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**Between the Resort and the Rave: Place Memory,
Oneirism, and Imagined Places in Charlotte Wells’
*Aftersun***

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Statement of Intellectual Honesty

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the relationship between memory and place in Charlotte Wells' *Aftersun* (2022). It aims to determine to what extent the film applies Edward S. Casey's concept of place memory as a mechanism through which Sophie revisits her childhood relationship with her father Calum, reconstructs moments of the holiday that she was not able to perceive as a child, and negotiates her grief after his implied suicide. The central research question asks how place memory operates within the film and whether it is sufficient to carry out Sophie's process of remembrance and grief. The study argues that the hotel is the main location of place memory, allowing Sophie to remember, reinterpret and reconstruct memories of intimacy and emotional distance with her father, as well as her own desires and aspirations of growing up during the holiday, which starkly contrast with her father's. However, place memory alone proves insufficient to handle the emotional consequences of the realizations that she has in this process of remembering. Therefore, Sophie's imagination constructs the rave as an imagined place that transcends the limitations of physical place memory, enabling her to freely express her unresolved feelings of love, guilt, anger, and loss.

Key words: *Aftersun*; Charlotte Wells; place memory; grief; imagined place; oneirism

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1. Introduction

In October 2022, Scottish director Charlotte Wells' debut film *Aftersun* premiered in theaters. The film tells the story of 11-year-old Sophie and her 30-year-old father Calum while they are on holiday in Turkey in the late 1990s. By the end of the film, it is heavily implied¹ (although not explicitly stated) that Calum died by suicide shortly after the holiday, making this the last time Sophie saw her father. The film shows how Sophie, now a 32-year-old adult², tries to revisit this holiday and assemble the missing pieces of Calum's experience in the light of what she knows now.

Despite being an independent film, *Aftersun* caught the attention of both critics and audiences, largely thanks to its distribution by A24, which at the time was producing successful titles like the Oscar-winning *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (Daniel Scheinert & Dan Kwan 2022), *Bodies Bodies Bodies* (Halina Reijn 2022), or *Pearl* (Ti West 2022). Having Paul Mescal, who was fresh out of having played his breakout role as Connell Waldron in the TV adaptation of Sally Rooney's *Normal People* (2020) playing Calum also contributed to its popularity. Reviews praised the performances by both main actors, namely Mescal and the newcomer Frankie Corio (Dina, 2023; Zacharek, 2022) as well as Wells' storytelling: being able to tell a complex story without having to spell out every detail to the audience (Zacharek, 2022), using silences and the unsaid as a narrative strategy (Collins, 2022), and the way she handles the themes of childhood memory and grief in the film (Dina, 2022).

¹ This will be further discussed in the section about the hotel.

² Throughout this dissertation, I will refer to Sophie at the age of 32, as she appears in the present-day sequences of the film, as 'adult Sophie', and to Sophie at the age of 11, as she appears in the holiday memories, as 'young Sophie', following the conventions adopted by other scholars (Dyer & Mecijsa, 2025; Geraghty, 2025; Kotaman, 2025; Whitehouse, 2025).

One of the ways in which the director deals with memory is by giving the film a fragmented structure. The film is formed by Sophie's recollections, MiniDV footage they both recorded during the holiday, and Sophie's imagination about what her father might have experienced while she was not looking. Apart from that, the holiday is interrupted with images of Sophie in the present, and with an imaginary setting of a rave where we see Calum carelessly dancing while adult Sophie, looking distressed, looks for him. The narrative structure of the film is loose: there is no apparent conflict, in the classical way, and the audience is shown a series of relatively mundane events that are linked because they form part of the same holiday (Geraghty 187). Through these fragments, Wells tries to imitate how memory works: not in a strictly chronological manner, but, more realistically, linking one thought to another to tell the story. Therefore, the film's fragmentation is not only a formal device, but also a way of realistically depicting how memory works. Given this focus on memory and remembrance, this study examines how the concept of place memory (Edward S. Casey) can be applied to the film, arguing that place memory from the Turkish resort allows Sophie to reconstruct her relationship with Calum, while the rave goes beyond the concept of place memory and becomes necessary to confront the grief and trauma that cannot be negotiated only through place memory.

In spite of its recent release, *Aftersun* has been analyzed by several scholars from a range of perspectives. Scholars like Geraghty (2025), Dyer & Mecija (2025) and Planes Pedreño and Juárez Rodríguez (2024) all essentially focus on Sophie's role as the narrator, although they debate on the real function of her point of view. Geraghty reads the young girl's perspective as a provider of authenticity, arguing that, because of this, the audience is forced to take the child's viewpoint seriously (180). Expanding on this idea of the child narrator, Dyer and Mecija add a queer temporal lens to the conversation, noting that adult Sophie's identity as a parent in a same-sex relationship is a direct product

of her childhood desires and dependencies (350). Taking a more technical approach to this exact dynamic, Planes Pedreño and Juárez Rodríguez, introduce a narratological perspective on focalization.

This debate surrounding the narrator and focalization intersects with how scholars interpret Calum's psychological state. Planes Pedreño and Juárez Rodríguez argue that Calum's self-violence is a product of the toxicity of hegemonic models of masculinity (345), and Ningish and colleagues (2024), for instance, apply a more psychological framework to also diagnose Calum's loneliness and identity crisis as a consequence of social pressure and "unmanaged emotional burdens" (558). Building on this psychological reading, Redmond introduces spatial theory to the conversation about Calum's isolation, posing the hotel as a lonely non-place that perfectly stages his alienation and economic struggles (118).

Finally, there have also been studies done on the themes of memory and nostalgia that are central to the film. Kotaman (2025) and Whitehouse (2025) both focus on remembrance, but they disagree on its therapeutic value. Kotaman (2025) treats memory as a narrative device for the story, and argues that it is a way through which Sophie questions her identity and her connection to the past (1). Whitehouse, in contrast, views this memory and nostalgia as a therapeutic tool that ultimately helps Sophie understand and overcome her grief for Calum (194). While the existing literature has successfully debated the functions of memory (Whitehouse, 2025; Kotaman, 2025; Planes Pedreño & Juárez Rodríguez, 2024) and the isolation of place (Redmond, 2025) as separate entities, they have failed to account for the intersection between the two. This represents a significant gap in the scholarship, because, as Michel Foucault notes, "space itself has a history in Western experience and it is not possible to disregard the fatal intersection of time with space" (1). By reading Whitehouse and Kotaman's studies on memory with

Redmond's analysis of the hotel, it is clear that Sophie's journey cannot be understood by treating time and place as separate.

In this context, the present dissertation aims to determine to what extent *Aftersun* applies Edward S. Casey's concept of place memory (*Remembering* xi) as a mechanism through which adult Sophie reflects on her childhood relationship with her father, retroactively fills in the gaps of her childhood perception, and processes the grief and mixed emotions that these retrospective realizations evoke. I argue that while the physical place memory from the Turkish hotel successfully allows Sophie to reconstruct the complexity of her relationship with her father, and the oneirism that becomes part of it helps her identify the signs of his father's suffering, it has clear limitations when it comes to dealing with grief. Therefore, because the hotel is insufficient to help her process the emotional consequences of her realizations, her subconscious is forced to construct the imagined place of the rave, which does not abide by the laws of real physical space. Through this timeless imagined place, she is finally able to confront her feelings toward Calum and negotiate her trauma.

The film will be approached through the method of close viewing and interpretation. Within this close viewing, the analysis will mainly focus on camera work, framing, color, mise-en-scène (Hall 1990), and sound (Chion 1994; Chung 2011) but post-production choices and music will also be important in the case of the analysis of the ending of the film. Narratological analysis will also be a part of this thesis, as examining how the film is built and what its fragmented structure conveys about Sophie's process of remembering is particularly useful to answer my research questions. The narratological study of these scenes can be useful to find a pattern in the scenes that trigger the sudden appearance of the rave, which helps cement its importance as the imagined place through which Sophie tackles her grief for Calum. Finally, due to the focus on

memory and place, the film will be mainly approached through a phenomenological lens, using Casey's concept of place memory (2000) alongside Trigg's more recent understanding of the concept (2012) as a base of the analysis of the resort. Apart from that, Bachelard's theories of oneirism in relation to memory (1994) will also play an important role to track how Sophie relies on imagination to piece together her father's experience of the holiday. Theories of space (Foucault 1986; Augé 1995; Agger 2015) are also relevant to explain Sophie and Calum's different experiences during that time and their perception of the resort they inhabited, as well as, in the case of Sophie, to determine the meaning, functions and limitations of the rave.

The analytical part is divided in two chapters which correspond to the two main places of the film: the hotel and the rave. However, to establish the grounds for the analysis, the analytical part is preceded by an introduction of the theoretical phenomenological concepts of memory, place, and place memory (Casey 2000) that will be used throughout it. The first chapter of the film's discussion focuses on the hotel, which is the base of Sophie's place memory. Through the analysis of different places within the hotel, like their room, the game room, and the swimming pool, this section will detail how Sophie reconstructs her relationship with her father, remembers her childhood hope for growing up, and realizes how different her and Calum's experiences of the holiday were.

However, these places in the resort are insufficient to help Sophie cope with the emotional and psychological consequences of the realizations that she has through place memory. Therefore, the second chapter is dedicated to the rave, which is approached through Gunhild Agger's framework of imagined places (2015) and Luis Manuel García-Mispirota's study of electronic dance music events (2023). In this context, the rave is defined as a timeless, self-reflexive imagined place that exists within adult Sophie's mind.

The chapter tracks the narrative moments that trigger its appearance, and closely analyzes the climax and the ending of the film. Through all this, I argue that the laxer laws of the rave allow Sophie to deal with her trauma and mixed emotions in a way that would be impossible merely through place memory and oneiric reconstruction. The rave is a step further in her journey towards healing, as it allows her to confront Calum and express her repressed feelings of love, anger and guilt through that final dance, to negotiate with her ongoing grief.

2. Place, memory, and place memory

Before turning to the close analysis of *Aftersun*, it is necessary to establish the conceptual framework of this study. It falls under the umbrella of phenomenological studies, grounded on the understanding that grief and memory are subjective, lived experiences, rather than a collection of objective facts. As a result, this stance directly influences its methodology. I pose that memory is inherently tied to the places we inhabit, and therefore Edward S. Casey's framework of 'place memory' becomes fundamental to the analysis of the film, along with Dylan Trigg's interpretation of the concept (2012). In *Remembering* (2000), Casey identifies three instances of remembering that are not only mentalistic, representational or recollective: 'body memory'³, 'place memory', and 'commemoration'⁴ (xi). He also highlights the importance of place memory among these three, saying that it is a form of memory that is often overlooked (xi). He defines it as the notion that concrete places have to hold traces of the past which can be brought back to life through our remembering them (xi). Essentially, Casey poses that place sets the ground on which memory stands:

³ Refers to "instances of remembering places, events, and people *with* and *in* the lived body" (*Remembering* xi; emphasis in the original), not just remembering a body.

⁴ Refers to the combination of body and place memory, but in a collective sense, it happens when different people participate in "ritualized scenes of co-remembering" (*Remembering* xi).

But if memory is not simply or exclusively “of the past,” what does it involve in addition? The very embodiment of remembering hints at the answer. To be embodied is ipso facto to assume a particular perspective and position; it is to have not just a point of view but a place in which we are situated. It is to occupy a portion of space from out of which we both undergo given experiences and remember them. ... As embodied existence opens onto place, indeed takes place in place and nowhere else, so our memory of what we experience in place is likewise place-specific: it is bound to place as to its own basis. (*Remembering* 182)

In addition to this, Trigg claims that “Sometimes it is the case that a place provides the defining character to a memory, such that the memory becomes inextricably bound with place, thus rendering it an event” (53). This implies that often memory cannot be separated from the place in which it occurred, as the environment itself defines how the experience is kept and, therefore, remembered. Having this framework in mind, the film’s settings will not be treated merely as containers of memories in this dissertation, but as active parts of them which help Sophie navigate her past through different ways of remembering.

The concept of place memory, however, raises an important issue that needs to be addressed, which is the definition of place: what counts as a “place”? Many theorists and philosophers from Aristotle, Descartes and Newton, to Freud, Bachelard or Proust have discussed this throughout history, and it is essential to set the terms in which this concept is going to be defined in the present work. One of the main authors on the topic is Michel de Certeau, whose book *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980) is considered foundational in the study of geography and sociology. In this book, he distinguishes space (*espace*) from place (*lieu*). He defines place as “an instantaneous configuration of positions” (117),

relating it to stability. In connection with this, to define space he famously states that “space is a practiced place” (117). This means that a person transforms a place into a space by inhabiting it. To make this more understandable, he gives the example of a street. The design of the street in urban planning is the place, but it is turned into a space by the people who stroll through it (117) or use the elements there, like benches or trash cans.

Casey takes these terms and defines them in relation to memorability. He distinguishes site from place, saying that a site lacks the specific characteristics that anchor memory, offering no meaningful points of connection or “contiguous associates” (*Remembering* 186). In contrast, he argues that a place is rich in distinctive features and sensory details that are both internally varied and at the same time clearly differentiated from other places. Due to this abundance of characteristics, place enhances memorability (Casey, *Remembering* 186). Furthermore, Casey describes our “being,” our existence, as a process of ‘implacement’, arguing that where we are serves as more than a “mere backdrop for concrete actions and thoughts”, and instead “Place itself is concrete and at one with action and thought” (*Getting Back Into Place* xiii). This is very relevant for *Afternoon* in the context of Sophie’s grief, as the loss of a parent is a process that can lead to a form of what Casey calls “place-panic” or “atopia”: a distressing state of being without a place (*Getting Back Into Place* ix).

From this brief review, it is clear that De Certeau and Casey use the term ‘place’ in nearly opposite ways. However, they agree on something fundamental: the importance of human inhabitancy, which is what marks the difference between place and space for De Certeau, and site and place for Casey (together with the ability to enhance memorability). For the purposes of this dissertation, as it is mainly concerned with Casey’s concept of place memory, ‘place’ will refer to Casey’s definition, which is very close to De Certeau’s definition of space. This way, there is no need to coin a new term

called “space memory” that follows Casey’s ideas but with De Certeau’s terminology. Therefore, ‘site’ will correspond to what De Certeau calls ‘place’: a static, geometric arrangement of elements that lacks inhabitancy and does not anchor memorability. Finally, to avoid unnecessary conceptual confusion, the term ‘space’ will not be used in De Certeau’s strict theoretical sense, but as a synonym for location or environment, keeping the focus on the difference between Casey’s place and site.

Having established these grounds for place, space and site, setting a definition for memory is also important. In this case, I will be using Dylan Trigg’s definition of memory, as he discusses it in relation to spatiality and the concept of place memory. He states memory is “an affective retrieval of an episodic experience” (51). Casey also considers that memory exceeds the mind and the physical body, taking us into the world that surrounds us as well as into our individual lives (*Remembering*, xix). Gaston Bachelard’s introduction of imagination to the notion of memory, which he calls “oneirism” (*The Poetics of Space* 13) is also essential to the discussion of memory in *Afternoon*, as many of the memories of the holiday depicted onscreen are part of Sophie’s imagination. The holiday is focalized through young Sophie’s perspective (Planes Pedreño & Juárez Rodríguez 361) and, at that age, she was often not aware of Calum’s struggle, because he tried to hide it from her. That is why the film’s focalization is not always internal to young Sophie, and is complemented with adult Sophie’s interpretation of the holiday, where she fills in the gaps with the information and experience she has in the present and imagines Calum’s struggles at the time. In this way, adult Sophie engages with what Bachelard defines as oneirism: she retrieves memories and often reconstructs moments where she was not present, using her imagination where her memory is limited⁵.

⁵ Planes Pedreño and Juárez Rodríguez elaborate a chart detailing the focalization of each scene of the film as internal (young Sophie’s memory) or spectatorial (adult Sophie’s interpretation and imagination filling in), available on pp. 350-351.

Bachelard states that daydreaming is the mediating passage between memory and imagination, and that continuity in terms of space and time is achieved through engagement with the “threshold of a daydream” (12-13). Trigg expands on Bachelard’s vision of oneirism within spatial theory, arguing that:

the achievement of involving the imagination is to keep the memory of place alive. In and through time, memories are reworked, reconstituted, and reconfigured to suit the constantly changing self that exists temporally. This relationship between the flux of time and the work of imagination points to the significance preservation plays in our experience of places. (67)

Therefore, imagination does not erode a memory, and instead it is what allows a memory to resurface, while place is the container of it (Trigg 66). In this sense, adult Sophie’s daydreaming is not a failure of memory, but its fulfillment. By engaging with imagination, she is able to account for her father’s struggle and mentally inhabit these places as her adult self.

3. The hotel

The hotel is the central place in which the holiday happens, and where Calum and Sophie spend most of their time together. It is not only the backdrop for these memories, but it is inextricably bound to them. Through the resort, Sophie reflects on her relationship with Calum at the time, and tries to understand and reconstruct his mental health problems through imagination, allowing more of her memories of the holiday to reemerge, as Bachelard poses (*The Poetics of Space* 13). In a way, Sophie is able to better understand Calum through this place. For her, the Turkish⁶ resorts become the place through which she is able to access and reinterpret these final memories of her father, and it shapes the

⁶ The significance of the resort being located specifically in Turkey will be explored later in this section.

way in which she reconstructs her relationship with Calum and makes sense of his suffering.

An important aspect of the resort as a setting is that, in reality, father and daughter oscillate between two quite contrasting resorts. They stay at the cheaper one that Calum was able to afford, in which they sleep and eat, while they spend their days in the more expensive resort next door with nicer facilities, taking advantage of its pool and game room. The fact that Sophie remembers both of them and how different they were indicates that, unlike his struggle with his declining mental health, young Sophie did notice Calum's issues with money and his difficulties to make ends meet, although it is not stated whether she was able to perceive this on her own or her mother had told her about it previously. This is made very clear when she loses the goggles he bought her as they go diving, and later, on the boat, she says she is sorry, acknowledging that she knew they were expensive (00:31:35). This shows awareness of the effort it must have been for him to purchase the diving mask. It is adult Sophie who, in the present, bridging her place memory through imagination, is able to relate Calum's economic problems to his mental health, noticing how he splurged on the Turkish carpet after hearing it cost £850 (00:46:58), or buying the overpriced polaroid photo that they get taken on the hotel (1:28:20). In retrospect, this reckless spending, along with other instances where he is irresponsible with his own life, like scuba diving without a license, indicate Calum's fatalistic mindset to adult Sophie. By completely disregarding his long-term financial stability, as well as his physical well-being, the narrative implies an awareness of his intentions once he got home, suggesting that he knew he would not face the consequences of these actions. Moreover, both of the items he spends money on (or the three, counting the holiday itself) are ways through which Sophie will remember this vacation, intricately linking Calum's tragic generosity to the specific space of the resort.

However, the stark contrast that exists between the significance that Sophie attaches to the hotel and its inherent nature as a commercialized environment is worth discussing. In spatial theory, vacation hotels have widely been considered non-places (Augé 79). Augé defines non-place in contrast with place, affirming that “If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place” (77-78). As a result, in non-places a lot of people can be gathered in the same geometrical space, but that gathering is purely based on chance, and the human interaction is minimal if not inexistent. Nevertheless, he is aware that in the modern age, as non-places are becoming increasingly common in everyday life, these sites he calls non-places (hotels, hospitals, public transportation, leisure parks, or refugee camps for example), cannot be purely devoid of humanity, and that some people can build relationships and construct identity in them (Augé 78). Even so, people usually remain anonymous and disconnected from other humans in these types of sites, adding a level of loneliness and isolation to them. This is what Sean Redmond argues in his article about *Aftersun* and *The Florida Project*, stating that the hotels, “Symbolically draped in dour, clinical, or excessive textures, their public spaces, winding interiors, and uniform bedrooms narratively become the site where characters’ melancholy, isolation and alienation — the central ingredients of loneliness — take centre stage” (102). When saying this, Redmond is focusing on Calum’s perspective of the holiday, as Sophie’s point of view is completely different. Her perspective aligns more closely with Foucault’s concept of heterotopia. He defines heterotopias in relation to utopias, claiming that, while a utopia is an unreal perfected version of society, a heterotopia is the enactment of the utopia in a real site (24). It is a place outside all places, but a heterotopia can be pointed at on a map, whereas a utopia cannot (24). Sophie remembers the hotel in vibrant colors (Figure 1) and as a place of

relationality, as she was able to continue building her relationship with her father there, as well as getting to know other children her age and older.



Figure 1(00:11:58)

It is interesting that these two realities (Calum's vision of the hotel that aligns as a soulless non-place and Sophie's vision that relates more to a Foucault's heterotopia) coexist in the film. This difference is established visually through Sophie's process of remembering. While her place memory from the hotel remembers it brightly lit and with warm colors, her adult oneiric reconstruction introduces cool, darker lighting and shadows to visually project his perspective of the hotel as an isolating place where he endured his suffering in secret⁷. Calum is not able to share Sophie's perspective of the hotel as a beautiful place full of opportunities and free of responsibilities, emphasizing his depression and feeling of loneliness, and that is the tragedy of the film: he feels a sense of inadequacy about being unable to forget about his issues and let go in a place that is specifically constructed to do so. In retrospect, adult Sophie merges the heterotopic place that she remembered from her childhood with the isolating non-place her father must have experienced, after realizing that they were inhabiting the same space but looking at it in completely different ways. This is made very clear when, during dinner one day, Sophie tells Calum that she wishes they could stay there for longer (01:28:55)

⁷ This will be better explored in the subsection dedicated to hotel room 501, and figures 8 to 13 show examples of the contrast in perspective through lighting and shadows.

and he answers “me too”, but with a sad and contemplative expression on his face (Figure 2).



Figure 2 (01:28:55)

The fact that the holiday takes place in a resort located in Turkey is also significant in this regard. The geographical and cultural distance from their hometown in Scotland reinforces the hotel’s condition as a non-place specifically designed for international tourism, where local culture is subordinated to the commercial and capitalistic logic of the vacation resort experience. Had the trip taken place in the UK, or in a destination culturally closer to Sophie and Calum, the sense of displacement and loneliness for Calum would likely have been less pronounced. Moreover, Turkey’s landscapes and nice climate only add to the hotel’s heterotopic nature, fostering Calum’s feeling of being insufficient: if he cannot be happy in such an idyllic place, what hope is there for him? Therefore, Turkey does not function as a culturally specific setting, but as a touristic place that is outside of Sophie and Calum’s culture and schemes, detached from their everyday routines and responsibilities.

3.1 Hotel room 501

In *Remembering*, Edward S. Casey highlights that “*place is selective for memories*: that is to say, a given place will invite certain memories while discouraging others. ... Place is always definite, and regarding a given place only some memories, indeed only certain

kinds of memory, will be pertinent” (189; emphasis in original). In *Aftersun* this happens with different places inside the hotel. The hotel room, for instance, is one of the places where Calum and Sophie spend most of their time together in the film, although, bearing in mind the reality of holidays, the room is usually only used to take a shower after a day at the pool and go to sleep. The fact that it is one of the places that is shown the most (in sixteen separate scenes, to be more exact) without it necessarily being where they spent most of their time during the vacation, alongside the fact that it is the setting in which the film starts, is very significant. In this section I argue that this is because Sophie remembers the intimacy she shared with her father through hotel room 501. Their room is the only private space that exists within the publicness of the rest of the spaces of the hotel, and therefore it is natural that adult Sophie associates it with intimacy. This aligns with the idea that the “hotel bedroom’s in-betweenness fosters the sense that they are outside of ‘normal’ time and that time is literally and metaphorically terminal” (Redmond 114). Consequently, the bedroom becomes “a key location for father and daughter interaction, and for confession and character revelation” (114). This means that the room is not only the place through which she remembers deep conversations they had on their holiday, but also where she reconstructs Calum’s vulnerability that she was not able to perceive when she was young. It is possible to see this in the content of the scenes themselves, but also through the camerawork, lighting, and the sound design of the film.

As Redmond observes, most of the more serious and confessional conversations of the film are shown to have happened in Sophie and Calum’s hotel room. This emphasis on the room reflects its importance within Sophie’s process of remembering, as it becomes the place through which intimacy with her father is recalled and reconstructed. This is supported by the film’s sound design, as Wells often uses an editing convention in which a scene begins sonically before the images are shown, creating a temporary

dissonance between what is seen and what is heard. This manipulation of the audio-visual synchronization evokes the technique of *acousmètre*, although the characters are not fully disembodied voices in the sense described by Chion⁸ (1994). According to Hye Jean Chung, the technique “troubles the false myth of unity”, expanding “the temporal and spatial boundaries of the diegesis” (106). This technique used in the film can be interpreted to serve a phenomenological function, as it replicates the fragmented nature of human remembrance, where a memory can trigger another one, before the first one is even completed. This anticipation of the sound is used, for example at the end of a scene in the balcony, when Sophie falls asleep, and Calum carries her inside in his arms (00:54:44). Suddenly a conversation starts playing, but the film still shows how Calum carries Sophie to bed. This suggests that Sophie probably remembers falling asleep on the balcony and waking up on her bed, knowing that it was Calum who carried her there. While a linear reading might suggest that Sophie simply woke up once they got to bed and began talking, the film’s costuming challenges this chronological continuity. When Calum carries Sophie inside, she is wearing a maroon t-shirt (Figure 3), but when the film cuts to them talking in bed, she is wearing a blue and pink one (Figure 4). This wardrobe shift indicates that Sophie probably joined two separate moments into a singular night, or changed the order in which the moments happened, illustrating how place memory works: while she can vividly recall where these experiences took place, after all these years, her mind is unable to organize her memories into a chronological sequence. Adult Sophie remembers falling asleep on the balcony and uses her imagination to reconstruct the moment her father took her to bed, as she probably recalls waking up in bed the following morning. However, the intimacy and safety of that imagined moment instantly triggers a

⁸ Michel Chion coined the term and defined it as a voice that is “neither inside nor outside the image. It is not inside, because the image of the voice’s source — the body, the mouth — is not included. Nor is it outside, since it is not clearly positioned offscreen in an imaginary ‘wing’ like a master of ceremonies or a witness, and it is implicated in the action, constantly about to be part of it.” (129)



Figure 3 (00:54:40)



Figure 4 (00:55:31)

completely separate, but also emotionally intense memory that happened in the exact same bed: the conversation where Calum confesses he will probably never return to Scotland. Sophie remembers Calum's words which are inseparably tied to the room and the bed, but is not able to fully place them in the holiday's chronology, and the sound design of the scene shows that. This choice also demonstrates that, within Sophie's process of remembering, place matters more than chronological time, allowing her to unify separate intimate moments and confessions in the intimacy of their room.

The conversations take place in hotel room 501 show the deep, yet fragile, connection that father and daughter used to have. As the only private space within the resort, the room functions in line with Casey's assertion that place acts as a "*mise en scène* for remembered events within its self-delimiting perimeters" (*Remembering* 189). By this, Casey implies that a place does not simply host recollection passively, but it is a stage that shapes the events that are remembered through it. In the film, the walls of their room create a private sanctuary that isolates them from the rest of the resort guests. Given this, it is the place where they both feel the safest, although Calum still has to keep up the appearance that he is well and having a good time for Sophie. This triggers Sophie to remember instances of this safety and intimacy through this place. The sense of security that the room gives them is used to discuss Calum's relationship with Sophie's mother, which seems to be cordial but distant, as she is curious as to why they say "I love you" to

each other if they are not together anymore (00:28:50). Later, Sophie also confesses to him that she sometimes feels exhausted after a good day, saying that the feeling is “like you’re sinking” (00:41:37), unknowingly implying that Calum’s struggles might have been passed on to her. The room is also the place where Sophie jokingly interviews Calum in the MiniDV footage that opens the film. In this scene, she asks him what he thought he would be doing now when he was eleven, and he quickly gets upset and asks her to turn off the camera (00:52:13). Being recorded footage, this is one of the only objective instances adult Sophie gets that indicates that Calum was having problems and was not actually as carefree and emotionally stable as he tried to appear throughout the holiday. After that, when she is recording with her “mind camera” (00:52:46) because Calum asked her to stop recording after that first question, she asks him about his eleventh birthday, and he confesses to her that no one remembered it. Because she is not filming, adult Sophie does not possess any digital or objective proof of this painful conversation to look back on, and the moment exists only within her memory. Since the MiniDV footage establishes that they are in room 501 when the tape cuts out, the unrecorded conversation that follows continues taking place in there. In this sense, the room acts as what Casey calls a “place-holder” (*Remembering* 189) for the memory, and it does not fade into an abstract conversation because the it is inextricably tied to it.

Beyond these conversations, the acts of kindness and mirroring between Sophie and Calum’s that take place in room 501 also help solidify it as the place that invites memories of intimacy for her. Inside the room, Calum tenderly takes care of Sophie; for instance, after teaching her self-defense, he caringly cleans her face (00:21:58); and he also carries her to bed after she has fallen asleep on the balcony (00:54:44). Sophie’s mirroring of Calum most obviously happens publicly, like when they practice Tai Chi together at a tourist stop (01:20:23), but it also maps back onto the privacy of their room.

Towards the end of the film, when Sophie returns to room 501, she finds Calum laying naked and vulnerable on the bed. When she sees this, she quietly puts a sheet over his body before going out to the balcony (1:14:43). This protective and tender gesture mirrors Calum's from the very first night, when, after she falls asleep, he takes off her shoes, drapes the sheet over her, tells her goodnight, and retreats to the balcony (00:08:20). This shows that Sophie does not only copy her father's actions, but she has internalized them as expressions of care and love, even if she cannot fully understand the emotional pain beneath them. These gestures, alongside their deeper conversations, are what consolidate hotel room 501 as a place of intimacy for Sophie, therefore inviting such memories of the holiday as an adult.

However, the way in which father and daughter inhabit the space of the hotel room also shows how Sophie remembers the fragility of their connection, without idealizing it, through the space of the room. This is because they can often be seen inhabiting different parts of the same room. Following the previous example, there are two scenes in which one of them is asleep on the bed, while the other goes to the balcony to think. In the scene where Sophie tells Calum about feeling extremely tired after a good day, she is lying on the bed, while he is listening from the bathroom (00:41:36). When Sophie is interviewing Calum, the footage shows how she is inside the room, while Calum is outside on the balcony (00:51:59), or when she is asking about his relationship with her mother, she is reading a magazine in the main room, while he is taking his cast off in the bathroom (00:29:13). The fact that they are often seen at what in proxemics is called "social distance" (4 to 7 ft) indicates that, despite the intimacy they build, there is still a level of not completely knowing each other, as this is the distance with which, for example, co-workers usually interact (Hall 121). This suggests an inability to fully reach or understand each other, probably due to them being in different places during most of the year, and

aggravated by Calum trying to hide his mental health struggles from her. It is also important to note that this distance between them is marked by a clear difference in who occupies what space: while Sophie more consistently occupies the bed and the main bedroom, which are traditional spaces of safety, intimacy, and comfort, Calum seeks out the more marginal spaces of the room, namely the bathroom and the balcony. His frequent inability to share the comfort of the bedroom with Sophie visually shows his psychological isolation. Therefore, their distance and positioning inside the room reflects the limits of their intimacy and Calum's inability to be completely transparent with Sophie.

Calum's frequenting of the balcony is of particular interest here, as it is possible to consider the balcony a threshold between the privacy of the bedroom and the publicness of the rest of the hotel (Burlacu 206). The film starts with him on the balcony, hinting at his liminality from the very beginning: he is there in Sophie's memories, but not in reality. When he is alone there, he uses it as a place of evasion and, in a way, to let go of the weight of having to pretend to be alright for Sophie. For example, when she falls asleep, he retreats there to smoke and relax a little while listening to music (00:08:20). This is a moment that young Sophie could not have been aware of, as she was asleep inside the room, so it is adult Sophie who, in her memories, places Calum on this liminal place, making the threshold of the balcony a symbol of his unstable position between connection



Figure 5 (00:57:38)

and emotional withdrawal. This is further supported by her imagining him doing Tai Chi on the edge of the balcony, careless about falling (Figure 5). Redmond focuses on the role of the balcony as the place where Calum externalizes his “inner grief — he is reaching beyond but from a precarious and immobile standing point. The hotel balcony is the tragic ‘stage’ from which he performs his chronic loneliness” (115). Redmond’s interpretation, therefore, reinforces the balcony’s symbolic function as a liminal and emotionally charged space through which Sophie remembers and imagines her father’s loneliness and distance.

This distance is further reflected in the way Sophie remembers Calum in the hotel room, which is often not face-to-face, and instead mediated through reflective surfaces. For example, when Calum tells Sophie that nobody remembered his eleventh birthday, his image is reflected on the dark TV and partially on the mirror behind it (Figure 6). When she is telling him about feeling like she is sinking after a good long day she is also seeing him through the reflection of a mirror (Figure 7). This choice of framing heavily relies on the unique properties of mirrors. As Foucault notes, a mirror often functions as a heterotopia, as it “makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there” (24). This heterotopic function shows the limbo of adult Sophie’s



Figure 6 (00:53:03)



Figure 7 (00:41:16)

memory: Calum's reflection is real, as they did go on that holiday twenty years ago, yet it is unreal in the sense that, as he passed away, he remains an unreachable part of that past. Moreover, these reflections also indicate how unknowable and unreachable he was even at that time, as his emotional distance prevents an unmediated face-to-face encounter between the two, meaning that, during the holiday itself, he also remained elusive, which is demonstrated by his often being mediated by the glass. Furthermore, these reflective surfaces also introduce a sense of duplication that direct eye contact does not. As Paul Coates observes, "the doubling of an image is a propagation that diminishes it" (11). As a result, the visual duplication of Calum's image on the dark screen or the mirror does not make him more visible, and, instead, it diminishes his presence. This indicates the haziness of Sophie's memory, highlighting its limits, as she is not able to fully remember her father's face directly.

To understand how the specific elements of room 501 shape the types of memories and the way in which Sophie remembers, Casey's focus on the nature of place memory becomes essential. He states that place is not a transparent container of any type of memory and, instead, "places furnish convenient points of attachment for memories" and "provide situations in which remembered actions can deploy themselves" (*Remembering* 189). He explains it using an example of watching a film in the cinema, affirming that it would be "literally 'out of place' to associate with this theater memories of isolated cogitation, of jogging," or "of painting", because the cinema possesses unique "local peculiarities that would not welcome such memories as these" (189). In other words, a place cannot be a blank slate (as a site could), as its physical environment conditions it to filter out some types of recollections, allowing others to emerge. In the film, room 501's local peculiarities, like its balcony, bathroom, mirrors or its dark TV screen, allow Sophie's memories of the subtle distance that Calum kept from her to resurface. In this

way, the room does not simply preserve memories of shared intimacy, but also, of separation. Its aforementioned features, like the reflective surfaces and thresholds, repeatedly direct Sophie to an awareness that Calum remained emotionally inaccessible, allowing the place to evoke the contradictory and complex nature of their relationship instead of reducing it to a mere nostalgic recollection of an unreal idyllic relationship.

Apart from being a place that invites memories of shared intimacy and an indicator of the limits of their relationship, room 501 is also the main place through which adult Sophie reconstructs the mental health struggles Calum was trying to hide from her during the holiday. As Redmond puts it, throughout the holiday, the hotel becomes a place of loneliness for Calum (102) that young Sophie could not have witnessed, which means that there are numerous sequences of Calum in the room that are retroactive fabrications of adult Sophie's imagination. Geraghty also reinforces this theory, saying that there is a possibility that "the shots of Calum which were not recorded by young Sophie are her creations. They can be understood as offering the adult Sophie's viewpoint as she reviews the memories of loss and melancholy stirred by the old camcorder footage" (191). This is evident in the scenes where Calum is left entirely alone in the room (including the bathroom and the balcony) while Sophie is away or asleep. For instance, while Sophie is asleep, Calum goes outside to the balcony to smoke (00:09:00), a secret habit that he hides from her, as he is never seen smoking at any other point in the film. Similarly, there is another sequence where Calum watches the camcorder footage in the dark while Sophie sleeps, only for the camera to reveal a digital clock that reads 3:08, implying that he suffers from insomnia (00:15:04). This progression of Calum's suffering inside the room continues until its culmination towards the end of the film, where the film shows him sitting at the edge of the bed, camera focusing on his hunched back, sobbing uncontrollably and gasping for breath (Figure 8). Because Sophie was asleep or absent

during these episodes, she retrospectively imagines them with the information she has as an adult, but it is significant that she chooses to reconstruct them inside the hotel room and not anywhere else. This way, she transforms the intimacy of the hotel room to also store her father's hidden suffering.



Figure 8 (1:26:19)

Sophie's reconstruction is also manifested through the film's use of lighting and camerawork, as cool, dim lighting and darkness visually represents Calum's struggles, as well as the camera's focus on specific objects. When Calum is alone, the warmth of the room is replaced by cooler lighting or darkness. Figure 9 shows the room when Sophie and Calum inhabit the same space together, while Figures 8 (previous page), 10 and 11 show Calum alone in the previous examples. This difference in lighting is adeptly represented by the scene in which Calum removes his plaster cast in the bathroom. While from the main room Sophie is talking about how, when she was younger, she hoped her parents would get married, Calum is shown trying to feign normalcy while he is bleeding into a bucket. Meanwhile, Sophie remains completely oblivious to his pain, and that is perfectly depicted in the film's visuals, both because of the physical threshold that exists between them, and because of the stark difference in lighting (Figure 12). This darkness is not only an aesthetic choice of the director, but an intentional choice within the diegesis by Calum, who uses it to be able to better conceal his suffering. By keeping the room dark, he adds another barrier between himself and Sophie, alongside the thresholds and

reflective surfaces already discussed. By doing this, he ensures that Sophie is not able to perceive his pain, and keeps her bright and optimistic perception of the holiday. In addition, Wells also represents adult Sophie noticing details that she had not paid attention to before by using the camera's focus. An example of this is that, when Sophie is interviewing Calum, there is a point when the focus stops being on the camera footage on the TV screen, and starts being on the meditation and Tai Chi books that are next to the TV (Figure 13). That little shift in focus feels like watching adult Sophie connect the books her father read to his depression in real time, only now seeing their significance.



Figure 9 (00:21:42)



Figure 10 (00:13:58)

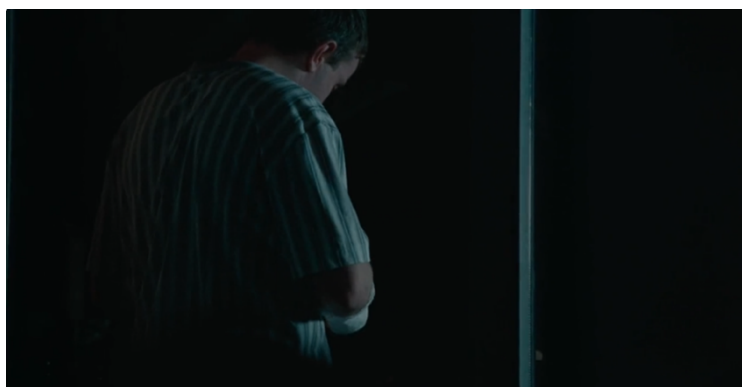


Figure 11 (00:09:00)



Figure 12 (00:29:20)



Figure 13 (00:51:14)

Finally, it is also interesting that Sophie does not use mirrors and reflective surfaces only to remember Calum, but also in her reconstruction of his experiences. This becomes another way through which adult Sophie imagines the trauma and loneliness that her father tried to hide from her, using the mirrors of the room to reflect his guilt, fear, and self-loathing. This is illustrated in the sequence where Sophie, who is speaking from the main bedroom, tells Calum that after a good long day she sometimes feels very tired and like she is sinking (00:41:37). Having listened to her from the bathroom, Calum seems to realize that he may have passed his psychological struggles onto his daughter, and, immediately, he spits directly at his reflection on the bathroom mirror (Figure 14). This guilty rejection of his own image happens within the privacy of the bathroom, so it is impossible that young Sophie witnessed it, but adult Sophie reconstructs it this way, using the mirror as an object through which Calum confronts himself and the struggles that he cannot seem to let go of. Similarly, in a scene later in the film, after the karaoke incident, Calum watches the day's MiniDV footage alone in the room (1:08:18). He seems distressed thinking about Sophie and his inability to fully step up and be the perfect father to her. In Sophie's imagination, she sees Calum doing this through the mirror of the room, which indicates that, even in her imagination of the events of the holiday, she cannot fully look him in the face, as she is not able to fully grasp him. This, again, ties into Casey's claim that the specific characteristics of a place make it invite certain types of memories (*Remembering* 189), and that "material things not only frequently constitute the specific content of places and memories alike, but by their special memorability they draw memory and place together in quite a significant way" (*Remembering* 205). This is because, as an adult, Sophie relies on the physical characteristics of the room, like the reflective surfaces she remembers seeing her father through, to recreate these moments of Calum's self-loathing. It is impossible for her not to look at Calum through a reflective

surface as she did at the time, even if now she is imagining him. This reliance exposes the limits of both place memory and oneiric reconstruction as, even when using her imagination, Sophie cannot escape the physical constraints of the place that she is remembering through, namely, the room. In turn, these limitations are exposed in the fact that she is watching her father through a reflection instead of looking at him directly in the face, which at the same time also shows her inability to fully see Calum's internal struggles. Therefore, room 501 becomes the place through which adult Sophie reconstructs the depression and loneliness that Calum tried to conceal from her, and that is portrayed through the film's lighting, focus, and use of objects like mirrors, among others. However, Sophie's reconstruction of the events follows the rules of real physical space, as she is remembering through it, and that is not enough for her to fully cope with the weight of those memories and the feelings that they awake on her.



Figure 14 (00:41:48)

3.2 The game room

The game room is another place in the hotel where Sophie specifically spends a lot of time in the film. It is interesting that, despite its significance in her memories, Calum only inhabits this space once throughout of the film. As a result, this place invites a different type of memory from the ones associated with room 501: more detached from paternal intimacy and instead focused on the group of older teenagers that are, in a way, the leaders

of the recreational area. This aligns with Puysségur's claim that "children's identities are constituted in and through spaces", and, more specifically, through the control of the space, which is a defining factor of their social category along with others like gender, race, sexuality, or class (118). The game room is mainly frequented by the older, cooler teenagers that Sophie looks up to with a mixture of curiosity and longing. Due to this frequentation of the space, it becomes the place where teenagehood and romantic and platonic social bonds are performed. For Sophie, inhabiting this place and trying to fit in with the older teenagers marks the beginning of her transition into adolescence. It is possible to see this in the content of the scenes themselves and the interactions that she has in this place, as well as through the coloring and cinematography that is used in these scenes. At the same time, the game room is also a perfect spatial representation of the growing distance between Sophie and Calum. This dynamic, again, directly illustrates Casey's claim that memories are selective for place, and that the particular elements of a place invite certain types of memories (*Remembering* 189). In this case, the recreational machines and games in the game room evoke memories of youth, playing, self-discovery, and eagerness to grow up through the observation of older teenagers as well as the interaction with a boy her age. In contrast, these memories also imply that adult Sophie is able to remember her desire to spend time away from her father and become more independent. However, while physical place memory accurately records this spatial separation, it is not enough on its own, since, as a child, young Sophie was oblivious to the meaning behind her father's absence in these moments. Therefore, similarly to room 501, adult Sophie fills in these gaps through the realm of oneirism, retroactively realizing that the growing distance that she believed to be a normal part of getting older was partially also shaped by her father's inability to fully participate in the holiday and by the mental health struggles he was trying to hide from her.

The first time the game room appears in the film, Sophie goes to a motorbike game while Calum talks on the phone with her mother, and she finds a boy her age there (00:17:40). They play against each other without talking much, and the camera changes focus to Calum in the background, who has finished talking on the phone and looks at them with a frown on his face before ending their interaction by calling Sophie. This contrasts with the second time they play together, when Sophie is the first one on the motorbike and Michael appears to invite her to play against each other again (00:38:42). Their interaction immediately changes the meaning of the space. From the way in which the camera focuses on their faces (Sophie's very close, and Michael's a bit further away, but together on the frame) to their almost touching arms, the film shows the romantic attraction that exists between them. Analyzing this through the framework of proxemics, the film shows how they immediately get on a personal distance (Hall 119), and near intimate distance with their arms (Figure 17), showing Sophie's willingness to form a new relationship outside of her family structure. The closeness of the camera to Sophie's



Figure 15 (00:18:02)

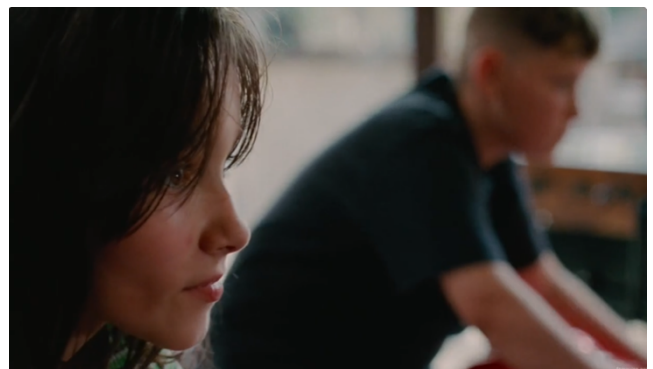


Figure 16 (00:39:40)

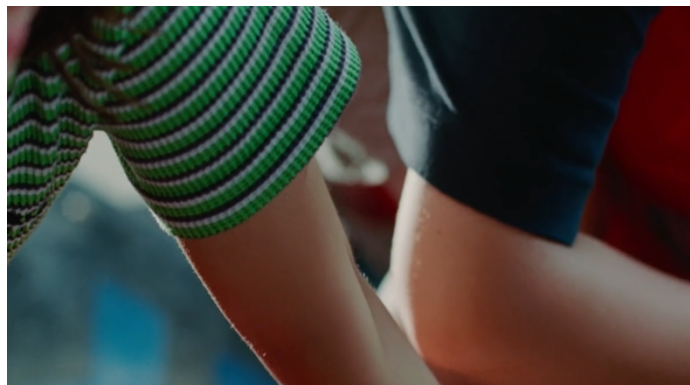


Figure 17 (00:39:34)

face also indicates this, as it reveals that this moment is more intimate in comparison to the first time they played the game against each other (Figure 16). This time they also talk more, with a joking competitiveness that shows flirtatiousness. Moreover, significantly, Calum is absent from this second scene, as Sophie does not associate the game room directly to him, but to the curiosity and hope she felt to grow up. This is reinforced at the end of the scene, when Sophie bites her tongue with a happy and excited expression on her face (00:39:58), suggesting that what remains memorable about this encounter is not the game itself, but the meaning it had for her at the time.

Apart from Michael, Sophie also meets other older teenagers (about four or five years older than her) in the game room. The first time they meet, Sophie and Calum are playing pool together when two boys arrive, and Sophie invites them to play a game of doubles (00:19:21). This little moment perfectly encapsulates the meaning of the room to Sophie: she refuses the opportunity to spend time alone with her father in favor of meeting other teenagers that she finds more interesting and may help her self-discovery. The pool table plays an important role in this shift, illustrating Casey's claim that material things "enter into active alliances with particular places" to invite certain memories and enhance memorability (*Remembering* 205). This is because it is a fundamental part of the game room, but also the very thing through which Sophie remembers taking that first step away from the safety of her family and towards adolescence, the pool table defines the moment, and so, it is intricately tied to it. Interestingly, the teenagers remain oblivious to Sophie's shift in behavior. There is a moment in which one of the teenagers, Ollie, cusses in front of Sophie, and his friend reprimands him for that, showing that they see Sophie as a kid. In contrast, this interaction, together with the encounter with Michael moments earlier, shows Calum that her daughter is already growing up into adolescence and the external world. Realizing this, he reacts in the immediate next scene by teaching her self-defense

in their hotel room (00:20:47). This change in place represents his attempt to reassert his role as her father, teaching her tools to defend herself in a future where he probably knows he will no longer be there to defend her.

However, instead of simply accepting this, Calum tries to fight against Sophie's impulses in the little ways he can. For example, when the teenagers pass next to them and she asks if they are going to play pool, he encourages her to go play with the girls her age (00:45:01). He tries to prevent her from growing up too early and he does so symbolically by trying to convince her not to go to the game room, which fosters her interaction with the older teenagers and her growing further apart from him. It is perhaps because of this implication that adult Sophie, even all these years later, still associates the game room to growing up. This connection, again, aligns Casey's point that memories "seek out particular places as their natural habitats" (*Remembering* 189), as, for Sophie, the game room becomes a place that evokes memories of adolescent experimentation and socialization in which Calum has little to no place. When she is with the teenagers, she forgets about Calum, and when she is in room 501, she does not ever mention the teenagers. This segregation shows how place memory affects the way in which she remembers the holiday by inviting certain types of memories depending on the space.

When she is with the teenagers, Sophie curiously observes them: what they are wearing, the vocabulary they use, how they touch each other, not looking at their faces, but at their bodies. By trying to mimic these codes and joining them in a pool prank, Sophie participates in what Puysségur calls a "performance of dreamed-up identity" (124): she fantasizes about her own maturity trying to act it. Nevertheless, the prank also exposes the limitations of this fantasy, as, when Ollie gets close with another girl (and presumably kisses her in the pool), Sophie's fantasies of teenagehood dissipate because

of this reminder of her status as a child (00:48:48). As a result, she accepts that she will not be an equal in this group of teenagers that see her as a kid.

This scene is interrupted by two separate scenes of an isolated Calum: first, practicing Tai-Chi in the hotel room as seen through a mirror (00:45:52), and second, looking lost in thought at the carpet store before laying down on his newly purchased rug with his eyes closed (00:46:54). Realistically, these two scenes taking place while Sophie is with the teenagers would be impossible chronologically, since Calum could not physically be in both places simultaneously while Sophie is in the game room. This explicitly indicates that Sophie has left the realm of place memory to enter oneiric reconstruction, as such temporal and spatial incongruence can only be a product of imagination. By engaging with her imagination, Sophie is able to “keep the memory of place alive” (Trigg 67), as she is able to reshape, reconstruct, and reconfigure the narrative to align with what she knows and is progressively learning about her father. By introducing these fragments into her memory of the game room, adult Sophie pairs her childhood curiosity about teenagehood and her romantic awakening with Calum’s emotional and psychological struggles. Her thinking about him doing Tai-Chi shows a retrospective awareness of his anxieties as he tries to get a grasp of himself after seeing Sophie slipping away into adolescence in front of his eyes. Furthermore, the second moment she imagines of him in the carpet store exposes a darker awareness of his impending suicide. As noted earlier in this chapter, Sophie recognizes the purchase of this luxurious, expensive carpet as the meditated choice of a Calum that already knows that he will not need his savings for long, and who chooses to spend this money to buy an item for his daughter to remember him by. This reveals that, in Sophie’s reconstruction of the holiday, the moment Calum makes his final decision about his future is when he buys the carpet, and that moment is juxtaposed with her discovery of teenagehood in her

mind. From the mixing of all these scenes, the film, again, reveals that Sophie's place memory alone is not enough to get a full understanding of the holiday, and that the imagined reconstructions that these memories trigger are the ones that, in the end, allow her to understand and, eventually, confront her mixed emotions towards Calum.

3.3 Water

The main breaking point between physical place memory and oneiric reconstruction in the film is given through the contrast between the resort's swimming pool and the Turkish sea. Both places share a very important element: water. However, they represent two different forms of it. The swimming pool is a domesticated and controlled body of water, while the sea remains wild and unpredictable. According to Adriano D'Aloia, water in Western culture acquires numerous different and contrasting meanings like "purification and contamination, life and death," or "transparency and opacity" (D'Aloia 90). These distinctions exemplify the divergent paths that Calum and Sophie are on during the holiday and that will continue after it, and correspond with the symbolic meanings of each of the spaces they occupy: the swimming pool in Sophie's case, the sea in Calum's case. Through her physical place memory at the pool, Sophie vividly remembers her first kiss with Michael (1:10:15), which is one of her first steps towards becoming a teenager and the culmination of her romantic awakening during the holiday. However, this memory is instantly followed by images of Calum decidedly walking into the dark sea at night (1:11:52). He is completely alone, so this is another instance where adult Sophie, through her imagination and bearing the information of the future that she now knows, tries to reconstruct what Calum was doing while she was having that pivotal moment in her life. As D'Aloia notes, "Cinematic water is an elusive fluid that stirs the innermost human drives and pours them forth to quench their thirst for fancy and aspiration, but it can also swallow them in a whirlpool of their fears" (92). In this way, in *Aftersun*, the hotel's pool

acts as the place that evokes young Sophie's aspirations and hopes for a future that she imagines bright, whereas the vast sea in the night represents the "whirlpool of [Calum's] fears" (D'Aloia 92), anxieties and general pessimism towards the future. This contrast is reinforced by the lighting and nature of both bodies of water. Although it is nighttime, the pool, being an artificial body of water, is calm and brightly lit by lamps, while the sea is vast, unstable, and pitch black, representing both their outlooks for the future (Figures 18 and 19).



Figure 18 (1:10:11)

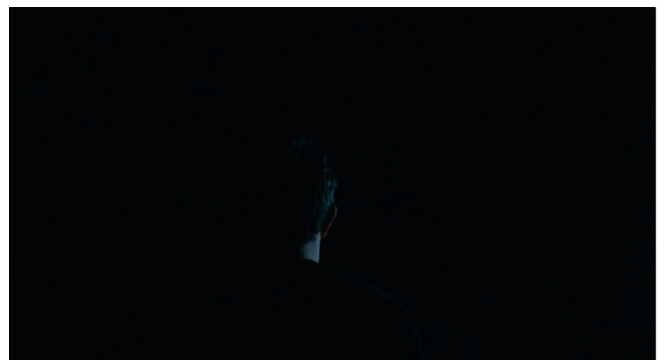


Figure 19 (1:11:40)

The contrast between the swimming pool and the sea extends beyond their symbolic meanings, as each body of water can also be argued to correspond to a different mode of remembering. It has been established that, in her imagination, Sophie pictures Calum walking into the dark sea. This is no coincidence, as D'Aloia, discussing Bachelard's words, defends that "The sensorial and sensuous experience of matter, memory and imagination find expression in poetic imagery based on water" (94), and the mind and the world are both involved in this process (Bachelard, *Water and Dreams* 21–22). In other words, he suggests that water is a means through which memories and imagination are expressed. Having this in mind, alongside the fact that Sophie is next to a body of water like the pool, it is clear that she does not create the image of Calum getting into the sea out of nothing. Instead, the sensory qualities of the pool, together with the imaginative process that Bachelard describes, results in her imagination reconstructing

Calum walking into the wild water of the sea as an expression of his inner turmoil. Consequently, the contrast between the swimming pool and the sea illustrates the different ways in which Sophie engages with the past. While the pool belongs to the realm of place memory, as it is a specific memory that she experienced during the holiday, the sea belongs to the realm of oneirism, being an imagined reconstruction. Therefore, water has two functions in this context: it is the element through which Sophie remembers her first steps towards adulthood, but also the element through which she reconstructs Calum's suffering at that same moment in time. In this sense, this contrast between the pool and the sea also reveals the limits of place memory for Sophie, as, through the pool, she can deal with what that moment meant to her, but she cannot deal with the questions that that exact moment leaves her with about Calum's experience. As a consequence, imagination intervenes to fill in these gaps, using the sea as the place through which Sophie depicts a father who, emotionally, was already slipping away from her while she was unaware of it.

4. The rave

The film's fragmented structure formed by Sophie's memories, her imagined reconstructions, images of her in the present, and camcorder footage is also interrupted by images of a rave throughout the film. At first, the film cuts to the darkness of the rave, and it is not clear what is happening onscreen, but as the film progresses it is possible to infer that this is not a real physical place, and that it is something else altogether. Therefore, this raises a very important question: what is the rave? It would be difficult to fit it into De Certeau's definitions of place or space, since these are more specifically designed for physical locations, as suggested by his example of the city street (117). However, this difficulty does not mean that his definitions are completely inapplicable to the rave. Extending his framework to Sophie's mind and imagination, the dark room with

its strobe lights can be understood as a static place which is transformed into a lived space through Sophie's mental inhabitation. By introducing her own memories, her grief, her emotions, and Calum into the setting, she practices the place, turning it into a space of emotional confrontation. However, relying only on De Certeau leaves a theoretical gap regarding memorability and the rave's origin. Looking at Casey's framework, the rave cannot be classified as a place, because it lacks the "stabilizing persistence [that place has] as a container of experiences that contributes so powerfully to its intrinsic memorability" (*Remembering* 185). Because the rave exists inside Sophie's mind and was never visited during the holiday, it does not offer what Casey calls "points of attachment" onto which memories hang and can be retrieved (*Remembering* 185), unlike with the hotel's thresholds, reflective surfaces, balcony, or pool table, among others. It could be argued that it is a rave that she attended in real life, years after the events of the holiday, but the memories triggered by the place could not be those of the holiday; there is a dissonance there. This apparent contradiction is resolved by looking beyond the definitions of De Certeau and Casey, and instead approaching the rave through Gunhild Agger's framework of imagined places. She defines them through a combination of Augé's non-places and empty spaces:

They are characterised by excess, ... but not in the sense indicated by Augé. Far from being linked to supermodernity, they exceed a binding to a specific period. Being places of blurred history, of hesitation and lost possibilities, of hide and seek, continually inscribed with symbolic meaning, non-places in this sense possess the characteristics of empty spaces. Consequently, the void places express an invitation to mirror time in all its different manifestations — as duration, timelessness, repetition. (303)

Although Agger constructs this framework to understand how place and space externalize the internalized trauma of characters in the films of Lars von Trier, it can be applied to the rave scenes in *Aftersun*. Since it is a place that exists in Sophie's imagination, it exceeds the constraints of time, which makes it contrast with the physical place of the hotel. As a result, the rave is not bound to a specific period, as it does not belong in the chronological timeline of the 1990s holiday, but neither in the reality of adult Sophie's present. Its excess is manifested through the strobe lights, as well as through the other faceless bodies that Sophie imagines to be there too. These people can be argued to represent relationships, acquaintances, or experiences that have happened in Sophie's life at some point during the twenty years since the holiday. Nevertheless, by making them part of the crowd and therefore, in a way, interchangeable, adult Sophie, to a certain degree, mutes their presence. In this way, the purpose of the space, which, in this case, only has to do with Calum, can be maintained without the disruption of these other people. Continuing with Agger's definition, the rave is also a place of "hesitation and lost opportunities" (303), as Sophie looks at his father's dancing figure and hesitates about what to do, or, in the final dance she goes through the lost opportunities of what she could have done with him had he not died⁹. It is also a place of hide and seek for Sophie, since, the first two times the rave appears, she is shown looking for something that is out of reach. Later in the film, the third time that the rave is onscreen, it is revealed that what she was looking for was Calum.

The notion of an empty space is a very important part of the definition of an imagined place, so it is essential to unpack it. In her article "Towards a History of Empty Spaces" (2008), Charlotte Brunsdon focuses on empty spaces in British cinema, and characterizes them as sites of hesitation (219), which often have an "unregulated, liminal

⁹ This will be further explored later in this section.

quality” (219). She goes on to give numerous examples of empty sites in British film, which include “bombsites, demolition and building sites, parks” or “temporary car-parks” (219) among others. According to Brunsdon, due to their liminality, these locations enhance self-reflexiveness (219), and this feature is what serves as the core characteristic of empty spaces that translates into Agger’s imagined places (303). At first, the rave may seem to contradict the literal definition of an empty space, as it is a crowded space. However, the emptiness of empty spaces does not have to do with the amount of people that inhabit them, but with their meaning. As Zygmunt Bauman states, “Empty spaces are first and foremost empty of *meaning*. Not that they are meaningless because of being empty: it is because they carry no meaning, nor are believed to be able to carry one, that they are seen as empty (more precisely, unseen)” (103). This meaninglessness comes from the fact that human interaction rarely happens in these empty spaces, as they often go “unseen” (Bauman 103) and even avoided (104) by the public. Therefore, in everyday social life, empty spaces themselves lack human interaction and, as a result, are locations where sensemaking, a phenomenon described as “an act of patterning, comprehending, redressing surprise, and creating meaning” (Kociatkiewicz & Kostera, cited in Bauman 103) does not happen. However, when applied to film, as Brunsdon affirms, they serve as a tool that fosters self-reflexiveness (219), as they are spaces in which patterning and social-interaction are completely out of the ordinary, so they force introspection.

When applied to *Aftersun*, it is possible to understand how Sophie engages with the rave through a combination of Bauman’s and Brunsdon’s observations. At first, it appears as an empty space, as the darkness and occasional strobe lights make it difficult to identify any specific location or time period. The crowd that inhabits the rave is anonymous, and it seems like the people there interact with each other, but no one interacts with Sophie. Therefore, for her, the rave is not a relational place before she finds

Calum. In this sense, the rave resembles what Augé describes as a non-place, since it lacks the markers of identity, relation, and history that characterize places (77-78). However, Sophie's interaction with the rave complicates this interpretation. Instead of remaining as this transitory non-place, as she continues remembering the holiday through her place memory, the rave gradually becomes the setting onto which she projects her memories, grief, and questions about Calum. The first time she sees him dancing among the crowd (00:35:57), the non-place is transformed into a site of emotional significance, and, therefore, it becomes a place, having to do with Sophie's identity, her relationship with Calum, and her memories of the holiday. The lack of defining features in the rave may also help explain why Sophie is able to fill it with personal meaning. As Brunsdon suggests, empty spaces in film can encourage self-reflexiveness (219), and the absence of any spatial, temporal and even social specificity in the rave allows her to do so. As a result, it is through the mixture of this self-reflexiveness, the faceless crowd, the sensory excess, and the lack of temporal laws that the rave ends up adequately fitting into Agger's framework of imagined places. Since it works outside of the laws of real places, the imagined place of the rave provides Sophie with the tools that she needs when place memory is insufficient to handle her mixed feelings and trauma. It is in this imagined place that the distance, the thresholds and the reflective surfaces of the hotel room disappear, allowing her to look Calum in the face, confront his suffering, and process her ongoing grief.

Having defined the rave as an imagined place, there is another important question that needs to be addressed: why does adult Sophie specifically choose a rave as the setting to deal with her memories and feelings towards Calum? To understand this, it is very useful to look at Luis Manuel García-Mispirota's framework on raves and night life that he discusses in his book *Together Somehow: Music, Affect, and Intimacy on the*

Dancefloor (2023). García-Mispirota notes that “The dancefloor has long served to symbolize a world better than this one. Thriving at both the physical and imaginative center of electronic dance music events, dancefloors are celebrated places of self-invention, experimentation, escape, comfort, refuge, transformation, connection, and communion” (7). In *Aftersun*, adult Sophie uses the imaginary rave for all these exact purposes. It becomes a place of self-invention where she is able to explore her connection with her father, and it is also a little escape from the memories that are coming to her from the holiday and the events that she does not remember but is imagining, specifically regarding Calum’s suffering. Moreover, it is a place of transformation for herself but also for her relationship with her late father, as the dancefloor gives her an opportunity to freely re-evaluate their shared suffering. Here, she is able to process the parallels between his past psychological pain and her own present one. The confrontation that happens at the end and the feelings that keep evolving continuously transform their relationship, but this dynamic will be analyzed closely through the analysis of the final choreography of the rave later in this section. In the same sense, it also fosters connection, even if the communion is one-sided, as Calum, being only a figment of Sophie’s imagination, cannot truly reciprocate her actions and feelings. Furthermore, the rave functions as what García Mispirota calls a “utopian space” (15), because it “holds open ‘the gap between what is and what could or should be’” while also “conjuring up an alternate world of emotional plenitude” (15). It is interesting that while García-Mispirota analyzes real, physical dancefloors that could be considered heterotopias within Foucault’s framework, Sophie’s rave does work as a pure utopia within that same framework. Because it is not a physical location in the real world and exists fully within her mind, it is not a heterotopia like the hotel, and it fits Foucault’s definition as a site “with no real place”, that has “a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of society”, and that is,

fundamentally, an unreal space (24). Through this unreal, imagined, space, adult Sophie is able to break the limits of space and time that still exist in her memories of the hotel, and is able to confront her father and her trauma directly, with no restraints.

As a result of this, the rave allows Sophie to reshape how she interacts with others in her mind, specifically when looking for Calum. The setting of the rave is fosters this because of how the crowd behaves on the dancefloor. As García-Mispirota observes, “the fluid, anonymous, and unpredictable aspects of crowds displace the conventional social structures of intimacy (such as spouse, lover, parent, and sibling) and replace them with strangers and acquaintances” (62). By making everyone else in the club a part of an anonymous mass, Sophie can forget about their individual identities, which helps her focus only on Calum without the disruption of other real people from her life. At the same time, the crowd is the only obstacle standing between her and the image of Calum dancing. This is interesting because the crowd is fluid and moving, while the physical barriers between her and Calum in the hotel were rigid, like walls or doors. Consequently, Sophie is able to push through the people and move towards him (00:35:46), and this is what sets up the game of hide and seek that is seen throughout the film. It also shows that the laws of this imagined space that she has created are laxer, which makes it easier for her to confront her feelings there.

To understand how the rave functions structurally within the film, it is necessary to look at the specific moments that trigger the interruptions to it. At the beginning, the rave appears after adult Sophie views footage of the camcorder. The first two interruptions happen within the first four minutes of the film and are triggered by two key recordings that prompt the rest of her memories and force her to reflect on Calum’s mental state. The first is a recording where young Sophie asks Calum, “when you were eleven, what did you think you would be doing now?” (00:02:17). This question and the attitude

change that it provoked on Calum, bearing in mind his fate after the holiday, makes Sophie confront the fact that he thought he was not living up to his aspirations, or that he had no aspirations to begin with. The latter is later supported in the film, when Sophie imagines Calum having a conversation with a scuba diving instructor, and he says that can't see himself at 40 and he is surprised he made it to 30 (00:33:44). The second trigger is the airport footage from Calum's perspective, where he says goodbye and "I love you" to Sophie, presumably for the last time (00:03:07). This footage acts as a catalyst for Sophie, sparking her curiosity to watch the rest of the camcorder recordings and retrieve memories that now acquire a completely new and painful meaning. That is seen just after the second appearance of the rave, as there is a string of camcorder footage of the holiday that follows (00:03:16). The third time the rave interrupts the narrative is also after another camcorder recording on a boat where Sophie says that Calum went scuba diving without a license (00:35:11). This is another example, this time objective, as it is a recording, of Calum's carelessness for his own life. Young Sophie was not able to piece together these signals as a child, but adult Sophie recognizes them instantly, and that is why this moment takes her back to looking for him at the rave.

As the film progresses, the cuts to the rave stop being sparked by the camcorder footage and move towards Sophie's own place memory, showing that her mind has taken over the search for Calum's holiday experience. The following two triggers happen in room 501 and, naturally, they represent deeply emotional moments that Sophie experienced and also acquire a new meaning after Calum's passing. The fourth interruption is triggered by an intimate scene in the room that has already been discussed in the section dedicated to the room: Sophie is lying down, Calum sits beside her, touches her face, and explains the feeling of no longer belonging in Scotland. He later encourages her to live wherever she wants and to be whoever she wants to be before tucking her into

bed (00:56:15). In retrospect, the scene feels like a goodbye, like this is the message that he wanted to transmit to her before letting her go forever. Later in the film, it is interesting that the fifth interruption reverses this dynamic, in a way, as it happens after Sophie returns to room 501 and finds Calum asleep and naked on the bed. As mentioned in the previous section, this time Sophie is the one that tucks him in before going out to the balcony (1:14:31). When the film cuts to the rave, there is a distinct shift in the film's sound. While during previous interruptions the rave carried on with the music of the previous scene, this time the rave is accompanied by the sound of heavy breaths. These breaths do not carry over from the previous hotel scene and, instead, belong entirely to the rave. They sound like a man's breaths, and they evoke a sense of panic and urgency that contrasts with the calm, sleeping image of Calum in the resort. They could be interpreted as a manifestation of Calum's suffering in Sophie's mind, giving a voice to the invisible suffering that he was enduring in secret. In all these instances, adult Sophie resorts to the rave during moments where she is reinterpreting Calum's actions and words, using the imagined place to reflect on them as if desperately asking "is this why you did or said that?". These triggers, which form the fragmented structure of the film, reveal one of the main functions of the rave: acting as the place where she negotiates these new, traumatic meanings and the feelings that they provoke towards her late father. Each time the footage or a memory reveals another signal of Calum's suffering and his possible intentions, she is pulled into the rave. Hannah Dyer and Casey Mecija support this in their article about queer temporalities and desire in *Aftersun*:

The recursion of the dancefloor in the film interrupts the notion of time as accumulation and progress, offering a cinematic structure that is similar to the experience of grief and the ways in which memory interrupts forward moving. The rave is perhaps the rawest expression of both relationality and interiority in

the film, as it becomes a device that collapses childhood experience and adulthood apprehension. The rave is not corrective to gaps in Sophie's memory, it is a tool with which to express what she is attempting to work through in the present. (344)

Once she is in the rave, she is shown to be getting physically closer to Calum's dancing image as she keeps recovering more memories, supporting the claim that the rave is an imagined place through which she slowly pushes her way towards her father's hidden story.

The sixth trigger happens outside on the last night of the holiday, and it marks the emotional climax of the film. Sophie and Calum are in their resort, where a disco party is taking place. "Under Pressure" by Queen and David Bowie is playing, and Sophie initially does not feel like dancing, but Calum goes to the full dancefloor anyway, looking at her and dancing in a silly and carefree way. This specific, playful image of her father is the final memory that Sophie holds of him appearing happy, which explains why her mind places this exact version of Calum in the rave. As the scene transitions from the resort to the darkness of the rave, "Under Pressure" continues playing, but it gradually shifts into a slightly altered version. This version starts when Mercury sings "Can't we give ourselves one more chance?" (Queen & Bowie), and it lacks the song's conventional instrumentation as a way to make the viewer focus more on the lyrics. The memory of the hotel bleeds into the imagined space of the rave through this emptier version of the song they danced to during the holiday. Dyer and Mecija note the unlikelihood of the pairing of rock music with the imagined setting of the rave (345), as rave music usually does not contain lyrics and is made up of "synthesized sounds from keyboards and drum machines" (345). In contrast, Sophie reverses this and leaves only lyrics which voice her frustrations, as she wonders why her father did not give life another chance.

This shift from the hotel to the rave is especially significant because, as Dyer and Meciija describe, “Sophie’s memories of dancing with her father as a child combine with adulthood” (341). Since this sequence in the rave merges her childhood experience with her adult knowledge and emotions, the dancefloor becomes an imagined place where, as McKenzie Wark states, the “past haunts the present, unburied, restless, electric” (82). This is represented in the moment when, after having spent the film looking for her father in the chaotic rave, she finally has him in front of her (01:30:41). It is very significant that, when she reaches him, the rest of the anonymous crowd completely disappears from the imagined party, leaving only the two of them isolated in the darkness, with only the strobe lights as occasional company. The memory of the real hug they shared on the resort disco party (or maybe adult Sophie projecting what she wishes she would have done onto that memory) is what triggers her to fiercely hold on to him in the rave too. For the first time, the thresholds, distance, and reflections of the hotel disappear, and she is finally able to look him right in the face, which is emphasized by a sudden close-up of Calum that indicates proximity (Figure 20). However, because of the complexity of her emotions, right after this close-up, Sophie aggressively pushes Calum away in the rave (Figure 21). This gesture can be read as a silent, painful accusation, as if she were asking why he abandoned her. Immediately after this push, an important shift happens when adult Sophie suddenly transforms into young Sophie (Figure 22). This marks the first time that 11-year-old Sophie inhabits this imagined space. This transformation suggests that adult Sophie is also dealing with intense feelings of guilt from her childhood, as she feels responsible for pushing Calum away or failing to notice the (now, in retrospect, obvious) signs of his suffering when she was eleven. This push and pull between them is the clearest “expression of both connection and disconnection between parent and child” (Dyer & Meciija 344), all while Bowie and Mercury symbolically sing “This is our last



Figure 20 (01:32:00)



Figure 21 (01:32:08)



Figure 22 (01:32:13)

dance”. In the end, however, since this connection and confrontation between father and daughter is taking place in an imagined place in her own mind, their connection cannot be sustained permanently. This ties back to the limits of the oneiric that Trigg discusses by stating that the imagined “resists absolute particularity” (66) and Bachelard supports, pointing out that imagination can be oriented, but it can never be fully accomplished (*The Poetics of Space* 13). In other words, imagination can never fully reproduce the specificity of lived experience. This limitation is further explained by retrieving Casey’s definition of place, as the rave lacks the “stabilizing persistence of a place as a container of memories” (*Remembering* 186). Specifically, unlike physical place, the imagined place of the rave has no enduring material reality to anchor memory, and exists only as an act of imagination. This explains why Calum eventually slips out of adult Sophie’s grip, falling back into the darkness of the now people-less space. Her failing to hold on to him here shows the rave’s limitations as an imagined place, as she can deal with her emotions

there, but ultimately she cannot communicate with a real version of her father or prevent his passing. Instead, as Dyer and Mecija pose, the rave is a site of reckoning and it does not function as a means of filling the gaps in Sophie's memory, but as a tool through which she expresses what she is trying to process in the present (344). By establishing the rave as an imagined place of expression instead of a place of remembering or of correction of history, it is possible to see how adult Sophie navigates her grief through this imagined place. Rather than remaining a passive spectator trapped in the repetitive cycle of watching her old camcorder tapes and replaying her memories, Sophie uses the laxer laws of the rave to directly confront her trauma. In this sense, place in the film goes from being a remembering mechanism to being an active part of Sophie's journey with grief, as it is through the freedom of the imagined place that she is able to finally challenge the distances of her memories of the resort, take ownership of her complex childhood memories, and transform into an active narrator who can process, instead of only experience, her loss.

The final moment where the rave is seen onscreen, the viewer watches from the real physical setting of the airport as Calum closes the camcorder, turns around, and opens a door that leads directly into the strobe lights of the rave (Figure 23). This moment is very significant, as it solidifies the rave's permanent role in Sophie's mind. Although, as established in the previous paragraph, it lacks the permanence of a physical place, her imagination can conjure the imagined place of the rave for her to be able to reach this imagined projection of Calum when she needs to. By choosing this specific moment as the conclusion of the film, it shows that adult Sophie constructs this imagined place in her mind to keep Calum's memory safely preserved there, instead of remembering him only through the painful reality of her place memory of the resort. The door that Calum opens is like a threshold to her mind, and it means that the rave does not disappear when

the film ends: it remains an accessible place where Sophie will be able to return whenever she needs to process her relationship with her father.



Figure 23 (01:35:05)

The significance of the choice of this ending becomes even more apparent when looking at the original script's divergent ending, which would have given the film a very different meaning¹⁰. In the initial script, after Calum closes the door that leads to the rave, the camera was supposed to pan back to adult Sophie sitting on her couch, who then leaves the room when she hears her daughter crying (Wells 99). After that, the script concludes with a final pan to young Calum and Sophie on the Turkish beach, jumping and sprinting together toward the sea (Wells 100). If Wells had kept this original ending, it would have shifted the focus back to a place memory of the actual holiday, rather than the imagined place of the rave. This alternative conclusion can be interpreted in different ways. On one hand, it would carry a darker implication for Sophie's future, as, throughout the film, it is suggested that she has inherited her father's mental health struggles and psychological suffering. Knowing what Calum walking into the ocean symbolized during Sophie's imaginary reconstructions of his loneliness, ending with them both sprinting

¹⁰ There are many differences between the film and the only available version of its script, usually in the order of the scenes, which reflects the fragmented structure of the film. Although the director has never publicly addressed these differences, they can be understood to be the result of post-production decisions, in which the order of the scenes was adjusted to better convey the desired emotions. These changes do not mostly alter the overall meaning of the film (with the notable exception of the ending), as fragments remain coherent and continue to evoke the same sensations.

into the sea would strongly imply that Sophie is destined to suffer the same fate as Calum. Although the film never explicitly states this, it offers subtle hints that adult Sophie is struggling psychologically. The very need to create the imagined place of the rave in order to reconnect with him and confront her feelings about his loss suggests that his passing at such a young age continues to shape her emotional life. Apart from that, in one of the scenes discussed in the section of the resort, she tells Calum that, after a good day, she feels very tired, as though she is sinking (00:41:37). Another example comes in one of the closing scenes, when adult Sophie watches the holiday recordings in her living room, the space no longer has the warmth and brightness that characterize the places she inhabits in her memories of the holiday. Instead, it is marked by the cooler, darker tones that resemble the spaces associated with Calum during the film (Figure 24). This visual parallel suggests that, as an adult, Sophie has a similar psychological state to Calum's during the holiday. On the other hand, this alternative ending can also be read in a more positive light: as a comforting reimagination of the holiday in which they both shared the experience of a genuine good and hopeful time. Through this reimagining, Sophie tries to erase Calum's suffering, and this fantasy introduces a touch of denial, as it is a way to create an alternative holiday in which there is no trauma. By rejecting the ending on the beach and instead ending the film with Calum entering the rave, this possible retreat into denial is prevented in exchange for a more mature and ultimately hopeful ending. The airport sequence implies that the rave successfully functions as a place of self-reflexiveness and emotional processing. It allows her to negotiate her grief within this

imagined place, making sure that, while her father is lost to the past, she can choose to keep living in the present and be there for her own daughter.



Figure 24 (01:34:19)

5. Conclusions and further research

The present dissertation aimed to determine to which point the concept of place memory (Casey 2000) can be applied to Charlotte Wells' *Aftersun* as a mechanism through which Sophie reflects on the relationship she had with her father, retroactively fills in the gaps of her childhood perception, and processes the grief and mixed emotions that her retrospective realizations produce on her. Through the close analysis of scenes that take place in both key places of the film, the hotel and the rave, this study has concluded that, while physical place memory does allow Sophie to achieve the first two goals, it is insufficient to help her cope with the psychological and emotional consequences of Calum's loss. The limitations of place memory are what forces her subconscious to transcend real physical spaces and create the rave as an imagined place, under Gunhild Agger's framework: a specialized, timeless place in her mind designed specifically to negotiate her ongoing grief.

As analyzed in chapter two, the physical spaces of the Turkish hotel evoke certain memories on Sophie, allowing her to reconstruct both the deep intimacy and the fragility of her bond with Calum. Through key elements of the room such as thresholds, reflective

surfaces, and spatial separation, Sophie is able to remember Calum's unreachability and distance due to the fact that he was hiding his struggles from her. At the same time, when her place memory reaches its limits, Sophie recurs to the realm of oneirism to retroactively piece together the silent signs of her father's suffering, for example, in situations where she was not physically present. Through these oneiric reconstructions, Sophie realizes that the distancing that she assumed was a part of growing up was also partially shaped by her father's silent mental health struggles. This dynamic's climax hits in the third act of the film, with the contrast between the domesticated water of the resort pool and the dark sea. This oneiric reconstruction perfectly encapsulates their contrasting experiences in the holiday through the use of water, which is an element that unites both experiences, while also highlighting their differences.

However, in the end, while these places in the hotel help Sophie remember the relationship she shared with her father as it was, with its intimacy and distance, and see the signs of Calum's suffering that are now obvious in retrospect, these recollections do not allow her to take a step forward and heal from the trauma and grief that the memories provoke on her. It is precisely because of the limits of her place memory that her imagination takes over and creates the imagined place of the rave. The rave is a lawless place that frees Sophie from real time and physical space, incorporates elements of Foucault's utopias, Augés non-places, and empty spaces, and therefore best fits into the category of imagined place. The anonymity that the crowd and the strobe lights give fosters a focused environment of self-reflexiveness for her to project Calum's dancing image onto. The analysis of the rave scenes, their progression, and triggers supported this claim. Its liminal character, anonymity and atemporality create the conditions for self-reflexiveness, allowing her to confront emotions that physical place memory alone cannot resolve. Therefore, although the rave has clear limitations in the sense that, as an imagined

place it cannot change history or help her really contact her father, it is successful in acting as a place through which Sophie expresses her feelings and deals with them in the present. This is a crucial step in her journey towards healing, as it complements her place memory and oneiric reconstruction of the holiday by providing a space where emotional processing becomes possible. In the end, the creation of the rave allows her to not only preserve an imagined connection with her father, but also to step away from constantly reliving her memories, return to the present, heal, and keep living.

Taken together, these findings contribute to the existing scholarship on *Aftersun* by proposing a reading where space intersects with memory, by placing Casey's theory of place memory in dialogue with Agger's concept of imagined place, as well as taking elements from Bachelard's theories about oneirism in relation to memory. While previous studies have often analyzed the film through frameworks of psychoanalysis, grief, narratology or memory, this dissertation argues that the memory and emotional complexity in the film are mediated through its spaces. More specifically, it suggests that memory and imagination are presented as complementary processes, illustrating Trigg's claim that involving imagination keeps the memory of place alive (67). Place memory allows Sophie to recover and reinterpret the past, while imagination intervenes when remembrance is no longer capable of addressing the emotional consequences of the past. Therefore, this dissertation contributes to broader discussions of memory and place in cinema by showing that imagined places can function as spaces through which characters negotiate their trauma in the present.

The film's complexity lends itself to be analyzed from a wide variety of lenses so, for further research, I would suggest a deeper analysis through a media-studies approach of the MiniDV camera footage, especially in contrast with the cinematic frame of Sophie's memories, the rave, and the present. Understanding how reviewing, pausing, or

fast forwarding the tape fits into spatial theory would be very enriching to the literature on the film. Apart from that, during the film there are also many moments that focus on the sky: they mention it, they look at it, or the camera pans at it. It would also be interesting to look into its significance in the film and its role on the spatial configuration of it. Finally, *Aftersun* can also be placed into a broader framework with other recent independent films that depict parent-child trauma through space and, specifically, spatial disruptions, like, for example Andrew Haigh's *All of Us Strangers* (2023), Celine Song's *Past Lives* (2023), Céline Sciamma's *Petit Maman* (2021) or even Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert's *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (2022). These films show a trend in contemporary cinema of going beyond the traditional chronological flashbacks and, instead, using imagination, oneiric spaces or even the surreal and using the flexibility that these places allow to escape the rigid rules of real physical space to be able to process family trauma.

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