The hotel and the city

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Abstract: This paper examines the relationship between cities and hotels, arguing that this urban space sheds light on many of the traits of twentieth-century urbanism. First, it sketches the relationship of hotels to urban space, either as landmarks within cities, as statements of civic self-confidence in booming central business districts, or as components of urban renewal strategies. Second, it is suggested that the design of hotel space is expressive of consumption choices, whether in terms of a standardized, hard-wearing functionality or an expression of uniqueness, reflecting contemporary trends in consumer marketing, distinction and branding. Third, these spaces are crucial to the notion of the 'circulatory' city. They are representative of a form of dwelling, of a temporary domestic, for various types of traveller, as well as serving as a business space. Fourth, they are reflective of the complex social geographies of city life, and provide a microcosm of the occupational hierarchies of hospitality services.

Key words: consumption, design, hotels, mobilities, service industries, urban space.

I Introduction

For three generations of New Yorkers, the majestic Plaza, overlooking their own Manhattan oasis of the trees and lakes of Central Park, offered reassurance that a way of life would survive wars, depressions, even death. She was elegant, yet sturdy, bulwark against all that was brash and mediocre, re-moved in spirit from the frenzied modern pace, indifferent to encroaching high-rise steel and chrome, serenely secure in her fine heritage. The Plaza was The Plaza. Nothing could disturb her well-ordered existence. (Brown, 1967: 230)

Ah! The Hilton! It used to be called the Sydney Hilton and … had no real front entrance. Just a set of double ramps rising from Pitt Street to the first level – an ugly, lumpen chunk of pebbledash beige and brown design conceit … a cigarette packet plonked east-west on top of a squashed lamington between two north-south city streets. Once you found the way in, via a narrow escalator, it was a place of distinction and certain style – but in diminuendo, eclipsed by other, smarter, hotels in taller, more elegant buildings with better views. It was also dark, with pokey public spaces. (Shmith, 2005)

In this paper, I suggest that the whole relationship of the hotel to the city – from the grandiose attachments of the Plaza to the dreary anti-icon of the Sydney Hilton, from half-hidden escalators through to opulent, timeless monolith – requires careful consideration. First, I sketch the relationship of hotels to urban space, either as landmarks within

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cities, as statements of civic self-confidence in booming central business districts, or as components of urban renewal strategies, tied into a postindustrial economy of business conventions and destination tourism. As buildings, they have a strongly articulated sense of exterior and interior space, and as such their designers have carefully to consider the degree to which their public and private natures are reconciled. Second, it is suggested that hotel space is expressive of consumption choices, providing status, appealing to taste, and often – due to its inbuilt political economy of heavy use – an avantgarde design space through its frequent refurbishment. As design artifacts, whether in terms of a standardized, hardwearing functionality or an expression of uniqueness, they reflect contemporary trends in consumer marketing, distinction and branding. Third, these spaces are crucial to the notion of the 'circulatory' city. They are representative of a form of dwelling, of a temporary domestic, for various types of traveller, as well as serving as a business space. Fourth, they are reflective of the complex social geographies of city life, and provide a microcosm of the occupational hierarchies of hospitality services. Increasingly organized around a globalized division of labour, hotels additionally operate within a bodily economy of performance, appearance and manual labour.

II Hotels and urban space

Beginning at the turn of the century and lasting well into the 20s, hotel construction had undergone a tremendous proliferation across Europe and the US. Hotels came to resemble cities in microcosm, vertical cities housing laundries, valet services, barbers, gymnasiums, travel offices, drug stores, libraries, music rooms, baggage rooms, automobile fleets, libraries, swimming pools, clothing stores, banks, florists, gift shops, screening rooms, medical services, convention halls, newsstands, mail services, roof gardens, and ballrooms – to name only the respectable services that hotels provided. Like the self-contained superblock, the privatized space of the metropolitan hotel

could be said to have turned its back on the city. And yet at the same time, the hotel recuperated urban life on terms that extended its *own* ability to manufacture desire. The hotel was not just an airbrushed city within the city; it also sold the city outside, the dirty city, a distinctly cosmopolitan self-image. (Katz, 1999: 137)

There is a close correlation between the economics of hotel property development and the design of the public and private spaces of the hotel itself. From the nineteenth century onwards, developers and financiers began to respond to the growing demand for large, luxurious spaces to house a mobile upper class. These 'grand hotels' – the Savoy in London, the Plaza in New York, the Hôtel de Crillon in Paris (Denby, 1998) – were welcomed by city authorities as demonstrations of local economic and cultural vitality (Katz, 1999: 137–38). Similarly, the grand 'oriental' hotels – Raffles in Singapore, the Peninsula in Hong Kong, The Peace Hotel in Shanghai, the Taj Mahal Hotel in Bombay/Mumbai, Frank Lloyd Wright's Imperial Hotel in Tokyo – would house and host an imperial economy (Denby, 1998). In the USA, the grand hotels took their place alongside early forms of middle market franchise (such as Travelodge and Marriott), and the burgeoning motel and motor inns that clustered around central business districts and major highways (Jakle *et al.*, 1996: Chapter 6). Rooming houses (Groth, 1994) played a significant role during the rise of the commercial downtown or central business district, the latter in particular providing affordable working-class accommodation in otherwise expensive locations.

Regardless of their relative affluence, the architects and operators of hotels have had to address the fact that their buildings are composed largely of extremely private spaces (bedrooms) located adjacent to very public spaces. Here, the hotel lobby is a key space in forms of cosmopolitan public interaction, recognized as such in Weimar Berlin by Siegfried Kracauer (republished 1995), and charted by social historians (Cocks, 2001;

Berger, 2005). As the luxury palace hotels began to be challenged by the early twentieth-century middle market business hotels of the likes of Ellsworth Statler, the relationship between hotels and their neighbourhoods began to be redefined:

> Making it easier for a wider range of people to stay in cities cheaply and respectably, they also provided only a bedroom. For the parlors, dining rooms, and lounges that had long mediated between hotel patrons and the city, the guest at a businessmen's hotel had to go elsewhere, probably to one of the growing number of commercial tearooms, bars, restaurants and cafes. There, visitors to the city might feel themselves immersed in the exciting, brightly lit life of the city, but they would not be integrated into a community of fellows. (Cocks, 2001: 88)

This trade-off has been recreated by hotel designers in recent years, and perhaps most notably in the case of Ian Schrager. In a range of Manhattan hotels opened in the late 1980s and early 1990s, such as Morgans, the Royalton and the Hudson, Schrager – along with designer Phillippe Starck – maximized the 'bright lights' philosophy at the expense of the full range of services that a major hotel could usually be expected to provide. One critic argued that they had 'redesigned the face of the cosmopolitan idea. For a city of strangers, they have proposed an aesthetics of strangeness' (Muschamp, 2000) with outsized chairs, brutalist concrete walls, and exposed 'catwalk'-style entry corridors. Schrager and Starck adopted motifs of Art Deco, a style that was 'urban and theatrical, a combination ripe for hotel exploitation' (Berens, 1997: 105). The 1980s had a parallel with the 1920s, in 'the search for a modern that is both comfortable and extraordinary. Disdaining the cliché and the usual, these hotels represent cutting-edge design … Too modern, too off-putting, or self-indulgent for some, yet exciting, sophisticated, and amusing for others, this design extracts extreme reactions' (Berens, 1997: 105). Some hotel firms sought to turn their lobbies and bars into destinations for the city's residents as much as for visitors (McKinley, 2000), playing upon tropes of theatricality and glamour:

> Hotel bars and lobbies, more than any other form of architecture or interior design, are realized fantasies … To enter the hotel lobby is to walk onto a stage set and into a world of wonder and expectation. These lobbies and bars are decisively scripted, with plots ranging from urban sophistication and luxurious elegance through paneled clubbiness and rustic gentility. Each demands its own behavior and demeanor from us, who play the dual roles of spectators in the audience and actors on stage. (Berens, 1997: 1)

While many early modern hotels were famed for their striking exterior architecture, it could be argued that the focusing of aesthetic detail on the interior rather than the exterior of buildings is part of a universal retraction from the nature of hotels as civic landmarks. Thus Muschamp asks:

> Why has New York architecture been driven inside? What does it mean that talented architects of Mr Starck's generation are lucky if they get to work on loft, restaurant and store interiors? What does this portend for a city that takes civic pride in its cosmopolitan composition? (Muschamp, 2000)

The lobby was, in the earliest manifestations of hotel space, an extension of the sidewalk, a public arena where a particular kind of urban sociality flourished (though this public was often gendered, racially and ethnically screened, and class-conscious). With its bars, tea-rooms and restaurants an adjunct to (and economic anchor of) the business of selling rooms for the night, hotels fulfilled a deeply urban function, and there quickly evolved a series of design styles that at times denied and at times celebrated this urbanity. In this context, the hotel lobby stands as a metaphor of cosmopolitanism, if one accepts that 'the boundaries of the city are explicitly drawn between those who are willing to acknowledge the essential common ground of

their togetherness, and those who are not' (Iveson, 2006: 80). Alternatively, one could argue that hotel space has become a sorting mechanism for self-selecting strangers who regard their choice of space as reflective of their identity, distinguishing themselves from others with different, perhaps 'inferior', tastes.

However, the relationship of hotels to cities – and in particular their unusual location at the threshold of public and private space – began to change in the postwar period, certainly in the public discourse of decline in American cities (Beauregard, 1993). Notorious for their relatively low rate of return relative to retail or commercial uses, hotels nonetheless became seen as essential contributors to the multiplier effects of convention tourism. While convention centres in the USA have been engaged in such intense competition that they are rarely able to turn a profit, they were placed 'on the development agenda as loss-leaders whose red ink should be wiped away by jobs and earnings in downtown hotels, restaurants and stores' (Frieden and Sagalyn, 1989: 270). They were attractive to beleaguered downtown economic development officials for their provision of unskilled work suitable for poorer residents and their raising of money via sales and hotel tax. Large hotels adjacent to convention centres, or with in-built conference facilities, were thus favoured by the local state's regeneration planners. However, this attempt to lure business back into the downtown also restricted the interface of the semi-private spaces of the hotel with the public nature of the street.

A watershed in this movement came with John Portman's Peachtree Center in Atlanta, opened in 1967. Through his elaboration of the atrium, the glass-roofed, many-storeyed hollow core that allows maximum surveillance of an internalized social space, Portman redefined many of the fundamental features of hotel design.[1] As he said of his landmark Atlanta Regency Hyatt:

> I wanted to explode the hotel; to open it up, to create a grandeur of space, almost a resort, in the center of the city. The whole idea was to open everything up; take the hotel from its closed, tight position and explode it; take the elevators and literally pull them out of the walls and let them become an experience within themselves, let them become a giant kinetic sculpture. (Portman and Barnett, 1976, quoted in Berens, 1997: 137)

Portman's formula would be repeated in San Francisco's Embarcadero Center, Detroit's Renaissance Center, and Los Angeles' Bonaventure, as well as in numerous cities in southeast Asia. His atrium hotels were a paradigmatic moment in postwar US urbanism, which brought mixed use multiblock developments into downtowns suffering from disinvestment and suburban out-migration. As Whitelegg (2000) has commented, in Atlanta – again, the Portman laboratory – the local Tourist bureau apparently boasted that it is possible 'to attend a conference in the city without ever having to set foot outside'. Indeed, 'Signs on the … doors of the lobbies almost aim not to keep people out but to keep them IN – warning of the dangers of not taking a taxi, venturing alone, and so on'. This form of megablock development also has pertinence in cities with extreme climates, either in the air-conditioned internal spaces common in Asian or Australian cities, or in the 'analogous' cities of Canada and the northern USA (Boddy, 1992).

The tradition of the grand hotel has been revived in recent years, perhaps reflecting the growth of a global 'super-rich' (Beaverstock *et al.*, 2004), but is increasingly located in the context of the skyscraper. Such developments can provide instant visual icons. For example, Dubai has explicitly used its Burj al Arab – famous for its sail-form, its nightly rates, and its opulent finishing – as 'advertecture', an iconic statement of its post-oil economy. Few luxury hotels are now purpose-built, although many new mixed-use developments (including skyscrapers) are planned for easy adaption into hotel

space. Shell and core structures such as the Grand Hyatt in Jin Mao Tower (in Pudong, Shanghai), the Four Seasons at London Bridge Tower on the Thames (yet to be built at the time of writing), and the Mandarin Oriental at Columbus Circle (near Central Park in Manhattan) are all examples of the use of high-rise vantage points to commodify views, where the hotel occupies the higher floors of a mixed-use commercial tower. By exploiting their verticality, the guest is given 'visual control' of the city (Wharton, 2001: 139). Thus hotel design is far from being neutral scenography, and actively constitutes the consumption of the hotel – and the cityscape – as commodity.

III Design, consumption and hospitality

In 2005, the Spanish Silken Group opened the latest property in their portfolio, a building that took the notion of 'starchitecture' to, perhaps, its ultimate: Hotel Puerta América, in Madrid. The premise is simple: the 12 floors of the hotel design are divided up between many of the world's leading architectural practices. Jean Nouvel has designed the exterior, and practices such as Zaha Hadid, David Chipperfield, Foster and Partners, John Pawson, Arata Isozaki, and many others have each styled a floor. Panned by several critics for its excess and with the group's executives admitting that profitability will be hard to achieve, the Puerta América is perhaps the zenith (or nadir) of the trend towards the highly stylized boutique or design hotel. As an architectural theme park, the concept is hard to beat, though the hotel is seen to lack formal integrity, being a 'Frankenstein' creation, a 'zoo' where one can buy into – indeed, sleep within – the designs of some of the world's celebrity architects (Booth, 2005; Fernández Galiano, 2005).

Puerta América may be an extreme example, but hotels have long prioritized design as a means of attracting both guests and other high-spending city dwellers. Outstanding contributions to popular architecture have been commissioned by American

developers, examples including the grand 'jazz age' hotels of Schultze and Weaver (Dolkart, 2005; Lamonaca, 2005), the austere International Style modernism of the early Hilton chains (Wharton, 2001),[2] the baroque fantasies of Morris Lapidus on Miami Beach (Friedman, 2005), and the spectacular theming of Las Vegas (Jaschke and Ötsche, 2003). In Europe, cunning adaptive reuse of empty buildings, from office blocks to factories, is widespread (Watson, 2005). In the United Arab Emirates, striking new-build neovernacular buildings such as Dubai's Royal Mirage or Madinat Jumeirah house opulent interiors derived from essentialized 'Arab' forms of interior living, and in southeast Asia postcolonial identities are being wittily explored (see Teo and Chang, 2006, on the 'Singaporean aesthetic'). Increasingly, celebrity interior designers, such as Philippe Starck, Karim Rashid and Ron Arad, or globally organized, specialist interiors architects such as Wimberly Allison Tong & Goo, Hirsch Bedner, and Wilson & Associates are engaged by developers or operators to provide a premium that will be reflected in higher room rates, and repeat bookings.

This new generation of design hotel raises a number of issues. First, the boutique or design hotel is usually small in terms of number of rooms, usually independent (many are part of a small chain), often possessing room-by-room distinctiveness and difference and, as noted above, exploiting and adapting unusual architectural spaces. In many, a disproportionately large chunk of the design budget is allocated to the lobby and public areas such as the pool or bar. Distinction may be expressed discretely, such as the absence of any name on the door of many Schrager hotels (Collins, 2001). Furthermore, certain boutique hotels can be located within the discourse of urban renaissance fostered – at least in postindustrial cities – through the refurbishment of historic buildings (including ex-factories and warehouses).

Second, as Leslie and Reimer (2003) have shown, design knowledge as a form of cultural

capital has been mediated and constructed in a number of ways. For example, *Wallpaper** magazine has played a significant role in promoting modernist styling as part of an explicitly urbane design ethos, challenging the rural idiom of the likes of *House Beautiful* and *Homes and Gardens.* This extends to the hotel sector. Books such as Herbert Ypma's *Hip Hotels* series, or lifestyle magazines such as *Condé Nast Traveller*, *Travel + Leisure*, and – again – *Wallpaper** all carry highly stylized, professionally taken photographs of the hotel design. In this sense, such hotels are consumed as art objects, at a distance, vicariously, *without* direct consumption (and can be contrasted with the somewhat grittier consumer reviews found in the likes of tripadvisor.com). In this respect, the links between home-making, taste formation and the avant-garde nature of boutique hotel design should be noted, with anecdotal evidence that hotel aesthetics help dictate domestic interior design trends.

Third, these developments are increasingly attached to the growth of branding within contemporary capitalism (Twitchell, 1999; 2004). While global hotel markets are dominated by six major operating companies – Marriott, Accor, Hilton, Intercontinental Hotels Group, Starwood, and Carlson-Rezidor SAS (Allison, 2005), there are a number of smaller, but globally operative, groups, such as Hyatt, Meridien, and Kempinski, along with regionally operative firms (Taj, Shangri-La, NH). These groups contain a range of hotel brands dedicated to a specific demographic which has a substantial impact on the design of its space, public and private. Having successfully rolled out the W chain as the corporate response to the boutique hotel boom, Starwood found themselves caught between the consumption preferences of baby-boomers and Gen-Xers, a popular demographic cleavage in American consumer society. According to Levere (2005), these groups (respectively, the 78 million Americans born between 1946 and 1964, and the 58 million Americans born between 1965 and 1980) are the key markets to which hotels have to pitch their offer. Starwood's W chain, launched with a strategy of creating 'buzz', found itself alienating the baby boomers, with overloud music, 'destination' bars, and challenging contemporary design. The group responded with a toned-down variation known as Aloft, which seeks to retain the 'boutique' aesthetic yet remain differentiated from the standardized, familiar, conservative designs of its Sheraton hotels. The Californian Joie de Vivre Group's self-promotional *The secrets to boutique success* commented on the W strategy with approval:

> Boutique hotels create loyalty by tapping into psychographic niches. No longer can a hotel say that its ideal guest is a 48-year-old businessman from Chicago as that demographic may not be as telling about this man as the words that executive would use to describe himself. W Hotels realized this and created a whole ad campaign that described both their hotel and their target demographic of customer: 'witty, warm, welcoming, wired and wonderful' (or as some of their detractors suggest, 'wannabe') … Most of us wouldn't be overtly flattered to be called the kinds of words we'd use to describe America's best-known hotel chains: bland, predictable, ubiquitous, safe, and consistent. (Joie de Vivre, no longer available)

This market research presents a challenge to hotel designers, particularly when guests split their consumption preferences depending on, for example, their work and leisure subjectivities, or variations in work and personal budgets. According to Postrel (2004):

> Aesthetic identity – *I like that, I'm like that* – is more specific and personal than 'That's attractive' in some universal sense … The subjective value of a particular form varies from person to person. A young female Westin guest transported to the clubby, pin-striped Sheraton room might appreciate its attractiveness but still feel slightly out of place. (Postrel, 2004: 107)

In a similar vein, there is a growing interest among fashion retailers in luxury hotels

as brand *extensions*. Sonia Rykiel, Alberta Ferretti, Givenchy, MaxMara, Ralph Lauren, Karl Lagerfeld, Diesel, Ferragamo, and Donatella Versace have all at one time or another partnered with hotel developers to project their products (Gross, 2004). Armani, Bulgari, and Camper have gone further, creating small chains of branded hotels as a means of expanding the experiential dimensions of their products. Some of these developments directly respond to the globalization of the fashion industry, and are located in fashion centres such as Milan, Paris, London and New York (Gilbert, 2006). The underlying logic of the development is, according to Leonardo Ferragamo, 'extreme retailing'. Here, hotels 'let customers indulge in the fantasy by moving into rooms that are live-in ads for sheets and towels, home decorating fabrics and furniture, bath and beauty products' (Gross, 2004).

Fourth, innovative design can rewrite traditional hotel pricing rules. The conventional measure of hotel profitability is captured in the RevPAR formula, Revenue per available room, where revenue is the result of occupancy multiplied by average nightly room rate (PKF Consulting, 1996). Standard hotel development formats tend to be based upon the provision of established room size standards, along with particular facilities (such as a bar, business centre and fitness suite). Room prices conventionally reflect location (centrality and amenity), which in turn bears some relation to local land prices. However, the boom in boutique hotels has challenged this logic, rewriting RevPAR rules by providing design uniqueness and 'buzz' in exchange for room size. By filling larger numbers of appealingly designed small rooms than the convention, a competitive edge can be achieved. In addition, given their lack of overheads to chain management companies, independent hoteliers can spend more on design although this may be offset by the low economies of scale achieved and may harm service standards.

Recent hotel formats have followed this logic through, inspired by the peculiarities of Japanese urbanism, characterized by long commutes and little privacy in the home, which has generated two unusual hotel forms: capsule hotels and love hotels. With rooms made from fibreglass, measuring 90 x 180 x 100 cm, the first capsule hotel was opened in Osaka in 1977 (in Albrecht, 2002a: 101). The capsule hotel is usually located close to major railway stations, designed to service the needs of the businessman (and these are very masculinized spaces) who has missed the last train. The love hotel is of a different nature, and accounts for approximately one quarter of Japan's sex industry (which, estimated at £25 billion, is equivalent to the country's defence budget) with over 35,000 in Japan, 3000 in Tokyo alone, priced by *time* rather than by night, and almost totally automated (allowing for the maximum discretion) (Richie, 1999: 99). According to Richie, these strongly themed environments have moved upmarket, where the phrase 'fashion-hotel' or 'leisure-hotel' is gradually becoming the norm. The logic of this particular hotel form – so peculiar to Japan – is currently being adapted for use in London. The Yotel company (which emerged out of bringing sushi conveyor belts to the UK) sells the concept of modularized rooms of 10 m^2, with internal windows, which can be fitted into disused 1950s–80s buildings, or even underground.[3] The pay-off would come with high-quality design in fashionable London locations, such as Shoreditch, Notting Hill Gate, and Soho – at affordable prices. The concept, which launched in 2004, has yet to be fully realized, but addresses the altering market with regard to cheap accommodation (a market increasingly tapped into by independent youth hostels), and assumes that youthful city visitors spend only a few hours in their rooms. The modular room shape has no corners (surfaces are curved) to facilitate cleaning. Stripping down the format yet further, New York's MetroNap

company has pioneered pod-like sleep-chairs, for those wishing to sleep for a few hours during the day (Beck, 2004).

Fifth, the earlier discussion of the hotel as hybrid of public and private space carries through in the harnessing of designs that materialize metaphors of escape, rejuvenation and re-engagement with the self usually associated with rural retreats (Conradson, 2005). In many ways, this reflects a broader attempt to break down the 'artificial analytical distinction between "public" (the high street, the mall, the department store) and "private" consumption spaces (the home, the garden)' (Crewe, 2000: 278). By expanding the guest's range of consumption options, the bedroom and areas restricted to guests such as pools or spas become significant drivers of revenue.

However, while design and distinction are primary foci within particular niches or segments of the hotel market, one of the largest market sectors is that of the functional, no-frills, chain hotel, often orientated towards business travellers. Such a format satisfies investors with relatively predictable returns, constant throughput, and tried and tested management models. Thus, to grasp the full significance of hotels within cities, we should consider their role as nodes within the growing paradigm of physical human mobility.

IV The hotel and the circulatory city

> Some hotels are so in tune with the life of the city around them that they become part of its public landscape and tradition. The very name of the hotel evokes the presence of its place and time. The clock in the now demolished New York Biltmore Hotel was immortalized as the meeting place of choice for F. Scott Fitzgerald's rich in love … Just say 'The Polo Lounge' to conjure up images of deals made and lost in the Beverly Hills Hotel and 'Meet me under the clock' in San Francisco to rendezvous at the Westin St. Francis. (Berens, 1997: xiv)

Hotels have long been sites where, and through which, the business of cities is organized. They provide the logistical support that makes possible the extensive inter-relationships between cities that have been the focus of so much work in urban geography in recent times. In the railway age, grand terminus hotels were important boosterist statements in cities around the world, civic landmarks as well as resting places for weary travellers (Parissien, 2001). Similarly, the evolution of motel forms reflected the new urban morphologies carved by the motor car, making possible the long-distance interurban trip, for either business or leisure. For Jakle *et al*. (1996), the motel has:

> come full circle in approximately fifty years. Initially conceived in contrast to, if not in direct competition with, hotel interests, the motel has become hotel-like. Not only has the motel penetrated the heart of the city but it has expanded its services and now seeks increased profits from enlarged public spaces just as hotels do. (Jakle *et al*., 1996: 55)

Motels are but one of the responses of the hospitality sector to the transient – indeed, nomadic – nature of modern life for many (Albrecht, 2002b). The airport hotel – with rooms serving the lay-over or early-flying passenger, but mainly rationalized by a hub and spoke convention business – has become a fixture of international travel. The lobby of the O'Hare Hilton in Chicago has airline monitor screens, and an American Airlines check-in desk, and the airport is surrounded by no fewer than 19 hotels of varying quality. In 1997, airport hotels were the best-performing sector in the USA in terms of occupancy rates and had higher average room rates than the industry average (McDowell, 1998b).

Hotels have thus long played a significant role in temporarily 'fixing' mobile bodies. As Cocks (2001) has vividly described, the period between 1850 and 1915 saw a marked evolution of the American hotel format, partly reflecting the changing class context of the USA, and the emergence of a large middle market between 'palace' hotels and rooming houses. Ellsworth Statler's pioneering hotel

chain of the early twentieth century not only housed the travelling salesman with an unprecedented economy ('A room and a bath for a dollar and a half'), but also helped sustain the growing practice of urban tourism. It is in this context that we might locate the 'new mobilities paradigm' (Sheller and Urry, 2006), through which we can consider the hotel as a space, operating between fixity and flow, locating and refreshing mobile bodies, embedding them in relatively fixed networks within particular cities. For Sheller and Urry, 'Social life thus seems full of multiple and extended connections often across long distances, but these are organized around certain nodes' (2006: 213).

Such nodes are often described as monotonous, yet this in turn derives from the predictability and service standards required by business travellers (intensified by the use of preferred chains by corporate travel buyers, and loyalty schemes), and the desirability of maintaining an anonymous, commercially understood form of hospitality (Bell, 2007). The standardized hotel and motel formats such as Holiday Inn and Statler that emerged in the early twentieth-century USA were a reflection of the popularity of scientific management, the rational use of space, efficiency measures in supply procurement, and the intensification of US automobile culture (Davidson, 2005). More recently, companies such as Accor have sustained this approach with a globalized roll-out of brands such as Ibis and Formule 1, while higher end chains such as Marriott have sought to colonize the middle market with cheaper branded alternatives (as in the Marriott Courtyard brand) (McDowell, 1998a). Such hotels form part of a 'life in corridors', where travel is understood as a cocooned passage between offices, airports and hotels, and where the cultural differences of travel are significantly erased. Lassen (2006) quotes an employee of Hewlett-Packard describing their travel routine:

> Brussels on Monday evening directly to the hotel, a meeting with the European executive, dinner with them, a beer in the bar, and then to bed. The next day in Belgium at a strategic meeting that lasts all day till five o'clock; then we drove in a car to Amsterdam … spent the night in a hotel and had dinner there, a beer in the bar and then to bed. Next a strategic meeting in Holland; this lasted till five o'clock, after which one goes to the airport in Amsterdam and then by plane to London, then to a hotel, a meeting with a German colleague at a hotel, dinner with this colleague, you know, a beer in the bar and up to the hotel. (quoted in Lassen, 2006: 306)

These rhythms of business life are, as Lassen recognizes, softened by various modes of 'escape' from the predictability of business travel, which may include the consumption of design difference offered by some hotels.

However, it is in the design and marketing of these business hotels that we can discern the significance of circulation. First, the way in which the 'business traveller' is conceived of and (speculatively) catered for by hotel operators and designers has altered dramatically, with a rethink on issues such as time, gender, and brand loyalty. It is widely argued that business travelers – particularly at the executive end of the market – are demanding improved relaxation and leisure facilities, from gymnasia to steam showers, spas and jacuzzis, as well as facials, massages, manicures and pedicures, relaxation and destressing therapies on demand as a response to the stresses of travel (FT.com, 2004). Second, changes in hotel practice are part of a broader 'reconfiguration of the CBD' (O'Neill and McGuirk, 2003), in which hotel location is increasingly driven by proximity to the diverse workforce of office markets (crudely put, avant-garde hotels may cater to media, fashion and advertising workers, while conservatively branded business hotels such as Sheraton may cater to law or accountancy professionals). Third, the interior of business hotel space has been transformed by a range of design innovations – from wifi technology to pillow menus – that have been factored into hotel design as a key element of branding and product differentiation on the part of major operators. Rooms are conceived of

as 'second offices' with a full portfolio of IT options. We can see this as part of what Sheller (2004: 43) calls the 'convergence and blurring of spaces and times of business, leisure, travel and inhabitance for certain groups … [which] … are said to be producing novel pressures to manage fragmented time budgets and dispersed social contacts in more complex ways'. Just as luxury cars are increasingly fitted with laptops, DVD players, and games consoles (Sheller, 2004: 44), so these technologies are employed in those apparently fixed, but in reality constituted-in-mobility spaces of the hotel room. Fourth, conscious design decisions have been made in the creation of meeting and conversation spaces within the hotel, a reflection of the value of face-to-face communication and copresence in business culture (Urry, 2003). Of course, as Sheller (2004) argues, this is part of the widespread redefinition of urban life and sociality, and 'it would be timely to consider how such transformations might affect normative models of "good" public space and civic life' (p. 43). Indeed, hotels have always been poised uneasily at the frontline of social interactions between some very differently positioned groups and occupations.

V A social geography of hotel work

It's very dark down here. I walk past the smoking room, the kitchens, and the staff dining rooms. I am in unfamiliar territory now. The hotel opens up like a rabbit warren of corridors and small rooms. It is all badly lit with flickering strip-lights and the place stinks of chlorine, cabbage and stale cigarettes. The smell is so sweet and high it makes you gag if you breathe in too deeply … Forget what I said earlier about the chambermaids; I actually think that the back-of-house guys have the worst job in the hotel. They do an eleven p.m. to seven a.m. shift, during which time they scrub the kitchens, clean all the silver, wipe down all the floors, clean the staff toilets and do all the washing up. And they hate their job. In a business that thrives on tips to top up poor wages, there is no chance of a single spare pound coin coming their way. For not only are

they not allowed to interact with the guests, they're not allowed to be seen in any public area at all. (Edwards-Jones and Anonymous, 2004: 211–13)

As the weary fictional narrator of the behind-the-scenes exposé of a day in the life of a luxury London hotel explains, the economic regulation of hotel space is a delicate business, with the front-of-house consumption choices serviced by a hierarchy ranging from concierge 'down' to chambermaids, bell-boys, kitchen porters, maintenance engineers and cleaners (and the gendered nature of these job titles should also be noted). Of course, this is nothing new. As Wharton (2001: 163–64) notes of the early decades of the twentieth century, hotels – despite their overt public nature – were very exclusive: 'In hotels, as in politics, the 'public' was for the most part white, male, and Christian. Women were banned from the bars of reputable hotels in the era before Prohibition, and, in some instances, they were not allowed into the lobby, but had separate entrances.' Jews and African-Americans were also often denied guest status, the latter even barred from service in some cases. As Wharton continues, 'remarkably absent in the hotel literature is any serious consideration of the exclusionary practices of the hotel industry' (Wharton, 2001: 164).

At the end of the nineteenth century, grand hotels often played upon their ability to solve the 'servant problem', allowing wealthy families to enjoy a high standard of living without having to manage staff (Groth, 1994: 28). This pattern has continued. Hotels continue to house within one building extremes of wealth and exploited labour that eclipses conditions in many other service industries. Union organization has often been difficult. Wills (2005) draws attention to some of the specific reasons for this in the UK context: high staff turnover, a large amount of time spent interacting with customers rather than each other, complex shift patterns, use of subcontracted labour, lack of experience of trade union organization, the

differentiated identity of hotel workers, and a high percentage of female workers who 'often have little spare time due to their caring responsibilities' (Wills, 2005: 148–49). The specificities of the labour process in the hotel industry are clear. Wills' case study of labour organizing at London's five-star Dorchester Hotel highlights the iniquitous nature of this particular hotel's pay structure:

> The Dorchester Hotel is owned and managed by the Dorchester Group, a company owned by the Sultan of Brunei, who is reputed to be one of the richest men in the world. At the time of the research, rooms at the hotel ranged in price from £285 to £2100 a night, and most of the staff took home as little as £200/£250 for working 40 hours a week. The Dorchester was known to make annual profits in the region of £10 million, partly because so little trickled down to those doing the work. (Wills, 2005: 150)

However, there is evidence that American labour is organizing more successfully, with unions across the USA gearing up in the mid-2000s for a nationwide hotel strike in protest at working conditions at some of the largest management chains. Pay and conditions in union-recognized hotels differ markedly from those who do not recognize unions. As Meyerson (2006) reports, a non-unionized housekeeper's average hourly wage in the USA is $8.67, or $17,340 a year, compared with $12 (Los Angeles) and $19 (New York and San Francisco) respectively for unionized labour, with a national average income of $26,000 a year. The 2004 merger of the hotel union with the textile and apparel workers' union into UNITE HERE has created a potent entity which aims to match the growing concentration of power found in the major hotel operators such as Hilton or Marriott.

The increasing standardization of room furnishing has led to major operators competing on bed quality and bedding, such as Marriott's 'Revive', Hilton's 'Suite Dreams' or Westin's 'Heavenly Bed'. The contemporary hotel bed is now dressed in up to 20 different items, including multiple pillows, covers, skirts and comforters (Jones, 2005). In their study of working practices at two Montréal hotels, Seifert and Messing (2006) provide ergonomic case studies which correlates growing physical stress to changes in furnishing design, and hotel cleaning practices. These time and motion pressures placed on chambermaids are noted in one recent news reportage, profiling a chambermaid who has to ice her arms after work, and take pain-relievers, due to the physical burden of rapidly changing heavy bed linens:

> At the Oakland Marriott, where housekeepers make about $12 an hour, the women – and housekeepers are almost exclusively women – must clean 16 rooms per day. For Herrmann, that means changing 26 beds, each of which has five to seven pillows, a duvet and all the accessories. Each bed takes 14 to 15 minutes to change, she said, leaving just 15 or 16 minutes to vacuum, dust and mop; empty the trash; replace the myriad soaps and lotions; and clean the mirror, tub, sink, toilet, walls and faucets. Plus she has to reload her cart with fresh linens from the laundry room, which requires a time-consuming trip to the hotel basement. (Jones, 2005)

It is also noted that the Bureau of Labor Statistics records 17,980 injuries among maids and housekeepers across the USA in 2004.

Aside from physical labour, other forms of 'body work' in service industries are of major importance. As Postrel (2004: Chapter 5) notes, hotel design does not end with furniture and fittings, but extends to staff, the appearance of whom is often central to the offer of many hotels, particularly in the boutique sector. Similarly, Collins (2001) argues that:

> The staff who man the entrance of a hotel are also an important element of the overall message. The smart grey uniform of the doorman of the Time in New York, for instance, acts as an effective contrast against the backdrop of a fashionable, very modern hotel by suggesting old-fashioned values of service. Conversely, the casually attired doormen at St Martins Lane in London

convey the impression that, although this is a sophisticated and expensive hotel, the protocol of jacket and tie does not apply. (Collins, 2001: 58)

Once past the door, uniforms are increasingly tailored to match what the guests are expected to be wearing, as seen at the Allegro in Chicago (Calvin Klein), the Metropolitan in London (Donna Karan), the Gramercy Tavern (Armani) and Mercer (Mizrahi) in New York (Powers, 1998). Of the latter, proprietor Andre Balazs suggested that 'he wanted the young staff to have "the ability to go straight from the hotel to a party without changing"' (Powers, 1998).

The gendered nature of this work is well known. Sandoval-Strauss and Wilk (2005) document the portrayal of hotel maids in American popular media through the twentieth century, from their appearance as bit-part players in MGM classics of the 1920s, through to starring roles such as the Jennifer Lopez vehicle *Maid in Manhattan* (2002), filmed in the Waldorf Astoria. This latter film 'recapitulates some of the accusations of the nineteenth century – maids eavesdrop, appropriate guests' property, and imbue the hotel with their sexuality – but completely reverses their moral content … the film unequivocally portrays [Lopez] and her fellow chambermaids as working class heroines and agents of social justice' (Sandoval-Strauss and Wilk, 2005: 183). Despite their fictional nature, such films help to capture the precariousness of hotel service work. Taken to extremes, it may even be institutionalized through a policy of looks-based staff profiling, as in the case of Schrager's Mondrian Hotel in Sunset Boulevard, Los Angeles, a takeover and boutique restyling of an existing hotel. Schrager – famed for the elitist door policy of 1970s New York club Studio 54 – has long viewed staff appearance and comportment as embodiments of a hotel's ethos, and is reported to have faxed a memo to the Mondrian's restaurant manager that the retained staff were 'too ethnic' (Gordon, 2001). Nine long-serving staff were sacked ('two Latinos, three Filipinos, two Cambodians, one black, and a lone white man'; Gordon, 2001). A subsequent lawsuit brought by the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission was settled out of court, each of the dismissed staff receiving $120,000 (US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2000).

As Crang (1994) has explored, any such service work – in his case, in a restaurant – involves workers negotiating their particular encounters and interactions with consumers and management, often following a hierarchically governed, highly surveyed model of 'customer service', to which workers respond in a range of ways (which for Crang entailed 'hiding'. 'masquerading', 'distancing', and 'posing'). Furthermore, it is not only consumers who make choices based on 'cultural capital', but also the service workers, who decide where to work on the basis of pay, tips, reputation, working conditions, and the kudos of the workplace. However, hotel work is highly gendered and stratified, and requires a range of interactions from employees, from the highly visible, or even sexualized, associated with front-of-house tasks, to the invisible, where the labour process is conducted entirely beyond the bounds of hotel guests (Tufts, 2006). This masking of low-paid service work (the grand public entrance on the street, as opposed to the staff entrance in the service area) highlights the complex social geographies inscribed in hotel space.

VI Conclusions

This brief discussion of hotel space leaves me with three conclusions. The first, quite simply, is to suggest that the contemporary hotel mirrors many of the contradictions and inequalities of modern consumer societies. The hotel as an element of produced space (that is, as financed, developed, designed and constructed) has been central to twentieth-century urbanism around the world, an icon of modernity, much in the same way as other institutions of city life, the music hall, office block, department store or theatre. We

can note the redesign of hotels as defensive enclaves, both in the American fear of downtowns and as bridgeheads of American culture in 'hostile' territories (Wharton, 2001). The introversion of hotel space, relying on car-based transportation to ferry guests through the city, reflected a broader paradigm of urban change, a response to both extreme climates and to the desire to insulate guests from the heterogeneity of city life. As consumption choices, hotels range from basic necessities (as in the rooming house tradition set out by Groth, 1994), to the sites of luxury that house a globally mobile upper class (Beaverstock *et al*., 2004). Yet, in their juxtaposition of a front house of studied service and a back house of sometimes paperless, poorly paid, non-unionized labourers, the hotel is a microcosm of the hidden processes of labour exploitation which is central to the consumption experience.

The second issue to consider is how hotels are represented in narratives of the city. At the very start of the paper, I highlighted how some hotels are described biographically, others rather dismissively, as icon and anti-icon. Some of us may flinch when we read the orgiastic descriptions of hotel interiors by design critics: 'Theatrical imagery is all around as soon as you enter the Delano. The lobby areas are divided by light gauze curtains, the furniture and fittings are arranged like haphazardly assembled props and scenery from some long-forgotten play' (Riewoldt, 1998: 18). Many others are not described at all, taking their place with the other mundane office blocks and commercial buildings of cities that have no public culture beyond their immediate band of users. Yet even the elite hotels are chronicled with a limited sense of their spatial and social significance within cities. The small genre of hotel histories identified in Wharton's 'historiographic excursus' are largely 'narrativized guest registers with a little institutional information thrown in. In such works, the aura of rich and famous patrons veil the building and

its workers' (Wharton, 2001: 199). Perhaps this representational foreclosure is due to the temporary nature of its residents, people who come and go with a light footstep on the city individually. But the hotel remains – and grows – as an enclave in a city parcelled into consumption spaces.

Third, a significant theme of this paper is the relationship between urbanity and the hotel, and in particular the hotel's function as an extension of public space in the form of the lobby or the bar. In the booming commercial downtowns of American cities of the early twentieth century, the subtle gradation between public and private space was an attractive element of upmarket 'palace' hotels. As Groth (1994) describes: 'The *selectivity* of hotel privacy was its advantage over other private realms. Once could intersperse days or hours of seclusion with the conviviality of the dining room, lobby, bar, or downtown theater, gymnasium, or club' (1994: 31). But what about the city downtown of today? How far do recent prototypes of the urban hotel (as seen in the numerous boutique hotels, and versions of the Japanese 'love' and 'capsule' hotels) reflect a trade-off of light, views and room size for a location in central cities? To echo Bell's (2007) call for a rethinking of the spaces of hospitality, 'the deployment, staging, or performance of hospitality and hospitableness in commercial spaces should not be dismissed as calculative, commercial imperatives' (2007: 19). Nonetheless, the theorization of 'premium network spaces' (Graham and Marvin, 2001) and the reworking of urbanized consumption spaces (eg, Hannigan, 1998) in recent years suggests that the spatiality of the hotel requires further elaboration. Does the swathe of new boutique hotels (and their corporate coat-tailers) return us to an older paradigm of hotels as sites of a cosmopolitan urbanity, or are we seeing subtler forms of distinction reinscribing class divisions within the supposed democracy of newly rediscovered city centres?

Notes

1. This moment in hotel design even featured as a central theme in one of the most noted essays that marked the postmodernism debate in the humanities, Frederic Jameson's (1991) reworking of the 'cultural logic of late capitalism' (which, for Katz, 1999: 149, 'has acquired virtual landmark status in criticism – along with an inevitable degree of reification'). Jameson used the Westin Bonaventure in Los Angeles as a reflection of the 'cognitive dissonance' of contemporary cultural economies.

2. 'In post-World War II Europe and the Middle East, the Hilton hotel was quite literally "a little America" … American postwar wealth produced the upper-middle-class travelers who staged their business or pleasure activities in the Hilton. The Hilton provided this elite with a familiar environment. From American suburbs and country clubs came the Hilton's lawns, swimming pools, and tennis courts. From American upper-middle-class social practices came its cocktail lounges and rooftop supper clubs. From American popular culture came its cheeseburgers, milkshakes and soda fountains. From American technology came its ice water tapped to individual guest rooms, its direct-line telephones, its radios, its air-conditioning, and, most fundamentally, the architectural form of the building itself' (Wharton, 2001: 1–2).

3. http://www.yotel.com/find_out. aspx?open=company_guide (last accessed 1 February 2008).

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