Geographies of hospitality

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I want to begin this chapter by considering three ‘moments’ of hospitality (Bell, 2007b). The first is the great annual migration of the festive holiday season, and the experiences of hosting and guesting that come with visiting friends and relatives, to use a tourism industry term. Families coming together in seasonal cheer or stress (or both), people finding ways to be together that are often partly ritualised, partly improvised: I think of my own recent experience of being first a guest in a familiar (in both senses of the word) place, gradually re-finding my sense of at-home-ness there, and, in turn, acting as a host when other guests arrive. I think of the importance placed on rituals of eating and drinking together, of being together and being togetherness. Of course, commercial hospitality spaces have important roles to play, too – the bars and hotels, restaurants and bed and breakfast places stage their own versions of togetherness at this time of year – but many of us make up togetherness in our own informal ways. I called this time of year ‘the great annual migration’ partly as a joke, but also to remember that so many of us are travelling to reconnect with family and friends; the traffic on the UK’s motorways a couple of days either side of Christmas Day are a vivid display of the mass-ness of this movement, cars packed with people and gifts, all coalescing and congregating in venues – most often in homes – for a moment of hospitality, of welcomes (and gifts) given and received, of food and drink shared, of nights spent under familiar roofs. Michael Herzfeld comments that, ‘hospitality seems to render the gift in spatial terms’ (2012: 212), and this festive coming-together seems emblematic of this assertion.

My second ‘moment’ of hospitality is very particular to this time/date (late December 2015) and place (Yorkshire, England), and concerns a current major UK news story about flooding.
The drive back home was made both more urgent and more anxious by the developing story of floods around Leeds and York, and the coverage in the media reminds us of both the importance of home (and the devastation of being rendered homeless) and the ordinary (and extraordinary) acts of kindness that unfold when incidents like this take place. We see images of people helping out, mucking in, offering support, providing food and shelter. And we see the formal and informal work of repair – both infrastructural repair and ‘social repair’ (Hall and Smith, 2015; Thrift, 2005) as communities rally and respond. While such stories of community resilience risk becoming a cliché, another instance of localism and voluntarism evoking the ‘human spirit’, there is something in these moments of kindness that speaks of the ‘good city’ (Amin, 2006) and of hospitality as a practice of this ‘goodness’, this generosity. In one news item I half-heard yesterday, attention turned to the question of having to stay away from one’s own home, not just for days, but potentially for months, maybe even years. People in flood-warned areas were urged to look for alternative accommodation should they need to evacuate their homes. Staying in hotels was discussed as some sort of emergency remedy, but as a very poor substitute for being at home (we will check back in to the hotel later in this chapter).

Of course, the experiences of those in flood hit areas being forced from their homes and losing their possessions – at least until the loss adjustors ship in – brings to mind one of the consistently biggest news stories of 2015, the plight of millions of displaced people crossing vast distances in the hope of a welcome, in what journalists and pundits here like to shorthand as ‘the migrant crisis’ and/or ‘the refugee crisis’. This is my third and most ambivalent, troubled and troubling moment of hospitality. The scale of loss of life and untold misery for migrants and refugees often shown very provisional and contingent welcomes – or, perhaps, unwelcomes – reveals the politics of hospitality in its most global and most human form. As politicians in the European Union argue over quotas and policies (and while some swiftly erect fences and walls or pass new laws), large numbers of people continue to attempt perilous journeys, fleeing war zones and escaping persecution in the hope of a hospitable arrival elsewhere. The great philosopher of hospitality Jacques Derrida is of course well known for this work exploring this precise question, and his discussion of the tension between unconditional and conditional hospitality seems more prescient than ever (Derrida, 2001; Still, 2010).

The Archbishop of Canterbury, leader of the Church of England, used the theme of hospitality repeatedly in his New Year speech, urging the UK to show a true welcome to these new arrivals that have risked so much. We wait to see if 2016 can bring better news of the plight of all the people caught up in this catastrophe. Like my other two moments of hospitality, this situation is of course intensely geographical; it concerns the sites and scales of hospitality. Geographers have, in fact, been at the forefront of exploring (both empirically and theoretically) many different spaces of hospitality, and in the next section of this chapter I provide a brief, non-comprehensive overview of some of these lines of enquiry, before focusing on three particular instances of hospitable space: the hotel, the ‘hospitel’ and spaces of commensality. I round off the chapter with a reiteration of the main points.

**Spaces and scales of hospitality**

Here I want to offer a provisional, somewhat fragmentary, ‘archive’ of ‘geographical’ work on hospitality, which has only quite recently become programmatic – in line with the so-called ‘critical turn’ in hospitality studies. My route through this archive is subjective, personal, reflecting my own route into hospitality studies as much as anything. So it begins with historical geography, which – like history – has long held an interest in the development and distribution of spaces of commercial hospitality, from inns to coffee houses, hotels to fast food.
joints (e.g. Schivelbusch, 1993). Of course, these spaces also created new ways of relating, from the coffee house as a place for political debate (Laurier and Philo, 2007) to the fast food outlet as a site for ‘prosumption’ (Ritzer, this volume). But as all good geographers know, space isn’t simply the maker of behaviours, it is also made by them: space is produced by our actions in it, even as our actions are shaped by the spaces we inhabit. Geographical work on spaces of hospitality has been increasingly attuned to this two-way interaction, building increasingly sophisticated analysis of, among other things, sitting alone in a café or serving behind a bar. David Seamon’s humanistic geography (1979) drew our attention to the former, in an account of a man who frequents the same café every day, and partakes in the same daily rituals – arrives at the same time, drinks the same drink, reads the same newspaper and sits in the same solitude.

Seamon’s delightful description of the ‘place ballet’ – that part scripted, part improvised, largely unspoken dance we all do around each other as we go about our daily lives – seems to speak volumes about the informal and often fleeting moments of hospitality that take place and make place intersubjectively (a theme also explored by those with symbolic interactionism and/or ethnomethodological persuasions – see below). Of course, not all bars and cafés are the same, in terms of who goes there and what takes place. Cultural geographer Barbara Weightman (1980) deserves special mention here for her pioneering work on gay bars in the USA, especially for her close reading of both exteriors and interiors of such spaces when they were marginal, illegal and precarious. Her great discussion of gay bars as (paradoxically) private spaces echoes that well-known phrase from historian George Chauncey (1996) – ‘privacy could only be had in public’. Weightman’s work was an important contribution to a body of research on ‘gay space’ which should be seen as making insightful contributions to our understandings of the practices and meanings of commercial hospitality in relation to questions of identity and power – a strand of work that continues to develop important new insights (Lugosi, 2007).

With the onset of postmodernism in human geography, new perspectives on space and place emerged, and iconic among these in terms of hospitality was Fredric Jameson’s at once bewitched, bothered and bewildered encounter with the atrium of the Bonaventure hotel in LA (1984) (of which, more later). While postmodernism did much to revivify the discipline, or at least wrong-foot it, subsequent ‘returns’ to hospitality – which have begun to combine into a more coherent research agenda – did not particularly follow Jameson’s lead into the vertiginous sublime. Instead, parallel strands of work on eating and drinking places (and some on spaces of accommodation) provided detailed examinations of both commercial and informal/social hospitality as a socio-spatial practice. Here, a few way markers will suffice to point interested travellers to productive stepping-off points: work on geographies of drinking and socialising, such as bars, cafés and clubs (Malbon, 2002; Chatterton and Hollands, 2003; Laurier and Philo, 2006a, 2006b; Lugosi, 2007, 2008), on restaurants and other eating places (Crang, 1994; Bell and Valentine, 1997; Bell and Binnie, 2005), and on hotels and other rest-stops (see below). Importantly, this work included studies of the production of hospitality as well as its consumption, shedding light on employment practices and working conditions (e.g. Tufts, 2006). So, for at least a decade, we can trace a consolidating research agenda bringing together the ‘critical’ work in hospitality studies with what we might see as the post-postmodern concerns of ‘critical’ human geography.

Attentive readers will have noticed that this section is headed ‘spaces and scales’, and will perhaps be wondering when that second term will come into play. Spatial scale is an enduring if sometimes vexed concept in geography (Herod, 2010), loved and loathed in equal measure. I have always found it useful, at least practically, and have deployed it to organise my thoughts on, among other things, the geographies of food consumption, beginning at the scale of the body (Bell and Valentine, 1997). Judith Still makes a fleeting mention of the same scalar thinking, writing that ‘the body is the first sphere of hospitality’ (2010: 22), and there has emerged a
rich seam of work looking at the bodily acts of hospitality, the tiny gestures and one-off encounters, the flickering moments of hosting, guesting and host-guesting (Laurier and Philo, 2006a, 2006b; Bell, 2007b). This work is often attentive to the micro-geographies, the ‘cold shoulders and napkins handed’ referred to in the title of a particularly good example of this genre (Laurier and Philo, 2006a). Drawing on the legacy of work in symbolic interactionism and/or ethnomethodology, it has provided valuable insights into both commercial hospitality spaces and informal, sometimes momentary, comings-together, welcomes extended, invitations accepted (or not). Its focus is on the business and busy-ness of everyday life, but it prefers to see this not as alienated or anomic but as full of nourishing interactions, even if these are almost unnoticed most of the time, and even when it turns attention towards the ‘hazards’ as well as the pleasures of sociability (on scales of hospitality, see also Candea and da Col, 2012). This research is also concerned to detail the work of conviviality – work carried out by all players, by consumers as well as those paid to provide service (Laurier and Philo, 2006a, 2006b; Bell, 2012).

Other studies have productively focused on a single site or venue, like Seamon’s man in the café: exploring the experiences of working in a bar or restaurant (Crang, 1994; Lugosi, 2007) or being a customer in a coffee bar (Laurier et al., 2001). Still, others have looked at the neighbourhood scale, investigating convivial spaces both formal and informal that together constitute the ‘feel’ of a place as people come together to produce and consume hospitality there (Latham, 2003; Koch and Latham, 2013). Pull back the focus further, and we see work looking at the city scale, both that which takes ‘the city’ as an archetype and that which explores particular cities and their configurations of hospitality and hospitableness (Thrift, 2005; Amin, 2006; Bell, 2007a; Broek Chavez and van der Rest, 2014; Hubbard and Wilkinson, 2015). Here, as with the following discussion, we begin to see a clear imprint of the turn towards continental philosophy in critical hospitality studies, and especially of Derrida’s work on this topic, for example in his discussion of the ‘city of refuge’ (Derrida, 2001). Derrida’s deconstructive approach to unpicking the hostility latent in hospitality, and to underscoring the power, even violence, playing across the threshold when host meets guest, has been especially important for understanding what he himself labelled the ‘foreigner question’, not least in the French context (with which he was particularly familiar; see Still, 2010).

Work tracing similar lines has here focused on ‘French hospitality’ and ‘postcolonial hospitality’, and has sought to shed critical light on the conditional and provisional extent of the welcome extended to the ‘stranger’ (Jelloun and Bray, 1999; Rosello, 2001; Gibson, 2003). Geographers including Clive Barnett (2005) and Mustafa Dikeç (2002) have written eloquently on this problématique, exploring ways of relating to ‘otherness’ and the often tense and fractured spaces of hospitality in the postcolonial context (Dikeç et al. 2009). National scale discussions of hospitality, therefore, return us to the issues of migration and movement, whether forced or voluntary. Who can move freely, and who is welcomed when they arrive? Of course, Derrida’s critique is grounded at least in part in Kant’s discussion of universal hospitality; unconditional and unquestioning, the absolute openness to welcome the other with no thought of reciprocity or obligation. At a global scale, then, we can similarly theorise (as well as empirically witnessing or experiencing) the politics of the welcome, the flows of people that cross the globe in ever-changing ‘ethnoscapes’ (Appadurai, 1990), pushed and pulled by forces of global geopolitics and economics. Of course, the ‘ideal’ of universal hospitality stands in stark contrast to the actually experienced relations of (in)hospitalableness that are the outworking of these global processes.

Having provided a provisional route map of some of the lines of enquiry concerned with geographies of hospitality, in the remainder of this chapter I have chosen to focus on three different cases that bring to light somewhat different configurations of hospitable sites and scales (though there are connecting threads, as I hope will become clear).
Hotels, or the comfort of strangers

A hotel is for staying in. But it is a kind of staying that includes its opposite: leaving.

(Walsh, 2015: 69)

While arguably less extensively and intensively studied by geographers than spaces of eating and drinking (and less too than informal sites of hospitality), hotels provide interesting windows into the business, pleasure and fraught nature of hospitality. As Joanna Walsh notes, they invite a particular type of staying – temporary, always prefigured by leaving, by checking out. They also, she adds, provide an escape from ordinary life – though also an escape that is temporary: ‘A hotel’s secret is that it’s only a seeming mini-break from the rights and wrongs of home. A hotel is an occasion for unheimlich longing’ (Walsh, 2015: 14). In her short book Hotel, Walsh combines aphorisms, dreams, postcards and fictional encounters (with Sigmund Freud, Groucho Marx and others); the book is also a meditation of her collapsing marriage and an account of her job as a hotel review blogger. In its own way, it adds to the body of work ‘decoding’ hotel space – trying to understand the work of being in a hotel, as a guest or as a host. While Walsh asserts that ‘I can’t think in a hotel’ (2015: 72), she in fact gives her readers a lot to think with, capturing something of that unheimlich experience of a temporary escape from home life. She breaks the hotel down into its constituent parts – rooms, corridors, pools, bars, restaurants and lobbies. Like Jameson, and, before him, Siegfried Krakauer and many others, she is drawn to the hotel lobby as a perplexing, paradoxical space: ‘Nowhere is more lonely … I’m only one of many. It never feels right, that’s the lobby problem’ (Walsh, 2015: 74).

And so it is in the lobby that we will begin our brief encounter with hotel space. Before Jameson had diagnosed the Bonaventure Hotel’s lobby as a postmodern ‘mutation in built space itself’ (1984: 80) – and we’ll join him there presently – the hotel lobby had been figured as ‘emblematic of certain aspects of modernity: broadly speaking, its routine yet kaleidoscopic, assembling and disassembling character’ (Tallack, 2002: 141; my emphasis). As Douglas Tallack explores through fiction, philosophy, art and film, the lobby is a site of fleeting drama, of ‘meetings, collisions, gazes and glances’, making it at once ‘comic and disturbing’ (2002: 141). What Walsh names as the ‘lobby problem’ Tallack also detects – an uncanny mix of the homely and the unhomely – and he describes the lobby as a strange stage set on which the ritual of arriving and checking in is played out, as well as a lot of waiting. Drawing in part on Kracauer’s essay (1999 [1925]; see also Katz 1999), Tallack writes the modern hotel lobby as a space to wait and watch – and to be watched (hence its frequent appearance in detective novels and movies). Building from this observation, Tallack concludes that:

The hotel lobby is a place to meet others but also to avoid the look of others; a place of seeing and being seen – but also of reserve and, as such, lounging in a lobby qualifies as a paradigmatic urban experience.

(2002: 146)

And so it is perhaps understandable that Fredric Jameson, hunting for clues to postmodernism, might gravitate to a hotel lobby, if not to lounge then to gaze in awe at this particular hotel, imagined as he writes as ‘a total space, a complete world, a kind of miniature city’ (1984: 81). Famously, he finds in the lobby (or atrium as such spaces have now been routinely redefined and redesigned) ‘a new collective practice, a new mode in which individuals move and congregate [as a] hyper-crowd’ (Jameson, 1984: 81). Crucially, Jameson writes that the Bonaventure offers a kind of simulacrum of the city, a substitute or replacement for the LA that surrounds it. But it
is the space itself that most fascinates and disturbs Jameson, from its mirror-glass exterior to its preponderance of escalators and elevators that seem to keep everyone in perpetual motion, and which seem to induce in Jameson a kind of motion sickness – stepping off, he finds himself at a loss to describe his arrival into the atrium, unable to discern its volume, all at sea in its ‘milling confusion’ (1984: 83). It is, in short, an experience of the postmodern sublime. Its architect, John Portman, declared that he ‘wanted to explode the hotel’ (quoted in McNeill, 2008: 384), and he certainly blew the mind of the postmodern adventurer.

Donald McNeill (2008) has provided a useful summary of writing on hotels that seeks to think of them in the context of the cities they inhabit, or perhaps seek to replace. His paper sketches one agenda for a geographical analysis of hotel space (we’ll turn to a second agenda later) – seeing (urban) hotels as embodying twentieth- and twenty-first-century urbanism, whether used as motors for urban renewal, reflecting (or creating) consumer tastes, providing key nodes in new forms of mobility and ‘circulation’, or revealing some of the class and occupational hierarchies that underpin city life. The hotel is a kind of condensation or concentration of the city, a sign or symptom of broader urban restructuring and of the preoccupations of city planners, livers and dreamers. (Of course, we should be mindful of over-privileging ‘the hotel’ as this ur-space of modern/postmodern urbanism, and give some attention to other sites of rest, such as B&Bs and motels – the latter are perfectly described by Sarah Treadwell as ‘filled with cheap deals, sour regrets, and nights of pleasure’ (2005: 215).)

Tallack’s discussion of seeing and being seen in hotel lobbies reminds us that hotels are, to borrow a phrase from Michael Herzfeld, spaces of ‘conspicuous hospitality’ (2012: 215) – precisely, places to see and be seen. While Tallack is concerned with the ‘ordinary hotel guest’, someone whose visibility is only a matter for themselves perhaps (it depends who they are sharing their room with), other guests (and hosts) are rendered more visible by the purpose of their stay. While McNeill (2008) notes that hotels are key sites where the business of cities takes place, a second research agenda is moving beyond this kind of ‘business’ to consider hotels as staging grounds for global geopolitics – a different kind of business. Sara Fregonese and Adam Ramadan (2015) have outlined this research agenda, and their review sits nicely alongside McNeill’s to guide us through our thinking about hotels. Hotels, they write, are important geopolitical spaces, sites where the business of politics is performed (watching coverage of the recent Paris climate change talks after having read Fregonese and Ramadan’s paper, I found myself endlessly wondering what was going on there in hotel bars, conference suites, bedrooms). ‘Hotel geopolitics: a research agenda’ provides an initial typology of the political uses of hotels, as sites of soft power, as soft targets for attack, as strategic infrastructure during conflict, as the space war reporters gather, and as sites for peace-making. Well-known hotel chains, from Hilton to Holiday Inn, are here redescribed as key sites in power plays and power struggles, in the brokering of peace or the theatre of war. As they conclude:

Hotels are far more than simply detached spaces of depoliticised leisure and tourism, of corporate hospitality mediated by financial exchange. They are also geopolitical spaces, embedded within broader relations of conflict and peacemaking.

(Fregonese and Ramadan, 2015: 809; emphasis in original)

Such hotels are also, as Ruth Craggs writes, ‘spaces for performing political identities’ (2012: 215) – spaces for the enactment of practices of hospitality, of staging welcomes and concocting convivial occasions (see also Craggs, 2014). International relations, Craggs reminds us, needs spaces for those relations to be performed, and the hotel has often been chosen as the ideal site for such hosting and guesting.
What emerges across this brief survey of hotel geographies is a clear reminder that spaces sometimes written off as only commercial and therefore instrumental and conditional – as far from ‘pure hospitality’ as it is possible to imagine – are actually filled up with countless other ways of relating (Bell, 2007a; Craggs, 2014). From the micropolitics of lounging in the lobby, looking and being looked at (or feeling lost and overawed), to the global geopolitics of diplomatic encounters in hotel spaces, and from the chance meetings among strangers in hotel bars to the planned and stage-managed encounters of world leaders sharing breakfast, hotels emerge as ‘a tangle of ethical, (geo)political, commercial, and instrumental concerns’ (Craggs, 2014: 98) that, in some sense, exceeds each of these different configurations of hospitality. We stay with hotels of a sort in my next discussion, though with a very particular form of hotel-space, in which very particular forms of hospitality are experienced.

Hospitality: spaces of care in medical tourism

In this section, drawing on a recent research project, I want to focus in on a particular emerging form of hybrid hospitable space in the context of medical tourism. For our purposes today, medical tourism can be defined as travel abroad for the purposes of accessing healthcare, and there are a number of different reasons why people are increasingly choosing to undertake these journeys, including cost, availability and quality of care (Connell, 2011). Medical tourism takes place across a whole range of different spaces, and is assembled when various complex flows interact (Holliday et al., 2015), but here I want to turn attention to an iconic space of medical tourism – and also one that attracts quite a lot of critical commentary – the ‘hospitel’, or hotel-hospital hybrid. Sociologist Anthony Elliott sketches what he sees as the defining character of these spaces in his book *Making the Cut*: they are, he writes, forms of non-place – ‘placeless, indistinguishable, indistinct. Like shopping malls and airports’, he continues, ‘private medical facilities and clinics are increasingly indistinguishable; they are, in effect, designed as “recuperative comfort zones” which provide a “sense of “global privatized enclosure” in which the cocooned patient rarely interacts in any sustained way with other patients or staff’, making medical tourism ‘a kind of solitary ordeal’ (2008: 104–105). Now, he might just have had bad experiences, but our own work (and that of others I’ll refer to here) counters this construction of the solitary ordeal of the enclaved patient in a kind of medicalised non-place. Hospitels can in fact be intensely placeful, and intensely hospitable.

To be sure, as Audrey Bochaton and Bertrand Lefebvre (2009) note, there are significant changes in medical (and tourism) architecture, design and organisation condensed into the hospitel, crafting ‘new places of care’ or therapeutic landscapes. And if you only looked at the brochures and websites of places like Bumrungrad International Hospital in Bangkok – usually held up as the most iconic of these spaces, the Bonaventure of medical tourism – you might think that their plush interiors, non-specific ‘international’ hotel stylings and generically luxurious comforts do seem somewhat placeless. But more close attention to these spaces reveals a more complex picture. Such spaces are moreover, as Bochaton and Lefebvre put it, ‘a paradoxical balance of medical, consumerist, and leisure space’ (2009: 106).

First, and most simply, the extent of ‘cocooning’ that is experienced – and desired – is not quite as uniform as critics like Elliott suggest. One only has to step outside Bumrungrad to confront a more ordinary and distinctive ‘Thai-ness’, and certainly some medical tourists want to do this. Even for those who don’t, the ‘hermetically sealed’ space of the hospitel is not the only place they experience: most will travel on ordinary flights alongside ordinary holidaymakers, business travellers and others; they will disembark, negotiate the airport and travel the city streets – even if in hybrid limo-ambulances. And many of the medical tourists want to experience
the placefulness of the places they are staying in, not to be cocooned. Often, of course, this is part of the offer of medical tourism: ‘surgery and safari’. In their ethnographic work on Thai hospitels, Andrea Whittaker and Chee Heng Leng (2015) highlight the multiple experiences of medical tourists in and around hospitels. While much of their discussion centres on cross-cultural tensions between staff and patients, and between patients and patients, they also comment on the ‘incompleteness’ of the attempt to produce a pure, seamless hybrid of hotel and hospital. Here they summarise the tensions in attempting to accomplish this assemblage:

the first part of the hybrid, that of a hotel, combines luxurious surroundings with convenient food and leisure activities. Single rooms and suites, all-day and overnight visiting … add to the sense of private space and hotel privilege. The second part, that of the hospital, is a space in large part determined by biomedical discourse and practices on the nature of health and disease, characterized by clinical spaces, liminal time, a lack of privacy for patients, technoscience and therapy.

(Whittaker and Chee, 2015: 292)

This results, they conclude, in an uneasy and imperfect balancing act – a great example is the plush ‘hotel’ interiors, which British medical tourists we spoke to felt might be less hygienic than the sterile surfaces of a UK hospital. The lack of hand sanitising stations also caused concern, although the visible presence of cleaning staff was felt to be reassuring. Clearly, at different moments of their experience, medical tourists want to experience hotel-ness and hospital-ness in different proportions. Upon arrival, the hotel part of the hybrid eases nerves and connotes holiday luxury, but afterwards, perhaps, it’s more important to feel like you’re in a medical facility. But travel companions might complicate this, wanting a different type of experience during their stay, not wanting to while away their precious holidays in a clinical hospital.

Whittaker and Chee also note the uneasy balance of ‘international-ness’ and Thai-ness in the spaces they studied: Thai-ness was selectively desired and experienced, just as it was selectively constructed and offered. It was, for example, embodied in an assumed ‘naturally caring’ disposition of staff – used in marketing as a major part of the distinctive offer for medical tourism. But even this was experienced and responded to variably by medical tourists, with some critiquing the ‘old fashioned’ hierarchical staffing structure, and not everyone simply expecting and enjoying the ‘subservient’ care imagined as ‘naturally Thai’.

Of course, the hospitality provided by hospitels is not the sum experience of care received by medical tourists. In our research, we found echoes of the discussions of informal hospitality-work undertaken by guests in commercial spaces (Lugosi, 2007): recuperating patients would support new arrivals, and constant use of social media between patients ensured that care was distributed among these communities of medical tourists (Jones et al., 2014). At times, too, this spilled over into performing care-work for others, and we encountered striking moments of conviviality and care not just among medical tourists, but between them and other patients with whom they sometimes shared hospital spaces (Holliday et al., 2015). Care is also undertaken by countless other intermediaries involved in medical tourism, from drivers to translators, travel companions and even, sometimes, by researchers (McDonald, 2011). And there are many moments of hospitality throughout the entire medical tourism journey, some of which we as researchers shared with participants, such as eating together in unfamiliar locations during recuperation. While to date there has been little interaction between work on medical tourism and that on hospitality, this initial exploration of the hospitel might suggest fruitful lines of enquiry to pursue in future work. To round off my discussion of geographies of hospitality, I am now departing the spaces of medical tourism, and turning to the shared dining table in other settings.
Commensality – the act of eating together at a shared table – has long been of interest to archaeologists, anthropologists and sociologists keen to trace those varied consequences and diverse activities that Hirschman hints at here, and keen to unpack the practices and meanings of eating together beyond the immediate household (Kerner et al., 2015). In the kind of diplomatic occasions that manifest ‘hotel geopolitics’, the state banquet or ‘informal’ breakfast meeting testifies to the power of sharing a meal table in terms of performing hospitality and lubricating politics (Craggs, 2014). Summarising the anthropological reading of ‘hopeful commensality’, Matei Candea and Giovanni da Col write that it ‘secures the maintenance of kinship and trade relations, and reinforces networks of mutual assistance; it increase intimacy, reinforces hierarchical differences, frames class distinctions, helps to establish leadership, or serves as a pacifying device’ (2012: 9) – it also, they remind us, *materialises* hospitality, and through the sharing of food the person ‘is extended and dispersed’ throughout the hospitable occasion (2012: 19). This interest in eating together is not confined to intellectual projects: there is something of a resurgence of enthusiasm for using food and eating as stimulants for social interaction and inclusion – a vivid UK example being the Big Lunch project launched in 2009 and establishing itself as a new tradition for neighbourhoods up and down the country.3

However, my attention here is more specific, narrower: I am interested in artists using commensality as a form of artwork itself, in the staging of the sharing of food as a relational art practice. More than simply ‘art about food’, this kind of art-eating reframes some of the anthropological interest in commensality, using shared food ‘as a Trojan horse in order to address related or even tangential topics’ (Denfeld et al., 2014: 10), raising questions about what and how we eat, how to share each other’s company, and through the often performative dimensions of the staged shared meal, drawing our attention to the everyday business and busyness of cooking, eating, talking. Recent years have seen increasing interest among artists in debates about hospitality (Tallant and Domel, 2012), as well as new forms of ‘post-studio’ and ‘engaged’ artistic practice that seeks to move beyond the confines of the ‘traditional’ artwork and artworld, often blurring the boundaries between art and activism. In this brief discussion, I will largely base my thoughts around two examples, though many more are collected in books such as *Feast: Radical Hospitality in Contemporary Art* (Smith, 2013) or *Experimental Eating* (Howells and Hayman, 2014), where among many instances we find a number that chime with the earlier discussion of hospitality and geopolitics (albeit in a different register), including The American Reputation Aid Society (a mobile kitchen dispensing archetypal American food to aid in mutual understanding), Enemy Kitchen (cooking and eating Baghdadi cuisine shared with military veterans) and Conflict Kitchen (serving different national cuisines from countries in conflict with the US, for example North Korea, Cuba, Afghanistan). These projects share an interest in grounding geopolitics in the mundane act of eating together, sharing food and stories, finding common ground.

My first example of an experiment in shared cooking and eating comes from the SoHo district of New York city, and dates from the 1970s: Gordon Matta-Clark’s *FOOD*, an artist-run restaurant that at once built on Matta-Clark’s ongoing experiments with urban space and architecture, responded to a real need for a cheap place to eat in a neighbourhood-in-transition colonised by artists and others in the wake of deindustrialisation (and a source of employment...
for some who lived there), and came to serve as a stage for the performance of cooking and eating as works of art (for accounts, see Waxman, 2008; Hoare, 2013). Spawned of a growing DIY arts scene, FOOD was set up in 1971 by Matta-Clark and fellow artist Carol Gooden, and can be aligned with similar experiments in both relational aesthetics and communal gastronomy (Waxman 2008). FOOD pioneered having chefs on display (now a restaurant staple) and hosted many guest chef-artists (such as Robert Rauschenberg and Donald Judd) who staged themed feasts and cooked elaborate meals that married food with art and politics (including the politics of food). Every aspect of the food preparation process was performed, on display – including the washing of the dishes. While the looseness of the owners’ grasp on the business of running a commercial restaurant meant that FOOD struggled to survive (at least until it later turned into a more conventional eatery), the point of FOOD was to try to posit an alternative to the usual way of producing and consuming food (and art). A film made by Matta-Clark, A Day in the Life of FOOD, captures something of the ethos and aesthetic of the venue in its early 1970s heyday, and a facsimile of the restaurant was staged at the Frieze New York art show in 2013.

FOOD’s legacy can certainly be traced in many of the subsequent experiments in the art of eating together, including those staged by Lucy and Jorge Orta, who have used shared meals in a number of their art projects, including All in One Basket (using food waste from Les Halles market in Paris to make jams and pickles) and the massed sit-down dinners of their 70 x 7 The Meal series, described as follows:

70 x 7 … is a pretext for multiple encounters of seven guests, invited to dine in surprising installations, complete with a set of limited edition Limoges porcelain, and a ‘endless’ tablecloth. Lucy and Jorge Orta have transformed the ancestral ritual of the meal into a series of dynamic encounters, bringing people from different horizons together, to meet, to discuss and debate … Each meal, in the form of an act, proposes a new educational, social, and environmental debate, and a pretext for new encounters for multiples of seven guests.

(Orta and Orta, 2006: 28–29)

In the book Collective Space (2006) Orta and Orta propose a new iteration of the 70 x 7 The Meal series, an immense feast (with at least 5,000 guests) spilling out of the gallery space of Tate Modern in London, across the Millennium Bridge, and onwards into the city streets. This variant of the meal is designed, they write, as ‘a way to reclaim and reinforce the idea of belonging to the city’ and to ‘provoke a reflection on the loss of public space, and re-build a sense of civic pride, and sow seeds for future change’ (Orta and Orta, 2006: 30). Although these outcomes are only hinted at, and the event itself remains speculative and unrealised, we can see a clear connection between FOOD and 70 x 7 The Meal, as both bring people together in an artist-made environment (one a restaurant, the other an outdoor banquet) in order to share food but also to build something in common between the guests, a shared experience and a chance to reflect on themes and issues suggested by the setting and the food. In Orta and Orta’s work, this is carried through to the design not only of the food, but also of the plates and tablecloths, all of which are united in their role as ‘relational objects’. That’s the watchword of this work, in fact: relational. Sitting down together to eat and talk produces new ways of relating (Lupton, 2011).

Conclusions

In this brief chapter I have sketched some lines of enquiry centred around geographies of hospitality. A selective itinerary through past work, largely by geographers, gave us some waymarkers for considering the sites and scales of hospitality, in both its commercial and social formations.
I then chose to pursue three quite distinctive lines: to think about hotels, mainly in terms of
their relationship to the city and as stages for geopolitics and international relations; to then
explore a particular and relatively new commingling of hotel-space with hospital-space, by
discussing the ‘hospitel’ as experienced by medical tourists, a growing population that encoun-
ters hospitality in very interesting ways; and, lastly, to consider artists who use food and eating
together in art projects, with a focus on the work of Gordon Matta-Clark and Lucy and Jorge
Orta. While these might seem like a somewhat disparate selection, my aim has not been to offer
a comprehensive assessment or programmatic agenda for researching geographies of hospitality,
but instead to shed light on some interesting case studies that, each in their own different way,
contribute to the broader ongoing project of critical hospitality studies.

Notes
1 I use the term ‘geographical’ quite loosely here, so my discussion includes ‘honorary geographers’ as well
as those formally trained in or employed by geography departments.
2 Material for this section of the chapter is based on the ESRC research project ‘Sun, Sea, Sand and
Silicone: Mapping Cosmetic Surgery Tourism’ (RES-062-23-2796). Further information on the proj-
et, and links to other outputs, can be found at www.ssss.leeds.ac.uk. Some of the ideas in this section
were presented in a talk for the seminar series ‘Exploring Hospitality in the Modern World’ at the
University of Nottingham in January 2015. Thanks to Mike Heffernan for inviting me, to all those who
attended and shared stories, and to Mike and to Zoe Trodd and Graham Thompson for their hospitality.
3 For details, see www.thebiglunch.com.

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