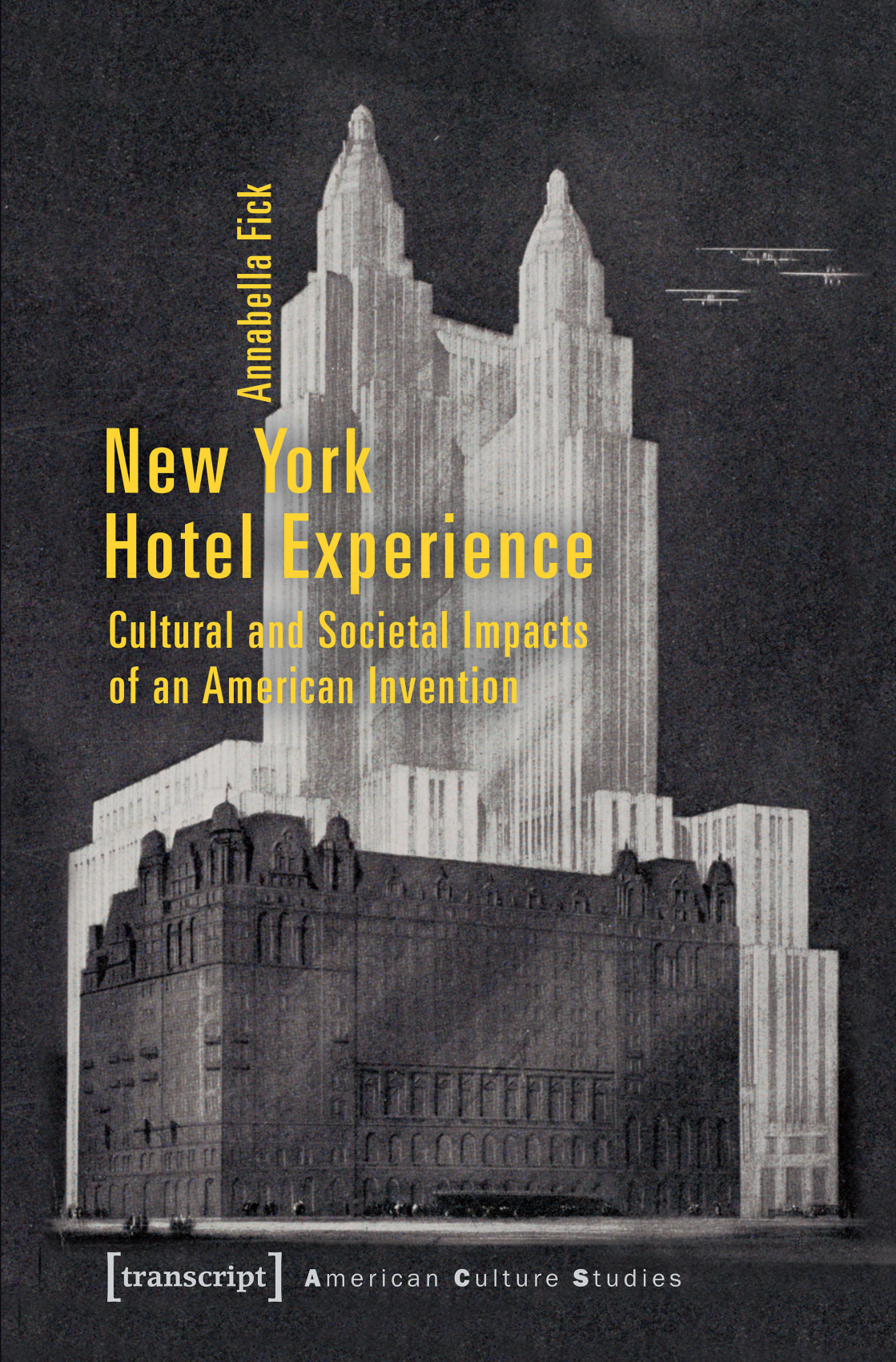
Annabella Fick
New York
Hotel Experience
Cultural and Societal Impacts
of an American Invention
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From:

Annabella Fick

New York Hotel Experience

Cultural and Societal Impacts of an American Invention

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For more than two hundred years hotels have played a significant role in American history. The modern hotel is even an American invention. In five case studies of iconic New York hotels, this book presents the hotel experience of the white upper class, literati, young artists, African Americans and Jewish Americans in the twentieth century. Using a variety of texts, including autobiographies, movies and novels, the impact of hotel experience on society and culture – which has been neglected until now – becomes apparent. This unique approach offers a new way of reading New York and helps to better understand the city's special dynamics.

Annabella Fick (PhD) works as an academic advisor for Cusanuswerk, a scholarship program for highly gifted Catholic students. Her research interests include American History, New York and Hotels.

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Table of Content

Introduction

> "The story of Greece is in its temples, that of America is in its hotels."
> GENE FOWLER/QTD. IN MCGINTY 2

With this quote by American journalist and author Gene Fowler Brian McGinty starts his history of American *Palace Inns* (1978). At first glance this statement sounds like a gross exaggeration of the hotel's position in American culture. Mentioning Greece immediately invokes the image of the cradle of human civilization. Greek temples are still admired as lasting evidence of Ancient Greece's contribution to the human world heritage. And yet, Fowler is not alone in stating the importance of the institution of the hotel for America. The first historian to publish a book on hotel history in America, Jefferson Williamson, champions Fowler's view, writing: "Our hotels have been …'the thermometers and barometers of our national civilization," (Williamson 4) and continues: "Tinsel and all, our ornate hotels symbolize and typify the spirit of America. They have been, perhaps, the most distinctively American of all our institutions, for they were nourished and brought to flower solely in American soils and borrowed practically nothing from abroad" (Williamson 4). Hotel space offers its users to live a life of a certain rootlessness, to give in to their inner drive of restless mobility and to fulfill the wish to see and be seen by the community. These traits are often perceived as typically American as they combine the Puritans' concept of a tightly knit, observing and controlling community and Turner's often invoked frontier spirit. Thus the hotel is the ideal space for American people. Since the early nineteenth century, the hotel presents a new kind of spatial entity to Americans. Especially the accessible American hotel lobby was a place of exchange and shaped the development of the nation, helping it to become a united country. The hotel is a product of capitalism, it made possible to enable and control modern life. Yet, according to Caroline Levander, "[h]otels … are not passive sites but bring a power of their own to the resident experience, real or imagined" (Levander 6).

The hotel is a most complex construction. It can be home, meeting place, work place, place of leisure, and entertainment.[1] Hotel scholar Molly Berger writes, it "is unlike any other institution because it is all these things at once" (Berger, *Hotel Dreams* 10). Henry James, the famous novelist and social critic, even went so far as to call the hotel a synonym for American civilization (James 105). Even though the hotel touches all parts of human life and challenges people's relationship with place more than any other institution in modern American society, the hotel has been neglected as research object in American Studies for quite some time. Thus, the research object of my thesis is the cultural phenomenon hotel.

RESEARCH OBJECT AND STATUS OF RESEARCH

While the hotel is often only perceived as a stopping place for the night, for a number of people it is their permanent home, work place, and a stage or platform to re-invent themselves. It is a place of intense human interaction, a reservoir of memories and experiences, a safe, yet liberating shelter, and a social laboratory for new ways of living. Its importance for modern societies can hardly be overestimated as the hotel has played "a powerful role in the constitution of the modern self" (Levander 3). My focus lies on the experiences people make in the hotel and how they preserve these in their writings. I argue that the special kind of hotel experience both enables and inspires the production of culture and provides the ground for social change. Influenced, manipulated, united, and liberated by the hotel atmosphere, a number of people from all walks of life decided to put their hotel experiences to paper. They recorded them in their autobiographies, memoirs, essays, and authorized biographies. In this thesis I will analyze these accounts together with several other texts, to support my claim of the considerable agency of hotel space for American society and culture. The entity hotel has been used in many ways, as an abstract image or concept, a setting and plot line for narratives, and it exists as an actual place in our everyday world. A hotel's nature is multifaceted. I am interested in the hotel as a physically existing and literary structure that has played a significant role in the development of New York urban society and culture over the last two hundred years. My focus thereby lies between the 1890s and the early 2000s. There seem to be endless possibilities to play with the idea of the hotel and many ways to use it for individuals and whole communities. German writer Leo Koszella stated:

1 See also Levander 14. She ascribes the undertheorization of the hotel to the unique malleability of its space, which makes it so hard to grasp for scholars.

Heut, wo das Hotel für eine Unmenge von Menschen geradezu die zweite Heimat darstellt, wo sich infolgedessen auch diese wichtige Kulturinstitution darauf eingestellt hat und – in Amerika noch stärker als auf unserem Kontinent – eine Welt für sich, ein Kosmos im kleinen bildet, heut ist der Begriff Hotel trotzdem oder gerade deswegen für die meisten eine Art Neuland, Märchenland, eine Art exterritorialen Gebietes. (Koszella 662)

With this study I will help explain the seemingly "extraterritorial space" of the hotel and put it at the center of scholarly discussion.

This study focuses on hotel experience in New York. What does hotel experience mean in this context? With hotel experience I describe the impact the institution has on the people that interact in it and with it. There are three main levels that have to be considered: the insider/hotel relationship of owners, staff, and hotel children; the liminal, more temporary guest/hotel relationship; and the outsider/hotel relationship, which includes broader New York society and the American public. They discuss the hotel from a 'once-removed' point of view, their hotel experience can be described as vicarious, meaning it is mediated through the eyes of others, e.g. in artistic products (Relph 52).

The selected New York hotels of this study are to a certain extent unlike the 'typical' hotel one might have in mind. They are special cases and the texts created around them have been created by an uncommon clientele. But they remain hotels with all the functions, codes, social practices, and chronotopic quality that we connect with the word. The term hotel experience covers the dynamic mutuality between people and place, how the actors shape the hotel according to their ideas and are themselves changed and positioned by their surrounding. This reminds one of Churchill's statement "We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us" (Churchill in Sandoval-Strausz 229). The hotel is a liminal space that is open for many different uses (Pritchard and Morgan 763). Seemingly as a consequence, this highly emotionally and meaning-charged space became the favorite place of producers of culture, such as writers, actors, directors, musicians, and painters (Krebs 39; Sandoval-Strausz and Wilk 175). Hotels provided them with a space to work in and liberated them from social conventions, which often led to a close identification with these places. Each of the hotels discussed here inspired texts, which are set in these institutions. They caused and enabled the creation of culture. These hotels have also become platforms for social and cultural developments in their communities because hotel experience is not limited to individuals but affects whole groups. I agree with Daniel Boorstin that it is the institution's multifacetedness and its multilateral impact on human life that makes hotels "both creatures and creators of communities" (143), real "microcosm[s] of American life" (147). Thus, I am also interested in the reactions of the surrounding communities.

Hotel experience has been captured in a variety of texts. Because experience is a phenomenon difficult to pin down, the material for my study covers a number of

different genres, from novels and films, historiographies, essays and magazine articles to functional texts such as speeches, hotel brochures, advertisements, and reviews.[2] Most important for this study, however, are life-writing accounts. More than any other text form, both autobiographical and biographical texts convey the experience of people and disclose the hotels' deeper (and more philosophical) meaning combined with their actual, physical dimension. The texts I use in this thesis reflect the different roles hotels play in the personal life of people, as well as in their communities, and the larger city surrounding them. They have been written by hotel owners, staff members, guests and also hotel children, who can be considered as a special American phenomenon. Hotel children take on a unique position in the discussion of hotel agency.

Spatial awareness and the expression of spatial experience are most apparent and graspable in life writing texts.[3] It is, therefore, surprising that the importance of space and place has been largely neglected in the discussion of life writing texts as Julia Watson, one of the leading scholars in the field of autobiographies, states: "space has not been theorized in Anglo-American autobiography in a systematic way" (Watson 13). Watson is one of the few scholars who consider space and place in autobiographies. She writes on the issue of place and identity in American autobiographies: "For some autobiographers, place is a problem to be solved; for others, it is the basis (or 'ground') for a claim of authenticity" (13). I argue that in my case studies we can see the latter. The life writing texts of hotel people all show an uncanny awareness of the peculiar space that surrounds them. They feel a close link to their hotel environment and derive a large part of their identity from it,

2 Caroline Levander uses a similar approach in her book Hotel Life. She writes: "for it is through this unorthodox mix of various kinds of materials that we can begin to delineate the ways in which the hotel, not merely as bricks and mortar or physical site but as imaginative location and shelter, comes to enable the creation, design, and curation of the modern self over time" (Levander 3).

3 I am aware that it is difficult to categorize these texts as non-fiction or fiction, as an autobiographical text consists of a specific selection of elements of the past, which is shaped into a certain narrative that represents only one facet of the 'truth' (McLennan 10f). For my purpose, however, it would be wrong to completely overlook the factuality of these accounts, which can often also be cross verified with other, scholarly researched texts. Furthermore, while I accept to a certain degree Lejeune's classic definition of autobiography as "a retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality" (Lejeune qtd. in Eakin 4), I also acknowledge the criticism wielded against his too simplified definition, e.g. by Linda Anderson who comments on the inherent "slipperiness of autobiography" (2). See also Rachel McLennan, American Autobiography.

which can be seen in the titles of their life writing texts: *Be My Guest* (Conrad Hilton, Waldorf), "Hotel Pilgrim" (Elsa Maxwell, Waldorf), *Tales of a Wayward Inn* (Frank Case, Algonquin), *Growing Up at Grossinger's* (Tania Grossinger, Grossinger's) or "The Chelsea Affect" (Arthur Miller, Chelsea).

Although place has not been discussed in a systematic fashion in scholarly texts on autobiographies, many have perceived a link between this genre and American national identity. Jay Parini writes that autobiography "could easily be called the essential American genre, a form of writing closely allied to our national self-consciousness" (11). This claim seems too essentialist and exceptionalist. However, it conveys the feelings of many that this genre is indeed of great and historical importance for Americans. Life writing has been part of the national experiment since the beginning of British colonization of America, starting with the Puritans, blossoming with statesmen like Benjamin Franklin, leading public thinkers like Henry David Thoreau and Henry Adams, and writers like Mark Twain and Walt Whitman. It has also been a genre in which female writers and minorities could express themselves, most notably in captivity narratives and slave narratives. Today, the medium is still a popular outlet for a great variety of people, including immigrants and people with disabilities, to tell their story and take their place in the discourse of Americanness. It is therefore only fitting that American hotel people, too, express their special experiences in life writing texts. Together with the other text sources, this mix of material will present a more diversified analysis of the historical, social, and cultural dimension of the hotel and will fill the existing gap in the scholarly discourse on the hotel.

It is in the nature of the topic that the life writing texts I analyze here come from a specific group of people. These people are directly connected to the hotels as managers, staff members and their families, as well as regular and longterm guests, often artists who are familiar with a creative outlet for their thoughts. Furthermore, several texts also come from communities that have close ties to the respective hotels and that perceive them as an essential part of their social and cultural sphere. This means that my study will not represent the point of view of transient hotel guests who check-in for a short time and use the hotel as stopping place on their journey. While their attitudes toward hotels are also interesting, discussing them would go beyond the scope of the work at hand. I will also not consider two interesting fields of hotel study, the chain hotel and hotels in Las Vegas as this would explode the capacity of this work. Concerning hotel experience, chain hotels rarely create enough deep relations with their guests to have a literary repercussion. I do not attempt to present here a complete overview over all types of hotel experience. With this study I want to present a specific and fascinating slice of New York's urban culture and show how certain hotels played an important role in its development.

New York lends itself as the obvious choice when it comes to researching hotel experience. Historically, the first structure worthy of the name, the City Hotel, was opened in New York in 1794. Over the next two centuries, New York developed into "the greatest hotel city in the world" (Williamson 76), leading hotel development in almost every aspect. Today, New York has more hotels per square mile than any other city in America. It is also the most international city in the country and therefore more affected and more reacting to new developments that cross the Atlantic. New York is perceived as *City of Cities*, as one can see for example in E.B. White's famous article "Here is New York" (1949). People see New York as a mirror of the whole of American society. Many of the leading hotel groups in the world have a flagship house in New York because no other city in the world is seen as so prestigious and economically relevant. For a hotel chain, it is a must-have to have a location in New York. New York is, furthermore, sufficiently diversified to harbor hotels that address specific groups, for example African-Americans and Jewish Americans. It is at once an outstanding and generalizing example for the analysis of hotel experience.

By focusing on the geographical region of New York I am also taking up a suggestion by Martina Krebs. At the end of her dissertation *Hotel Stories: Representations of Escapes and Encounters in Fiction and Film* (2009), she considers it to be "worthwhile to analyze hotels more closely from a cultural-geographic perspective, locating hotels in their geographic contexts, examining their ensuing cultural meanings" (Krebs 165). I agree. Analyzing the close links between this particular city and its hotels in my thesis I will show what the institution hotel has done and still does for New York City and how hotel experience continues to shape our perception of this city.

Concerning the time span of my work, I have decided to focus on the twentieth century. This decision is connected to the status of research on the American hotel as well as to the nature of the hotels which I have selected. Even though one currently perceives a growing interest in the topic hotel in several academic fields, the number of texts existing on the topic remains still quite small. This neglect, especially by American Cultural Studies, is somewhat surprising since Jefferson Williamson's *The American Hotel: An Anecdotal History* (1930) and Norman S. Hayner's *Hotel Life* (1936) were already published in the 1930s. With the exception of Boorstin's enlightening chapter "Palaces of the Public" in *The Americans: The National Experiment* (1967), not much has been published in academia on the hotel's importance for American society until the 1990s.[4]

4 There are a few publications containing the history of specific hotels, many of them belonging to the group of grand hotels. However, most of these books belong in the category of coffee-table books, beautifully illustrated but only with a limited number of essays on the topic included, for example David Watkin's *Grand Hotels: the Golden Age*

With Paul Groth's *Living Downtown: The History of Residential Hotels in the United States* (1999) the hotel as research object has again stepped out of the shadows. Writing from a sociological point of view Groth's social and cultural history explains the centrality of the hotel in people's urban living experience, especially for San Francisco and New York. In the 2000s two publications followed which have been of great importance for my study: Andrew K. Sandoval-Strausz's *Hotel: An American History* (2009) and Molly Berger's *Hotel Dreams: Luxury, Technology, and Urban Ambition in America, 1829-1929* (2011).[5] These two texts make a powerful case for the importance of the hotel as a research object, especially concerning its impact on American society. They have greatly inspired my work and have provided a large portion of the historical information of my study.

Since the year 2000, the topic hotel has also been increasingly discussed from a European perspective. These books, however, concentrate more on the institution's presentation in literature. There are two very interesting German studies on the use of the hotel as setting by Bettina Matthias and Cordula Seger. In *The Hotel as Setting in Early Twentieth-Century German and Austrian Literature: Checking in to Tell a Story* (2006), Bettina Matthias provides us with a good entry point into the nature of hotels in modernist literature by highlighting the cultural and theoretical context in which the institution developed. Cordula Seger's *Grand Hotel – Schauplatz der Literatur* (2005) goes further time-wise, by also considering the hotel's position after the war and its development at the end of the century, finishing her study with a look at the fantastic buildings of Las Vegas. Both authors, however, focus mostly on German-speaking texts by e.g Thomas Mann, Stefan Zweig, and Vicki Baum and except for Seger's outlook on Las Vegas hotels their studies remain concentrated on European culture.

Different from these two scholars, Martina Krebs centers her study around English-speaking texts of hotel literature. In *Hotel Stories: Representations of Escapes and Encounters in Fiction and Film* (2009) she discusses the hotel's function in literature by using Michael Bakthin's concept of the chronotope. Beyond considering the hotel chronotopes of escape, encounter, crime, and desire she also discusses the impact of the hotel on the identity of the characters in literary

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of Palace Hotels (1984), Catherine Donzel's *Grand American Hotels* (1990) and Carol Berens *Hotel Lobbies and Bars* (1996).

5 Another scholarly 'hotel text' which belongs in the same period is Wayne Koestenbaum's book *Hotel Theory/Hotel Women* (2008). This text is partly a philosophical discussion of hotel theories, concepts, and personal ideas about the place and a pulp-fiction novel set in a hotel. Koestenbaum has created an interesting compilation of information on hotels and their significance for people, yet the text remains on a very abstract level and therefore does not lend itself so much for my study. Still, I have used some of his ideas and recommend it as a fascinating reading on hotels on two different levels.

texts, even including the impact the hotel has on the authors of the books she discusses. Although she uses some American examples, the main corpus of her study is made up of British and Irish texts. And while she also considers the historical institution hotel she remains focused on its use in literature throughout her book.

Both Joanne Pready and Holly Prescott have worked on specific functions of the hotel in English-speaking literature in their online-published PhD-theses. In her study *The Power of Place: Re-Negotiating Identity in Hotel Fiction* (2009), Pready focuses on identity constructions in hotel texts while Holly Prescott is interested in the *Rethinking of Urban Space in Contemporary British Writing* (2011). Both scholars provide interesting theoretical insights into the possible use of hotel space in literature and beyond, and have been inspirations for my work. However, they, too, mostly remain in the realm of British literature in their studies and, except for marginal comments, do not further consider the historical and social impact of the hotel on American society.[6]

Betsy Klimasmith is one of very few scholars who have written about the historical context of American hotel literature. In her book *At Home in the City: Urban Domesticity in American Literature and Culture, 1850-1930* (2005), she has included an interesting chapter on the use of the hotel setting in Edith Wharton's *The Custom of the Country*. Klimasmith convincingly embeds the novel's hotel setting in its socio-historical context and provides useful inspirations on hotel life in the Gilded Age for my study. There are only two books currently available on the history of New York hotels: Jeff Hirsch's *Manhattan Hotels, 1880-1920* (1997) and Ward Morehouse III's *Life At The Top: Inside New York's Grand Hotels* (2005). However, the first one is strictly speaking an illustrated book and contains only short texts on the hotels depicted and the second one is a quite subjective and anecdotal account. Still, at the moment they are the most extensive books existing on the topic of New York hotels. A handful of scholarly books on hotels will be published in the next years, among them Caroline Levander's *Hotel Life* (2015), the book *The Rise and Fall of the Grand Hotel* by Laura Kolbe et al., containing the proceedings of the conference "Grand Hotels at the Fin de Siécle" (CMS, Humboldt

6 Besides these books there are a number of articles from different scholarly fields such as sociology, architectural history, hospitality studies, and cultural studies that deal with the hotel. Among them are Karl Raitz and John Paul Jones's article "The City Hotel as Landscape Artifact and Community Symbol" (1988); Roy Wood's "The Image of the Hotel in Popular Literature: a Preliminary Statement" (1990); Carolyn Brucken, "In the Public Eye: Women and the American Luxury Hotel" (1996); Charlotte Bates "Hotel Histories: Modern Tourists, Modern Nomads and the Culture of Hotel-Consciousness" (2003); Donald McNeill's "The Hotel and the City" (2008); Olga Garcia's "Das Hotel im Spiegel der deutschsprachigen Literatur – Motiv, Kulisse, Bühne und Schauplatz" (2011).

University, Berlin 2013), and *Inns and Hotels in Britain and the United States in the Long Nineteenth Century* (forthcoming 2017) edited by Monika Elbert and Susanne Schmid.

With my study I hope to bring together findings from literary studies, cultural studies, human geography, and history to present a more rounded picture of the impact which hotels have on American society and culture through the hotel experience of people. This study intends to function as a bridge between already existing research and new concepts concerning the importance of places on people's identity.

Working with the texts listed above, it surprised me that many of them, especially the American studies by Berger and Sandoval-Strausz, close with the decade of the 1930s. They declare the era of great hotel development in America closed with the opening of the second Waldorf-Astoria in 1931, the last grand hotel project of this size in America for decades. In this decision they are not alone. Other publications like Arthur White's *The Palaces of the People* (1968)[7] and Elaine Denby's *Grand Hotels: Reality and Illusion* (1998) also agree with them. During my research, however, I repeatedly encountered hotels in contemporary American novels, as well as in other text types that I needed for context.[8] For me, the history of American hotels and their importance for American society and culture does not end with the year 1930. Most of the hotels that I will discuss continue to be relevant in the second half of the twentieth century. As my study will show, the institution hotel has lived on to play an important role in New York society and can still be seen as inspiration and as enabler of cultural and social change. Thus, as the American hotel has already been well researched for the nineteenth and early twentieth century (see chapter 1.3), my study will focus on the twentieth century. While I accept that the institution hotel had its greatest impact on American culture nationwide in the nineteenth century, I still consider its continuous influence after 1900 as crucial, for the city of New York as well as beyond. For example, the Jewish resort hotels in the Catskills, which I will discuss in chapter 6, can be considered as forerunners of Las Vegas casino hotels and by this sparked one of the best known hotel types of the twentieth century.

In addition, this time frame is necessary because I focus on the importance of hotel experience for the production of culture and social change. For hotels to have a significant impact, a large and stable middle-class is needed along with a well-developed infrastructure, modern media, and an approximation of life styles,

7 White's book offers interesting insights into the history of hotels in Europe and America, yet it is too anecdotal and unfocused to function as scholarly source.

8 See for example Arthur Hailey's *Hotel* (1965), John Irving's *Hotel New Hampshire* (1981); Paul Theroux's *Hotel Honolulu* (2002); Laurence Geller's *Do Not Disturb* (2005); Karen Tei Yamashita's *I Hotel* (2010).

education and values. Moreover, two of the hotels that I discuss in my study did not exist in the nineteenth century the way they did in the twentieth century. Neither Jewish-Americans nor African Americans were yet fully accepted in American society. Hotels like the Hotel Theresa and the Hotel Grossinger's would not have been viable and even if smaller equivalents started in the nineteenth century, they did not have the marked impact on society that the two institutions developed in the middle of the twentieth century.

To approach the topic of hotel experience and its influence on New York society and culture I will present five case studies, each focusing on one distinctive hotel. I have selected these five hotels to show the different types of hotels existing in New York, as well as the use of the institution by different social groups, taking into consideration the categories of class, lifestyle, race, gender, and religion. All five establishments are situated in New York City or, in one case, nearby. The hotel experience described in this thesis is quite specific and is not representative for all American hotels. Yet, I argue that the five institutions present a very unique and important slice of New York culture that becomes visible through examining hotel experience.

I have arranged the five case studies chronologically, considering the time when the respective hotels were at their peak. I will start with three established New York hotel institutions, the Hotel Waldorf-Astoria, the Hotel Algonquin and the Hotel Chelsea. The focus with them is on their function as stages for society and for personal achievements, work places, and as homes. I will then examine the Hotel Theresa in Harlem and the Hotel Grossinger's in the Catskills and I will analyze their important roles as platforms for their respective communities and social laboratories for change and cultural self-manifestation. By using this structure, basic notions of hotel experience will already have been established and can then be put to effective use in the more complex cases of the last two hotels.

Each case study is structured by the main narratives of hotel experience that surround the respective hotel. This will help to clarify each hotel's particular importance and its special position in New York. I have filtered these narratives from the life writing texts as well as other text sources mentioned above. They present the hotel's different functions and examine which role took precedence in the respective hotel. Using these narratives also establishes a red thread, which runs through all five case studies and enables us to see the parallels but also the specific differences that occur when a hotel is adopted by a special group or community.

The Waldorf-Astoria, the grand hotel par excellence, functions as a kind of prototype and point of entry for the discussion of New York hotels. This does not mean that all American hotels operate on such grand a scale as the Waldorf, yet, for good reasons (see chapter 1) this institution has been repeatedly called "the mother of modern hotels" (McCarthy 107). Due to its particular history, the Waldorf is also the bridge between the well-researched hotel period of the nineteenth century and

this work's focus on the twentieth century. When speaking of the Waldorf-Astoria we are actually talking about two different hotel structures. The first Waldorf was erected in 1893, marking the beginning of the boom of hotel building in the Gilded Age. After its demolition in 1929, a second structure of the same name was erected in 1931 on Park Avenue and 49th Street, covering a whole city block.[9] As the leading hotel of the city, the Waldorf-Astoria played a crucial role in New York's history and the development of the city's society. As I will show in this case study, the hotel experience made in this establishment helped on the one hand to democratize New York and on the other hand confirmed society's position. The hotel performed both the role of a stage as well as a microcosm of the larger city. In the case of the Waldorf we can perceive the hotel in its prime function as a stage for society.

My second case study focuses on the Algonquin Hotel. This comparatively small city hotel on 44th Street between Sixth and Seventh Avenue became the birthplace of New York's sophistication in the 1920s and 30s and continued to house literati, artists of reputation, and members of the intelligentsia throughout the twentieth century (Mordden 24). The hotel was the home of the Algonquin Round Table, a literary circle, and inspired the creation of the quintessential urbane magazine, *The New Yorker* (1925). With the Algonquin, the uncommonly close relationship between hotel people and the hotel is apparent. In this case study we have a number of life writing texts and first person accounts, telling us in detail how owner, family, and guests came to identify with this city hotel and how it has received its reputation. The Algonquin functioned as a workplace and as a home in the texts I am analyzing. It was also New York's literary salon.

The Chelsea Hotel will be discussed in the third case study. It is probably the most iconic New York hotel. Famous as the mecca for bohemians it has housed free spirits and convention-defying artists since the late nineteenth century, even before it was turned into a hotel in 1905. However, the heyday of this hotel undoubtably lies in the 1950s and 60s, when the world's alternative culture scene looked upon the hotel for new impulses and "listened" to its walls for inspiration. Because of its peculiar nature, the Chelsea Hotel is the ideal example to study the hotel experience of artists, a quintessential clientele of hotels worldwide. Their life accounts show how the place inspired the residents in their creative process. With the Chelsea, a special kind of hotel/people relationship can be observed, which had an equally large influence on New York culture as the Algonquin, yet was more unconventional. The Chelsea, too, was a work place and stage, but here the emphasis is on the hotel's function as artist's home and source of inspiration.

9 These two buildings are not only connected by the same name but also by the people that work in them and the guests that stay there. Therefore, I will treat the Waldorf-Astoria as one hotel phenomenon in my thesis.

With the Hotel Theresa in Harlem, the focus shifts from the hotel's impact on creative people to the socio-political impact the institution can have. Opened as a whites-only establishment in 1913, the Theresa was desegregated in 1940 and run by black management. By that time Harlem had already become New York's dominantly black neighborhood. As the best black hotel of its time in America, probably in the world, the Theresa became the center of Harlem's community and African American society beyond. On the one hand, the hotel was perceived by its guests as a secure haven from the discrimination of midtown hotels. On the other hand, it was the stage for a new black self-confidence and a platform for politicians who wanted to better the situation of African Americans and made the hotel their stomping ground. In this case study we can see the intricate links between a hotel and its surrounding community, which is quite visible here. The Theresa Hotel is a prime example to see how the institution hotel is successfully adapted by a minority group and how race plays out in hotel experience.

In the last case study of my thesis I will discuss not only one hotel, but a whole hotel region, the Jewish Catskills. This area, about 90 miles Northwest of New York City, performed a crucial role in the acculturation of Jewish immigrants in American culture. A significant number of New York Jews went for vacation to the Catskills and here they came into their own as Jewish-Americans for the first time. For a certain comparability I will use the example of Grossinger's Hotel and Country Club to point out the most important narratives of Jewish-American hotel experience. Grossinger's was called the "Queen of the Mountains" (T. Grossinger 178), the leading hotel of the Borscht Belt. In this fifth case study, the categories gender and religion will be the main focus. It will also be of interest how a resort hotel interacts with identity formation and how hotel experience in the country differs from its city counterparts. This resort presents an especially interesting case of hotel experience because three different members of the Grossinger family have written about their lives at the hotel.

The aim of my five case studies is to better understand the hotels' influence on New York's urban society and the creation of culture. In his seminal text "Traveling Cultures" the anthropologist James Clifford realizes that an understanding of the dynamic relationship between dwelling and traveling is crucial to read our modern-day world. He comes to the conclusion that it is necessary to take travel knowledge seriously and to rethink cultures "as sites of dwelling *and* travel": "Thus the ambivalent setting of the hotel suggest[s] itself as a supplement to the field… It frame[s], at least, encounters between people to some degree away from home" (104).

The hotel is the ideal place in this dwelling/traveling approach to culture as it indeed provides for both states. In New York, more than in any other American or European city, hotels have been homes for permanent residents as well as for transient travelers. Seen through the hotel, our understanding of New York's

society and culture can open up in new ways. In the following I will present the methods I will apply in my study.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

To examine the hotel experience presented in the five case studies of this book, space-oriented approaches and theories are necessary. My argument is that hotel experience results from the interaction between people and the place hotel, both sides having a certain agency. Therefore, an analysis of both the individual practices creating the social space of the hotel as well as the influence of the actual materiality of the institution on people is necessary. Seen together, they create people-place relationship that enables the production of culture in hotels and the creation of new social conventions.[10]

Since the 1980s, the Spatial Turn has created a great momentum in the Humanities, starting a new discussion about space and place. In various fields of social and cultural sciences, scholars reinforced their work on theories that explain the creation and function of space and place and make it a workable research subject. In the first part of this introduction to my methods I will present some key spatial theories that informed this work. The first part contains the foundations of spatial theory in humanities as conceived by Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, and Edward Soja. As Morgan and Pritchard write, it is important to understand the hotel as a "phenomenon which is much more than simply an operational entity, but a cultural construction which exists in lived, perceived and conceived as well as physical space" (771). While these ideas will inform the main part, their use is implicit here. In the second part of this subchapter on methodology, I will present those concepts that are directly used in the case studies and that I will refer to repeatedly throughout the main part. Embedded in a phenomenological approach these are atmosphere and spatial agency, place-identity and social centrality, and the consideration of hotels as microcosms.

The first important step for the Humanities was to go beyond the Euclidean idea of space and the concept of space as an empty container that can be used in various

10 I have not conducted empirical surveys using questionnaires and I will not discuss hotel statistics here. While this kind of sociological material might present interesting information on the institution hotel, it would not work as well for the analysis of hotel experience. Accordingly, it is not the aim of this study to work on a sociological and empirical basis.

kinds of ways and can be filled without further consequences.[11] Henri Lefebvre most successfully achieved this in his study *The Production of Space* (1991, original *La Production de l'espace*, 1974). The French Marxist scholar was one of the first thinkers to understand that space is socially produced and that social relations are produced and reproduced through space (Aitken 148). In his work, Lefebvre made clear that space is not only a mere container for human activity but that "space is never empty: it always embodies a meaning" (Lefebvre 154). For Lefebvre, space is a social product that is used as a tool for thought and action. By deciphering social space we are able to understand the mechanisms behind a given society and learn about its hierarchies and power structures. According to Lefebvre, each society produces its own space (59). Only if it does so, it can be successful. When we consider this in relation to the hotel, we can say that Americans created the hotel in the nineteenth century as an important social space that represented their society and provided it with a place in which this society could develop and prosper. Today, hotel space is still important in a number of social practices and functions, e.g. as useful representational spaces for social events such as political conventions and international conferences.

For Lefebvre space consists of three interrelated aspects. These aspects came to be known as Lefebvre's triad. The triad consists of *spatial practice* (perceived space), *representations of space* (conceived space) and *representational space* (lived space). All of our lived experiences of the world are comprised of these three aspects (Watkins 209). *Spatial practices* refer to how people concretely relate to the outside world and what they do in space, e.g. "journeys to work, to home, to sites of leisure…" (Thacker 19f). One can think of it as physical place. *Representations of space* refer to the spaces as conceived by planners, architects and governments. By creating maps and drawing up plans the production of space is connected to the political. This aspect can be described as mental space. According to Lefebvre, the third aspect, *representational space,* is "directly lived through its associated images and symbols" (39). This space results in symbolic and artistic productions. In contrast to representations of space, representational space for Lefebvre is alive and "it speaks" (42). It can be thought of as social space. All three aspects are interrelated with each other and cannot be thought of separately. While Lefebvre is almost frustratingly vague in his application of his triad, it becomes clear that for the French scholar "social space is inherently composite, mingling heterogenous spaces together in one physical location" (18).

The hotel space is a social product. Therefore, Lefebvre's triad can help in deciphering hotel experience and its meanings. The geographical location and floor

11 In a Euclidean understanding "place is basically understood as location definable by sets of coordinates" (Relph 24). It does not consider the human interaction connected to places and place-making.

plans of the hotels discussed in my study, these representations of space, tell us about the function of these social spaces for society and the intentions of their planners. The social practices occurring in the hotels show us how the respective institutions are perceived and how they are made part of the daily life of people. By analyzing what kind of social practices happen in each of the five case studies, one can learn how each of these buildings contributes to their particular community and their role in the hotel network of New York. Finally, by reading the life writing accounts of 'hotel people', the representational space of the hotel, we can understand the symbolic meanings which the hotels take on for the people who interact with them, how these places speak to them and how they reflect this in their lived experience. Lefebvre's triad helps us to examine the hotel experiences that are connected to the five institutions discussed in this study and to comprehend what these experiences mean for the production of culture and social change.

While Lefebvre's approach to space is useful, there is one issue that I have with it. Henri Lefebvre is solely interested in human agency that creates social space, he does not consider the agency of the space created.[12] This focus is too limited for my understanding of hotel space. In the second part of this introduction, I will show how we can open up the discussion of space by including also the idea of spatial agency.

Lefebvre does not discuss the distinction of the words space and place in depth in his text. For him: "Place is ultimately…only one form, though with its own ideology and politics, of the many existing discourses of social space" (19). The distinction of space and place, however, plays a significant role in Michel de Certeau's works. In his seminal work *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984, original *L'invention du quotidien,* 1980) de Certeau defines place as "the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence" and space as "composed of intersections of mobile elements" (de Certeau 117). For de Certeau "space is practiced place" (de Certeau 117). Through human actions place is transformed into space, like a street that comes alive through the actions of walkers. It is important to de Certeau that one does not make an absolute distinction between space and place, as "there are passages back and forth" (de Certeau 118; see also Thacker 32).

Michel de Certeau writes of the "identification of places" and "actualization of spaces" (de Certeau 118). Place is considered to be more fixed while space is more mobile, flexible and abstract. De Certeau adds two new concepts to the discussion of space and place, *tour* and *map*. In his work, the identification of place relies on a mode of discourse termed the *map*. *Maps* describe a more distant, objective view of

12 See Prescott 193. For Prescott, Lefebvre's understanding of space is also too much focused on the actions of humans. He does not consider the dynamic mutuality between people and places, that people are also influenced by the space that surrounds them.

place, as if seen from a great height.[13] *Tour*, on the other hand, describes a more direct, intimate contact with space. It is the experiential discourse associated with the actualization of space (Thacker 31). The *tour* is the pedestrian's experience of space, less graspable, less ordered but more alive and showing the changing nature of space. These two concepts, *map* and *tour*, add new dimensions to the spatial discussion. For my work they are indirectly important. In the life writing accounts as well as in the other text forms, an intermingling of both concepts can be found. Very often the autobiographies and memories start with a map of the hotel, describing its layout, contents, and location and then move on to fill the building with life by touring it. Here, then, the hotel experience takes place. In their life writing texts hotel people describe how they are affected by the hotel space, what functions it has for their lives and how the people/place relationship can be perceived as a mutual and dynamic. The place of the hotel becomes an actualized space through the interaction of people with it. De Certeau's concepts help us see this identification of place and actualization of space in hotel texts and get us closer to understanding hotel experience and its effects.

Both interrelated concepts are needed. I argue that without the *map*, the uninitiated reader is not able to follow the narrator in the texts. In addition, the mapping parts contain important information that influences the touring parts. Together, the hotel experience can be conveyed in a rounded way. Taking both *map* and *tour* into consideration the reader in turn can grasp and examine the described place.

De Certeau and Lefebvre's concepts are fruitful for an understanding of hotel space and to a certain extent hotel experience. Both highlight the relationship between people and their environment. The two scholars focus strongly on human agency as generating space and place. However, the strong focus on human agency of both scholars is also what I find problematic. Reading the life accounts of the people discussed in my study, it emerges that it is not enough to explain space only as a social construct created through human agency. While some of the people, whose life accounts I analyze in this study, are actively involved in the production of the social space in the hotels and even in the material creation of the place, there is still a spatial element recognizable in the texts that goes beyond human agency. To explain this, additional theoretical concepts are needed.

As a connection point between a Lefebvrian understanding of space and that of human geographers belonging to the school of phenomenology, one can look to Edward Soja's writing. Soja has been strongly inspired by Lefebvre and has expanded Lefebvre's concepts with his own, called "Thirdspace." For him, "[e]verything comes together in the Thirdspace: subjectivity and objectivity, the

13 De Certeau uses the examples of standing on a skyscraper in New York and viewing the city which lies immobilized and readable in front of the viewer.

abstract and the concrete, the real and imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and unconsciousness, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history" (Soja 56). Using Lefebvre's triad as foil, Soja loosely links his Firstspace to representations of space and social practices, and the Secondspace to the imagined, representational space. In Thirdspace then all come together in the lived experience. Thirdspace is "a distinct mode of critical spatial awareness that is appropriate to the new scope and significance being brought about in the rebalanced trialectics of spatiality-historicality-sociality" (Soja 57). This threeness allows him to see beyond binary structures and to challenge conventions. While his text is criticized for trying to encompass too much, it nevertheless inspired many to think about space and place in a new way. The emphasis in his work to combine imagined space with actual places allows also for a combinational treatment of the two the way I attempt it in this study. Andrew Thacker writes that for Soja "society shapes spaces according to its needs, but, equally, space plays a formative role in the construction of social life" (17). Soja himself calls this the "socio-spatial dialectic" (78).

Ray Oldenburg was inspired by Soja's work for his own concept of the *third place* in *The Great Good Place* (1989). He makes a strong case for the preservation of places like the barbershop or the pub, which are neither home nor work-place and fulfill important social functions for communities: "Most needed are those 'third places' which lend a public balance to the increased privatization of home life. Third places are nothing more than informal public gathering places. The phrase 'third places' derives from considering our homes to be the 'first' places in our lives, and our work places as the 'second'" (Oldenburg, "Our Vanishing 'Third Places'"). Among other places like parks and cafés, hotels and their lobbies fulfill this function in a city like New York, where hotels have a long tradition of offering privatized public space. An example is the importance of the Hotel Algonquin for the original Algonquin Round Table. The regulars met in its dining room each day to lunch together and exchange ideas. For the members of the circle, it fulfilled the role of a third place. It was open and inexpensive.

Third places like hotel lobbies are especially important in American cities because America historically lacks the variety of public places that developed in Europe and that Habermas described in his seminal book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962, transl. 1989). The openness of the hotel lobby is a crucial spatial feature, which was "invented" in America and sets it apart from European hotels. About the importance of lobbies Carol Berens writes: "Lobbies are where our public and private worlds meet. …This sense of place is critical in present day America where locations for public life are disappearing fast" (xiii). She continues: "One of the defining characteristics of urban life is that it is lived in public. There are times, however, when rampant urbanism must be tamed.

The best respite from frenzied streets is the well-designed, well-tendered hotel lobby. Here one can find an attitude fast disappearing in the public realm – courtesy is respected and one's comfort is important" (xv).

Soja and Oldenburg see a mutuality between people and places. This leads us to the understanding of place by phenomenologists, which will allow us to see hotel experience as a combination of human *and* spatial agency. Repeatedly, the life writing texts discussed in this thesis speak of an influence of the physical surrounding that is not a mere projection of people's actions but that emanates from the structures themselves. To explain this, a phenomenological approach is necessary as well as the concepts of atmosphere and spatial agency, place-identity and social centrality, and the idea of the microcosm. Combined with the understanding of space and place outlined above, this will allow us a deeper understanding of the phenomenon hotel experience as expressed in the writings examined in this study.

Phenomenology explicitly deals with "those direct experiences of the world" (Relph, PaP 4) which presupposes all formal knowledge. It is, so to say, the science of experience. The special people-place dynamic and the mutuality of it have been championed by a number of scholars who affiliate themselves with the field of phenomenology. The 'trailblazers' of this approach are Yi-Fu Tuan, Edward Relph, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. For them, place is of crucial importance for human life because human beings are always already embedded in place. As humans we live in places and experience them. According to Cresswell, "[w]hat experience does is transform a scientific notion of space into a relatively lived and meaningful notion of place" ("Place" 171). While space is abstract, place, for me, is concrete and experiential. The main interest of this work is a place's meaning for humans and the interrelationship between people and place as expressed in a variety of texts, but foremost in life writing accounts.

One of the most useful place studies is Edward Relph's seminal text *Place and Placelessness* (PaP, 1976). It had a large impact on the humanities and is still considered an important source for the discussion of the experience of place. Relph makes clear that place is "not a bit of space, nor another word for landscape or environment, it is not a figment of individual experience, nor a social construct… It is, instead, the foundation of being both human and nonhuman; experience, actions, and life itself begin and end with place" (Relph, "A Pragmatic Sense of Place" 36). Place is of crucial import for human existence because people have to organize their experiences of the world. Living in this world one has to know, distinguish, and react to the different places in which one works, relaxes, and sleeps (Relph, PaP 1). For Relph, places are the combinations of the human and natural order and are "the significant centers of our immediate experiences of the world" (Relph, PaP 141).

Places are filled with real objects, activities, and meanings, they are constituted by all three. A phenomenology of place is interested in lived space, as it is

experienced by people and communities, concerning its functions for them as well the intentions apparent in the place-making. Consequentially, places are important sources for individual as well as community identity.

Place is a multifaceted phenomenon of experience, therefore Relph distinguishes different levels of involvement, to show how the experience of a place can differ according to the level of involvement. He starts with existential outsideness, which is a strong feeling of not belonging somewhere, of being condemned to the position of a mere observer.[14] Relph also lists different levels of insideness, which are of importance concerning hotel experience in the present texts. Emphatic insideness, for example, means to understand the place as "rich in meaning" (54). People who experience emphatic insideness are very aware of the place and its special identity. They are, however, not unconsciously part of it as it is the case in existential insideness. Here, one is part of the place and the place is part of oneself (55).

There is one more level of insideness, which is quite complex, but important for this study. Relph calls it 'vicarious insideness.' It means the experience of places through artistic products such as novels, photographies and other kinds of media (50). Even though this is a second-hand experience of place, it allows us to feel a deep involvement with a place without having actually been there. According to Relph "[t]he degree to which we are transported and the identity of those places to which we are transported depends presumably both on the artist's skills of description and on our own imaginative and emphatic inclinations" (53). The five hotels in this study have all been written about in articles and fictional texts. The respective hotel's identity is therefore not only founded on the first-hand experience of hotel people, but also on the vicarious insideness transported in the texts of journalists and authors. I will present the influence of some of these texts and discuss how successfully this insideness is transported and what the impact on people outside of New York is.

These different levels of involvement in the respective hotels are important for the analysis of the selected texts, especially the life writing accounts. Depending on how much the writer is involved in the hotel, different shades of hotel experiences are described and different facets of the hotel's identity become apparent. As a sense of place is necessary for people's sense of reality (63), the reading of the hotel space that surrounds them and with which they often intensively identify themselves tells us also much about the writers.

It is also important to mention here is that while Relph's distinction into insider and outsider experiences can appear exclusionary, insideness and outsideness in the case of hotels is much less fixed than in 'normal', unifunctional places. Almost

14 In the case of Jewish Americans and African Americans, both groups have been forced to take this position toward mainstream hotels until the mid of the twentieth century.

everyone can become a hotel insider. Looking at the special institution hotel in this study allows us to challenge some classic concepts connected to place such as inside and outside, private and public, owner and guest, home and away from home. These challenging notions run through my whole study, breaking up some fixed ideas about places to connect them to the changing reality of our mobile world. [15]

Place-identity and the Hotel

Edward Relph's work has inspired David Seamon, a fellow phenomenologist, whose approach to place and his use of the concept place-identity has informed my understanding of place for this thesis. For David Seamon one of the central concerns of phenomenology "is identifying foundational structures through which human life is given coherence and continuity" ("Place, Place Identity and Phenomenology" 3). As with Relph, the focus of Seamon's understanding of place centers on the experience of place by people in their "lifeworld" (8). According to Seamon, it is important to see place in relation to people, and also to see people in relation to the place which surrounds them: "researchers need to understand place as incorporating a lived engagement and process whereby human beings afford and are afforded by the world of places in which they find themselves" (Seamon 3).[16] By approaching place with the concept of place-identity, David Seamon sees a way of getting closer to the nature of place and its role in human life.[17]

To discuss human/place relations on a deeper level, Seamon uses a triadic approach like Lefebvre and Soja, yet he specifically adds a relationship-level.

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15 To look at the hotel as a more open place also supports Doreen Massey's invitation to consider the character of a place as extroverted, "which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world" (Massey, "A Global Sense of Place" 155). She asks us to see places as "articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings" (154). In my study I want to show the network that exists among the five hotels which strengthens their own character but also shows that this character depends on their relation with the city surrounding them and the connections they strike up with the larger world.

16 Seamon refers also to Jeff Malpas, for whom the mutuality between place and human is fundamental for his work. Malpas writes: "It is through our engagement with place that our own human being is made real, but it is also through our engagement that place takes on a sense and a significance of its own" (Malpas 23).

17 Seamon approaches place with a more body-centered focus. His best known contribution to the discussion of place is the 'body-ballet'. To a certain extent his definition of place-identity is connected to this. For more about this concept, see David Seamon, "Body-subject, time-space routines, and place-ballets" in A. Buttimer & D. Seamon (ed.), *The Human Experience of Space and Place* (1980).

Seamon distinguishes the geographic ensemble, people-in-place and the spirit of place as the three elements of the triad of place (Seamon 10).[18] Out of this triad develops *place identity*. This mutuality between people and places is described as the way "how people living in a place take up that place as their world; how they unself-consciously and self-consciously accept and recognize that place as part of their personal and communal identity" (Seamon 12f). For Seamon, place-identity is an essential dimension for understanding place experience and the making of places. For place identity to develop, places need identifiable, singular, obvious elements, which people can identify with.

Using Seamon's concepts I will bring together the physical nature of the respective New York hotel, the way people write about their interaction with it, and I will carve out the spirit, or atmosphere, that people perceive in the place and which we can discover in their texts. The hotels selected for this study all have a specific style, something unique to them, which does not only come out of their structure or their location, but out of a mélange of the three elements presented above. They have a certain physical legibility to them that hotel people translate into their writings and which I will examine. This close identification can be seen already in the circumstance that these people label themselves as Waldorf Crowd, Algonquinites, Chelseaites etc. It also shows itself in how they describe their spatial experiences in the hotels. The intense way in which they experience security at the hotel and a sense of belonging is a sign for a strong place-identity, which involves "positively valenced cognitions of one or some combination of these settings which outweigh" (Proshansky 76) more negative aspects.[19]

It might seem surprising that place-identity develops in the institution hotel, a place that due to its temporary nature appears unlikely to develop place-identity. Hotels are often only conceived as what Augé terms "non-places," spaces that "cannot be defined as relational, or historical or concerned with identity" (Augé

18 Seamon mirrors with this Relph's idea of place-identity being made up of physical setting, activity, and meaning.

19 Up until the 1970s, place was largely ignored as an important factor in people's self-perception. By the 1970s, human geographers and environmental psychologists realized that not only social roles, but "the places and spaces a child grows up in, those that he or she comes to know, prefer, and seek out or avoid also contribute significantly to self-identity" (Proshansky et al. 74). Proshansky et al. outline that place-identity has a similar conceptual structure as social roles for self-identity and that physical settings are directly relevant to the successful performance of these social roles and the definition of who we are (Proshansky et al. 74). Seamon expands Proshansky's approach to focus more on the physical place involved in the creation of place-identity.

78).[20] Yet, the institution hotel has been an important part of American culture for more than two hundred years and is said to fit the American restless, mobile nature better than most other environments. Another explanation has to do with the kind of people frequenting hotels. Most of them are used to a mobile lifestyle, several of them are artists. For them, the nature of the hotel, its simultaneous public and private quality, the liberating spirit of not being tied to domestic obligations paired with the opportunity of social interaction in the public parts of the house, is a seemingly perfect fit, not exclusively in America, but especially here (see also Garcia 25; Peters 76; Zeveloff).[21] Place-identity and the triad of place complement Elisabeth Bowen's understanding of the hotel as an entity consisting of historic, social, and organic aspects. In the life writing accounts that I discuss the question of place-identity will come up repeatedly.

Social Centrality of Hotels

Connected to the issue of place-identity is another concept that is also useful for my study, the concept of *social centrality* as conceived by Rob Shields and extended by Kevin Hetherington. It goes beyond the place-identity of individuals and considers the identity-shaping power of certain places for whole communities. Edward Relph writes about place and its importance for the identity of a community: "The relationship between community and place is indeed a very powerful one in which each reinforces the identity of the other, and in which the landscape is very much an expression of communally held beliefs and values and of interpersonal involvements" (PaP 34). Kevin Hetherington thinks along the same lines when he takes up Rob Shields's concept of social centrality and shows its impact on identity formation processes of groups, in his example of those at the margins of society.

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20 In his book *Non-Place: An Introduction to An Anthropology of Supermodernity* (1996) Augé focuses mostly on contemporary transient places like airport terminals, highways, and chain hotels. He does not see the term non-place as necessarily negative but as a mere description of its nature. Even Edward Relph, who started the discussion in *Place and Placelessness* (1976), concedes that placelessness can also mean freedom from place (140), freedom from conventions and obligations. In some cases non-places can also feel secure or liberating. They are useful in a mobile world and a part of everyday life. As the hotels discussed in this study were all originally non-chain hotels, they are not non-places. Thus, Augé's central term is not applicable to them.

21 To pay for a temporary home alienates us from it, but as Georg Simmel writes: "[t]he desirable party for financial transactions – in which, as it has been said quite correctly, business is business – is the person completely indifferent to us, engaged neither for us nor against us" (Simmel 227). We feel no obligations to the hotel clerk and therefore are freed from personal obligations.

Hetherington defines social centrality as the property of a place that "provides a focus for the articulation of identity and a sense of belonging" (34). This also necessitates the identification of key sites (Hetherington 34). In his essay Kevin Hetherington focuses especially on outsider groups like New Age Travelers. For them, places that are marginal or outside of the norms of society can act like shrines; coming together in these places creates a feeling of community and gives the participants group identity (34). The concept can also be applied to other groups that come together in one specific place and draw their identity from this meeting place, like longterm hotel guests.

Hetherington is especially interested in heterotopic spaces as for him they not only provide the symbolic properties of social centrality for a group, they also provide, through their alternate ordering, a distinctive place for being different and a shared sense of belonging expressed through that difference that takes the form of a *communitas* of intensely affectual forms of sociality among the initiands (39). [22]

One example of a heterotopia, as Foucault defined it, is the hotel. The concept of social centrality can thus be applied to hotels and their communities.[23] They are part of their cities, but for guests, hotels are often only stopping places or places they use at a time of crisis. Hotels project permanence and transience at the same time. According to Hetherington, it is "this key ambivalence, which gives it its heterotopic significance" (47). For regulars of the Waldorf, the Algonquin and the Chelsea Hotel in particular, the respective hotel can take on a deeper, more spiritual meaning. In the life writing texts on these two institutions one finds statements describing them as "temples," "meccas," and centers of the city's nerve system. Algonquinites and Chelseaites actively derive their communal identity from their connection to these hotels. The spirit of community that develops in hotels among the guests and staff has been often observed and is surprisingly strong. The concept of communitas can be applied to the guests' relationship to hotels, while employees may share such feelings. However, they are also bound by a contract and are paid for being part of the operation. All five hotels described in my thesis show this strong sense of community feeling, of social centrality. For the people frequenting these hotels regularly, staff, guests, and hotel family members, this communal

22 The term communitas goes back to Victor Turner and suggests the spontaneous development of a community as opposed to its institutionalization (Achilles and Bergmann 9). Hetherington defines communitas here as "an intense, if fleeting, condition of affectual solidarity and bonding that produces its own forms of sociation through which an identification and shared sense of belonging is formed" (39f).

23 The community identity described in this text does not counter Doreen Massey's statement concerning the misidentification of communities with places. It just shows that communities can be connected to places, they just do not necessarily have to be.

identity is not a coincidental occurrence but a decisive element in their lives and in the way they perceive themselves.

Atmosphere and the Hotel

To get closer to what causes the uniqueness of places, especially hotels, so that they become a part of one's identity or a community's identity, one has to consider the concept of *atmosphere*. Edward Relph calls it the *genius loci* of a place, this quality that a place exudes which is hard to grasp, but often powerful. People usually circumscribe it with the term atmosphere. Atmosphere, one of the "central tenets of spatial theory" (Pready 76), is an important concept for this study because it expresses that part of the hotel experience not originating solely in human agency. It comes up in almost all the texts analyzed in this work and is of great importance for the understanding of hotel experience.

There is an ongoing debate what constitutes atmosphere.[24] Some scholars believe that atmosphere is wholly a projection of people's feelings and emotions on a place. For Seamon, atmosphere is something that arises in the in-between or, as he puts it: it "has its own phenomenal reality and integrity that human beings can know and engage with" (11). While sociologist Martina Löw acknowledges a certain "generability" (Löw 44) in atmosphere, she sees more to it.[25] For Löw, atmosphere is "an external effect, instantiated in perception, of social goods and human beings in their situated spatial order/ing" (25). Another term that she uses for atmosphere is the *potentiality of space*, which underlines again the spatial character of atmosphere. Löw stresses the point that it is important to realize that the perception of atmosphere is socially pre-structured (46). In the examples of this study, the groups connected to the hotels discussed, and a large portion of New Yorkers, experience the atmosphere, the spirit of place, of the selected institutions in a similar way.

I agree with the findings of Seamon and Löw on atmosphere as my research on the five selected hotels shows that the selected hotels draw people to them because they exude some kind of inherent attraction. Guests describe that coming to these hotels, their mood can change, they feel different, empowered, inspired.[26] While the

24 Among the most recent studies is Andreas Rauh's *Die besondere Atmosphäre: Ästhetische Feldforschungen* (2012). Rauh perceives atmosphere as one of the basic phenomena of our lifeworld and, despite the vagueness of the concept, as crucial part of our everyday experience.

25 People work hard to achieve a certain kind of atmosphere, as can be seen in the case of hotels.

26 This mood change is seen by scholars as the most significant proof for the claim that atmosphere is something external (Löw 44).

hotels' atmosphere originates partly in the aura of their guests and staff, the institutions themselves bring something into this equation, they have spirit of place. Seamon puts it in the following way: "Just by being one way rather than another, [place] can affect human life because of its particular physical, spatial, and environmental qualities" (12). The specific spatial and social nature of a hotel, with its ordering, code, hierarchy, and its economical need to attract guests shows this even clearer than any other institution. Edward Relph writes: "just as the individuality and distinctiveness of the appearance of any one person endures from childhood to old age, so the identity of a particular place can persist through many external changes because there is some inner, hidden force - 'a god within'" (31).

Hotel and Spatial Agency

The examination of the potentiality of space leads us to the concept of spatial agency, which will help us further to understand the hotels' role in New York culture and people's hotel experience in them. Spatial agency in hotel literature has already been discussed in two dissertations in the last years, Joanne Pready's *The Power of Place: Re-Negotating Identity in Hotel Fiction* (2009), and Holly Prescott's *Rethinking of Urban Space in Contemporary British Writing* (2011). While Pready uses spatial agency of the hotel more abstractly in her work, Prescott makes a strong case for it by using and adapting Bruno Latour's concept of 'material agency' to the discussion of space.[27] In her dissertation, Prescott works on developing new ways of reading urban spaces in literature, especially spaces on the margin of society like ruins, underground spaces, and transient spaces like the hotel. This new way is necessary, according to Prescott, because too many literary scholars have used Lefebvre's framework of reading space in literature, by this neglecting and even rejecting the notion of non-human agency of spaces, reducing spaces completely to a man-made, socially produced entity.[28] I support Prescott's claim for more openness to a spatial, material agency, especially when it comes to analyzing the hotel in texts.[29]

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27 Latour is one of the scholars developing the actor-network theory.

28 According to Prescott, in a Lefebvrian framework of reading space, the notion of spatial agency "would be seen as theoretically dangerous, further fetishising space and concealing the social relations from which this agency 'really' arises" (58). I agree with Prescott that to allow for the existence of spatial agency does not necessarily mean that one shuts one's eyes to other agencies at work.

29 In her texts, Prescott moves away from the Lefebvrian framework of reading space in literature and instead uses the concepts of Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer, who both allow for the particular power of space to shape narratives and human experience and who are both also interested in more marginal spaces of society, including the

Bruno Latour defines non-human agency in the following way: "In addition to 'determining' and serving as a 'backdrop of human action' things might authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid, and so on… ." Thus, "we should be ready to inquire about the agency of all sorts of objects" (76).[30] He questions the sole supremacy of human agency. For Latour objects do influence human actions and therefore one can speak of a certain agency, even if this effect is not as intentional as it is with humans: "anything that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor – or, if it has no figuration yet, an actant" (Latour 71).

For her redefinition of the theory of space in literature, which allows a use of it in a wider context, Holly Prescott expands Bruno Latour's concept to also utilize it for space, which is a convincing consideration. Prescott claim spatial agency especially for hotel space because a "hotel [is] a space with an irresistible ability to arrest human agency" (28). The hotel space itself influences the people acting in it. Like their surrounding cities, the microcosmic space of hotels is a "field[] of movements … bringing into relation all kinds of actors, human and non-human, in all manners of combinations of agency" (Amin & Thrift 83).[31]

The influence of hotel space on fictional stories has already been examined. As an example, Prescott introduces Virginia Woolf's use of the hotel in her texts and shows that "the ways in which taking the hotel space as one's literary subject matter may indeed have necessary and profound implications for the ultimate narrative structure of the resulting work" (Prescott 29). From Woolf's texts as well as from ur-texts of the hotel genre like Vicki Baum's *Menschen im Hotel* (1929), a plot type has been derived which can be called *hotel plot*. In the hotel plot a number of unrelated plot lines are united and become credible only because of their setting in the hotel (Matthias 174). Here, the hotel is not only backdrop but the structural reason why the plot works for the reader. Alexa Weik von Mossner describes this kind of dynamic of the fictional space as 'mithandelnder Schauplatz', "a diegetic space that is not so much the setting for the action as it is an *active agent* and thus *part* of the action" (Weik von Mossner). The hotel plot shows how a specific urban space and its agency can have "profound influence on literary form as well as content" (Prescott 29). First related to modernism and reworked and used by

transient space of the hotel. Kracauer emphasizes "how a space refers beyond itself, points to past as well as distant associations" (John Allen 31). He recognizes and accentuates the importance of hotel spaces in his seminal essay "The Hotel Lobby".

30 Note the word choice "backdrop of human action." This already evokes more of a spatial consideration.

31 Armin and Thrift are cultural geographers and follow the non-representational theory, which is related to the actor-network theory of Latour and the concept of material agency.

postmodernists, it allows for a fragmentary structure to make sense and capture more authentically the urban experience of modern individuals.

I will show this spatial agency at work in life writing texts and a number of other text forms, which allows us to consider the impact of space on the fictional creations of people and their understanding of place in their artistic work. All the hotel people whose texts I am analyzing are deeply influenced by their respective hotel. They express in their works the spatial agency of the hotel surrounding them. Furthermore, inspired by their hotel experience, the writers are able to 'jump' in their narration between topics and introduce people and events without a long pretext. In that, their writings are quite similar to Vicki Baum's *Menschen im Hotel*, where this kind of nonlinear combination of different plot lines was successfully used for the first time. The same can be said for cultural products created at the hotel such as books of hotel photographies which present a seemingly wild mixture of subjects and angles, but which are all connected by the topos hotel.

I argue that due to their peculiar heterotopic quality and their openness hotels exceed their original uses similar to the underground spaces Prescott analyzes. The strong dynamic mutuality between people and the hotel space allows it to be used more creatively, becoming a powerful and empowering place. I will present one example. James Donald writes: "No longer can you assume that people's experience of space will be determined by your plan for that space" (140). In his biography, Oscar Tschirky, the maître d' hotel of the Waldorf, remembers: "When the architect designed the Waldorf his only purpose in including the corridor [Peacock Alley] was to have a spacious entrance to the Palm Room, which was destined to be New York's most exclusive restaurant. The natural vanity of man and woman turned the dead-end alley into the hotel's greatest asset" (Schriftgiesser 71). The materiality of the space together with the social practice of the people give this place, Peacock Alley, its meaning as New York's foremost parading ground. In my case studies we see this "interdependence of human agency and a distinct kind of spatial agency" (55), as Prescott puts it, repeatedly. It becomes most obvious when the place is not just fulfilling the role that it has been planned for, but when it encourages a kind of behavior that goes beyond this use, that shows dynamics that we can describe as spatial agency.

Hotel As Microcosm

As we saw above, the hotel, like its surrounding environment the city, is a place that brings together all kinds of human and non-human actors. Due to this it can function as a condensed version of the city. This is the reason why the hotel has been repeatedly called a microcosm of the city. In my study I will treat the hotels discussed in the five case studies as microcosms of certain parts of New York society, sometimes more inclusive, sometimes more limited. The *Oxford English*

Dictionary defines microcosm as "[a]ny complex entity, esp. a community, regarded as forming a self-contained or self-regulating world or universe. …More generally: a place, situation, etc. regarded as encapsulating in miniature the characteristic qualities or features *of* something much larger" (OED). Many scholars working on the hotel repeatedly use the term microcosm to express the nature of the institution and its function and position for the community that surrounds it (Raitz 32; McNeill 384; Krebs 43). For Daniel Boorstin, "American hotels were a microcosm of American life" (Boorstin 147). I argue that the reason for the constant use of this word is that it comes closest to the complex nature of a hotel. We can treat hotels as miniatures of the larger society because in their complex spatial ordering and hierarchy almost all groups of society can be found. The hotel functions as home, workplace, place of leisure, meeting place, information exchange, and in this mirrors the human activities occurring in the larger urban society.

Different functions create different kind of hotels, such as the city, railroad or resort hotel, different identities of hotel people, and consequentially different hotel experiences. What causes and allows these various uses of space to occur in the same place is the heterotopic and liminal nature of the hotel, already mentioned shortly in the discussion of social centrality. Pritchard and Morgan write: "The hotel is a similarly betwixt transitory space, outside the ordinary of most people's everyday social life, distinct from our normal place of home" (764). The term heterotopia is a concept made popular by French philosopher and social critic Michel Foucault. A heterotopia is defined as "all the other sites that can be found within [a] culture [which] are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (Foucault 24). In contrast to utopia and dystopia, a heterotopia is an actual place in modern society and is often used in times of crisis or for rites of passage (such as the hospital or the honeymoon suite) and for the social ordering of people defying the norm (such as prisoners, but also artists like Udo Lindenberg who decided to live permanently in the Hotel Atlantic). A heterotopia is "capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (Foucault 25). This is the case in the hotel. Because it is private and public at the same time, open to all but limited by certain rites and norms like the check-in, hotel space is heterotopic and multi-functional.[32] Over the decades it has been used as workplace, stage, and home. I argue that the heterotopic nature of the hotel allows it to play such a focal role in American society and imbues it with so much creative energy. I want to end my methodological considerations by discussing these

32 The hotel, of course, has also an economic function. The hotelkeeper earns his or her livelihood with the hotel, he pays the employees with the money guests pay for using the rooms. This should not be overlooked and will be considered in the main part.

seemingly contradictory functions, which will be of importance in the five case studies.

Basically, a hotel is a place of shelter and refreshment, which is provided by the innkeeper and the hotel staff. Someone of the hotel staff needs to be on-site 24/7. Several scholars and writers have commented on the fact that people working in hotels often identify themselves to a large degree with these hotels. In classic hotel novels such as the *Grand Babylon Hotel* by Arnold Bennett, *Work of Art* by Sinclair Lewis, and *Martin Dressler* by Steven Millhauser, the hotel people depicted see themselves as part of their hotels, they derive their own self-identity from their work place.[33] In my thesis, several of the autobiographies and life writing accounts have been written by managers and staff members. Their texts are often as much a biography of the hotel in which they work as their own life stories. The accounts of hotel children, often depicting the diverse obligations and long work hours of their parents, also stress the uniqueness of the hotel as workplace. Hotels are open 24/7 and hotel work never becomes routine due to the circumstance that the guests are constantly changing. Pritchard and Morgan add: "as workplaces, hotels also traverse many different social positionings and the boundaries between staff and guests are often crossed" (768). In this study, it is often the case that long-term guests perceive the hotel staff no longer only as service-providers but as part of the family. They are considered as friends and intimates even though or probably because they are paid employees and the relationship between guests and staff follows clearer, less messy lines than among normal friends, which especially artistic guests like e.g. Alec Wilder prefer.

On the other side of the front desk, the guests use the hotel as place of rest on their business trips, but sometimes also as actual workplace, as for example the writers Joseph Roth and Maya Angelou. Joseph Roth developed such a close relationship with hotels that he called himself a "Hotelpatriot" (Roth 6). Maya Angelou once stated in an interview that she needed the liberating, neutral atmosphere of a hotel to write. So she reserved herself a hotel room for months at a time in which she would not sleep but only come to work each morning and leave each afternoon (Zeveloff). Thus, hotels can be workplaces for owners and employees as well as guests.

Hotels are not only workplaces, but they often perform as stages for society and politics (Matthias 28f), a side of the hotel which is often neglected in analyses. Places like lobbies, hotel restaurants, lavish hallways, and ballrooms have performed as the background to many bigger and smaller human dramas. It is the function of the hotel as stage, which allows us, for a moment, to consider the paradoxical nature of the hotel as an elitist and a leveling place. For me, this is a

33 Martina Krebs as well as Joanne Pready have dedicated whole chapters to the staff-hotel relationship in their studies.

consequence of the heterotopic condition of the hotel. The phrase 'palace of the public' is a condensation of this tension existing in the American hotel. The American grand hotel developed as a counterpart to European aristocratic residences, so an elitist character was part of the hotel experience from the beginning. A hotel was a prestige object for a community, representing the town at its best (see the development of grand hotels in 1.3). Accordingly, it was decorated pompously. On the other hand, many hotels made their real profit not with their hotel rooms but instead with their bars, restaurants and event business (Sandoval-Strausz 168). The essayist N.P. Williams remarks: "The going to the Astor and dining with two hundred well-dressed people, and sitting in full dress in a splendid drawing room with plenty of company – is the charm of going to the city" (qtd. in Sandoval-Strausz 169). Hotels needed the larger public as customers, those who could not pay two dollars for a room, but could pay for food, barber shop service, and a drink. The money made from selling alcoholic drinks balanced out losses at times of low occupancy. Accordingly, in the public places of the hotel, a very heterogeneous mix of people existed. As long as everyone adhered to the basic hotel rules, one did not even need to purchase anything. So-called hotel loungers are probably the most famous result of the public nature of American hotels. This was a term for usually white men, who dressed respectably and used the lobby as their extended living rooms but never actually consumed anything there.[34] It is true that these white middle class men do not represent the whole of American society. Yet, their behavior created the impression that hotel lobbies were places where everyone was welcome. This was underlined by the circumstance that hotels also functioned as stages for politicians and were the places where one could see the actual workings of the democratic process. As we will see in the following case studies, the hotel as stage can have a powerful impact on society, so much as to even alter society's behavior. It can become a social laboratory for change.

Besides being a stage the hotel's most often discussed function is that of a temporary, or even permanent, home. Most of the writers of autobiographies and memoirs in my study experienced the hotel to some degree as home. The home is the place which arguably has the strongest impact on us. The word 'home' is recurrent when it comes to any discussion of hotels and hotel space. The best-known description of the hotel is that of a "home away from home," a kind of substitute home when people, for whatever reason, have to leave their own home and take up accommodation in a hotel. For most hotels it is their ultimate goal to succeed in giving people this feeling of being at home, of offering privacy and

34 The most famous description of this type can be found in the character Hurstwood in Theodore Dreiser's novel *Sister Carrie* (1901). After Hurstwood elopes with Carrie to New York and is unable to find a suitable job, he joins the brotherhood of lounge lizards, who were an everyday occurrence in New York hotels at the turn of the century.

security, a nurturing place in a hectic world. Yet, this image of the hotel as "home away from home" is also the starting point for most criticism wielded against the hotel. Critics of the hotel state that it is only a commercial institution, which fakes being a real home. For them, it does neither have the necessary foundation nor the true spirit of a home. With increasing standardization hotels have come to resemble much more a well-oiled machine than a 'home.' Thus, the relationship between the terms *home* and *hotel* is tense.

What, then, is the definition of home? Many scholars have concerned themselves with attempts to try to define 'home.'[35] Human geographer Tim Cresswell writes that "[h]ome is an exemplary kind of place where people feel a sense of attachment and rootedness" (*Place* 24). For him, it is a "center of meaning and a field of care" (24). For David Seamon, the home is a place which lends people a feeling of security, a place where they can control what happens to some degree (*A Geography of the Lifeworld* 78f). Home is often considered the place where people can be themselves without needing to hide behind a social mask. For philosopher and phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard, home is "our corner of the world. …[I]t is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word" (Bachelard 4). It is an intimate space where experience is particularly intense, the starting point from which most people understand the wider world.[36]

What do we make of these considerations of 'home' in relation to the hotel? In my opinion, the criticism directed against the hotel as a fake and empty "home away from home" is too short-sighted. Although I know of instances where hotels are indeed despised by people who have to be away from their private homes too often and stay in too many hotels, there are an equally large number of people who are very grateful for the institution hotel as a "home away from home" and gladly seek shelter there. Considering my findings, hotels can indeed become homes, and for some, even better fitting homes than the classic private residence. In the anonymity of hotels, they are freed from expectations of their family or their jobs. My case studies show that this is especially true for people connected to the arts. Hotels can develop into places where people experience rootedness (see e.g. Alec

35 Recently, Klaus Stierstorfer has published a collection of essays on the topic, *Constructions of Home: Interdisciplinary Studies in Architecture, Law, and Literature* (2010).

36 According to Cresswell, the concept 'home' has seen much criticism in the last years from the side of feminists who take an issue with the over-positive, nostalgic depiction of home. For them this view is a male-dominated understanding of the place. For women, home is often less a nurturing place, but a place of oppression, of exploitation and isolation (Rose 53). While other female scholars do not view home as negatively, they ask at least for a more cautious and open definition of what home means and how this meaning was attached to the place in the first place.

Wilder and the Algonquin Hotel), where they can be more themselves than at home where they would have to fulfill preexisting role models (see e.g. Elsa Maxwell at the Waldorf, and Edgar Lee Masters at the Chelsea). After going through the rituals of checking-in they are liberated by the hotel from domestic duties and conventions. For them the anonymity of hotel life is what allows them to be themselves or to play with different identities. While guests in hotels have not the same amount of control over the place as they would have in their private residence, they are often quite happy to let go of this control temporarily. In the case of hotel children, who are less free in their choice of location, they themselves find ways to undermine the classic hotel order and create places of their own, because the complex character of hotel space allows for it.

I do not want to claim that a hotel can be a comfortable home for everyone. But I argue for a more open-minded approach to hotels as "homes away from home." Architectural critic Ian Nairn writes about modern nomadism and the increasing mobility of the twentieth century world: "People put down roots... in a terribly short time; … I would even argue paradoxically, that that mobility increases the sense of place" (Nairn 10). Looking at the autobiographical texts of this study, I agree with him. I think that in a world, which has become more mobile than ever, alternative homes like hotels are needed to make this mobile lifestyle safe and comfortable. In addition, for people who cherish mobility and a certain lack of bourgeois convention, hotels remain open and open-minded places to find shelter. Each of the hotels discussed here will fulfill all three functions discussed above to some degree. It is often impossible to make a clear distinction between them, as the three functions often merge.

Hotels are microcosms of society. Confronted with this microcosmic perception of the hotel, some critics point out that not the whole of society is represented in hotels, that often marginal figures are left out, especially the unemployed and poor, and that hotels are places out of the ordinary and not part of the normal life. I do not disregard this criticism. I am aware that in the case studies here not all groups existing in American society are represented. It is also true that grand hotels like the Waldorf-Astoria are places were 'regular' people are only able to stay as part of a once-in-a-lifetime experience. However, a grand hotel, as any other hotel, still consists of people of all classes, from wealthy residents, rich guests, white-collar workers, people celebrating special anniversaries or rites of passages like proms and weddings, to visitors from the street, blue collar-workers, and freshly arrived immigrants who often work in menial jobs.

I also want to point out again that the American hotel, in contrast to the European hotel, is thought of as inherently more public, more open for visitors and more part of the local community. When I speak of the microcosmic nature of the Hotel Algonquin, I do not mean to imply that all hotels are like this particular institution and that always all of society is represented at once in this place. But for

an artist residing there or regularly meeting friends for lunch, it contains at that moment everything that her or his world is meant to contain. It fulfills that person's needs and expectations and represents a self-contained society, which she or he defines as relevant.

Finally, due to the legitimate criticism of social selection and class bias I felt it to be especially important to examine how different ethnic groups make use of the institution hotel. I want to demonstrate that the institution hotel has been successfully adapted to different environments and functions. The hotel is not exclusively for the rich white establishment. In the case study of the Hotel Theresa in Harlem and Grossinger's Hotel and Country Resort in the Catskills I will show that for African Americans and Jewish-Americans the hotel, too, is a useful entity that fits their needs and can be used as a tool to achieve their goal of integration, acculturation, and acceptance.[37] Over more than two centuries, the American hotel has become an important institution for the inspiration, production, and distribution of culture and social change. Its history shows that the hotel has been and still can be used and adapted to a wide range of different groups and communities, a microcosm of America.

HOTEL HISTORY

At the beginning of this introductory chapter I have already alluded to the close historical connection between America and the institution hotel. The special hotel experience described in the five case studies and the great significance of these hotels for New York society and culture can only be understood against the hotel's historical background. To round off this introduction, thus, I will now present a condensed historical overview.

Hotels became essential institutions in American society at a time when America was experiencing the greatest changes since its foundation. In the nineteenth century, America changed from a more agricultural country to an industrial nation. This caused change in the social make-up, creating new kinds of classes and social structures. This era also saw an explosion of urbanization, a huge influx of immigrants, a revolution in the transportation system, and a greater mixture of cultures than ever before. For these developments, new institutions were needed. According to Williamson, these new places became reality in "the modern

37 People know that there are certain ways to behave in public, like not running naked in the streets. These rules seem to be dictated to us by commonsense. However, according to Cresswell "[i]t is this very commonsense nature of place-based norms that make them so powerful and ideological tool" ("Place" 174).

hotel, an institution that is perhaps the most representative and expressive example of those changes that we have had" (Williamson 3). For the historian, "the modern first-class hotel was an invention, with the old-style inn merely furnishing the root idea – just as … Stephenson's locomotive, based on Watt's condensing steam-engine" (Williamson 3). Williamson was writing this in 1930. More than seventy years later, Andrew Sandoval-Strausz still comes to the same conclusion: "[t]he hotel was part of the project of American nationhood" (Sandoval-Strausz 39).

The most common critical reaction to these claims is that places for the accommodation of strangers have existed since before the Roman Empire. Accordingly, freely quoting Anne Bradstreet, they have not just sprung up lately in America. Moreover, the word 'hotel' itself is not American, but of French origin, meaning a noble man's house. Both points of criticism are valid. Yet, looking at the findings by Williamson, Sandoval-Strausz, Berger, and other scholars America's leading role is nevertheless correct.

Hospitality is one of the most necessary and basic rites of human society. According to anthropologist Julian Pitt-Rivers: "hospitality is a 'rite of incorporation'" (Julian Pitt-Rivers qtd. in Sandoval-Strausz 137). Strangers are accepted into a community, are cared for and protected. Thus, the exchange of information and traditions can take place. Already 12,000 years ago, tribes provided a special hut or cottage for foreigners seeking temporary shelter, usually suited for one person. According to Williamson the history of the commercial inn starts in the 6th century B.C., with the invention of money. At the beginning of the Modern Age, inns provided rooms for up to thirty travelers and basic services like food, drinks, and stables for the animals. Concerning the built structure, the services, and the cleanliness of the place, there were no great differences to the inns of the Roman Empire. With the stagecoach, travel increased on the European continent and the British Isles but the comfort in the accommodations stayed largely the same, with common dining and common sleeping, often three or four guests in the same bed.

Indeed, a really new change in hospitality businesses occurred for the first time in hundreds of years on the American continent at the end of the 18th century. Up until then, British America was covered with inns and taverns very closely resembling the British role models and of the same standard. This, however, began to change. Berger writes: "Toward the end of the eighteenth century, the word *hotel* came into use in America to describe the elite group of taverns and inns that catered to upper-class patrons" (Berger, *Hotel Dreams* 14). One of the great changes was a superior service that justified this new word 'hotel.'[38] Yet, it was not only the type

38 The new meaning of the word 'hotel' is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* in the following way: "A building or establishment where travellers or tourists are provided with overnight accommodation, meals, and other services. Hotels may be distinguished from other forms of temporary lodging for travellers by their larger size and range of

of service that changed, but for the first time buildings for the explicit use of hotels were erected to accommodate larger numbers of people.

Image 1: The First American Hotel, "The City Hotel," New York

City Hotel, Trinity & Grace Churches, Broadway, 1831. From the New York Public Library

Most historians agree that the first place worthy of the name 'hotel' was The City Hotel, New York, which opened in 1794. In a city of 30,000 inhabitants it offered 73 rooms, "a ballroom, public parlors, bar, stores, offices, and a circulating library" (Sandoval-Strausz 24). It quickly developed into the "chief social center" (Williamson 10) of the town. As can be seen in the print above, the hotel creates traffic, is a hub in early New York (Image 1). While it still largely resembled an overgrown inn, it was erected expressively for hotel purposes (10). In contrast to other early establishments, The City Hotel in New York was financed by a stock company, a joint group of citizens that wanted to improve the town's accommodation for visitors and that raised the money together to realize this enterprise.[39] With this type of financing, the early American hotel becomes part of

facilities, now often being equipped with a restaurant, bar, conference rooms and leisure facilities, though the term is also widely used to refer to smaller establishments" (OED).

39 According to Sandoval-Strausz, the erection of the first hotels at this particular time can also be linked to the first Presidential Tour of George Washington. During this journey, Washington refused to stay with leading citizens of the towns he visited to avoid

big business (10), a player in the early capitalist system. After the City Hotel, hotels started to open across America. New constructions followed in Boston, Baltimore and Philadelphia. These buildings were larger and improved on the role model of the City Hotel. Yet, none of them presented a full break away from the original inn.

A real innovation came with the opening of the Tremont House in Boston, finished in 1829. It is widely regarded as the first urban luxury hotel of the world.[40] Built by architect Isaiah Rogers in the Greek Revival style the hotel set standards for all modern hotels to come.[41] The reason why this hotel is seen as the trailblazer for the modern hotel is found on the ground floor of the new structure. For the first time a hotel offered services like a barber-shop, a post office, a ticket and a law office, as well as bathing rooms: "The concentration of service on the ground floor was the first step toward the goal to satisfy every traveler's anticipated needs, eventually leading to the hotel's designation as a 'city within a city'" (Berger, *Hotel Dreams* 19). The Tremont is the first structure were the later famous metaphor for the hotel, being "a city within a city," was indeed justified.

In addition to these services, the Tremont also had several other innovations to vouch for its uniqueness. It was notably the first structure to possess a separate, impressive lobby (Williamson 16).[42] Before, the entry point to a hotel was usually the barroom. The importance of a real lobby should not be underestimated as it put the enterprise on a new professional level. It enabled greater exchange among locals and foreigners than the bar. While the early hotels still had ladies' entrances, lobbies did not exclude women in the same way as barrooms did. Furthermore, this elevated the position of the hotel clerk, who was now in a more visible place.

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accusations of favoritism. Instead, he opted for the existing inns. However, as his own writings show, these accommodations often were of the lowest order, uncomfortable and filthy. As a reaction, several of the larger cities in the recently founded United States made it their task to build better and more comfortable establishments, out of civic pride and a sense of business (Sandoval-Strausz 15). The former colonies realized that they needed to work closely together now that they were a common nation. This caused an increase of travel, in addition to the constant influx of immigrants.

40 According to Berger the urban luxury hotel has to be treated as the starting point of modern hostelry because it performed as showcase of domestic progress. If innovations at palace hotels proved successfully they were copied by commercial and family hotels.

41 Isaiah Rogers became the foremost architect of American hotels, building, amongst others, the famous Astor House, New York's first luxury hotel and the Tremont's most serious rival. The choice of the Neo-classical style was not a coincidence but deliberately selected to marry the concepts of democracy and commerce (Berger, *Hotel Dreams* 26).

42 The lobby was still called 'the office' back then, the term 'lobby' only became common usage in the 1850s.

With its 170 rooms, the Tremont became the standard against which other houses were judged. It was the first hotel that provided each guest with a pitcher and a bowl, and a piece of soap, something that was unheard of before. It had eight water closets and eight bathrooms on the first floor. At that time plumbing was still in its early days, so indoor bathrooms were seen as a great step forward in personal hygiene. The Tremont House also set standards by having mostly single and double rooms, ending the habit of putting up several people in one bedroom. In addition, for the first time each door had its own lock and guests were now handed a separate key to their room, establishing the separation of public and private space in hotels.

Throughout the nineteenth century, hotels in America were seen as showcases for inventions in domestic technologies. The logic behind this was simple, as often people first came into contact with new amenities at hotels and then decided to order them for their private homes. Among the innovations for the home that became popular through the hotel were modern bathrooms, starting in the 1840s and 50s (Europeans would later call Americans 'bathroom crazy;' by the 1890s most of the larger hotels had bathrooms in each room). The Fifth Avenue Hotel in New York famously introduced the first 'vertical railroad', the original name for elevators introduced in 1859 (Williamson 64). Elevators made rooms higher up attractive and profitable. In 1882 the first hotels in New York introduced electric lighting (66). The first telephone exchange in New York started in 1879 (70) and the phone was shortly after installed in hotels (e.g. the Netherland Hotel was the first hotel with its own telephones and switchboard in 1894). These innovations were further proof that hotels were the leading institution of the country and justified its fame as a progressive place.

Similar to the City Hotel, the Tremont House, too, was financed by a corporation of citizens of Boston. Berger writes: "The hotel became important, not just as an investment and a city necessity but also as a public representation of the personal, business, and civic ethos of a class of men" (Berger, *Hotel Dreams* 35). The hotel became a symbol for the city's aspirations, embodying the hopes already aired during the opening that it would be an expression of the city's public spirit (49). According to Edward Relph, a cityscape is a "medium of communication in which all the elements may have messages – buildings, streets, parades … all serve not only to unite communities but also to make them explicit" (34). The Boston Tremont House is a fitting example. It sent out the message to Bostonians and visitors that the city was welcoming, open-minded and ready for business. The first luxury hotel of Boston was perceived as the expression of the values of its city and its leading citizens (Sandoval-Strausz 314). Charles Dickens, a visitor from across the Atlantic, acknowledged in his *American Notes* (1842) that with the Tremont House a new kind of comfort was established (Williamson 16).

It is important to mention once more that an urban luxury hotel like the Tremont House was not only catering to foreign visitors but, by being a new kind of public

institution, was linking these people to the local community. The new public spaces, like the lobby, "created a sense of community among guests, residents, and locals, imbuing hotels with a resolutely public culture" (Sandoval-Strausz 143). It is important, too, that in contrast to other kinds of public institutions, such as the theater, community halls, and parks, hotels brought different people together not only for minutes or a couple of hours but often for days. This kind of contact did not only take place in the public sphere but in intimate places like the parlor or the bedroom (143). It should not be underestimated how important this kind of contact was, especially for a nation so large and loosely connected as the United States. Daniel Boorstin writes in 1965: "Hotels were among the earliest transient facilities that bound the nation together. They were … symptoms of the frenetic quest for community" (Boorstin 143). Boorstin is joined in this assessment by other scholars, among them Paul Goldberger, the famous architectural critic. He sees hotels as the only places "in which Americans have been comfortable living the public life, and admitting to urbanity" (Goldberger 8).

As Boorstin mentioned, hotels helped bind the nation together. They also played an important role in the development of America's political culture: "The principle of deliberative democracy on the basis of geographic representation required by its very nature that individuals from across a large territory gather at a single location in order to discuss and resolve matters of public importance" (Sandoval-Strausz 42). Due to the vastness of the American landscape, candidates needed to tour extensively to reach voters and encourage their following. They needed hotels for their accommodation, but also as semi-private places for strategic meetings, and as public stages for their speeches.[43] Since the early nineteenth century, political parties held their conventions at hotels, a practice that is being continued. Because they offered public as well as private space and were centers of their communities, hotels played a decisive role in the democratization of America, offering the political network a strong partner.

The connection between hotels and democracy was first made in an editorial in the *National Intelligencer* on June 18, 1827, in which the modern American hotels were dubbed 'palaces of the public' (Berger, *Hotel Dreams* 5). However, despite the high praise for the public spirit of the first grand hotels in America, there is also criticism in how far these often blatantly elitist structures could be called democratic. Berger describes the luxury hotel as "one of the most important institutions through which American urban elites forged a highly unified identity

43 *Harper's Weekly* printed a number of political speeches and cartoons with drawings of politicians standing on a hotel balcony or on pedestals in front of a hotel. This can also be seen in many Civil War images, where President Lincoln and the Confederacy leader Jefferson Davis are shown in front of hotels speaking to the crowds (see Sandoval-Strausz 254).

that was both local and specific to place and, at the same time, representative of national ideas" (4). For several years, until the American middle-class developed into the leading force in American culture, the possibility to live in these palatial edifices was limited to people who could afford the relatively high prices.[44] Therefore, Paul Goldberger writes that "[t]here is something fundamentally un-American about the idea of the grand hotel: it is not democratic, it is not fair-minded, it is not for everyone" (8). Goldberg, however, continues: "But it is an altogether wonderful paradox of the American grand hotel that it is, in fact, for everyone: if it is not for everyone to spend a night in, then it is for everyone to visit, to fantasize about, to celebrate in" (8). Because of the peculiar publicness of the modern American hotel it became one of the "most leveling of all American 'institutions'" (Sandoval-Strausz 185). And while, according to Berger, the hotel "presented a class-defined, idealized version of life outside its walls" (Berger, *Hotel Dreams* 6) the hotel space was too complex and open to keep life so neatly segregated as elitist groups wished it to be. Instead, hotels represented the city outside realistically, with its achievements and failures.[45]

Visitors from abroad agreed with this assessment. In the 1930s, Leo Koszella writes that hotels are different in America: "wo gerade in den großen und größten Hotels alle Welt ein und aus geht, wo man sich in den Hotelhallen trifft, ganz gleich zu welchem Zweck und ganz gleich, ob man dort wohnt oder nicht und ohne Rücksicht auf äußere Eleganz. Dort sind eben das demokratische Prinzip und der Servicegedanke bedeutend entwickelter" (662). European visitors often reported their shock over the social heterogeneity seen at American hotels, writing in detail about "a promiscuous mixing of social classes that characterized the growth of the American bourgeoisie" (Berger, *Hotel Dreams* 58).[46] Hotels in America, especially

44 In her introduction, Molly Berger describes a visit with her family to New York, including a short stop at the Essex House. From a contemporary perspective she muses: "This was an American palace. What did it take to belong? Our American birthright supported our presumption that we could claim equal access to any public space. This particular public space, however, asked for a certain level of economic achievement or, alternatively, a convincing performance that – through dress and manners – would convey the affect of that achievement" (Berger, *Hotel Dreams* 2). The quote tells us that the atmosphere at luxury hotels in America is still paradoxical, while Berger's story confirms that the lobby of a grand hotel is indeed public.

45 Caroline Levander writes on the question whether the hotel is a site of freedom or coercion: "The hotel is never just one thing. It is always a site of power and resistance, authority and self-fashioning, dominance and subversion" (Levander 5).

46 Carol Berens describes the difference to hotels across the Atlantic in the following way: "While American and European hotel forms often resemble each other, their substance indeed differs. There are dramatic contrasts in heritage and pedigree between European

of the luxurious class, were seen as the counterpart to European palaces, yet more open and more penetrable for social mobility. Lacking a court as social center

> Americans created their counterpart in the community hotel. …In the period of most rapid growth, it was not by churches or government buildings but by hotels that cities judged themselves and expected others to judge them. …The hotel lobby, like the outer rooms of a royal palace, became a loitering place, a headquarter of gossip, a vantage point for a glimpse of the great, the rich, the powerful. (Boorstin 135)

The special nature of American hotels made them at the same time leveling *and* elitist, democratic *and* palatial. It lies in the heterotopic, stage-like nature of the hotel as well as in the accepting nature of the heterogeneous American society that the institution is able to overcome this apparent paradox and to function for all at the same time.

Anthony Trollope's *North America* (1862) may serve as an eyewitness account of the most striking features of mid-nineteenth century American hotels. Trollope's depiction of the American nation shortly before and during the Civil War is fascinating. He even includes a chapter solely focusing on the modern American hotel, the facility which vexed and occupied him probably the most. Written after traveling the non-seceding states, except for California, his estimation of the situation of hotels in America is a very enlightening one, despite his statement that he does not like the American hotel at all.

Trollope starts his chapter by writing:

> I find it impossible to resist the subject of inns. As I have gone on with my journey, I have gone on with my book, and have spoken here and there of American hotels as I have encountered them. But in the States the hotels are so large an institution, having so much closer and wider a bearing on social life than they do in any other country, that I feel myself bound to treat them in a separate chapter as a great national feature in themselves. They are quite as much thought of in the nation as the legislature, or judicature, or literature of the country. (Trollope 480)

Trollope acknowledges right away that the Americans have a special connection to the institution hotel. He also makes clear that in America the hotel has more impact on daily life than in any other nation that he encountered. Comparing the American establishment with hostelries in the different countries of Europe he finds that the American hotel is "altogether an institution apart, and a thing of itself" (483).

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hotels and their American counterparts. In Europe, the phrase 'fit for a king' constitutes not hyperbole because, in contrast to American hotels, which were built as palaces for the people, continental hotels were designed as palaces for royalty" (Berens 145).

Trollope is surprised by the wasteful way space is used in the hotel. In contrast to Europe, where the crowdedness of the old cities would not allow for such lavish use of space, in America "[e]verything about them [the hotels] must be on a large scale. …They are always built on a plan which to a European seems to be most unnecessarily extravagant in space" (485). The writer also confirms that, in contrast to European establishments, American hotels always have an office, or lobby, allowing the public to use the building. This democratic publicness highly irritates Trollope: "In those other more congenial chambers is always gathered together a crowd, apparently belonging in no way to the hotel. It would seem that a great portion of an American inn is as open to the public as an Exchange, or as the wayside of the street" (491). Trollope also dislikes the fashion of public eating or mass-feeding as he sees it: "Certain feeding hours are named, which generally include nearly all the day. …When the guest presents himself at any of these hours he is marshalled to a seat, and a bill is put into his hand containing the names of all the eatables then offered for his choice. The list is incredibly and most unnecessarily long" (490).[47] While Americans saw this generous food plan as a sign of hospitality, foreign visitors were often aghast at the amount of food eaten and wasted. Moreover, they were often shocked that people of all classes were sitting together at one table, and that there was no possibility of private dining.[48] From the American perspective this was just seen as one more proof of the egalitarian atmosphere of the hotel.

One of the most interesting parts of Trollope's text is his estimation of the importance of the institution hotel for the project of westward expansion. He writes that even in the most remote frontier town "the first sign of an incipient settlement is an [sic] hotel five stories high, with an office, a bar, a cloak-room, three gentlemen's parlours, two ladies' parlours, a ladies' entrance, and two hundred bedrooms" (Trollope 483). He adds in a mocking way: "When the new hotel rises up in the wilderness, it is presumed that people will come there with the express object of inhabiting it. The hotel itself will create a population, – as the railways

47 What the writer describes here is the so-called American Plan, which was introduced very early in the development of the modern American hotel. This plan included all mealtimes, usually four, and allowed people to eat as much as they wanted.

48 On the difference of American and European manners see for contemporary accounts Fanny Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the American's* (1832) and Henry Lunettes, *The American Gentleman's Guide to Politeness and Fashion* (1858); academic sources are Dietmar Schloss, *Civilizing America: Manners and Civility in American Literature and Culture* (2009); Aurelian Craiutu and Jeffrey C. Isaac, *America Through European Eyes: British and French Reflections on the New World From the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (2009); Kenneth D. Rose, *Unspeakable Awfulness: America Through the Eyes of European Travelers, 1865-1900* (2014).

do" (484).[49] It is very interesting that the writer describes here that pioneer hotels attract a following of their own, that they become active players in the expansion of America. Reading the development correctly, Trollope draws a direct connection between the growth of the railroad network and the spread of hotels across the country.[50] The first commercial railroad routes were established in the 1820s and rapidly increased until the Civil War. In 1862 Trollope can declare: "The railways and the hotels have between them so churned up the people [in America] that an untravelled man or woman is a rare animal. We are apt to suppose that travellers make roads, and that guests create hotels; but the cause and effect run exactly in the other way" (485). Again Trollope comments on the great agency of the institution hotel, which is more than a passive construction. The hotel is not only reacting to but it causes these developments. This comment shows that spatial agency of hotels has a long history in America. It existed from the beginning of hotels and found its entry early into literature and life writing

Besides commenting on the appearance of the place, the behavior of the staff, and the rates, Trollope also describes the people residing in the hotels, noting an important difference between Europeans and Americans. According to the British traveler, many young couples start their life together in hotels, and actually seem to prefer it there to founding their own household: "I think I may allege that the mode of life found in these hotels is liked by the people who frequent them. It is to their

49 Many hotel historians agree with Trollope on the importance of the institution hotel for westward expansion. Sandoval-Strausz writes: "Hotels would anchor new cities along an advancing western frontier, extending settlement across the continent" (Sandoval-Strausz 44). See for this function of the hotel also Boorstin (145f) and Raitz and Jones, who call hotels in their text "cornerstones of urban development on America's settlement frontier" (17). According to them, a town with a hotel was perceived by settlers as a "place of permanence and potential, a bit of civilization in the wilderness" (19). The most famous hotel on the west coast in the nineteenth century was the Palace Hotel in San Francisco with 755 rooms, opened in 1875 (Williamson 91). For hotel development in the West see Richard A. Van Orman, *A Room For the Night: Hotels of the Old West* (1966). In the South hotel building lagged behind the rest of the country until the late twentieth century. An important exception is the St. Charles in New Orleans: "It used to be said of the St. Charles that 'half of the history of Louisiana' was written in it" (Williamson 98).

50 According to Groth and Sandoval-Strausz, one important type of the hotel was the railroad hotel, built for the railroad workers as well as being a shelter for travelers and first accommodation for settlers. Sandoval-Strausz lists all together seven different hotel types. These are the luxury hotel, the commercial hotel, the middle-class hotel, marginal hotels, resort hotels, railroad hotels, and settlement hotels. It can be debated if all these types can be clearly distinguished from each other, but this categorization provides us with a useful tool to discuss the different ways hotels cater to people in America.

taste. They are happy, or at any rate contented, at these hotels, and do not wish for household cares" (Trollope 484). What Trollope describes here is a condition particular to the American hotel. In contrast to European hotels, which in the nineteenth century mostly catered to transient guests, American hotels often housed permanent residents (Gregory 4). Hotel living was already very popular in the middle of the nineteenth century and continued to draw people for many decades. Williamson confirms this by stating that the second major difference between the American and the European hotel, besides the egalitarian atmosphere, is "the American habit of permanent living in hotels" (9).

Hotel living was seen as problematic by many social critics. According to them, the more public life in hotels interfered with the normal family life: "the husband is but half a husband, the wife but half a wife, the child but half a child, when all three reside in some huge caravanserai in common with some hundreds of other persons" (qtd. in Sandoval-Strausz 271).[51] The comparatively large percentage of Americans residing in hotels permanently caused Europeans to believe "that home life in a house was almost unknown on this side of the Atlantic" (Williamson 48).[52] It is clear that Trollope was intrigued by the institution of the modern American hotel, yet at the same time he was also disgusted by it. It remains unclear if this disgust is really caused by the conceived faults of the institution or if it is a result of the

51 While it is true that cases of disrupted family life were reported in newspapers, often caused by neglect or adultery, hotel living was also seen as liberating by women of the nineteenth century. Charlotte Perkins Gilman spoke out for communal living to liberate women from household chores in *Women and Economics* (1898). It would allow them to enter the public sphere, thereby become active members of society: "From the most primitive caravansary up to the square miles of floor space in the Grand Hotels, …the public house has met the needs of social evolution as no private house could have done" (Gilman 187). For many families, permanent residence in hotels was also cheaper than keeping a traditional household. For young couples, it allowed them to start private living without the interference of their parents.

52 Edith Wharton takes up this prejudice in her novel *The Custom of the Country* (1913). Here, the French relatives of Udine Spragg, the American protagonist, criticize her for her lifestyle: "It was natural that the Americans, who had no homes, who were born and died in hotels, should have contracted nomadic habits" (Wharton 512). Later in the text the hotel is used again as a symbol for the erratic behavior of Americans, when Udine's third husband, Comte Raymond de Chelles, exclaims: "you come from hotels as big as towns, and from towns as flimsy as paper, where the streets haven't had time to be named, and the buildings are demolished before they're dry, and the people are as proud of changing as we are of holding to what we have" (Wharton 545). For an analysis of the use of the hotel in *The Custom of the Country* see Betsy Klimasmith, *At Home in the City* (2005).

writer's patriotism in the face of what he felt to be American superiority. Anthony Trollope ends his chapter fittingly with an ambiguous comment: "I do not like the American hotels; but I must say in their favour that they afford an immense amount of accommodation" (Trollope 491).

Overall, Trollope's chapter on American hotels in *North America* is a most fascinating glimpse into the early era of this institution and the depiction of hotel experience in literary travelogues. In addition, it is a very useful testimony of the importance of hotels for American society. Trollope realizes the relevance of the hotel for America's westward expansion. He understands the close ties between the railroad and the hotel network and sees that the two together actively shape the mobile character of Americans. Furthermore, for the European readers he establishes the American hotel as an institution set apart from its European counterpart. In America it is a place where people come together on a mostly equal standing and share their meal with a large number of strangers. Americans freely decide to live permanently in hotels, defying the Victorian conventions still dominating Western life. In addition, Trollope grants the hotel an agency that scholars would only rediscover more than a century later.

As can be read from Trollope's chapter, hotel building in Europe, despite its long history in inns, lagged behind. George Augustus Sala, another well-experienced British traveler writes: "the American hotel is to an English hotel what an elephant is to a periwinkle... as roomy as Buckingham Palace and not much inferior in its internal fittings" (Sala qtd. in Gregory 20). While Trollope rightly criticized the lack in style and training among the hotel staff in the 1860s, by the last third of the century Europeans concede that "American dominance in hotel architecture had been matched by leadership in the provision of hospitality" (Sandoval-Strausz 185). It was finally accepted that America had become the trendsetter in the hostelry business and the modern hotel became one of the most successful American exports of the nineteenth century.

By the end of the nineteenth century the hotel had become an essential institution of American cities and small towns. It represented to visitors the community's self-perception and functioned as an important center of social exchange (Raitz 28). Hotels were workplaces for a large amount of people. Some of the grand hotels at the end of the century employed up to 1,000 staff members, small cities in themselves. They were permanent homes for a surprisingly large number of guests and staff members, as well as temporary accommodations for thousands of strangers. In addition, over the century hotels had become important places for leisure and social activities. During the Gilded Age, grand hotels were some of the preferred showcases to confirm one's status. They functioned as stages for "conspicuous consumption" to quote Thorstein Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899). Hotels had become so defining in the urban life of Americans that Henry James stated in his travelogue *The American Scene* (1907): "one is

verily tempted to ask if the hotel-spirit may not just *be* the American spirit most seeking and most finding itself" (102).

By the beginning of the twentieth century, hotels on both sides of the Atlantic could claim relatively similar standards. Still, America continued to lead the way in hotel development. Following the national trend of time-saving and homogenization of the work process, first attempts of standardization were made. Early in the century, E.M. Statler created one of the first hotel chains. Between 1907 and 1927 he built seven hotels throughout the North East. With his slogan "A bed and a bath for a dollar and a half" Statler revolutionized the hotel business, making hotels even more affordable and accessible to a now large American middle class. Other hoteliers followed his example, most famously Conrad N. Hilton, J. Willard Marriott, and Kemmon Wilson, the founder of Holiday Inn.[53] While the expansion of their hotels around the globe was criticized as a form of American imperialism, they provided travelers, especially Americans, with predictable and reassuring standards.[54]

Travel culture in America changed in the twentieth century. After 1930, almost no new grand hotels were built for many years. Hotel scholars see the opening of the second Waldorf-Astoria in 1931 as the terminus of the influential period of hotels – a consideration that I want to challenge in this thesis. Since the 1920s three more global hotel booms have been registered by hospitality researchers. In the 1950s, a new type of hotel transformed the desert of Nevada, the casino resort hotels in Las Vegas. The first successful casino hotel was The Flamingo, which opened its doors in 1947. Over the next decades, the casino hotel industry turned Las Vegas into the "world's largest multifaceted resort" (Rutes, Penner & Adams 179) with over 145,000 hotel rooms. More than any hotel type before the casino resort hotel focuses on the elements of illusion and escapism and tries to present its

53 Motels were another important development in the hospitality industry in the twentieth century. This very American type of accommodation, where the important asset is that one has a parking space directly in front of one's room, was a reaction to the huge success of the car in American society in the 1920s. It revolutionized America's mode of traveling. By 1928, more than 3,000 motels had been built and in the 1940s more motels than hotels existed in America. They were cheaper, smaller and often located on the outskirts of towns or on the road, which made the running of motels less expensive. They also importantly lacked a lobby. Due to this they were not fulfilling a role in the local community. Therefore, I disregard motels in my study. While some economists predicted the end of hotels with the coming of motels, hotels continued to exist.

54 According to hotel anecdotes, in Spain, a country which took to the idea of the modern hotel very late, people believed for some time that the word Hilton is synonymous with the word hotel, as Hilton hotels were the first large group of hostelry establishments to open in the country.

guests with a complete dream world of its own. This combination of hotel, theme parks, shopping malls, and convention centers is also called "integrated resort" development and has been copied all around the world, particularly in Asia, here especially in Macau (180).

The 1980s saw a boom of holiday villages, specialized hotels like boutique hotels, as well as convention hotels, which helped the hospitality industry out of a period of stagnation and economic depression. Boutique hotels were especially important for New York. The first boutique hotel was The Morgans, created by Ian Schrager and Steve Rubell. They wanted to "[d]e-emphasiz[e] the traditional vocabulary of hotel space" of functionality and pompous luxury, and instead tried to fulfill the "societal desire for *experience*, ... a mise en scène for contemporary life" (Volland 26). This hotel type presented a move away from so-called 'monster hotels' toward a more individualistic kind of enterprise. The last significant period of new hotel construction has been registered around the year 2000 with the erection of very luxurious hotels in the Arabian world, so-called seven star hotels, and a revitalization of the cruise ship industry (Rutes, Penner & Adams 10f). Although these last developments show that the American hospitality industry is no longer the only force behind new hotel types, one can still state that "[t]oday, an international American style is all-pervasive" (Gregory 17).

To summarize this overview of the history of the American hotel one can see that since their 'invention' in the early nineteenth century, hotels have become symbols for the nation's aspiration and self-perception. Over the decades, they functioned as stages of society, workplaces, and permanent homes, enabling American society to deal with the challenges of immigration, urbanization, and industrialization. Hotels made social change possible and at the same time stabilized existing social hierarchies. They were crucial meeting places for politicians and businessmen and helped unite the vast American nation in a time before telecommunication and air travel. Hotels were as much a product of market society as part of the mechanism behind it (Berger, *Hotel Dreams* 28). I want to stress once more that since the early nineteenth century hotels have actively helped to shape the urban cultural landscape in America (Berger, *Hotel Dreams* 6; Williamson 4). While Sandoval-Strausz is cautious with using the word agency in connection with the built structure of the hotel, it is still important to put on record that "the spatial arrangements and social behaviors specific to hotels led to or at least favored particular historical outcomes" (Sandoval-Strausz 229). [55] All in all, the history of the American hotel is full of proof for the existence of a close people-place relationship. The experience of Americans in the cultural phenomenon hotel is one of the most obvious examples of the power of place in people's lives.

55 He considers intentionality problematic with regard to an inanimate object.

Molly Berger writes that every person has a hotel story, which translates into: everyone already has a preconceived notion of what a hotel is and what it means to her or him. The following examples will support some convictions, but often they will challenge our understanding of what the hotel can mean for society and culture. Hotel experience is a powerful, inspiring, sometimes life-changing phenomenon. It has played an important role in New York's development for more than two hundred years. By examining hotel experience, we will learn more about America's leading city and understand better the complex mechanism and structures which made New York what it is today and which will shape it in the future.