

# WAR HOTELS

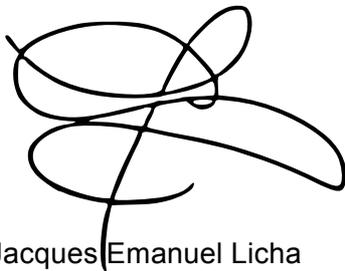
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A practice-based thesis submitted  
for the degree of PhD

In the Centre for Research Architecture  
Department of Visual Cultures  
Goldsmiths, University of London

April 2015

I hereby declare that the work presented in the thesis is my own.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Jacques Emanuel Licha

April 2015

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His invitation to embark on the uncommon intellectual journey that has been the second roundtable of the Centre for Research Architecture was just the first of a series of stimulating and supportive contributions he made to my research project. For this I wish to thank Eyal Weizman warmly. The group he brought together formed the sharp and attentive community that I was longing for. Among them, I am particularly indebted to my supervisor Susan Schuppli for her critical insights and flawless support. The rigour and carefulness of her reading and comments of every single text I submitted to her would only equal the open-mindedness of our conversations. I am also grateful to Thomas Keenan, my other inspirational supervisor, for inciting restlessness in the process of apprehending the stakes of my project. His positively disconcerting questions often left me unsettled for long periods of time (and some still do).

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## **Abstract**

When a conflict breaks out and whenever it is possible, foreign media workers travelling to cover it congregate in the same hotel to live and to work. This is where they cross paths with other protagonists of the conflict, thus converting this space into a site of strategic importance to the overall conduct of warfare. As the architectures from which conflicts are observed, analysed, discussed, and enunciated, 'war hotels' must be understood as playing an active role in the framing of conflicts: both the ways they are publically represented and the ways that we in turn see them unfold. Despite extended research into the mediatisation of conflict, little is known about the role of 'war hotels' as a crucial staging ground for the production of these representations. Through practice-led research, writing, and the making of a feature-length film, the past and present role of the phenomena of war hotels is examined in detail. While the film creates spatial and temporal conflations to depict what is, in effect, a non-specific meta-war hotel in a post-conflict environment, the written portion of the dissertation proceeds from an analysis of specific cases. A US Army training facility in California with its mock Iraqi villages and provisional hotel serves as a point of departure to establish and explore the concept of the war hotel as an optical device complicit in the production, representation and reception of conflict. With the advent of social media and distributed journalism conventional modes of war correspondence and coverage have been challenged and with it perhaps the necessity of a war hotel. Nevertheless, this thesis argues that this architectural-optical device has shaped the complex media constructions through which conflicts are seen and consumed and thus demands to be assessed theoretically and practically.

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### **Note about the film**

As part of this practice-based research project, a feature-length film has been produced and is submitted as partial fulfilment of the requirements for the PhD.

*Hotel Machine*, dir. Emanuel Licha, 2015. Film (duration: 66').

The full version of the film is available on the DVD as a digital file and on a dedicated website:

<http://emanuel-lich.com/warhotels>

User: licha

Password: phdlich

### **Note about the videos and films cited**

The figures **indicated in red** in the image captions correspond to extracts or full-length versions of videos, films or reports that are available on the attached DVD. The same material is available on the dedicated website mentioned above.

# 1.

## INTRODUCTION

### LEARNING FROM FORT IRWIN

These 'observatories' had almost an ideal model: the military camp — the short-lived, artificial city, built and reshaped almost at will; the seat of a power that must be all the stronger, but also all the more discreet, all the more effective and on the alert in that it is exercised over armed men. In the perfect camp, all power would be exercised solely through exact observation; each gaze would form a part of the overall functioning of power.

Michel Foucault <sup>1</sup>

This research project began with a trip I made to Fort Irwin, a US Army training facility in the Mojave Desert in California. The purpose of this trip was to film one of the mock Iraqi villages built on this site for training soldiers about to be deployed in Iraq or Afghanistan. During this visit, I came across a remarkable element of the decor: a hotel stood in the centre of the village. It was built to host visitors—journalists in particular—coming to observe the training activities at 'Medina Wasl'—the name given by the military to one of the thirteen Military Operations in Urban Terrain (MOUT) complexes of Fort Irwin. I made a film *Mirages* (2010) about this training camp, which stands today as a prelude to this research project that includes this text and a feature-length creative documentary titled *Hotel Machine* (2015).

The fact that a hotel held a prominent place at Medina Wasl—it was both tall and functional, the latter aspect being an exception in this decor that was mostly made of empty shipping containers—drew my attention to the seemingly awkward presence of a hotel in a training camp (fig. 1). At first sight, it is difficult to imagine that a hotel could have any strategic purpose in the conduct and the unfolding of conflicts. It would indeed be tempting to dismiss the decision of the US military to include such a device in their training facility by looking at it as just an innocuous element in their on-going preparation for conflict and orchestration of warfare. Instead, to take their claim that hotels are

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, New York: Vintage, 1995. p. 171.

effective seriously, or in other words that hotels have a role and a function not only in training, but also in conflicts themselves, can help us learn something about conflicts and the way they are seen. Taking a close look at what I will henceforth call 'war hotels',<sup>2</sup> is a way to enhance our understanding of how conflicts are represented, and thus how they are perceived and in turn potentially influenced by public opinion.

Fort Irwin National Training Center (NTC) occupies a large area of 2 580 km<sup>2</sup>, 60 km northeast of Barstow in the High Mojave Desert midway between Las Vegas, Nevada and Los Angeles, California.<sup>3</sup> It is one of 19 major U.S. Army training facilities for MOUT which can be described as "a collection of structures that together give the appearance of a small to medium-size village".<sup>4</sup> The Department of the Army's official guidance gives precise indications as to what type of structures and infrastructure should be included in the villages, including detailed specifications for the construction of a hotel.<sup>5</sup> It stipulates, "The hotel is a dominating structure typical of a central business district. The hotel has an elevator shaft, fire escapes, and a large first-floor lobby".<sup>6</sup> On the map reproduced in the guidance book (fig. 2), the suggestion made to training camp contractors is, interestingly, to locate the hotel (number 09 on the map) between a shop (08) and the police station / jail (10).

One morning of July 2009, I passed the entrance gate of Fort Irwin and reached the office for public affairs with my (film) crew, where the Public Affairs Officer (PAO) greeted us. The atmosphere was extremely friendly and laidback. It is worth mentioning here that during my visit at Fort Irwin, I was given an equivalent status to a journalist, since the PAO had not planned, as he told me, "any special treatment for artists or filmmakers".

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<sup>2</sup> A more precise term than 'war hotel' is actually 'conflict hotel', but it has less sonorous impact. I am using the word 'war' only for this expression, and am retaining the word 'conflict' elsewhere. I thereby follow the classification established by the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research for which "war" is the fifth and last scale of conflicts (the four others being, in order: disputes, non-violent crises, violent crises, and limited wars). See Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research, *Conflict Barometer 2013*. Heidelberg: HIIK, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> For an accurate description of the site, see Fort Irwin's website. <http://www.irwin.army.mil> (accessed 12 July 2014). An article of the official homepage of the US Army quotes Capt. Seth Henson, from the Army Corps of Engineers: "The footprint for the village came from actual satellite imagery of Baghdad (...) to ensure the construction design was authentic to Iraqi standards. Everything is authentic to the dimensions. Parsons, the contractor, has extensive experience building in Iraq. They contacted their experts in Iraq. They had their people bring back samples from Iraq to make sure we matched what we were building." Daniel J. Calder. "Iraqi Village' on Irwin". Official Homepage Of The US Army. 31 Mar. 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Russell W. Glenn et al. *Preparing for the Proven Inevitable: An Urban Operations Training Strategy for America*. Santa Monica: RAND National Defense Research Institute, 2006. pp. 34-5.

<sup>5</sup> Department of the Army, Headquarters. *Training for Urban Operations*. Training Circular 90-1. Washington, DC: Department of the Army. 19 May 2008. Chap. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. Chap. 5-3.



Fig. 1. The hotel where journalists are staying in 'Medina Was', Fort Irwin National Training Centre, is, alongside the mosque, the tallest and most richly decorated building in the village. Photo: Emanuel Licha.

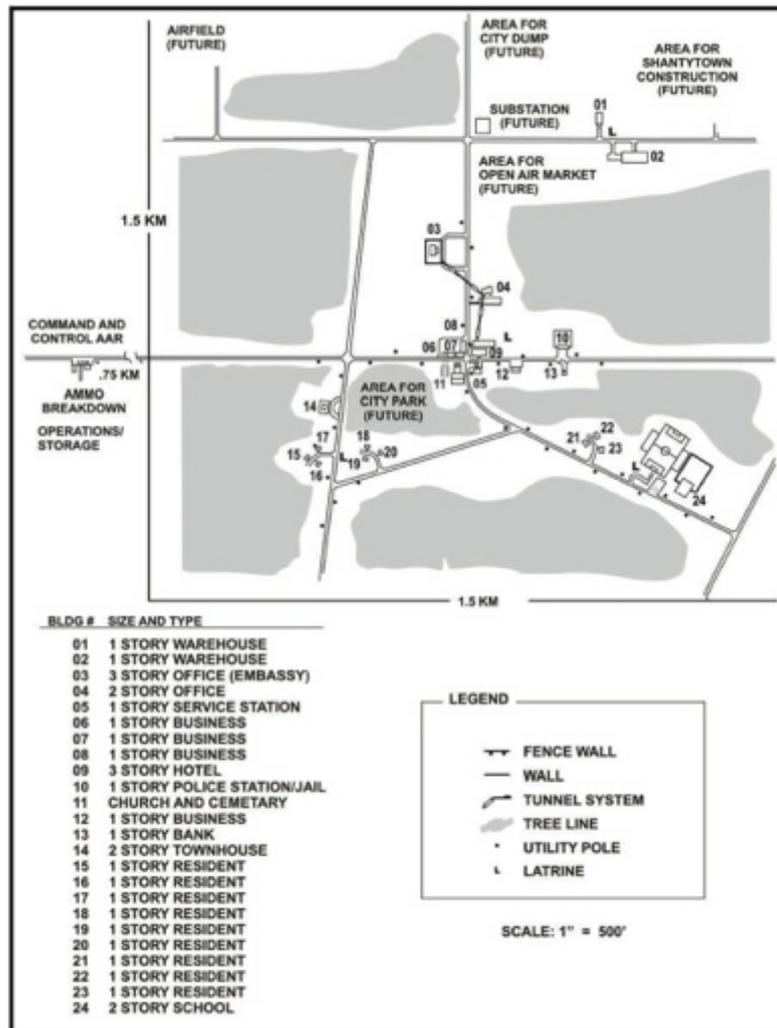


Fig. 2. Plan showing the ideal situation of the hotel, according to the US Army's guidance book. Source: Headquarters, Department of the US Army, guidebook TC 90-1, *Training for Urban Operations*.

This 'misunderstanding' allowed me to experience first-hand the way journalists are considered and treated by the military. Shortly after signing a bundle of documents,<sup>7</sup> the PAO used an official vehicle to take us to Medina Wasl, some 15 km away. We were not given permission to use our personal vehicle, which had to remain in front of the PAO's office for the entire duration of our stay. In July, the temperature in this area often rises to 48° Celsius, making it hazardous to walk under the sun over long distances. Without an access to our own vehicle, it meant we were not left to go around freely.

At Medina Wasl we were promptly taken to the hotel where two friendly soldiers-receptionists wearing dishdashahes met us. They were obliging enough to carry our luggage and equipment to our rooms. The hotel was rudimentary yet functional. It was the only building in the village furnished and decorated inside: each room had a bed, a table, a (plastic) plant, an armchair, prints on the wall, and an efficient air conditioning system (fig. 3). There were only two major inconveniences: there was no running water and no window curtains. About the latter, one was left wondering if the omission was meant to give the occupant an unrestricted access to the stunning view (right on the main square, where all the action took place) or to ensure visual control from outside on what was happening inside the room.

In either case, the absence of curtains drew one's attention to the contour of the window. A precise measurement of the window frame confirmed what had initially been an assumption: the proportions were exactly the same as those of a television screen (16:9). From that moment on, this window became the main architectural element that, in my understanding, set the agenda of Fort Irwin as a National *Optical* Training Center (NOTC). What journalists would see from their hotel room, as the window framed it, were the tip of a rootless palm tree in the foreground and the dome of the mosque in the background. Between the two, all the important events of the mock village took place. Within this carefully framed composition, events were effectively ready to be broadcast, and what remained to be done was only to turn the camera on.

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<sup>7</sup> From that moment, we were 'embedded'. One of the documents read: "The media employee acknowledges that failure to follow any direction, order, regulation, or ground rule may result in the termination of the media employee's participation in the embedding process"; and also "The media organization and the media employee understand and agree that the Government may terminate the embedding process at *any time* and for *any reason*, as the Government determines appropriate in its sole discretion". See United States Department of Defense. *Release, Indemnification, and Hold Harmless Agreement and Agreement Not to Sue*. n.d.



Fig. 3. The 16:9 window in the hotel room where journalists are staying inside the mock village at Fort Irwin National training Centre has no curtains. Photo: Emanuel Licha.

A corollary of this framing device stood approximately 50-metres away from the hotel. An observation deck was situated along the main alley, giving an overhanging position on the ‘theatre of operations’ (fig. 4). This was where the PAO took journalists right after they deposited their luggage at the hotel. Like the hotel, it was built to accommodate journalists and to offer them a vantage point to photograph and film. As such, it can be considered as an extension of the hotel room with its 16:9 window. When I visited, my initial intention was to spend the first hours without filming in order to figure out the space first. Therefore, I reached the deck without my equipment. This, as I soon understood, was inconceivable from the PAO’s point of view: he insisted that I bring my camera along since it would be, according to him, my only chance to see the attacks against the troops from such a privileged point of view. He said, lending his voice to the architectural apparatus: “you *have to* film this”.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> In their richly illustrated account of their visit at Fort Irwin, Geoff Manaugh and Nicola Twilley tell that they have been similarly pressured to take photographs. “In the series of set-piece training exercises that take place within the village, the action is coordinated from above by a ring of walkie-talkie connected scenographers, including an extensive internal media presence, who film all of the simulations for later replay in combat analysis. The sense of being on an elaborate, extremely detailed film set is here made explicit. In fact, visitors are openly encouraged to participate in this mediation of the events: We were repeatedly urged to take as many photographs as possible and to share the resulting images on Facebook, Twitter, and more.” Geoff Manaugh and Nicola Twilley. “It’s Artificial Afghanistan: A Simulated Battlefield in the Mojave Desert”. *The Atlantic*, 18 May 2013.



**Fig. 4.** The observation deck is where journalists are immediately taken upon their arrival at the camp, and from which they are encouraged to film/photograph the theatre of operations. Film still from *Mirages*, directed by Emanuel Licha.

The expression ‘theatre of operations’ acquired here a literal meaning with the journalists watching the action from a box, be it their hotel room or the observation deck. The village was the set and the alley was the stage where the play was enacted. In a discussion Elie During had with Alain Badiou as a contribution to the catalogue of the exhibition *A Theater Without Theater* held at the MACBA in Barcelona in 2007, the latter stated that “theatre is bound to the State; it is a public mediation between the state and its exterior – the crowd, gathered together”.<sup>9</sup> In his essay *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, published in continuity with the discussion he had with During, Badiou contend that the state takes the shape of theatre to announce publicly in what its actions consist.

Theatre, which is a form of the State, says what this State *will have been* by lending it the fable of a past. Unable to come back to the present it activates, theatre establishes the future anterior of a state of affairs by putting it at the distance that is required for the present of its operation. Thinking in terms of time, theatre executes this thinking in the past tense.<sup>10</sup>

Just as choreographed military parades are organized to show off the state’s military power, theatre needs spectators in order to exist. If it does not have a public, it becomes a mere rehearsal while losing its demonstrative capacity. At Fort Irwin NOTC, it is important to remember that the hotel room and the observation deck were the very first places where the PAO took journalists. Even if they eventually went out of their room and stepped down from the platform, everything they subsequently looked at bore the mark of this initial

<sup>9</sup> Alain Badiou and Elie During. “A Theater of Operations”. *A Theater without Theater*. Ed. Manuel J. Borja-Villel. Barcelona: Museu d’art contemporani de Barcelona, 2007. p. 22.

<sup>10</sup> Alain Badiou. “Rhapsody for the Theatre: A Short Philosophical Treatise”. *Theatre Survey*, 49, 2, Nov. 2008. p. 207.

configuration. The fact that they were allowed to walk in the set underlined the effort to blur the line between the audience and the stage. However, the attempt to enfeeble the presence of the stage did not mean that it was not theatre anymore. For Badiou, “there is theatre as soon as there is a public exhibition, with or without a stage, of a desired combination of bodies and languages”.<sup>11</sup>

The hotel room with its 16:9 window, as much as the observation deck as its corollary, was made explicitly to accommodate media workers. While the windows were built to facilitate their work, they also orient it. They stand as a reminder for journalists that everything they see, everything they film or photograph has already been framed for them, and that the architecture of the camp is an optical device for making them see. Everything that is happening at the two ‘simulated villages’, “Medina Wasl” and “Medina Jabl” that journalists were exclusively taken to, is made to be looked at, filmed and photographed, as well as talked about.<sup>12</sup> They are de facto stages waiting for an audience.<sup>13</sup> The demonstrative capacity of Fort Irwin consists in showing how the military orchestrate their preparations for warfare, and what they consider important to it.

Throughout this text, I am using the key 16:9 window as a constant reminder that (training for) warfare is as much a question of (learning) combat techniques as it is one of orienting the ways of seeing, and that in this endeavour, war hotels play a significant role. The modes of seeing or the viewing apparatuses that I consider are not exclusively those of the journalists covering each conflict. Indeed, their presence within war hotels induces a multiplicity of subjectivities that need to be taken into consideration to understand how conflicts are being looked at and what sort of information and knowledge are produced about them. In other words, the ways of seeing conflicts and the production of knowledge about them are the results of a constellation of gazes, which, as I contend, all converge through the war hotel. Before going to ‘real world’ war hotels though, let us linger at Fort Irwin and meander a bit in the streets of Medina Wasl. This will allow us to see how the

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<sup>11</sup> Badiou and Daring. Op. cit. p. 22.

<sup>12</sup> All the reports from journalists or visitors I have found mention only those two ‘villages’, although Fort Irwin encompasses thirteen of them. Those two are probably the most developed, and therefore the most photogenic. One might think that another kind of training, less spectacular, is happening at the other locations to which journalists are not given access.

<sup>13</sup> During my visit in July 2009, I came across a delegation of Burma’s army officials visiting the facility. Other types of spectators also flocked to this theatre: tourists, journalists, filmmakers and artists. The Army organizes tours of the training centre for civilians. It is interesting to note that the cost of such a tour, \$48 (as of 2009), is roughly equivalent to what one needs to spend to visit one of the nearby Hollywood studios.

presence of journalists in the training camp—as both a result and a cause for the existence of a war hotel within its premises—is regulating the modes of seeing and the conduct of the other users through the production of certain subjectivities.

We have seen briefly how the apparatus of the camp operates as a potential framing device for journalists. I will now look at two other categories of users: soldiers and role players on one hand, and news audience on the other. Although not physically present on the site, the latter are indeed trained to become spectators of war through the work of the media. This classification into categories of users is inspired by Ariella Azoulay's proposition of a civil contract linking the main protagonists of photography. In her seminal work *The Civil Contract of Photography*,<sup>14</sup> Azoulay proceeds from the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau to define a new type of social contract. Whereas Rousseau was establishing that all individuals give the sovereign (the people itself) power to govern themselves, Azoulay proposes an organization of political relations that would not be mediated and regulated by a sovereign power, but rather in the "form of an open and dynamic framework among individuals".<sup>15</sup> This, she argues, is achieved through a civil contract of photography that is inherent to any image. She considers that "the members of the community of photography are (...) anyone and everyone who bears any relationship whatsoever to photographs—as a photographer, a viewer of photographs, or a photographed person".<sup>16</sup> My claim is that if, in times of conflict, one were to situate these various users in a physical space, that space would be the war hotel. As much as Azoulay's proposition is useful to rethink the political relations between them through photography, the materiality of an architectural object such as the war hotel is needed to anchor these sets of relations. Azoulay states that, as an apparatus in which everyone involved in the making and showing of a photograph is automatically incorporated, the 'civil contract of photography' is a "civil space"<sup>17</sup> and a "tacit agreement".<sup>18</sup> I argue that these definitions also apply to the war hotel as an apparatus in which everyone involved in the representation and the production of information on conflicts is represented.

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<sup>14</sup> Ariella Azoulay. *The Civil Contract of Photography*. New York: Zone Books, 2008.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p. 110.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p. 97.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p. 85.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p. 109.

## Soldiers and role players

Within the framework of an interview for my film *Mirages*—shot in a classical ‘talking head’ manner which gave our conversation a very formal tone—Brian Howe, the manager of Fort Irwin’s training operations said that the goal was to “make [the mock village] as real as possible, so that when the soldiers actually get for the first time into Iraq or whatever theatre they go to, it’s not new, it’s familiar”.<sup>19</sup> He spoke as if the situation in which soldiers would find themselves in, once in Iraq, had been pre-narrated before they departed, and that Fort Irwin was not only contributing to teach them how to move about on urban terrains, but also functioned as an optical training device. Even though the events on the Iraqi terrain would never bother to follow the Californian guideline, Brian Howe emphasised the fact that the aim was to “make the soldiers believe that they’re not in America, that it’s not just a training exercise, that’s it’s real”. He added that “the more you can accept it’s a real environment you’re in, the more you can really focus on your training. The more you can take soldiers out of California and get their feet in Iraq, the more they’ll benefit from this”.<sup>20</sup> This statement was reiterated—in almost identical terms—by other staff members I also interviewed, giving the feeling they were communicating an official version to feed the press.

When asked if the set was built by or with the collaboration of Iraqi experts, architects or urban planners, Howe answered that there was no need for this type of collaboration, since the set builders already had a direct access to military personnel who had previously been deployed in Iraq. He said that their visual expertise was considered reliable to give indications as to what Iraq looks like. He added that the designers enhanced some aspects of the set to make it correspond to what they thought it should look like: “To build this set we worked with military who have been to Iraq. They bring back their pictures and their knowledge. We also do research online to get very real pictures of the environment. We then put together a model of what we think *it* should look like” (my emphasis).<sup>21</sup> He was most probably referring to the way they wanted the *mock-village* they were about to build to look like. Nevertheless, let us imagine for a while that *it* stood for *Iraq* itself: the model they built would have then represented an imaginary Iraq and existed in the stead of its reality. It

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<sup>19</sup> Brian Howe. Interview. Fort Irwin, 16 Jul. 2009.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

would not have represented an Iraqi-village-as-it-is, but rather what this village *shall* be. If we follow this hypothesis, the mock villages built by the military were not only 'simulations' of Iraqi villages, or an attempt to copy what they looked like in reality, but rather an idealised version of the reality towards which the US authorities strove.

Role players (fig. 5) underwent a visual training as well. As of August 2008, the daily population of Fort Irwin was 22 726 people, of which approximately 5 000 were rotational soldiers. The rest of the population were either assigned Military (4 709), family members (7 461) or civilian workforce (5 646).<sup>22</sup> One of the main service providers at Fort Irwin NOTC was a company called Strategic Operations, which was in charge, under the supervision of the Army Corps of Engineers, of the construction and the maintenance of the mock villages, as well as of the recruitment of role players. Of a total number of about 1,800 role players—a great proportion of which were wives and husbands of permanent military staff, approximately 250 were 'Foreign Language Speakers' (FLS). Most of them were Iraqi-Americans from the San Diego area. They lived inside the mock village during an entire rotation of 15 days, unlike the American role players who did not sleep in the village. The FLS converted some of the shipping containers constituting the set into their temporary homes. In these they lived, cooked, gathered, forming a heterogeneous Iraqi community in the middle of the Mojave Desert. Their employer, Strategic Operations, is part of Stu Segall Productions, "one of the largest independent TV/movie studios in the country".<sup>23</sup> Their website sings the praises of "hyper-realistic training": "Strategic Operations, Inc. provides Hyper- Realistic™ training environments for military, law enforcement and other organizations, using state-of-the-art movie industry special effects, role players, proprietary techniques, training scenarios, facilities, mobile structures, sets, props, and equipment. (...) Strategic Operations introduced 'The magic of Hollywood' to live military training by employing all the techniques of film and TV production integrated with military tactics, techniques, and procedures".<sup>24</sup> When asked to talk about

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<sup>22</sup> Fort Irwin's official website: <http://www.irwin.army.mil> (accessed 3 June 2014).

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.strategic-operations.com> (accessed 3 June 2014).

<sup>24</sup> The company registered the expression "hyper-realistic" under the category of "Goods and services" with the United States Patent and Trademark Office on 27 July 2009. They defined it as "Training services in the field of urban warfare; providing urban-simulated facilities for educational training, namely, military training; preparation for others of operational specific urban combat training scenarios provided in connection with urban warfare training services; and preparation for others of special effects including weapons special effects, namely, rocket-propelled grenades, mines, improvised explosive devices, lighting, smoke, noise, explosions, and combat wounds, for use in military training".

their work, role players consistently showed a more or less genuine awe for the ‘magic of Hollywood’ they were part of, raving about the mise en scène and the efforts deployed by the military to reach this ‘level of authenticity’.<sup>25</sup>



**Fig. 5.** Two role players are posing for the camera, in front of a mock Al-Sadr office, in Medina Wasl, Fort Irwin National Training Centre. Film still from *Mirages*, directed by Emanuel Licha.

In an interview she gave for *Mirages*, Michelle Crampton, the acting coach for the non-Iraqi extras working at Fort Irwin, said that their goal was “to interact with the soldiers in the most realistic and culturally correct way possible”.<sup>26</sup> She added that in order to achieve this, all the new employees went through a ‘cultural training’, during which they were taught “the basics of Arabic language”. As for the FLS role players, they pledged allegiance to their new country through a sartorial caricature that could be read as a kind of symbolic betrayal of their home country.<sup>27</sup> Their participation in the training programme involved looking at the actions of the soldiers, and this remunerated participation functioned as an approval of what they saw. The set and the mise en scène at Fort Irwin were there to prove that according to the designers, Iraq and Iraqis did not look typical enough, and their representation had therefore to be hyper-ritualised. The results were dubious caricatures of Iraqi architecture, dress codes and customs.

<sup>25</sup> Note of the author, in conversation with various Iraqi role players. However, after only a couple of hours spent in the complex, the ‘magic of Hollywood’ vanishes. What remains are the empty buildings made from containers, the mock fruits and meat made from plastic, the mosque turned into a gym, the calls to prayer broadcast every hour on the hour (sic), and the bored American role-players repeating ad nauseam the few words of Arabic they were taught.

<sup>26</sup> Michelle Crampton. Interview. Fort Irwin, 17 Jul. 2009.

<sup>27</sup> The “hyper-realistic” training provided at Fort Irwin resulted in what sociologist Erving Goffman called a “hyper-ritualisation”. In his study of the representation of women in photographic advertisements Goffman underlined how these carry an ideal conception of femininity. See Erving Goffman. *Gender Advertisements*. New York: Harper & Row, 1979. Advertising does not create the ritualized expressions it employs, but rather emphasizes them, as far as the caricature. In return, advertising influences the perception of reality. See Vickie Rutledge Shields and Dawn Heinecken. *Measuring Up: How Advertising Affects Self-Image*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002.



Fig. 6. Video still from a news report broadcast on KCAL9/CBS television network showing journalist Paul Mager interviewing an Iraqi role player inside the mock village. The broadcast is 'live from Fort Irwin'. Source: YouTube/KCAL.

One of the Iraqi-American role players I interviewed summarised what he saw as his duty by stating: "I do my best to help out, to prepare US military, so when they go to Iraq they are ready to deal with the situation".<sup>28</sup> A report on Fort Irwin that was broadcast in October 2009 by KCAL9/CBS Los Angeles, a local television network, shows other meaningful interviews (fig. 6).<sup>29</sup> The overall tone of the report is one of glorification of the training activities of the Army, as the journalists insistently emphasise the fact that training in this simulacrum is an ideal way to get ready for the reality of the war in Iraq, stating that it is "maybe the best classroom the US Army has ever had". The journalists were 'embedded' in Fort Irwin, and it is from within that they were reporting. They interviewed military personnel and role players, among whom some are Iraqi-Americans. They answer with such things as: "I've been in this country for the last eight years, and I think that what this country's done for me is a lot, and what I'm doing is gonna be just a small part"; or "We have to help the soldiers over here so they can help our country build a country"; or "I met President Bush, and he said 'Honored to meet you. What you guys are doing is unbelievable'". One interview in particular reveals a lot about the current frame of mind of these role players and about how Fort Irwin as an optical machine is functioning for them. An Iraqi-American role player is interviewed and introduced by the journalist by his first name only: Nassir. The man is small (the journalist can lean over him) and shy, his English is rather rough,

<sup>28</sup> An unidentified Iraqi-American role player. Interview. Fort Irwin, 16 Jul. 2009.

<sup>29</sup> "Paul Mager Reports Live from Fort Irwin". KCAL9/CBS, Los Angeles. 19 Oct. 2009.

and he seems to be impressed by the situation. He is dressed as an Iraqi police officer. He tells the journalist that he has just become a US citizen. Nassir appears to be genuinely happy about this news, and his image speaks in praise of the American policy: before 1996, he was in Iraq, but ultimately left because “there was no freedom in the country”. He then worked for the US Army to contribute to the “good things” they do for Iraq. The reporter as an underlying connection establishes working for the Army and gaining access to US citizenship. It is indeed a well-known fact among immigrants in the US that one way to enhance the chances to be granted citizenship is to enrol in the Army.<sup>30</sup> Nassir is shown as an example, and this (tele)visual lesson is conducted using the shape of theatre, through the architecture, or rather the scenography of Medina Wasl.

### Spectators

The same KCAL9/CBS report provides an interesting example of the visual training operations originating from the architecture of Medina Wasl. Following the agenda set by the hotel window, the journalists used the architecture of the camp to frame information. Although they never hid the fact that they were dealing with a mocked-up environment, they reproduced the same visual configuration as the one used by journalists reporting on an actual war (fig. 7a). In news reports we usually see a journalist live from the battle scene, with a text appearing on the screen: it indicates the location from which the journalist is reporting, and the word “live” (fig. 7b). This sequence is usually followed by a discussion between the journalist in the studio and the journalist on the field, and the two are often shown with a split-screen effect. The chosen graphic design is usually dramatic. This is the journalistic dispositif the spectators are now familiar with, easily identified and immediately interpreted as a well-informed and reliable source of information on the outside world. What is the status of the first image (KCAL)? Is it a rehearsal for the other image (CNN)? If this were to be the case, reporting from Fort Irwin could then be considered as a real-scale training exercise for journalists, technicians, military and spectators. A somewhat disquieting feeling to this exercise lies in the fact that this operation of resemblance is done in silence. This subtle resemblance between a report from a simulacrum and a report from what could

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<sup>30</sup> Various websites give instructions on how to become a US citizen through enrolment in the Army. See for example: “Join the army and become a US citizen in 6 months” <http://www.usadiversitylottery.com/green-card-dv2011-immigration-news-march182009.php> ; or “Becoming a Citizen in the U.S. Military” <http://usmilitary.about.com/od/theorderlyroom/a/citizenship.htm>

provisionally be called 'reality' could be a way to accustom viewers to the fact that they are both the same. Indeed, they are both framed, and any relation to reality—and to the realities of war—is probably not to be found inside either frame, even though it is the premise that underscores the latter.



Fig. 7a. Video still from a news report broadcast on KCAL9/CBS television network showing journalist Paul Mager live from Fort Irwin in discussion with two journalists in the studio, with a split screen effect. Source: YouTube/KCAL.



Fig. 7b. Video still from a news report broadcast on CNN. The journalist in Baghdad is in discussion with the journalist in the studio, with a similar split screen effect as shown in fig. 7a. Source: YouTube/CNN.

Fort Irwin understood as an optical training device functions with different ends for each group of users—soldiers and role players, journalists, and news audience—but it does re-arrange the assemblage and interaction between them, helping to produce a new discourse on media and warfare. The architecture of Medina Wasl with the war hotel at its core is what brings them

together. This proposition prolongs in the materiality of architecture the notion of the frame as Judith Butler discusses it. While Azoulay sees the relation between the protagonists of photography coordinated by a social apparatus, Butler establishes their connections through the image itself, as this relation “takes place by virtue of the frame. The frame permits, orchestrates, and mediates that relation”.<sup>31</sup> I will return to this aspect in the third section.

In retrospect, what I have learned from Fort Irwin is to pay attention to apparently innocuous details of the warfare landscape and the ways in which they operate as an apparatus for the representation of conflicts. The point of departure for this insight took the form of a window in a journalists’ hotel room set in a mock Iraqi village. This experience and its subsequent revelation signalled the key role that hotels play in shaping the ways in which we see conflicts. I contend that the presence of a war hotel within a theatre of operations influences how the protagonists of a conflict behave with regard to that conflict and how they talk about it. In other words, the war hotel makes them say and do things in particular ways given that it influences how they see the conflict. I have argued that the journalists’ gaze at Fort Irwin is literally framed by the hotel, and specifically by the 16:9 media proportions of the window in their room. Their position on one side of this window conditions not only how they act and what they look at, but also, how they are being treated, talked to and informed about the on-going situation around them. Their presence within and around the war hotel makes other protagonists also behave in certain ways. As such, the war hotel is a forceful component in the production of ways of ‘seeing’ conflicts. The subjects produced by the war hotel are not merely the journalists, but all who produce a discourse around conflict, and include military, resistance organizations, groups of victims and of perpetrators, citizen journalists, normal citizens, as well as artists and filmmakers. Each of these groups produces its own sets of images, info-graphics, and analyses, that they broadcast using social media among other channels.

The cinematic window frame encountered at Fort Irwin remains, throughout this text, a reminder of the function of the war hotel as an important architectural object in the mediation of the relations between the various protagonists of conflicts. It is most improbable that the set designers

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<sup>31</sup> Judith Butler. *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* London: Verso, 2009. p. 82.

mandated by the US Army to build this mock up environment have intentionally designed that window for that purpose, and it is beyond my point to estimate if it was some kind of subconsciously deliberate mistake on their behalf. In any case, my encounter with this 16:9 window led me to consider the crucial role that the hotel, as one component in the infrastructural logistics of warfare, plays in its execution. Furthermore, the fact that this architectural detail shares a lexical proximity with the field of image-making allows me to bridge the investigation of the functions of this building and the practice of making a film on the same subject. It is interesting to note that in both academic research and filmmaking, the roles and functions of war hotels have been largely overlooked. They are often mentioned in news reports, in press articles and they even appear as the setting of numerous fiction films, but a comprehensive analysis of what is it that they do in and to conflicts remains to be done. Indeed, although we have by now well understood that the representations of conflicts have an influence on their unfolding, what we have not thought so much about is the role of hotels as an apparatus in the production of these representations. My thesis is therefore an effort to analyse an overlooked element of conflict—the war hotel—to describe it in detail, and to highlight the role it has and continues to play in the understanding and the representation of conflicts.

## 2. WAR HOTEL AS...

Once again it is confirmed that a large hotel is a world unto itself and that this world is like the rest of the large world. The guests here roam about in their light-hearted, careless summer existence without suspecting anything of the strange mysteries circulating among them.

Sven Elvestad<sup>32</sup>

So, what exactly is a war hotel? The literature covering the topic of hotels in conflict zones is very scarce, and the public only gets to hear about them when the work of journalists is threatened, for example when they are held hostages, or when their hotel is the target of attacks.<sup>33</sup> Verily most of what we know from the working conditions of journalists and their use of hotels comes from fiction movies. Interestingly, scriptwriters and film directors have often used war correspondents as their main protagonists and situated the action of the film in a hotel environment.<sup>34</sup>

To begin, let us say that a war hotel is far more than a building. 'War hotel' is a concept that I define using examples provided by some of the fiction films that I analysed to understand their role in warfare, as well as various accounts taken from 'real world' situations. The hotels that I take into consideration are mostly those that were used by western media workers when they covered a

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<sup>32</sup> Sven Elvestad. *Der Tod kehrt im Hotel ein* (Death Enters the Hotel), cited in Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995. p. 184.

<sup>33</sup> The situation in Tripoli in 2011 when foreign journalists were held hostage in a 5-star hotel by the Kaddhafi regime offers good examples of reports describing the life of journalists in that environment. See for example Harriet Sherwood, "No Freedom For Foreign Press At Tripoli's Rixos Hotel". *The Guardian*, 14 Apr. 2011; David D. Kirkpatrick. "Libya's Experiments With a Free Press Often Rattle the News Media Lab Rats". *The New York Times*, 16 Mar. 2011. Also, the story of the attack against the Palestine Hotel, where most of the media workers stayed in 2003 while covering the war in Iraq is one such example. See "Foreign Media Suffer Baghdad Losses". BBC News, 8 Apr. 2003.

<sup>34</sup> My filmic essay *Hotel Sampling: 142 Extracts From 11 Films Featuring Journalists In Their Hotel*. Dir. Emanuel Licha, 2011 (the full version of the film is accessible on the dedicated website). The film is made of a selection of 142 extracts from 11 fiction films, classified according to the space where the scene is taking place inside the hotel: the lobby, elevators, bars, lounges, swimming pools, rooms, etc. The result is an archetypal representation of the journalist and the profession, as well as his/her personal dilemmas and ethical conflicts. We also understand that the hotel setting is far more than a décor, as it appears to have a decisive role in the unfolding of the action. Extracts from the following films were used for the edit: *A Mighty Heart*. Dir. Michael Winterbottom. 2007; *Hotel Rwanda*. Dir. Terry George. 2004; *Live from Baghdad*. Dir. Mick Jackson. 2002; *Message from Nam*. Dir. Paul Wendkos. 1993; *Salvador*. Dir. Oliver Stone. 1986; *The Hunting Party*. Dir. Richard Shepard. 2007; *The Killing Fields*. Dir. Roland Joffré. 1984; *The Year Of Living Dangerously*. Dir. Peter Weir. 1982; *The Quiet American*. Dir. Phillip Noyce. 2002; *Under Fire*. Dir. Roger Spottiswoode. 1983; *Welcome to Sarajevo*. Dir. Michael Winterbottom. 1997.

conflict, but not only. It is important to keep in mind that there is not automatically a hotel used by journalists in every conflict. There are sometimes no war hotels at all, and in other situations, some important events uncovered by the press happened in war hotels.<sup>35</sup> Although 'war hotel' is not a synonym of 'media hotel', the former rather encompassing the latter, for the purpose of my investigation the presence of media workers remained the main criteria to identify a hotel as a war hotel. This section examines the reasons as to why a hotel becomes a war hotel during a conflict. Although I am examining how war hotels have an impact on each of the protagonists involved in the representation of conflicts—just as the war hotel in Fort Irwin affected each category of users of the training camp—the focus of this section is primarily on journalists and the reasons why they choose certain hotels, and what they do with them. Indeed, with only a few exceptions, I contend that it is primarily the presence of media workers that operates as a catalyst for the transformation of a hotel into a war hotel.

When international media networks send people and equipment abroad to cover an event, the logistics is important, echoing the military's organisation of moving, housing, and supplying troops and equipment. The choice of the hotel is made according to its capacity to provide security, personnel, communications, food and electricity, as well as to its situation in regard of the theatre of operations. Those criteria, among others that I detail in this section often lead media workers to one specific hotel where they will live and work, sometimes for years. In return, their presence attracts other protagonists of the conflict: politicians, negotiators, experts and military officials, as well as civilians. The discussions and negotiations that take place in the hotel premises between those actors, added to the fact that it is also from there that images and discourses about war are put in circulation, contribute to transforming it into a pivotal place in the unfolding of events. A hotel can become a 'war hotel' for various reasons. Five of these contribute to defining this concept.

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<sup>35</sup> One infamous example took place at the Hotel Fontana in Bratunac (Bosnia-Herzegovina) on 11 July 1995. This is where the Bosnian Serb army chief Ratko Mladic and Thomas Karremans, Commander of the Dutch UN Peacekeeping troops in charge of protecting the enclave of Srebrenica met to negotiate and organize the deportation of more than 8 000 Muslim men—which ultimately led to their death. See Michael Dobbs. "Mladic in Srebrenica - Day 1". *Foreign Policy*. 10 Jan. 2012.

## 'War hotel' as proximity

If your photographs aren't good enough, you're not close enough.

Robert Capa

If we accept the idea that journalists need to be close to the events they are covering, they then have to travel abroad, and therefore they need modes of transportation as well as a place to sleep and work from. There are many ways to cover a conflict, and a solitary or independent journalist might want to choose alternative accommodation solutions. However, for those who are part of large media organisations, and for all the others who want to be part of the hub, the solution is: the war hotel.



Fig. 8. The CNN crew is arriving at the Al Rasheed Hotel. Film still from *Live from Baghdad*, directed Mick Jackson. (Film extract available on the dedicated website).

Returning to the example provided by the coverage of the First Gulf War by CNN in 1991, Robert Wiener, the CNN executive producer who led the crew responsible for the live broadcast of the landmark images of the initial attacks on Baghdad, wrote a book describing this episode of his career.<sup>36</sup> It was later adapted to become a fiction film directed by Mick Jackson, with the same title: *Live from Baghdad* (2002). The initial 84 minutes of the 104 minutes-long film are dedicated to the five months that the CNN crew spent at the Al-Rasheed Hotel in Baghdad waiting for the US attacks. As soon as the main characters

<sup>36</sup> See Robert Wiener. *Live from Baghdad: Making Journalism History Behind the Lines*. New York: St Martin's Griffin, 1991.

of the film arrive at the Baghdad airport, Wiener meets a CBS colleague who is forced to leave the country. He is the one to suggest that Wiener and his crew stay at the Al Rasheed Hotel. Still at the airport, the crew meets the minder they were assigned by the Ministry of Information, who is there 'to help' them, as he puts it. Shortly after the eighth minute, the crew arrives at the hotel and checks in (fig. 8). Wiener sees that many more government minders are prowling in the lobby. The Ministry of Information even has a desk facing the reception (fig. 9).



**Fig. 9.** The Iraqi Ministry of Information has a desk in the lobby of the Al-Rasheed Hotel. Film still from *Live from Baghdad*, directed by Mick Jackson. (Film extract available on the dedicated website).

To avoid being assigned an official translator who would most probably report everything to the authorities, Wiener swiftly hires an Egyptian tourist guide he meets at the reception. While bribing the reception clerk to get rooms for his staff, Wiener hears from a colleague working for the ABC television network a confirmation that Saddam Hussein is expelling most of the foreign press from the country. This is enough to make us understand that they will be working against the odds. If he wants to be in Baghdad in the close vicinity of the attacks to come, Wiener understands that he needs to accept that the whereabouts of his crew are to be closely monitored by the Iraqi administration. Proximity to the events implies being watched (by minders, by surveillance cameras...). Therefore, it also implies to be given restricted access to information and people. His work as an executive producer will be about finding stratagems to by-pass the restrictions, while behaving according to the regime's conditions. The pending sanction is expulsion and remoteness.

During the Iraq War starting in 2003, most of the foreign reporters stayed at another hotel: the Palestine, overlooking Firdos Square where the American troops famously toppled a statue of Saddam Hussein shortly after the invasion. The proximity of that hotel, full of journalists, played a role in the choice made by the troops to knock down this particular statue among all the available exemplars in the city. Taking it down under the eyes and the lenses of the reporters assured them wide coverage of this most symbolic action.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, the images of the statue of Saddam falling down became an iconic representation of the victory of the US, and a sign of their ‘full recovery’, only nineteen months after the fall of the Twin Towers. These images became highly emblematic of the unmet promise of a wholesome regime change.<sup>38</sup>



Fig. 10. The toppling of Saddam Hussein's statue as seen from the Palestine Hotel, Firdos Square, Baghdad, 9 April 2003. Photo: Patrick Baz / AFP / Getty Images.

During the weeks and months that followed, as Iraq drifted into a war that lasted officially until the end of 2011, the work of reporters became growingly dangerous. Violent attacks against journalists became daily facts.<sup>39</sup> Journalists were not able to venture outside the guarded compound of the hotel without the protection of heavily armed private security or without being embedded with the American or British troops. The impossibility to cover the events and

<sup>37</sup> See Michael Omer-Man. "This Week in History: Toppling Saddam Hussein". *Jerusalem Post*, 4 Aug. 2012.

<sup>38</sup> For a comprehensive description of the event of the toppling of the statue of Saddam Hussein, see Peter Maass. "The Toppling". *The New Yorker*, 10 Jan. 2011.

<sup>39</sup> Between the American invasion in March 2003 and December 2011, when the war was declared over, at least 150 journalists and 54 media support workers were killed. At least 92 of these deaths were not "collateral damages" but rather targeted assassinations. See Frank Smyth. "Iraq War And News Media: A Look Inside The Death Toll". *Committee to Protect Journalists*. 18 March 2013.

to meet and interview civilians without being surrounded by bodyguards convinced some journalists that it made no difference if they were in Baghdad inside a hotel or in their office in Paris, London or New York. Therefore, they left Iraq. A handful of them stayed, and they were criticised for practicing what Robert Fisk, a correspondent for *The Independent*, called 'hotel journalism'.<sup>40</sup> Fisk coins this very suggestive and somehow misleading expression—the image of the journalist spending his days at the bar waiting for brave colleagues to bring back news from the front is a tenacious cliché. Fisk suggests that the threat on journalists' lives during the second Gulf War gave the US Army a free hand as journalists were kept out of the action. Fisk notes that the only way for Western journalists to venture outside their hotel in Baghdad was to be embedded with the troops, thus reducing their vision of the war by getting only the American side of the story. Journalist John J. Fialka makes a similar comment in his analysis of the working conditions of the press during the 1<sup>st</sup> Gulf War. His intonation is somehow more accusatory when he writes:

In all American wars, the number of journalists who actually witness the violence, danger, bloodshed, and the snafus of combat is a tiny minority of those who go to cover the war. This phenomenon continues to amaze the military. Colonel Mulvey, who fended off the crowds of reporters at the JIB in the Dhahran International Hotel, recalls that as the commander of a rifle platoon in Vietnam, 'I never saw a reporter during the entire year in the field'.<sup>41</sup>

In an interview he gave me, Patrick Robert, an independent photographer who worked in Iraq, explained the case of a colleague of his—who remained anonymous in the discussion—who stayed in Baghdad long after all the other journalists had left. He wrote articles and broadcast radio reports mostly for French-speaking media networks, working exclusively from his hotel room. This is where he had installed a few television monitors to watch CNN, Al-Jazeera, Al-Arabiya, etc. simultaneously. He also had access by Internet to the Agence France Press wire. He would only leave the hotel in an armoured vehicle to attend press conferences held by the coalition or the Iraqi government. Robert quoted him claiming the value of his work: "yes, I do stay in my hotel room, I have no choice, I have no time for running around the city, and if I had, I would need to take so much care, and go with so many

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<sup>40</sup> Robert Fisk. "Hotel Journalism Gives American Troops a Free Hand as the Press Shelters Indoors." *The Independent*, 17 Jan. 2005.

<sup>41</sup> John Fialka. *Hotel Warrior: Covering the Gulf War*. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1991. p. 55.

bodyguards, that what I would see would be anyway totally biased”.<sup>42</sup> Despite reduced access to the protagonists of the conflict due to the violence raging in the streets, Robert estimated that being close to the events—even under such extreme conditions that made journalists remain secluded in their hotel—did allow one to see and to know much more than one would do by staying in an office in Paris, New York or London.

Right from the beginning of the film *Live from Baghdad*, we understand that there is a strong competition between the various media networks to cover the events—CNN, ABC, CBS, to name only the few that are mentioned. It seems as if major media networks cannot afford not to have a correspondent on site. Journalists heading for Tripoli in February-March 2011 to cover the expected fall of Muammar Gaddafi knew they would not be given the possibility to circulate as they pleased. Nevertheless, most of the international media networks sent people and equipment to Libya. One of the city’s most luxurious hotels, the Rixos Al-Nasr Hotel, was as far as they could get. The hotel belongs to the Turkish-based Rixos Hotels group and opened in March 2010. This is where the government forced foreign journalists to stay. Later in August 2011, when the battle for Tripoli began, journalists were literally held hostages by the Gaddafi regime inside the hotel. A report by Charles Stratford for Al Jazeera titled “International Journalists Remain Trapped in Rixos” shows almost grotesque images of journalists wearing flak jackets inside the luxurious hotel (fig. 11).



**Fig. 11.** In August 2011, journalists were not able to leave the hotel Rixos in Tripoli of their own free will. Many reports were done on this situation, offering a rare opportunity to see the hotel where journalists work. Video still from an Al Jazeera report broadcast on 24 August 2011. (The full report is available on the dedicated website).

<sup>42</sup> Patrick Robert. Skype interview. 1 June 2011 (my translation from French).

The fact that a large number of journalists were trapped inside the hotel without being able to do anything else than reflect on their condition resulted in a few interesting examples of accounts on the work and life of journalists inside hotels, which is something of a rarity. One of these gems is Jonathan Miller's report for Channel 4, "How to report news from inside Gaddafi's Tripoli heartland", broadcast on 24 April 2011. Talking about the presence of foreign journalists such as himself in Tripoli, Miller presents the hotel lobby as the "centre of [their] universe". He goes on describing their work: "the Rixos lobby correspondents huddle here to file copy, call contacts and write about a war we're not allowed to witness. But the regime has planted its people throughout the hotel. There are scores of government minders and their faces change every day. They hang out in the hotel drinking endless cups of coffee. Our job is to film things the government doesn't want us to see, theirs is to stop us".



**Fig. 12.** Jonathan Miller, one of the journalists trapped inside the Rixos hotel is seen in his hotel room. This sequence is a *mise en scène* of the working conditions of the media workers in Tripoli at that time. Video still from a Channel 4 News broadcast on 24 April 2011. (The full report is available on the dedicated website).

In another sequence of the same report, Miller shows himself in his impeccably ironed white shirt looking at images of combat on a computer screen, sitting at a table in what seems to be, by the size and the style of the table he is sitting at, a hotel room (fig. 12). His voiceover is heard saying "we can only leave [the hotel] with government minders to see what the government wants us to see. There's been a war going on up the road for two months (...)." The computer sits among other pieces of equipment that one can recognize as being professional portable video editing equipment. This image suggests that Miller wants to show in an unusually detailed fashion how journalists work, and to prove that they are ready (and equipped) to do so. If they do not however, it is because they are prevented from doing so by an outside force. His report is precisely about that: to prove that he is close to the

events, full of good will and ready to do his work. On various occasions in his reports from Tripoli, he showed himself being prevented from working by the government minders. His reports feel generally like an apologetic response to the poor coverage of the conflict rather than a deliberate Benjaminian attempt to 'describe the relation' to produce a critique of the violence of the regime.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, in "How to report news from inside Gaddafi's Tripoli heartland", he does manage to show some of the framing operations as well as elements of the apparatus of restriction. Furthermore, his images shed light on how the regime operates a clever twist in one of the functions of the war hotel. The strong belief among reporters that 'war hotel' means proximity contributes to transforming it into the instrument that regimes might use to counter the accessibility they are longing for. War hotels are tools used to grant media nearness in space without necessarily according them access to information. During the Egyptian revolution of 2011, most journalists wanted to be close to Tahrir Square and many of the TV teams found prime positions overlooking the square from the balconies of the Hotel Hilton Ramses. Soon after, when Mubarak supporters started turning their anger against the foreign press and incidentally against the hotel, journalists were not allowed to occupy rooms overlooking the square. When they did nonetheless, the hotel security service would burst in their room, confiscating their equipment on some occasions. Because of the angry mobs waiting for them outside, journalists were at some point even prevented from leaving the premises of the hotel. Chris Cobb-Smith, a media safety advisor with a military background, who accompanied a BBC television crew to Cairo during that time commented on the situation in an interview he gave me: "That was a terrible situation: you got yourself on a prime position but you couldn't film from the balconies and then you couldn't leave the hotel. So what was the point? You were too close to the action (...). So we shouldn't be too close to where it's all happening".<sup>44</sup>

Finding the right distance to the events is a long-time and key issue for war journalism. A saying routinely attributed to Robert Capa has long influenced journalists—and more specifically those involved in the production of images—to get as close as possible to their subject. One aspect of Cobb-Smith's work consists in taking care of the logistics of war reporting, which includes choosing the proper hotel for journalists. He explained that "there is

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<sup>43</sup> See Walter Benjamin. "Critique of Violence." *Selected Writings*. Vol. 1. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996. pp. 1913-26.

<sup>44</sup> Chris Cobb-Smith. Phone interview. 6 June 2012. And Skype interview. 4 Feb. 2014.

always a conflict between remaining safe and achieving the editorial lane.” He added, “if it doesn’t increase the risk immeasurably, of course [the story] has to come first” and “if we have to go on the 20<sup>th</sup> floor to get a good view of the fighting, that’s the imperative.” This aspect concerning the conditions in which images are produced brings us to the second definition of ‘war hotel’.

### **‘War hotel’ as vantage point**

*Under Fire*, a film directed by Roger Spottiswoode in 1983, has some interesting moments showing how journalists reported on the last days of the dictatorial Somoza regime in Nicaragua in 1979. In one scene, we see a group of foreign journalists gathered on the roof of their hotel to watch the bombing of Managua by Army planes (fig. 13). Some of the journalists use that landscape as a background to file their report. Most of the journalists are standing, while some are sitting as if they were spectators of a theatre play.

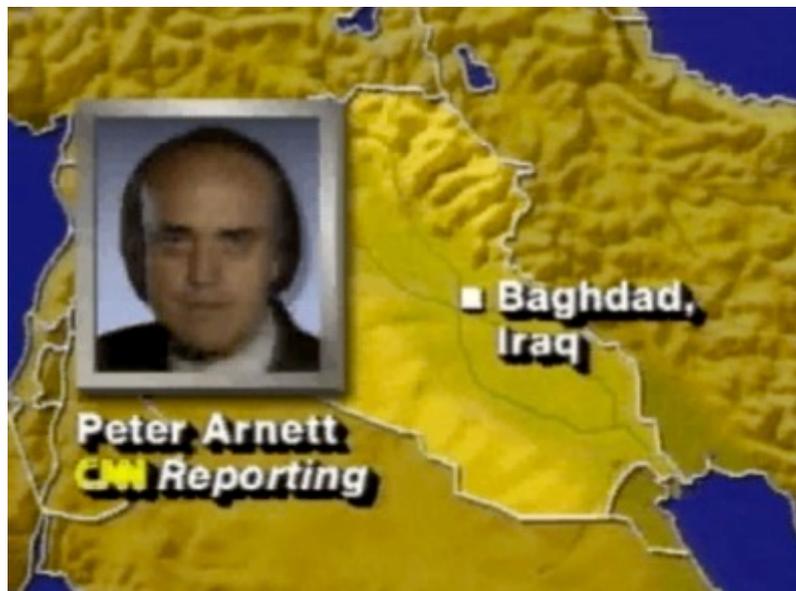


**Fig. 13.** Journalists gather on the hotel roof to observe and film an air raid on Managua. Film still from *Under Fire* directed by Roger Spottiswoode. (Film extract available on the dedicated website).

A similar situation occurs in *Live from Baghdad* by director Mick Jackson (2002) when the journalists are seen broadcasting the battle as it is seen from the hotel (fig. 14). CNN executive producer Robert Wiener’s decision to stay in Baghdad, despite all the warnings that had been given to foreign nationals to leave the country before the American assault, paid off. He managed to broadcast the war live, filming the first attacks from the window of the hotel room that his crew was occupying at the Al Rasheed hotel. The voices of journalists Bernard Shaw and Peter Arnett describing how “the sky over Baghdad has been illuminated” have become somehow iconic (fig. 15). Mick Jackson re-constitutes a moment in the history of journalism that set the tone for what reporters hope to achieve in their broadcast of images of conflicts since then. ‘Live’ images of bombardments and battles are now part of the basic expectations of the public.



**Fig. 14.** The window of the hotel room is used to film the attacks on Baghdad during the First Gulf War. Film still from *Live from Baghdad*, directed by Mick Jackson. (Film extract available on the dedicated website).



**Fig. 15.** This image appeared on television monitors around the world while CNN journalist Peter Arnett reported live from his hotel room during the attacks on Baghdad during the First Gulf War. Video still from a CNN news broadcast on 17 January 1991. (An audio extract of the most famous sequence of the report is available on the dedicated website).

In Benghazi in 2011, photo reporter Patrick Baz achieved this much sought after goal (fig. 16). Speaking about how he achieved this in a Skype interview he gave me in January 2014, he says:

I'd say it's 50% luck, and 50% of organization. You have to provoke luck. It doesn't come to you like that. Whenever I go to war torn countries or places where there's conflict, I usually pick a hotel with a view. I don't believe I can see things from the first or second floor, so I usually tend to go very high up. This way I can see what's going on in the city, because when you wake up in the early morning you're not in the streets and you need to see what's going on.



Fig. 16. A government fighter plane crashing on Benghazi on 19 March, 2011. Photo-journalist Patrick Baz took this photograph from his hotel balcony. In a Skype interview on 28 January 2014, he tells how he did it (extract of the interview available on the dedicated website). Photo: Patrick Baz/AFP.

Another recent iteration of this phenomenon took place on 20 February 2014, when violent clashes occurred on Maidan Place in Kiev between protestors and government forces. On the night of the most violent day when over 70 people were killed, the journalist of Arte Journal was talking to the news presenter live from his room at the Hotel Ukraine overlooking the square (fig. 17). During their conversation, the journalist wearing a loose flak jacket mentioned several times that he was in his hotel and that it offered some of the best views on the battle. Two versions of the conversation were broadcast, one for the French edition of the journal, the other for the German edition. In both versions, the journalist appears on the screen with the city as a background. It is dark outside and one can only distinguish some street lighting. In the French edition, it feels as if the journalist is floating over the city, as there is no indication that he is standing on a balcony. In the German version however, what seems to be the doorframe of the balcony is seen in the image. It is then clear that the journalist is inside. It was not possible to find out which one of the two conversations was recorded first. One indicator though suggests that the German version was done before the French one: the lighting on the journalist in Kiev is much better in the French version, and we can therefore suppose that it has been adjusted in a second step. On the same occasion, someone may have suggested to tighten the frame to hide the doorframe. If the journalist decided to appear with his flak jacket on, was it seen as a contradiction to remind the spectators that he was safely reporting from his hotel room?



Fig. 17. The French and the German versions of Arte Journal, live from Kiev, differed slightly on 20 February 2014. The French crew reframed the image of the journalist speaking from his hotel room overlooking the Maidan as to conceal the window frame. Video still from a Arte news report broadcast on 20 February 2014.

Another insightful example of the hotel as vantage point is given by the events that unfolded on Tahrir Square in Cairo during the demonstrations of the Arab Spring in the early months of 2011. All the hotels around Tahrir Square and the 6 of October Bridge behind the Egyptian Museum were then heavily packed with journalists. Professional press photographers and camera operators used the windows or balconies of hotels to produce high-angle shots of the demonstrations. An analysis of these images in relationship to a map of the area allows us to identify four main hotels: the Hilton Ramses, the Intercontinental Semiramis, the Arabesque Hostel, and the Ismailia Hotel (fig. 18). The images shot from these hotels made it possible to show the extent of the protests as the square was filled by a growing number of demonstrators (fig. 19a-b). In return, the images that were broadcast contributed to the augmentation of the number of demonstrators in the streets of Cairo.<sup>45</sup> The height of the hotel became a tool not only for the journalists but for the protagonists of the conflict as well. All that was seen from the ‘watchtower’ contributed to taking decisions on the ground (fig. 20). However, the difference with a military watchtower is that the information did not go directly from the tower to the ground, but rather it first circulated around the world to come back seconds later to television sets on the ground, a few meters below and throughout the city of Cairo.

<sup>45</sup> “From the hotel balcony they documented one of the most violent clashes of the 18-day revolt, and their footage appeared in news bulletins around the world. In Cairo, despite the Internet ban, many people managed to see the images, and enraged, took to the streets to join the protests.” Jess Smee. “Reporting on Revolution: Movie Examines Journalists’ Battle to Report Egypt’s Uprising”. *Spiegel Online*, 17 Feb. 2012.

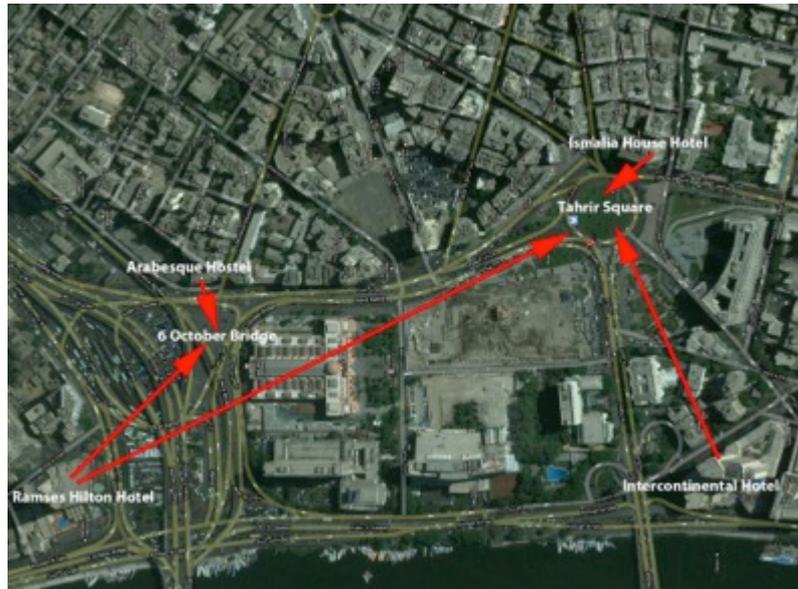


Fig. 18. Map situating the hotels used by journalists around Tahrir Square to report on the Egyptian Revolution in 2011. Map: Google Maps, cartography: Emanuel Licha



Fig. 19 a-b. Journalists used the Hilton Ramses hotel balconies to shoot images of the 2011 protests on Tahrir Square in Cairo. Video still from a NBC News broadcast on 2 February 2011 (upper image). Photo: The Guardian / Reuters, Feb. 4, 2011 (lower image).



Fig. 20. View of the (watch)tower of the Hilton Ramses Hotel, with the 6 October bridge, as seen from Tahrir Square. Photo: Hannibal Hanschke / MAXPPP

Among all the hotels around the square that were used by media workers, the case of the Hilton Ramses Hotel is particularly interesting. The hotel is a charmless tower of about 35 floors situated at about 100m from Tahrir Square. Media organizations such as CNN, France2, TF1, among many others, chose it as it offers very good views of the surroundings. A great number of images of the demonstrations that were broadcast by the international media were shot from its balconies. However, on February 3, the first attacks on journalists by pro-Mubarak mobs started. The following day thousands of Mubarak supporters gathered outside the Hilton Ramses shouting slogans such as “bring them [the foreign journalists] to us”, and threatening to throw rocks at the windows.<sup>46</sup> They had identified the property as home base for foreign news crews through the shots they broadcast.<sup>47</sup> In response to this threat, the administration of the Hilton decided to forbid journalists to use the hotel windows and balconies to shoot images.<sup>48</sup> This decision caused uproar in the press with accusations against the American-owned Hilton chain of hotels of collaborating with the Mubarak government, as other international companies

<sup>46</sup> See Nicolas Delesalle. “Au Caire, l’hôtel des caméras brisées”. *Télérama*, 9 Feb. 2011. See also “Pro-Mubarak Rioters Chase Reporters in Cairo Hotels”. Associated Press and JPOST.com Staff, 3 Feb. 2011; “Dutch Journalists Evacuated From Hotel In Cairo”. Radio Netherland Worldwide. 4 Feb. 2011.

<sup>47</sup> See Xeni Jardin. “Egypt: Journalists Targeted at Hilton Hotel in Cairo”. *Boingboing*, 3 Feb. 2011.

<sup>48</sup> The Hilton Hotels worldwide management issued a press release stating that “Due to the gravity, immediacy and dynamic nature of the situation in Cairo, our hotel is implementing additional measures to ensure the ongoing safety and security of our guests and employees, as this remains our highest priority. These measures include a request not to film from the property due to the threat this poses to the reporters themselves as well as others on property. We appreciate your understanding and support during these challenging circumstances”. “Official Statement From Hilton Worldwide Regarding The Situation In Cairo, Egypt”. Hilton Hotels and Resorts, Global Media Center, 3 Feb. 2011.

had done.<sup>49</sup> The management of the hotel even forced reporters to check in their broadcast gear on arrival, and retrieve it when they step out of the property. This anecdote reminds us of a similar incident at the Commodore Hotel in Beirut during the Civil War, when gunmen were asked to check their weapons at the door.<sup>50</sup>

As a matter of fact, for the same reasons that journalists choose a hotel because it offers a good vantage point on the theatre of operations, an interesting shift of function can happen when a hotel stops operating as an inn to become some kind of sentry box or watchtower. The hotel then becomes literally part of the war machinery, as snipers take advantage of its height to control a given area. Indeed, hotels are often high-rise buildings because architects are asked to give tourists the best possible views of the surroundings. What is a pleasurable and luxurious activity during a time of peace becomes a strategic *sine qua non* in the art of war: to control one must be able to see.<sup>51</sup>



Fig. 21. View from inside the Holiday Inn in Beirut during the episode of the 'Battle of the hotels' in 1975 during the Civil War. Photo: Don McCullin.

For some days in October 1975, during the Lebanese civil war, both 'clientele' of tourists and fighters shared the same space, during the first moments of a sub-conflict called 'The Battle of the Hotels' that lasted until December of the same year (fig. 21). Combats opposing the militia of the Independent

<sup>49</sup> See Jardin. Op. cit. "Vodafone, the British-based cell phone network, is believed to have sent pro-Mubarak text messages at the government's behest".

<sup>50</sup> See J. Michael Kennedy. "Beirut Haven for Press to Close Its Doors : Commodore 'Won't Be a Hotel Anymore,' Owner Says of Money-Loser". *Los Angeles Times*, 21 Feb. 1987.

<sup>51</sup> See Eyal Weizman. *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation*. London: Verso, 2007.

Nasserite Movement (INM) and the Christian fighters of the Phalange Kataeb Regulatory Forces (KRF) started on October 24 in the Minet-el-Hosn hotel district of downtown Beirut to take possession of high buildings, such as the Holiday Inn, the St-George Hotel and the Phoenicia Intercontinental Hotel. These operations created a shift in the function of these hotels. The good views initially offered to tourists became interesting for snipers as well. However, both groups can hardly coexist harmoniously: in 1975 Beirut they only managed to share the space for less than a week. Tourists and hotel staff left the hotel during a ceasefire organised for their evacuation on October 29.<sup>52</sup>

As a slogan of the Holiday Inn chain of hotels put it in the 1970's, "the best surprise is no surprise". The catchphrase took an ironic turn in Sarajevo on April 5, 1992 when Serb paramilitaries led by Radovan Karadžić shot from the roof of the Holiday Inn Sarajevo on a crowd of civilians gathered in front of the nearby parliament during a demonstration, killing six demonstrators. Between March 2 and April 6, 1992, Karadžić who was the leader of the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) had established his party headquarter at the Holiday Inn Sarajevo.<sup>53</sup> This killing started the Bosnian war on the following day, which lasted until December 1995.<sup>54</sup>

The coexistence of different categories of users in one space makes the Holiday Inn of Sarajevo particularly interesting for the discussion on the various roles and functions of hotels in conflicts, while offering a good example of the versatility of such spaces. Soon after the beginning of the war, Karadžić and his acolytes left the hotel to go to Pale, yet another position overlooking Sarajevo, where they remained throughout the war. They made space for the next customers: the horde of foreign reporters who came to cover the conflict and chose to stay at the Holiday Inn, which was at the time the only big hotel in town, and therefore the only place that could provide access to basic needs, in a city under siege.

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<sup>52</sup> For a detailed description of the Battle of the Hotels, see Edgar O'Ballance. *Civil War in Lebanon, 1975-92*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998.

<sup>53</sup> See Robert J. Donia. *Radovan Karadžić: Architect of the Bosnian Genocide*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014. p. 189.

<sup>54</sup> See Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia : A Short Story*. New York: New York University Press, 1996. p. 231.

## 'War hotel' as security

The Serena Hotel is an ideal target for the Taliban. The most luxurious hotel in the city, it was also, until last Thursday, the safest in Kabul. It had therefore become a haven for official delegations, especially that of the UN. (...) Diplomats, journalists and Afghan officials met regularly at the hotel cafeteria to exchange scoops and information about Hamid Karzai's succession and the upcoming elections.<sup>55</sup>

One major reason for journalists to choose to live in a specific hotel has to do with logistics. When all the infrastructure of a city collapses, when there are shortages of water, food, electricity and means of communication, the hotel is sometimes able to provide the basic needs for people to live and work. In 2006, during the Israeli attacks on Beirut, the Commodore Hotel was particularly popular among journalists who came to cover the events. Although the city was then not cut-off and had regular access to electricity, food and water supplies, those in charge of the logistics of the media remembered that during the Lebanese civil war, the Commodore had been the favourite cluster for reporters. The main reason for this was that the staff managed to have the hotel running and did a lot to facilitate the life of their guests. When it finally closed its doors in February 1987 after a bloody battle in its lobby between Druse and Shiite Moslem militiamen, nostalgic journalists who had resided there wrote articles on the hotel, raving about Fuad Saleh, the Commodore's "dapper", "impeccably attired in custom-made suits", "unflappable manager" of the hotel. He was considered "a super 'fixer' for the hotel's guests, a man who could overcome almost any problem".<sup>56</sup> He and the hotel owner, Youssef Nazzal, "regularly worked miracles to keep the hotel running, their guests satisfied." Although, upon checking in, nervous guests were asked if they wanted a room on the "shell side or car bomb side",<sup>57</sup> the Commodore remained a relatively safe place to be even during the gloomiest days of the civil war. This was achieved by Nazzal by "paying off the various militia factions that roamed the streets and, when necessary, by posting guards around the hotel".<sup>58</sup>

The sense of safety provided by the hotel can sometimes be challenged *because* journalists gather there. As we have seen with the example of the

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<sup>55</sup> Frédéric Bobin. "À Kaboul, les étrangers forcés de vivre dans des bunkers". *Le Monde*, 21 Mar. 2014. (My translation).

<sup>56</sup> See Rebecca Trounson. "Gunfight Is Last Straw For Historic Beirut Hotel Staff", *Houston Chronicle*, 23 Feb. 1987.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Kennedy. Op. cit.

Hilton Ramses in Cairo, those who recognise themselves as the target of the media might attack the journalists' hotel.<sup>59</sup> In certain cases, such attacks constitute a way to attract wide media attention. Another example is the Europa Hotel in Belfast which has been named the 'world's most bombed hotel', after a countless number of attacks were conducted against it by the IRA.<sup>60</sup>

Casualties can also be caused by 'friendly fire'. On April 8, 2003, an American tank fired a shell on the Palestine Hotel in Baghdad, killing two journalists. As Colin Powell had subsequently admitted, the Army knew that foreign journalists were staying there, but the exact reasons why the Army opened fire and the exact circumstances of that 'incident' remain unknown to this day, although colleagues of the journalists who were killed on that day advocate the idea that this attack was intentional.<sup>61</sup>

To secure the hotel premises, some hotel management hire private security. In Baghdad, heavily armed men were recruited, contributing further more to a certain isolation of the place. This of course has a cost which is only worth if there is a sufficient number of journalists to protect. This cluster makes it also easier to inform the combatants about the importance of not attacking it. On certain occasions, organizations such as NATO or the US military are informed about the presence of journalists in specific hotels and summoned to avoid bombing the area.<sup>62</sup> Because of this, a hotel becomes a zone of exclusion, a sheltered and somehow 'neutral' area spared by the war that obeys other laws and deals with other realities, the way embassies do. The

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<sup>59</sup> A similar attack by angry mob took place at Rixos Hotel in Tripoli on 27 June 2011. See O.A.. "Reporting from Libya: Close your window". *The Economist*, 1 Jul 2011.

<sup>60</sup> See Ian Wylie. "He's Belfast Security Blanket". *Fast Company magazine*, Dec. 2001. "No one's sure of the exact tally—the staff stopped counting after 30—but only the Holiday Inn in Sarajevo can rival the four-star hotel on Belfast's Great Victoria Street for the unenviable title of "world's most bombed hotel." (...). Because it remained Belfast's only world-class hotel, the Europa became home to all the hacks covering the conflict. The IRA's easy target became the perfect target. With every attack, the press got its story and the terrorists got publicity."

<sup>61</sup> The documentary *Hotel Palestine : Killing the Witness* (Telecinco, 2006) recounts the circumstances in which the American tank fired a shell on the hotel. The film's main argument is that this attack was planned and meant to intimidate media workers. The synopsis of the film reads: "The Palestine Hotel was to be a safe space in Baghdad for members of the media who were capturing the essence of war in Iraq through various mediums to inform the people. The Pentagon was told their location coordinates, and the journalists felt secure in the promise that the firing would not be targeted towards their site. But on 8 April 2003, a U.S. tank aimed and fired at the floor where José Couso was set up with his camera. The U.S. government continues to tell conflicted stories as to what happened that day".

<sup>62</sup> As Chris Cobb-Smith, a media safety advisor told me: "In the early days of the Gulf War, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Gulf War, I think it was good that all the journalists were in one hotel. Because that information (...) was transmitted to NATO. And so they knew there were one or two hotels that were full of foreign media and that they had to take a particular care to avoid any collateral damage to those hotels. I do know these hotels did suffer some strikes and some people were killed and injured. But there are some scenarios where I think it's good that an organization like NATO says look, you must put a big red circle around this hotel. You're attacking that country but this is where all the foreign media are. So in some aspects it could be a lot safer for them all to be together." See Cobb-Smith. Skype interview. Op. cit.

proximity of a war hotel can be therefore an opportunity for those seeking a sanctuary for bellicose activities. Hamas in Gaza, for example, has often been accused of using journalists as human-shields, by taking advantage of the proximity of a war hotel to install rocket launching devices.<sup>63</sup>

This 'bubble' contributes to making the war hotel also attractive for civilians who might seek refuge in the hotel. Officials of the Gaddafi regime understood it: during the Libyan Civil War in 2011 they installed their family members at the Rixos hotel, where the media workers were all living. When the situation in Tripoli became critical for the government, BBC journalist Matthew Price observed "the children and the wives of Col Muammar Gaddafi's officials packing and leaving the five-star Rixos hotel (...) heading presumably somewhere safer".<sup>64</sup>

One other possibility for civilians to benefit from the relative safety of the war hotel is to become part of its staff. It is interesting to note that the government of Bosnia in 1992 had recognized the Holiday Inn in Sarajevo as a strategic institution in war, one that had to continue running—such as other state-run companies dedicated to public service. Therefore, the male hotel workers were not required to be part of the army and to go to the frontline. This made the work positions at the Holiday Inn to be much sought-after, even though, so the story goes, employees were not paid for their work.<sup>65</sup> Still, employees, male or female, enjoyed working at the hotel, as they often felt safer there than in their own homes.

This same perception of the hotel as an international, protected zone, are the reasons that brought Tutsis to seek refuge at the Hotel des Mille Collines in Kigali during the genocide in Rwanda. Paul Rusesabagina, the hotel manager, allegedly sheltered over 1,200 refugees in the hotel. It is said that he used his influence and connections to achieve this.<sup>66</sup> Rusesabagina's figure became

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<sup>63</sup> See Anne Barnard and Jodi Rudoren. "Israel Says That Hamas Uses Civilian Shields, Reviving Debate", *The New York Times*, 23 July 2014. They write, "Militant rockets can be seen launching from crowded neighborhoods, near apartment buildings, schools and hotels."

<sup>64</sup> Matthew Price. "Inside Tripoli's Rixos Hotel As Rebels Close In". BBC News. 22 Aug. 2011.

<sup>65</sup> The information about the work conditions at the Holiday Inn during the war comes from interviews I conducted at the hotel in April 2012 with some members of the personnel: Hatidža Kadribegović, head of the hospitality service from 1992 to 2012; Slobodan Kakuča, head of food and drink department since 1984; and Zahi Bukva, maître d'hôtel since 1988. The economy of the country was very heavily disrupted, and banks stopped functioning. The hotel was Austrian-owned and paying salaries from Austria was somehow very difficult. Hatidža Kadribegović told me that employees "forgot" to ask retroactively for their wages, even though the hotel made large profits during the war (it was fully booked by journalists and by NGO and international organizations workers during almost four years, with an average daily rate of 82 US\$).

<sup>66</sup> See "Hotel Rwanda's Paul Rusesabagina Lantos award condemned". BBC News. 17 Nov. 2011.

the main protagonist of a film directed by Terry George about the genocide in Rwanda. In a scene of *Hotel Rwanda* (2004), we see large numbers of civilians arriving at the hotel compound, seeking refuge from the massacres that started (fig. 22). Many of them are severely injured, and one of them tells Rusesabagina that the militias are “killing everyone”. In one shot of that sequence, we see joining in the same space, at the entrance of the hotel, hotel staff, civilians, journalists and UN soldiers. A few seconds later, the perpetrators also appear chasing the civilians who are now hiding inside the hotel. UN General Roméo Dallaire manages to push them back by threatening them with his gun. Before leaving, the militiamen throw a blue helmet stained with blood on the ground. We understand that it belonged to one of the ten UNAMIR soldiers who were killed while escorting Prime Minister Uwilingiyimana. The next scene shows Dallaire asking Rusesabagina to keep the refugees inside the hotel. He promises to put “two of [his] best lieutenants” to protect the hotel gate, while the “Europeans are putting together an intervention force” supposed to arrive in Kigali in a few days. As we know, this force did come to Kigali only to evacuate foreigners, not to protect civilians.



**Fig. 22.** Refugees in Kigali sought shelter at the Hotel des Mille-Collines compound. A re-enactment for the film *Hotel Rwanda* shows hotel staff and UN soldiers helping the refugees while a TV crew is filming. Film still from *Hotel Rwanda* directed by Terry George. (Film extract available on the dedicated website).

The story of another civilian seeking protection sheds an interesting light on the function of war hotels as refuges. Eman Al-Obeidy, a Libyan woman who claimed that she was detained, raped and beaten by Gadhafi brigades, burst at breakfast time into the lobby of the Rixos Al-Nasr hotel in Tripoli on March 26, 2011.<sup>67</sup> This is where she met Channel 4 journalist Jonathan Miller. She

<sup>67</sup> For a detailed account of this episode, see David D. Kirkpatrick. “Libyan Woman Struggles to Tell Media of Her Rape”. *The New York Times*, 26 Mar. 2011.

told him her story only minutes before being spotted by government minders who, unsurprisingly, arrested her and deported her to an unknown location. What is slightly more unusual is that hotel employees assisted them in this task (fig. 23). In a CNN report, they are seen holding Al-Obeidi and putting a dark cloth over her head. Some others are said to have threatened journalists with a (butter?) knife, and even with a gun.



**Fig. 23.** Eman al-Obeidi is being held by hotel employees before being arrested by government minders. Video still from a CNN report broadcast on 26 March 2011. (The full report is available on the dedicated website).

One would expect a somehow more neutral stance from the employees of a Turkish-owned international chain of hotels. A few days after the arrest, a public announcement issued on Facebook by the hotel management tried to re-establish this neutrality (fig. 24). Still, it is easy to imagine that there could have been a certain form of complicity between the owners of the hotel and the Gaddafi regime. The lobby of the hotel was adorned with portraits of the dictator (fig. 25), and Gaddafi himself made a few appearances in the hotel lobby to meet journalists and to give interviews. It was even rumoured among journalists that there was a direct access to the hotel's underground conference rooms via tunnels from Gaddafi's nearby compound at Bab al-Aziziya, although Bihan Varoz, the architect of the hotel denied it in an interview with the *Guardian*.<sup>68</sup> Still, the image of the luxury hotel as an oasis and a haven was severely undermined by such complicity.

Al-Obeidi underestimated the scale of this complicity when she came to the war hotel. She thought the cameras would protect her, but the violence and the arrogance of the regime hindered this endeavour. For her, this particular

<sup>68</sup> Matthew Weaver, et al. "Libya: the Fall of Tripoli". *The Guardian*, 24 Aug. 2011.

function of the war hotel as a secure place was not met. What she did achieve however is to spread her story on an international scale. She knew that the war hotel was the place to share her information.



Fig. 24. The Rixos Hotels administration used its Facebook page to make an announcement in response to the events that led to the arrest of Eman Al-Obeidy which involved some of its Tripoli employees, 27 March 2011. Source: Facebook.



Fig. 25. The portrait of Gaddafi adorned the Rixos hotel lobby, bringing suspicion over the independence of a foreign-owned hotel from the influence of the government. Video still from a Channel 4 report broadcast on 24 April 2011.

### **‘War hotel’ as communication**

When Al-Obeidy burst into the lobby of the Rixos hotel, she was chiefly coming to speak to foreign journalists. She knew they would disseminate the precious information she was about to deliver. The story she told only once to Miller at the hotel breakfast room was echoed around the world in the

following hours. This is one of the other functions of war hotels: they are places where one goes to speak and to give information. As a place that makes one speak, it is likely that there will be someone on the receiving end to listen to what is being said, to collect the information and to broadcast it. What is heard inside a war hotel is doomed to be known around the world. It acts as a resonance chamber. In his book *Hotel Warrior: Covering the Gulf War*, reporter John J. Fialka recounts a story that one of his colleagues told him: “We’d befriend the soldiers who would come in for a meal. We’d give them keys to our hotel room; that way they could have a hot shower and call home. Without even asking, they would just kinda talk about what was going on”.<sup>69</sup>

If Al-Obeidy used the hotel to speak in the hope that her words would reverberate, other categories of users try to counterbalance this function of the hotel as a listening and broadcast device. Going back once again to the film *Live from Baghdad*, the sequence following the moment when the CNN crew members check in at the Al-Rasheed shows them heading to their rooms as they appear on black and white surveillance monitors set throughout the hotel (fig. 26). As soon as they arrive to their room, they start transforming it into an editing and broadcast studio, while they check for hidden microphones and cameras. Needless to say, today’s spying technologies are far more sophisticated as they involve tools such as “eavesdropping radio signals beamed toward hotel rooms”.<sup>70</sup> It is therefore of no use to search rooms for hidden devices. When President Obama travels, his aides retrofit his hotel room by installing a ‘security tent’ into which he ducks when he handles sensitive information. A US official says that “[they] took for granted that in some of these hotels, no matter the state, that [spying] devices were built in there”.<sup>71</sup>

As early as the mid-1970’s during the Lebanese Civil War, Hotel Le Commodore’s owner Youssef Nazzal understood that one function of a war hotel was to provide access to proper communication technologies. Nazzal recounted how in 1976, during a flight between London and Beirut packed with journalists who were coming to cover the first events of the war, he was asked

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<sup>69</sup> Fialka. Op. cit. p. 47.

<sup>70</sup> “Even when Mr. Obama travels to allied nations, aides quickly set up the security tent — which has opaque sides and noise-making devices inside — in a room near his hotel suite. When the president needs to read a classified document or have a sensitive conversation, he ducks into the tent to shield himself from secret video cameras and listening devices.” See Michael S. Schmidt and Eric Schmitt. “Obama’s Portable Zone of Secrecy (Some Assembly Required)”. *New York Times*, 9 Nov. 2013.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

where was the best place to stay in town. He had recently acquired this hotel and he simply invited the reporters to stay over.<sup>72</sup> From that moment on, he made sure that journalists would have everything they needed for their work. He had new telephones and telex equipment installed, along with teleprinters that carried the Associated Press and Reuters reports. He managed to have his equipment always in a state ready for use, even when communications were knocked out in the rest of the city.



**Fig. 26.** Hotels can be zones of secrecy while being at the same time spaces that are constantly monitored. Film still from *Live from Baghdad*, directed by Mick Jackson. (Film extract available on the dedicated website).

Although the hotel management did not directly provide it, access to technology is also what made the Holiday Inn in Sarajevo so popular among media workers during the 1992-96 siege of the city.<sup>73</sup> The hotel was built for the 1984 Olympics with over 200 rooms. It was part of the infrastructure needed by this relatively small city to welcome such a big event. The building was equipped with its own water cisterns, which proved to be very useful some eight years after its construction in a besieged and cut-off city. Generators provided approximately three to four hours of electricity everyday, enough to keep some of the essential equipment working. With the help of some of the journalists the hotel staff managed to smuggle gasoline for the generators, trafficking with the Ukrainian and French soldiers of the UNPROFOR.<sup>74</sup> In 1992, satellite phones were still

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<sup>72</sup> See Kennedy, Op. cit.

<sup>73</sup> See Fialka, Op. cit., p. 4. During approximately the same years, in the preparation for the 1<sup>st</sup> Gulf War, Fialka describes the Dhahran International Hotel as a technological hub: "The hotel, long since booked solid by journalists, fairly bristled with sophisticated gear: laptop computers, satellite telephones, shortwave radios, fax machines, infrared cameras, and other electronic paraphernalia designed for nearly instantaneous communication from the desert".

<sup>74</sup> The information gathered on the life at the Holiday Inn during the war comes mostly from an interview with Rémy Ourdan, former correspondent for *Le Monde* in Sarajevo during the war. See Rémy Ourdan.

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heavy and expensive pieces of equipment and there were only five or six of them throughout the town. They belonged to major press agencies such as AFP and Reuters or media networks such as BBC or CNN. Smaller networks or newspapers, or independent journalists were not equipped. Therefore, they had to be on a waiting list to borrow one. Staying at the Holiday Inn, where these phones were installed, facilitated that process. War reporter Rémy Ourdan stayed throughout the conflict in Sarajevo. He arrived in the first days of the siege in April 1992, first as an independent journalist to become later the correspondent for *Le Monde*. He spent the first two years of the war at the Holiday Inn. In 1994, he was able to move out of the hotel to live in a private flat in the city for the last two years of the conflict, because he got access to two technological improvements: a Honda generator, light enough to be carried by one person, and a personal satellite phone. The phone was still not the one that journalists have nowadays that can fit in a pocket. It was a case “approximately three times the size of a computer”,<sup>75</sup> but still, these two pieces of equipment that he got for his personal use allowed him to free himself from the Holiday Inn and its technology, gaining a much sought-after communication-wise autonomy. Although he did not live in the hotel from 1994, Ourdan kept coming back on a regular basis to meet colleagues, because, as he puts it, it was beneficial for his work to be able to compare sources, information, and points of view with them. The access to information a war hotel provides is also beneficial to civilians. In besieged Sarajevo, as the Holiday Inn was one of the few places where there was still electricity and communication, it became one of the places where one would go to know what was happening in the rest of the country. The presence of generators maintained by the hotel staff and some of the foreign journalists permitted access to television broadcast that allowed the local employees to follow the news provided by international networks on the situation in the rest of the country. Some were even eager to know what was happening in Iraq, where there was at the time another conflict raging.<sup>76</sup> The hotel employees, through the close contact they had with the media workers living in the hotel, were also able to gather information on the situation outside and share it with their families and relatives.<sup>77</sup> A similar situation is evoked in a scene from the film *Hotel Rwanda* (2004). The hotel manager comes to repair

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Interview. Paris, 28 May 2011. And Skype interview. 29 Jan. 2014. I also conducted interviews with the Holiday Inn staff during a research trip to Sarajevo April 2012, and once again during the shooting of *Hotel Machine* in September 2014.

<sup>75</sup> Ourdan, Op. cit.

<sup>76</sup> See Kadribegović. Op. cit.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

the air conditioning system in the room of a television crew (fig. 27). While he is in the room, he catches sight of the footage a camera operator just brought back to the editing studio installed in that same room. This is how he discovers that the situation outside the hotel, only “half a mile” away, as the cameraman puts it, has gotten very bad: civilians are being massacred by militiamen at checkpoints.



**Fig. 27a-b.** Images of the violence outside are broadcast inside the hotel. Two film stills from *Hotel Rwanda*, directed by Terry George. (Film extract available on the dedicated website).

*Hotel Rwanda* (2004) and *Under Fire* (1983), both starring actor Nick Nolte, feature an important space within war hotels: the conference room, a space used to make formal announcements. In *Under Fire*, it is from the conference room that President Somozoa announces the death of a journalist. The journalist’s former partner, also a journalist herself, listens to the television broadcast of the president’s speech from her room situated in the same hotel (fig. 28). In *Hotel Rwanda* UNAMIR General Dallaire holds a press conference titled “Peace, love and brotherhood!” inside the hotel, raising his glass “to peace”. In both cases, officials—military or politicians—use the conference room to issue public statements. More recently, during the 2011 Libyan war, Moussa Ibrahim, the official government spokesperson, used the hotel compound to address the media and make statements on behalf of the government. Press conferences were held at any time of the day or of the night with Ibrahim’s own voice

resonating over the hotel's public address system, calling journalists to the press conference room (fig. 29).<sup>78</sup>



Fig. 28. A press conference held inside the hotel serves to announce the death of a journalist. That conference is broadcast on television, back into the rooms of the same hotel. Film still still from *Under Fire*, directed by Roger Spottiswoode (Film extract available on the dedicated website).



Fig. 29. Journalist gathered in the conference room of the Rixos Al-Nasr hotel in Tripoli, April 2011. Video still from Channel 4 report broadcast on 24 April 2011.

The conference room encompasses the various means of communication available in a war hotel. As shown by the two fiction films and by images from the Hyatt Belgrade, the Holiday Inn Sarajevo (fig. 30) or the Rixos Tripoli, it is equipped with microphones, speakers, cameras, screens, as well as Internet and satellite connections. This is the place where one goes to speak and to show images, as well as to record statements and to broadcast images. Because of these various communication functions, the conference room is, along with the lobby, the space in a war hotel where the vastest array of actors of a conflict will cross paths.

<sup>78</sup> See Al-shalchi, Hadeel. "Reporting From Tripoli, Chafing On Qadhafi's Leash". Associated Press, 4 Apr. 2011.

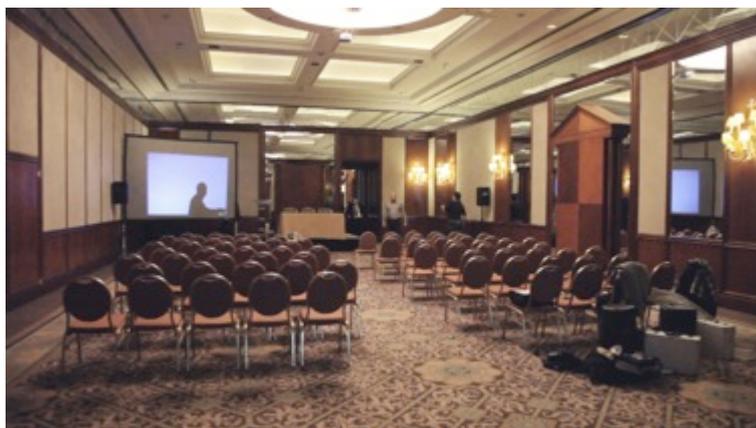


Fig. 30a-b. Hotel conference rooms at the Hotel Hyatt, Belgrade. and at the Holiday Inn, Sarajevo. Film stills from *Hotel Machine*, directed by Emanuel Licha.

### **‘War hotel’ as hub**

The fifth and last definition of ‘war hotel’ is a corollary of the four previous ones: be it for proximity, security, vantage point or communication reasons, a wide range of people are drawn to the war hotel. Journalist Susan Taylor Martin described Baghdad’s Palestine Hotel lobby during the Iraq War as “jammed with reporters, photographers, soldiers, translators, drivers, job seekers and various hangers-on”.<sup>79</sup> The Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuściński describes the crowd gathering at the New Africa Hotel in Dar es Salaam in similar terms.

In the very center of Dar es Salaam, halfway along Independence Avenue, stands a four-story, poured-concrete building encircled with balconies: the New Africa Hotel. There is a large terrace on the roof, with a long bar and several tables. All of Africa conspires here these days. Here gather the fugitives, refugees, and emigrants from various parts of the continent. One can spot

<sup>79</sup> Susan Taylor Martin. “In Baghdad, Lap Of Luxury Isn’t All That Comfortable”. *St. Petersburg Times*, 26 Apr. 2003.

sitting at one table Mondlane from Mozambique, Kaunda from Zambia, Mugabe from Rhodesia. At another—Karume from Zanzibar, Chisiza from Malawi, Nujoma from Namibia, etc. Tanganyika is the first independent country in these parts, so people from all the colonies flock here. In the evening, when it grows cooler and a refreshing breeze blows in from the sea, the terrace fills with people discussing, planning courses of action, calculating their strengths and assessing their chances. It becomes a command center, a temporary captain's bridge. We, the correspondents, come by here frequently, to pick up something. We already know all the leaders, we know who is worth sidling up to. We know that the cheerful, open Mondlane talks willingly, and that the mysterious, closed Chisiza won't even part his lips.<sup>80</sup>

A press photographer such as Baz would say that war hotels become hubs because 'visual journalists' choose it, and all the other journalists after them. Their presence then attracts other protagonists.

If TV stations—which means visual journalism—move into a hotel, it means (...) that government officials, NGOs, UN, politicians... they follow. Because they want to give live interviews. (...) [The text journalist] just followed the TV network. He made his choice according to the TV networks' choice. Because they rule, I would say.<sup>81</sup>

The conference room, as we have seen, is the space within the hotel where these protagonists are most likely to meet. However, there is another hotel space that is much more open, and therefore adapted to unpredictable relations: the hotel lobby. The lobby is the space that best represents hotels as versatile structures that are able to harbour fast-changing and somehow hazy relations. In a sequence of *A Mighty Heart* (2007), a film directed by Michael Winterbottom based on the story of journalist Daniel Pearl who was kidnapped and beheaded in Pakistan in 2002, we see Pearl meeting his contacts in two distinct hotel lobbies. The first extract (fig. 31a) takes place in the lobby of a big international hotel, where Pearl's contact is watched by what seems to be a great number of agents from the secret service. Different camera angles and short shots give the impression that the lobby is a highly surveyed space. The second extract (fig. 31b) shows another meeting taking place in a much smaller, local hotel, where it is unlikely that foreign agents could go unnoticed. Later in the film, as the third extract shows (fig. 31c), while the same men are looking for more discreet spaces to meet, they are seen

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<sup>80</sup> Ryszard Kapuściński. *The Shadow of the Sun*. New York: Vintage. p. 76.

<sup>81</sup> Patrick Baz. Skype Interview. 28 Jan. 2014.

discussing in the intimacy of a room in that same hotel. As Lara Pawson, former BBC permanent correspondent in Luanda during the civil war, said in an interview she gave me: “What was great about the Tivoli [Hotel in Luanda] was that people trusted the guy running it. (...) You did not want to go to a hotel, or a restaurant, or a bar where somebody would ring up and say ‘We’ve got this UNITA guy telling that BBC reporter everything he knows’. The Tivoli was a safe space”.<sup>82</sup>



**Fig. 31a-c.** Hotels offer different spaces for meetings, from the lobby to the rooms. Three film stills from *A Mighty Heart* directed by Michael Winterbottom. (Film extracts available on the dedicated website).

<sup>82</sup> Lara Pawson. Skype interview. 27 Jan. 2014.

An odd video found on the Internet shows Radovan Karadžić standing in the lobby of the Holiday Inn in Sarajevo, apparently waiting for something or someone (fig. 32). He seems serious, or nervous, or unhappy, maybe all at once. His hands are joined behind his back, in a strict and official pose. Many people, mostly soldiers, some carrying rifles, surround him. EU observers are standing close by. Karadžić is in discussion with Muhamed Čengić, a Muslim representative. Both men are having an argument about who is responsible for the chaos in the country. They are talking without directly looking at each other with a three-quarters side stance. They are rather facing the camera operator who has his back to the entrance door. Journalists are there as well: we see at least one microphone and a recorder. The journalist with the microphone asks “who are we waiting for?”. Karadžić answers that he is waiting for the president (Alija Izetbegović) to join him. It is from the Holiday Inn that they will walk together to the building of the television. Although the video is not dated, we understand that this scene is happening some days before the beginning of the war. At the time, Karadžić’s Serbian Democratic Party (Srpska Demokratska Stranka - SDS) had its headquarter at the Holiday Inn. In the discussion he is having with the Muslim representative, Karadžić is accusing Izetbegović to be calling for a “mobilisation” (mobilizacija) of Muslims against Serb populations, portraying himself as the one who wants peace in Bosnia Herzegovina. By making the (to-be-) war hotel the point of departure of a procession to the television building, the two politicians are unconsciously giving it a highly symbolic role in the representation of the(ir) conflict.<sup>83</sup>

It is also in part from the premises of a hotel that Karadžić’s soulmate Ratko Mladić organized the deportation and killing of the Muslim population of Srebrenica.<sup>84</sup> On July 11, 1995, as he was accustomed, Mladić trailed his personal video crew. On a video he himself produced, he is seen in a meeting room of Hotel Fontana in Bratunac, BiH, negotiating the evacuation (which will turn out to be a massive deportation and genocide) with Colonel Thom Karremans, commander of the Dutch peacekeeping force, and with Muslim representatives from Srebrenica (fig. 33).<sup>85</sup> The hotel is where discussions and negotiations take place, and it is therefore incorporated into the nomenclature

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<sup>83</sup> It is interesting to note that *Videograms of a Revolution*, a film by Harun Farocki codirected with Andrei Ujică about the '89 Romanian uprisings against the Ceaușescu regime, also shows that insurgents stormed the TV station rather than the presidential palace. See Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujică. *Videograms of a Revolution*, 1992.

<sup>84</sup> See Dobbs. Op. cit.

<sup>85</sup> See extract on the dedicated website. For the complete version, see "Ratko Mladic - Srebrenica Fontana Hotel 2 - July 11, 1995". 22 Feb. 2013. Online video.

of the event. The architecture of the hotel was used to orchestrate an atmosphere of intimidation, as the Serbs slaughtered a pig outside the window at the beginning of the meeting.<sup>86</sup> The hotel became a place of representation, encompassing all the functions of a theatre. It is used as a backstage: this is where the negotiation is taking place. It is also a theatre box: the slaughtering of the pig is 'performed' for the 'spectators' in the meeting room. In addition, it is a stage: the footage we are looking at was filmed at Mladić's request, as he made sure all his conquests were recorded and archived. It is as if Mladić knew that what was happening in that room would be at the centre of a public's attention, one day. Ironically, many years later at his trial at the ICTY these videos are playing a central role in Mladić's incrimination for crimes against humanity.



**Fig. 32.** Radovan Karadžić waiting for Alija Izetbegović in the lobby of the Holiday Inn in Sarajevo, a few days before the beginning of the war on 6 April 1992. Video still. Source: Youtube. (Video available on the dedicated website).



**Fig. 33.** Ratko Mladić and Colonel Thom Karremans with Muslim representatives at Hotel Fontana on 11 July 1995. Video still. Source: YouTube (Video available on the dedicated website).

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<sup>86</sup> See Dobbs. Op. cit.

The growing importance of images as evidence in courtroom situations, such as at the ICTY,<sup>87</sup> leads the protagonists of a conflict—more specifically the victims—to pay specific attention to the documentation of any form of abuses for a potential use in court. Although it was not premeditated, there was probably no better and more efficient way to achieve this than to install a makeshift hospital in the lobby of the Hotel Ukraine during the events on Maidan Place in Kiev in February 2014. As we have seen, the Hotel Ukraine is situated right on the Maidan with a very good view over it. Therefore, it was chosen by the vast majority of the journalists coming to Kiev to cover the conflict. Again, although it was most likely not a chosen strategy, installing the makeshift hospital inside the hotel ensured the demonstrators that the foreign press would instantly witness the high toll of dead and injured. Indeed, many reports showed images of the wounded and the dead as they kept arriving at the war hotel-hospital. A former Lebanese fixer interviewed about his work in Beirut during the 2006 Israeli attacks on the country had described the lobby of the Commodore Hotel as so busy, 24h a day, that “it looked almost like the emergency room of a hospital”.<sup>88</sup> In Kiev in 2014, it was literally the case, except this time it was also a morgue, as dead bodies were aligned on the carpets of the lobby, under the hotel’s white bed sheets (fig. 34). The events in Kiev added two new categories of users of the war hotel as hub: doctors who came from all over the country to try to save lives, and priests who came to perform the last rites.



**Fig. 34.** Bodies of dead protesters in the lobby of the Hotel Ukraine. Video still from a Euronews report broadcast on 20 February 2014. (The full report is available on the dedicated website).

<sup>87</sup> See the project by artist Judy Radul: *World Rehearsal Court*. 2009.

<sup>88</sup> Gheith Al-Amine. Interview. Mayflower Hotel, Beirut, 10 Jul. 2012.

What these five definitions of a war hotel enable us to see is the central space it occupies in warfare. Although they are in the midst of conflicts, war hotels always remain slightly detached from them. Entering a war hotel during a conflict is like entering a distinct world. The only fact that they always remain provisioned even though there might be shortages of electricity, food and water elsewhere in the city is sufficient to understand how remote from the events one might feel in these places. Other factors, such as the vantage points some war hotels provide, or the fact that they have Internet connections, attract media workers covering conflicts to stay in those hotels. Their presence draws, in return, other protagonists of the conflict, who will come to meet, to negotiate, to be interviewed, to hold press conferences, to sign peace agreements... and the war hotel henceforth becomes an integral part of the conflict, conditioning the ways it is seen and represented. These five traits contribute to delineating the war hotel as a concept, one that I will now use to decipher the ways in which it is an essential optical and cognitive device in the apprehension and the representation of conflicts.

### 3.

## WAYS OF SEEING CONFLICTS: MEDIA — ARCHITECTURE

Now just have a look at this machine. Up till now a few things still had to be set by hand, but from this moment it works all by itself. (...) It's a remarkable piece of apparatus...

Franz Kafka<sup>89</sup>

One of the motivations to look at the roles hotels play in conflict originates in the understanding of the importance of images in the conduct of warfare. The centrality of the image in the analysis and the understanding of contemporary politics and conflict is recognised by various authors who contributed to establishing a clear understanding of the tight relation that binds conflicts to their representation. To the extent that it is now a commonplace to say that there is no war without media. The singular role images play in this representation is one of the reasons why they are the focus point of this section, without excluding the other media formats from which they cannot be clearly distinguished.

With the emergence of social media, the production and broadcast of images and information about conflicts has bypassed the professional journalist. In recent years, citizen journalism and social media have challenged the way mainstream media cover conflicts, and they have contributed to reshaping it. The representations of today's conflicts are happening in a highly complex and saturated visual field. All the protagonists of a conflict are now involved in its representation, trying to influence the way it is seen. Armies have Facebook and Twitter accounts, which they use to upload info-graphics, photographs and videos. The same goes for resistance groups, which broadcast visual representations of their actions and their claims. Citizen journalists, bloggers, NGOs, victims, perpetrators... are all busy representing the conflicts, with different ends for each of them. The visual field has consequently become very nuanced and diffused. Since the abundance of representations does not

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<sup>89</sup> Franz Kafka. *In The Penal Colony*. New York: Penguin Classics, 2011.

add any clarity, the only possible way to understand conflicts today is to find a path through this complexity. This is how journalists today can construct stories contributing to this understanding. For this particular reason, my research has a particular focus on their work and on what is believed to be an important tool in this endeavour, the war hotel. The war hotel is the privileged—and perhaps the only possible—position for producing the multi-layered representation that is the condition for grasping the stakes of contemporary conflicts. Although it is beyond the scope of this research to evaluate the impact of social media and citizen journalism on conflict communication, it is interesting to note that war hotels enable us to see the changing landscape of the representation of conflicts.<sup>90</sup>

What is referred to as *media* is not a set of technologies or communication techniques that can be used or not by those involved in a conflict. In an article on the ‘mediatisation of society’, Stig Hjarvard notes that “a significant share of the influence media exert arises out of the fact that they have become an integral part of other institutions’ operations, while they also have achieved a degree of self-determination and authority that forces other institutions, to greater or lesser degrees, to submit to their logic”.<sup>91</sup> The relation between warfare and media is not a facultative one, and Andrew Hoskins and Ben O’Loughlin note that “the planning, waging and consequences of warfare do not reside outside of the media”.<sup>92</sup> In their book *War and Media* they write:

As a result of changes in the communications technologies available to news media, citizen media and to militaries themselves, media are becoming part of the practices of warfare to the point that the conduct of war cannot be understood unless one carefully accounts for the role in media in it. This is what it means to speak of war as *mediatized*.<sup>93</sup>

Hoskins and O’Loughlin distinguish two distinct phases in the mediatisation of conflicts. The ‘first phase of mediatisation’ started with the advent of satellite newsgathering which became significant towards the end of the 1980s. It replaced the electronic newsgathering of the 1970s, early 1980s. This shift in

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<sup>90</sup> For the role of citizen journalists and social media in conflict communication, see for example: Einar Thorsen and Stuart Allan, eds. *Citizen Journalism: Global Perspectives, Volume Two*. New York: Peter Lang, 2014; Lilie Chouliaraki, ed. *Self-Mediation: New Media, Citizenship and Civil Selves*. London: Routledge, 2012; Andrew Hoskins. “Death of a Single Medium”. *Media, War and Conflict*, 6 (1), 2013. pp. 3-6.

<sup>91</sup> Stig Hjarvard. “The Mediatization of Society: A Theory of the Media as Agents of Social and Cultural Change”. *Nordicom Review* 29 (2008) 2, p. 106.

<sup>92</sup> Andrew Hoskins and Ben O’Loughlin. *War and Media: the Emergence of Diffused War*. Cambridge: Polity, 2010. p. 5.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.* p. 4

technology allowed media to follow and broadcast the events in almost real-time, creating a situation in which “those conducting war are aware of themselves as involved in a process being recorded and disseminated via media, and media consider their coverage as part of the war itself.”<sup>94</sup> The coverage of the 1991 Gulf War by CNN is an emblematic example of this phase of mediatisation. Through 24-hour coverage of the war, CNN succeeded in establishing the conflict as an *object* permanently accessible to viewers around the world.<sup>95</sup> Live images of the war were available to everyone, all the time. This new form of mediatisation entailed what has later been called the ‘CNN effect’, as it is believed to have had an impact on how the war was waged, and particularly upon foreign policy makers who are presumably forced to respond to what media focuses on.<sup>96</sup>

The ‘second phase of mediatisation’ corresponds in its own right to yet another shift in technology. New media technologies, such as the internet, smartphones, social media, etc.—which started proliferating in the twenty-first century—initiated a new ‘media ecology’ in which “people, events and news media have become increasingly connected and interpenetrated through the technological compressions of time-space”.<sup>97</sup> In this second phase, media is no longer something outside of the public, or separate from it, for the latter are now involved in the continuous recording and instant broadcast of events. This shift between the first and the second phase of mediatisation has contributed to setting the conditions of what the authors term ‘diffused war’ which “creates immediate and unpredictable connections between the trinity of government, military and publics, forcing each to find new ways to manage information about war”.<sup>98</sup>

Within this new ‘media ecology’, images play a particular role. Indeed, one noteworthy corollary of the mediatisation of warfare—most particularly in its second phase—lies in the (omni)presence of images, which has been described by various authors—using rather hydrous metaphors—as a

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid. p. 16.

<sup>95</sup> CNN was initially launched in 1980. It was then, and still in 1991, the only news satellite channel accessible throughout the world 24 hours a day.

<sup>96</sup> See Piers Robinson. “The CNN Effect: Can the News Media Drive Foreign Policy?”. *Review of International Studies* 25, 2, 1999. pp. 301-09.

<sup>97</sup> Hoskins and O’Loughlin. Op. cit. p. 18.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

'flooding' or a 'torrent'.<sup>99</sup> The vast amount of images that can be produced, broadcast and seen daily creates a set of possibilities not only for policy makers and other various protagonists of conflicts including the media, but also for spectators who thereby find new ways to apprehend issues of warfare. Thomas Keenan argues, "the high-speed electronic news media have created new opportunities not just for activism and awareness, but also for performance, presentation, advertising, propaganda, and for political work of all kinds".<sup>100</sup> Keenan thinks of images as "actions and weapons" in conflicts, and considers that cameras "take part in them, shape not only our understanding of them but their very conduct".<sup>101</sup> The idea that images are influential in conflicts has been largely assimilated, to a point that the strong belief that they can provoke action may lead to disappointing situations. Looking specifically at the faith human rights movements put into images to 'mobilize shame' against organizations such as governments, businesses, or armies,<sup>102</sup> Keenan notes that recent examples show that in spite of the fact that the media broadly covered the disastrous effects of a conflict, it was not always followed by any strong official reaction. The relation between media coverage and official reactivity appears to be weaker than the human rights movements would hope. While Sontag contends that the flooding of images of violence has made the spectator lose the capacity to react,<sup>103</sup> Keenan argues that it is not because the spectator has become used to them and thus indifferent. It is, on the contrary, because there is too much faith put into images: there is a strong common belief that knowledge will almost automatically provoke action, and that from the moment a tragedy appears as images, something will be done to heal it. Sometimes though, this 'something' is not the adequate response. In the case of the war in Bosnia, it meant sending military observers and escorting convoys. These actions contributed to maintaining the status quo, which, in that case, meant death for many more civilians. Newsreels dating back to the war in Bosnia show bitter

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<sup>99</sup> See Susan Sontag. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. London: Penguin Books, 2004. p. 96. See also Todd Gitlin. *Media Unlimited: How the Torrent of Images and Sounds Overwhelms Our Lives*. New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2002.

<sup>100</sup> Thomas Keenan. "Mobilizing Shame". *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 103, 2/3, Spring/Summer 2004. p. 442.

<sup>101</sup> Thomas Keenan. "Publicity and Indifference: Media, Surveillance, 'Humanitarian Intervention'". Joram Ten Brink and Joshua Oppenheimer, eds. *Killer Images: Documentary Film, Memory and the Performance of Violence*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012. p. 24.

<sup>102</sup> This axiom implies that in reaction to the unveiling of compromising information or images, these organizations will feel ashamed and thus, modify their behaviour accordingly. See Keenan. "Mobilizing Shame". Op. cit.

<sup>103</sup> Sontag. Op. cit. p. 96.

correspondents: they do not understand why, despite the images of horror they are broadcasting everyday, there is no military intervention from the UN, the EU or the US. Christiane Amanpour, a somewhat disenchanted journalist who covered the Sarajevo siege, believes that since there are people who are acting as watchdogs, and therefore since the whole world has access to visual evidence of what is happening in the most remote places, it is not 'normal' that genocides still occur today. Giving the example of the world's and particularly of US procrastination over the idea of a military intervention in Bosnia in 1992-95, she says, in *Scream Bloody Murder*, a documentary she directed for CNN in 2008, that for more than three years, politicians watched images of slaughtering, that she, among many other journalists, had contributed to make visible. But that did not help.

If we fail to grasp the significance of this ambivalence of images in warfare, it might be because too much attention is paid to what it is that they show, to the detriment of what they are concealing. In other words, an examination and a description of the image do not suffice to understand what is in the frame. The frame is not only a boundary to the image; it is also what reveals its political background. Butler's writing provides a crucial contribution to shaping the orientations of visual culture studies, which aims to understand how images orient the perception of contemporary conflicts. In her book *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?*, she writes:

To learn to see the frame that blinds us to what we see is no easy matter. And if there is a critical role for visual culture during times of war it is precisely to thematize the forcible frame, the one that conducts the dehumanizing norm, that restricts what is perceivable and, indeed, what can be. Although restriction is necessary for focus, and there is no seeing without selection, this restriction we have been asked to live with imposes constraints on what can be heard, read, seen, felt, and known, and so works to undermine both a sensate understanding of war, and the conditions for a sensate opposition to war. This 'not seeing' in the midst of seeing, this not seeing that is the condition of seeing, became the visual norm (...).<sup>104</sup>

Central to the work of Butler is the notion of performativity as a form of non-verbal action. She developed this idea—that individuals are constantly performing their identity—within what she calls, after Foucault, 'regulative discourses'. The reiterated statements produced through those discourses

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<sup>104</sup> Butler. Op. cit. p. 100.

exert power and as Butler shows, this power is embedded in images as well by the means of the operations of the frame. In a chapter of the book titled “Torture and the Ethics of Photography: Thinking with Sontag”, Butler discusses issues related to frames and framing operations using the case of the images of torture produced by US soldiers at the prison of Abu Ghraib. The notion of performativity as developed by Butler is crucial to understanding what is at stake when these soldiers performed their actions in front of the camera. Their non-verbal discourse, repeated through the circulation of the images that are recording them, is a discourse of power. When they are performing their action in front of the camera, they are not performing for the camera or the cameraperson. They know that images are being recorded, and that those images will circulate, repeating their action possibly infinitely. It is the utterance of this performative act, through the reproducibility of its image that transforms it into a discourse and a demonstration of power.

According to Butler, one objective of an investigation of the frame is to unveil the framing conducted by state and military power. Indeed, what is inside the frame is not necessarily what is visible in the image. The state and military power, for example, is not immediately visible in the image, although it is implicitly in the frame. What seems then to be at stake when working with images is the comprehension of what it is that they are showing and of what is contained within the frame, as much as what is excluded from it. Butler’s demonstration makes it clear that the representation of an event through images is always the result of a selection, and that certain things are made visible through an operation of concealment of others. An image in warfare is not only about what is in the frame, but also, about how what it represents is framed and “how it shows what it shows”.<sup>105</sup> Although the framing operations might be non-figurable, as Butler puts it, it does not mean that they cannot be exposed.<sup>106</sup> Showing the framing is, for example, revealing “the staging apparatus itself, the maps that exclude certain regions, the directives of the army, the positioning of the cameras, the punishments that lie in wait if reporting protocols are breached”.<sup>107</sup> To Butler’s list of examples of elements that constitute the apparatus of production and circulation of images, I contend

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid. p. 71.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. pp. 73-4. “To imagine the state as a dramaturge, thus representing its power through an anthropomorphic figure, would be mistaken, since it is essential to its continuing operation that this power should not be seen and, indeed, should not be organized (or figured) as the action of the subject. Rather, it is precisely a non-figurable and, to some extent, non-intentional operation of power that works to delimit the domain of representability itself”.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. p. 74.

that war hotels are not an incongruous addition.

Being places from which conflicts are analysed and enunciated, war hotels are important elements of the warfare landscape as well as having an active role in the framing of the information. How does that function? What could be such a role for a building, knowing that it will vary from one conflict to the other? Why do we need a building to tell us anything about what seems to be primarily a question of editorial and political choices, of military affairs and media strategies? The beginning of an answer comes from the question of the frame and of framing operations as Butler articulates it. In addition to participating actively in the framing operations of journalists' work, war hotels are themselves frames, and as such, they are inherently part of what defines the visual representation of conflicts. The question of the frame is crucial in understanding the political background of images and of the framing operations involved in their fabrication, knowing that such operations can be conducted by 'non-human' figures, such as buildings.

We have seen in the previous section that various factors contribute to considering war hotels as significant 'framers' (proximity to the field, vantage points, security, communication, centre of activity). Let us now go back to the introductory section and to the hotel window at Fort Irwin. We saw that its 16:9 proportions were similar to that of a modern video image and from this we can speculate that it was conceived as both an encouragement to film and a kind of 'pre-photographic narration'. The window frame offered journalists the possibility to pre-visualize the images they would record. In other words, the view from the window prefigured what their images could show and what they could conceal.<sup>108</sup> The reason why a description of the hotel room at Fort Irwin introduced this text is that what it creates in that space goes far beyond the sole conveniences of journalism reporting on military training. It sets instead the agenda for the representation of modern warfare. What this suggests is that for journalists the hotel does not only frame their work, but the whole building is itself acting as a kind of frame and is therefore an integral part of the journalistic representation of conflicts. The sort of seeing that the frame of the war hotel enables is defined by the five traits described previously: the hotel stands in the vicinity of the events, it offers vantage points, it is safe, it is

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<sup>108</sup> It is as if the media had assumed the role of future-tellers. When the Ancient Greeks practiced ornithomancy—the reading of omens from the flights of birds—they also used a frame, the *templum*, to delimitate the area of the sky that would be observed. The passage of birds beyond the frame would not be taken into account for divination.

equipped with the technology allowing to communicate, and it is a meeting point for the protagonists of the conflict.

Butler's discussion of the *frame* is primarily about the frame of the photograph, which is the delimitation between what the photograph makes visible and what it conceals. She distinguishes the *framing* as being all the operations leading to the *frame*. For Butler, the question that the frame poses is that of which lives are qualified as lives, which are worth being represented, and later grieved when they are lost. Frames create norms for what can be recognised as a grievable life and which cannot. What the frame does is that it selects what 'deserves' to be in it and what is doomed to remain outside. As such, it operates as the threshold between the two areas, which also binds one to the other. While the frame highlights some objects, people and actions, it also crops others. Even though the latter continue to exist, they are nevertheless not included in a given representation. As deterministic as it may sound, the frame is not optional; it is inherent to any visual representation. The frame is a constituent of the image, and it even is what *makes* the image.

Conflating the issues of the frame and that of framing into one common object allows us to consider the war hotel for the active part it takes in the framing apparatus of production of knowledge on conflicts as well as a material effect and a product of this activity. The war hotel is indeed the field of actions of various protagonists of the representation of conflicts and a space where various forces collide. It is also an object providing a materiality that alternates zones of transparency and opacity, and that allows seeing at a given instant and hiding at the next.

Taking into consideration a sense other than sight that can also be affected by the obliteration of certain parts of reality, such as hearing, is useful to apprehend how architecture functions as a frame. Lara Pawson, a former BBC permanent correspondent in Angola, commented upon the difference of perception of reality between journalists like herself who resided permanently in Luanda during the civil war, and those she called the 'drop in – drop out' reporters who visited only on the occasion of particular events related to the conflict. While she stayed in a regular house in the city centre, these visiting reporters, whose work she said had a much higher visibility than hers, would stay in the big hotels of the city:

You go into those hotels and it's like you're in another world. You leave behind the street. They have big double glazed windows so you can't hear the noise. One of the things about living in Luanda that drives you insane but that's also wonderful about it, is that it's incredibly noisy. If you live in an old Portuguese

colonial house like I did (...) you hear the noise all the time of the ladies walking past with fish on their head, shouting that they've got fish on their head to sell; you hear the horrific hooting of the cars all the time, because the traffic is so manic and unbearable. If you live in a hotel, that's all cut out, you don't get that, so you really are living in a bubble.<sup>109</sup>

As much as a window is an opening in a wall destined to admit natural light and fresh air and to give the possibility to those inside to see what stands on the other side of the wall, a 'double glazed window' fulfils additional functions such as isolating phonically (and olfactively). The hotel becomes an auditory frame, which implies that an architectural element is directly called upon to perform a form of deletion. It is a rather banal and harmless example but it shows that if the hotel allows one to be in Luanda, its thick windows prevent one from listening to the women shouting that they have fish to sell. Whose other presence and life does it obliterate?

What the Fort Irwin hypothesis also suggests is that a modern warfare landscape is complete with a hotel dedicated to media workers. As soon as it was integrated into the training camp, the war hotel became part of the embedding process of journalists, as a frame that is imposed upon them. One might argue that there were war hotels long before the construction of the mock village at Fort Irwin, and that the military only replicated what they saw as already being used in the real world, and that journalists simply continued using them thereafter. Another way of seeing it is that before Fort Irwin, journalists used the hotel in conflict torn regions as a commodity. From the moment it was reproduced at the camp—not only to reflect an existing reality but also to make the statement that the journalistic hotel is an integral part of a warfare environment—hotels became the norm. 'Hotels used by journalists in conflict zones' became 'war hotels' conditioning the representations of conflicts.

Architecture provides objects that are not only bricks and mortar, but that also shape the relations between individuals and hence contribute to defining the events resulting from their encounters. One of the reasons why it is worth exposing an architectural detail of the apparatus of production of information about conflicts, is that war hotels—as every building does—make certain things possible and others unworkable: they are facilitators, as much as they can be obstacles. They allow people to meet and to communicate, to rise

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<sup>109</sup> Pawson. Op. cit.

above the ground or to take shelter, as much as they isolate, block access or hide activities. Architecture and buildings as its material manifestations are much more than roofs and walls sheltering people. Buildings are contributions to shaping the relations between them, sometimes inducing them, sometimes challenging them, and sometimes barring them. The attention to this detail of the apparatus of production of information is a passageway leading to a broader field that includes the modes and structures of this production, the interactions between its protagonists, as well as their social and political implications.

As Keller Easterling puts it, “architecture is a theater of activity, as that word is used in the military to express the consequential sequencing of organizations, activities, claims and exchanges”.<sup>110</sup> In her book *Enduring Innocence: Global Architecture and its Political Masquerades*, Easterling tells the stories of what she calls ‘spatial products’ while unpacking their ‘political misadventures’. The first story she tells is about a South Korean, Hyundai-owned cruise ship traveling to the DPRK (Democratic People’s Republic of Korea). In exchange of exclusive rights to develop a tourist project in North Korea, Hyundai was to pay the DPRK US\$ 942 million over a period of six years. She notes, “It was a cruise ship, after all, with all its promiscuity and luxury, that was able to penetrate the North”.<sup>111</sup> Cruise ships or hotels affect, like many other spatial products of tourism, to be apolitical. They are “usually presumed to be innocent of involvement in the extreme spaces of war.”<sup>112</sup> Of course, we know they are not. The method Easterling uses of telling stories about specific places to evoke other, more global issues, is a useful way to extend ideas out of the particular contexts of the work on hotels. Telling the story of ‘spatial products’, such as war hotels, allows me to describe their political composition, making it possible to preserve and observe the connections between its components, and to approach it as a complex whole.

In the same fashion as weighty machines are constituted by moving parts, and despite their fixity, hotels are particularly interesting because they are anchored entities yet not immutable ones. They are versatile structures that are able not only to harbour fast-changing relations, but to generate them as well. Considering the fact that war hotels are places where information is

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<sup>110</sup> Keller Easterling. *Enduring Innocence: Global Architecture and Its Political Masquerades*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005. p. 2.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.* p. 32.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.* p. 3.

produced and from where it is put in circulation, and that the representation of conflicts is also about establishing some kind of order within a greatly saturated visual and informational field, it is interesting to note that the hotel itself contributes to creating specific sets of relations. Easterling observes that “architecture has almost become information itself—information not as text in a book or text encoded on a digital device but information in activity, invisible but pervasive activity that controls how objects will be organized and circulated in the world.”<sup>113</sup> She adds that it is “information in activity in space. Not in wires, not in microwaves, but in space”.<sup>114</sup> By virtue of this pervasive activity, war hotels do not only frame events and human relations, they also define them.

It is understood that hotels are never initially designed to be war hotels. They are always built in peaceful environments, never under fire. They are meant to accommodate tourists or business travellers, and are not originally destined to billet war reporters, warlords or snipers. Hotels *become* war hotels for all the reasons that have been detailed in the previous section. When conflicts are over and journalists are gone, war hotels resume their functions as ‘normal’ hotels. However, this usage is not sufficient to grasp the full meaning of these spatial products. Even if a group of people would decide to use a hotel in a peaceful environment as if there was a conflict outside, it would not suffice to transform it into a war hotel. Many steps precede the moment when a group of people start using it as such. One important aspect, evidently, is that there needs to be a conflict. Yet, that does not suffice either: not every hotel of a given city during a conflict becomes a war hotel. Actually, in the most severe conflicts, such as wars, the majority of hotels are deserted and simply close their doors. Only one or two hotels will operate the transformation successfully—while sometimes there are none. Once this transformative step is taken, the war hotel will begin its ‘pervasive’ activity of shaping events. It is this spatial product in transformation that we are now observing, as much as the usage that is made of it. This attention to the object ‘war hotel’ as methodology is what Arjun Appadurai would call ‘methodological fetishism’.

We have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories. It is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that

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<sup>113</sup> Keller Easterling. “The Space in Which We’re Swimming”, conference at TEDxYale City 2.0, 13 Oct. 2012.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

enliven things. Thus, even though from a *theoretical* point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a *methodological* point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context.<sup>115</sup>

From the moment a hotel goes through the transformations that allow it to become a war hotel, the presence of the new alternative clientele (media and NGO workers, politicians, negotiators...) gives it a particular importance within the conflict. These experts cross paths in that space, and war hotels therefore offer a materiality that can be used to locate the interactions between them in a single spatial entity.<sup>116</sup> War hotels are therefore useful anthropological tools to study at close range the 'human transactions and calculations' that influence conflicts and the modes in which they are represented.<sup>117</sup> Through war hotels, we can look at the changing landscape of the representation of conflicts. As Eyal Weizman points out, "built environments are composite assemblies of structures, spaces, infrastructure, services, and technologies with the capacity to act and interact with their surroundings and shape events around them. They structure and condition rather than simply frame human action, they actively—sometimes violently—shape incidents and events".<sup>118</sup>

Although our attention does not aim at reconstructing facts that would illuminate the circumstances of a precise event, the methodology used by the *Forensic Architecture* project shares similarities with that consisting in paying a close attention to war hotels, as details of a larger apparatus that we want to examine. This ambitious research project based at Goldsmiths, University of London since 2011 has brought together researchers from various disciplines, such as architects, artists, filmmakers, curators, activists and theorists, who have been working from architectural objects and using spatial analysis to

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<sup>115</sup> Arjun Appadurai, ed. *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986. p. 5.

<sup>116</sup> See Kracauer. Op. cit. Discussing the hotel lobby, Siegfried Kracauer writes that it is the privileged space for unlikely encounters as "it accommodates all who go there to meet no one". The relations that take place in hotels are loose and unbound relations that can dissolve as soon as they start existing, and later give way to other encounters. The hotel space is designed for this type of fleeting—and flitting—relations, which is not to say that they are superficial and of no consequence. In this chapter of the book, Kracauer compares the crowd gathering in the lobby of a hotel to the community of followers—the congregation—of a house of God. Whereas the members of a congregation come together as a community to establish a connection with God, those frequenting the hotel lobby do not come together to meet one in particular. "In the *house of God* which presupposes an already extant community, the congregation accomplishes the task of making connections. Once the members of the congregation have abandoned the relation on which the place is founded, the house of God retains only a decorative significance. (...) The typical characteristics of the *hotel lobby*, which appears repeatedly in detective novels, indicate that it is conceived as the inverted image of the house of God." p. 175.

<sup>117</sup> For an interesting example of how a discipline such as anthropology uses the hotel to discuss broader issues such as social hierarchies within a given society, see Francis Khek Gee Lim. "Hotels as Sites of Power: Tourism, Status, and Politics in Nepal Himalaya." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13 3, 2007. 721-38.

<sup>118</sup> Eyal Weizman. "Introduction: Forensic". In *Forensic Architecture*, ed. *Forensis : the Architecture of Public Truth*, Berlin : Sternberg Press. 2014. p. 16.

bring evidence to legal and political forums.<sup>119</sup> In the introduction of the book *Forensis: the Architecture of Public Truth*, Weizman writes: "Under the microphysical lens of methodological fetishism, it is in the object that the fabric of complex social relations, imprinted political forces, and logics of practice are folded. If fetishism is the attribution of an inherent power and a certain agency to inanimate objects, then we must embrace the term as we come to understand objects, buildings, cracks, and representation as historical agents".<sup>120</sup> Weizman notes that a modern acceptance of the word forensics has narrowed its influence to the use of medicine and science within the court of law, but that the Latin adjective *forensis* originally meant 'pertaining to the forum'. One of the aims of the research project is to return to a definition of the forum that exceeds the legal domain to "perform across a multiplicity of forums, political and juridical, institutional and informal".<sup>121</sup> If the site of the forum hence transcends the limits of the court of law, the field, which is the other site of forensics, must also be understood beyond its locational characteristics. Weizman writes: "The field is not only a neutral, abstract grid on which traces of a crime can be plotted out, but itself a dynamic and elastic territory, a *force field* that is shaped by but also shapes conflict".<sup>122</sup>

War hotels operate in an area situated at the crossroads of the two sites that are the forum and the field of investigation. Journalists investigate on the sites of conflicts that extend up to the revolving doors of the war hotel and sometimes drift inside, and they report to a forum that consists of the spectators, a vast and largely informal, open group. They often address them from within the hotel itself, as reporters use it to broadcast information, sometimes live, thus directly addressing the forum. War hotels are the structures that connect both, the field and the forum, as a threshold and a binding zone between the two. War hotels are optical devices from which the city in conflict is continuously observed, and from where images of it are ceaselessly produced, recorded and broadcast.

As I have shown in the previous section while describing the different traits of war hotels, this is the place where all the necessary conditions are brought together for this representation. War hotels bring, as I contend, proximity, security, technology and means of communication, good vantage points, and

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<sup>119</sup> See the project description at <http://www.forensic-architecture.org> (accessed 21 Aug. 2014).

<sup>120</sup> Weizman. Op. cit. p. 19.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. p. 9

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

this is where all the actors involved in the representations of conflicts converge. The long-lived role of traditional journalism continues to exist today, as some aspects of the institution it represents are persistent and it is still often considered more objective than other forms of seeing and representing.<sup>123</sup> Nevertheless, we see that it is now being challenged and that some of the conventional functions of the war hotel as frame are somehow out-dated. The traditional role of journalism is today vigorously questioned: indeed, how could one suppose that the war hotel, the way it was announced at Fort Irwin, could resist the constraints inflicted by the chaotic reality of warfare as well as the new modes of representing conflicts? How is it possible to expect that such a 'perfect' window frame would reappear in every hotel room, from one conflict to the other? Referring to the photographic frame, Butler observes that it only succeeds in determining what is seen if the conditions of reproducibility are controlled. Since this is never the case, especially in the actual phase of mediatisation, she brings up the interesting idea that the frame is meant to 'break apart', and that "this self-breaking becomes part of [its] very definition".<sup>124</sup> For her, the frame is never definitive, and in that sense, it is vulnerable.

The frame (...) does not quite contain what it conveys, but breaks apart every time it seeks to give definitive organization to its content. In other words, the frame does not hold anything together in one place, but itself becomes a kind of perpetual breakage, subject to a temporal logic by which it moves from place to place. As the frame constantly breaks from its context, this self-breaking becomes part of the very definition. This leads us to a different way of understanding both the frame's efficacy and its vulnerability to reversal, to subversion, even to critical instrumentalization. What is taken for granted in one instance becomes thematized critically or even incredulously in another.<sup>125</sup>

The 16:9 hotel window at Fort Irwin allows us to do just that: to draw a parallel between the war hotel as a frame to the representation of conflicts and the photographic frame discussed by Butler. The vulnerability of the frame, which is, according to her, part of its very definition, allows us to foresee its importance and paradoxically its resilience. It is by being adaptable and elastic that the frame can pretend to be part of the very definition of the

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<sup>123</sup> Although videos produced by citizen journalists and uploaded on social media are used to report abuses and to file complaints, the cases that end up being investigated by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) for instance are often cases that have been filmed by international journalists. On one hand, what does not have any photographic record is simply denied by the IDF, while on the other hand the military investigators are being very suspicious about material produced by the Palestinians themselves. See Eyal Weizman. Skype interview. 1 Dec. 2014.

<sup>124</sup> Butler. Op. cit. p.10.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

representation of conflicts. In other words, the 'hotelness' of the representation could very well dispense with the building of the hotel itself. Butler's proposition is to look at the frame as something that is not necessarily a static constraint but rather a part of the representation that can adapt to new modes of seeing and representing.

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As a consequence of the development of social media and citizen journalism, those who were previously the subjects of news reports are now participating in the making of the information, thus strengthening the process (rather than taking over it). It is what Foucault called the 'functional inversion of the disciplines' in his discussion of the extension of disciplinary institutions:

(...) now they were being asked to play a positive role, for they were becoming able to do so, to increase the possible utility of individuals. (...) The disciplines function increasingly as techniques for making useful individuals.<sup>126</sup>

Citizen journalists and social media are giving professional journalists access to unexpected sources, augmenting their zone of influence by allowing them to see people and things they would never have had access to without their intervention. This process of a refinement of power relations and "a multiplication of the effects of power through the formation and accumulation of new forms of knowledge"<sup>127</sup> is what Foucault described as the 'swarming of disciplinary mechanisms'.

While, on the one hand, the disciplinary establishments increase, their mechanisms have a certain tendency to become 'de-institutionalized', to emerge from the closed fortresses in which they once functioned and to circulate in a 'free' state; the massive, compact disciplines are broken down into flexible methods of control, which may be transferred and adapted. Sometimes the closed apparatuses add to their internal and specific function a role of external surveillance, developing around themselves a whole margin of lateral controls.<sup>128</sup>

Considering that from every window of every building in a contemporary city in war a camera is potentially recording, and that people living in these places are constantly monitoring the conflict and broadcasting images and information about it, it is as if the model of the war hotel had disseminated

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<sup>126</sup> Michel Foucault. *Discipline and Punish : the Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage. 1995. pp. 210-11.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid. p. 224.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid. p. 211.

throughout the city. It is multiplying the journalistic sources and the perspectives, forming a dense grid on that space. The model of the war hotel thus allows us to understand the contemporary city in conflict as a visual apparatus that is constantly producing and broadcasting images and information about itself. If yesterday, the war hotel was a building where war reporters lived and worked, and where they produced and broadcast their own representation of the conflict, the war hotel today is a diffused space, criss-crossed by a multitude of perspectives, points of views, opinions, images, and information, reflecting the complexity of contemporary conflicts.

In *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, Foucault discusses the Panopticon, a proposal for a panoptical prison elaborated by philosopher and social reformer Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832). The Panopticon is a circular structure that includes a central tower from which the prison guards can inspect the prisoners' cells distributed around the circumference. While light comes through the cells, the tower is darkened, thus making it possible for the observer to see without being seen by the prisoners. Consequently, the latter never know when they are being observed and can only presume that they are being watched, possibly all the time. This potentially permanent surveillance dictates their behaviour, and the gaze of the guard in the tower produces knowledge about the (mis)conduct of prisoners. As Foucault puts it, "the formation of knowledge and the increase of power regularly reinforce one another in a circular process".<sup>129</sup> The concept of 'power-knowledge' developed by Foucault finds an exemplary architectural form in the Panopticon: although it was never built, it remains, as Paul Hirst put it, "both a possible construction and a 'statement' in construction. It is the space and site of a certain form of productive power".<sup>130</sup> Foucault's work indeed establishes strong connections between discourses of power and buildings. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault defined a discourse as the collective meaning of a succession of 'statements', knowing that these do not need to be understood as being exclusively linguistics.<sup>131</sup> A practice of observation and of representation, along with its constructed objects—not only prisons, but also schools, factories, hospitals, military bases, and now war hotels—are statements. Indeed, surveillance, and therefore knowledge and power, are "expressed in

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid. p. 224.

<sup>130</sup> Paul Hirst. *Space and Power: Politics, War and Architecture*. Cambridge: Polity Press. 2005. p. 169.

<sup>131</sup> See Michel Foucault. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. New York: Vintage. 1982.

architecture by innumerable petty mechanisms".<sup>132</sup> Hirst writes:

Following Foucault, we can treat the statement as something that is not merely written down in words but which nevertheless can be part of a discourse. We can consider constructed objects as components of a discursive formation, and relate the practices of the construction, inclusion and exclusion of objects to the rules and patterns of such formations. In this way we can bridge the gap between theory in architecture and spatial constructs, not merely by treating constructs as examples of a theory, but examining how discourses enter into construction and how in consequence buildings or planned environments become *statements*.<sup>133</sup>

Referring to Foucault and his study of the Panopticon makes it explicit that the attempt here is to add war hotels to the list of institutions of 'power-knowledge' that he already established, deliberately leaving it open to further additions. If the sites of power-knowledge that are the architectural corollaries of justice, education, work, medicine and army are the courthouse, the prison, the school, the factory, the office building, the hospital, and the training camp, that of representing conflicts is the war hotel. According to Foucault, "what the[se] apparatuses and institutions operate is, in a sense, a microphysics of power",<sup>134</sup> and their action is diffused throughout the social body, in a variety of relations and networks.<sup>135</sup> As such, there is no identifiable centre to this power, but only networks of sites where it is exercised.

A whole problematic then develops: that of an architecture that is no longer built simply to be seen (as with the ostentation palaces), or to observe the external space (cf. the geometry of fortresses), but to permit an internal, articulated and detailed control—to render visible those who are inside it; in more general terms, an architecture that would operate to transform individuals: to act on those it shelters, to provide a hold on their conduct, to carry the effects of power right to them, to make it possible to know them, to alter them.<sup>136</sup>

In the contemporary definition of the war hotel, we are now looking at the building itself as well as at the diffused space in the city in which this architectural model disseminated into hundreds of vantage points. Consequently, 'those who are inside' are not only those who penetrate inside the building of the journalistic hotel, but also all those who are in the space encompassing the new apparatus of the representation of conflicts, that is to

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<sup>132</sup> Foucault. *Discipline and Punish*. Op. cit. p. 173.

<sup>133</sup> Hirst. Op. cit. p. 158.

<sup>134</sup> Foucault. *Discipline and Punish*. Op. cit. p. 26.

<sup>135</sup> See Hirst. Op. cit. p. 168.

<sup>136</sup> Foucault. *Discipline and Punish*. Op. cit. p. 172.

say potentially anyone throughout the city.<sup>137</sup> Although the extension of the boundaries of the war hotel questions the way we see conflicts, decades of war reporting have established a model that is still active and influential. The objectives and ideals may vary considerably from one mode of representation to the other, but it is worth noting that they often use similar forms of journalistic practices. Citizen journalists are trained by professional reporters, armies and resistance groups maintain elaborate websites featuring 'News', 'Headlines' and 'Featured Photos' sections, and they all share information, info-graphics and images on personal blogs, as well as on Facebook, Twitter, Google+, YouTube, Pinterest, Flickr, Instagram, to name only a few. All these representations are criss-crossing to form the complex environment that shapes our understanding of conflicts today.

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has recently posted a video featuring a hostage, a British journalist going by the pre-destined name of John Cantlie, in which he is seen singing the praises of the organization, emphasizing how 'normal' life is in areas controlled by the organization (fig. 35). In sequences reminiscent of reports western television networks produce, Cantlie is shown roaming over Mosul, the Iraqi city now controlled by ISIS, addressing the viewers by looking straight into the camera. He visits a market and a hospital in an attempt to show how normal life is, and now even better and safer than before. There is no shortage of electricity in the city, he says, and hospitals are functioning properly.

Everywhere you look, everywhere you go, here in this old souk, one of the oldest in Mosul, you're struck by just how normal and crazy and busy everything is. This is not a city living in fear, as Western media would have you believe. This is just a normal city going about its daily business. And certainly nothing that was written in the Guardian on the 27<sup>th</sup> of October [is true], which said, "The prices of basic goods have gone up sharply", "People have no money", they said. Rubbish lies.<sup>138</sup>

The model of that representation is the news report filed by a war reporter, although it is clear that this journalist is forced to mimic his own profession in a desperate attempt to save his own life. Still, it is interesting to note that ISIS, after having produced and broadcast very graphic videos of decapitations of

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<sup>137</sup> Foucault. *Discipline and Punish*. Op. cit. p. 207. "The seeing machine was once a sort of dark room into which individuals spied; it has become a transparent building in which the exercise of power may be supervised by society as a whole".

<sup>138</sup> See "John Cantlie Narrates Latest ISIS Propaganda Video From Mosul". *The Huffington Post online*, 4 Jan. 2015. John Cantlie was kidnapped in Syria with James Foley, whose decapitation in August 2014 was shown on a video produced and circulated by ISIS.

hostages, is simultaneously trying to address the Western world using the style of traditional media representations and a journalist who will not go back to his hotel after making the report, but rather to his place of captivity.



Fig. 35a-b. British journalist John Cantlie who is held hostage by ISIS is seen in a series of videos posted on the Internet by the organization. He is “reporting” from regions held by ISIS, actually forced to sing their praises. Video stills. Source: [liveleak.com](http://liveleak.com)

What the model of the war hotel makes all those who are representing the conflict do is a constant pendular movement between the field (the city in conflict) and the forum (the spectators). The war hotel belongs to both worlds, and the attention of its occupants is two-way. It acts as mediation between the theatres of operations into which it is incorporated—and which events it monitors, records and processes as representations—and the wider space of the public opinion it is aiming at informing. Indeed, what is heard inside and seen from the war hotel is destined to be broadcast abroad. The war hotel is constantly monitoring and recording the city while almost simultaneously broadcasting representations of it: it is a machine that incessantly absorbs, digests and disgorges information. As such, it is an adequate reflection of the contemporary city in war, which is—with its inhabitants—the subject as well as the producer of constant representations.

The example of Cantlie 'performing' his identity as a foreign correspondent for the cameras operated by his captors is an interesting twist of the situation observed at Fort Irwin, where Iraqi-American extras were performing for the journalists the roles of the inhabitants of 'Medina Wasl', the mock-up Iraqi village. At Fort Irwin, war hotels were zones of convergence of gazes and machines of total vision. In this 'perfect camp', those who observed the conflict were integrated into a global and complex visual apparatus. What 'real' war hotels propose in return is a diligent organisation of the gazes, both inwards and outwards. Three of the five traits described in the second section ('War hotel' as vantage point; 'War hotel' as communication; 'War hotel' as hub) showed that it is the point of convergence of gazes. Indeed, it proposes standpoints from its windows, balconies and roof for a direct and unmediated observation of the theatre of operations. It provides access to technology and therefore to efficient means of communication allowing the broadcast of information and images and the monitoring of people and events, both inside the hotel premises (through the closed circuit surveillance camera system) and outside of it (through reliable internet or satellite connections). Lastly, and most particularly in its lobby, the war hotel billets most of the protagonists of conflicts who meet, observe each other, exchange and produce information. The war hotel is undoubtedly more than a fortress that would allow observing the external space. The array of those who are inside is large enough to represent all the protagonists of a conflict, especially now that its model has expanded throughout the city. In Fort Irwin, the visual apparatus of the hotel was a statement. Through the reiteration of this optical device in 'real world' situations, it transformed into a discourse and a model that is conditioning the representations of conflicts, not only for journalists, but for all those involved in representing contemporary conflicts as well. The war hotel and the subsequent 'war hotelisation' of the representations of conflicts have penetrated deeply the complex construction through which we see conflicts.

# 4.

## POSTFACE

### ‘WAR HOTEL’ AS FILM SUBJECT

When the wise man points at the moon, the idiot looks at the finger.

Old Chinese saying

‘War hotel’ is also the subject of a film that contributes towards my PhD. This text is led by extensive research that comes out of the making of the ‘creative documentary’ film, titled *Hotel Machine*.<sup>139</sup> My practice consists in researching topics through the making of films. The heuristic value of this process lies obviously in the film itself—which an audience uses to familiarise themselves with a given subject matter, a place, an event, or a character—but not only. The process of making the film is as important, in particular for the filmmaker-as-researcher. In other words, the process of making a film leads to an object that will be shared and discussed, but it is also an agency moulding certain behaviours, which thus influences the analyses of facts. Approaching a place or people with the project of making a film is indeed a unique way to undertake research. On one hand, it gives a reason to the researcher-filmmaker to access certain sites and meet certain persons that could otherwise be out of reach. On the other hand, as almost everybody has expectations at the sight of a camera, people start behaving accordingly. The material gathered by the filmmaker is therefore of a particular nature: it is filmic—and that adjective includes everything it can imply in terms of subjectivity.

One good example of this phenomenon is the initial encounter with a (mock) war hotel I described in my introduction, which was incidental to the making of a film.<sup>140</sup> It is through the project of filming the training camp that I got permission to access it. The image recording devices that I, as a filmmaker, was carrying along helped opening the door of the PAO’s office. To him, what

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<sup>139</sup> See Emanuel Licha, dir. *Hotel Machine*. 2015. Film. The full version of the film can be watched on the dedicated website.

<sup>140</sup> See Emanuel Licha, dir. *Mirages*. 2010. Film. The full version of the film can be watched on the dedicated website.

these instruments promised is that they would film, and therefore record and export images of the objects he had to display. Once inside the camp, when I filmed the interior of the hotel room with its 16:9 window, as well as the observation deck, I was 'only' filming objects of the space I was interested in—not being yet fully aware of the reasons of my attraction to it. I realized only later, back at the editing table, that what I had been filming in that hotel room was not only an object, but the subject of the film itself and hence, of that research: how hotels produce ways of seeing. The very basic and foremost problem—which was also my chance at Fort Irwin—that is posed to a filmmaker is that (s)he needs to film *something*. With a few exceptions, most filmmakers are busy producing images of people, objects, and spaces, which they bring closer to each other through montage, in order to address issues that none of the images taken separately could address by itself.<sup>141</sup> Without this agenda of making a film, and consequently of having to film something, this window might have gone unnoticed. This situation resulted in one of these rare occasions given to a filmmaker to film the object that is the limit condition of filming itself. In other words, what I was able to film were material elements of the framing apparatus organized by the PAO. He introduced me to objects I could film which were equally the objects *from which* I could film, as well as the condition of filming itself.

With the decision of making a film about 'real' war hotels, the question of whether I would find such 'loquacious' objects to film posed itself at once. Was there anything lingering in these that could be worth filming and that could inform me about the way we look at conflicts? This question unleashed a series of others, as so many challenges to the writing phase of the film, and which contributed to shaping the project in their own right.

Naturally, questions relating to the temporality of the action of the film were pivotal. Considering the fact that a war hotel only exists when it is in use, the predisposition of the film was that it be shot during a conflict. But doing so would have put the filmmaker in the footsteps of the journalist. Although this strategy proved to be productive in Fort Irwin, it would have implied to follow the flow of the actuality and to work at a pace that did not seem compatible

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<sup>141</sup> Jean-Luc Godard regularly uses the word 'rapprochement' as a synonym for montage: "That's what I call montage, simply a rapprochement." See Jean-Luc Godard. *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma*. Paris: Albatros, 1980. p. 22. See also Jean-Luc Godard. *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard, 1984-1998* vol. 2, Paris: Les Cahiers du cinéma, 1998. p. 20. "And that's what cinema is: the rapprochement of things that ought to be brought together, but which aren't predisposed to being so."

with a scrutiny of the apparatus of framing and producing knowledge. Nevertheless, when I initiated the research on war hotels in early 2011, I considered that the first step I needed to take was to familiarize myself with the work of foreign correspondents. In March 2011, I conducted my first interviews with war correspondents, in order to understand to what extent hotels were important for their work. Unsurprisingly, most of them argued, probably rightly so, that the best way to understand what was at stake in these hotels was to travel to one of them *during* a conflict, and not only *after*. In the spring of 2011, there were a few possibilities to travel not too far to observe the work of journalists in a zone of conflict, as the events of the ‘Arab Spring’ were unfolding. At this stage of the project, I was working on my own; therefore, I chose to go where the logistics would be manageable, and that implied going to a zone where the risks were not too high. As their country began to be in turmoil, Syrian refugees started crossing the border with Turkey in the province of Hatay, where the Turkish government in collaboration with the Red Crescent had set up refugee camps. Within a few days in June 2011, international media workers flocked to the city of Antakya from which they travelled to the refugee camps situated along the Syrian border, which they crossed illegally to report from within Syria. As soon as I identified this situation, I decided to travel to Antakya. Before leaving, I got in contact with foreign correspondents that were already there since a few days to obtain a confirmation that international media workers had indeed installed their base in the city. It took me two days to organize a 5-day trip, and I thought that was fast. The day I arrived in Antakya the city hotels were, as expected, full with journalists and it was therefore not possible to book a room in the hotel in which most of them were staying. On the second day I managed to obtain a room in that hotel and I started leading the same life as that of foreign correspondents: I lived in the same hotel, I ate in the same restaurants, went to the same cafés... Like them, I hired a fixer who drove me to the Syrian border where I was able to observe ‘my colleagues’ at work (fig. 36).<sup>142</sup> The photographic and videographic equipment I carried was very similar to that of war photographers; therefore, I did not have to pretend to be considered one of them. By the third morning, as I was going downstairs to the breakfast room, going through the lobby and passing by the reception desk, I noticed that entire media crews were checking out. After less than a week of intense media

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<sup>142</sup> For a filmic account of that research trip, see Emanuel Licha, dir. *How do we know what we know?*. Film. 2011. The full version of the film can be watched on the dedicated website.

coverage, the city of Antakya and the refugees at the border with Syria were not the main news focus anymore. It did not make much sense for me to stay longer, as I had come mainly to observe their work, how they lived and how they behaved. But as I had bought the cheapest plane ticket possible, it revealed impossible to change the return date. As a result, I stayed three more days in a city which had been at the centre of the world's attention for a week and which was now a media desert. Not only had I come too late, I also left too late. These three days I spent alone in a media-deserted hotel proved to be determining in the unfolding of the project. It was from this moment that the hotel staff, restaurant owners, fixers, translators, taxi drivers, who had all spent an intense week collaborating with media workers, became available to talk. I learned more on the work of war correspondents during these three days than I did researching that topic during the few months prior. This is also the moment when my decision to 'remain late' to direct my film on war hotels became clear.



**Fig. 36.** Observing the work of foreign correspondents in the Turkish province of Hatay at the Syrian border in June 2011. Film still from *How Do We Know What We Know?* directed by Emanuel Licha. (The film is available on the dedicated website).

Although artists and filmmakers share with journalism the same medium, they do not necessarily work with the same means. Indeed, not only do they not have the same budgets, nor any equivalent logistic infrastructure, but their pace and their endeavour also differ substantially. Considering these variations, it is as if an artistic response to a given event, especially in the case of political turmoil, is doomed to be 'always too late'. In regard to the ever-growing speed with which media operate, 'being too late' is commonly understood as a sign of impotence, of being behind, and of being unaware of recent events. One of the objectives of the film was to show that 'being late', by coming after the events, could prove to be a productive stance by providing

a different angle of view and a fertile ground to produce critical images. Yet another reinforcement of this stance, the choice of working with the proper means of cinema, which implied working with a film crew, a producer, and therefore a certain budget, was made very early on.<sup>143</sup> This, together with the choice of making a feature-length film, would ensure the project a pace diametrically opposed to that of the media news organizations.

The irony contained in the opening quote of this section does not obliterate some of its truth. In this case, the ‘finger of the wise man pointing at the moon’ is understood to be the journalist’s. While the idiot looking at the pointing finger instead of contemplating the moon that is shown to him is none other than the filmmaker who spends time studying a detail of the vast apparatus of fabrication of the way we see conflicts. The polarity of the wise man and the idiot is comparable to the opposition between ‘those who know’ and ‘those who “just” believe’ discussed by Isabelle Stengers.

Such a rivalry was sadly exhibited some years ago, in the famous ‘science wars’, with scientists aggressively reacting against the thesis that science was a practice like any other. Whatever the dogmatic rigidity of this reaction, it would be a mistake to identify it with a mere defence of their privileges. It may well be that some of the angry protesters would have accepted, as would any heir to Marx, that sciences are practices, and that whatever claims to truth, objectivity or validity they produce, these have to be actively related to those practices. But what scientists heard, and what made them angry, was an attack by academic rivals and judges, claiming that science was ‘only’ a practice, as ‘any’ other, implying that those rivals and judges possessed the general definition of a practice.<sup>144</sup>

Stengers notes “The issue is (...) the very mode of production of scientific knowledge, with the certainties of lab biologists silencing those colleagues who work outside of the lab and ask different and perplexing questions”.<sup>145</sup> Questioning the means by which knowledge about conflicts is produced might also be considered by some as an attack against the practices of journalism. However, the work on war hotels, which includes the film, is not intended as an insight into the world of journalism, nor as a critique of it, but rather as a way to address a different set of questions on the way we see conflicts. What

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<sup>143</sup> One of the main reasons the film took such a long time to produce has to do with the process of funding the project. It took about four years, from 2011 to 2015, to finance the approximate 200,000 euros cost of the film.

<sup>144</sup> Isabelle Stengers. “Diderot’s egg: Divorcing Materialism From Eliminativism”. *Radical Philosophy* 144, July/August 2007.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

Stengers claims is a space for other practitioners to question the repercussions of science from their own specific points of view, may they be that of historians', philosophers', anthropologists', or artists' and filmmakers'. The objective of the film is not to explain what war hotels are or how journalism functions. As a filmmaker, through observation and by talking to certain protagonists, I slowly understood a little more on the topic. My intent with the films I make, and with *Hotel Machine* in particular, is to put the spectators in my footsteps so to speak, so that they can themselves formulate their own sets of questions. Naturally, my point of view remains manifest through a series of choices in filming and editing, but the film is calling upon the spectator to work to construct her own seeing. Journalism as a practice could benefit from this process as well.

In a book titled *Aesthetic Journalism: How to Inform Without Informing*,<sup>146</sup> Alfredo Cramerotti discusses artistic practices that borrow the tools of journalism to offer a representation of a given phenomenon. Although it is enticing, the idea that these practices would constitute what he calls a 'new mode of journalism' is misleading. It is true that a fairly recent tendency has brought artists to use techniques that are similar to those employed by investigative journalism, such as interviews, embedding, or hidden cameras, resulting in objects that bring close resemblance to reportages. This documentary trend has long been acknowledged by curators and authors, who agree that what art does is *something else* than journalism.<sup>147</sup> Cramerotti himself writes that "art does not replace the journalistic perspective with a new one, but extends the possibility of understanding the first—where journalism attempts to give answers, art strives to raise questions".<sup>148</sup> In his attempt to reconcile 'journalism' and 'aesthetics', Cramerotti adds that "if journalism at large can be considered a view of the world (of what happened and its representation), then aesthetics would be the view of the view: a tool to question both the selection of the material delivered, and the specific reasons why things are selected".<sup>149</sup> However, art is not some kind of 'meta journalism'. It is when it adopted a very different posture than that of journalism that it

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<sup>146</sup> Alfredo Cramerotti. *Aesthetic Journalism: How to Inform without Informing*. Bristol: Intellect, 2009.

<sup>147</sup> The 'documentary turn' in art was central to the edition of Documenta curated by Okwui Enwezor in 2002, which had been nicknamed by some critics the 'CNN Documenta'. Another recent example is the *Berlin Documentary Forum*, "New Practices Across Disciplines", that was first held at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin in June 2010, and again in 2012 and 2014. One of the forum's intents was to bridge artistic and documentary practices.

<sup>148</sup> Cramerotti. Op. cit. pp. 29-30.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid. p. 28.

proved to be relevant when questioning the representations of the world that we have access to, including those provided by journalists, politicians, military, etc. Again, it might share with journalism the same means of representation, but what it does when it questions these representations is—in a much broader way than what Cramerotti suggests—to interrogate the conditions in which they are produced.

Following the initial trip to the Syrian border, I continued researching on ‘pacified war hotels’ by doing fieldwork in hotels that were previously used by journalists when reporting on conflicts, in Europe and the Middle East. In April 2012, I conducted two more research trips on my own to the Hyatt in Belgrade and the Holiday Inn in Sarajevo. The first of four film shoots involving a full film crew—consisting of the director (myself), an assistant director, a director of photography, a sound engineer, a line producer and a fixer-as-actor—took place in Beirut in July 2012. Two subsequent years of fund-raising followed and shooting resumed in April 2014 at the Al Deira Hotel in Gaza City and at the Hotel Ukraine in Kiev, and once again at the Holiday Inn in Sarajevo in September 2014. The initial intent was to cover a larger number of hotels, in other geographical zones—particularly on the African continent—but the difficulty of finding additional funding and the will not to prolong further the realisation of this project made me decide to edit the film with this choice of hotels. In any case, although the list of possible hotels where we could film seemed long at first sight, the preparatory work revealed that many hotels remained out of reach, according to the following three main criteria:

- The period of the conflict it corresponded to could not be older than the ‘first phase of mediatisation’ of the early 90’s, corresponding to the advent of satellite newsgathering (see my comment of the work of Hoskins and O’Loughlin in section 3). Since the film as much as the overall research project chiefly intend to question actual practices, going back too far in time would have meant to deal with too disparate media ecologies. Since the beginning of the actual phase of mediatisation, war hotels play a less straightforward role and have therefore become much more complex (and I believe more interesting) entities shaping the way we see conflicts. This criterion excluded hotels such as the Europa Hotel in Belfast or the Caravelle in Saigon. In addition, being too far in time from the time of the conflict restricted access to the protagonists, such as the hotel staff who worked during the conflict, or even to the journalists who covered the conflict. It has been the case for the Commodore Hotel in Beirut, whose owner is now the Méri-dien chain of hotels.

The hotel has been completely renovated and the young staff knows only very little about the major role the hotel played during the civil war. The same applies for the Dhahran International Hotel in Dammam, which was the base for all the journalists reporting on the invasion of Kuwait in 1990.

- The area needed to be relatively safe. Not only was it important for the project to 'be late', meaning going to these hotels after the conflict and once the reporters are gone, but the fact that the issue of safety is posed in the cinema industry in very different terms than in the news media industry also mattered. Hiring a film crew implies traveling with technicians who are usually neither familiar with situations of conflict nor trained to work in such conditions. Therefore, the insurance policies for cinema workers and equipment would not cover 'zones of potential unrest'. Additional insurances or the services of a personal protection company could be bought, but these were beyond the budget of the film. Although for a long time I contemplated the idea of going to the Al Rasheed and the Palestine Hotels in Baghdad, these safety issues persuaded us not to go, especially after the increase of violence in Iraq in 2014. The Gaza Strip was also considered 'at risk', but we managed to go during a relatively calm period, only three months before the start of the Operation Protective Edge launched by the Israeli Army in July 2014.

- Permission to film was mandatory. To film in Egypt or in Gaza for example, we needed to obtain a permit to film from the authorities. Access to Gaza is strictly limited and the only possibility to enter at the moment is with press cards issued by the Israeli Government Press Office (GPO). As I am not a journalist (contrary to what the PAO at Fort Irwin convinced himself), I do not have access to one of these. In an initial telephone conversation with the GPO, I described the project of the film. After just a few sentences, it was made clear to me that I would not be able to obtain a press card. Luckily, I had the presence of mind to mention ZDF/Arte as a 'confirmed' commissioning editor (that was pure bluff, I had only met them once. Later, when I told them about the situation, they agreed to produce a letter of support), and this is the moment when our access to Gaza became conceivable from the GPO perspective.

In Egypt, after the coup d'état removing Mohamed Morsi from power in July 2013, the new, paranoid authorities practically stopped delivering authorisations to film. Furthermore, in December 2013, the Egyptian authorities raided the makeshift office suite of Al-Jazeera in Cairo's Marriott

hotel, arresting twenty Al-Jazeera workers. In a statement, prosecutors said the journalists aimed "to weaken the state's status, harming the national interest of the country, disturbing public security, instilling fear among the people, causing damage to the public interest, and possession of communication, filming, broadcast, video transmission without permit from the concerned authorities".<sup>150</sup> It was thus clearly not a good period to go filming in a hotel in Cairo.

On other occasions, the hotel administration itself did not give the authorisation to film. It appeared that hotels belonging to big, international chains were the most difficult to convince. First contacts with the administration of the Hilton Ramses in Cairo did not prove to be promising. At the Hyatt Regency in Belgrade we were not allowed to film outside the public areas, or to interview employees. As for the Rixos Hotel in Tripoli they never returned calls nor answered emails. It is as if these international hotels do not wish to be associated with any particular local event, moreover if it concerns a conflict.

Considering all these restrictions, the four main locations in which *Hotel Machine* was shot were ultimately the following:

- Hotel Holiday, Sarajevo (former Holiday Inn)<sup>151</sup>

Built on the occasion of the 1984 winter Olympics, this hotel of about 350 rooms is a landmark building in Sarajevo. The Bosnian architect Ivan Štraus thought that a hotel needed to preserve within its design the idea of leisure and amusement, even more so since traveling circuses formerly used the site. He built a bright yellow and ludic façade, visible from many standpoints in the city. The hotel is located in the sector of Marijin Dvor, at the intersection of the old and the new parts of the town. This area is also the limit of what could have become a 'Serb Sarajevo' if the city had been partitioned, as the Serb Nationalists wanted it to be. Neighbouring buildings include what used to be the most prominent business towers in the city—the UNIS Towers, as well as former barracks of the Yugoslav Army. The Parliament stands on the other side of the street. From the early moments of the Yugoslav crisis in the early 1990s, the Bosnian-Serb Serbian Democratic Party (SDS), led by Radovan

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<sup>150</sup> Patrick Kingsley. "In Cairo Egypt to charge al-Jazeera journalists with damaging country's reputation". *The Guardian*, 29 Jan. 2014.

<sup>151</sup> <http://holidaysarajevo.ba> (accessed 14 Oct. 2014).

Karadžić, held numerous meetings in the hotel. The hotel manager of the time, a Bosnian-Serb, was a friend of Karadžić. Between February and April 1992, the hotel became the home of the Karadžić family, before they all fled to Pale, a small city southeast of Sarajevo, which became the Serb Nationalists stronghold throughout the war. On April 6, 1992, pacifist demonstrators gathered in front of the parliament and marched on the hotel. Karadžić's men shot on the crowd from the hotel windows and rooftop, killing six people. These are believed to be the first victims of the Bosnian war. Shortly after, foreign reporters flocked to this hotel, which was one of the few venues equipped to accommodate all of them. It managed to function throughout the conflict, for more than three years. The hotel had its own water cistern and it was equipped with powerful generators. The hotel staff, with the help of some of the journalists, bought smuggled gasoline from the Ukrainian UN soldiers to make them function. International journalists from major news network residing at the hotel had brought along communication equipment such as satellite phones. At the beginning of the conflict, when all the telephone lines in the country were cut, these satellite phones became essential to communicate with the rest of the world, and major Bosnian politicians, including President Izetbegović himself, came to the hotel to use these phones.<sup>152</sup> The hotel had been included by the new Bosnian state in the list of essential services, which meant that the men who were part of its staff did not have to serve in the army and to go to the battlefield. Working positions in the hotel were therefore highly coveted, to such an extent that employees accepted to work without being paid throughout the conflict.

Highly exposed, situated on the so-called 'Snipers alley', the hotel was often shot at during the war, but not as much as some of the buildings around it. This might suggest that an agreement to spare it had taken place between the belligerents. The façade exposed to the south, towards the frontlines, was severely damaged, while the rest was still standing at the end of the war. After the war, the hotel had a few more good years, while Bosnia was under reconstruction and international organizations kept sending personnel to monitor it. Its slow decline started shortly after, and today the financial situation of this oversized hotel is precarious.

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<sup>152</sup> Jovan Divjak. Interview. Holiday Inn, Sarajevo, 23 Sept. 2014. Divjak served as general for the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1992 to 1995.

- Hotel Mayflower, Beirut.<sup>153</sup>

The Mayflower Hotel opened in 1957 when tourism was booming in Beirut. The Samaha family has owned it since then. It is a far less flamboyant building and institution than the Holiday Inn in Sarajevo, which might be one of the reasons why it continues to be popular among the journalists and international organizations workers: it is a small, discrete, and well-run family hotel of about 85 rooms. It was probably not as famous among reporters as the Commodore Hotel, which remains the 'war hotel' reference in Beirut. Like the Commodore though, it had, and still has, a renowned bar, the Duke of Wellington, a London-style pub with reindeer heads, and old English paintings, where clients could (and still can) consume alcohol, even during the most severe moments of the war. The hotel is said to have never closed its doors since 1957, and it was therefore open to journalists during the 2006 Lebanon War as well. Like the Commodore's, the managers of the hotel used their connections (and some corruption) to remain open. This was achieved "through connections, through people helping (...), of course through paying some people off".<sup>154</sup> The Mayflower has the reputation in Beirut to be a den for spies, which is of course impossible to verify. Still, in an article published in *The Independent* in October 2007, British journalist Robert Fisk, who has lived in Beirut for many years and has been a frequent patron of the hotel's bar, suggested that the Mayflower's guests included members of militias connected to parliamentary leader Saad Hariri, the son of the former Prime Minister who was assassinated in 2005.<sup>155</sup> After the hotel owner threatened to sue *The Independent*, Fisk took back the accusation.<sup>156</sup>

- Hotel Al Deira, Gaza City.<sup>157</sup>

The Al Deira Hotel is "Your Home in Gaza", as its slogan goes. It is a small, 22 rooms boutique hotel, with a direct access to the beach. Since the Israeli authorities strictly regulate the access to the Gaza Strip and only grant access to aid workers and journalists, the Al Deira is situated in what can be assimilated to a zone of permanent conflict. Even when combats are not raging between the Hamas and Israel, there are no tourists visiting Gaza. The

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<sup>153</sup> <http://www.mayflowerbeirut.com> (accessed 14 Oct. 2014).

<sup>154</sup> Sherif Samaha. Interview. Mayflower Hotel, Beirut, 20 July 2012. Samaha is the hotel owner and manager. He is the son of Mounir Samaha, the founder and previous manager of the hotel.

<sup>155</sup> See Michael Bluhm. "Mayflower Hotel sues UK's *The Independent* for libel". *The Daily Star*, 10 Nov. 2007.

<sup>156</sup> See Robert Fisk. "Darkness falls on the Middle East". *The Independent*, 24 Nov. 2007.

<sup>157</sup> <http://www.aldeira.ps> (accessed 14 Oct. 2014).

Al Deira has therefore always been—since it opened in 2000, in ‘optimistic’ times, shortly before the second Intifada—a war hotel. I was there with my crew in April 2014, only three months before a new iteration of the conflict between Israel and the Hamas. Looking back, it was an interesting situation as we were both in a post- and pre- (although we did not know it at the time, and could only conjecture) conflict situation. The hotel was then empty and we were, during the weeklong of our stay, the only clients staying there. The economical reason why the hotel manages to survive is that it has a restaurant with a vast terrace overlooking the Mediterranean Sea, where the Gazan elite comes to smoke apple-flavored tobacco from water pipes and eat fancy desserts. The hotel is equipped with a rather decent Internet connection and a powerful generator. As there are several power cuts each day, this is an essential tool: each time, several times a day, the reception clerk runs through the hotel corridors with his torch lamp to start the generator manually, leaving the guests without electricity for less than a minute.

As soon as fighting or bombings resume in Gaza, the press corps colonizes the Al Deira, on a first come first serve basis.<sup>158</sup> It has been the case again recently in July 2014 during the Operation Protective Edge launched by the Israeli Army in the Gaza Strip. This operation has resulted, once again, in a very high civilian death toll.<sup>159</sup> In the afternoon of July 16, the journalists standing on the terrace of the Al Deira saw that a blast hit a shack on the nearby beach, where a group of children were playing. One boy was killed instantly. Several accounts describe how the journalists then saw the children waving at them and running towards the hotel.<sup>160</sup> It is at this instant that a second blast hit the beach, killing three other boys. Three others, who were severely injured, managed to reach the hotel where they were assisted by the hotel staff and the journalists, and later taken to the hospital. Since the start of the operation, journalists had been reporting on the attacks on civilians and the destruction of private houses, hospitals and schools. This attack on the beach was the first journalists witnessed directly, and they reported on it in

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<sup>158</sup> See Thomas Coex. Skype interview. 4 Nov. 2014. Coex is the AFP Chief Photographer for Israel and the Palestinian Territories. Coex recommended that hotel and helped organizing the film shoot in Gaza.

<sup>159</sup> See United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). *Occupied Palestinian Territory: Gaza Emergency Situation Report*. 28 Aug. 2014. As of 28 Aug. 2014, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimated the Palestinian fatality toll at 2,104, of whom 1,462 have been identified as civilians, including 495 children.

<sup>160</sup> See for example : Anne Barnard. “Boys Drawn to Gaza Beach, and Into Center of Mideast Strife”. *The New York Times*, 16 July 2014; Peter Beaumont. “Witness to a shelling: first-hand account of deadly strike on Gaza port”. *The Guardian*, 16 July 2014; William Booth. “Israeli strike kills four children on a Gaza beach”. *The Washington Post*, 16 July 2014.

unusually emotional terms. Only one day after, on July 17, journalists received a warning from the IDF that they had to evacuate all beachfront hotels, before the ground invasion that was announced on the same day. It is as if the Israeli army, with these two occurrences—the attack and the order to evacuate, was flouting the conventions around the war hotel, in what could be read as an attempt to lessen its strategic importance. What happened, inversely, is that its role was emphasized. Due to the extensive coverage of the event, the Army opened a criminal probe of IDF into the killing of the boys on the beach.<sup>161</sup>

- Hotel Ukraine, Kiev.<sup>162</sup>

The Hotel Ukraine is a large 14-storey hotel with 371 rooms overlooking the Maidan Nezalezhnosti ('Independence Square') in Kiev. The hotel, which opened in 1961 as 'Hotel Moscow', is state-owned and belongs to the State Management of Affairs. Starting in November 2013, thousands of demonstrators gathered on Maidan, calling for the resignation of President Viktor Yanukovych and his government, and demanding closer European integration. Because of its privileged position, the hotel was chosen as a base by most news organizations, and the reporters used its windows and balconies to film the protests on the square. In mid-February, after several weeks of occupation, the protests reached a climax and serious clashes took place between the demonstrators and the police forces. Between February 18 and 20, snipers positioned themselves in buildings around the square, including the Hotel Ukraine, to shoot on the crowd, killing over 100 people. Just like the Holiday Inn in Sarajevo, the hotel had multiple visual tasks: its height made it a privileged standpoint for journalists to film the events, and for snipers as well who used it to monitor and control the area. Many of the victims of the shooting were taken to a makeshift hospital that was installed in the lobby of the hotel. This is where news crews filmed the wounded bodies of the protesters and the corpses that were aligned and covered with hotel bed sheets, near the reception desk. It was another of these moments when the hotel becomes part of the nomenclature of the event. The images of the bodies were broadcast, contributing to reinforce the anger and the determination of the demonstrators, whose new actions were again filmed from the hotel windows.

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<sup>161</sup> See Yaakov Lappin. "Army opens criminal probe of IDF strike on Gaza beach that killed 4 kids and attack on UNRWA school". *The Jerusalem Post*, 9 Sept. 2014.

<sup>162</sup> <http://www.ukraine-hotel.kiev.ua/en> (accessed 14 Oct. 2014).

The idea of *Hotel Machine* is not necessarily to tell all these stories, for each of these places, although they would certainly contribute to conveying a good understanding of the strategic importance of hotels in a given warfare landscape. As I have suggested in the previous sections, the role of these hotels has been evolving constantly in recent years. The way armies and insurgents conduct conflicts, and the means deployed by media organizations to cover them, both transform at such a rapid pace that it would be vain to try to describe how war hotels adapt to these fast changing landscapes. Instead, I considered that a more productive posture to direct a film on war hotels was to acknowledge the fact that they appear at times and recede at others. As last year's events in Kiev have shown, it is at the instant when we would be tempted to think that the role of the hotel is out-dated that it returns forcibly into the nomenclature of events. This ambivalence contributes to its complexity and its relevance. It is what makes it interesting not only as the subject of a film, but also as its main character, around which emerges the rest of the cast, and from which stories materialize.

In the following section, I am reviewing some of the choices that contributed to making *Hotel Machine*. The discussion concerns specific formal decisions as well as some of the attributes of the filmic dispositif that exemplify the posture of the film: that of questioning the changing and various roles of the war hotel, its resilience, and its prospective functions in an increasingly diffused war and media environment.

### **The set**

*Hotel Machine* is not a film on any particular conflict or war hotel, and the choice of filming in different places and different countries does not follow either the logic of the series. The different sets allow the film to focus away from any particular conflict, especially since the editing 'weaves' together the different hotels where the shooting took place into one complex and protean space: not a generic, but rather a kind of 'meta-hotel'... The first sequence of the film shows three different staff members, from three different hotels, dressed in three different uniforms, doing the same gesture of wiping a mirror (fig. 37).<sup>163</sup> Later sequences alternate images of various lobbies, rooms, kitchens or views from windows; different languages are heard, and it thus

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<sup>163</sup> This gesture was chosen as the introduction to the film as a symbolic way to 'clean the frame': it is as if these hotel employees were facing us and wiping the marks off the screen, intent on letting us see the image better.

becomes progressively clear that the question of where the action is situated has no relevance in this film. What remains as far as understanding the setting is concerned is threefold: it is a hotel; it was formerly in a conflict zone; journalists frequented it.



**Fig. 37a-c.** The first sequence of *Hotel Machine*. The maids are 'cleaning the frame'. Film stills from *Hotel Machine* directed by Emanuel Licha (The film is available on the dedicated website).

The film is shot exclusively in the interior of the hotel. It is a pacified space, it resumed its usual activities and tourists are back. Nothing special is happening. Filming takes place in different zones, corresponding to five different types of gazes.

1. Zones of fortuitous gaze. It corresponds to zones of transit and random encounters: here, the gaze is scanning the space. It includes the entrance to the hotel, the reception desk, the lobby, corridors and elevators.

2. Zones of intended gaze. Journalists go to these spaces when they intend to look at something specific. It may be a press conference or the battlefield. It is a zone of scrutiny, from which events and people are watched intentionally and with the aim of analyzing what is seen. In hotels, these spaces may be the conference rooms or spaces to watch towards the outside, such as windows, balconies and rooftops.

3. Zones of social gaze. This is where one goes to see as much as to be seen. In this space, information is shared that contributes to the understanding of the events and situation. They include the swimming pool, the restaurant, the bar or the lounges.

4. Zones of reflexive gaze. These are the hotel rooms that are journalists' private spaces for retreat and reflection. This is where they read their colleagues' articles, conduct their own research, process their images, write their articles and send them out for publication.

5. Zones of machinic gaze. The hotel staff uses these, using their 'expert' gaze to ensure the hotel is running properly. They include the kitchen, the laundry, the boiler room, etc. These zones are shown in the film to catch a glimpse on the machinic aspect of the hotel, what makes it function. Close shots or slow zoom-ins on details of machines functioning inside the hotel, such as the oily engine activating the elevators, the rusty handles, the dripping pipes and the pressure relief valve in the boiler room, the whistling stove burners in the kitchen, the heavy press at the laundry and the dusty ventilator in the storage room, the steamy espresso coffee machine and the flickering neon lights... all give the impression of a round-the-clock process and of an imminent threat, as if the machine was kept in activity to be ready at all times.

The *Hotel Machine* spectator's gaze is almost exclusively limited to these zones. When she sees outside of the hotel, it is always through a window, or a

doorframe, as the camera operator remained permanently indoors. The only moment in the film when the image is freed from the frame of the building—the image then shows the outside without any window, door or balcony frame—is in the very last sequence of the film (fig. 38). A slow tracking-in shot brings the camera away from the hotel for the first time, leaving behind the confused sounds of overlapping voices from a press conference held inside. It is the very last image of the film: the city is seen in the distance. The proposition with this ending is that the model of the war hotel is now brought outside of it, to the rest of the city, where potentially from every window or balcony of every building, someone could be reporting. Another idea lies in the fact that the tracking shot is interrupted by a black screen while the camera is still in a forward motion: it is as if it was ‘flying away’ from the hotel, from the discordant voices, to the tranquillity of a non-conflictual space or maybe, on the contrary, to the next war zone.



**Fig. 38a-b.** The last sequence of *Hotel Machine*. The camera is tracking in to go outside of the hotel for the first time. Film stills from *Hotel Machine* directed by Emanuel Licha.

## **Image and sound**

The hotel is filmed in a very formal way, alternating distance shots and extreme close-ups in almost abstract frames. This symmetry and rigour allow moving from one hotel to another, which is needed in order to render the idea of a 'meta-hotel' and to give the impression of a place as a whole (even if constituted by distinct hotels). A tripod or a dolly was systematically used, to produce very symmetrical long shots, frames in the frame, but also very tight shots that help break up the space. These shots differ from moments that are 'more documentary' in style, especially when employees are filmed during their work or discussing between themselves. The camera is then slightly more mobile.

The hotel is filmed as a character and it is discovered in layers. The space is broken up using, for example, the reflections in different objects, such as windows and mirrors. Slow zoom-ins on certain objects are used in order to emphasise the build-up of tension. Associated to the sound work, the movement of the tracking shots dramatises some sequences by approaching a door, moving in a corridor, or going over the window frame to see beyond. Some panoramic shots, taking advantage of an obstacle in the frame enable us to move into another remote zone of the hotel or to another hotel. As the film proceeds by layers, searching for meaning and progressive discoveries, the work on the focus of the image also becomes a narrative element. Some shots have a very short depth of field, focusing on a specific detail in a wider, blurrier context. The film does not aim at translating the premise of the hotel accurately, proposing rather an imaginary construction.

The main challenge in the direction of the film was, as I have already commented, to render the now somehow banal spaces of the pacified hotels into relevant images. Before I describe some of the choices for the direction of the film that allowed it to 'inhabit' and to revive these spaces, I need to discuss the role of sound in the film. Indeed, it was important that the hotel be not only a décor and a setting for protagonists to perform actions and tell stories. The 'naked' space needed to 'talk' on its own as well, and this is when sound became pivotal. The sound in the film has various origins: it can be diegetic (its source is visible on the screen) or non-diegetic (the source is not present on screen nor is it implied to be present in the action). The play with both conventions is used to create ambiguity and tension. In Gaza for example, there is almost always the sound of drones in the sky. They are sometimes nowhere to be seen, but they are constantly heard, even in 'peaceful' times.

This invisible threat has a constant auditory reminder. In the film, I used this example to create a tension: the sound of a drone was added as a special effect and it is heard on very quiet images of the hotel. This creates, on an unconscious level, the impression that something grave is about to happen. It contributes to showing the hotel not only in a historical perspective (this is where it happened) but in a protention as well (it could happen 'there' again). 'There' is not necessarily this specific hotel. This aspect is important, because it is not to say that a conflict could break out once again in that same place (which was unfortunately the case in Gaza). But since I am dealing with a 'meta hotel' and not with specific hotels, cities or conflicts, this filmic strategy opens up possibilities for future occurrences in yet unknown places and hotels. It also reasserts the relevance of the war hotel in the present. Other sounds from outside, far away, enter the hotel at some very specific moments. Those sounds indicate that the outside is under pressure (sirens, disputes between pedestrians, thunder...). They blend with the sounds of the interior or the archives and then gradually disappear. The sounds of everyday objects from the hotel (air conditioning, wireless waves, dripping tap, computer keyboard, dishes manipulated / broken, neon light blinking, phone ringing, etc.), or caused by a gesture (for instance knocks on the door, fingers patting a table, but also voices, etc.) are used to write a musical score of confrontation time. A reference is, in *Apocalypse Now*, the moment when the blades of a fan are shown and the sound of a helicopter is heard. Those sounds are mixed with those of archives from stories or films.

Another type of sound work includes moments such as when a radio set was filmed that was used by the kitchen employees to listen to music. During editing, the music was replaced by an audio archive of a news report from a conflict zone. Obviously, we do not see on the screen any specific reaction to the news from the staff (as they were actually simply listening to music), and this apparent insouciance reinforces the idea of the war hotel as some kind of 'bubble', embedded in the conflict but somehow detached from it as well.

A last example of the sound work in the film is the sound of a Larsen effect that was added as a special effect on two occasions in the film. The first time is at the beginning of the film, when we see the hotel staff organising a room for a conference, while the second occurrence is during the sequence before the last during the press conference. A Larsen effect (or audio feedback) occurs when a signal emitted by an audio output (a speaker for example) is received by an audio input (a microphone for example) and then passed

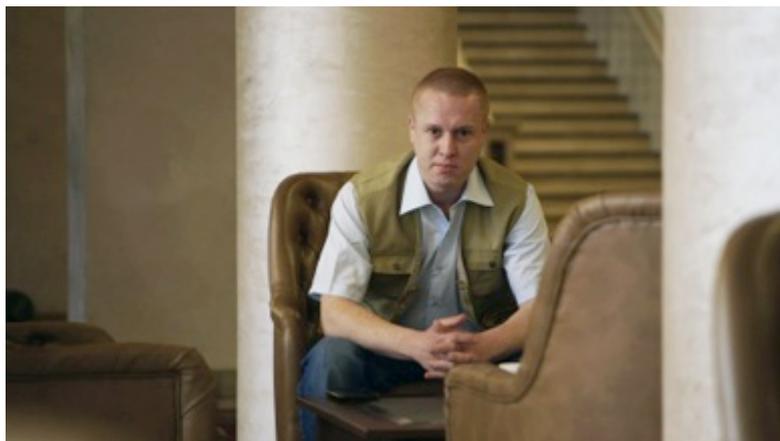
through again the audio output. It thus creates a sound loop, producing a strident, and sometimes painful, sound. This idea of the loop is twofold: on one hand, it conveys the idea that the war hotel is this machine that receives and observes as much as it emits. The input and the output sources in a single location produce this loop, creating this sound that covers everything, making unintelligible any other sounds or voices. On the other hand, within the film, the loop is seen in the reiteration of the scene of the conference room. For a great portion of the film, we understood that we were dealing with a war hotel from the past, and all that was said about it were memories. But returning to the conference room in one of the last sequences, this time filled with cameras, microphones and journalists, shows that history is repeating itself and that what we have been learning from the past of the war hotel may well be valid to consider it in its present materialisation.

## **Direction**

### **The Fixer**

To make the various stories emerge from the hotel and to make that object 'speak', the film crew needed an interpreter and mediator. Foreign reporters usually attribute this role to fixers. The fixers are their translators and guides and they act as intermediaries to access local sources. The character of the fixer is particularly interesting because he participates in a very concrete way in the framing of the information. The quality of the information greatly relies on his contacts and on the rigour of his translations. For the purposes of the film, a fixer who was active during the war was hired to play his own (former) role. He is seen in the film in various public spaces of the hotel and his presence establishes a link between the hotel as it is today and what it was during the conflict (fig. 39). He seems to be waiting for something, maybe for someone, or for the next conflict to break out and further contracts with media crews. The first time we see him, he is sitting in the hotel lobby, shuffling through a handful of international journalists' business cards, carefully reading some, dismissing others... It is not clear if he ever left the lobby after the journalists left the country, or if he is simply back for a visit. In any case, he seems at ease in this environment, calmly smoking cigarettes or shishas, walking around and talking to the personnel. His function is similar to that of the coryphaeus in the Greek tragedy, who speaks on behalf of the choir that is responsible for telling the background information—everything that could not be represented on stage, such as the great battles, and for summarizing the situations to help the public follow the events. The fixer is the only one to look

straight into the camera, as if addressing the spectators directly. He is saying a text that has been written for him, using his own words after a long preparatory interview concerning his tasks and what happened at the hotel during the conflict. Although there are different fixers for each hotel, they all represent a single character that we recognise by a dress code: he wears a pale blue short-sleeved shirt under a beige 'journalist vest'. There is thus only one character of the fixer, with different faces.



**Fig. 39a-c.** The fixer has different faces, but he is one single character. Production stills from *Hotel Machine* directed by Emanuel Licha.

### The Skype interviewees

In various sequences, the fixer is seen holding and looking at a smartphone on which screen we see what appears to be Skype interlocutors (fig. 40). They are the various 'experts'—journalists, historians, safety consultants, politicians—whose testimonies are essential to understanding what is at stake in these hotels during conflicts. Photo reporter Patrick Baz, for example, recalls how he used a hotel balcony in Benghazi to photograph a plane crashing, or the time he saw young Jihadists sleeping next to Marines in a hotel lobby in Baghdad. Other journalists (Rémy Ourdan, Lara Pawson) tell more war hotel stories, and we also hear a safety expert (Chris Cobb Smith) explaining what are his criteria when choosing a hotel for media crews he escorts to conflict zones. An architect (Eyal Weizman) and a historian (Kenneth Morrison) discuss the strategic roles of war hotels... The content of each of these interviews is heard on the background of images of the hotel. The contrast between the violence of their stories and the tranquillity of the pacified hotel produces a disturbing effect, forcing the viewer to mentally insert, by himself, the visions created by the stories into this banal setting. This process differs greatly from what is normally proposed by journalism, which tends to use images to illustrate stories. With *Hotel Machine*, the spectator is called upon to (re)construct by himself these unsettling scenes.

The footage of these interviews is actually real Skype recordings. Technically, fixers were filmed holding a smartphone with a green screen, which was later overlaid by the interview footage during post-production. Initially, I conducted these Skype interviews for research purposes, and they were not intended to be included in the film. Instead, during the first shooting with the full crew that took place in Beirut, I invited inside the hotel people who could talk about what happened there (local journalists, historians, architects...). But this strategy revealed inadequate to gather sufficient material during the time I could afford to stay in one place. In this attempt, I was also not able to find a proper way to interview them. I did not want to conduct 'talking heads'-style interviews inside the hotel, and the interviewees felt awkward to talk otherwise. I did try to ask some of them to perform various duties while talking (stand at a window, sit at the bar, etc.), but the result looked clumsy. It is upon my return, after looking at the film footage from this shooting that I decided to disconnect the content of the interviews from the places where I was filming. This allowed me to include some pivotal statements I had already gathered while researching, and to reach other 'experts' that I could not afford to bring 'back' to the hotels. This decision also reinforced the distinction between the interviewees who

'belong' to the space, such as the staff members, and those who are connected to that space for reasons dealing with the conflict, which itself belong to the past. It is indeed a consistent strategy if we consider that the time when the shooting takes place is post-conflict and that these experts have no more reasons to be in that hotel. The way they remain connected to it though is through the fixer. It is with him, who is the mediator between the absentees and those who remained in the pacified hotels, and who is now back (or maybe never left them after the conflicts), that they are 'conversing'.



**Fig. 40a-b.** The interviews of the 'experts' are seen on mobile phones held by the fixer. Production stills from *Hotel Machine* directed by Emanuel Licha.

Another aspect of that strategy consisting in having the interviewees appear on the screens of hand-held devices or small monitors inside the hotel deals with the fact that editing these interviews in the film in full screen would have constituted an 'escape' from the hotel. Indeed, I wanted images of the hotel to remain permanently on the screen, in order to offer no other distraction from it for the entire duration of the film. As a result, every single shot of the film deals with a representation of the hotel, and the interviews, as well as all the other 'imported' material (as described below for the archive material), are

broadcast on available devices already in the hotel, such as smartphones, computers, and television sets for images, walky-talkies or radio sets for audio archive.

#### Hotel staff testimonies

One of the Skype interviewees, former BBC journalist Lara Pawson, says in the film: “Knowing the way journalists work, particularly when you’re under massive time pressure: you arrive in a country, you have five days, maybe ten days there. You’ve got to get information as quickly as you can. So of course, the people who run the bar in the hotel, or the women who drop in to clean the bedroom are all potential sources of information”. For *Hotel Machine* as well they became important sources of information, especially since they are the unique direct witnesses we could meet inside the hotel after everyone else has left it after the conflict. The employees who tell a story of the hotel in wartime are filmed while working, in conversation with colleagues. They never look directly into the camera. One of the opening sequences shows two hotel waiters in a semi-dark conference room filled with chairs (fig. 41). One asks: “Do you remember who was here?”. His colleague answers: “Fifty war reporters during three years.” We understand that this scene takes place in what used to be the dining room of the hotel during the conflict. In a mnemonic action, they start reordering the chairs, placing them as they were when journalists had dinner there. They try to remember where each of the journalists sat and they place the chairs accordingly: “Can you remember who was sitting where?”, one of them asks. “Christiane Amanpour was sitting here”, and further away “a French crew had a table of eight.” This scene is emblematic of what I tried to achieve with this filmic dispositif: to have the hotel—including its objects and its personnel—‘speak’ about what it ‘did’ during the conflict.



**Fig. 41.** Two waiters are arranging the chairs to reconstitute the former dining room. Film still from *Hotel Machine* directed by Emanuel Licha.

This scene owes a great deal to Rithy Panh's *S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine* (2003). Even though it addresses very different issues than that of hotels in conflict, his documentary film offers a compelling example of the use of an architectural object in the process of describing and understanding a given phenomenon through film. Panh filmed on the location of what was once the Security Prison 21 (S-21) in Phnom Penh. This former high school was used by the Khmer Rouge regime from August 1975 until its fall in 1979 to detain, interrogate, torture and eventually kill an estimated number of 17,000 people. Panh's sober dispositif consists in filming two victims and about a dozen perpetrators face to face in the empty rooms of S-21 amid its artefacts. One of the victims, a painter, uses his painting to describe what the prisoners' life was like. He also interrogates the guards, struggling to understand, more than twenty-five years later, the reasons behind their cruel behaviour. In many scenes, the former prison guards re-create their routine, typing reports, opening cell doors, feeding imaginary prisoners... One of these scenes is edifying: it shows guard Khieu Ches ("Pœuv") re-creating his routine, shouting at inmates only he can 'see', pushing and slapping them, repeatedly opening and closing an invisible lock... It is clear that he is haunted by the images of the past, which he uses to fill the voids in the prison space (fig. 42). These images appear precisely because he is exposed to the site of his trauma. The corridors he is roaming are the same; the doors of the cells are still up, as well as the metal bars on the windows. He uses the materiality of these architectural elements—as well as, most probably, the smell, the light, and the sounds of these spaces that are all powerful mnemonics—to insert the missing elements such as the furniture, the lock pad, and the prisoners themselves. Pœuv gives the impression of being possessed. He is in a sense, as his whole body is controlled by the haunting images of the past. Pœuv could have recreated these gestures in another, more neutral space: but it is almost certain that the scene would not have had the same intensity, as he would be *acting* his past gestures. In the very same space where he initially performed them, he is re-living them.<sup>164</sup> The impact of this scene, among others in the film, is such that in December 2003, after three decades of denial, Khieu Samphan, the Head of State of Democratic Kampuchea wrote in an

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<sup>164</sup> For an analysis of this scene and of the rest of the film, see Deirdre Boyle. "Shattering Silence: Traumatic Memory and Reenactment in Rithy Panh's *S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine*". *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, Vol. 50, No. 1/2 (Spring & Fall 2009), pp. 95-106; See also A. C. H. Lim, "Reassembling Memory: Rithy Panh's *S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine*". In S. O. Opondo and M. J. Shapiro, eds. *The New Violent Cartography: Geo-analysis After the Aesthetic Turn*, 2012. New York: Routledge. pp. 118-133.

open letter, that genocide did take place in Cambodia between 1975 and 1979. It was, as he wrote, after seeing Panh's film that he was able—or forced—to admit it.<sup>165</sup> What Panh's *S21* does indeed is to return to the bodies and to (one of the) places of the genocide. As such, it forcibly makes evidence almost palpable. The leading principle of the film is that objects, such as the 'petty mechanisms' of the detention centre, can make one talk. Not only was this statement valid for the prison warders twenty-four years after the facts, but it also functioned for Khieu Samphan through a filmic ricochet.



**Fig. 42.** Former S21 guard recalls his routine at the prison. Film still from *S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine*, directed by Rithy Panh. (the corresponding extract is available on the dedicated website).

*Hotel Machine's* endeavour is of course different. No one is expected to *admit* anything after seeing it. The film does not adopt an investigative stance, nor does it disclose any evidence. In fact, the spectator of *Hotel Machine* hears or sees nothing new to her: but what she does see might very well be unique and thus able to raise questions about the representations of conflicts. Such a combination of different filmic processes is indeed an unusual way to deal with topics dealing with the way conflicts are seen, represented and understood.<sup>166</sup> Three styles of film writing are dialoguing, sometimes within the same shot:

<sup>165</sup> See Joshua Oppenheimer. "Perpetrators' Testimony and the Restoration of Humanity: S21, Rithy Panh". In Ten Brink, Joram and Joshua Oppenheimer (eds.) *Killer Images: Documentary Film, Memory, and the Performance of Violence*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013. pp. 243-55.

<sup>166</sup> One of the most interesting attempts already dates back to 1994. See Marcel Ophuls, dir. *The Troubles We've Seen: The History of Journalism in Wartime*, 1994. Ophuls is seen travelling to war-torn Sarajevo to observe and question the work of journalists. For a comprehensive review of the film, see Janet Maslin. "A Report on Reporters in the World's Hot Spots". *The New York Times*, 6 Oct. 1994.

documentary (employees at work, guests of the hotel); directed documentary (such as the scene in the dining room); fiction (the fixer in his function of coryphaeus)... in conjunction with interviews, and audio and film archive. Panh's soberer film highlights the efficiency of the mnemonic process that consists in associating testimony to a meaningful space. It is a dispositif that I had already explored in my film *Green, Green Grass of Home* (2002) in which a former inhabitant of Sarajevo is seen in an empty field describing the plan of the apartment she lost during the war. She tries to remember the layout of the apartment in details, walking in the field as if she were inside of it: she goes 'from one room to the other', describing the content of each and telling anecdotes.<sup>167</sup> This filmic process, inspired by methods used in the discipline of psychology for instance, reminds us that history remains vivid in the present, translating into various signs, emitted by speech, body language, actions and traces of various sorts.

### **Archives**

A film is a good format to unveil these traces and to give them a new resonance by juxtaposing them through montage. In the case of a project looking at war hotels over a period of more than twenty years, a film allows the shuffling of various temporalities in order to question what is left of their past roles in the present. The spatial and temporal conflation in *Hotel Machine* are the most manifest with the use of archive material. Monitors or screens available in the hotel (the television monitor in the rooms, the lobby, the lounges or the bar, the screens in the conference room, and other available computers), as well as radio sets, are used to broadcast archive material recorded in or from a hotel during a conflict. The evocation of the past through archive material enables the spectator to weight the relevance of these spaces in the present. These hotels were hastily repaired after the conflict, and with the rare exception of the hotel Ukraine in Kiev where we were only two months after the events of February 2014 and where there were still bullet holes in some windows, they bear no (visible) scars from the combats. The dispositif of the film unveils them. For example, in the opening sequence we see a housekeeping employee calmly dusting the reception desk. It is only much later, towards the end of the film, that we see him once again, this time on a footage broadcast on a television monitor in a room: he is shown carrying the

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<sup>167</sup> See Emanuel Licha and Maja Bajević, dir. *Green, Green Grass of Home*. 2002.

body of a wounded boy, after the July 16, 2014 attack on the beach in Gaza (fig. 43a-b). Another example is taken from the moment when the lobby of the Hotel Ukraine was transformed into a makeshift hospital: archive footage showing the wounded bodies in the lobby is broadcast on a television monitor placed in the exact same space (fig. 44a). We know it is the same space because we recognise the armchairs, which appear both in the main image and in the broadcast. In the archive, we also see stairs in which journalists are standing, photographing and filming the chaotic scene below (image detail: fig. 44b). In the following shot, we see a housekeeper quietly wiping the same stairs today. A voiceover—hers, which was not recorded at the same time she was filmed, thus constituting a third temporality—is heard telling the horrific story of that day (fig. 45). The contrast between a seemingly un-agitated décor and the violence of its past (or in the case of Gaza, its future, as the attack took place three months *after* we filmed in that hotel) is shown repeatedly throughout the film, by juxtaposing images of the pacified space with other disquiet images or sounds from archive material. To describe how these various temporalities blend in, Elizabeth Grosz describes, after Bergson, a “persistence of the past in the present”. She writes:

The past, in other words, is not only the condition of the present but also the condition of every possible future that may arise from or be made out of the present. Which is another way of saying that the past is infinitely reflective: it is revived, returned to relevance, rewritten (that is, actualized) in potentially infinite (future) forms. (...) It is not so much revived by the present as it seeks activity, reactivation in whatever form the present may enable. The active force is not simply the present seeking out past resemblances and relevancies, precedents; it is also the past seeking to extend itself and its potential into the present, waiting for those present events that provide it with revivification.<sup>168</sup>

A film enables the possibility not only for a ubiquitous stance, but also to perform jump cuts in time, as these operations are part of its very grammar. This temporal conflation is not meant to obfuscate, on the contrary. It is rather meant to highlight how former practices, as well as memory, continue to influence and to build the present. Past is embedded in the present, which makes it possible to represent the past, and to some extent the future as well. Film matters in this regard, as it can entangle different temporalities in a consistent way. Once this idea is granted, it is coherent to evoke a situation of

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<sup>168</sup> Elizabeth Grosz. *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution, and the Untimely*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004. p. 254.

the early 90's using a contemporary technology such as Skype. Or to see in a hotel lobby today a television screen displaying what appears to be a live broadcast of a conflict that took place in 2003.



Fig. 43a-b. An employee of the Al-Deira Hotel in Gaza, seen at work and in a news report. Film stills from *Hotel Machine* directed by Emanuel Licha.

To address the complexity of war hotels, *Hotel Machine* needed to resort to the different filmic strategies I have described. The concept of war hotel contributes to a certain way of seeing conflicts, when it blends in particular types of warfare landscapes—as the criteria described in section two have shown. It is certain that new modes of seeing—which are increasingly complex constructions—have downgraded the position of the war hotel as a limit condition for the representation of conflicts. Consequently, it would be tempting to speculate that the war hotel is no longer required in this process and that it can only recede. But examples of recent conflicts I have discussed (Ukraine, Gaza) appear to be contradicting this. Indeed, the war hotel seems to have played a significant role there, in concurrence to other, multiple, and diffuse spaces, while remaining a model to them. This is what the graceless expression of a ‘war hotelisation of the representation of conflicts’ I used previously meant. The blurry passage from a very defined space to a more scattered one is what the film tries to emphasize, by adopting a ubiquitous stance and establishing temporal connotations.



**Fig. 44a-b.** The lobby of the Hotel Ukraine with a broadcast of the scenes that happened in the exact same place two months before (detail in the lower image). Film still and detail from still from *Hotel Machine* directed by Emanuel Licha.



**Fig. 45.** An employee of the hotel recalls the day of the massacre on Maidan. Film still from *Hotel Machine* directed by Emanuel Licha.

It all started by looking through a window, in a mock Iraqi village in the Mojave Desert in California. Conflation of roles, spatialities and temporalities have subsequently continued to define the work—going through seven different countries, looking at past conflicts spanning over a period of more than twenty years, from the different perspectives of the (accidental) journalist, the filmmaker and the researcher in architecture/visual cultures—of understanding what the window stood for. As the last sequence of *Hotel Machine* suggests, in which the camera is tracking in to ‘fly out’ of the hotel through another window, it is now time to continue looking at the events of the world, equipped as we now are with this concept of the war hotel. It shall function as a tool to assist us in understanding the representations of the events of the world a little better, or should I rather say the manner and the conditions under which we are being told about the events of the world.

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## Appendix (DVD)

The attached DVD contains the following video and film material (the dedicated website includes the same material).

### 1. WORKS CITED IN THE TEXT (works not by Emanuel Licha)

**1.01-fig08-09.mp4** - *Live from Baghdad*. Dir. Mick Jackson. HBO, 2002. Film (02'43" extract).

**1.02-fig11.mp4** - from "Foreign Reporters Trapped in Libya Hotel". Al Jazeera English, 24 Aug. 2011. Television (02'10" extract).

**1.03-fig12.mp4** - "How To Report News From Inside Gaddafi's Tripoli Heartland". Channel 4 News. 24 Apr. 2011. Television (07'16").

**1.04-fig13.mp4** - *Under Fire*. Dir. Roger Spottiswoode. Orion Pictures, 1983. Film (01'58" extract).

**1.05-fig14.mp4** - *Live from Baghdad*. Dir. Mick Jackson. HBO, 2002. Film (05'24" extract).

**1.06-fig15.mp3** - Wiener, Robert, prod. "Live from Baghdad". CNN, Atlanta. 16 January 1991. Television (00'41" audio extract).

**1.07-fig22.mov** - *Hotel Rwanda*. Dir. Terry George. Metro-Goldwin-Mayer, 2004. Film (01'35" extract).

**1.08-fig23.mp4** - "Libyan Woman Bursts Into Hotel To Tell Her Story Of Rape". CNN, 26 March 2011. Television (03'17").

**1.09-fig26.mov** - *Live from Baghdad*. Dir. Mick Jackson. HBO, 2002. Film (01'12" extract).

**1.10-fig27.mov** - *Hotel Rwanda*. Dir. Terry George. Metro-Goldwin-Mayer, 2004. Film (01'44" extract).

**1.11-fig28.mov** - *Under Fire*. Dir. Roger Spottiswoode. Orion Pictures, 1983. Film (00'59" extract).

**1.12-fig31a.mov** - *A Mighty Heart*. Dir. Michael Winterbottom. Paramount, 2007. Film (00'43" extract).

**1.13-fig31b.mov** - *A Mighty Heart*. Dir. Michael Winterbottom. Paramount, 2007. Film (00'15" extract).

**1.14-fig31c.mov** - *A Mighty Heart*. Dir. Michael Winterbottom. Paramount, 2007. Film (0'41" extract).

**1.15-fig32.mp4** - "Radovan Karadžić - Holiday Inn 1992". 90sWarVideos. 16 Feb. 2013. Video (04'48").

**1.15b-fig33.mp4** - "Ratko Mladić - Srebrenica Fonatna Hotel 2, July 11, 1995". 22 Feb. 2013. Video (02'33").

**1.16-fig34.mp4** - "Kyiv's Ukraine Hotel Turned Into Makeshift Hospital And Morgue". Euronews, 21 Feb. 2014. Television (02'27").

**1.17-fig42.mp4** - Panh, Rithy. Dir. *S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine*. 2003. Film (04'36" extract).

## **2. PREPARATORY WORKS** (by Emanuel Licha)

**2.01-Mirages-2ch** - Licha, Emanuel. Dir. *Mirages*. 2010. Two-channel video installation (19'30").

see additional images of the installation at:

[http://emanuel-lich.com/EN\\_why-photogenic.html](http://emanuel-lich.com/EN_why-photogenic.html)

**2.02-Mirages-1ch** - Licha, Emanuel. Dir. *Mirages*. 2011. Film (20').

**2.03-HDWK** - Licha, Emanuel. Dir. *How Do We Know What We Know?*. 2011. Film (17'30").

**2.04-Hotel-Sampling** - Licha, Emanuel. Dir. *Hotel Sampling: 142 Extracts From 11 Films Featuring Journalists In Their Hotel*. 2011. Film (122').

## **3. WORK SUBMITTED WITH THE THESIS** (by Emanuel Licha)

**3.01-Hotel-Machine** - Licha, Emanuel. Dir. *Hotel Machine*. 2015. Film (66').

10 April 2015  
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