asylum seekers to be reoriented towards a response that is not entirely fabricated by the asylum system. These four possibilities are certainly not exhaustive, but they indicate some directions for developing a responsive ethics, based on attention, that will be outlined in the final part of this text. Through the re-birth of responsiveness that they allow, the mobilizations of attention presented here can be characterized as modes of hospitality, offering a refuge for learning, resting, playing, projecting oneself, and more.

9 As this text focuses on the relationships and interactions between asylum seekers and "helpers," it should be clarified that the effectiveness of hospitality will be studied from asylum seekers' point of view and not that of the "helpers."

a. Scene 1: New solicitations of attention

Aslam is an Iranian man in his early thirties. Since we met, he has been granted asylum. He was lucky, he says, but luck had some help. Someone he met when he started his application, a social worker in an emergency accommodation center, played an important part in his ability to not "pop like a balloon and disappear." When he first arrived, Aslam had trouble concentrating on learning French and he barely left the center. He slept a lot, just waiting for time to pass. "I would go out to grab something to eat, but I didn't eat much!" he says. But four months after his arrival at the center, a new social worker was hired. She would invite asylum seekers into her office to talk. Aslam spent a lot of time speaking with her. He got to know her husband and their children. This woman inspired him to go out, to move. She gave him passes to the pool, along with weekly challenges to get faster and to improve his crawl, since he favored the breaststroke. After a month of constant visits ("I gave it my all in the pool, it felt great!"), he caught the eye of a woman his age, also in her thirties. They exchanged Instagram handles and got drinks from the coffee machine in the pool lobby. After getting together to swim a few times, they went out together. Aslam now has a daily routine. He has regained his appetite, goes swimming, and, above all, has this woman over almost every day. She is Belgian and lives across the border with her grandmother. She takes the bus to the pool and to the accommodation center as well. They now spend their afternoons together. And now that he is lucky enough to have a private room (thanks to a letter from a psychiatrist), she can sometimes spend the night with him. Or, to be precise, they spend the evening in bed, and then he leaves it to her and sleeps on a mattress on the floor. But this is not the most important point: by hosting her, he is offering this woman hospitality. In a place where he is welcomed, he also welcomes. Responsiveness is revived.

A lot happened between these moments and Aslam being granted asylum: a child, being forced to move following a decision by the OFII (French Office for Immigration and Integration), a separation (due to the displacement), a Christian pilgrimage in France, a job working as a commis chef in a restaurant in Lille. But the fact that all of this could have *happened to him*, that is to say he could define himself once again as a subject through experience, was thanks to

his interactions with that social worker: "before her, nothing happened to me, all I did was sleep and eat. She took the time for me, she made me think about other things, that's—yeah—really what changed my life, honestly!"

The new social worker that Aslam met *obliged* him to think of other things. This is a surprising gesture of hospitality, in the guise of a constraint. And yet, this encounter is a positive one and has lasting effects. Aslam even recounts it on his "private calendar" as a "biographical event" (Leclerc-Olive 1997) that granted him a new lease on life. The events that followed (starting with meeting the future mother of his child) are interpreted, in his retelling, in relation to that meeting. The value of this constraint is that it enabled Aslam to respond creatively, to overcome the responsive block that threatened his selfhood, with a responsive re-birth, to use Bernhard Waldenfels's terms. It is important to remember that, as mentioned above, attention does not begin with me. Even when everything is going well, when I am attentive in a positive sense, when I can make sense of what I perceive, attention is first aroused (*geweckt*, as Waldenfels says) by a *Widerfahrnis*, a call that happens to or strikes me. There is always an element of constraint in attention: we do not direct it in an entirely autonomous manner. But there is a fundamental difference between the way in which the social worker arouses Aslam's attention and the way in which his attention does (not) awaken while he waits for time to pass. In the latter case, each time that his attention is awakened, the path of response is already largely predetermined, in what we might call a rut of meaning. The room's damp ceiling that he sees when he opens his eyes reminds him that he is living in an accommodation center, the food that he picks up from food banks reminds him that he no longer eats his country's cuisine, his exchanges with other social workers remind him that he is not at home. But each time that he meets with that new social worker, she is interested in him not simply as an asylum seeker, but as an adult emigrant in his thirties. She talks to him as much about herself as she does about him, telling him about her husband and her children, whom he meets. They speak about his old job and his city in a positive light, not about the persecutions that lead to his departure. It is a form of *invitation* that opens a common sphere through the attention that it arouses. The information they share is not offered up for its own sake (as in the case of the events recounted before the officials who make asylum decisions, which

must be classified according to the categories of persecution defined in the Geneva Convention), rather it provokes speech, it allows the speakers to take an interest in one another based on what they say. It is a personal way of opening up the other's attention. At the heart of everyday dialogue lies something out of the ordinary that breaks (partially and momentarily) the chains of alienated attention. My use of the metaphor of chains is not unintentional. A renewal of attention allows one to see *the same things* differently, which is truly liberating. For example, the room may be damp, but it allows him to have his girlfriend over; the quality of the food is not great, but they are able to eat *together*, etc. A community develops with his girlfriend, allowing him to tell his story in a different way.

The common sphere created with the social worker is also established through small athletic challenges. One of the social worker's first concrete actions was to convince Aslam to go swimming. Giving him challenges allowed her to arouse his attention even when she was not with him. These challenges acted as self-timer, issuing calls even after their interaction. But they also had, in a very concrete way, a corporeal aspect. Instead of lying prostrate in his room, she "invites [Aslam] to use his body, to arouse his motor skills, specifically in the form of a challenge, therefore with the aim of improving, in this case honing a skill, a possible source of pride."[10] Finally, this meeting and those that follow facilitate a renewal of the process of attention for Aslam, who is bolstered by the fact that, once again, he *feels* good. This revival allows him to partially leave the order of asylum, but also, in a literal sense, to *awaken* his attention. Before the social worker's arrival, his attention was alienated by the asylum system, but it was also partially *asleep*. It takes more and more time for calls to arouse a response. This is evident in the many hours spent sleeping and the fact that, according to Aslam, even when thoughts arise, they often pass, before he has had "time to think about them." The self, divided between passivity and responsiveness, finds itself essentially deprived of response and initiative. In addition to all these actions, we can hypothesize that the fact that the social worker arrived at the center *after* him helped Aslam renew his

10 I thank Joan Stavo-Debauge for highlighting this corporeal aspect. He is quoted here according to a personal communication.

attention, since she was not part of his field of perception upon his arrival at the center, nor during his first weeks there. Attention cannot awaken on its own, as Waldenfels reminds us, when he writes that "[i]n the past the secondary school transcript had an evaluative category called 'keenness' [Fleiß], which appeared next to that of 'attention' [Aufmerksamkeit], making one think that everything important hinged on the good will and understanding of the pupil." However, he asks, "how do we assess the kind of attention that needs to be awakened first?" (2011, 64). Knowing how to awaken attention without creating pre-established responsive ruts can be a tool for making the other feel like they can be a part of the community and that they are not condemned to remain on the threshold, like a guest who must behave according to the host's rules.

This renewal of the responsive process does not fix everything. "I still often do things the wrong way, not like the French," Aslam explains to me. Just because he is newly able to direct his attention does not mean that he now belongs fully to the community. It does not resolve all the problems the foreigner must face, in order to find their place (Schütz 1944). But this allows them to become themselves again in another way, even if it must be noted that this "re-becoming" remains largely dependent on the government. If an asylum application is rejected, one must sometimes start over from zero. At the day-to-day level, everything is not resolved by this revival, but offering the possibility of creative responses is a first step. This also gives the foreigner the chance to interpret for themselves, which rules, norms, and customs they must learn to respect, without pre-directing their attention towards the things that seem obvious to *us*.

Finally, as we examine the following scenes, it is important to keep in mind the fact that it can be difficult to draw the line between moments that *go well* and interactions that can be characterized as paternalistic. The line between a demanding hospitality that includes an element of constraint meant to redirect attention, and "a benevolence which necessarily includes a good measure of scorn" (Delphy 2016, 107), as paternalism is defined in materialist feminism, is not always as clear. The difference lies in the capacity to contribute to the common ground, to not *only* be constraining, but also considerate. It involves accepting to give of oneself, to share common ground, without positioning oneself as being above or distant from the other or as someone in the know

telling them what to do without being open to the possibility that they too could play an active role in the relationship.

b. Scene 2: Specific domains of attention

Mahmoud, an Iraqi asylum seeker living in a reception center in a mid-sized city in Baden-Württemberg, explains that volunteer-organized outings were very important to him:

> With the other residents, we don't really have relationships in the center… But luckily, some people, the volunteers, really do a lot. For starters, they help with the language, with finding training courses. And above all they really do a lot for us—it's… very moving. Now, I love the region: it's thanks to them. Multiple times they've offered to organize outings to castles, to visit old things in Heidelberg, to a forest with big rocks. If I know the region, it's thanks to the volunteers; and I tell you what, it's not thanks to the social workers. For them, it's, "you have to do this, la di da." Now, you see, the volunteers said to us, "We really like to go to this place or that, would you like us to organize something and go there together?" You see, the thing is, they think about us: if you don't want to come, you don't come, that's it. Actually, a lot of people from the center didn't come. But I'm telling you, it's very good for your head, very good! You really think about other things, the problems stay in your room. And it lets you better understand their way of thinking. Anyway, it's their special German way of thinking, always with the papers, direct, a little harsh. After I saw the old streets, the big castle, I told myself: "OK, even old Germans liked order, it's not us that they have a problem with." After all, in Iraq we also have our way of thinking, but it's not the same. But it's really with these outings that I learned that; after that, man, I was more relaxed. But the social workers? [My initial question was about the relationships between social workers and residents.] No, really, they help with the papers. It's fine. But the volunteers are really important. They can't do it often, they have—I don't know—but, probably kids, work, you know. But it helps a lot, that's for sure. (*Interview, July 2019.*)

Mahmoud points to the influence of these outings on two levels:

(1) In the moment, he "really think[s] about other things," which allows him to escape his problems for a while. If asylum seekers are part of the

migrant populations who experience "the world as problem" (Agier 2016, chap. I), these moments allow Mahmoud to see the world, for a few hours, not as a problem, but as something to discover. In other words, he manages to deflect the insistent, paralyzing call of "asylum problems" by responding with an attention that lends itself to the discovery of new places. In this respect, these outings play, in part, the same role as Aslam's exchanges with the social worker.

(2) Afterwards, these outings give him the tools to interpret the world, in which he finds himself and the behavior of Germans. He gains information that allows him to form ideal types of Germans' mentality by referring to their history. This process is only possible due to the fact that he feels "more relaxed." This relaxation allows him to *contain* [*encaisser*] (Stavo-Debauge 2012a) that, which had previously inhibited his responsiveness, and to transform the pathos into meaning. In this way, the activities were just as much occasions to revive the investigative process of a foreigner arriving in a new place (Schütz 1944), which was previously impeded ("it's really with these outings that I learned that," he said). Here, interpretation is oriented more directly than that of "rediscovering oneself," as evoked in Aslam's story, because it is based on direct observations and explanations from volunteers who, as Germans, have a particular understanding of their own culture.

Finally, while on the one hand he seems almost to lament—albeit in an understanding way—the fact that the outings do not take place more frequently, he also emphasizes the ability to choose: "if you don't want to come, you don't come, that's it." In fact, it is due to the infrequency of these invitations that the capacity to choose is perceived as intact. If the outings took place more regularly, responses would transform into response ruts and would take on an element of repetition, which would not function as effectively as a way out of the world as problem. In other words, it is once again the extra-ordinary at the heart of the everyday that allows the everyday to be revived and redirected. The fact that it is volunteers who organize these outings is not unimportant. Attention is paid seemingly for nothing in return and without contractual obligation, as is the case of social workers, for example. This is what Mahmoud says is "very

moving."[11] This importance of choice, of participation, is demonstrated in a new way when another asylum seeker, Kenese, living in the same center, explains that he feels a form of insistence from the volunteers. "They do too much for us, it's almost uncomfortable," he says. Here, the recipients of the volunteers' attention are scared of responding poorly to what they are offered. "They do so much for us, it's too much pressure, right now, first, I'd like to relax," declares Kenese. If the volunteers are acting in the name of a certain form of hospitality, if they "are doing what they think is best and are not guilty of any violation of hospitality," the foreigner is "nevertheless not immune from fear, and will have many reasons to harbor some fears" (Stavo-Debauge 2017, 204). In light of this observation, it should be emphasized that, too often, hospitality (perhaps following Derrida) is thought of exclusively as the opening of a well-defined place or even a subject. It is clear that, in order to give to another, we must open ourselves up; we must not close ourselves to the foreigner's call. But here we see that it is not necessary to open a *place* (the state takes care of this in the

11 But this emotion can sometimes be problematic. In some cases, it can represent a form of power that the person who elicits the emotion holds over the other, who is then indebted and has trouble returning the favor. As my focus in this is moments that go well and are hospitable, I will not linger on these possibilities. However, in Aulanier 2021b, I describe a moment, in which an asylum seeker's world falls apart following the rejection of his application for refugee status. He loses all ability to contribute to the small community he formed with social workers by serving as an interpreter. Emotionally, he asks for help. Here, it is the social worker who finds herself indebted in the relationship, unable to offer anything, following such a sudden and tragic appeal. Neither of them is in a position to make a positive contribution to the *common* ground of the *community*, attention is no longer shared, and no longer offers hospitality. There is nothing left (at this moment) to allow a revival of responsive ability.
More common, perhaps, is the insistence of some volunteers (particularly those who host asylum seekers in their homes) on explicitly seeking recognition from asylum seekers, by letting them know that they can (or must…) express their emotions. But this is not a straightforward issue, and we cannot confine ourselves to getting upset with people who welcome others, even if they expect something in return (emotion is a form of repayment), without studying the motivations behind their actions. Generally, hospitality is never entirely free (although it is worth the effort to make it as egalitarian as possible), and idealist visions of perfectly symmetrical hospitality should be avoided. At the very least, occupying a position that enables one to welcome another into a space implies an imbalance, even if it is not necessarily in the form of unequal rights.

form of reception centers, themselves rather inhospitable) to be in a mode of hospitality. Time and information can be offered in the name of hospitality; it is in this way that attention transforms into a mode of hospitality. In doing so, attention is at risk of the dangers defined by Stavo-Debauge in the expression "the newcomer's fears" (205). Paying too much attention to a newcomer increases the risk of them feeling anxious about "not being able to rise to the level of hospitality extended to them, or worrying about not knowing how to demonstrate the abilities that would seal their integration" (205). This fear signifies that while the modalities of opening attention may have constructed a common ground between those who are involved, the norms and customs of the host country have not become common. The common ground may, as is the case for Mahmoud, open specific domains of attention. Here, it is, in particular, the so-called German desire for "order," on which common ground is found. Attention is awakened by "the old streets, the big castle," which act as a reflective surface to sustain shared attention on an everyday problem for Mahmoud: the apparent order of the streets, which he contrasts with the "madness and noise" of cities in Iraq. But the desire for common ground, and through it the desire to participate, is not exhausted in these specific domains, numerous as they are. Mahmoud, who considers himself well-integrated (I speak German with him, he has a good command of the language; he cooks in a German restaurant and now knows how to prepare German specialties, etc.), continues to fear that he has not done enough to receive his papers. This fear sometimes pushes him to doubt his loyalty: does he *deserve* to stay in Germany? It is sometimes through this lens that he experiences the volunteers' invitations to continue participating in activities: he has to do even more. There is a long way to go before his attention is no longer redirected towards administrative concerns, towards his *papers*.

Despite all the care given to the way attention is offered, it remains a partial mode of hospitality, never certain, always risky. Achieving happy attention within certain specific domains does not mean that pathologies of attention are altogether resolved and that the newcomer's fears are behind them. This nonetheless permits a form of an augmentation of being, or of becoming-vigilance, as discussed by Natalie Depraz (2014, 143–201), which enables us to become more human (again). The struggle against the dehumanization

engendered by the asylum system (Aulanier 2021c)—which leads to a separation from the outside world (Täubig 2019)—is nevertheless an important mode of hospitality in the sense that it allows the newcomer to emerge from their status as surplus, as a superfluous individual, through the common ground (never fixed and continuously nurtured) created by attention.

c. Scene 3: Story as mediation

The common ground of attention, as I have presented it, can have a reflective quality. This is particularly true in the case of a specific form of *story*, which I explore here, as I present the third scene of interactions between asylum seekers and volunteers.

An organization that works to support asylum seekers organized an afternoon for them to share their stories and their perceptions of hospitality in Lille. After presenting, Tidjani, an asylum seeker, explained:

> Me, I kind of wrote five pages like that, and my text was selected as the best text, and I have been asked to read it like that in front of people, so that people really understand the experience. I'm in the network now, basically. That—it's really amazing, a very, very powerful experience. Very powerful. A lot of emotion. And on top of that, it reframes you. [He pauses on this word, I ask him to elaborate.] I mean that truly, I had to take time to write this you know, to think back on meetings, think back on my entire life after arriving here in France. I realized the luck I had to, *voilà*, to have known so many people like that, like you, I met you there. Without that, I wouldn't have met you and… all the other people either. There, truly I've thought about that multiple times, and now I have the video to remember it. J. [a volunteer] sent it to me on *WhatsApp*. Black brothers and the French, I know almost all of them. Actually, she just sent a message: we're here until 5:30 PM, come one come all. You see, that's what's good about it, you get together, you chat, it's a huge relief. Yes, really! (*Interview, May 2019.*)

We see here, as in the previous scene, a durable aspect of attention, which does not limit itself to the instantaneousness of initial perception. This duration, this continuous contact, leads us to understand that hospitality goes beyond an "opening up." What is a "huge relief" to the asylum seeker here in particular

is the fact of *re*joining the others, to see each other and offer a reassuring environment. The duration of hospitality is important (Stavo-Debauge 2019). This duration becomes effective here through the common ground that is progressively created through the shared attention to the stories told by asylum seekers. (On another note, within this association, courses, whose themes are largely determined by the explicit wishes of asylum seekers, work to set up and shape a common ground.) For example, in sharing his story, Tidjani does not solely offer an object of knowledge to be appropriated by the people present. Rather, through the attention that he pays to his own (written) story in the way that he reads it aloud and through the attention others pay to him as he speaks, "the phenomenon of attention opens an intersubjective scene that can no longer be reduced to the economy of property" (Alloa 2010, 137). And, as it can no longer be reduced to an economy of property, this scene nurtures common ground and allows it to last, because the quality of Tidjani's text is recognized. He is recognized as having something important to contribute to this common ground, which he is proud to point out to me several weeks later. Recognition of the quality of his text implies that the group members pay attention to him: they recognize him at the next meetings, talk to him again about his text, involve him in French courses for other asylum seekers. In this way, attention permits a mode of hospitality liberated in part from the burden of place, which belongs to someone who must open it (and then close it again) to offer protection to those who need it. This liberation is only partial, because a place must still have the minimal qualities of hospitality (calm, cleanliness, etc.) necessary for supporting shared attention. Thanks to this form of shared attention, writes Alloa, "the common bond is not formed on the basis of *being-one-through-the-other*, but on being devoted to that, which belongs neither to the other nor to Me." Everyone concentrates on the story in a different way, the "intentional beam bends and folds to form a shared attentional space" (Alloa 2010, 137). This attention among one another makes it possible to welcome clumsy, awkward calls, to borrow a phrase from the phenomenologist Michel Vanni.[12] Paying attention to the common-between-us [le commun-entre-

12 *Translator's note*: In the original French, Vanni introduces a play on words with his use of the term *mal-adressé*, translated literally in this sentence as *awkward*. The

nous] involves "not reacting too normatively to internal awkwardness that runs through [a system], but rather to make them productive" (Vanni 2010, 202). Starting from the common nature of attention, the other's awkwardness in how they address or respond to me is interpreted on the basis of the nascent and continuing relationship, not as characteristic of the other. I turn again to Vanni's reflections on what it means to be an activist:

> The activist here is one who, far from being frightened by the inherent awkwardness of all practical actions and all institutions, instead tries to encourage it. They are not an expert, nor a professional revolutionary, and they never know with total certainty, which are the worthy causes, nor if there are only voices to be heard and to be made heard. Yet, they act well and truly with urgency and determination, but without believing that the answers they give are definitive and perfectly addressed. In short, I intend to dispel any claim to a mastery of the voice. If there is such a thing as an activist creativity, it is essentially the result of trial and error, and deliberately so. Therefore, whatever the failures or delays, the activist will always refuse to succumb to despair, which is born above all from the mistaken belief in expert address and in the effectiveness of listening to voices. (Vanni 2010, 203.)

These lines seem important to my desire to characterize the relationships between asylum seekers and "helpers" when *they go well*. In their descriptions of a hospitable welcome or relationships that improve life as it is, asylum seekers rarely focus much on professional expertise. They know more or less where to find this when they need it. Instead, they focus on the fact that, regardless of their level of expertise, those who offer attention are conscious of the fact that the way calls are addressed may not be perfectly *effective*, but will be *more or less* understood. The common ground created by attention, when it is not rejected, also shatters "any claim to a mastery of voice." In doing so, it deflects hospitality towards an *in-between-space* (that is not exclusive to anyone) that allows, in reviving responsivity, to pave the way for a possible belonging that is

French word *adresse* can also mean directing (a speech or an action) and is translated as *address* in the following passage. Vanni juxtaposes the awkwardness and imperfection of activism with the illogical ideal of *l'adresse experte* (expert address).

neither assimilation of the newcomer nor forced integration. Hospitality takes place here on the basis of the awkwardness of responses that, far from being a pretext for accusations of mis-integration, are occasions to create a space for exchange based on third-party objects. These can be, as in the case described here, personal narratives that allow "a shared attentional space" to form. They can also be spaces of political struggle, or appear in a more everyday way, during conversations about the news or sports, for example.

To suppose that hospitality is found in the acceptance of awkwardness is to say that the common ground is not always constructed in a linear and rational way. Tone of voice, gazes, and gestures can all sometimes be as important as the content of the message itself, which can be difficult to grasp. In other words, awkwardness highlights the corporeal aspect of hospitality.

d. Scene 4

In contrast to the previous scenes, which concerned the modalities of attention, this final scene presents a positive aspect of *in*attention.

Samuel is Cameroonian. He is thirty-five. He arrived in Germany in 2015 during what has been called "the long summer of migration." He lives in the same reception center as Mahmoud, but has had very few relationships with social workers or volunteers. As his asylum application has not been successful, he has taken the opportunity to begin a work-study professional training program in baking. This program offers him the possibility to stay in Germany, until he receives his diploma, thanks to his status as "tolerated."[13] This status, he explains, is not very

13 *Geduldet* in German. In Samuel's case, this status, which allows him to work, has enabled a responsive revival. However, one should not be too quick to assume that this is an enviable status for migrants (even Samuel understands that he is not entirely welcome). With "chain toleration" (*Kettenduldung*), it is possible to have a particularly uncertain legal status for multiple years, without being able to see a future for oneself, since tolerance is valid only for the duration of the training program or after signing an employment contract. This is called "toleration," because this status is not a residence permit, but rather a suspension of the obligation to leave the country for people who otherwise would be deported from Germany. The ones who are classified as being under *Duldung* can, if the situation in their country of origin changes (in cases of people who are refused asylum, but cannot be deported due to a war in their country of origin) or if their individual situation changes (loss of employment, interruption in

clear to him. What he knows is "that it shows that they [the Germans] aren't super open to us being here either." Accommodation at the reception center, a frequently noisy place that cannot be made into a home, contributes to this impression.

> When you leave there, people know right away that you don't have your stable papers; for starters, you have black skin, or it's the same for all of the Arabs who live here, they can see that you're not *Deutsch*. But when you leave there, it's worse.

As the conversation continues, he talks about his education and general classroom experience. Just as in the immediate surroundings of the accommodation center, he feels *noticed*.

> For starters, I'm getting a little old, the others are children, so we're already not thinking about the same things. And then the teachers, they often say that we need to integrate, that we need to get better at the language, even if it's hard. There's another teacher, in math, he's nice you know, but he comes to talk to me all the time to tell me, "Let's go, keep it up." It's really annoying; I say thank you, but it's mentally exhausting. I know exactly what I need to do. But anyways…

In contrast, now, after eighteen months at the bakery he works for, he no longer has the impression of being the center of attention.

> Of course, my coworkers see me, they say hello, they ask me things. The boss is a little annoying, but you know, he's like that with everyone. He's not always watching over me, he's not, like, "Okay what did you do there with your flour, did you add the salt?", like the practice course teacher at school, for example. I do my job in peace, like, it relaxes the mind, because you have the impression of being a normal guy; I can concentrate on my job.

education…), be deported, even if they have been in Germany for many years. For more details about this status and the problems it entails, in particular for young Sub-Saharan immigrants, see Sandrine Bakoben's work, for example: Bakoben and Rühl 2020.

His words allow us to draw out a fourth lesson: too much attention suffocates the creativity of response. Samuel nevertheless distinguishes two major modalities of *overflow*. The first is present in public space: the place where he lives and the color of his skin lead him to feel a weight in the gaze of passersby. This sensation reminds him relentlessly of his status as an immigrant without a stable residence permit (even if he is there legally). In contrast, the "big city" has an aspect of rest, as urban sociology has long pointed out: a place opens up, if it is accessible without one's presence being noticed, or at least noticed as a potential immigrant, for example. This concerns being noticed solely *as a passerby*, and thus the response to the opening of attention becomes simply a form of averting one's gaze, in order to signify: you do not worry me, you are not out of the ordinary. "This attentional regime consists of putting certain powers of the eye to sleep, […]. This 'civil inattention' constitutes 'the effective form of the culture of city hospitality' (Joseph 2007, 217)." (Stavo-Debauge 2020b, 65.) Once an asylum seeker no longer feels noticed in public, they are protected by a certain form of anonymity. From this moment on, it is simpler for them to act, without their attention being alienated by the order of asylum and without the constitution of meaning being oriented towards their status as an asylum seeker every time their attention is opened. This observation—in addition to that of, for example, very poor living conditions (as referenced in Täubig 2009 and Aulanier 2020c, among many others)—is an argument in favor of smaller reception centers and accommodations in city apartments, both of which favor autonomy and anonymity, as well as integration into the urban fabric. It is, however, important to note that the city does not offer the same refuge for everyone. Florent Chossière (2021) has provided evidence that LGBTQI+ asylum seekers feel cramped in the city due to a fear of being recognized. In this way, population density can play an opposite role to that of the benevolent anonymity.

The second feeling of overflow, on the other hand, is situated at the heart of an intersubjective relationship, during Samuel's exchanges with his teachers. Even as he distinguishes a "nice teacher" who encourages him "all the time" from other instructors who explicitly discuss integration, the result is the same: "it's mentally exhausting." Showing someone that you are paying attention to them too insistently is counterproductive. Far from being able to create

an inter-attention, which engages a form of common ground, giving one's attention in such a repetitive way is the gesture of someone *in the know*, who is not ready to abandon their power, and places the recipient of this attention in a position that can be infantilizing, especially for adults. This gesture prevents the recipient of this attention from directing it and from responding creatively. In the same way that "the success of the instructor's actions depends on the response of the person being taught," the success of one who pays attention to someone in need is dependent on the possibility of the latter to direct their attention. Further, "it is necessary to wait for attention to come. As the French suggests, *attention* is not only close to *intention*, but also to *attente* (waiting)" (Waldenfels 2010, 43). There is no point in being overly insistent, in coming "all the time" to show one's presence and availability. Aroused attention only becomes a mode of learning or, in our case, a mode of hospitality, when it is captured mid-air and redirected towards the construction of meaning that takes the aspect aroused as its basis, without being satisfied with it. Repetition brings with it the risk that "directed attention [will] degenerate into fabricated attention," which, as Waldenfels points out, is already "to some extent the reality we know" (43). In other words, paying attention to someone is important, and potentially crucial, for that person's responsive capacity, when it is possible to go beyond the intersubjective relationship, in order to call upon a common ground that does not solely belong to either of the two people involved in the exchange, but that opens to the world and helps interpret it. To give a brief example, it is nonsensical to make hospitality conditional on asylum seekers' efforts to pay attention to language learning: other means must be found to ensure that language emerges as the focus of attention. Otherwise, compulsory language courses are simply assimilation processes for the unilateral benefit of the state.[14] Attention must allow for a focus on the *relationship* itself, not weigh more heavily on one of its two poles.

14 The unilateral nature of this benefit arises when attendance at a language course comes to be seen by immigrants as something owed to the state, as a stigmatizing constraint that prevents them from voluntarily directing their attention. For more on this subject, see Emma Fiedler's work on integration courses for newcomers in France and Germany. For a preliminary overview, see Fiedler 2020.

These four lessons have provided us with the elements required to outline an ethics of attention, that is to say an attentive behavior with regard to the other that revives their capacity to respond, to make sense of that, which strikes them, and that has a lasting influence.

3. Attention as a mode of hospitality. Outlining an ethics of attention

Before developing a *mode* of hospitality, it seems necessary to shed light on what would constitute truly hospitable hospitality, starting from the evocation of contacts between the own and the alien. To do so, I draw on the one hand from Waldenfels's phenomenology of the alien, which describes healthy relationships with the alien, and on the other hand from Stavo-Debauge's grammar of hospitality. Below, I mention three key points.

First, hospitality must make way for the *extra*ordinary, the disconcerting. The gesture of hospitality is a gesture that creates common ground. In other words, conceiving hospitality means not pre-categorizing the welcomed, as is the case in cosmopolitan thought, particularly fashionable since the "crisis" of 2015.[15] Cosmopolitanism requires thinking about the common "*us*," a common morality. And this premise presumes a common political world. In a cosmopolitan world, those who do not belong to this performative "us," who do not belong to this "cement with definable attributes that enables men and peoples to come together" (Bisiaux 2016, 168), are excluded. Others ("undocumented" and "illegal" immigrants, "asylum seekers," etc.) are reduced to their own voice since:

> No We says "we," but I or someone else says "we," and this to you or to you all. No "we," however inclusive, can clarify this difference between the own and the alien position. A purely "inclusive community" would be a ghost. The performative "we" of the act of declaration does not coincide with the "we" of acknowledgement of the end of the declaration. (Waldenfels 2007, 362.)

15 Among other references: *Raison présente* 2017 (201); Policar 2019.

The only way for the alien to exist is paradoxically to no longer be alien. Those who remain others, outside the movement of appropriation and the entry into the cosmopolitan sphere—the rejects, the excluded, the outsiders—, are undesirables who may become enemies. They are not among those who can be received, who can participate in the sharing, the creation of common ground. Common ground must be thought of as a result: as a socio-phenomenologist, it is necessary to show how it is created and how the actors experience it. Cosmopolitanism, on the contrary, presupposes common ground (common Humanity, common Reason…), and finally asks a lot of the other, who must take part in a common sphere, before even trying to contribute to it.[16]

Second, the welcomer must be able to "contain" ["encaisser"] the shock of the other's appearance, as explained by Stavo-Debauge (2009, 238 *et seq.*). In other words, before welcoming the other, one must have the strength and the energy necessary to face the new, which is never neutral. The ability to absorb change that is at work in hospitality also depends on the habitability of the place, which must "covet facility of movement, ease of gesture, convenience of space" (Breviglieri 2006b, 92). A certain arrangement of the space is required to allow both the welcomer and the welcomed to absorb part of the discord of the relationship. Own space becomes common space and in so doing, the everyday is changed. Mirroring containment [encaissement], too much must not be expected of the other. The welcomer must not demand that the other should change, must not be awaiting a shock, an experience that improves their being or satisfies their curiosity (through the moment that hosts sometimes expect, in which the welcomed reveal themselves, offering their story in exchange for hospitality).

Third, and finally, "it is also necessary to consider [the] temporal deployment [of hospitality], by going beyond the sole decision that opens hospitality to the

16 Regarding the dynamic of the exclusion of the foreigner from cosmopolitanism, see my commentary on Waldenfels in Aulanier 2021a. For a more detailed presentation that returns to the sources of cosmopolitanism before considering a cosmo-politics that is more respectful with regard to the foreigner, see Sophie-Anne Bisiaux's book (2016). We refer to the first section (Bisiaux 2016, 25–72), before she details her own suggestions, in order to learn more about cosmopolitanism's ambivalent relationship to the alien.

other and by understanding it as a welcome as much as a reception" (Stavo-Debauge 2017, 208). The sociologist is thinking here of the Derridean concept of hospitality, which focuses entirely on the extreme openness of a subject-welcomer for the guest-welcomed. If, in fact, hospitality begins with openness to the other's call, it endures over time. It requires adaptations and is not steady. The relationship transforms over time, as the guest develops the ability to live with the welcoming community, rather than in someone else's home.

Building upon the four lessons described above and upon these three key points, I will now outline an ethics of attention, which is one possible mode of hospitality.

It must first be noted, with Waldenfels, that "attention is connected to adoration, to respect, to regard, to watching-out, to *Andenken*. […] Those who keep an eye on the Other cannot help but notice when there is something wrong with him, but also if he is somehow joyful." (2011, 65–66.) With these links, we see that attention engages a corporeal gesture, which is visible in the German *Zuwendung* and which once again shows that attention is not something that is purely personal, but is rather situated between the *own* and the *alien*. Above all, this corporeal gesture depends on something or someone that arouses it. Attention awakens, when something or someone is there: this is an eminently practical issue, based on the fact that the alien *is* there. It is not a question of an "us," of defining the limits of who we can/should welcome. The fact is plainly that the alien is there and awakens attention. It is in this sense that Waldenfels recommends a politics of neighborhood (2021), which conceives of hospitality on the basis of everyday encounters in close geographical proximity and third-party figures who help make these encounters possible. Conceiving of attention on the basis of neighborhood reduces the risk of placing too much weight on the event of appearance: if I offer attention, then the creation of the sphere of common attention turns this instantaneous state into a (more or less) enduring one. Giving one's attention is not as demanding as the gift that goes beyond what one possesses of the Derridean hospitality, since attention is precisely what I never possess in my own right. To pay attention is to engage a common ground, which can continue in a doing-together or in an understanding-together. In any case, there is a form of reciprocity in attention that is situated beyond that, which is actually exchanged. For the foreigner, this common reciprocity is perceived

in the first person as hospitality, because it enables a revival of responsivity by breaking out of the ruts of meaning created by the world of asylum. This common ground is what gets the ball rolling to "establish a community, to which they could both belong; insofar as it would be hospitable to the sharing of things that concern them, so that they could live together and hold together, despite that which separates them and what they are otherwise attached to." "This dynamic was not modeled" (Stavo-Debauge 2017, 289), explains the author, by Simmel, Schütz, Derrida, and Crépon, who he studies in his book. The phenomenon of attention appears to allow us, following the conclusion of Stavo-Debauge, not to overly separate hospitality from integration.[17] The former continues, while the latter's process begins. Attention, through the duration of the common ground that it creates (let us think back to Aslam's social worker, to Mahmoud's new interpretations…), is a hospitality that does not forget that the guest can be treated as a member of the community. Even in cases, where the joint object of attention is a story told by a foreigner, it does not function as a worn-out story offered up to thank the host, but as a point of departure of a responsive re-birth, as the story does not have an imposed framework. It speaks from a self, but addressing a small community allows for a necessary distance, and an interweaving of action and suffering. Finally, attention is linked to regards, according to the quote from Waldenfels. These regards appear in multiple ways, but they are never as present as when *in*-attention becomes necessary to responsive reconstruction. Being hospitable here means not giving one's attention, not insisting, when one perceives that insistence no longer leaves space for the creativity of the response, that the common ground is no longer sustained, but that the call of the other is perceived as a sort of threat. When attention is focused on the common ground, as in inter-attention, it is truly a mode of hospitality that allows the welcomer to take care of themselves as much as they take care of the other.

Attention, however, leaves little room for place. Of course, a meeting place is necessary, but it is not centrally important. Moreover, this is perhaps what makes attention only *a* mode of hospitality, that it remains incomplete for

17 A heavily charged concept in the sociological sense and one that should be used with caution, *integration* nonetheless allows us to highlight an essential point: when we think of hospitality, we must think of its duration, and enable the welcomed not to remain a guest, but to finally be able to be *at home*.

understanding the nature of this relationship between hosts and guests. There is a moment when a sustainably inhabitable place is necessary. But in the case of asylum seekers, it is perhaps precisely this minor importance given to place that makes attention such an important mode of hospitality, in contrast to the official state reception that provides housing, though not always, or even the space of the national territory. The experiences depicted in the four scenes above show that hospitality cannot be reduced to the question of reception infrastructure; rather, it concerns the milieu that allows (or prevents) sharing (thus a dynamic process). The experience of this sharing, and thus of hospitality, is then realized through the experience of being able to direct one's attention creatively once again, to act creatively through the lively experience of imagination.[18] Directing one's attention creatively means being able to give responses that go beyond (at least partially) *the order of asylum*, as I described it in the first part of this text. Such responses are creative not in the sense that they escape any order, but in the sense that, starting from a solicitation of attention, they create a new direction. This direction is not *imaginary*, it is also subject to other orders, but it is not trapped in a rut of meaning. But, while it is not imaginary, it is permitted by the lively experience of imagination, which I understand here as a capacity to project oneself into the future, to suspend pre-established response pathways, in order to attempt, clumsily, through trial and error, new paths. These paths do not always work, do not always yield *results*, but they contribute to making experience lively, to maintaining hope by staying in motion and awakening attention. A mode of attention that allows such experiences of imagination is particularly important for asylum seekers, who have seen their possibilities for hope mishandled by the order of asylum. These difficulties are not without consequence for taking care of oneself, as is demonstrated by Camara's lucid and sad analysis quoted at the beginning of this article ("when you lose hope, your self-confidence goes with it," he said). To experience the liveliness of imagination is to regain the ability to hope.

18 For more on the links between imagination and attention, notably drawing from Ricoeur and Boltanski, see Ascarate 2022 (chapter II and III) and Loute 2020. On the concept of acting creatively, which I borrow from Waldenfels with slight modifications, I refer back to chapter 4 of his work on the limits of normalization, entitled "Symbolic, Creative, and Responsive Aspects of Action" (Waldenfels 2008, 82–94).

If the management of asylum seeker's attention is an element of the reception system and is one of the manifestations of the state's inhospitality, an ethics of attention responds by developing a common ground that combats this inhospitality.

Conclusion

I have shown, based on empirical research, that the asylum system in Europe provokes pathologies of attention for asylum seekers. The goal of this text was thus to examine possible remedies for these pathologies, while understanding that they cannot disappear entirely as long as one remains an asylum seeker, due to the weight of rigid administrative constraints present during this time. Through the analysis of different scenes, I was able to develop the first outline of an ethics of attention as a mode of hospitality. Attention allows hospitality not to be thought of as a movement that goes primarily from the self to the alien, risking overlooking the wishes of the welcomed. The inherent trial and error of attention makes it possible, among other things, to understand the intentions of the person being welcomed through consecutive attempts, which are not necessarily the same as those of the welcomer.[19] What is at stake for everyone is the successful creation of a common ground through shared attention.

Through its approach, this text establishes a window into a phenomenological practice, notably opened by Natalie Depraz (2004). Indeed, "in phenomenology one is used to not knowing exactly what one is looking for, and to turning this partial ignorance into an additional stimulus for research, a spur to open up questions and problems" (Vanni 2009, 11). In my research, I began by describing situations using the practical tools of phenomenology. The proposition of an ethics of attention was constructed in the same way—clumsily and by testing different avenues, taking circuitous routes—that a common ground is built in the relationships between asylum seekers and those who help them. To be interested in modes of response is to leave behind an ethics of the *Other*, which presupposes the Other as a starting

19 This also allows "not to confuse transit with reception." For a discussion on the omission of the migrants' intentions, see the critique that Joan Stavo-Debauge (2020a) addresses to Michel Agier.

point, and take on the features of a responsive ethics as described by Bernhard Waldenfels. The ethics of attention as a mode of hospitality proposed here is ultimately a practical variant of the German phenomenologist's elaborations regarding intermediate domains, which contain "co-affections, cooperation, life rhythms, social techniques, relationships, value tables, norm systems—in short, everything that can neither be attributed exclusively to myself nor exclusively to Others" (2012, 14).[20] Attention as an intermediate domain is the point of departure for a relational hospitality, which in itself belongs to no one. Phenomenology ultimately allows us to detach hospitality both from cosmopolitanism, which encompasses the own and the alien in a common reason, and the total engagement of a *subject*, which risks understanding a unilateral hospitality.

Translated by Claire Stacey (cstaceytranslation@gmail.com)

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20 The next step for this research would be to consider moving from an ethics of attention to an attentional politics of the alien. Here, the ethics of attention can in a certain way act as a practical guide for "helpers." The shift to politics would involve reflecting on what a community guided by the modes of attention described above should look like. For example, it would probably be necessary to accentuate intermediaries of all kinds (interpreters, psychologists, social workers, etc.), who enable us to establish personal relationships that are a stepping-stone to feeling a sense of belonging to the community. But I wonder to what extent the shift to a truly political way of thinking would overly stiffen the flexibility, with which attention, within the bounds of the neighborhood, allows hospitality to be seen as a responsive revival. A politics, in which responsive revival is an *objective* to be achieved, would lose sight of its principle: the need to let attention fumble, try things out, experiment. It would also risk being too quick to turn certain types of experience into "tricks" to be applied after certain events, forgetting that sometimes these events, when they are not contained [encaissé], do not allow us to "experiment" (Stavo-Debauge 2012a).
This research is therefore unfinished and will require further discussions, in-depth explorations, and testing.

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