

Chantal Akerman – The non-human gaze in *Hotel Monterey* by Mia Engberg

Chantal Akerman's 1971 film *Hotel Monterey* brings us to a rundown Manhattan hotel. The film consists of several very long shots from inside the hotel, and it's hard to say who the subject of the film is or whose gaze is shaping what I see.

The images are static and show the hotel's interiors: a corridor, an elevator, a lobby, a room. The images are composed in such a way that all of the objects contained in it are equally important. There are people – in some shots – but there are also columns, carpets, sinks and walls. They are all shown with the same interest, or disinterest. There is no perceivable plot and no dialogue – it is completely silent – and the subject is unstated. Is it the hotel itself whose floors and ceilings and walls are watching the guests come and go? Or is it a depiction of time as it passes? The film opens in the evening on the hotel's ground floor and ends on its roof at dawn, when we see the sun rising.

Time is palpable in every image. The silence of slowness. The shots are so long that I have time to think many thoughts of my own before the film moves on. Akerman says:

When you look at a picture, if you look just one second you get the information, 'that's a corridor.' But after a while you forget it's a corridor, you just see that it's yellow, red, lines; and then it comes back as a corridor. ¹

By many definitions *Hotel Monterey* is a boring film. Nothing "happens." I doze off while I watch it. I have time to think about hotels I've stayed in and men I've made love to there. I think about the cockroaches I shared an apartment with in New York and I think about Clarice Lispector's story about meeting a cockroach.

I looked at it, at the roach: I hated it so much that I was going over to its side,,feeling solidarity with it, since I couldn't stand being left alone with my aggression. ²

Maybe, I think, we are seeing *Hotel Monterey* from the perspective of a cockroach sitting in a crevice between the wallpaper and the wall. Maybe its perception of time bores us, or maybe we feel provoked by its disinterest in humans?

One could say that this film is the opposite of escapism. Instead of fleeing reality, I'm given a chance to see reality in a new way.

I haven't tried to find a compromise between myself and others. I have thought that the more particular I am the more I address the general. ³

1. Ivone Margulies, *Nothing Happens – Chantal Akerman's Hyperrealist Everyday*, (Duke University Press, 1996) p. 43

2. Lispector, Clarice, *The Passion According to G.H.* – Trans. Idra Novey, (New Directions, 2012. First published 1964)

3. Ivone Margulies, *Nothing Happens – Chantal Akerman's Hyperrealist Everyday*, (Duke University Press, 1996)