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# Tourist or Guest

## Designing Tourism Experiences or Hospitality Relations?

**Carla Martins Cipolla**

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The second decade of the twentieth century, left the traces of a silent philosophical revolution in its wake. Among these we find Buber's statement that "the Self's primal notion" is not the *subject* but rather our vulnerability to otherness. More specifically, his statement suggests that the 'I' would be impossible without a 'Thou'.

Martin Buber's masterpiece *I and thou* (1921) is taken as the basis of this paper, the aim of which is to seek to understand tourism in terms of various sets of *relations*.

Buber asserts the urgent need to heal the deep wounds carved on the face of mankind by the fallacious option between possessive individualism and compulsory collectivism. Individualism had been constituted by the Enlightenment to mean an obstinate effort of man to assert his individuality, to seek self-glorification and self-congratulation as an isolated individual. The converse is the ability to escape into a collective being and thus be rid of personal responsibility (and accountability to oneself). Between these two extremes, the issue of 'I can become a person' vanishes.

Buber points to the huge apparatus of contemporary existence that reliably provides for man's (sic) every need,

with the consequence that man no longer has to be responsible for himself, nor for other beings or entities. Everything will be done for him and he must only make himself available. That is the opposite, precisely the antithesis, of the personal giving of a true *relation*. In this way 'man' becomes like the wheel in a machine. The machine needs that wheel, so the latter must give itself without responsibility.<sup>1</sup>

Like this example, tourism<sup>2</sup> may constitute an expression of an individual's surrender to an apparatus that welcomes, protects and guides.

According to Buber, the individual becomes a person when he is a being who establishes 'relations' with other human beings, the 'I-THOU' relation. This is the only means whereby an individual can become a *person*. Society, a huge relation of human beings, is real only to the extent that it consists of specific and authentic inter-human meetings amongst 'men'. 'Man-with-Man' – that is what a community consists of, the prevalence of the relational pattern 'I-THOU' amongst men.

A key word in Buber's thought is 'relation'. This fundamental idea will be used in this paper to understand the hospitality concept. We will analyse how the dialogical principle of Martin Buber helps us to understand the difference between a tourist 'experience' and a hospitality 'relation'.

### **I-Thou and I-It**

Martin Buber uses two principle-words, 'I-Thou' and 'I-It' to cover every possible kind of encounter, neither being good or evil as such. We simply live this polarity and it does not apply solely to inter-human issues, but rather to any and all forms of 'between.'

The 'I-Thou' relation is the most unique feature of being human. It is the ability to have a face-to-face relation with the other, a direct relation harboring both dialogue and encounter. This 'I-Thou' encounter requires no concepts or certainties. When I relate to any 'Thou' I hazard into an unknown adventure, with no sure definitions or classifications.

When I interact with 'It', I always confront something I know, that I have known as an 'It', and about which I might wish to know more through my actions of knowledge. When I relate to a 'Thou', I always have before me a person whom I do not know entirely, and whom I will never know unless I listen to what the person's presence tells me and what that person lets me know of themself.

The distinctive characteristics of the two principle-words 'I-It' and 'I-Thou', according to Buber, reside principally in the difference between a 'relation' and an 'experience'.

The *relation* between an 'I' and a 'Thou' is immediate; the interaction between them happens without the interposition of any

concept, any imagination or fantasy. Each one is, for the other, a pure **presence**. Exactly because of that it is an action that happens only in the **present** time.

The **experience** between an 'I' and an 'It' doesn't happen in the present time, even if the two persons are simultaneously one in front of the other. The 'I-It' experience happens in the **past** time, because it has been anticipated by preconceptions that each one had previously about the other. The 'I' in an 'I-It' relation is not in front of a *presence*, but in front of an **object** previously judged and valued.

The sadness in this process as well as in our fate, according to Buber,<sup>3</sup> is the fact that each 'Thou' must necessarily become an 'It'. Though this **presence** may have been exclusive, as soon as it is no longer felt or is permeated by various mediations, the 'Thou' becomes a thing among things, an 'It'. The **relation** becomes an **experience** and I have in front of me an **object**, describable, decomposable, and classifiable.

Buber stresses that the principle-word and the experience 'I-It' in itself is not evil because it is inevitable for us classify and describe **relations**. It is an intellectual activity, proper to human beings. Evil lies only in the fact that the term purports to embody everything. If man allows it, the growing world of 'It' will invade him and his own 'I' will be lost.<sup>4</sup>

### **Tourism as an Experience: Past and Object**

Tourism<sup>5</sup> – as an industry that creates and commercialises a service – is construed to offer an 'experience'. This **experience** is carried through many modalities of services, following steps previously determined. It may include transportation, hotel accommodation and programmed tours that are conducted by a 'tour guide'.

The tourist buys a travel product, i.e., pays to acquire a lived 'experience' that conforms to information described in promotional catalogues. These travel products are **experiences**, according to Buber's thought: happening in the **past** time because the traveller lives something that had been described and prefigured before departure. Tourists bring with them all the concepts and classifications previously created about the place and the locals. The latter are the **objects** of the tourism experience.

Tourist travel, as described above, is related to the principle-word 'I-It'. The tourist leaves home and brings in their luggage images and concepts about what and who they will meet; in this way the tourist 'has already lived' the contact with the inhabitants and their local culture. These concepts *a priori* create a block – or make almost impossible – any possibility to live a 'relation', this because the **relation** is a pure presence, without conceptual anticipations.

One example of this conceptual anticipation is the description of some places as 'exotic'. The 'exotic' concept, as applied to places or people, is a perfect expression of the anticipation created by the tourist industry when commercialising an **experience**. The 'exotic' transforms everything into an **object** of appreciation: the local community and the place are already judged and valued.

Every tourism **experience** has a determined **object** that is apprehended. The tourist may grasp it as an image and take a photo in admiration. S/he may learn more about it or hear about its history and details from the tour guide. Using these means, the tourist **experiences** a specific place, being the 'I' in the principle-word 'I-It'. The 'I-It' emerges as egotistic and has a strong self-awareness as the core subject of an **experience** when visiting (traveling through) a community and discovering its 'attractions.'

The local community is expected in turn to make room for the arriving visitor, adapting and performing for him/her. This performance express that they are an 'It', an **object** for the tourist. Changing viewpoint to consider a member of the local community in terms of an 'I' in the principle-word 'I-It' – and consequently the tourist as an 'It' – everything still remains the same. The tourist, for the local community, is also an **object**, from which it is possible to profit or that represents a work opportunity.<sup>6</sup>

At this point it is important to remember that human beings don't participate in the world only through **experiences**. They can also know and pronounce the principle-word 'I-Thou' which provides the foundation for the world of the **relation**. The implication, in terms of the concerns of this paper, is that human beings can live 'hospitality relations'.

### **Hospitality as a Relation: Presence and Present**

We described how tourism is an expression of the principle-word 'I-It', being an **experience** that is prefigured by already-existing concepts and images. In this sense it happens fundamentally in the **past**. Now we will present the hospitality concept.

Hospitality can be defined, using Buber's dialogic principle, as a **relation**, i.e., an expression of the principle-word 'I-Thou', being pronounced between a guest, 'I' and host – 'Thou'. As explained before, between this 'I' and the respective 'Thou' there are no intermediations or preconceptions, imaginations or fantasy. Therefore a 'guest' takes part in a meeting that happens totally in the **present**. In this case, they must not bring with them *a priori* concepts about the inhabitants of the place, or at least not allow themselves to be a prisoner of these concepts. The other that presents in front of the 'guest' in a hospitality relation, is the 'host'. The host cannot be described or objectified: he/she is a 'Thou'. This means that the 'I' as the guest has in front of them a **presence**, not an object.

The **relation** can begin when a traveller, without preconceptions or prefigured images, encounters a community, a monument, a natural environment or a cultural expression. Either out of personal choice or touched by grace, as Buber argues, such a traveller encountering one of these ‘attractions’ might be led into a **relation** with it; it is no longer an ‘It’, or even a ‘tourist attraction’, it is now a **presence**. Something happened, and it was precisely during this moment that the relation was established. Now the threshold is surely not specifically between ‘experience’ and ‘non-experience’ but rather between the ‘Thou’ and the ‘It’, between a **presence** and an **object**.<sup>7</sup>

When this **relation** is established between a traveller – ‘I’ – and a member (or members) of a local community – ‘Thou’ – the hospitality relation starts.

According to Buber, the ‘I-Thou’ relation is established necessarily in a mutual way.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, the concept of ‘hospitality’ applies both to the ‘guest’ and to the ‘host.’ They share the hospitality ‘relation’ on an equal basis. Because of that, the guest creates necessarily the host and vice-versa.

There is no egotistic core in such a **relation**. This core is found only in a tourist **experience**. A ‘guest’ as the ‘I’ in the principle-word ‘I-Thou’, emerges as a *person* and is aware of his own subjectivity. A *person* becomes a person at the very moment he enters in a **relation** with other persons; this is a fundamental point of Buber’s thought. Relationships are the specific way through which we become ‘persons’. Therefore hospitality relations, – as any other **relations**, are relevant.

The only purpose of the **relation** is the being, i.e., a contact with the ‘Thou’. Such is the **relation** that strikes between a guest and his host. The community welcomes the arriving visitor. Period. There is nothing else to add. A unique **relation** starts between the guest and one or more members of that community.

The etymology of the term ‘hospitality’ shows that the word comes from the Latin ‘hospes’ [the guest] and ‘hostipotis’ [the lord of the foreign land]; this latter word is composed by the word ‘potis’ [lord, master] and the word ‘hostis’ [the stranger, the enemy]. Progressively the signification was changed from ‘enemy’/‘stranger’ to ‘friend’,<sup>9</sup> i.e., the ‘stranger’ was progressively considered a ‘friend’. What also disappeared was the distinction between who receives (the host) and who is received (the guest); they are both part of the hospitality **relation**, in which they share an equal condition.<sup>10</sup> One is not more important than the other. Hospitality requires their availability to each other, exactly as affirmed by Buber: ‘relation is reciprocity.’<sup>11</sup>

Buber also points out that the ‘I-Thou’ and ‘I-It’ modalities are not permanent, but that nevertheless they retain the two human poles: the personal and the egotistic one. Each one of us lives in the heart of this twofold ‘I’.<sup>12</sup> These two extremes are neither

static nor permanent references. Thus, there are not two rigid types of visitors, the 'tourist' and the 'guest.' Each visitor lives in this twofold setting. These are the extremes of this twofold setting:

- a) Tourism as mass consumption, where travel is programmed, the tourist and the tour operator define what will be done and what will be visited according to their prior conceptions and the tourist pays to have an 'experience – I-It' – and is protected and conducted;
- b) Hospitality, where the guest lives a 'relation – I-Thou' that is not programmed but spontaneous, that happens between a traveller and a local habitant whereby each one is a 'presence' to the other.

Buber's point that the 'I-Thou' and 'I-It' modalities are not permanent, can be applied to tourism ('I-It' experience) and to hospitality ('I-Thou' relations) in which neither are fixed nor invariant. This can be particularly applied to hospitality relations. Buber observes that there is a certain instability in **relations**: each **presence** can become an 'It', a thing among things, an 'object'. This happens because human beings have the capacity and the tendency to describe, decompose and classify things as well as other human beings. The guest and the host cannot escape this destiny, thus becoming respectively a 'tourist' and a 'service supplier'. How or when this transformation happens cannot be determined or controlled: the **relations** cannot be programmed or foreseen.

As said, the 'tourism experience' puts the 'tourist' in the center, offering many kinds of previously programmed services. Many employees serve the tourist, carrying out the activities that make part of the experience. Local inhabitants, for example, are part of this group of employees, working in hotels, bars or restaurants, supplying transportation or presenting shows. The kind of interactions between them and the tourist is strongly defined. These defined roles protect one from another, preventing them living a spontaneous **relation**. However the tourist and the local inhabitants – in some unexpected and uncontrolled way – can surpass this limitation and establish a **relation**. A relation, according to Buber, cannot be programmed; it happens as a 'grace'. It is not possible to foresee when and if an **object** will become a **presence**. Probably this can only happen if they are able to leave behind their specific roles and preconceptions about each other.

### The Design Process

Given what has been presented above, it now needs to be asked about whether it is possible to design tourism services and hospitality relations. The key word of hospitality is 'relation'. We

have just seen that **relations** happens in the present time; they are spontaneous and occur without any conceptual anticipation.

On the other hand, the design process includes 'anticipation'.<sup>13</sup> The designer anticipates – in a mental project or scheme – what will happen through the design of services (whether articulating existing services or creating new ones) to satisfy requirements (transport, eating, sleeping, viewing, touring, etc). So the traveller fulfills procedures already designed. The fundamental time of these actions – considering the designer and the traveller – is the **past**. This is the time of 'I-It' experiences.

In fact, tourism **experiences** are totally conducted through services offered, and these services are the result of a design process that has anticipated and controlled – as much as possible – all the variables involved.

It is simple to understand how it is possible to design tourism **experiences**. The problem consists in whether it is possible to design 'hospitality.' Hospitality is about the **relation** between two human beings: it is clearly impossible to project one's own 'relation' *directly* and *intentionally*. The **relations**, in the Buberian sense, cannot be anticipated, as they happen entirely in the **present** time: consequently they cannot be the result of a design process. Hospitality, as an 'I' and 'Thou' *relation*, can harbor no interplay of concepts, no scheme, no fantasy, no project. Every means is an obstacle and the encounter, i.e the *relation*, will occur only to the extent that all means can be removed.<sup>14</sup>

Therefore it is clearly impossible to design a hospitality **relation** itself. But a designer can go *in the direction* of hospitality, this by introducing the concept of 'vulnerability'.

### **Vulnerability and Invulnerability**

The term 'vulnerability' comes from the Latin words *vulnerare*, *vulnerabilis*, meaning 'capable of being wounded', or 'able to be hurt'. It is thus usually construed in a negative sense as a weakness to be avoided or overcome.

In the process of design, likewise, the probability that a given product may be misused, not meet its function effectively, become broken in use, may damage the environment; or that a service may occasionally become ineffective; these are seen as vulnerabilities to be avoided or overcome.

If 'vulnerability' is understood in this manner, the idea of taking it into consideration might sound paradoxical. However, in the Buberian approach to 'relations' this paradox must be taken into account. The possibility of an 'I-Thou' *relation*, and therefore of something most uniquely human, arises precisely from the **vulnerability** of an 'I' as it faces a 'Thou' and vice-versa.

The etymological analysis of the word 'hospitality' makes clear that the 'hospitality' concept comprises essentially an 'encounter'. As discussed above, initially the word expressed an encounter



between strangers, accompanied by fear; but progressively the word 'hospitality' came to refer to an encounter between friends. However the word has always meant a *personal* encounter, i.e., the word hospitality express that one person is not anonymous or indifferent to the other. In hospitality relations, each one feels their own **vulnerability** to the other.

**Vulnerability** is the key word to understand how the hospitality process starts. Hospitality happens when the conditions are created in which an 'I' can be vulnerable to a 'Thou' and vice-versa. Being 'vulnerable' corresponds exactly to the possibility to 'be hurt', not in a negative sense, but in the sense of 'to feel' or 'be affected or touched'. I'm 'vulnerable' then the other can really 'touch' and 'affect' me. Hospitality happens only when a human being is **vulnerable** to another; they are present<sup>15</sup> (**presence**) to each other.

On the other hand, tourism creates **invulnerability**. The 'I' is *a priori* closed to having an 'I-Thou' *relation*. As has been argued, tourism<sup>16</sup> is construed to offer an 'experience – I-It' in which the tourists and the local community have pre-defined roles. Vulnerability is not an essential part of the tourism activity and is not included in any senses of the word 'tourism'.<sup>17</sup>

The 'I' – tourist is anonymous. The tourist is 'one more', dissolved into a group observing an 'attraction' or listening to the explanations of the guide. If the tourism 'attraction' is a human being, this person can give feedback to the group or to an individual tourist, but the possibility that this interaction can evolve into a 'relation' is minimal. The schedules to follow, the predetermined roles and the anonymity all create invulnerability, making it difficult to live an 'I-Thou' **relation**. Moreover, the tourism 'experience' is also a mental operation to confirm to ideas that the tourist has had prefigured (and has paid for) about a specific **object**: the tourist 'attractions'. A mental operation doesn't require vulnerability to work. The tourist can remain invulnerable observing 'attractions'. Nothing in the tourism service itself stimulates the tourist to get involved with these 'attractions' or be directly affected by them.

### **Vulnerability as a Project Intent: Designing Hospitality**

We have characterised the differences between tourism and hospitality thus: tourism as a designed service, prefigured (**past**) to create a condition of invulnerability; hospitality as happening in the **present** moment, requiring reciprocal vulnerability between an 'I' and a 'Thou'.

This poses the dilemma. If it is not possible to anticipate a hospitality **relation**, and if this **relation** cannot be intermediated by concepts, instruments or anything else, how can it be possible to design it?

In fact it is not possible to directly design hospitality. This also means it cannot be considered as a project objective. Hospitality is a **relation**: relations are uncontrollable and unexpected. It remains

only possible to design hospitality indirectly, i.e., to enunciate the project objective in a negative sense, according to the following:

“Don’t *hinder*<sup>18</sup> the human capacity to develop a (hospitality) relation.”

As any decision to attempt to project ‘hospitality’ itself – i.e. the ‘I-Thou’ relation – is obviously impossible, the only feasible projectual approach is to project ‘vulnerability,’ which is indeed projectable. This corresponds to clearly defining ‘vulnerability’ itself as a project objective.

Projecting ‘vulnerability’ means banking on the possibility that an ‘I’ will be vulnerable to a ‘Thou’ as the project goal, i.e. the possibility of the visitor being ‘vulnerable’ to the *presence* of the other and thus having the choice of becoming or not becoming a ‘guest.’

On the other hand, there is an equal chance that the local community members will be also vulnerable to the visitor.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps no ‘relation’ will effectively occur between them, but a hospitality service – considering the hospitality concept that we have just proposed in this paper – should not be designed *a priori* so as to prevent that possibility.

Only a **possibility** is able to be projected. No project or managerial tool can necessarily ensure or induce the development of a ‘relation.’

## Conclusion

This paper thus finishes knowing that there are many questions to be answered. We have been able only to affirm this: that hospitality can only be designed as a service that doesn’t hinder the possibility of developing a **relation**. But we are left with methodological questions such as:

- How can ‘vulnerability’ can be enunciated as a project objective?
- How could a designer lead a project process with a final objective enunciated in a negative sense?
- How can the hospitality relation be ‘translated’ into a service? Can this be a service that is paid for?

What has been presented in this paper raises some questions about the possibilities and limits of the design of services. Services are a cobweb of interactions between men and women. Reflection about the design of services needs to construct a consistent philosophical inquiry about these human interactions in order to try to understand what can and cannot be designed. The aim has been to contribute to this reflection by considering the philosophical anthropology and the dialogical principle of Martin Buber.

## Notes

1. Martin Buber *Sobre Comunidade* Sao Paulo: Editora Perspectiva, 1987, 125. ‘Individualism and Collectivism’

- Conference, Martin Buber July 7, 1947. Originals held at the Martin Buber Archives at the Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem.
2. John Urry *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* London: Sage Publications, 1990. See comments on tourism as a mass consumption in chapter 1.
  3. Buber *op cit* 24–25.
  4. Martin Buber *Ich und Du* Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1974, 58.
  5. Urry *op cit* ch. 1.
  6. Further discussion about the local community point of view will not be pursued here, as the analysis of this paper is principally concerned with the ‘tourist’ and ‘guest’ points of view.
  7. Buber *op cit* 19.
  8. Buber *op cit* 14–15.
  9. A. Castelli & B. Villari (eds) *STAR - Costruire l’organizzazione della conoscenza: Il caso Me.design*. Milan: POLI.Design Press, 2003, presents an extensive glossary of terms related to local development through tourism services.
  10. For further discussion of the hospitality concept see Jacques Derrida. and Anne Dufourmantelle *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond* Palo Alto (California): Stanford University Press, 2000.
  11. Buber *op cit* 14–15.
  12. Buber *op cit* 79.
  13. Ken Friedman in ‘Creating design knowledge: from research into practice’ Leicestershire: IDATER Design Conference, Loughborough University, 2000, presents an analysis of the word ‘design’ which encompasses ‘anticipation’ in the design process: ‘The first cited use of the noun ‘design’ occurs in 1588. Merriam-Webster (1993: 343) defines the noun, as ‘a particular purpose held in view by an individual or group; deliberate, purposive planning; a mental project or scheme in which means to an end are laid down.’ Here, too, purpose and planning toward desired outcomes are central. Among these are ‘a preliminary sketch or outline showing the main features of something to be executed; an underlying scheme that governs functioning, developing or unfolding; a plan or protocol for carrying out or accomplishing something ... ‘ (9). Herbert Simon in *The Sciences of the Artificial* Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1982 (2nd.ed) presents a definition that also includes ‘anticipation’, i.e. to design, is to devise ‘courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones’ To devise the ‘courses of action’ it is necessary first to define the ‘preferred ones’ (129).
  14. Buber *op cit* 19.
  15. The translation of the phrase ‘they are present’ in the Portuguese language is ‘eles estão presentes’. The word

'presente' means the 'present time' but also 'gift'. Then the following translation could be made: 'one is a 'gift' for the other'. To be 'present' as to be a 'gift' is an interesting consideration about the sense of the word hospitality: the guest needs to be vulnerable to their host and vice-versa (reciprocal vulnerability). This is a *gift* offered to the other.

16. Urry *op cit*.
17. Merriam-Webster ([www.merriam-webster.com](http://www.merriam-webster.com)) defines tourism as: 1 the practice of traveling for recreation; 2 the guidance or management of tourists; 3 (a) the promotion or encouragement of touring; (b) the accommodation of tourists.
18. Merriam-Webster ([www.merriam-webster.com](http://www.merriam-webster.com)) presents the differences between the following words: 'HINDER, IMPEDE, OBSTRUCT, BLOCK mean to interfere with the activity or progress of. HINDER stresses causing harmful or annoying delay or interference with progress <rain hindered the climb. IMPEDE implies making forward progress difficult by clogging>, hampering, or fettering <tight clothing that impedes movement>. OBSTRUCT implies interfering with something in motion or in progress by the sometimes intentional placing of obstacles in the way <the view was obstructed by billboards>. BLOCK implies complete obstruction to passage or progress <a landslide blocked the road>.'
19. 'Relation is reciprocity.' Buber *op cit* 14–15.