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CITY AS HOTEL

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* Anna Puigjaner’s essay “The City as a Hotel,” published in the catalogue for the Together! Exhibition, makes a case for kitchenless apartments as instigators for collectivity.
* These apartments, which proliferated in New York at the turn of the century because they fell outside the bracket of housing subject to the Tenement House Law of 1901 (they were technically equated to hotels), eliminated domestic drudgery for the individual dweller by creating collective domestic services, more commonly associated with hotels. Thus, “some elements normally found within the home” were “moved… into the public sphere” (65).
* Collective kitchens, dining rooms, centralized vacuuming systems, nurseries, and shared maids were some of the services that were exported from the private home into the larger, public collective of the building. This new typology “reduced the cost of living significantly but also modified the role of women in the home,” and framed domesticity “in a much broader urban vision” (65).
* The Ansonia was an apartment hotel in New York owned and developed by W.E.D. Stokes. Stokes had a vision for creating “ an exemplary residential building with…collective household services and extraordinary facilities for the comfort of its residents” (65). From summer cooling via cold-water pipes along the façade, to integrated communication via pneumatic tubes that connected all apartments through which messages and small objects could be sent, to even a small farm on the roof to augment The Ansonia’s self sufficiency and provided fresh milk and eggs delivered via butler to each apartment, Stokes created an experiment in living together in comfort – a version of collective luxury.
* The apartment layout was flexible in order to accommodate changing needs and fluctuating family size of residents. Many types of apartments were available, from one bedrooms with or without a bathroom to apartments of up to fourteen rooms with several bathrooms and with or without a kitchen. Out of the 340 apartments, only 140 had kitchens and dining rooms (66).
* Because of the flexible layout, vacant rooms could be rented out at hotel rooms, ensuring profitability of the overall investment (67). Also, some apartments could be extended through adjoining rooms.
* The loophole of the apartment as hotel, while both a higher-yield investment for developers and a more affordable way of living for a broader range of people, such as single working women, could only exist if regulated by the more lax building code for hotels. The 1929 Multiple Dwelling Law put an end to the apartment hotel by directly targeting the kitchenless typology, stipulating height, occupancy, and size that eliminated the privileges previously enjoyed by the apartment hotel and caused it to longer be a profitable investment (71).
* Another visionary experiment that relied on the kitchenless typology was Topolobampo. Promoted by Albert K. Owen, who followed Fourier’s utopian principals in designing a city of apartment hotels and cooperative domestic buildings, “believed that the city should be planned as a unitary grand hotel, where streets were halls and houses were rooms, everything planned, connected, and well served” (67).
* The city was designed as an orthogonal grid with three types of streets and three types of buildings (avenues, streets and alleys; residential hotels, terraced houses, detached houses), each typology with its own domestic service and a communal dining room on every corner (68).
* Innovation in transport was the main collectivizing principal, with electric cars planned to deliver food and goods all over the city at any hour. Electric and pneumatic systems “allowed cities to be imagined in which the whole urban fabric was organized and formalized based on the transport of cooked food, bags of laundry, goods, and other collective domestic supplies (69).

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Anna Puigjaner, The City as a Hotel,” Together! Exhibition Catalogue, Vitra Design Museum and Ruby Press, Weil am Rhein (2017).