



Forethoughts     Dominic J. Jaeckle & Jess Chandler

A  
Jaeckle, 'Neither Helena nor Oliver  
had seen the Green Ray'

SOME CRESTING THOUGHTS ON A PAPER HOTEL: Across the seven issues of the 'paper hotel' (2016 to 2021), a persistent effort was made to never write an editorial nor preface for each of the seven instalments in the series. There was ever a keenness for the work to speak for itself; to rest on the page without any attendant road map for the astrology of ideas or constellation of concerns as each number in the series would accommodate. As such, the following remarks represent a reflection on a palmful of the ideas as underpinned *Hotel's* curation, its project, and the kernel of argument as informs *Seven Rooms*.

This is a book that Chandler and I have deigned as more of an ancestor to *Hotel's* activities; it is more a paper sculpture underwritten by the human and animal evidence as left in the room than any permanent record of a building's architecture. *Hotel* was intended to be a carnival of subjectivities, a prism for conversation. Likewise, *Seven Rooms* is a paean to the authority and practice of dialogue as a means of stretching the limits of literature's activity. *Hotel* is—and was—a 'paper plane' of a project; an undertaking dedicated to the practice of (to borrow a line from Edward Albee) our 'taking the wits for a walk.' *Seven Rooms*, in counterpoint, is that same paper plane now cresting on a line of thought.

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*I do not take any  
calls except from  
the century we are in  
when there is no bible in my hotel room  
it makes me sad to have no place to put  
my filthy poems for future guests  
it is important to let them know*  
—CA Conrad, 'Acclimating to Discomfort  
of the System Breaking Beneath Us'

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ON OUR INSTRUMENTS (PIANO & CLARINET): Thomas Bernhard, in his 1983 novel, *The Loser*, delivers the following instruction to

his reader: 'Naturally, we want to have a practical relationship with the things that fascinate us, [...] because a theoretical relationship isn't enough.'

*The Loser*, if you were to boil the book down to the bare bones of its argument and indication, is a book about the conditions of (and commitment to) a sanguine engagement with the lived experience of creativity. It is a book about playing the piano, in the main, but equally the ways in which our elected preoccupations serve to tickle our own ivories and adjust the architectonics of the spirit and skeleton. How a sincere relationship with any given instrument serves as means to manipulate body and mind; to conjure up a contractual sense of dedication to something. The musician, for Bernhard, is a means with which to examine commitment; commitment to a practice, or craft, rather than to the more professionalist aurora and vapour trail of any theory of success as follows creative enterprise. 'A theoretical relationship' with the things that preoccupy us is ever deficient, for Bernhard, without its axiomatic 'practical' activity kept in mind. *Hotel*, borne out of such a sentiment, was always about the practice of creativity, of criticality, and the narrative drive of doing.

Such an idea constellates around myriad efforts to crystallise and portray creativity as an activity as we shuttle from the twentieth century to the terms and conditions of the twenty-first.

We look over our shoulder at Robert Stone for instance, who – in his own screen adaptation of his 1967 novel *A Hall of Mirrors*, Stuart Rosenberg's film *WUSA* (1970) – would riff on this very idea as a form of 'gratuitous grace.' In his case, the want to levy practical engagement over theoretical insight alone is figured as a life and death scenario. Stone envisages a clarinettist who, having '[fallen] off his life,' describes the high stakes of creative pursuit. Played by Paul Newman, our clarinettist coils around Stone's prose. An adaptive soul is key in 'an imperfect world,' Newman murmurs – 'take me to water and I'll grow gills and disappear into a flurry of fins' – but there is a sense of urgency that the clarinettist felt defined his need to play. Grace in gratuity. 'Gratuitous grace.' Such a sense of grace needs be 'wrangled,' it needs be ridden; if the horse isn't shod, so to speak, such a grace comports a kind of poison, says Newman, sipping ice water in New Orleans. That grace can kill you, Stone suggests, if it's not given over to a practice.

*We want to have a practical relationship with the things that fascinate us, because a theoretical relationship isn't enough.*

Bernhard's piano and Stone's clarinet are instruments akin to those that sound out the way in *Hotel's* orchestra of words and works; the ideas that play on as the vital organs within this project.

In *The Loser*, Bernhard antagonises a want and desire to play the piano; in Stone's *Mirrors*, the author describes the ways in which the clarinet itself plays the clarinettist. *Hotel* wanted to assemble works that rest in-between these two extremities. To consider works that were in conversation with a world and its contexts rather than contextually rendered subordinate to the world beyond the *Hotel* itself.

'A short story is narrower than a room in a cheap hotel,' writes Jack Spicer in his poem 'The Scrollwork on the Casket.' In *Hotel's* contexts, this was a claim that required a little investigation. The narrowness of a story against the breadth of a room feels a way of picturing exactly the form of creativity that *Hotel* hoped marshal, champion, and accommodate. It was a publication defined by the simple idea that the room was ever big enough to afford myriad forms of telling, a multimodal form of tale, and all you needed do was decide to put a 'room' to purpose. To give it a job. To consider a practical relationship with a theoretical object of enquiry in a place designed for those aiming to 'pass on through.'

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*Two dogs named Ted and Fred do everything the opposite of each other. They go to the mountains and get rooms in a small hotel. The big dog gets a bed that's too small and the little dog one that's too big. Neither of them can sleep. The next day a bird suggests to them they trade rooms. Both dogs go back to sleep for the rest of the day. That is all there is of that story.*

– Bernadette Mayer, 'Big Dog, Little Dog'

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ONE BIG UNION: The 'hotel' was a practical metaphor first borne out in a South London eatery where I'd worked for some eight or so years in the kitchen to supplement the hourly costs of the city with the demands of hourly pay.\*

In the kitchen, we'd occasionally loop on the idea of a union, of working in union – of 'one big union' – and a kitchen is always a beautiful place to think on the harmonics of working collectively. This gave birth to an ongoing conversation on and around collaboration; how such a public place as a café invariably hides the people that serve to scaffold it, as though secreting away a tattoo just above a hemline; how the best work is that which goes unnoticed. A hotel, a notable cliché in literary works of myriad vintage, holds its own easy, symbolic vernacular; the night-time; the illegitimate; the decadent; the runaway; of disappearing or (of standing on the brink of)

\* With eternal gratitude to Daniel 'Red Man' Hughes of the Bluebrick Café for his example, his fraternity, and his friendship.

disappearance; but how a hotel shapeshifts was of interest. ‘A hotel is defined by its inhabitants,’ was the lead line on our masthead; the structure remains the same; the building is recharged, reformed, redressed by whomever may stake a room on any given night.

We set ourselves up to envisage the project of building such a ‘hotel’ that could (and would) present itself as a building willing itself to change shape on a regular basis. A proverbial run of rooms for occasional works, the idea that each cell would spill and inform the whole was fundamental. One big union.

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*The rose load falls silently from the walls,  
and ground shines through the carpet.*

– Ingeborg Bachmann, ‘Hôtel de la Paix’

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ON DEVOTION: Conversations concerning the first Hotel broadly occurred in a garden, amidst the ducks and chickens behind Café Crema – a now shuttered coffeehouse on the New Cross Road – and it is to those birds to whom this book is dedicated.

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*He’s talking  
to the sky its finger  
and walking bridge.  
the mummers disappear  
my city sounds.  
dance crumples to*

*the archive sky of fela.*

– Fred Moten, ‘tonk and waterfront, black line fade,  
unbuilt hotel, that union hall’

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TO UNFOLD A MAP OF THE WORLD IN THE RAIN (1): Over the course of its life, *Hotel’s* construction owes to the following lines of longitude and latitude: 51.5072° N, 0.1276° W; 51.4545° N, 2.5879° W; 51.0500° N, 3.7303° E; 38.7223° N, 9.1393° W; 40.7128° N, 74.0060° W; and, however briefly, 37.7749° N, 122.4194° W.

Whilst we aimed provide a fleeting surveillance of a ‘practical relationship’ with literature, a relationship with London in end itself proved fleeting, and so a number of houses and cities were drawn into the mix. A little journeying serves as a footnote to *Hotel’s* dedication to communion, collectivity, and to conversation, but the circumstances of authorial and editorial play in our contemporary moment demanded serious engagement with internationalism from the outset.

*Hotel #1* was published on the summer solstice, 2016, and launched on the summer eve of the BREXIT referendum in a room above a pub in Somers Town. The effects of this evening on any theory of ‘conversation’ from an English standpoint proved undeniable and immeasurable but – in line with *Hotel’s* efforts to facilitate a sense of direction – it made certain that internationalism would remain a given in any assembly of works as would lobby in this imagined building.

*Hotel* was a project indebted to the porousness of paper; it was a project that aimed actively ignore the borderlines between ideas; to repudiate any definitive sense of discipline; to encourage the making-public of a ‘work-in-progress’ as a talismanic stand-in for a ‘practical relationship’ with literary enterprise. Such aims were rendered all the more challenging in an eternal return of predicaments; be they mercantile, financialist – be it the rising price of paper or the soaring costs of accommodation – our circumstances gifted something to the idea of the publication of each instalment of *Hotel* as a temporary home for homeless ideas, and that knowing need that the swing doors that’d twirl about its spine needed remain eternally oiled and permanently open. Our argument itself needed its practical avenue.

*Hotel* was unfunded, with each issue in its seven-volume run seeded and set to scale solely by pre-orders and managed voluntarily throughout the project’s duration. The project was defined by care, rather than capital, and – accordingly – *Seven Rooms* is dedicated to the hours spent and subdivided willingly on the works that formed *Hotel’s* ever-changing foundation. To the effort to advent lasting things when time is a semi-precious stone set at a high rate of tax.

Following *Hotel’s* lead, *Seven Rooms* is thus a compendium of conceptual rhymes. A paean to the forms of conversation, enthusiasm, and generous criticality as scaffolded the *Hotel* project and – in tribute to such a philosophy – it presents itself as an associative thread of broken couplets that roll on – in and out of the terms of argument – ever breaking and extending the reach of each rhyme, to present a collectivised dialogue.

It is a conversation eternally on the make; on the lamb; running; bleeding; growing, in terms both organic and artificial, and self-modifying as it goes.

*Hotel* was, somewhat deliberately, never a specifically or explicitly political forum – nor was it an effort to antagonise or analyse the drift of creativity when the odds are so stacked against creativity itself. To quote Joan Brossa (by way of a single line poem that retrospectively became something of a manifesto or mantra for *Hotel's* activities), *Hotel* was a seven-storey effort ‘To unfold a map of the world in the rain,’ or – as ee cummings would put it – ‘to eat flowers and not be afraid.’

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*You ordered  
the wrong  
thing but it's ok we can  
come back  
to this  
restaurant  
another time*

– The epigram to *Hotel* #1, excerpted from  
Mat Riviere's 'Accident Book,' circa 2016

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Rather than any logbook or register of *Hotel's* itinerant cohort, *Seven Rooms* is an effort to render a history of *Hotel's* changing shape over the course of its seven years of operation.

The anthology begins with the final entry in the first *Hotel* and works its way through to the closing pages of the final instalment in the series, *Hotel* #7. The collation of works is neither completist nor concrete – indeed, the book could have taken many a different shape – and, in its collection, it endeavours to underscore the degree of editorial accident as underpinned the project's curation. By accident, I am not implying that *Hotel* was a haphazard or unthinking enterprise – far from it – but the ‘accident’ of our enquiry serves as a means of situating the kind of experimental work in (and on) literature and culture we'd hoped to support. Conversation and collectivity was the main; openness, generosity, and a keenness to counter the forms of isolation that circle a more prosaic and ‘garretted’ form of artistry the project hoped to repudiate. An openness to ideas was fundamental, and a want for each idea to redirect and refract any light that'd shine on its predecessor equally so.

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*I can see the blank wall  
I can see the silhouette in the window  
He's talking  
I'm not interested in  
what he's talkin' about  
I am only interested in the fact  
That it's the last hotel  
The last hotel  
Ghosts in my bed  
Goats are bled  
The last hotel*

– Jack Kerouac, ‘The Last Hotel  
& Some of Dharma’

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ON CRAQUELURE: For those who work in heritage, in conservation and in museum cultures, ‘craquelure’ is a form of damage that marks the history of a painting and assists in the adjudication of its value. A term for the network of fine cracks that appear in the varnish of an oil painting over time, the morphology of these cracks displays the dynamics of history on the surface of a canvas, effecting an image with a new set of desire lines, with distortions – a kind of pictorial crow's feet that delineate a painting's age and antiquity – and these fissures or fault lines explicitly show how every surface gives way to tension, in end. Is changed by virtue of a subjection to its environments. A painting's decay can delineate a form of signature; the association of a work with a given school, with a given time. It's a signal of authenticity; a kind of lighthouse for those looking to identify whether a work is fraudulent or no; and a means of ascertaining how time effects a work of art.\*

In some cases, craquelure is a hallmark of history; in others, the impact of accident. For example, if a layer of paint is applied over a wet surface, it causes what has been referred to as ‘youth’ craquelure. Alternatively, mix two types of chemical compounds in two varieties of paint that shouldn't meet – bitumen or asphaltum, for instance – and you've wide depressions in the paint layer, known as ‘alligating.’

The work that *Hotel* sought to afford space for arguably bears more in common with craquelure than it does the practice of painting itself. Herein, we've the work of some seventy-five makers (of the five hundred or so who have thus far contributed to *Hotel's* train of thought to date, across the project's various wings), engaging a

\* The metaphorical purchase of ‘craquelure’ is an idea that I owe (with thanks) to Chloe Aridjis.

practical effort to ‘alligator’ any fixed image of the *Hotel* as an edifice and to examine the cracks, crevices, and new symmetries that emerge.

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ON SHAKY GROUND: In a building such as an imaginary hotel, as of knowingly and willingly fluid foundations, a nod to the work of the termite is appropriate here.

Critic Manny Farber, and his sense of a ‘termite art’ as in counterpoint to the work of the ‘white elephants’ of the twentieth century, was a signal post for our building the first *Hotel*. The ‘elephants,’ for Farber, are progenitors of humidior-like projects that showcase a ‘drive to break out of tradition while, irrationally, hewing to the square, boxed in shape and gemlike inertia of the old, densely wrought masterpiece.’ In sum, works that err toward a want to build themselves on the shoulders of a history of accepted experimentation and, in formal terms, mollify an audience with a satisfied understanding of what such an experiment is for – what it should be, in narratological or argumentative terms – and how such an experiment should look and feel.

At war with the emotive elephants of false experiment (or of an experiment set about with its results already in the mind’s eye), Farber argues that we should side, instead, with the ‘termite.’ A critical quality he opines as akin to ‘moss’ or ‘fungus’ – Farber alludes to a kind of creativity that ‘goes always forward eating its own boundaries, [...] termite-like, it feels its way through the walls of particularisation’ to eat away ‘the immediate boundaries of [an] art, and [turn] these boundaries or limitations into the conditions of a next achievement.’

In typifying his termite, picturing his termite at work, Farber is not presenting any limited view of story or of genre convention. The idea of resolution, for example, is not the enemy. If you write the story of a housefire, that the building burns to the ground is not necessarily a keystone to the telling, but it is obviously intrinsic to the work at hand. In this sense, Farber doesn’t flag the gratification of a rhyming couplet nor the traditional *ends-and-means* of a story as any indicator that there’s an ‘elephant’ in the room. He cites John Wayne’s ‘bitter-amused’ performance in John Ford’s *The Man Who Shot Liberty Vallance* as emblematic of such a train of thought for its ‘intra-mural’ qualities. Rather, to focus on the ‘termite’ is to think on the fragility of accepted structures, to consider how – by virtue of a subtle redirection of light – you can demonstrate such fragility and, in so doing, generate new and unexpected ideas.

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TO UNFOLD A MAP OF THE WORLD IN THE RAIN (II): A favoured metaphor for the kind of creativity *Hotel* aimed to champion owes to Jules Verne’s 1882 novel, *Le rayon vert / The Green Ray*. An unusual entry in Verne’s escapist arsenal, here we’ve a more personal counterpoint.

Helena, besotted by the apparently revelatory, revolutionary effects that a meteorological phenomenon can have on our outlook, sets out for Scotland in the hopes of seeing the ‘green ray’ – an optical illusion, a green band that thumbs its way above a setting sun, in the right weather conditions, separating the declining light into distinct limbs of an apparently clear, green light. Helena’s ‘ray’ is sought as a means of securing her interiority; she hopes that the split sun will provide a source of illumination for the darker corners of her own outlook.

Over the course of their journeying along the coastline, countless obstacles abstract the horizon as each day closes. Clouds, seabirds, *et cetera*. When the conditions hit their zenith, those clouds clear and the gulls alight, the light begins to subdivide; Helena and her compatriot – Oliver – are lost in conversation.

To miss the light for the sake of an exchange – to co-convene and co-conspire on a *tête-à-tête*, in spite of the authority and determinism of any weather system, the glow of a god light, or a metaphorical meteorology of distractions... This was the constant aim throughout the duration of *Hotel*’s seven-year run – a scrutiny thereof, *Hotel*’s hopeful wheelhouse – and it is an active effort to miss the light for the sake and privilege of conversation that runs through these pages.

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B  
Chandler, 'The Inhabitants'

Now with a key in my hand, I'm surveying the foundations of the hotel I was for many years a regular inhabitant of. I remember clearly the excitement surrounding its original appearance, as though somebody had overheard our conversations and pleas for a new kind of creative accommodation, and suddenly there it was – welcoming us in, without asking for anything in return; 'a temporary home for homeless ideas.' *Hotel* was a magazine 'redefined by its inhabitants,' but constructed with a rigour, intelligence and vision which was invisible yet vital – formative in ways that its driving spirit of generosity and collaboration never chose to foreground, but which this volume shows so clearly.

When *Hotel* first appeared, I was running Test Centre, a small press co-founded in 2011 with my friend Will Shutes, releasing spoken word records and cassettes, poetry and fiction books, and eight issues of a fiction and poetry magazine based on the DIY approach of the magazines of the New York Mimeograph Revolution of the 1960s and '70s. Our first guest invitation came via Jen Calleja, who wanted to interview us for the *Hotel Archive* (an online counterpoint to the 'paper hotel'). We'd recently published her first poetry book, *Serious Justice*, and I've since published her short story collection and debut novel at Prototype – an ongoing collaboration that has been vital for us both. In her introduction to the interview, Jen wrote: 'I find great satisfaction and joy supporting the independent publishers I have the opportunity to work with through writing and translating, and I like to think of Jess and Will not as "my publisher" but as two new friends who I collaborated with to make a book. I feel proud of them and to be associated with them.' This is the spirit that has sustained us, and which adds meaning to the work within these pages, and to the work of its contributors that has followed. *Hotel* provided a space for so many reflective and interrogative conversations, and countless fictional lives were conceived within its rooms. Crucially, it wasn't just writers who found a home there, but editors and publishers too, and it became central to a small press ecology dependent on acts of generosity and collaboration.

*Hotel* came into being at a time (still ongoing) of exploration and experimentation in independent publishing, and looking back through its archive, it's clear how crucial a moment it captured, and nurtured. So many of the writers published in its pages, and reproduced here, along with the publishers who first discovered them, now lead the way – both as growing independents, and as recognised



Neither Oliver nor Helena had seen the Green Ray. Page 306.

leaders in a much wider, and dare I say commercial, literary landscape. But this trajectory towards more mainstream publishing – as a way of becoming sustainable – was by no means predetermined, or even desired, and *Hotel* helped support a growing ambition to establish a means of allowing bold and innovative work to exist and thrive in the margins, with a quiet confidence in its importance and influence, confirmed by the strength of the community it built and sustained.

In his preface to *A Secret Location on The Lower East Side*, a document / catalogue / checklist of an incredibly influential era in countercultural American literary history, Jerome Rothenberg describes that crucial New York scene ‘as mainstream and margin both, [representing] our underground economy as poets, the grey market for our spiritual / corporeal exchanges.’\* It was on the edges but also absolutely central, mapping out a future culture. As with most movements, it emerged in response to a growing need for alternatives, as ‘[w]riters who sought new ways & languages took charge of their own publication.’\*\* It was self-generated and unfinanced, with writers often doubling as publishers, making the operation of publishing itself central to the creative process, resulting in works in which form and content were truly aligned, the printed object inseparable from the written word.

In New York, location was vital, and the scene of those decades can be retrospectively mapped along specific topographies; collaboration was key, bringing with it an internal economy for the generation and distribution of work which kept it alive. *Hotel* kept the centrality of physical space and cohabitation alive, but as an imagined location, removing the walls in doing so, allowing individuals their own space within a shared community of web- or printed pages where nobody would ever be alone. Though London may have been its focus at times, any connection to one geographical place soon disappeared, and the magazine became distinctly international, and even more so as BREXIT tried its best to shrink the world around us. Just as the networks of the city once allowed, the networks of online communication and support grew and strengthened, and continue to reinforce the foundations we walk on now.

As a magazine ‘redefined by its inhabitants,’ *Hotel* remained in a state of energetic flux, reshaped by each new entry. By foregrounding the occupier over the building, it was vitally opposed to forces of ownership and division. As indie publishers in search of readers, and determined to give our authors the exposure we so strongly

\* Jerome Rothenberg, ‘Preface’, in *A Secret Location on the Lower East Side: adventures in writing, 1960–1980: a sourcebook of information*, by Steven Clay and Rodney Phillips (New York: The New York Public Library, 1998), p.9.

\*\* Ibid., p.10.

believed they deserved, *Hotel* opened its doors and formed its own audience, offering, as Jaeckle says, shelter to otherwise homeless things. It’s no coincidence that interdisciplinary work was so strongly supported in its pages, and its editorial approach was an act of curation, filling the growing gallery space with work which over time took shape as something coherent, giving permanence to transient things.

Paul Buck, editor of the seminal 1970s magazine *Curtains*, and both a Test Centre and Prototype author, conceived of the magazine as a form of ‘public notebook,’ allowing a ‘dialogue between contemporaries.’ As the magazine evolves and develops, new ideas emerge; it starts to create its own afterlife. In his introduction to *Disappearing Curtains (a journal)*, Buck also asserts the importance of editorial conviction and courage, writing that ‘when we create, when we edit, we shouldn’t care to think in terms of a wide readership, we have to focus on what we need to explore, and to explode, and even to exploit, without fear of failure or going so far that we fall into the abyss.’\*

So what does it mean to be publishing this book? Is it an archive of a moment, or an attempt to build something permanent from something designed to remain unfinished? There’s no doubt that we’re all on our own trajectories, and that the need to live, to adapt to rising costs and pressures, often requires us to either let things fade, or try to strengthen them into structures that can keep us more secure. This collection shows how crucial and influential the work of indie publishing can be; how important the foundations we’ve built are when the developers come in and acquire our land. And perhaps that’s a process we should embrace, as long as it’s acknowledged, and our work supported, so that we are able to continue it. Our fragility is our strength and our freedom, and with it we’ve built these seven rooms.

\* Paul Buck, ‘Notes in & out of the disappearing mist,’ in *Disappearing Curtains (a journal)*, ed. Paul Buck (London: Slimvolume, 2016), p.10.