

Article

Cine-Anthology of Hotels as a Place of Time and Death

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Abstract: Every place has a story. Hotels, however, have thousands of stories that are multilayered, interwoven, and imbricated. Their puzzled fictions resemble films in that they both overlap unrelated tales, phenomena, and characters within a short temporal fragment. Mysteries, secrets, love, cabal, fraud, hate, cheating, shows, fun, prostitution, gambling, falls, and so on—all of these conditions and emotions pertain to hotels, as well as films. Working under this framework, then, this paper aims to approach hotels as a temporal experience which goes beyond space for the purpose of both analyzing hotel deaths as a symbolic case of urban living and in order to interpret films as a type of testimony regarding social change. Beyond all of the bright surfaces, hotels represent and reproduce insincerity, insusceptibility, omission, coldness, and distance. Hotels represent gaps, desolateness, devastation, homelessness, and timelessness.

Keywords: hotel; space; time; death; cinema

“Any big hotels have got scandals”, he said.
“Just like every big hotel has got a ghost. Why?
Hell, people come and go.
Sometimes one of em will pop off in his room,
heart attack or stroke or something like that.
Hotels are superstitious places.
No thirteenth floor or room thirteen,
no mirrors on the back of the door you come in through,
stuff like that. [...]”
(*The Shining* [1]¹)

1. Prologue

Once upon a time, composing poetry or writing novels in hotel rooms was seen as common and popular, but never *dying* therein! At the utmost, this only would have happened due to either an incurable disease or wretched poverty. Oscar Wilde (1854–1900) was an example of such a case. It was Hôtel d’Alsace in Paris that had been his last stop. Indeed, that hotel still promotes itself as “Oscar Wilde’s last home” on its official website [2]. It was his last destination, but was it really home? Similarly, Nikola Tesla (1856–1943), a Serbian-American inventor and engineer, had to live in hotels and ultimately died in debt at the New Yorker Hotel due to heart failure. Seven years later, in 1950, Cesare Pavese (1908–1950), an Italian poet and novelist, added a new dimension to hotel rooms:

¹ The Shining, Stephen King’s horror novel published in 1977, was adapted into a feature film by Stanley Kubrick in 1980.

suicide. On November 6, 1938, he had related the sense of loneliness that brought him to committing suicide: “I spent the whole evening sitting before a mirror to keep myself company” ([3], p. 116). Mirrors, therefore, are not a person’s friend while staying in hotel rooms.

In the following years, residing, and even living (and, *ergo*, dying), in hotel rooms have turned into an ordinary circumstance and professional routine for celebrities; hence, new causes of death, such as drug overdoses, heart attacks, and murders, have emerged. Apart from these, there are also accidental and unknown causes of death which have been recorded, as well. Hotel deaths have occurred to many famous people from around the world, e.g., Martin Luther King (1929–1968), Jim Morrison (1943–1971), John Entwistle (1944–2002), Eddie Guerrero (1967–2005), Jimi Hendrix (1942–1970), Bob Crane (1928–1978), Leslie Cheung Kwok-Wing (1956–2003), Anna Nicole Smith (1967–2007), Chad Lamont Butler (known as Pimp C) (1973–2007), Gary Moore (1951–2011), Mikey Welsh (1971–2011), Dean Meminger (1948–2013), and Johnny Winter (1944–2014), to name only a few. In due course, hotel deaths have been associated with arcane stories and exaggerated myths; so much so that, like Hotel Chelsea in New York, some of these hotels have been coded as death hotels or hotels of secrets. In the meantime, the most famous city for hotel deaths is understandably Los Angeles, which is the heart of popular culture. Indeed, not only Los Angeles, but also all other cities and places, generate their own lifestyle and forms of death.

As for hotels, they are simultaneously constitutive and destructive. In this respect, hotels are a sort of *précis* of modern urban living and popular culture. The approaches of living in hotels and of residing in cities resemble each other. They reflect and reproduce each other. In both, even if physical reality can be separated, stories and feelings necessarily and consistently intersect. Role-sharing exists between hotels and cities, with the former being imaginary symbols of urban success, and the latter, the essence of capital circulation ([4], p. 58). Moreover, they both present some characteristic symptoms of globalization, such as the complexities of movement and connection ([5], p. 204). In this sense, hotels can, and should, be analyzed in the context, not only of spatiality or of tourism and entertainment facilities, but also in terms of the interdisciplinary sociological-philosophical concept of “Zeitgeist”. David Harvey in his book *Social Justice and the City* underlines the importance of conceptualizing contemporary urban living using sociological theories in conjunction with geological theories ([6], p. 27). In order to do so, as a first step, social behaviors should first be associated with spatial entities [6]. Nonetheless, since space does not consist only of spatial or geographical variables, it should also be supported by contemporary debates being held in the social studies.

2. Methodology

In this paper, I deal with hotel deaths, not simply as either a matter of fate or coincidence, but as a collective behavior and modern condition. Although I use some theoretical debates, this study is not theory-based. On the other hand, it is difficult to reduce this paper into a certain academic field, such as film studies or cultural studies. Since hotels themselves are interdisciplinary places that require geographical, philosophical, sociological, cultural, and historical approaches, this paper is similarly fictionalized around all these academic contexts without separating one another through the films that collect them in an artistic and intellectual way. I use films as a sort of testimony or projector that gains insight into hotel places because place-analysis requires—as Harvey suggests ([6], p. 37)—a tool or projector which has the ability to construct a link between sociological and geographical imaginations: “If, for example, we are interested in the interaction between spatial symbolism of the city, the mental maps of individuals, their states of stress, and their patterns of social and spatial behavior, then we will require a different set” [6]. Additionally, I use a wide range of films rather than a specific movie. This is the reason for defining this article as “cine-anthology”. Thus, its aim is to define the notion not only of hotels but also of a cinematic gaze on hotel places.

Throughout this paper, from the entrance to the reception and from the lobby to the room, it is also implied the relationship between hotels and films and between time and place. Furthermore, the questions of how hotels manipulate the bodily realm of the guests right from when they enter

the hotel, of how they create mental confusions, of how and why they reduce relationships to their surfaces, of how they transform secure discourses into a threat on the sly, of how they divide the liquid notion of the outer world, and of how they produce their own life-and-death formula are discussed. Some sections of the article are more prolonged. This is because they are more remarkable, more significant, and more crucial in terms of the hotel-related lifestyle. I do not prefer a rigid language and style; therefore, this paper may be thought as a journalistic or poetic piece. However, I think, the most efficient way to portray hotels is to approach them in a poetic sense just like the films. As for the selection criteria of the films I touch upon in this paper, they are the films in which hotels are central and analyzable. The relation between these films and hotels are not arbitrary, but essential, and ontologically-constructive. In this paper, most texts are American. This is understandable because, I think both cinema and hotels, as the extension and representation of popular modern culture, are mainly American-oriented. Hotels in European movies are relatively more intellectual and elitist. Nevertheless, this does not mean that hotels are local. I think they are universal in terms of expressing the sense of homelessness, isolation, solitude, consumption, show, *etc.*

3. Entrance: The Cyclicity of the Revolving Door and Time

Hotels are a reference to time rather than to place. Although temporality refers, in this context, to an objective duration, as an objective experience, it stands for timelessness or, indeed, even a gap filled by nothing. In other words, even if the stay in a hotel is clearly delineated by the check-in and check-out moments, time accumulates itself as a whole, thereby creating an ambivalence and indifference to temporal perception.

Jack's Girlfriend (Natalie Portman): How long have you been at this hotel now?

Jack Whitman (Jason Schwartzman): I don't know.

Jack's Girlfriend: More than a week?

Jack Whitman: More than a week.

Jack's Girlfriend: More than a month?

Jack Whitman: More than a month.

Almost every action peculiar either to night or day can easily be replaced in hotels. Just like in the film, *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* (*Last Year at Marienbad*, 1961) directed by Alain Resnais [7], classical fiction is shattered and the continuity of time is broken. According to what the film shows, reality refutes its own being, with unsynchronized sounds and dialogues accompanying a distorted temporal flow.² Given these inconsistencies, bodies and minds reserve an unrestrained place which transcends the walls surrounding them. Although this appears like a sort of freedom, it is, rather, an involuntary deviation and driftage. Nevertheless, guests in hotel rooms experience timelessness and inertia. Is it possible to know the time at which Barton Fink (John Turturro), the main character in the film, lives in the Hotel Earle? In my opinion, it could be at anytime. The film's characters, objects, furniture, and even the hotel itself, are like an animated cartoon or like a portrait which a novelist describes. The ruined notion of room design has always been lyrical and inspirational for writers. Perhaps that is why Barton Fink prefers to write his script in such a place [9].

Every hotel is an island, just as illustrated in the films *Key Largo* [10] and *Hotel Splendide* [11]. Anonymous relationships, incalculable encountering, unexpected events, sneaky plans. The hotel, as an island, is a purgatory where lost people and homeless voyagers inevitably encounter each other. It is neither home nor outside the home. Despite this, the hotel captures its guests whenever they are away from their homes—if, of course, there is one—by representing itself as a home away from home.

² This could also describe the plot of *Memento* (2000), another film in which Leonard (Guy Pearce), the main character lives in a motel room [8].

In this respect, staying in hotels is accidental and unpredictable; what is more, it is a compulsion that looks like a delighted preference. Leigh (Marion Crane), the main character in Hitchcock's cult film, *Psycho* [12], has to stay in the Bates Motel due to an unforeseen storm. To her, the motel is a shelter. This is rational, but on the other hand, since the shelter is open to everybody, it is off-guard. Under the circumstances, even the most blissful acts and moments may involve some risks and threats at the very same time. In a similar vein, Leigh is killed while having a shower in her *confidential* room. Safety and privacy here are as transparent and permeable as a shower curtain. The source of fear and anxiety waits like a shadow murderer behind the curtain with a knife.

Peace, joy, and harmony in hotels are on a knife's edge. Drunkenness and gambling may sometimes transform ordinariness into hate and violence. As in the film *Ocean's Eleven* [13], the expectations for fun and gain melt into crime in an instant. Action is always potentially at one's door. *Dirty Pretty Things* [14] shows us, the viewers, how dangerous games become inherent secrets in hotels. Accordingly, dirty things done in hotel rooms are also easily cleaned up; so much so that they are often used as autonomous regions freed from all rules and norms and as rebel zones in which almost everything is permissible and probable. In the film, the human heart that is found in the closet pushes the limits; but no one is accused. As the hotel manager Juan (Sergi López), alias "Sneaky", says, "the hotel business is about strangers. And strangers will always surprise you, you know? They come to hotels in the night to do dirty things, and in the morning it is our job to make things all pretty again."

In hotels, evil and doubt are more contagious than favor and comfort; that is why they cannot be a relaxing asylum for celebrities who wish to take a breath in a stable environment. Their rooms are very close to each other, and neighbors are unknown in the home of strangerhood. Neighborhood, itself, here is based not on reliable proximity but on an uncontrolled encountering. Anxiety and fear in hotels are nourished from superficiality and from the lack of deep communication. This, according to Sennett, constitutes the essence of stereotypical judgment about other people, and especially about strangers [15]. Indeed, hotels are a territory in which all guests become strangers to each other. The determining factor among controversial situations is, again, time itself. Obscure identities, plans and attempts are enlightened in *time*. Dirty things are also cleaned with the hands of time. Even though Marc Augé defines hotels as a non-place [16], they refer to a temporal entity that promotes itself as an absolute place of calm and happiness. Their presentation is so polished that even the tragedies which occur in them are experienced in a festive spirit. This is, I think, the essence of the devastating charm of hotels, especially in terms of celebrities.

Elise (Susan French), an old woman in the film *Somewhere in Time* [17], lives within time; therefore, the main character, Richard Collier (Christopher Reeve), who desires to reach her tries to overcome temporal, instead of spatial, barriers. In this struggle, the most essential objects which establish a bond between the woman and the young man are, unsurprisingly, both a pocket watch and an old photograph. In order to contact her, he travels through time using a hotel room since that room allows him to imagine distant times by means of used furniture.³ The hotel room works like a time machine. Nevertheless, the time travel is, as mentioned, circular, not linear. Names and identities change, and the fiction repeats itself just like the revolving-door at the entrance of many hotels. In the film *Century Hotel* [19], the seven stories that take place during different decades in a single room which are related are also like this. Thus, the hotel, on the one hand, promises continuous changes to its guests while, on the other hand, resists change. As doctor Otternschlag (Lewis Stone) in the film *Grand Hotel* says, "People come; people go. Who cares? Nothing ever happens" [20]. Despite this, people keep coming and going to hotels with hopes for new beginnings.

³ In this sense, *The Lost Room* [18], a mini-series which uses a very similar plot device, can also be watched.

4. Reception: Payment for New Beginnings

Each reserved day in a hotel is a promise for a *new beginning*. This promise, which requires both registration and payment, includes emotional pleasure and mental calm, along with an all-you-can-eat buffet, Wi-Fi, a sauna, a massage, a pool, and room service. Resting, relaxing, entertaining one's self, and escaping from the crowd outside is paid for in cash inside. In other words, the spiritual and mental needs of the homeless modern individual are allotted a calculable value. Death is the only incalculable and undesirable option; likewise, nobody comes to hotels in order to die. Additionally, hotels create an aura that oversimplifies death.

The story starts with the receptionist's forced or genuine smile. The smile is often welcomed with a counter-smile. This is like a game, and it is played at least with two characters. In the game, both the receptionist—or the hotel manager and the customer—are impersonal nothings ([21], p. 176). Their relationship is similarly based on a pre-established discourse and norms. The content of the dialogues are obviously dominated by the formal writing up of a contract for the exchange of money for services. Sincere intimacy and words—I mean, if they still exist—are suppressed with a sense of politeness. Time, here, is experienced on the surface, and the promised surprises are dependent on the verification of a credit card. Any rejected payment—if there is no ready cash—suspends the promise and hope for new beginnings.

The registration procedures and requirements at the reception reduce this game to a matter of finance instead one of morals ([22], p. 298). This is, indeed, what differentiates hotels from the home. The whole being of the individual, who turns into a customer in hotels, is imprisoned in the form of a registered name and room number.

“By checking in and handing over your credit card or passport you effectively surrender your identity. By becoming a temporary resident of this non-place you become a non-person and are granted an ethical equivalent of diplomatic immunity. You become morally weightless. In the confines of the hotel you are no longer Mr or Ms Whoever, you are simply the occupant of a room. You have no history.” [22]

Not only the customer-guest, but also the receptionist, hotel manager, and the other employees in sight, become individuals with no identity. The hotel manager, Pat Cooper (Wendy Hiller), in the film *Separate Tables* [23], is a broken-hearted woman who forces herself to suppress her feelings and to pretend that she is happy. This inhuman condition is, *sine qua non*, done to maintain the hotel's standards. I think she is the most troubled character in the film because, in her daily life, she cannot answer the question of who she is. Everything is temporal and everybody is ephemeral. Nevertheless, she experiences this maddening dilemma as a sort of ordinariness and normality as a matter of professional necessity, but what if a receptionist like her falls in love with his, or her, customer? Truly, hotel loves are both the easiest and the most difficult of loves. Attaining such a love is as instantaneous as losing it. Loyalty hangs on by a hair. Brilliant beginnings and disappointing endings naturally live together.⁴

Death in Venice, directed by Luchino Visconti [32], implies that hotels abound with passionate encounters; furthermore, one's logic and rational faculties can be seized at a moment's notice with sensual enthusiasm. In the film, the hotel represents an unstable affectivity. In this respect, feelings—not to mention the ones who have them—wander at the edge of the abyss; so much so that both reputation and wealth may lose their value in virtue of a simple, and even banal, coincidence. The main character, Gustav von Aschenbach (Dirk Bogarde), as well as faces, status, morality, value

⁴ There is an exception to this situation. In the film, *A Room with a View* [24], distant hotels are depicted as the heart of golden opportunities in terms of love and passion. Not only in this film, but also in most films which display, or are set in, distant countries, hotels tend to be portrayed as exotic and romantic places. Examples of these films include *A Night in Casablanca* [25], *Hotel Sahara* [26], *Hotel Colonial* [27], *Hotel de Love* [28], *Love Hotel* [29], *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* [30], and *The Second Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* [31].

judgments, principles, and even talent, disappear once senses move. There is, therefore, no room for permanence in hotels.

Anyone who attentively observes the reception can easily realize that everything and everybody is transient. This circulation underlines, as stated, the temporality or, more precisely, timelessness of hotels. Place, here, is only a dead body—simply a costume of time. To put this differently, hotel space, as a costume, reduces the culture in which it exists into some certain symbolic decor and behavioral pattern. Registered, but unpredictable identities; swift but baseless relationships; luxury, but detached design; perfect, but cold service; dynamic, but pre-determined activities; gracious, but boring dialogues; controlled, but restricted areas; *etc.* Are these really what a celebrity, who tries to escape from the superficiality, hypocrisy, and unreliability of the outer world, wants and hopes to find in a hotel?

5. Lobby: Masks and Surfaces

The lobby is the heart of accidental encountering. These contacts take place through bodies or, more precisely, through self-presentations, so they are mostly superficial and painted. The crowd itself in a lobby is, paradoxically, the source of non-communication and solitude. As Kracauer describes, the lobby is the space of unrelatedness ([21], p. 179) and is a gap in which people experience *vis-a-vis de rien* ([21], p. 176). It transforms guests into players in the context of pre-determined roles. Separate tables represent separate plays and performances. Those who sit around their own tables know well how to behave and what not to do. Any loud-voiced laughter is, for instance, generally suppressed by the sharp and arrogant eye-shots of other guests in compliance with unwritten lobby rules. What the guests really feel about each other hides behind artificial salutations and frigid smiles.

From this point of view, each guest is a potential outsider. In order not to be an outsider, being as one seems is preferred to seeming as one is. Just like in the film *Separate Tables* [23], each character has a separated story and lie. Guests somehow always assume that their lies cannot be examined and, furthermore, that they will last forever. They think this because their stories, when told in a hotel, are fragmental or, as the phrase goes, *beginningless* and *endless*. These stories are convenient for every kind of dramatization, garnished with exaggeration and lies. Thus, the teller gets a chance to reconstruct him or herself as she or he likes. Major Pollock, one of the players/guests in the film, uses such a design:

Sibyl Railton-Bell (Deborah Kerr): Why have you told so many awful lies?

Major Angus Pollock (David Niven): Because I don't like myself the way I am, I suppose. I had to invent someone else. [23]

On the other hand, the lies which are told in hotels are protective, but unprotected and vulnerable; moreover, although lies normalize relationships in hotels, they spread quickly by means of metamorphosis. Guests in hotels are alone with their own honesty and are crowded with their shared lies. The tie that gathers them together never creates a sense of togetherness—or, more precisely, the “we” feeling. Instead, this false affiliation emerges just like the isolation of anonymous atoms ([21], p. 182). Despite this, it is not possible to claim that this is a complete and permanent disintegration. For instance, in case any attack comes from the outside, those who stand in the lobby may display a common action against the unknown enemy. Even the most distant characters in the film, *Bobby* [33], similarly, support each other when they are attacked. At that moment, the previous negative attitudes and feelings which they felt towards one another, such as envy and arrogance, are suspended for the first—and, perhaps, the last—time. This sort of attack potentially affects them commonly—but again, not equally. In other words, even if their problems are equal, the solutions often differentiate, and even discriminate, the guests. The film, *Hotel Rwanda* [34] saliently shows the viewers that, even in the chaotic situation of the Rwanda Genocide, some guests in the hotel are “more equal than others” ([35],

p. 192).⁵ In this film, those who are more equal are the Belgian citizens who are given priority to be saved. In this respect, and in the view of celebrities, to be famous is both a blessing and a curse, both seductive and painful.

The agony of celebrities peaks in the lobby. They are always enclosed by their fans' hyperbolic interest and contact. A sense of freedom, however, hides behind the ordinariness and unknownness of the hotel; therefore, every new unconsumed place, and their being alone therein, render service to freedom ([36], p. 160). Yet, is there any such place in the world for a well-known celebrity? Bob Harris (Bill Murray) plays a famous actor in the film, *Lost in Translation* [37], who goes to Japan in order to, perhaps, pull himself away from his acquaintances. However, to him, the cost of his escape becomes complete isolation. This isolation might have incited him to commit suicide. Bob Harris is lucky, though, because he comes across Charlotte (Scarlett Johansson) who accepts him, not as a famous person but as an ordinary man, and this, in turn, is already what Harris misses.

From this point of view, celebrities live in a prison, and their fans become its walls. That is why Canetti defines the worst crowd as a crowd which consists of acquaintances ([36], p. 123). As Simmel proposes, every interaction is a sort of exchange, but these acquaintances tend to behave as if they were payees ([38], p. 43). The lobby reproduces the sense of exchange that destroys naturalness. Expected warmth is an invisible face of hotels. For instance, in the kitchen or laundry. In the film, *Bobby* [33], those who work in the kitchen are fugitives—poor and uneducated, but happy and warm, characters. They freely display humane actions, such as crying, laughing, getting angry, becoming despondent, regretting, *etc.* However, this is a sort of prohibited zone for customers. People in uniforms and masks occupy the places outside of this zone. In other words, in the lobby and corridors, uniforms and masks have a strong authority over relationships. For instance, for the hotel porter (Emil Jannings), the main character in the silent film, *The Last Laugh* [39], his uniform is not just a dress, but indeed a sign of respect and approval. When he loses his job and uniform, he loses honour and esteem, as well. This film implies, then, that masks and surfaces are both deceptive and vital at the same time.

Sennett also affirms the role of masks, seeing them as a crucial and necessary tool which enables sociability in modern life ([40], p. 264). This approach implies that the truth, or being truthful, can sometimes be hurtful and that masks beneficially regulated relationships. Similarly, according to Canetti ([41], p. 277), wearing a mask is an intentional and voluntary orientation; so much so that, "the wearer knows perfectly well who he really is; but his task is to act the mask" [41]. Additionally, as time passes by, masks take the place of faces, and then the pleasure and easiness which masks provide prevail over the reality. In other words, "the more often he has worn it and the better he knows it, the more of himself will flow into the figure it represents" [41]. Celebrities, on the one hand, own their own masks while, at the same time, wishing to rid themselves of those masks and masked relationships. The lobby, however, which is the center of the masks, does not allow them to take a long, deep breath as free individuals; hence, they feel obliged to find a spatially-near, yet mentally-remote, realm in which to de-mask themselves. This realm is probably to be found in the hotel room.

6. The Room: To Escape or Be Seized; That Is the Question

The hotel room is the antithesis to the lobby. The show which was played in the lobby turns into an inner-showdown and nudity in the hotel room. The door of the room is not a simple door; instead, it is a border that represents the mysterious contrasts and conflicts of human nature. Completely opposite acts take place in front of, and behind, the door. As a mental and behavioral line, it is opened to reclusion and works like a barrier between society and the individual. In this sense, the motto-like "Do Not Disturb" sign provides a continuance of this secession. Whereas the hotel highlights sharing and communion, the room itself sells isolation. The money paid by the guests is not only for dinner or

⁵ This phrase is a reference to George Orwell's famous quote: "all animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others" [35].

sleeping, but essentially for a sense of freedom, escape, quiet, and solitude. In other words, the door provides an opportunity of escape ([42], p. 80). Namely, the expected feelings that are promised by the hotel start to be actualized, not in front of the hotel entrance but in front of the room door and ends once one leaves that door.

The room neutralizes social norms, oppressions, and expectation, albeit temporarily. It is, as Lodge calls it, a sort of antiseptic that sterilizes the microbes outside the room ([43], p. 211). Since it is also characterless [43], it is open to all possibilities. On the other hand, hotel rooms are almost the same, not only in terms of architectural design, but also essentially in the impression and feeling stimulated over the guests. Temporality detaches from the schedule of the external world, flows on its own path, and orients the guests to its own tangled tempo. "Time passes differently in the solitude of hotel rooms. The mind expands, but lazily, and the body contracts in its bright box of space. Because one may think of anything at all, one thinks for a long time of nothing" ([44], p. 185). No matter how splendid the decor of the room, the excited impression that the room makes on the visitor soon turns into one of ordinariness. Staying longer than a week in a hotel room, or even in a royal suite, becomes a tiresome banality. No matter how large the room is, it is always insufficient to take a walk in order to stimulate large thoughts. In here, neither a loyal relative nor a truehearted friend is to be found. Only changeable furniture and objects, such as bed, night table, wardrobe, seat, television, telephone, and shower cabin or hot tub—does it really matter which one it is when one is alone?

The eye-catching, ornate landscape seen from the window of the room is always distant insofar as it cannot be captured and possessed. The sharp, but fleeting, charm and impression of what lies outside of the room soon perishes. In other words, the perfect but distant image turns, with each passing day, into a colorless, frigid, and dull frame. David Sedaris summarizes this deadlock well: "The landscape is best described as 'pedestrian hostile'. [sic] It's pointless to try to take a walk, so I generally just stay in the room and think about shooting myself in the head" ([45], p. 257). The guest's mental framework is surrounded by concrete walls. There are only a few meters to walk in order to exit the room. Not only one's body, but also one's mind and emotions, hit the walls of the room. This is another version of what a prisoner experiences in a cell; for this reason, the desire for reclusion in the room is both costly and dangerous and may, in turn, cause an inevitable inner-confrontation.

The only alone and troubled one is not the guest, but the room itself; the room spreads a sticky, contagious, and repressive aura over newcomers. This may manifest a time-space, space-reality, and time-reality confusion that cause anxiety, insanity, overdose, heart-attack, *etc.* Sounds take images' place in the room; so much so that reality is occupied by real or unreal whispers and clicks which destroy the room's privacy and stillness. Every hoarse sound and voice wraps themselves up in a challenging, uncanny, threatening body. Anxiety encircles time and place. In most thriller films set in hotel rooms, fear generates itself through auditory signals. The unseen, but heard, *incognita* is always the essence of terror. Scary feelings are incited through sounds, but catharsis is only achieved when the heard but unseen enemy becomes visible. In other words, hearing without seeing is tension; whereas seeing with hearing is relief. In any case, even the slightest movements are able to awaken sleepy senses altogether.

The room is surrounded by instant probabilities. The reclusion found inside can be interrupted abruptly and even by mistake. Just like in the film *Blame it on the Bellboy* [46], names and room numbers can be confused. The second segment of the film *Four Rooms* entitled "The Wrong Man" directed by Alexandre Rockwell shows the viewers a hotel room full of private and dangerous secrets and the door which covers them all guiltlessly [47]. However, as soon as the door is opened involuntarily or by mistake, the privacy turns into violence. So indeed, as underlined previously, the door is, beyond an object or tool, a precious border which hides huge truths, inglorious mistakes, insurmountable fears, unbearable woes, uncontrolled desires, *etc.* Even if the story begins once the door opens, there is no perfect reclusion in hotel rooms.

The complicated, but rich, nature of hotel rooms has been depicted substantially for films. More interestingly, guests who pass through hotel rooms resemble actors in films. Both have stories full

of surprises and agonies in the heart of garish environments. In both cases, they are honored but not permanent. It is perhaps for this reason that the home of ghosts in many movies has been hotels. For instance, in the film *The Shining* [48], past tenants of the rooms leave vague traces in their hotel rooms. In time, the traces accumulate and present themselves to the new guests. This inevitable and deceptive heritage creates a fanciful realm over the room; so much so that each room of a vacant hotel turns into an imaginary geography filled with myths and gossips. These hotels, just like *The Grand Budapest Hotel* [49], keep living in the minds of others as fantastic legends and endless adventures, which is somehow seductive both for films and viewers. The curious characters in the film, *The Innkeepers* [50], face a similar adventure. At the end, sounds, shadows, ghosts, fear, and death find them. The most highlighted messages in films set in hotels are fictionalized around the concepts of temporality, uncertainty, unreliability, darkness, changeability, immediacy, nakedness, and vulnerability. From this point of view, staying in a hotel room is like sleeping with a prostitute.

Years ago, Georg Simmel found a similarity between the nature of money and the nature of prostitution ([38], pp. 121–22). I believe, however, that the resemblance between the nature of prostitution and the nature of the hotel room is more obvious. First of all, the room, which is formulated mainly around men's desires and fantasies ([51], p. 5), is a gendered space. It, just like a prostitute, reproduces itself for different people for a given amount of time. For both, loyalty is not an issue. Furthermore, luxury rooms could be compared to one's having to pay more in order to sleep with a beautiful prostitute. Both give their customers the impression that they are being used for the first time. The truth, however, lies just behind the heavy coating of make-up and polished furniture, and, as for dated hotels, they could be compared to weazened prostitutes. Both provide one's basic needs (sex or sleep) in a relatively cheap way. Regardless of whether it is luxury or ruined, the hotel room is, in contrast to Bussel's claim ([52], p. 235), not "hot" in terms of sensual relations. The most apparent features of the room are coldness, ephemerality, and disloyalty. As the dancer Gruzinskaya (Greta Garbo) in the film *Grand Hotel* [20] says regarding the way hotels feel, "everything is cold and finished."

7. Conclusions or Exit

To me, hotels, and especially hotel rooms, symbolize the transience of people and things. In these places, everybody, including celebrities, artists, rich people, and everything—curtains, carpets, towels, glasses, sofas, cars, and so on—are all inevitably changed and renewed. Hotels, just like the liquid sequence in which things are rapidly dated and worn out, position individuals as guests and customers. Consequently, the temporality in and of hotel rooms is experienced, not as cumulative, but as instantaneous. For these places, everything is sterilized and for single-use only. Thus, the room creates a moment that weakens the mental nexus between object and subject, thereby making suicide easier to commit. At this point, even the Holy Book in the hotel room refers to death rather than to life.

Although the staying or living in a hotel room represents the dialectic of moving or travelling, both indicate homelessness and placelessness. In other words, hotels and roads are two dimensions of experiencing strangerhood. Hotels are either on roads or near to train stations, terminals, or airports. Therefore, they catch people while away from their homes and while they are on the move. Indeed, to be on the move is both the prize and the punishment of being a modern individual. *Motherland Hotel (Anayurt Oteli)* [53], one of the most spectacular Turkish films, establishes a philosophical link between the hotel and the train station next to the hotel. Throughout the film, sounds of trains are heard in the rooms. The hotel is like a stationary train in which passengers move continuously. The only difference between them is that trains are a reference to travel through space, whereas hotels characterize (as discussed in the introduction) a travel through time. As a consequence of this, in hotels, reality is subjective and questionable. Moreover, this may cause a psychological delusion, not only over the guests but also over the employees of the hotels themselves. For instance, the receptionist Zebercet (Macit Koper), the main character in *Motherland Hotel* [53], falls in love with a woman. She stays for one night and leaves with the promise of coming back after a week, but she does not. Zebercet starts to live with her in his dream world, loses his mental balance, and hangs himself a short time

afterwards. Nobody knows if she really existed or not. In hotel living, there is no room for certainty and *pacta sunt servanda*. Although the hotel promotes itself as a “motherland”, it rather represents and reproduces the liquid notion of modern urban living. Hotel deaths are an ironic indicator of this global catastrophe.

This portrait, which mainly rises in Los Angeles hotels, is as widespread as hotels themselves. Tufts claims that hotels generate a differentiation in urban space ([4], p. 58). However, even though they offer architectural authenticity only partially, they compose and spread an obvious sameness in terms of urban experience and modern lifestyles. For this very reason, hotels—at least as well as cities—are global socio-philosophical and socio-psychological, rather than merely spatial and architectural, questions. Just as these cities resemble each other, hotels have become monotypic and reduce cultural differences into some symbolic ornaments. Likewise, they conceive, design, and enforce a standardized living. Those who spend most of their time in hotels, no matter how many countries they visit, are deemed to stay in one country, one city, one building, and even one room. “They think Rotterdam is Liverpool. They think Shinjuku in Tokyo is Liverpool’s famed ‘Japanese Garden’. [sic] They think the desert is a city. They wake up in generic hotel rooms, with no idea where they are, or why they’re there” states Alex Cox ([54], p. 242) while analyzing his own movie, *Three Businessmen* [55]. The urban experience, however, begins outside of the hotel. Ray (Colin Farrell) and Ken (Brendan Gleeson), the two main characters in the film, *In Bruges* [56], keep themselves away from their hotel in order to gain insights into the city of Bruges. On the other hand, since hotels are easily-accessible to everybody, they are unsafe. Just like in the murder of Martin Luther King, hotels encourage a public space that can be reserved even by the psychopath. In this sense, the hotel balcony is always an easy and tempting target for murderers, as well as paparazzi.

Hotels are pompous, yet destructive, nothings; therefore, to reside in them is to dwell nowhere ([22], p. 298). As for living in hotel rooms, it is a driftage that strengthens itself via alluring, yet nevertheless pernicious, habits. It is detachment itself that turns everything into a fatal greyness because, in hotels, “man petrifies and darkens in the distances he has created. He drags at the burden of them, but cannot move. He forgets that it is self-inflicted, and longs for liberation. But how, alone, can he free himself?” ([41], p. 18). In other words, even if hotels—especially their rooms—allow guests to escape from the masses, they turn them into victims of desolation. As for celebrities who are found dead in hotel rooms, although they live in a sensational way, their pathetic deaths reduce their supreme stories into the simple headline: “Found dead in hotel room!” Being found dead in a hotel room is the last extension of a celebrated life. Live sensationally and die simply! At the end, the dead body, which once was blessed, is taken out with a black bag like a product. Is not this the most tragic portrait of the cruel indifference of the liquidity of modern living?

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