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Concept curated by_vienna 2014 by Beatriz Colomina

THE CENTURY OF THE BED

In what is probably now a conservative estimate, *The Wall Street Journal* reported in 2012 that 80% of young New York City professionals work regularly from bed. Millions of dispersed beds are taking over from concentrated office buildings. The boudoir is defeating the tower. Networked electronic technologies have removed any limit to what can be done in bed. It is not just that the bed/office has been made possible by new media. Rather new media is designed to extend a 100-year-old dream of domestic connectivity to millions of people. The city has moved into the bed.

How did we get here?

In his famous short text "Louis-Philippe, or the Interior," Walter Benjamin wrote of the splitting of work and home in the 19th century:

> Under Louis-Philippe, the private citizen enters the stage of history.... For the private person, living space becomes, for the first time, antithetical to the place of work. The former is constituted by the interior; the office is its complement. The private person who squares his accounts with reality in his office demands that his interior be maintained in his illusions... From this spring the phantasmagorias of the interior. For the private individual the private environment represents the universe. In it he gathers remote places and the past. His living room is a box in the world theater.[i]

Industrialization brought with it the 8 hour shift and the radical separation between home and office/ factory, rest and work, night and day. Post-industrialization collapses work back into the home and takes it further into the bedroom and into the bed itself. Fantasmagoria is no longer lining the room in wallpaper, fabric, images, and objects. It is now in the electronic devices. The whole universe is concentrated on a small screen with the bed floating in an infinite sea of information. To lie down is not to rest but to move. The bed is now a site of action. But the voluntary invalid has no need of their legs. The bed has become the ultimate prosthetic and a whole new industry is devoted to providing contraptions to facilitate work while lying down: reading, writing, texting, recording, broadcasting, listening, talking, and of course, eating, drinking, sleeping or making love, activities which seem to have been turned of late into work itself. Waiters in restaurants in the U.S. ask if you are "still working on that" before removing your plate or your glass. And endless advice is being dispensed about how to "work" on your personal relationships, "schedule" sex with your partner. Sleeping is definitely hard work too for millions, with the psycho-pharmaceutical industry providing new drugs every year and an army of sleep experts providing advice on how to achieve this apparently ever more elusive goal—

of course, all in the name of higher productivity. Everything done in the bed has become work.

This philosophy was already embodied in the figure of Hugh Hefner, who famously almost never left his bed, let alone his house. He literally moved his office to his bed in 1960 when he moved into the Playboy Mansion in 1340 North State Parkway, Chicago, turning it into the epicenter of a global empire and his silk pajamas and dressing gown into his business attire. "I don't go out of the house at all!!!.... I am a contemporary recluse," he told Tom Wolfe, guessing that the last time he was out had been three and a half months before and that in the last two years he had been out of the house only nine times.[ii] Fascinated, Wolfe described him as "the tender-tympany green heart of an artichoke."[iii]

Playboy turns the bed into a workplace. From the mid-1950s on, the bed becomes increasingly sophisticated, outfitted with all sorts of entertainment and communication devices as a kind of control room. The magazine devoted many articles to the design of the perfect bed. Hefner acted as the model with his famous round bed in the Playboy Mansion in Chicago. The bed was first introduced as a feature in the "Playboy Townhouse" article of 1962, which presents a detailed unrealized project in plans, sections and renderings that had been originally commissioned to be Hefner's own house. Not by chance, the only piece of the design to be realized was the bed, which was installed in the Mansion. The bed itself is a house. Its rotating and vibrating structure is packed with a small fridge, hi-fi, telephone, filling cabinets, bar, microphone, Dictaphone, video-cameras, headphones, TV, breakfast table, work surfaces, and control for all the lighting fixtures, for the man who never wants to leave. The bed was Hefner's office, his place of business, where he conducted interviews, made his phone calls, selected images, adjusted lay-outs, edited texts, ate, drank, and consulted with playmates.

Hefner was not alone. The bed may have been the ultimate American office at mid-century. In an interview in the *Paris Review* in 1957, Truman Capote is asked: "What are some of your writing habits? Do you use a desk? Do you write on a machine?" To which he answers:

> I am a completely horizontal author. I can't think unless I'm lying down, either in bed or stretched on a couch and with a cigarette and a coffee handy. I've got to be puffing and sipping. As the afternoon wears on, I shift from coffee to mint tea to sherry to martinis. No, I don't use a typewriter. Not in the beginning. I write my first version in longhand. Then I do a complete revision, also in longhand.... Then I type a third draft on yellow paper... No, I don't get out of bed to do this. I balance the machine on my knees. Sure, it works fine; I can manage a hundred words a minute. [iv]

For morning to afternoon to evening, the drinks, the paper, the equipment, changes but his position on the bed does not.

The postwar era inaugurated the high performance bed as an epicenter of productivity: a new form of industrialization which was exported globally and has now become available to an international army of dispersed but interconnected

producers. A new kind of factory without walls is constructed by compact electronics and extra pillows for the 24/7 generation.

The kind of equipment that Hefner envisioned (some of which, like the answering machine, didn't yet exist) is now expanded for the internet and social media generation, who not only work in bed but socialize in bed, exercise in bed, read the news in bed, and entertain sexual relationships with people miles away from their beds. The Playboy fantasy of the nice girl next door is more likely realized today with someone in another continent than in the same building or neighborhood—a person you may have never seen before and may never see again, and it is anybody's guess if she is real—exists in some place and time—or an electronic construction. Does it matter? As in the recent film HER, a moving depiction of life in the soft, uterine state that is a corollary to our new mobile technologies, HER is an operating system that turns out to be a more satisfying partner than a person. The protagonist lies in bed with HER, chatting, arguing, making love.

If, according to Jonathan Crary, capitalism is the end of sleep, colonizing every minute of our lives for production and consumption,[v] the actions of the voluntary recluse are not so voluntary in the end. It may be worth noting that Communism had its own ideas of bringing the bed to the work place. In 1929, at the height of Stalin's first five year plan, with the working day extended and mass exhaustion of factory workers in the face of staggering production quotas, the Soviet government organized a competition for a new city of rest for 100,000 workers. Konstantin Melnikov presented the "Sonata of Sleep," a new building type for collective sleep, with mechanized bed rocking the workers to unconsciousness and slanted floors to eliminate the need for pillows. Centralized control booths with sleep attendants would regulate temperature, humidity, smell, and even sounds to maximize sleep. The inspiration was symptomatically American. Melnikov had read about a military academy in Pensacola, Florida that taught language to sleeping cadets. Sleep itself had become part of the industrial process.

In today's attention deficit disorder society, we have discovered that we work better in short burst punctuated by rest. Today many companies provide sleeping pods in the office to maximize productivity. Bed and office are never far apart in the 24/7 world. Special self-enclosed beds have been designed for office spaces—turning themselves into compact sealed capsules, mini space ships, that can be used in isolation or gathered together in clusters or lined up in rows for synchronized sleep—understood as a part of work rather than its opposite.

Between the bed inserted in the office and the office inserted in the bed a whole new horizontal architecture has taken over. It is magnified by the "flat" networks of social media that have themselves been fully integrated into the professional, business and industrial environment in a collapse of traditional distinctions between private and public, work and play, rest and action. The bed itself with its ever more sophisticated mattress, linings, and technical attachments is the basis of an intrauterine environment that combines the sense of deep interiority with the sense of hyper connectivity to the outside. Not by chance, Hefner's round bed was a kind of flying saucer hovering in space in a room without windows, as if in orbit, with the TV hanging above as the reference to planet earth. It is a circle, the classical image of the universe. The bed today has also become a portable universe, equipped with every possible technology of communication. A mid-century fantasy has turned into a mass-reality.

What is the architecture of this new space and time?

In the 1960s and 70s experimental architects devoted themselves to the equipment of the new mobile nomads in a whole galaxy of lightweight, portable interiors with soft reclining spaces as the core of a complex of prosthetic extensions. All of these projects can be understood as high performance beds complete with media, artificial atmospheres, color, light, smell… a kind of POP Psychedelic Melnikov with the worker now sleeping inside the control booth. Reyner Banham wrote about naked Jane Fonda flying through space in her fur-lined horizontal bubble in the same breath that he enthusiastically embraced the architecture of *Playboy*. It was just a matter of time before John Lennon and Yoko Ono held a week-long Bed-In for Peace in the Amsterdam Hilton Hotel during their honey moon in March 1969. The idea of Bed-In came from "Sit-In" protests and was intended as a non-violent protest against war and to promote world peace. "Make love, not war" was the slogan of the day but to the disappointment of journalists, John and Yoko were fully dressed in their pajamas, sitting in bed, as John put it, like angels. The bed has taken over from the street as the site of protest. They invited the world's press into their room every day between 9am and 9pm, treating the bed as an office in which they worked while journalists streamed in and images streamed out.

What is the nature of this new interior in which we have decided collectively to check ourselves in? What is the architecture of this prison in which night and day, work and play are no longer differentiated and we are permanently under surveillance, even as we sleep in the control booth? New media turns us all into inmates, constantly under surveillance, even as we celebrate endless connectivity. We have all become "a contemporary recluse" as Hefner put it half a century ago.

This curatorial project is devoted to the radical role of the bed in the last century: From Adolf Loos' fur covered bedroom for his young wife, to Sigmund Freud's divan, to the tuberculosis bed of sanatoria, to the Playboy bed, to the zip up bags in space capsules, to the radical nomadic bubbles of the experimental architects of the 1960s, to Barbarella's flying bed, to the nap pods of today… the project invites to explore every dimension of the bed in the last century. The combined efforts of all the galleries will be to reconstruct the secret history of the supercharged bed as one of the most critical sites of social, cultural, artistic, psychological, medical, sexual and economic transaction. The bed can no longer be left behind. To quote Ulrich in Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities*, "Modern man is born in a hospital and dies in a hospital, so he should make his home like a hospital, as a leading architect of the moment claimed." What would Ulrich say today?

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[i] Walter Benjamin, "Louis-Philippe, or the Interior," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. by Peter Demetz, translation by Edmud Jephcott (New York: Schoken Books, 1978), p. 154.

[ii] Tom Wolfe, "King of the Status Dropouts," *The Pump House Gang* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1965).

[iii] Ibid. p.63.

[iv] "Truman Capote, The Art of Fiction No. 17," interviewed by Patti Hill, *The Paris Review n.* 16, Spring-Summer 1957.

[v]Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (Verso, 2013).