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***THE INTERNATIONAL HOTEL AS A  
HETEROTOPIC SITE AND A NON-PLACE IN THE SAN  
FRANCISCO NOVEL I HOTEL BY KAREN TEI  
YAMASHITA***

**Keywords:** *heterotopia, non-place, Karen Tei Yamashita, International Hotel, San Francisco*

**Abstract:** *Michel Foucault notices that “heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates and makes them penetrable, [...] [they are] not freely accessible like a public place,” (Foucault 26) but the “individual has to submit to certain rites” and their inhabitants feel “sheltered, [...] hidden, and isolated without being allowed out in the open.” (Foucault 26-27) Since hotels are erected in almost every American city and they may also belong to the category of non-places (using Marc Auge’s terminology), the aim of the present article is to shed some light upon the construction of the hotel as a heterotopic site and a non-place in the San Francisco-set novel I Hotel (2010) written by the Asian American writer Karen Tei Yamashita. In this context, the present article also touches upon the question whether the adopted country should be perceived by the immigrants who are ‘on route to assimilation’ as a host country or as a hotel country.*

Michel Foucault, a French philosopher and literary critic, notices that “heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates and makes them penetrable, [...] [they are] not freely accessible like a public place,” (Foucault 26) but the “individual has to submit to certain rites” and their inhabitants feel “sheltered, [...] hidden, and isolated without being allowed out in the open.” (Foucault 26-27) Since hotels are erected in almost every American city and they may also belong to the category of non-places (using Marc Auge’s terminology), the aim of the present article is to shed some light upon the construction of the hotel as a heterotopic site and a non-place in the San Francisco-set novel “I Hotel” written by the Asian American writer Karen Tei Yamashita.<sup>1</sup> In this context, the present article

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<sup>1</sup> Karen Tei Yamashita (1951 - ) gained popularity and success on American literary scene after publication of sophisticated prose texts, including *Through the Arc of the Rainforest* (1990), *Brazil-Marú* (1992), *Tropic of Orange* (1997), and *Circle K Cycles* (2001). She is the recipient of two American Book Awards, the Janet Heidinger Kafka Award in 1992, a California Book Award as well as the Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature. Not only does Yamashita devote her literary career to writing fiction but she has also been fascinated with drama and theatre, which found its expression in the several plays that Yamashita has written, such as *Omen, an American Kabuki*, *Hannah Kusoh*, *Noh Bozos* and *O-Men*. In 1974 the author was awarded the Thomas J. Watson fellowship to conduct research on Japanese immigration to Brazil. Even though the project was supposed to last only two years, Yamashita spent almost a decade living in Brazil where he married an architect/artist Ronaldo Lopes de

also touches upon the question whether the adopted country should be perceived by the immigrants who are ‘on route to assimilation’ as a host country or as a hotel country.

In the essay “Of Other Spaces” published in the French journal in 1984, Michel Foucault maintains that heterotopias “are outside of all places, [and] even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality; they are absolutely different from all the sites.” (Foucault 24) These places can take various forms as there is no one universal form of heterotopia that can be found. According to Foucault there exist crisis heterotopias, i. e. “privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis: adolescents, pregnant women, the elderly.” (Foucault 24) One may also distinguish heterotopias of deviation and these are defined by Foucault as dwellings “in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed,” (Foucault 25) for instance psychiatric hospitals, prisons and retirement homes that, as the French theoretician points out, “are on the borderline between the heterotopia of crisis and the heterotopia of deviation since, after all, old age is a crisis, but it is also a deviation” because “in our society where leisure is the rule idleness is a sort of deviation.” (Foucault 25) What is more, while presenting the description of heterotopias functioning within urban spaces, Foucault explains that “each heterotopia has a precise and determined function within the society,” (Foucault 25) and it “is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible,” (Foucault 25) like the theatre that brings onto the stage “a whole series of places that are foreign to one another.” (Foucault 25) Heterotopic sites possess power to “accumulate time” “establishing a sort of general archive,” (Foucault 26) like the power that is exercised by museums and libraries, which “enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms [and] all tastes.” (Foucault 26) Finally, as Foucault further observes, every single individual can enter such a site but in fact it is only an illusion because “we think we enter, but the very fact that we enter excludes us,” (Foucault 26) which suggests that the individual or traveller after entering the building can go only to his/her own room and is denied access to the rest of the premises. In order to exemplify his line of thinking better, Foucault mentions the couple who decide to stay for the night in the American motel room. The man and woman, thus, become the inhabitants of the heterotopia and, in fact, can be described as the “guests in transit, [...] not really the invited guest[s].” (Foucault 26) On the one hand, they have the feeling of belonging to a particular sheltered place, which makes them feel isolated, hidden and protected; but on the other hand, they are exposed, vulnerable and “allowed out in the open.” (Foucault 27)

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Oliveira (Seiwoong Oh 329-330). Scholars agree that there is a great variety of issues explored in the literary works of Yamashita and they include but are not limited to: “global economic policies and inequalities, the migration of people, cultural flows and consumer culture, information and digital technology, new types of knowledge, global ecology, the dynamic borders of nation-states, and the re-organization of community.” (Thoma 6). Currently, Yamashita is Associate Professor of Literature and works at University of California, Santa Cruz where she teaches creative writing fiction and Asian American literature. Her latest work includes *Anime Wong: Fictions of Performance*, which was published in 2014.

What Foucault delineates as a heterotopia, Marc Auge, a French anthropologist and ethnologist, seems to define as a non-place.<sup>2</sup> In Auge's seminal study "Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity" published in 1995, the author formulates the definition of a non-place on the basis of his observations of postmodern reality. Auge's stance is aptly illustrated by one of the book's key quotes:

Supermodernity produces non-places, meaning spaces which are not themselves anthropological places, and which [...] do not integrate the earlier places: instead these are listed, classified, promoted to the status of 'places of memory,' and assigned to a circumscribed and specific position. A world where people are born in the clinic and die in hospital, where transit points and temporary abodes are proliferating under luxurious or inhuman conditions [...]; where a dense network of means of transport which are also inhabited spaces is developing; where the habitue of supermarkets, slot machines and credit cards communicated wordlessly, through gestures, with an abstract, unmediated commerce [...] (Auge 78)

In the light of the above, Auge notices that the proliferation of generic spaces like hotels, airports, freeways, malls have given rise to spaces which guarantee a sense of familiarity in an unfamiliar landscape, and can be felt as known even though they have never been visited. Such non-places have become integral parts of people's daily existence because, as Ian Buchanan carefully observes in the review of Auge's book, "cities today are structured around them." (Buchanan 393) Auge starts his in-depth analysis of the function and existence of non-places with Michel de Certeau's differentiation between space (a "frequented place," "an intersection of moving bodies" (Auge 79)) and place ("an assembly of elements coexisting in a certain order" (Auge 80)) in order to reach a conclusion that "there are certain places that while not being spaces in de Certeau's terms, are nevertheless not places either" (Buchanan 395). This idea seems to lie behind the following passage:

[t]he word 'non-place' designates two complementary but distinct realities: spaces formed in relation to certain ends (transport, transit, commerce, leisure), and the relations that individuals have with these spaces. Although the two sets of relations overlap to a large extent, and in any case officially [...] they are still not confused with one another; for non-places mediate a whole mass of relations, with the self and with others, which are only indirectly connected with their purposes. As anthropological places create the organically social, so non-places create solitary contractuality. (Auge 94)

To simplify somewhat, Auge deduces that there exist the so-called non-places of supermodernity, i.e. motorways with service stations, which "[adopt] an increasingly aggressive role as centres of regional culture, selling [...] local goods with a few maps and guidebooks [...] to anyone who is thinking of stopping," (Auge 97-

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<sup>2</sup> Such a stance seems to be viable in the light of the comments made by Sylviane Agacinski. Near the end of Auge's essay the author refers to Agacinski, who writes "is that it is also a non-place, a nowhere, something like what Michel Foucault – who did not envisage it as including the town – called a heterotopia" (Auge 112).

98) airport lounges where passengers wait for their next flight, or hotels where people are entitled to feel at home but, in fact, it is only an illusion because they are the visitors and do not belong there. Those non-places, in Auge's view, are inhabited by individuals who go through them or pass them by, but they are not meant to occupy a non-place infinitely. It is mainly due to the fact that non-places are perceived as transitory points, "they are measured in units of time," (Auge 104) i.e. departure and arrival times. In other words, non-places are supposed to provide their users with a temporary shelter in a similar manner as hotels, refugee camps or shantytowns threatened with demolition, which offer their inhabitants provisional protection. Nonetheless, "a non-place creates the shared identity of passengers, customers or Sunday drivers," (Auge 101) such a similar sense of shared identity may be felt/noticed among passengers travelling by plane, who do not necessarily have to share relation with one another apart from the fact that they have taken the same flight. Another example may be provided by the travellers who wait for their plane and spend time in the "limbo land," (Buchanan 397) i.e. the departure lounge, or the passengers who go on a shopping frenzy in a duty free zone. The inhabitants of non-places may be called customers, drivers, passengers, immigrants or refugees but, as Auge explains, they should have one, fundamental thing in common, i.e. "the user of a non-place is in contractual relations with it (or with the powers that govern it), [one] is reminded, when necessary, that the contract exists." (Auge 101) Therefore, a ticket has to be bought and shown at the check-in-desk at the airport, a boarding pass with one's own name has to be given in order to embark a plane, a credit card or a cheque must be used in a supermarket revealing thus the identity of the customer. What seems significant to mention at this point is the fact that via such gestures (presenting one's ID, credit card or passport) or by the presence of checkpoints (a check-in-desk, reception desk or tollbooth on a motorway) the user of the non-place is always required to prove his innocence. If one's innocence is established then the individual can proceed further and enjoy his/her status of a non-place occupier. What is more, the French anthropologist admits that the non-places are usually characterized by the 'instructions for use' (and these may include prescriptive, prohibitive or informative guidelines), (Cf: Auge 96) hence, the non-place users have to adhere to and follow them.

All of the above mentioned lengthy descriptions of heterotopic sites and non-places can well fit in with the description and the functions of the International Hotel in San Francisco (or I-Hotel as it has been more commonly known), both: the fictional and actual place in Karen Tei Yamashita's National Book Award finalist historical novel published in 2010, which bears the same title.

Situated at 848 Kearny Street in the Manilatown (i.e. Filipino American neighbourhood) and Chinatown section of San Francisco, the I-Hotel became a pivotal site in the history of Asian American communities living in the San Francisco megalopolis. The acronym I-Hotel, as Karen Tei Yamashita reminds her readers, may also stand for "I Spy Hotel," "Aiiieeee! Hotel,"<sup>3</sup> "I-Migrant Hotel" or "Inter-National

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<sup>3</sup> Yamashita is alluding at this point to the most significant artistic outcome of the Asian American movement, i.e. Aiiieeee! An Anthology of Asian American Writers edited by Frank

Hotel” (with a hyphen) and it was the last remnant of the ten-block Manilatown neighbourhood, as well as a residential hotel for low-income migrant workers, most of whom were elderly Filipino and Chinese Americans. Due to the fact that Manilatown had stretched along ten blocks of the Kearny Street, north from Market Street to Columbus Avenue as well as along the eastern edge of Chinatown, and was one block west of the financial district, town planners perceived it as the obstacle in the progress and development of the city. Consequently, step by step, with the approval of San Francisco’s politicians, the Filipino neighbourhood, which had consisted mainly of single-resident-occupancy hotels started to be demolished over the course of the 1950s and 1960s, except for the very last block where the International Hotel was situated. (Cf. Habal 4) The I-Hotel did not only perform the role of a boardinghouse for male immigrants mainly from the Philippines and China, but the very building itself was a home for community projects of Asian American activist organizations such as the Asian Community Centre, Chinatown Cooperative Garment Factory, Chinese Progressive Association as well as the Japantown Collective. Therefore, the hotel became a crucible of the politics of space in the city, the epicenter of anti-eviction movement and, as Xiaojing Zhou emphasizes, “its transformations illustrate the active, multiple, protean characteristics of space shaped by social relations and interactions and altered by different ways of inhabitation.” (Zhou 294)

Karen Tei Yamashita’s novel “I Hotel” is structured like “an international hotel with many rooms.” (Yamashita 605) The book is divided into ten novellas, one for each year, spanning the period of ten years (from 1968 to 1977) with the key concepts that the author touches upon in particular sections as well as the names of the central characters displayed and embedded into the cube like structures, which function as the points of orientation for the readers. During the Salzburg Seminar American Studies Association Symposium in 2014 Yamashita explained that her intention was to create small scale rooms and once the readers would happen to cut the cubes out and glue their walls they would obtain the three dimensional structures.<sup>4</sup> Most of the ten novellas usually depict two young activists with a mentor and the readers have got a chance to follow their contribution to or changes of their attitude

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Chin, Jeffery Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada, Shawn Wong and published in 1974. (See also: Lai Ying Yu 68).

<sup>4</sup> Yamashita derived inspiration for the creation of the structure of the novel from her husband’s architectural blueprints. Consequently, the author succeeded at establishing parallels between writing a novel and building design. The author of the “I Hotel” explains the appearance of the three-dimensional structures at the beginning of her book serving as the points of orientation as follows: “[i]n the International Hotel there is a kitchen and there’s a separate bathroom and, then, there was an entryway. So, I started to parse this out as symbolic parts of any novella. I knew that there were ten hotels and that each hotel would be the hotel, but would not be the hotel. So I began to think about the relationship between a particular hotel and the time period, of course 1968, and the geographical concern, which was in the city. And the geographical concern might be in Japantown, it might be U.C. Berkley, or it could be a community. And then there was also something international that was tied to it and there was also something historical. [...] All of those things started to build the parts of the hotel, the layers of this architecture for the work.” (Lai Ying Yu 77)

toward the movement. (Cf: Ying Yu 64) Yamashita's publication is not an ordinary novel, in fact it constitutes a "multi-voiced fusion of fiction, playwriting, graphic art and philosophy" as the blurb announces, and may become a challenge for the readers who, from the very onset of this literary work, are overwhelmed with the myriad of forms adopted by the author. Yamashita employs different sets of narrative techniques, which include storytelling, pastiche, quotations, monologues, letters, graphic short stories, cartoons, transcripts, dance choreography translated into print, illustrations, cinema verite, a fusion of Chinese opera and avant-garde jazz, as well as poetry which, on the one hand, helped the writer to capture multitudes of voices but, on the other hand, Yamashita's use of the diversity of such techniques prompted the author to reflect the heterogeneous histories and experiences not only of Asian Americans, but also of African Americans, Native Americans and Latino people living in California. By acquiring a large number of various narrative techniques<sup>5</sup> Yamashita has achieved one of her chief aims, which has been lucidly spelt out by the reviewer of "I Hotel" as follows:

The breadth of [the book's] embrace is encyclopedic and its effect is kaleidoscopic. It wants to inform and dazzle us on the confusion and conclusions on the question of culture and assimilation. And it often does. (Cheuse 1)

But Yamashita's "I Hotel" does something more than that: it captures the spirit of the Asian American social change movement by using various artistic and political media circulating during that specific period of time and shows her readers who constitutes/constituted Asians in the United States.<sup>6</sup>

What is more, Yamashita presents a wide kaleidoscope of characters representing different strata of the ethnic American society. One may encounter here the characters who are professors, workers, 'fountain-pen students,' writers, painters, artists, revolutionaries, agitators, and musicians, only some of whom happen to be loosely interconnected; their actions, however, take place in various locations, which are not only limited to the territory of the United States. Zhou observes that these narratives "expand on the meanings of the I-Hotel and link the eviction movement to the experience of other racial minorities, larger histories," (Zhou 297) and other transit

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<sup>5</sup> It may not be left unnoticed that one of the main themes of the *I Hotel* is "melding of Asian American identity with art from classical Asian texts [and it] was a critical part of the visual aesthetics of the Asian American movement." (Ying Yu 74) Therefore, it is not surprising that Yamashita included in her novel artworks of Leland Wong and Sina Grace. Wong used to be a participant of The Kearny Street Workshop, an initiative that encouraged the creation of art pieces by Asian American artists in collaboration with local residents, teenagers and tenants of the I Hotel. Apart from bonding the members of the community the main goal of the KSW was to "express different images and ideas about contemporary Asian America, images different from the 'oriental' stereotypes of popular media." (Ying Yo 73).

<sup>6</sup> The usage of dazzling and highly unusual narrative techniques is far from accidental and does not only confirm the fact that Yamashita's research was well conducted. What seems even more significant is the fact that "the complex forms of discourse that were produced in the Asian American movement, as well as their related activities, create the basis for the complex use of genres in I Hotel." (Ying Yu 65).



guests pushed to the margins of the society only because of the color of their skin and a heavy accent.

Yamashita spent ten years doing research for her novel, studying more than 150 personal interviews with the witnesses, (Cf: Valdes 1) collecting materials in the archives and talking to the former tenants of the International Hotel who are still alive. Taking into consideration the fact that “I Hotel” is an example of historical fiction one may wonder to what extent the events and characters depicted in the book are true and how the author has managed to find the balance between the historical and the fictional. Yamashita in one of her interviews explains that “the events had to be historical but the people must be fictional” (Yamashita as quoted by Hong 1) even though historical figures do appear among fictional characters.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, certain protagonists in the novel may have their real-life counterparts, for instance the UCSF acting president S.I. Hayakawa, or Mo Akagi, who bear a striking resemblance to real-life activists of that era: Richard Aoki and Mo Nishida. Yamashita does not also deny the fact that while crafting the characters of the Asian Pacific American matriarch/patriarch duo in the novel she heavily relied on the actual, well-known Asian American authors Maxine Hong Kingston and Frank Chin although, as Yamashita admits, she attempted to create “only versions” of them achieving, as a result, their “composites.” (Cf: Hong 1) Elaborating on the fictional and real elements in her novel as well as the time-consuming and laborious research that Yamashita pursued, the author of the “I Hotel” confesses:

I do play a lot with metaphors throughout the book. I play with the question of fiction. Here’s a work in which I study activists who lived during that period, but I myself didn’t ‘live San Francisco’ like these characters. But then I was told stories... who can say what is fact, what is fiction? Some told me versions that were exaggerations, but they were great stories. Some left large gaps, so I had to imagine what happened. (Yamashita as quoted by Hong 1)

Finally, Karen Tei Yamashita realized that her “project was scattered across political affinities, ethnicities, artistic pursuits – difficult to coalesce into any one storyline or historic chronology” (Yamashita 610) but although “the choices of people [with whom she spoke] took different trajectories, everyone was there, really *there*.” (Yamashita 610) Emphasizing thus, activists’ and other people’s involvement in the Asian American movement as well as their ties with the I-Hotel in San Francisco. Yamashita chronicles the rise and fall of “intersecting and intertwining movements related to the anti-eviction struggle,” (Yamashita 610) and the multiple perspectives allow her to “parallel stories and [...] honour the complex architecture of a time, a movement, a hotel and its people” (Yamashita 610) as she confesses in the afterword of her novel. What is central in Yamashita’s story of the 1970s in San Francisco, however, is the fact that most of the survivors in the novel become united in their

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<sup>7</sup> Lai Ying Yu emphasizes the fact that Yamashita’s novel should not be perceived as “the direct documentary of the struggle to save the International Hotel but it is rather her interpretation of the movement” (Ying Yu 79) and makes a claim that probably the most fictional novella in *I Hotel* is the one that concerns the year 1971, despite the fact that “it touches on actual events.” (Ying Yu 78)

nonviolent resistance to save and liberate the International Hotel, the heart of their neighbourhood and locus of their fight for visibility.

San Francisco's International Hotel was built in 1907, after the original hotel had been destroyed during the California 1906 earthquake, and since then it underwent several reincarnations. Estella Habal, an American historian, mentions that at first the I-Hotel used to be "a luxury accommodation in the city's centre that attracted visiting dignitaries, which took on its Asian character when it began to house Japanese naval officers at the beginning of the XXth century." (Habal 9) When the Philippine-American War ended in 1902, huge waves of Philippine immigrants "began coming to the United States as subjects of their new colonial ruler," (Habal 9) filled the demand for cheap labour in California agricultural valleys (the workers were recruited as the so called "third wave of Asian labour" (Habal 14)) and soon became the victims of prejudice, discrimination as well as the strict segregation politics. Such victimization took place even though Philippine immigrants were not subjected to the existing immigration laws: "they were neither American citizens nor legally alien." (Habal 15) Before the Second World War Filipinos could have rented their rooms only if they had stayed within the area bounded by Columbus Avenue to the north and California Street to the south, therefore Columbus Avenue had been perceived as a dividing line: it was not possible for the Filipino immigrant workers to rent a room beyond that boundary. (Cf. Habal 10) Yet, Manilatown with its Kearny Street became a vibrant centre for Filipinos' activities with dozens of restaurants, cafes and opium dens. Filipinos flocked together establishing various organizations, cliques devoted to preservation of the memories and aspirations of their native land, or recreational patterns involving native customs (e.g. playing checkers in the park), and established a network of personal friendships with their compatriots. Their businesses that proliferated in the area offered immigrants from the Philippines a form of escape from "the ugly realities of racial beatings, [No Filipinos or Dogs Allowed Signs], low wages and exploitation." (Habal 12)

The Filipino and Chinese dwellers of the I-Hotel were mainly migrants without families and, as a consequence, created predominantly male-only communities or the so-called bachelor societies. Habal explains that the main reasons for such severe gender imbalances included "patriarchal values, hostile living conditions, and a sojourner mentality of migrants" (Habal 17) who wanted to return home. In the case of Chinese migrants from the turn of the century their "Chinese tradition and culture limited the possibilities of migration for women" (Takaki 36): women of all classes were expected to take care of their husbands' aging parents, were forced to stay within the walls of their village, they were perceived as inferior to men and had a duty to remain at home performing domestic chores; after all the tradition of foot binding among Chinese women of gentle birth apart from being considered as 'beautiful' also "symbolized their subordinate status as women and served to prevent them from wandering." (Takaki 37) Only after passing the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 that abolished national quotas did the ratio of the immigrant influx change (Cf. Habal 18). As a consequence, a growing number of Filipino families started to settle in San Francisco ethnic enclaves such as Japantown and the Latino Mission District or the white working class South of Market area instead of choosing Chinatown or Manilatown. Meanwhile, the predominantly male-



only/bachelor community of Filipino and Chinese immigrants “continued to live at the I-Hotel because of its cheap rent and the culture of the surrounding businesses.” (Habal 20) Most of the I Hotel’s elderly and retired tenants, however, and these were usually called ‘manongs’ (which is a Filipino term of endearment for elder brother or an uncle) lived with their small pensions on the verge of poverty. Sociologists claim that the aging bachelors, being deprived of a better low-income housing opportunities in the city, remained at the I-Hotel and “disdained the notion of accepting welfare or other people’s care in nursing homes.” (Habal 20)

The functions of the hotel changed significantly in 1968 when the elderly tenants faced the eviction threats and the hotel became a centre for the Asian American grassroots movement. Despite the advanced age of the dwellers of the I-Hotel and the fact that they were the representatives of working classes, many of them had been involved in labour struggles during the Depression Era and a huge majority of them had also fought in the first and the second World War. Therefore, with the help of the Asian American students from the University of California, Berkeley and from San Francisco State University the I-Hotel tenants started to “organize and mobilize meetings, gatherings and demonstrations” (Habal 22) creating fierce resistance. With time, the International Hotel became the cradle of the anti-eviction movement, the catalytic site of community activism for human rights and affordable housing gaining at the same time prominence and recognition among the inhabitants of San Francisco and the Bay Area.<sup>8</sup> The I-Hotel became a magnet for “civil-rights activists, labour unions, religious leaders, the antiwar movement, and the growing gay community.” (Habal 3) But above all, for the young defendants of the place, the Hotel became a repository of knowledge. To quote Habal again:

[The I Hotel] invoked an active recovery of the past and the honouring of injured forefathers, [while for the elderly tenants] it meant recognition and a glimpse of the promise of American democracy that their generation had long cherished. (Habal 3)

As the anti-eviction movement coincided with the Asian American movement and Filipino youth were willing to raise their fists to signal their Yellow Power, it also became intertwined with the Third World Liberation Front – African American, Asian

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<sup>8</sup> Habal notices the development of the familial kinship among the tenants of the hotel. Due to the lack of appropriate storage facilities and limited number of kitchen areas within the hotel, the inhabitants of this dilapidating building cooked for each other, shared meals or visited the nearby lunch counters, Chinese restaurants or grocery shops, where they could buy familiar ethnic foods (See: Habal 44-45). A strong sense of brotherhood among the residents was also fostered by the presence of small businesses situated on the ground floor of the hotel such as a pool hall, a barbershop or an eatery which altogether provided a communal space for the Filipino and Chinese workers where they could share stories and socialize (See Ying Lu 63). Even though the inhabitants of the I Hotel were living in squalid housing and sanitary conditions, and were being constantly harassed by the landlords, who wanted to force the tenants to move out ‘voluntarily’ (See: Habal 44), in an act of solidarity the empty storefront spaces of the hotel were rented by the members of various Asian American community organizations when the original businesses started to be closed down after issuing the first eviction notice (See: Ying Lu 65).

American, Chicano and Native American students organized campus coalitions whose aim was to focus on “contemporary problems of urban and rural living of Third World peoples, and [...] to produce students having knowledge, expertise, understanding, commitment and desire to identify and present solutions to problems in their respective communities.” (Habal 25) Representatives of ethnic minorities felt a great urge to identify themselves with the social awakening of people living in Africa, as “the Third World Liberation Front linked racial minorities’ experience to the history of colonialism and its legacies in Third World countries.” (Zhou 295) The Third World Liberation Front leaders encouraged students to organize protests and strikes at the universities in San Francisco and contributed to the changes introduced in the university curricula, The Third World Liberation Front members also led to the establishment of ethnic studies at the San Francisco State University and University of California, Berkeley and thanks to the fierce rebellion of the ethnic youth the admission to universities for minority students was expanded. (Cf: Zhou 295)

During the period of almost ten years when the Asian Americans in San Francisco were involved in the anti-eviction battle, the I-Hotel was transformed into a multiethnic community centre and a dynamic space of political and cultural activities. Yamashita emphasizes the significance of this place as follows:

we learned to educate ourselves in a literature and culture of resistance, and finding ourselves gathered together at the very centre of our Asian communities, we also began to educate ourselves in the practice of that resistance; [...] once we entered one of the four inviting radical doors of the I-Hotel and gave our lives to any one of the projects within, our lives were transformed. (Yamashita 598)

By the time of the eviction, which took place in August 1977, the hotel had been the place where “activists organized themselves and developed long lasting ties to their communities” (Habal 4) and even when the bloody night of the eviction was over and 30 remaining elderly tenants were dragged out of the building by force, and hundreds of people forming human barricades were beaten by the police, the Asian American community members continued its struggle effectively. The building was demolished in 1979 leaving behind an ‘open wound,’ a hole in the ground, reminding Asian Americans of their defiance for several years. Habal notices that “no commercial project could be built on the site without a significant housing component because of pressure from the Filipino and Chinese communities and other city activists.” (Habal 4) Finally, in 2005 a New International Hotel was built “on the corner of Jackson Street with the same address as the old hotel [...] and [has been] devoted to low-income housing for the elderly and the disabled.” (Habal 5)

The International Hotel in San Francisco has gained over the years the qualities of a heterotopic site and a non-place. Now, the newly erected building partially performs the role of the museum honouring the intersecting and interconnected histories, locations, and Asian American voices because on the ground floor of the building the International Hotel Manilatown Centre in partnership with Manilatown Heritage Foundation is situated. Its mission is to trace and perpetuate the history of San Francisco’s Filipino community as well as to pay tribute to the tenants who wanted to save the I Hotel through “educational programs, exhibits, and cultural

performances.” (Habal 5) As a consequence the hotel has become a place that “accumulate[es] time” and “establish[es] a sort of general archive”(Foucault 26) as Foucault describes it. In the past the hotel served as a site that “presupposed a system of opening and closing that both isolated and made its inhabitants penetrable,” (Foucault 26) alluding to Foucault’s description of heterotopic sites once again because, as Yamashita admits, “hotels in San Francisco have long served as temporary but also permanent homes, [and] living in hotels had been a normal consequence of living in the city.” (Yamashita 589) The residents of the hotel were bound with their landlord by means of a contract, they were being constantly reminded of their pernicious and pitiable condition as the hotel was supposed to guarantee its inhabitants only temporary provisional protection. The contractual relation with the powers that governed it ended when the eviction notice was issued. Therefore, the function of the non-place was preserved and a hotel as a non-place revealed its measuring qualities, i.e. it was supposed to perform the role of a transitory point because the times of the arrival and the forced departure of Filipino and Chinese workers can be easily distinguished. Furthermore, as the main function of the non-place is the creation of a sense of shared identity one may conclude that such a sense of identity was also developed and established among both: fictional and actual residents of the place. In Lai Ying Yu’s words:

[it was] the struggle itself, the willingness to identify however loosely and in however many complex and unexpected ways as a group working toward an idea of sociality. . . . Artistic expressions were, thus, both assertions of race consciousness and experimentations with the idea of being ‘Asian American.’ . . . The many activities, [which Yamashita describes] the large cast of characters [employed in the novel], deep history, and the use of mixed genres is, in large part, an investigation into how the discrete groups and individuals working in the Asian American movement came to embrace and wrestle with [the] identity marker. (Ying Yu 71)

In the light of the above, the residents of the International Hotel, the invisible (to mainstream Americans) inhabitants of San Francisco city, did not only occupy the same, shared space, which was not their property although they felt at home there, but the residents of the hotel became united within the walls of this place in the anti-eviction struggle. Furthermore, the efforts to change their status of second-class citizens and the immigrants’ fight for respectability made them assert their identity as Asian Americans. To recall Lai Ying Yu’s remarks: “what brought [Asian Americans] together was a shared moral urgency for social change.” (Ying Yu 74) The I Hotel turns into a heterotopic site and a non-place: it is neither home nor a parking lot because it possesses the qualities of both.<sup>9</sup> On the one hand, the hotel guarantees temporary safety, on the other hand, however, it becomes to some extent a public space in the same sense as the car driver can occupy a parking lot as long as one has

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<sup>9</sup> The second chapter of Estella Habal’s thorough study devoted to the history of the International Hotel is entitled “A Home or a Parking Lot? Human Rights versus Property Rights, 1968-69,” hence the allusion to a carpark. In reality, the owner of the I Hotel, Milton Meyer and Company, had specific plans to demolish the building and create a parking lot. (Cf: Habal 33)

got a car and is allowed to leave the vehicle in a particular spot for a clearly determined period of time. Nowhere is the significance of the I Hotel (as a heterotopic site and a non-place) in San Francisco (as space) more visible than in the last chapter of the novel “1977: I-Hotel,” which describes the events prior to the eviction night and the incidents accompanying the removal of the elderly tenants. Yamashita adopts here the collective voice ‘we’ and emphasizes the fact that “city life and hotel life were inextricably connected, that what the city had to offer had a home in the hotel,” (Yamashita 589) however, because of the rapid development of San Francisco, the character of this relationship had to be changed; the city planners decided to transform the cityscape in order to “liberate [Asian Americans’] homes for the public good, even if the public good meant giving up [their] property for the wealthy few.” (Yamashita 590) The occupiers of the heterotopic site and a non-place always risk being removed when the contract is over. When Yamashita confesses that “the immigrants’ city life could perhaps be translated as hotel life,” (Yamashita 590) and that “hotel life defined the freedom of the city, but such freedom was for some reason suspect,” (Yamashita 590) one may find in the before mentioned quotes the echoes of Auge’s remarks about proving one’s innocence, i.e. checking one’s credibility as a hotel user, proving one’s trustworthiness as a legal resident of the United States or legitimizing one’s status of being the citizen of the American nation. In the last fragment of the novel, when the author comments upon the transitory character of Asian American ethnics living in the hotel in the 1970s and in the Manilatown neighbourhood, Yamashita clearly alludes to the points explicitly made by Foucault for whom heterotopias constitute the sites inhabited by individuals who are, “in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis.” (Foucault 24) Therefore, it does not seem to be a too far-fetched statement to admit that Filipino Americans were in a state of crisis, treated as aliens, occupying “a recreation spot for disreputable and unhealthy people” (Habel 27) and, as a consequence, became the residents of a heterotopic site. Yamashita claims that the I-Hotel has changed the cityscape because it embeds the geographies of displacement, homelessness, resistance and voices of those who refused to be made invisible and her novel “I Hotel” has definitely helped the readers to understand the essence of the Asian American movement and the city itself. In the final chapter of the novel the author concludes:

And even though the city required our labour and allowed us housing in cheap hotels, in time we came to know that laboring people are necessary but considered transitory. Eventually, it was thought, we’d just go away and become invisible. So even if hotels depended on our constant occupancy, we were not considered permanent or stable members of society. We did not own our homes. We may have had families, but hotels were suspect places to raise children, and so we were suspect families. Our communal lives in hotels with shared bathrooms and shared dining, shared genders, shared ethnicities, and heaven forbid, shared thinking that might lead to shared politics, were also suspect [...] We were the displaced people in the city’s plan to impose a particular meaning of *home* and a particular meaning of *nation*. (Yamashita 590)

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