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Abstract

There was a time in the United States when hotels served as ad hoc homes, providing full time housing as well as hotel services. At that moment, hotel life blurred the difference between tourist architecture and housing architecture. Nowadays those dwelling typologies can become a reference to ensure social benefit on new touristic areas or existing ones.

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From the American Apartment Hotel to Nowadays

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From the American Apartment Hotel to Nowadays

There was a time in the United States when hotels served as ad hoc homes, providing full time housing as well as hotel services. At that moment, hotel life blurred the difference between tourist architecture and housing architecture. Due to the pressure of scarce land and housing stock during the economic depression after the Civil War (1860-65), most of the American cities, especially New York, needed to build apartment houses for middle class tenants in order to cut down housing expenses. Appeared then different housing typologies which, remembering hotel living, combined the European apartment type with the American hotel type. This typology between apartment and hotel allowed to eliminate housekeeping annoyances and thus, to reduce significantly its costs.

The wide range of dwelling typologies glimpsed in this text, claim for a series of nuances and typological complexities that during the XX century have been obliterated or lost. Nowadays those dwelling typologies can become a reference to ensure social benefit on touristic areas blurring again the limits between tourism and everyday life.

During the nineteenth century the "American Hotel" ¹ offered a very desirable housing type for wealthy society because it removed the responsibility for house management and also offered luxury domestic services in the best locations of the city. They used to host permanent as well as temporary residents. For instance the first major hotel in New York, the Astor House, built in 1836 on Broadway Avenue between Barclay and Vesey Street, was mainly occupied by permanent residents. Designed by Isaiah Rogers, the hotel had 309 rooms and restrooms available on each floor, a great novelty, since even the most luxurious mansions lacked such facilities. Shortly after opening its doors, Horace Greeley published in the New Yorker that a half of its rooms were rented to permanent residents: "*We hear that half the rooms are already engaged by families who give up housekeeping on account of the present enormous rents of the city*". Primarily residents of the hotels were singles or young couples from moderately wealthy families who were unable to bear the cost of keeping a dwelling at the level their social relationships required. Hotels offered at a much lower cost, extravagant and luxurious furnishings as well as housekeeping services which were unaffordable in a detached house.

Except for the expensive hotel life, until the post-war years it was inconceivable that a moderately wealthy family could share the same roof with other families. However after the Civil War the situation changed drastically. In October 1866 the New York Times warned of the lack of housing for the middle class: working families with average salaries, teachers, artists or vendors -could neither afford to buy a town house, nor to accept living in a tenement building due to its social connotations-.² Most of them ended up living in boarding houses, or turned their home into one. This situation forced the construction of the first apartment buildings for middle class, trying to adapt the European apartment building type to the American way of living some of them took into account the tradition of hotel living and incorporated hotel services.

In 1870 the Stuyvesant Building designed by Richard Morris Hunt was built and, although there are other prior or contemporary examples, it is considered the first apartment building in New York. Only a year later, in 1871, the first apartment building with hotel services was opened. It was an adaptation of an old family home into multi-family dwelling for twenty families and several bachelors. The building was situated on the corner of 15th Street and Fifth Avenue, it was called Haight House and had five floors, four devoted to family apartments and the fifth floor devoted to bachelor apartments. In each floor plan there were five apartments -composed by three bedrooms, parlor, living room, kitchen, pantry, bathroom and two bedrooms for the service. On the fifth floor there were eleven bachelor apartments, five of them had a parlor and two bedrooms, the rest had only a parlor

1 Isaiah Rogers defined for the first time the "American Hotel" in 1829 at "*Dictionary of American Biography*". Rogers explained that an American Hotel had to have: "*ground-floor shops, a distinguished entrance, elaborate lobby, receiving counters and rooms, first-floor dining rooms and bars, an individual rooms and suites arranged along long hallways in the stories above; less obvious, but equally important, would be the parallel service universe of kitchens, laundries, dormitories, storage, areas, and repair shops*"

2 "It is an attempt, and in this city a recent and honorable one, to congregate under one roof a number of families, usually ranging from ten to twenty. At the outset the idea was a repulsive one, as partaking of many of the features of the ordinary tenement house, and a difficult and insuperable problem in the case has been to eliminate these distinctive objections." *Real Estate Record*, January 20, 1877, p. 42

and a bedroom.³ A laundry and a kitchen sited in the basement could serve through a dumbwaiter the different apartments. Meals were served in the common dining room or in each of the apartments. Pneumatic tubes and electric bells connected the apartments with the kitchen and the reception of the building.⁴

After the construction of the Haight House many similar buildings began to proliferate in New York. Although most of the examples followed the same pattern, the name used to designate them used to change depending on its character or its services. During this first epoch both the used terminology to describe them and the law that regulated them were of a great ambiguity. The existing housing law considered only the word "tenement", which defined a building that housed three or more families cooking on their premises. Usually the word "tenement" was associated to low income working class, so new housing typologies targeted the middle class using other terms to be clearly different from them, apartment building with hotel services were usually appointed under the term hotel, family hotel or apartment hotel. During these early years several examples were built around Fifth Avenue, between 10th and 27th Street, but after the opening of the elevated railroad along Ninth Avenue in 1879, most of them were built in the Upper West Side area -among them the Beresford, the Winthrop, the Endicott, the San Remo, the Rutledge or the Brockholst-.

One of the key factors of the success of this housing type was the lack of domestic service and the consequent rising of its fees during the second half of the nineteenth century. During the post-war years, due to the increasing incorporation of women into labor and the decrease of incoming immigration,⁵ the demand for domestic service could not be satisfied and it consequently became more expensive. After the war several articles were published on the newspapers warning about the excessive housekeeping cost and the disastrous efficiency of the existing domestic service. Many of them claimed to professionalize domestic services and to optimize the design of the dwellings in order to reduce the cost of housing maintenance.⁶ An article published in The New York Times compared the situation to Biblical times and invited to spread professionalization even to cooking food: *"It will be said that these household activities cannot profitably be divided; but on the one hand, it is certain that it is becoming very unprofitable to perform them as we do now, and on the other, a great many of them are already partially distributed, and can be much more so. To have our meats and vegetables served to us hot as we require them, by professional cooks outside of our houses, is no more inconceivable for us, than it was for our great grandfathers that cloth could be bought better and more cheaply than it could be made at home, ..."*

3 "French Apartment Houses" *New York Times*, april 16, 1871

4 Stern, Robert A.M.; Mellins, Thomas; Fishman, David, *New York 1880. Architecture and Urbanism in the Gilded Age*, The Monacelli Press, New York, 1999, p.515

5 *World*, january 15 1867; "Wanted good servants" *New York Times*, october 4 1863

6 "The statement that housekeeping has become, for most people, intolerable expensive and difficult is one which almost universal experience and observation will confirm. House-rent is high; houses are inconvenient in arrangement and construction; food, as generally cooked, is costly and not remarkably healthful or attractive; servants are not readily procured, cannot be retained long, and are wasteful; unskillful, and negligent to a very annoying extent. Of course, this is not a statement without exceptions, which we are only too happy to recognize. But the exceptions are few and far between." "Housekeeping" *New York Times*, february 12 1873

During the construction of the Stuyvesant it came out an article in the New York Times that, quoting Melusina Fay Pierce, claimed to incorporate domestic services into the building. Pierce published in 1868 a book titled "Cooperative housekeeping: how not to do it and how to do it, a study in sociology" where she first introduced the term "cooperative housekeeping ". Pierce proposed that women should undertake domestic work together in special facilities and that their work should be paid by their husbands. In that way every woman could do what best suited to their capabilities, optimizing the time spent and the cost of each domestic labor. She proposed a way to professionalize domestic work, incorporating women into labor, and offering them economic independence. Pierce's proposal had a clear impact on architecture, not only because it promoted a new type of community services building, but also because it consequently involved removing kitchens and other service rooms from housing. Shortly after the publication of the book, the journalist Nathan Meeker published that article, and, in opposition to other opinions which proposed the construction of domestic services buildings, encouraged to incorporate those services into the apartment buildings predicting what later came into being at the Haight House. The problem of housekeeping was being widely discussed and the apartment hotel offered a possible solution.

During this epoch came out several urban projects that tried to give an answer to this general concern and took into account the collectivization of domestic services. Among them Albert K. Owen's project was the more ambitious one. In 1884 Owen founded a city called Topolobampo which was created following Fourier's principles and where apartment hotels and cooperative domestic buildings were to be build. Owen was an engineer of the company in charge to build the railway network that had to connect United States to the Atlantic coast through Mexico. It was expected that the new railway network would shorten the route from the United States to the Pacific Ocean and that it would gain the Mexican trade. In 1872 the project failed and Owen, who at that time was only 25 years old, decided to keep the project and promote the construction of the railway himself. After many years looking for funding, Owen managed to start the construction of the railroad in 1884 and threw himself into planning a new port city on the bay of Topolobampo, Mexico, which had to be representative of its time. The city offered a dream life; however, unlike similar utopian proposals Owen was totally realistic and practical. He projected in detail the future city based on all kinds of statistics on demographics, cities' density, land values or everyday life expenses.

Although the port city idea appeared in 1872, it is not until the eighties that he began to define the project. During that period of time was of great importance the friendship he established in 1874 with Edward and Marie Howland.⁷ The couple had lived in the Guise Familistère led by Jean-Baptiste-André Godin and previously lived in the Unitary Household, a housing experiment directed by Stephen Pearl Andrews. Andrews turned in 1858 a townhouse located in Stuyvesant Street, New York, into a non-housekeeping apartment building with collective

⁷ Hayden, Dolores. *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities*. The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England. 1981 p.96

spaces. The community had a large impact on the newspapers and it is therefore possible that it could be an influence on the design and the organization of the Haight House. The building held twenty groups of residents, including families, singles or widows. Each one lived in a private apartment and shared parlors and dining rooms. Housekeeping and domestic services were hired and controlled by one of the residents who had a lower annual rental fee.

Owen worked on the planning with Marie Steven and John J. Deery who was primarily responsible for drawing the plans. The city was designed as an orthogonal grid formed by blocks of 180 by 90 meters separated by three types of streets (avenues, streets and alleys) which generated a hierarchy in the functioning of the city. The avenue had a width of 60 meters and was located every 4 blocks east to west, and every 6 blocks north to south, grouping sets of 24 blocks. Streets had 30 meters width and passages had 15 meters width. Each block contained 48 plots of 7,5 by 45 meters. These 24 unit megablocks were divided in two through its diagonal by a 30 meters wide street called "Pradas". At the junction of several "Pradas" there were 420 by 240 meters parks filled with trees, flowers and different sources. Each park was located approximately at a walking distance, around 1300 meters.

Owen believed that the city had to be planned as a unitary grand hotel, where streets were halls and houses were rooms. As if it was an interior city couldn't have noise or pollution at all. As if it was an interior city couldn't have any time of noise or pollution. Owen didn't allow the use of horse-drawn carriage or steam, just bicycles, tricycles and electric cars could circulate through the city. In Pacific City there would be no noise or smoke, factories would be located along the main avenues, the transport of goods would be done by electric cars to the shops and from there through pipes to different homes, allowing citizens to shop without leaving home.

“A hotel is simply a big house with distinct rooms, where the host protects every guest in the enjoyment of the common advantages of the building. Animals, children, smoking and noise, are prohibited in the corridors of a first-class hotel. Guests go at their will and for their pleasure, but must live in accordance with the regulations of the hotel while they are there. A city should be a large club hotel, laid out and built by the club for its own members, where each head of a family can live in his or her own home, instead of a rented room, and where the management may be so perfected, in the interest of all, that the thoroughfares become as secure, clean and attractive as the corridors in a hotel. Streets are simply open passage-ways leading from one house to another, as the entries in a house facilitate the communication between rooms under the same roof.”⁸

On the grid were strategically distributed three types of buildings: apartment hotels (or residents hotels as he called them), row houses and detached houses with yards. The apartment hotels were located centrally at the

8 Owen, Albert K. *Integral Co-operation at Work*. John Lowell Co., New York, 1890, p. 11

junction of the diagonal avenues, replacing some of the parks. They were large buildings that occupied the entire block and that could house several hundred people:

“The resident hotel... is designed to take the place of the “club house”, “flats” and the “apartment house”, being an improved and enlarged combination of all... Each house will be a distinct home, showing the individuality of its owner within and on the piazza fronting its private entrance, but there will be a restaurant, dining-room, parlor, library, reading room, lecture hall, nursery, and play area, laundry, bath and barber room common to all. From the restaurant, meals may be served in the homes à la carte at any hour and in the manner ordered by telephone, or the families may go to the table d'hôte served at regular hours in the dining-room”⁹

The row houses were arranged along the avenues and the remaining blocks were filled with detached houses which had also hotel services. The row houses blocks configured a closed set that could house 14 families and included meeting rooms, schools, bathrooms, laundry, nursery and bedroom for guests. The dining room, where meals were served daily, was located on a corner of the block. From the restaurant, meals may be served in the homes *à la carte* at any hour and in the manner ordered by telephone.

Although Topolobampo was never built up as it was planned, it was an important influence for the imaginary of the future city. In Topolobampo the apartment hotel organization is extrapolated to the entire city encouraging that cooperative household should not be limited to the organization of buildings but to urban planning in general. A city designed as a hotel -City Hotel- would improve daily life and urban economy in general. For instance, statistics show that hotel room occupancy in Spain never reaches 100% during most of the year. During the last three years hotel room occupancy in Barcelona, where the congress is hosted, rates have averaged a 61,42% with a minimum occupancy of 38,1% in January 2010 and a maximum occupancy of 79,5% in August 2010. In a City Hotel there would be no difference between permanent dwelling and tourist dwelling. Housing would fill vacant hotel's room and would have the possibility to use hotel services. In that way it would be made the most of each infrastructure and housekeeping facilities would be provided to permanent residents. The solution to ensure social benefit on new touristic areas or existing ones could be found blurring the boundaries between temporary and permanent uses as it was tried at Topolobampo.

9 Hayden, Dolores. *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities*. The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England. 1981 p.106