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IN this week's issue, Ioana Man looks at accommodation types - the architectures that have historically attended different modes of travel and tourism - before looking at Airbnb and its implications for our readings of the city.

POST-HOTEL: WHAT HAPPENED TO THE DOOMED HOTEL?

Ioana Man

TEMPORARY accommodation appeared as a response to a specific need: finding shelter when away from one's permanent dwelling. As such, it was always subject to the specifics of how people travel. Today, accommodation continues to be perceived as synonymous with the commercial hotel, rather than other models deemed deviations of unconventional tourists. But although the conventional hotel tries to adapt, other models threaten to displace its dominance. Historically, this was the middle-class campsite. Today it is Airbnb.

Architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner begins the timeline of the hotel as an architectural 'type' by asking the question *what is the difference between the inn and the hotel?* His account starts with a time when people traveled by horse-drawn carriage. As a direct consequence of this mode of travel, and the need to feed and shelter horses, the layout and usage of the inn was determined: an interior cobble court with an arched entrance, rooms along both sides, a kitchen and public rooms at the front side, and stables at the rear. The inn introduced the model of a single building which provided temporary accommodation and catering, a model not challenged until much later.

In the second half of the 19th century, 'Grand Hotels' began to be built by the central railway stations of major European cities. Embodying a new type of leisure travel, they represented, in their dramatic jump in scale from the inns, a new building type for a new social stratum. Herbert

Lachmayer has argued that the fundamental difference between travel and tourism was that the former's main aim had been to explore different worlds and societies, while that of the latter was to enjoy fashionable and comfortable foreign sites. By catering to tourists rather than travellers, commercial hotels moved away from being spaces where one would merely eat and sleep, and began to show characteristics of the historical *hôtel*, a French aristocrat's town house. New spaces were added according to this blueprint which, coupled with an expansive staff, transformed the experience into a highly ceremonial one. Hotels became spaces of spectacle undergirded by a broad and hidden service system: *Light and water and servants obeyed them*. Retaining the basic structure of the Grand Hotel, they continued to add services over time, slowly producing an all-encompassing, self-sufficient accommodation type, but one in which the tourist was always centred in a sphere of bourgeois ceremony.

While the Grand Hotel model is still in use today, its particular program is very quickly becoming outdated. The rapid proliferation of cars in the 20th century led to the emergence of auto-centric accommodation types. As cars became more affordable, hotel guests went from being demanding elites to anyone who

IS THE HOTEL (AS WE KNOW IT NOW) DOOMED?

by Basil West

an essay as a prophecy

What we are watching, in effect, is an evolution in the very nature of the hotel, an evolution brought about by the automobile and express highways.

Hotel men must realize that if they themselves do not enter the motor lodge field, the present motor lodges will expand of themselves into first-class and deluxe hotels, and the stubborn conservatives in the hotel ranks will be left to cater to the increasingly few travelers who do not travel by automobile or motor-bus—

Before the widespread use of the automobile it was necessary to build hotels near railway stations and centers of population in zones where land values were high and taxes equally elevated.

train-centricity

Service should be optional. That is to say, if a traveler chooses to avoid tips by unloading his own car and running his own errands, there should be no obstacle placed in his way.

obsolescence of hotel practices

There will be positively no public lobby.

Hotel men, when they read this, may call it a dream and say "God forbid!" But it is no dream. The hotel I have described is coming in the near future as surely as the future itself. □
© 1935 Automobile Club of S. California, courtesy Westways.

the hotels of the future are in airbnb and camp sites

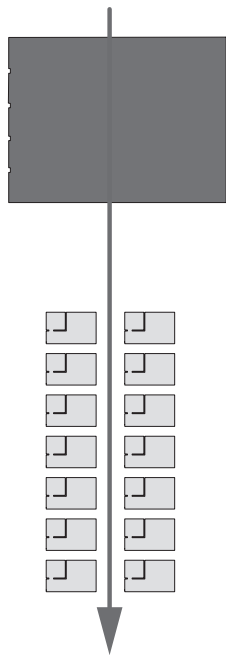
owned a car, a mode of transportation that allowed the journey itself to be part of the vacation.

In this context, camping in the 20th century can be seen as a reaction to the formality and rigidity of the hotel, Grand or otherwise, whose costs and protocols many guests resented. Having stripped the hotel type down to a bare service platform, camping, at least in theory if not in practice, was able to lead to an infinite diversity of sleeping environments, able to cater to any category of guest.

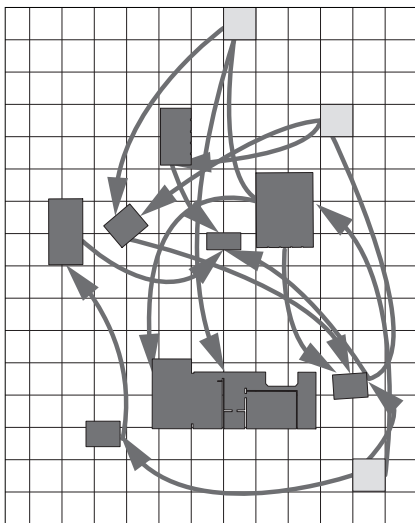
Following ever grander demands from the middle-class tourist, the empty field with a toilet began to develop into the all-inclusive holiday village of today (cf. the Union Lido, a campsite close to Venice, which can accommodate 11,000 people and has an on-site doctor, church and car-wash). Offering all the facilities one might need in a neighbouring city, the campsite has become completely autonomous and hermetic. In it, the urban tissue is no longer showcased, but rather copied and distilled. Like *No-Stop City*, by the radical Italian architectural group Archizoom, the holiday village provides all the basic

conditions required for a city to exist: *a bathroom every 50 square meters*.

Today, the conventional hotel faces another challenge in the form the internet and the growth of the sharing economy. In



Above: Hotels are determined by spectacle and hierarchy, while also being based on an extensive and hidden service system. **The Grand Hotel is a standardised and sophisticated service machine.**



Above: Camping reduces the hotel to a service platform, islands of public programme scattered on a field that supports plug-in accommodation spaces. **The campsite is not accommodation in a city, but rather a model for a city.**

2003, Airbnb took what was left of the Grand Hotel and stripped it of every auxiliary service until all that was left was a bed. In their model, the public spaces of both hotel and camping are lost: there is no more reception, restaurant, bar or pool. In lieu of

staff, the host becomes receptionist, cleaner and tour guide.

With all other activities besides sleeping removed from the space, the ceremonial nature of a Grand Hotel stay is replaced by a more flexible lifestyle. And it those who aspire to this lifestyle that Airbnb targets, those who see more value in a postcode than an area's inherent qualities, and for whom the hotel seems just as superfluous and overpriced as it did for middle-class campers in the 20th century.

Airbnb does not only reflect changes in how people travel, but also in how people interact with their homes and hometowns. As a service, it relies on people who no longer see their homes as private sanctuaries, capitalising on the fundamental element of both homes and hotel: the mattress. But whereas the hotel was designed to be specific to its program, Airbnb needs only "hosts" and "guests": a network that relies on human participation and the willingness to share their personal (or not) spaces with guests.

As part of its brand, Airbnb claims a kind of uniform humanity. However, when looking at the majority of the listings, one can see very few variations on Swiss architect Hannes Meyer's project *Co-op Zimmer*: an empty room with a bed and just enough objects to signify the room as a bedroom. According to Pier Vittorio Aureli, the *Co-Op Zimmer* reduces the domestic interior to an empty space, which makes clear that permanent occupation is impossible. Airbnb does not only provide travellers with a network of sleeping modules, but also turns all spaces listed into a mesh of de-domesticised hotel-homes. As Airbnb establishes itself as a novel typology of accommodation, it manifests a different way of relating to the city for both guests and hosts.

Although services provided by the hotel are now provided by new forms of accommodation, the need for them has not yet disappeared, and instead, new relationships are being forced upon tourists and the city. Tourists must now rely on the urban tissue to find services they would have otherwise found in a hotel, bringing additional commercial activity to the areas in which they are staying, but also strain on the urban infrastructure.

While camping tried to remove itself from the city by providing an all-encompassing infrastructure, Airbnb depends entirely on the city. Where campers rarely left the campsite, Airbnb guests rarely stay inside, leaving their bedrooms to go to restaurants, bars and public spaces. As such, the city

becomes less of an environment to be explored and more of an extensive hotel lobby.

In other words, just as the hoteliers vouch for the quality of the spaces you may find in hotels, hosts need to do the same thing with their surroundings. With suggestions by the host and extensive neighbourhood descriptions provided on Airbnb, one knows what to do and where to go even before getting to the apartment. It comes as no surprise then that the most popular listings are in "up-and-coming", "hip", "fashionable" areas, where the brunch offer is extensive and even the most demanding drinker can find a craft beer to suit her taste. One never goes to a completely unknown place.

While the hotel will not disappear anytime soon, it is no longer the accommodation type best suited to the contemporary tourist. Although the hotel was once itself considered doomed shortly after its arrival, it has managed to survive both as a successful business model and as part of an entire conception of travel. But now, with the growth in popularity of alternative accommodation types, it has lost its position as the sole means to interact with and decipher cities and spaces when travelling.

The archetype of the contemporary tourist is no longer content with a predictable list offered by the concierge. She demands access to the personal and the 'authentic'. No longer happy to be a just tourist, today one needs to be able to belong anywhere.

All diagrams by the author.

Ioana Man is a third-year student at the AA, writer and researcher from Transylvania, Romania.



Above: Airbnb works on the basis of an active dependency on the city. The city becomes less of an unknown environment to be explored and more of an extensive hotel lobby. **One never goes to a completely unknown place.**