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Hijacked: Parasitic Injection of the Social Condenser within the Contemporary City

Lara Moock

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**Hijacked:** Parasitic Injection of the Social Condenser within the Contemporary City

This thesis contends that the constructivist “social condenser” should be injected through the lens of the 21st century, capitalist city in order to reveal the interwoven collisions and hidden overlaps between the homeless and tech industry of San Francisco. The condenser will operate like a parasitic intervention by hijacking spaces along the spine of the city, heavily influenced by social and policy concerns, to formally and programmatically make these invisibilities between the two entities evident.

The social condenser will not be used as an ideology to solve inequalities, but rather as a critical tool to investigate the existing social, political and physical dynamics of these adjacencies. The goal is to understand the links and possibilities of friction that can be generated in order to uncover the disguised layers of the Bay Area.
**Situation**

Within the last 5 years, there has been an unprecedented change in San Francisco, California. The headquarters of the tech industry, known to be located 37 miles south of San Francisco in Silicon Valley, are moving directly in the city center. The incentive comes from both the multi-billionaire companies as well as its employees. The tech headquarters are benefiting from a major tax break from the government in order to move downtown, which has decreased the number of unemployment. The young tech employees are also more willing to move to the busy and culturally rich city rather than work in the suburbs. This growing tech hub is rapidly taking over the city and changing the culture and fabric of San Francisco.
Changing Identity

“Stroll along Market Street in San Francisco’s historic Tenderloin district and you find yourself wandering through a futuristic Internet enclave. Customer support software developer Zendesk is next to dating site Zoosk, and a stone’s throw from co-working space WeWork. A bit further up, Uber and Square are neighbors. In the offices adjacent to the nearby Warfield Theater, where artists ranging from Louis Armstrong to the Grateful Dead performed, venture capital firms Benchmark and Artis Ventures have opened shop as have Spotify and a productivity start-up called Quip. And then there’s Twitter’s 295,000-square-foot global headquarters in a 1937 art deco building.”

Juxtapositions: The Homeless vs. the Tech Industry

The Bay Area has not only experienced a tremendous shift in its identity but also in its inequalities. A tech employee makes a median household income of $115,000 a year compared to a homeless person who makes $12,000. The rent price differs from $4000 a month to $1800 a month.

The tech industry is compensated to move next to the Tenderloin and Soma, which is comprised of 57% of homelessness and deals with daily issues of crime, drug use and prostitution. According to current legislation and zoning, “78 percent of the housing stock is rent stabilized or permanently affordable” which provides “structural limitations to gentrification” \(^2\). This means that the new tech incomers have to accept the community they have become apart of.

This thesis does not aim to solve the global issue of homelessness through architecture, but rather use architectural tools to reveal, exaggerate, and critique the city through the lens of the current dynamic between the homeless and tech industry. This thesis aims to propose a series of plausible interventions that serve the homeless population. The social condenser will hijack current spaces to inject new program and formal operations that relate to the undertones of the social, political and economical relationships.
Implementing the Constructivist Social Condenser: History

The term social condenser was first come into circulation by the Russian constructivist in 1920s in order to “create new types of architecture capable of considering new social relationship”. This concept was mainly implemented in collective housing, clubs and factories. This was an opportunity for experimentation that the constructivist architects of the Union of Contemporary Architects took full advantage of. They would serve to house the proletarian masses and aimed to influence the social behavior of its inhabitants. Most of the activities which previously were part of private life, took place in common kitchens, canteens, launderettes or nurseries. Anatolie Kopp underlines the dual function of social condenser in society in a way that “[…] in addition to its immediate function, [social condenser] would firstly foreshadow the architecture and town planning of the future so that future users would grow accustomed to both; and secondly influence users through its use of spaces so as to introduce a new way of life into their social habits.”
Implementing the Constructivist Social Condenser: History

“The fundamentals elements of Constructivism consist of all the various possible unions of elements which go to make up a structure. The following formal relationships of elements must therefore be recognized as the basic principles of Constructivism: Insertion, Clamping, Twisting, Embracing, Mounting, Bending, Coupling, Piercing, and so on” - Iakov Chernikov.

Soviet Constructivism has its own architectural language of forms, combinations and spatial qualities, which is a constructive method for experimentation. “The wealth of forms in general and the diversity of possible combinations of different elements make the range of possible constructive solutions infinitely great.”

These formal relationships start to come together through amalgamation, combination, assemblage, and conjugation and begin to construct a narrative.

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Amalgamation

Combination

Assemblage

Conjugation
## Social Condenser Case Study: Communal Housing

Barsch and Vladimirov, 1929

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<tr>
<th>Social Strategies</th>
<th>Formal Strategies</th>
<th>Limitations</th>
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<tr>
<td>organization of daily life</td>
<td>apartment: no kitchen, family shares single room, very modest space</td>
<td>time period: lack of technical ability in the building industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maximum collectivization</td>
<td>dwelling-perceived as community, city, which includes other program</td>
<td>inconvenience: no precedent to make buildings as efficient as possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 main functions: rest, food, married life, children’s education, culture, and hygiene and health</td>
<td>social spaces are center of design</td>
<td>population was not ready for such a radical change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>serves individual+collective</td>
<td>volumes broken down according to their function</td>
<td></td>
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Figure3: Anatole Kopp, "Constructivist architecture in the USSR / Anatole Kopp", p. 82
## Social Condenser Case Study: Factory Kitchen

Yekaterina Maksimova, 1931

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<th>Limitations</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>the canteen was meant to transform the working and family life</td>
<td>the interior and plan design formed an integral, dynamic part of the building’s aesthetic impact. The factory kitchen was located in the hammer, where three conveyor belts brought the food to the canteen in the sickle</td>
<td>not located in urban/capital city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“sweep away the bourgeois idea of eating at home, to free women from cooking and produce a shared experience in canteens where people could eat together”</td>
<td>maximise sunlight exposure in all the flats</td>
<td>currently is in a state of decay and is used by the homeless population</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

includes: sports facility, reading room, kitchen’s administration |

Figure 4: Ross Wolfe, The hammer-and-sickle kitchen-factory in Samara (1931), http://linkis.com/utECG
Social Condenser Case Study: Park de la Vilette

Rem Koolhaas, 1982

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<th>Formal Strategies</th>
<th>Limitations</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>generating dynamic coexistence of various activities based on horizontal congestion</td>
<td>the strategy of strip/horizontal bands: “max. length of border between the max. number of programmatic components which will guarantee the max. permeability of each programmatic band and the max. number of programmatic mutations”</td>
<td>uses the diagram of a skyscraper onto the site; a strategy of pure program, still untested in its goal to produce ‘horizontal congestion’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>layering upon vacant terrain to encourage dynamic coexistence of activities and to generate through their interference, unprecedented events</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**WHY the Social Condenser** (and not the hybrid)

The social condenser has been a forgotten and lost concept, that has been overshadowed by the concept of the hybrid, which was developed during the same time as a result of capitalism. It is the commercial result of a sum of private interests and subtraction of urban determiners. Hybrids are characterized by a mix of uses in the same project. It integrates different programmes which also have different developers, different management and, different users. All of the relationships are established outside the domestic area, the public realm. The main reason why the condenser was abandoned and considered a failure was due the fact that it was never used in an urban context, which is why the hybrid seemed to be a better option. This thesis will investigate on a NEW social condenser by extracting the key architectural concepts and inject them in an URBAN environment.

Figure 6: Anatole Kopp, “Town and Revolution: Soviet Architecture and City Planning 1917-1935”, p. 196.
Existing Social Overlaps
Existing Political Overlaps
Existing Physical Overlaps
Existing Urban Fabric: the Spine

Market Street is the spine of where the social condenser will take place. This is the primary means of confrontation, juxtapositions and opportunity.

Along this spine, there are four major nodes that make up the fabric of the Bay Area. These include:

4 HIGH-RISES
3 MID-RISES
2 ROW HOUSES
1 CIVIC BUILDINGS
Existing Urban Fabric: four Nodes

1 CIVIC - Public Structures:
Civic buildings are typically part of a civic center, which represents the hub of a city. Civic buildings include public and government buildings.

CITY HALL
neighborhood: Civic Center
height: 308 ft
square footage: 500,000 ft²
floors: 5
program: government offices
Existing Urban Fabric: four Nodes

ROW HOUSES - Residential Hotels (SROs)
Row houses in San Francisco are known to include low income housing or retail spaces. They have a strong identity within the city and are protected as historical landmarks.

SUNNYSIDE HOTEL
neighborhood: South of Market
height: 53 ft
square footage: 4,006 ft²
floors: 4
program: SRO (Residential Hotel), retail
Existing Urban Fabric: four Nodes

3 MID RISES - Tax Exempt Property

A mid-rise is a shorter version of the high-rise and typically includes 5-10 floors max. A lot of San Francisco’s older infrastructure are mid-rises, whereas a majority of high-rises are modern buildings.

TIFFANY & CO
neighborhood: Union Square
height: 160 ft
square footage: 11,060 ft²
floors: 10
program: retail
A high-rise is a tall structure that is typically used as either office, retail or residential space. The defining factor of the high-rise is the height, which typically starts around 115 feet and above.

SALESFORCE TOWER
neighborhood: South of Market
height: 1,070 ft
square footage: 714,000 ft²
floors: 61
program: commercial offices, retail
Proposal: Revealed

The formal operations that will be introduced in the proposal are generated by the social and political understanding of the city and will be used to exaggerate and reveal its hidden layers.

A homeless person has 4 essential needs:

1- Sleep. (Housing)
2- Eat. (Dining Halls, Restaurants)
3- Work. (Offices, Computer labs, Retail, Grocery stores)
4- Play. (Library, Museum, Movie complex, Mall)

These needs represent the social condensers that will be injected into the 4 hijacked nodes of the city:

1- Public Structures.
2- Residential Hotels (SROs).
3- Tax Exempt Property.
4- POPOS.

In order to start testing out the parameters of the social condenser in each node, formal operations will be implemented:

1- Fracture
2- Carve
3- Embed
4- Intersect
NODE 1

Social Condenser: ‘SLEEP’ injected in Public Structures
Operation: FRACTURE
NODE 2

Social Condenser: ‘EAT’ injected in Residential Hotels (SRO’s).
Operation: CARVE
NODE 3

Operation: EMBED
NODE 4

Social Condenser: ‘PLAY’ injected in Privately Owned Public Open Spaces.
Operation: INTERSECT
Conclusion

To conclude, this thesis is implementing the new social condenser as a means of unveiling and exposing the existing social, political and physical overlaps between the homeless and tech industry of San Francisco as well as openly critiquing the supposedly claimed altruistic endeavors by the city and the tech companies. This thesis proposes plausible interventions along market street in each defined node and hijacks spaces in order to use formal operations that reflect the current invisible dynamics.

This thesis plans to test the different combinations of spatial and programmatic ‘condensing’ in each node. The graphic provocations will uncover the layers through speculative maps/axons, collages and models.
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