

First Dossier

Welcome Tour

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HEIDEGGER HOTEL

In January 2002, broken, I read Heidegger's Being and Time and thought nonstop about hotels.

Heidegger was my hotel, an unfriendly, dominating domicile. I stayed for one cold, difficult month.

No philosopher, I entered Being and Time for aesthetic pleasure and for hotel gleanings.

My goal: to refurbish the meaning of hotel. As Heidegger says, "it is the business of philosophy to protect the power of the most elemental words..." (All my Being and Time quotations are from Joan Stambaugh's translation.)

Being-at-home, Heidegger says, is not the "primordial phenomenon." "Not-being-at-home" is more fundamental. To be not-at-home may mean to be at hotel. (Am I at home in this language?)

Hotel Women confused strangers, who expected women only, and were surprised to discover that men, too, resided there.

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Liberace—or someone who answers to that name—admired himself in his private room's full-length mirror. To conquer vertigo from corridor conversations with other Hotel Women residents, he stared at his naked reflection. His groin, *primum mobile*, couldn't communicate. No one knew how to acknowledge it or house it appropriately.

OPEN CITY

I may deviate from
Heidegger in this discussion.

Hotel presupposes home. To
speak about a hotel is an
oblique way to address home
problems.

Do you check into a hotel?
Or does the hotel condition
check into you?

My friend referred to his
lover's death, euphemistical-
ly, as "checking out": "Mark
checked out." We "check out"
when we cruise: "I checked him
out."

Dwelling in the hotel
state, my voice newly neutral
and indifferent, I hope to
override the "They" of home,
of fixed domicile.

HEIDEGGER AND CUSTARD PIE

While reading Being and
Time, suddenly I remembered a
custard pie from the 1960s. I
hadn't tasted it; I'd merely
seen it, quivering, in its
cafeteria vitrine. The rela-
tion between house and hotel
is like the relation between
restaurant and self-serve
smorgasbord. The custard pie,
trembling behind glass, is the
hotel, offering itself.

Hotel existence uncannily
suspends us above grounded-
ness. To be in hotel is to
float, or to tremble, like
just-set custard.

Heidegger frequently uses
the term "thrown." We are
thrown into Being. And, I'd
add, we are thrown into the
hotel, thrown into its imper-

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Whitehead, Hotel Women's
owner and de facto handyman,
removed his shirt before repair-
ing Liberace's shower, while
Liberace lay topless in bed,
perusing *Motor Sport*.

Whitehead thought,
*Maybe Liberace appreciates my
narrow waist, flat chest, shaved
head, pierced nipples, butterfly
tattoo, masochism, indiscrimi-
nateness.*

Whitehead worried about
Hotel Women's emotional health
but not its finances. His dead
wife's stocks kept Hotel Women
afloat.

Abstract thinker, Whitehead
obeyed stern moral codes. No
Hotel Women guest could rival
his naïveté and sophistication—
their rare, brimming combina-
tion.

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Liberace was Hotel Women's
most important resident, but his
value was sinking. That trend
excited him. His loneliness was
well-known, as was his madness.

Slowness had recently over-

sonal, public muddle.

We turn away from work as a means of "taking care," says Heidegger. To check into a hotel: this, too, may be a mode of taking care, of refusal.

Hotel is a method of "not-staying." Curious, we stray; we enter the euphoric state of "never dwelling anywhere."

Hotel existence, because socially unattached, is silent, even amid noise.

We may take speed in a hotel room, and yet a hotel room more frequently finds us tranquillized and numb. Stranded, alienated, closed off from authenticity, in the hotel we commit what Heidegger calls "the plunge." We dive into "everydayness." We eddy. We "fall prey."

To be in hotel: is this an inauthentic practice? Checking into a hotel, are we freed from surveillance and ordinariness, or are we squashed and smothered by the "They"?

MORE "THEY"

Unfortunately, a hotel is the control station of the "They."

We have reason, therefore, in hotels, to feel intensely phobic.

Other than TV, and invisible enemies, there may be nothing, in a hotel room, to watch. (Mirror? Lover? Airshaft?)

What am I trying to discov-

taken his cognition—blissful turgidity. Unfortunately, he made too many social mistakes. His latest errors were stasis, confidence, alertness.

"I must accomplish great things!" shouted Liberace, alone in his hotel room. Career dependence unnerved him. He thought, I don't want to care about fame, but I can't avoid striving for it. Quiet is what I need. Appreciate sunsets and tractors. Stay away from stars. They're querulous.

Liberace looked at his nineteenth-century Bavarian glass dish, once his mother's property, now filled with salted peanuts. He loved that dish. Lonely and important, it had sat, long ago, on his mother's bureau; Liberace had read Shakespeare while that dish, gathering clout and bragadocio, waited.

Liberace thought, If this hotel becomes too devoted to pornographic activities, I'm going to move across Dolores Street to Hotel Theory. I'll communicate to fellow Hotel Women residents my everlasting importance, and then I'll disappear. Relaxing at Hotel Theory, I'll brood on my separation from Hotel Women, that bordello.

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er in Heidegger? I want to clasp Being, apart from the particulars that locate and disguise it. "Hotel" uncovers a state of undressed Being, without presuppositions. In a hotel, Being is abstracted, naked. We suspend—or lift—the conventional identity tags.

HOTEL CHOPIN

Chopin is always "in a mood." (Heidegger writes that "Dasein is always already in a mood.") Hotel mood is a running or bleeding of an emotion, as ink runs when water touches it. What kind of a mood is Chopin in? Can't pin it down. Labile, it spreads and liquefies before we can give it a name.

Fooling around with a Chopin mazurka, I perform non-activity, temporary location, rooms-to-let; I hang the sign (VACANCY) and respond to its open-ended call.

Dream: I rented a room in a dormitory-hotel. There, my friend S. gave me a blue perfume called Chopin. (The bottle was blue. So were its contents.) I marveled that Chopin was now an expensive French scent's name. (Then I remembered that Chopin was also a brand of cheap vodka in tiny bottles, sold as stocking stuffers and souvenirs.) Accidentally I'd left my friend's gift on her toilet lid. Didn't I value Chopin's

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After Lana Turner's studio workday ended, she drove her red Alfa Romeo down Dolores, which led circuitously from MGM to Hotel Women. Dolores confused her. It sprouted multiple, conflicting intersections, diverse streets bearing identical names. Sameness flummoxed stars, but plebeian residents had mastered misleading nomenclature, which created sullen, storm-cloud effects above taquerias and massage parlors. Hotel Women, large pink building with stained awnings, never to be cleaned, overshadowed its salmon rival, Hotel Theory, which might soon fold, intimidated by competition.

Lana parked her Alfa Romeo on Dolores. "I could use morning and evening assistance," Lana said to Whitehead, who manned Hotel Women's front desk.

Whitehead agreed to mind Baby Helena when Lana was busy at MGM or socializing with other hotel guests.

She was grateful that Whitehead had volunteered to convert her life from maternal abomination into orderly vista.

She was not cold-hearted,

blueness? Was it a depressed perfume?

HÔTEL TRANSYLVANIE

The title of Frank O'Hara's poem "Hôtel Transylvanie" suggests that transfusions and transmigrations occur in hotels: Dracula, blood-mingling, identity-swap. In such hotels, guests share needles, bareback, and refuse all activities except for respiration and fornication.

HOTEL DREAM

Dreamt that I forgot the name and location of my hotel, either in Barcelona or Vienna. Feebly I told the cab driver, "I think it's near the Lido." The driver cruised the streets. Eventually we made it to a hotel that might have been mine. I'd inscribed in my appointment calendar the hotel's enigmatic initials: TH, or HT, connected to "The," or "Theory," or Heidegger's "They."

Underground tunnels linked the hotel to a major Jewish library, manywindowed, ultramodern. In its stacks I saw rabbis poring over texts. Then I walked into a mall, connected by subterranean passage to the hotel. I entered a men's clothing store—prices slashed. The clerks stared aggressively at me: I didn't speak the language, lacked currency... The suits on sale were ille-

despite Dr. Ferruccio's claims: psychotherapist at MGM, he'd encouraged her to leave Ditmas Boulevard's spacious hacienda, temporarily, and relocate, experimentally, to Hotel Women.

Society unnerves me, thought Lana, while Baby Helena napped. Lana remembered her childhood home's grapefruit tree. She remembered her father's and grandfather's paralysis from horseback-riding accidents. She worried about Baby Helena's developing consciousness.

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Lana Turner lay alone in her Hotel Women bed. United States, depressed, approached war with Germany. MGM did its best to cheer up phobic populations. Was it morally wrong to be gay during crisis? Lana wanted commensurability and parallelism. Bigotry, both local and foreign, dwarfed Lana's cognition. *If I could cancel my mentality, I would*, Lana thought; *but I cannot. I am Lana Turner, doomed to cogitate; doomed to reign; doomed to oscillate between my well-appointed hacienda on Ditmas Boulevard, from which I*

OPEN CITY

git, sleazy.

I waited for my boyfriend in our elegant, ochre, unfashionable hotel—the color of faded brick, with seven hundred rooms, orange carpet, and coat-of-arms motifs in the wallpaper.

Did the stingy receptionist ever grant me a room key?

I walked onto a short dock and stepped into a rowboat. A windstorm resumed its assault.

HOTEL CORRESPONDENCE

A communication from a hotel comes from nowhere. The letterhead deceives, masks a lack of location.

“HOTEL”

Movies like Hotel, even in 1967, were passé. Its opulent hotel is a symbol of the film industry, in which Merle Oberon (the Duchess, her hair a complex, projectile, distracting stack) no longer belongs, though she is allowed, as a courtesy, to stay on—a dinosaur, like the segregated Hotel St. Gregory, owned by Melvyn Douglas.

Images:

Through the Hotel St. Gregory’s lobby wanders a woman in a sari.

Downstairs in the oyster bar, Carmen McRae, in neon-pink mood light, sings.

Catherine Spaak, starlet dressed by Edith Head, doodles a self-portrait on hotel sta-

have inexcusably exiled myself, and this squalid, spacious Hotel Women room. She could not justify simultaneous residency in hotel and home; dining with studio bigwig Solly Freund last night downstairs at El Salvador, Lana had mentioned, self-critically, how morally dubious it was to maintain dual residences, but Solly had rationalized Hotel Women as Lana’s “experiment in transiency” (as he put it), or her “venture into contingent dwelling.” Lana irrationally feared being cut from Hotel Women’s scene. She wanted to dominate every milieu, however marginal and degraded, and to widen her repertoire of locations.

Lana spent last Christmas helping Mildred, her mother, cope with vertigo in Boulevard Arms, condo complex in San Clemente. Mildred telephoned Lana this morning and said, “I forgive you for leaving home, miffed, on Christmas Eve.” Mildred pardoned Lana for slapping her face.

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Balmy winter evening: Lana Turner drove her Impala from MGM to Cremona and Dolores,

tionery.

Heavy hotel drapes block consciousness.

Suddenly I remember the Monopoly game. Hotels were a high category of desire and attainment, superior to houses. A hotel was worth four houses.

A new efficiency-hotel empire is trying to buy the St. Gregory from Melvyn Douglas, but he doesn't want to sell. The potential buyer wants to run it as a "completely automated hotel"--like a car wash, without hands. Douglas, clinging to "old-time" standards, despises this new genre of "cheap-run joint," a hotel chain catering to "automatons" with "lubricants for blood."

Karl Malden, playing the hotel thief, escapes via a dumb waiter. The thief is the hotel's antibody--circulating, cunny, crazy.

The lift system short-circuits, sending the problematic elevator number three downward in a death dive.

A hotel is an arbitrary collection of human beings. Like other city-structures (stores, arcades), hotels throw strangers together in chance arrangements.

A hotel is a box, containing smaller boxes (rooms). The grid of cells gives formal-structure to the crowd's chaos.

A street, with its cars and pedestrians, is not a closed

where Hotel Women sat, dilapidated and importunate, its bulk disfigured. She owned several cars. She couldn't survive without daily luxuries. Her attraction to Hotel Women was metaphysical: she never forgot lessons imparted by Professor Hal Hoffstrom, who'd impregnated and then jilted her, leaving her to raise Baby Helena alone.

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Whitehead babysat Helena whenever duties or pleasures occupied Lana. Babysitting suited Whitehead's rigid, grid-ruled outlook. His taste for mental rudiments quelled hurricanes of recollection that assaulted him in grammar school and led hasty teachers to diagnose him "retarded." He could absorb information only piecemeal. With isolated facts he traveled far, but he could not leap

between tidbits. Disseminate my feeble-mindedness, thought Whitehead. Arrest every guest's mind.

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OPEN CITY

set. Its participants change every moment. A hotel's cast changes, but less frequently, and with greater ceremony. A hotel is a temporarily finite set—hence, a laboratory, a culture demanding dumbwaiters and thieves, bellhops and prostitutes, duchesses and switchboard operators, complaints and licentiousness, stairs and red leather arm-chairs, bathrobes and old-time hospitality, automatons and B-girl routines, a “colored couple” and a sari, drapes and credit cards, turbans and ash-trays, Presidential suites and oyster bars.

HOTEL DE CERTEAU

Michel de Certeau, in The Practice of Everyday Life, speaks of mutations that make a text “habitable, like a rented apartment.” Or like a hotel room. I mutate The Practice of Everyday Life, turn it into a hotel text. Thus I make it habitable. I push the book away from its proper identity. I commit an act that Certeau calls *la perruque* (the wig): I steal time from the boss, divert it, use it for my own purposes. Certeau suggests that we might turn writing itself into a practice of la perruque; we might transform writing into an uncommon, useless thing. Consider this book, Hotel Theory, to be a diverted text, occupied for purposes other

Lana Turner lived in Hotel Women so that she could taste its starry exclusivity and claustrophobia. *Ad nauseum* she drove down Dolores from MGM; she felt lightheaded from Thiothixene. She'd broken into sweats while shooting *Betrayed*. Clark Gable had called her “defective.” Her fame would evaporate unless she quickly returned to Hotel Women. She depressed her yellow Fiat's accelerator and honked. She said, out loud, “I live in Hotel Women because it is possible to live in Hotel Women. I need no other justification.”

In her room she contemplated upcoming disasters. At home on Ditmas Boulevard she lacked perspective. Here, in Hotel Women, she could leisurely think about confining hacienda and disobedient Cheryl. On vanity table she placed framed sweater-girl photos, out of date. *I'll tell Dr. Brice: I need empathy, not surgery*. She had switched psychiatrists. MGM had many. Dr. Brice. Dr. Rank. All were top-notch, able to dispense modern calmatives.

She continued to brood about her current locale and her bad taste in men. *They call it Hotel Women, but its clientele is Hollywood homosexuals,*

than its original intention.

We practice a hotel room, just as we practice space: residing and walking are ways of turning space to account, defining and molding it.

Nothing gets accomplished in the hotel room. The hotel room is unthinkable, though I am trying to think it. I ponder the problem of the hotel room because I want to escape the "closed system."

A hotel room is what I say it is. It is a space I am choosing to practice, a space open to my definitional fever.

SPECULATIVE INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM OF HOTELS

A woman lives in a hotel. She may be temporary, but as long as she resides there (two weeks, a month), time alters, and she becomes permanent—a hotel woman. She may never check out.

A deluxe hotel (five-hundred rooms) contains five-hundred destinies. Some rooms shift occupancy, night to night. Others contain permanent residents. Only the clerk can tabulate the indecisions. And the clerk is insufficiently philosophical.

At her room in the Hotel St. Claire, my grandmother kept a box of chocolates in the bureau's top drawer. She opened it to show me bonbons--proof of occupancy, supremacy, greed. It might not have been good candy.

starstruck pansies who consider it their ticket to Tinseltown, not their death sentence. When my last husband was alive, I never had problems with trash. My lover, Wallace, former tattoo artist, currently bookie, thinks he can hide with me in Hotel Women and regain virility, but he's wrong. Welcome to Hotel Women, world capital of impotence.

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Liberace admired his reflection. Early morning light entered Hotel Women and hit his naked, mirrored figure. He thought, *Perhaps my body's improved since yesterday. Harder chest?* He lifted dumbbells, then looked again and verified development. *Let Lana Turner ignore me.* He didn't mind being snubbed by fellow stars. Lana Turner was replaceable but Liberace was not. He contemplated his irreplaceability. Erect, it glistened. Fortunately, Whitehead didn't monitor what transpired in private rooms. He didn't want to be accused of molesting stars. Liberace dreaded losing personality and becoming generic; his identity, sealed, must never disintegrate. On Hotel Women's roofdeck,

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My great-aunt stayed in the Hotel De Anza, less fancy than the Hotel St. Claire. From De Anza to St. Claire was an appreciation, a hill.

Because, tonight, I am sleeping in the Hotel De Anza, I am happy to announce that this new slow tempo has become the norm.

Observation Point, he sunbathed daily, nude no matter who else was present.

Time moved abnormally in Hotel Women. Several decades co-existed without quarrelling. Cautious residents considered it 1930. Dissenters dwelled in 1940 or 1950. Freethinkers attained 1960. Management didn't bother to correct chronological irregularities. In Hotel Women, time bent over backward to make guests happy.

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