Go Green: Hotels, Design, and the Sustainability Paradox

David Brody

Introduction

In his now-famous article on the sociology of “things,” titled “Mixing Humans and Nonhumans Together: The Sociology of a Door-Closer,” Bruno Latour briefly, and somewhat humorously, turns to the world of hotels as an anomaly when it comes to disciplining bodies to perform labor. Latour, writing as the pseudonymous Jim Johnson, notes that getting people to do menial tasks is not easy. Indeed, “two hundred years of capitalism has not completely solved” how to get people “to reliably fulfill a boring and underpaid duty.” To problematize this labor dynamic, Latour mentions the complications of race and how the history of inequitable economic accessibility continues to taint our perceptions of labor and fair wages. In other words, people and physical work make life knotty. But hotels, according to Latour, seem to have solved this dilemma; they have disentangled the skein. At the end of his discussion about getting a “groom” to act as a doorman, he claims: “Disciplining a groom is an enormous and costly task that only Hilton Hotels can tackle, and that for other reasons that have nothing to do with keeping the door properly closed.” This is the only mention that Latour makes of hotels in his article, but this raises questions: What are hotels doing that others have not mastered? Why is work, and getting people to accomplish work, so difficult?

Latour broaches some possible answers when he claims that nonhuman agents—those designed objects—affect human interactions. Latour asks that sociologists—and, in fact, anyone studying people—take the inanimate world of things seriously. Using the example of the door—that most common of designed objects that gives meaning to our lives through spatial definition and control—Latour claims that we now “have this relatively new choice: either to discipline the people or to substitute for the unreliable humans a delegated nonhuman character whose only function is to open and close the door.” So, how do Hilton and other hotels circumvent this dynamic and “tackle” the social complexities of disciplining the “live” door groom with such aplomb? We can take Latour’s argument to its logical extension and find an

2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., 301.

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answer to this question in the writing of Langdon Winner, whom Latour mentions in his essay. For Winner, the world of technology offers “ways of building order in our world.” Societies make deliberate choices in creating, implementing, and using these technologies; and these choices lead to a scenario in which “different people are situated differently and possess unequal degrees of power, as well as unequal levels of awareness.”

In short, design is an inherently political process that might mask itself in a container of democratization but that, in fact, helps solidify distinctions and hierarchies that “divide” society. It is our responsibility—Winner claims—to pay “careful attention” to these systems, things, and relationships we advance in our designed world. Like Latour, Winner wants us to understand that we may fetishize the innocent nature of technology, but this ideological stance—this dream of the apolitical—is false. This facade of design’s apolitical nature needs to be questioned. Indeed, getting objects to accomplish tasks is often easy, but we need to be more critical of design’s relationship to us.

Returning to Latour’s doorman at the hotel, we can unpack some of these concerns. Let’s assume that the hotel doorman just got word that the hotel he works for has started a new green initiative. A few specifics about the program have been released in the form of a well-crafted public relations statement. Moving forward, guests will be able to signal to housekeeping that towels and sheets do not have to be washed each day; a recycling bin has been placed in each room; and many rooms will be redesigned, replete with energy-saving lighting systems and new décor, including an overabundance of glass and “tasteful” wood, all of which signal the hotel’s commitment to “going green.” The doorman and the hotel’s guests are enthusiastic as the hotel’s marketing department hangs signs about the new program in the lobby, right next to the reception desk. This hotel is doing what thousands of hotels worldwide have engaged in during the past decade. Guests now expect some mention of sustainable practices in the tourism industry.

Although they might not be immediately apparent, the doorman’s hotel has also introduced several new, nonhuman design elements into the metaphoric and literal fabric of its property. These “green” decisions are design decisions that affect the work of the employees who maintain and service this property. Moreover, returning to Winner’s contention, these decisions cause new power relationships and systems of inequity to come to the fore. The doorman, the guests, the housekeeping staff, and even the hotel’s management probably do not comprehend the enormity of the changes put in place, but all design decisions matter—especially those by which intentions and realities become obfuscated by putatively innocent agendas.

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5 As Neil Maycroft has noted, “Contemporary academic fascination with designed objects has tended to emphasize their semiotic and symbolic attributes.” Hence, all too often the prevalence and “goodness” of design is lauded without assessing its actual function, beyond what appears to be its obvious use. Moreover, by turning to functionality, we can begin to assess how design, in the words of Cameron Tonkinwise, does or does not function “as the process of humanizing things.” See Neil Maycroft, “The Objectness of Everyday Life: Disburdenment or Engagement?” *Geoforum* 35, no. 6 (2004): 714; and Cameron Tonkinwise, “Thingly Cosmopolitanism: Caring for the Other by Design,” www.iade.pt/designist/issue/000_10.htm (accessed April 10, 2011).
Much of my discussion about labor and hotels is a direct response to Rachel Sherman’s path-breaking study, *Class Acts: Service and Inequality in Luxury Hotels* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).


Devising Green Initiatives

Auden Schendler, Vice President of Sustainability for Aspen Skiing Company, is very open about the conflicts that arise between green initiatives and hotel labor. Aspen owns three hotels, but Schendler is particularly fond of discussing The Little Nell, a world-renowned property situated next to the base of the gondola at Aspen Mountain. The Little Nell has 90 rooms and is arguably the most luxurious hotel in Aspen—a town where luxury lines the city’s streets with high-end boutiques and gourmet restaurants. In 2000, Kris Loan, who was the Nell’s engineer, developed several proposals that would help the hotel save energy and money. A new, more efficient boiler was installed, the temperature of the snowmelt system that makes certain guestroom patios remain clean was lowered, and the roof’s electric heater (a miraculous device that keeps snowfall off the roof) was turned off during the summer. Each of these changes seemed like a wise decision, based on logical thinking that would not affect the Nell’s staff from delivering the utmost in customer service. But there was a backlash as many hotel workers found these decisions untenable.

The conflict that Schendler discusses brings us back to Latour’s notion that human actors do not always perfectly mesh with nonhuman agents, especially when humans make decisions

Because of design’s centrality and often-overlooked significance, this article questions specific choices the hotel industry has made about sustainable practices. I look at this decision-making about design from two different, yet interrelated, perspectives. First, I am interested in the actual material design choices that are integral to these green spaces. Second, I am interested in how the adoption of ecologically minded design influences, hinders, and sometimes enhances the design of workflow systems—what many now refer to as service design. To get at this topic, I first examine a program that the Aspen Skiing Company embraced at its famous luxury hotel, The Little Nell. Then I turn to hotel sites in Hawaii, where the eco-friendly practices at Starwood Hotels and Resorts led to a very particular outcry from workers who had to cope with these changes—changes that had led to lost wages, decreased benefits, and much more taxing work. These voices from the field of hotel labor open up another set of issues that Latour’s and Winner’s theoretical conjectures intimate. These workers on the front lines of the tourism industry contextualize my larger argument that, when executed without thought, specific design choices can negatively affect labor. By exploring design’s connection to people and social relationships, and the ways in which design can hinder work and reduce wages, this essay proffers a number of ethical conundrums that sit uncomfortably at the center of the hotel business.
that radically change how we interact with nonhuman things. In this case, members of the maintenance staff at the hotel were not keen about having their authority usurped by these new mandates. Other staff members at the Nell were also reluctant to embrace these modifications. Then, in a moment of sheer ecological madness, the manager of the Nell went to visit a hotel in Sun Valley, Idaho where he saw steam rising from the swimming pool. He wanted to create the same effect at the Nell, which required raising the pool’s temperature to 103°F—“creating ‘Aspen’s biggest hot tub’ and negating much of the natural gas savings realized” by the other initiatives. People, both consciously and unconsciously, rebelled against these decisions, which they thought would detract from the luxury experiences the hotel was delivering, albeit through enormous expenditures on energy, both in terms of cost and environmental impact.

Today, The Little Nell continues its attempts to deliver ecologically sound luxury to its guests. Its website lists a number of “green initiatives,” such as “energy efficient lighting throughout the hotel,” “use of environmentally friendly cleaning products,” “fluorescent lighting” in the garage, and “a comprehensive hotel-wide recycling program.” In addition, guests can opt into the hotel’s Eco-Luxe program. For an additional $2 nightly fee donated to the Aspen Valley Land Trust, an organization that helps preserve undeveloped land, the environmentally minded guests receive the following: the use of the hotel’s fleet of bikes, a guarantee that water will be placed in pitchers during turndown service, the placement of recycling bins in their rooms, and the option to skip daily bed linen and towel cleaning. As the website details, “Bed linens and towels are laundered every three days,” which deviates from the standard daily change that occurs at most luxury hotels.

Schendler describes how the hotel’s wealthy clientele do not always respond enthusiastically to these sustainable practices. Although many guests embrace these ideas; some, understandably, do not want their vacations interrupted by the guilt that can attend sustainable thinking. Thus, part of the hotel’s challenge is to make these programs visible while not burdening those who pay premium prices to stay at a five-star property. Schendler has worked hard at Aspen and The Little Nell to stress the importance of spending money on sustainability while maintaining a unique level of service. In addition, Aspen has been careful not to let its Eco-Luxe program interfere with what has led to labor disputes at other hotels. For instance, at the Nell, housekeepers are not required to clean more rooms because some guests decide not to have the sheets and linens laundered daily; the expectations are the same, explains the hotel’s Director of Housekeeping Gioanna Villabrille, “whether the guest has Eco-Luxe or not.”

8 Ibid.
9 The Little Nell, littlenell.com (accessed April 2, 2011).
10 Ibid. Although this was the case in 2011, the Land Trust is no longer mentioned on the hotel’s website. The site now notes that the $2 given by the guest each night, along with the $3 given by the hotel, will be donated to a group called the Environmental Foundation.
11 Auden Schendler, interview by David Brody via telephone, January 20, 2011. I have received Institutional Review Board approval for this study from the New School, which permits me to interview subjects. Some of the subjects I interviewed in person (e.g., the housekeepers in Hawaii) received $20 for their time, as discussed in my Institutional Review Board application for the year 2011. Also, unless otherwise specified, I have used the names of my interview subjects, both in management (e.g., Schendler) and housekeeping. Although I thought extensively about issues related to anonymity, what became clear—especially while interviewing my subjects in Hawaii—is that most of the housekeepers wanted their names used and their voices heard. These interviewees were, of course, offered anonymity, and it was given when they requested it.
12 Gioanna Villabrille, interview by David Brody via telephone, January 27, 2011.
These decisions about waste, energy, products, and building are, of course, design decisions. These programs create challenges in terms of designing hotel properties that successfully implement such codes of green conduct. Sustainable practices also force attention on new types of service design that allow workflow, and its concomitant, labor, to expedite these practices. Many in the industry have celebrated these programs, but others, including unions and scientists, have criticized these policies for their disingenuousness, as well as for their negative effect on fair labor practices, as many have lost benefits and pay as a result of green initiatives. By focusing on how these green programs have been carried out by Starwood hotels in Hawaii, I assess in the next section of this article the larger debate—not through the discourse of economic models, on which many studies have relied, but through the voices of workers who all too often have been ignored during the planning and execution of these green programs. Indeed, the workers who have to contend with many of the physical and fiscal realities of green design have been overlooked for far too long.

Going Green in Paradise

In 2009, Starwood Hotels and Resorts, an enormous hospitality management company, instituted a program called “Make a Green Choice” on several Hawaiian Islands, including Oahu, Kauai, and Maui. Starwood’s reach in the industry is vast. It manages many brands, including Sheraton, Westin, and W Hotels. The “Make a Green Choice” program, which Starwood offers at select properties, allows guests to opt out of housekeeping services for one to three days, and in return, the guest receives either a $5 meal voucher or 500 Starwood Preferred Guest Starpoints for each day of participation. According to the company’s website, the program helps save electricity, water, natural gas, and chemicals. Starwood proclaims the virtues of these savings by declaring, “See what a difference a night can make!” This “difference,” which is clearly marked as a pro-green choice on the company’s website through color (light green) and visual tropes (fauna)—signs that customers look for when making “green” decisions—may have been good for Starwood and its guests. But as my fieldwork in Hawaii revealed, these decisions about “savings” had dramatic service design implications that affected the lives of housekeepers in significant ways. Noting such effects forces us to think about Latour’s mandate to consider how decisions about the nonhuman world alter the lives of workers through pay cuts, the result of lost work hours, and the dissolution of benefits.

According to Sheraton Seattle General Manager Matthieu Van Der Peet, many of Starwood’s “guests are environmentally conscious in their day-to-day lives.” The program “is a great way to give our guests a choice to continue their green practices while


14 Starwood Hotels, starwoodhotels.com (accessed April 1, 2011). Note that awards for a free night at Starwood Hotels begin at 2,000 points.
at the Sheraton...”. This idea of helping guests feel at home, and giving them what they want, is also how Starwood described the program to its employees. Many of the housekeepers I spoke with in Hawaii explained that their managers promoted the program by claiming that guests wanted these changes; it was deemed good for business to “treat the guests to be comfortable [like the way they feel] at home.” Some Starwood guests in Hawaii helped promote the program with their web-based reviews of the hotels’ green efforts. One guest on the popular website, Tripadvisor.com, wrote that the Sheraton in Kauai has “pioneered a commendable Go-Green program where they offer restaurant credit in exchange for not having maid service on any given day. We’ve found this program to be attractive financially, but also think it’s a great idea environmentally—just imagine the energy and resource savings of not having linens replaced every day.”

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Traveling to a place like Kauai and seeing a large hotel corporation make an effort to lower its environmental impact was heartening to many guests, who also were given the incentive of free food and award points. However, these “green” guests might be surprised to learn that opting into the program dramatically affected the lives of hotel workers. Interviews with 11 housekeepers in Hawaii, eight who work in Honolulu and three who work on Kauai, made clear the human costs of going green. Although the environmental effects of chemicals, detergents, and electricity were mitigated by the program, the sanitary condition of the room, the workflow for the housekeepers, and the loss of work resulting from the lack of rooms to clean were critical issues mentioned by all of the women with whom I spoke. This gendered work is often done with enormous pride, but the difficulties these women encountered in Hawaii became too demanding. As Lydia Agustin, at the Moana Surfrider—a Starwood property in Honolulu—explained, “Housekeepers [are] the backbone of the hotel industry.” She noted, “We are the one making the guest coming back to the hotel... we take care of them.” For her, the Go-Green Program, as she and the other housekeepers called it, hindered the delivery of “caring.” If they could not clean the room, and the room became in their estimation unsanitary, their positive perceptions of their work quickly became negative. Moreover, if they and their colleagues were losing pay, their assessment of the value of their jobs would only worsen.

The Go-Green Program degraded the integrity of the room’s physical design, which made cleaning more difficult for housekeepers. One woman with whom I spoke had worked as a housekeeper at the Sheraton Waikiki for 17 years, and she talked about the sunscreen and oils that would get into bathtubs. Because the hotel is on one of the most famous beaches in the world, guests would go to the beach, use tanning oil or sunscreen, and

18 For more on the gendered nature of hotel work, see Yvonne Guerrier and Amel S. Adib, “‘No, We Don’t Provide that Service’: The Harassment of Hotel Employees by Customers,” Work, Employment and Society 14, no. 4 (2000): 689-705.
19 Lydia Agustin, interview by David Brody, Honolulu, Hawaii, July 15, 2011.

then wash the oils off their bodies when they returned to their rooms. Each day that the room could not be serviced meant more of a buildup of oil and other lotions in the tub. Several housekeepers also talked about the presence of mold. Given the beach location of these hotels, mold is already a problem; several days without service meant more dirt and more of a chance for mold to infiltrate tiled and cloth surfaces. Lilibeth Herrell of the Sheraton Waikiki explained, “It’s so filthy, get mold everything.” The lack of cleaning led to smells, “especially if they [the guests] have kids.” In terms of children, one of the more surprising things about the program was the guests’ diaper disposal practices. When housekeeping entered the rooms only every third day, the trash would accumulate into a mess of filth. Carolina Cacal, of the Sheraton on Kauai, described guests’ tendency to leave used diapers either on the room’s balcony or outside the room door in the hallway. The additional odors and mess complicated the housekeepers’ cleaning responsibilities.

The Go-Green Program also affected and interrupted the design of the workflow systems, on which housekeeping depends for efficiency. Room cleaning could no longer be scheduled in advance because of the opt-in/opt-out decision of the guest. In hotels, the room-cleaning schedule—or “board,” as it is often called—functions as a work plan detailing the rooms that a housekeeper needs to clean. The board also identifies which rooms are checkouts and which rooms are mid-stay. Housekeepers tend to work on the same section of rooms each day, with little variation; to minimize movement of the loaded service carts, these rooms are typically next to each other. But under the Starwood green initiative, the slate of 15 rooms that the housekeepers had to service could now be more randomly located on the property. The housekeepers no longer serviced 15 rooms on the same floor (in Honolulu) or in the same building (on Kauai). Carolina Cacal explained, “I have to pick up rooms from the other buildings, from floor to floor, and it’s very hard for me; it’s too stressful.”

The Sheraton Kauai’s eight separate buildings are spread out across the property. Maneuvering her cart and supplies became more difficult for Cacal because the rooms that she needed to clean were in various locations. In other words, the highly orchestrated workflow of housekeeping became disorganized, which made Cacal’s task more complicated. Even in the high-rise structure in Honolulu, many of the housekeepers described a scenario in which they had to move their carts from floor to floor. “Let’s say [in] my station, I have 15 rooms, and let’s say 5 rooms refuse service because of the so-called ‘Go-Green,’ so I gotta bump another station to make my 15 rooms, which is hard,” noted Rosemary Esperanza.

20 Anonymous, interview.
21 Lilibeth Herrell, interview by David Brody, Honolulu, Hawaii, July 15, 2011.
22 Carolina Cacal, interview by David Brody, Lihue, HI, July 17, 2011.
23 The term “board” is a reference to the clipboard that housekeeping managers carry that details the cleaning schedule.
24 Cacal, interview.
In other unexpected ways the Go-Green Program wreaked havoc on the hotel’s carefully orchestrated service design strategy.\(^{26}\) The housekeepers could not enter the room of a guest who opted in, but if that same guest asked for other housekeeping services, these requests could not be refused. Housekeepers did not get a room credit for cleaning a room that was participating in Go-Green, but they might still be called by a guest to deliver new towels, or to take out the trash, which added to the guestroom attendant’s workload.

This excess work, coupled with the loss of hours from the reduced cleaning needs, made life for housekeepers in Hawaii very difficult. Latour’s warning about nonhuman agents changing human lives became very relevant in the situations of Caridad Rodrigues and Rizalyn Balisacan, two housekeepers at the Sheraton on Kauai. They explained how eco-tourism had reduced their vacation time and sick days, both of which accrue after working a set number of days in a given year. In other words, they remained “on call” for so many days as a result of Go Green that they did not accumulate paid time off. Moreover, while on call, they did not earn their hourly wage. In addition to losing wages and benefits, they received no additional credit for servicing rooms that had not been cleaned in three days. Rodrigues had to ask the state of Hawaii for medical insurance, “but they said no, I cannot qualify because my husband, he get the pension. Then they ask everything, it’s like you going to welfare; they ask [everything] in the papers.”\(^{27}\) Her sense of humiliation at having to go outside her workplace for this assistance was palpable. Balisacan noted that because her income had declined, she could not send funds to her family in the Philippines, which created hardships for those who depended on her for financial assistance.\(^{28}\)

The majority of the housekeepers working in Hawaiian hotels are Filipino; in fact, all of the women I interviewed in Hawaii were born in the Philippines.\(^{29}\) One housekeeper explained that the history of Filipinos in Hawaii is important to consider when looking at labor on the Islands. Lilia Olsen, from the Hyatt in Honolulu, talked about the history of plantation life in Hawaii. She noted that generations of Filipinos have struggled for fair working conditions and that “old timers… pass it on to us to be strong.” Explaining the generational issues, she stated, “We have to think about the future… for grandkids…. That’s why we are fighting.” Labor issues came to the fore with the sugar cane plantations: “the old senior citizen, and all the people that retired… they started that [battle], and we have to continue that.”\(^{30}\) Filipinos began to immigrate to Hawaii in the early twentieth century to work on sugar plantations. The Hawaiian Sugar Planter’s Association (HSPA) was not very kind to Filipino workers during the first

\(^{26}\) For more on the issue of service design at hotels, see David Brody, “A Textbook Case: Design, Housekeeping and Labor,” Design and Culture 3, no. 1 (2011): 25–49. For definitions of service design and a current understanding of this developing field, see Marc Stickdorn et al., ed., This Is Service Design Thinking: Basics—Tools—Cases (Amsterdam: BIS Publishers, 2010).

\(^{27}\) Caridad Rodrigues, interview by David Brody, Po’ipu, Hawaii, July 17, 2011.

\(^{28}\) Rizalyn Balisacan, interview by David Brody, Po’ipu, Hawaii, July 17, 2011.

\(^{29}\) For more on Filipinos working in Hawaiian hotels, see Patricia Adler and Peter Adler, Paradise Laborers: Hotel Work in the Global Economy (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

\(^{30}\) Lilia Olsen, interview by David Brody, Honolulu, HI, July 15, 2011. Although Olsen works for Hyatt Corp., and not for a Starwood property, she was involved with the local UNITE HERE chapter (Local 5 Hawaii) and was very familiar with the issues at Starwood.
decade of the century, in which the wave of immigrants numbered 18,144. However, by 1920 Filipinos started to organize aggressively, and large strikes occurred to protest unfair wages and deplorable working conditions. Several of these actions became violent as the Hawaiian police used rifles to try to control the protesters. This tension did eventually lead to better working conditions and the development of established unions, but the mistreatment of Filipino workers in the Hawaiian colony created a legacy of labor disharmony that Olsen sought to explain.

This legacy, perhaps in part, led to the vocal outcry that eventually ended Starwood’s Go-Green Program in Hawaii. Housekeepers and their union representatives from UNITE HERE had voiced their overwhelming concern with the program from its inception, but during contract negotiations in early 2011, Starwood hotels canceled Make a Green Choice in Hawaii. Through strikes and campaigns that brought the program to the public’s attention, UNITE HERE was able to negotiate its discontinuation.

Although the program still exists in other locations, the housekeepers in Hawaii successfully countered conventional perspectives about Make a Green Choice. Consequences that had included reduced work hours, additional time and effort to maintain the integrity of the room’s design, and upheaval in the delicate balance of workflow became too burdensome. As a result of the housekeepers’ unified voice, Starwood’s Hawaiian properties stopped asking guests to forgo housekeeping. These housekeepers had become design activists by raising important questions about the conventional wisdom that all too often equates environmental decisions with ethical standards.

Starwood had not heeded the wisdom of Bruno Latour about paying attention to the human costs of design decisions. So the housekeepers, led by UNITE HERE, demanded that Starwood attend to the human consequences of its decisions. Many guests clearly embraced the program, with its meal vouchers and rewards points, and general managers likely were happy with the cost savings associated with lower operational expenses, but the dissatisfaction and hardships that the housekeepers faced brought Starwood’s myopic vision into focus. None of the housekeepers intimated a sense of pride in the program’s ecological effects. Instead, the message that accompanied their organized action stressed the human-centered aspects of daily work that Starwood ignored during its implementation of a presumed ethical set of practices.

The Starwood example should be extrapolated into other arenas where the unquestioned flag of “green” praxis needs to be interrogated.

32 Ibid., 198–232.
34 I have made multiple attempts to interview Starwood’s management, but these attempts have gone unanswered.
The Green Paradox

Many guests who stay at hotels with programs that show environmental sensitivity revel in the tourism industry’s new emphasis on this politically charged topic. That Starwood offers sustainable options for conference planners that use its hotels is telling. Meeting planners, who book enormous blocks of rooms, look for programs like Starwood’s so they can promote to their attendees what they are doing to lessen their carbon footprint, while still putting on what many perceive to be an “old-fashioned” professional meeting. However, what the industry all too often elides in this process of greening hotels is labor: The consequences to labor remain hidden in the promotion of these sustainable practices.

This paradox—that politically progressive guests are unknowingly condoning practices they would find abhorrent by supporting these green programs—needs to be addressed. As one housekeeper in Honolulu explained, “We are suffering, the workers are suffering, and the guests are going to suffer.” Her distress about Starwood’s move in this direction, and the details she provided about the program’s effect on the room’s design integrity, made the paradox of sustainability palpable. Despite the focus here on the human problems that arise in relation to corporations’ efforts to promote ecological thinking, the challenge is that climate change—the dire consequences of global warming—are very real. So what can be done? How do we negotiate between the need to change our thinking about ecology and the realities of work?

A solution to this greenwashing dilemma may be found in the context of further union organizing. As geographer Steven Tufts has explained, “There are opportunities for hotel unions such as UNITE HERE to intervene in the green certification process. Specifically, the union itself could rate its employers and issue a union ‘rating’ similar to the well known diamond and star systems used by travel providers.” Along these lines, UNITE HERE created its Information Meeting Exchange (INMEX) system, which is a web-based resource that allows conference planners to see the ways in which various hotel properties treat their workers. Tufts wants a similar system in place that would help guests understand just how genuine a corporation is being when it comes to green practices. By taking the lead, labor could change the conversation and help hotel owners and managers understand the critical nature of these decisions. Such programs might have limitations, but they would undoubtedly foster a dialog that could change the larger discussion about programs, such as Starwood’s attempt with Make a Green Choice. Indeed, this type of program would make Latour’s mandate about being aware of design’s consequences come to life.

35 Starwood Hotels.
37 Anonymous, interview.
The hotel industry needs to establish a greater awareness of design’s relationship to labor. Many of the guests at these hotels who laud the virtues of sustainable practices might not think about how employees suffer because of additional work requirements and the potential of layoffs. Latour tells us that the hotel industry has tamed the doorman and made his plight invisible—but, at what cost? The voices of the housekeepers in Hawaii, whose collective ire led to changes and a heightened sense of awareness, need to be heard by other hotels. The industry should pursue sustainable initiatives, but the human toll—the effects that these choices have on labor—demands further consideration.

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