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# The Remains of the Stay: Memory, Identity, and the Afterlife of the Guest

Post-Stay

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**Edmondo Grassi approaches the post-stay phase as a sociologist rather than a technologist, and the perspective is unsettling. When a guest checks out, he argues, their stay does not end — it migrates into a data infrastructure that remembers with absolute precision what the guest themselves only vaguely recalls, raising a question the industry rarely asks: who has the right to hold that memory, and on whose behalf?**

In the common imagination, a single gesture comes to mind when we picture checking out of a hotel: the guest sets the key on the counter, crosses the lobby one last time, and as the door closes behind them their story with the hotel comes to an end. For some years now that scene has been changing. The stay no longer ends at check-out; it merely changes form. The body that has left the room goes on living elsewhere, condensed into a profile, a trail of data, a prediction about what it will want next time.

I have spent many years studying how technology, and algorithms still more, reshape social life, its habits, its relational dynamics, the very tastes of a person, and few images render this as sharply. The guest leaves the building, yet their trace is etched into the managerial grammars of service, and for precisely this reason they have never been so present. What we call the post-stay is the threshold where it is decided who will keep the memory of that stay, and with what power to act.

## HOSPITALITY AS AN ART OF MEMORY

Long before algorithms, fine hospitality was already a craft of memory. The *maitre* who remembers which wine you chose two years ago, the golden book on which the traveller left a signature, the concierge who anticipates a request not yet spoken: the difference between an ordinary service and an unforgettable one has always run through here. Ever since Pine and Gilmore (1999) wrote of the experience economy, tourism research has developed a precise construct, the *memorable tourism experience*, defined as an experience remembered and recalled after it has ended (Kim, Ritchie and Tung, 2010, cited in Bigné et al., 2020), and a recent review confirms its centrality to loyalty and to the guest's return (Hosany et al., 2022). The service we call hospitality is, in the end, not the night spent but the memory imprinted on the guest's senses.

Artificial intelligence does not touch this function; it changes the hand that performs it. For centuries the one who remembered the guest was a person of flesh and blood, fallible and affectionate, capable of confusing a name and of being moved by a return. Today what holds that memory is an infrastructure. It is the shift Stiegler (2010) called tertiary retention: the memory that leaves someone's mind and settles into an external technical support, kept in our stead. van Dijck (2007), in turn, has shown how our memories now pass almost always through platforms that do not merely record them; they shape them, deciding what will stand out and what will fade. One difference changes everything: the old *maitre*, over the years, would come to forget and to forgive, while an infrastructure knows neither grace.

## WHEN THE GUEST BECOMES A DIGITAL TWIN

From here springs an asymmetry worth examining closely. The system remembers everything, with absolute granularity, while the guest remembers a sensation, the light of one morning, the taste of a dinner. The two memories do not weigh the same and do not confer the same power, because when the guest returns the system will know them better than they remember themselves, and will greet them with a profile already filled in. Rouvroy and Berns (2013) gave this condition a name: algorithmic governmentality, a form of power that governs you not by questioning you but by anticipating you, preferring to deduce who you are from the traces you have left and from the behaviour of thousands of other guests statistically similar to you.

Your next choice is estimated before you make it, and the environment arranges itself accordingly: the temperature of the room, the cocktail suggested before dinner, the offer that appears on the screen at the exact moment you would be inclined to accept it. The delicate point is that a profile, by definition, is made of your past, and a guest reduced to their past loses the most human thing they have, the possibility of changing, of contradicting themselves, of wanting something they had never asked for before. You are not asked who you are. You are told who you will be.

In Las Vegas a hotel has opened that presents itself as the first establishment governed entirely by artificial intelligence. Its founder describes the workings without euphemism: the system gathers the data of past bookings and stays, goes so far as to comb the web and the client's social profiles, and builds from them a digital avatar, a digital twin of the person (Fox5 Vegas, 2025). The software learns and refines itself with every visit, so as to predict desires before they are voiced. The contrast the property claims with the old loyalty schemes is telling: no longer the card that files you into a generic tier, silver, gold or platinum, but an individual portrait that updates itself.

Here theory becomes merchandise. What Hayles (1999) described as the posthuman, the human rethought as information able to move across different supports, and what Haggerty and Ericson (2000) called the *data double*, the data-self that acts on our behalf, find a commercial incarnation that bears precisely that name. The posthuman guest is no longer an elegant metaphor; it takes on the character of a function for sale.

In the scenario sketched here, the guest is an active part of the system and takes part in their own construction through the request for a review, the satisfaction survey, the rating given to breakfast, which become the places where they stage their memory for the algorithm. A study devoted precisely to online reviews shows how far the account a traveller gives of their own experience becomes raw material for these systems (Bigné et al., 2020). It is the trait I have proposed elsewhere to call the *algomorphic society* (Grassi, 2024), a term that holds together two words, algorithm and form, and describes a society that takes on the shape of algorithms in the very gesture by which it gives them shape.

We absorb the machine's logic, we learn to speak to it, we already behave with a view to how it will read us. Someone who writes a review thinking about how it will be classified, who chooses carefully what to declare in the arrival questionnaire, is already reasoning like an algorithm. The guest, then, is not merely observed; they are invited to collaborate on their own archive, to keep updated with their own hands the portrait that will one day precede them at the reception desk.

### WHO HAS THE RIGHT TO REMEMBER

Every transformation can be read in two opposing ways, and the guest's is no exception. The generous reading speaks of recognition. Rosa (2019) would call it resonance: to be remembered is a form of care; the welcome back that already knows what you prefer turns a transaction into a bond and restores to hospitality its oldest meaning. Among anonymous and interchangeable places, the hotel that remembers you is the only one that truly sees you.

The critical reading is just as solid. That same memory can become capture. Returning to the Las Vegas hotel, the local press quickly offered a less flattering reading, describing the promise of personalization as a systematic harvesting of data in the service of profit, and asking what it means to hand over one's habits and behaviours before even arriving (The Nevada Globe, 2025). Consent, after all, is gathered through a questionnaire presented as a game, and it is worth asking whether it is still consent when it becomes the price of being recognized. Zuboff (2019) would speak of the extraction of behavioural surplus, since every trace of the stay feeds a prediction worth more than the stay itself.

One question remains, and it is not the one hotels usually ask. Not whether the stay was enjoyable, but who has the right to remember it. It is the question the post-stay hides beneath the courtesy of automated emails. I think of the butler in Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989), an impeccable memory spent in the service of another, an entire life passed remembering on someone else's behalf until he loses his own. He is the inverted mirror of our posthuman guest. There, a man who remembered everything and possessed nothing of his own life. Here, a guest who remembers little, and of whom everything is remembered elsewhere. Between the two endures the same old question, whether to remember is an act of care or an exercise of power. Almost always it has been, at once, both. The task of those who host, in the age of artificial intelligence, is to keep the second from devouring the first.

