# Working Glamour
# John Lennon and Yoko Ono's Bed-In as Blueprint for Creative Labour Turned Permanent Performance

*Andreas Rumpfhuber*


Film stills from various documentaries of the bed-in performances in Amsterdam and Montreal, March and May 1969

Today the bed is the paradigmatic site of contemporary forms of knowledge and creative work. It used to be the ultimate utopia of industrial workers, to one day be as glamorous as a queen or monarch holding court and to not have to go to work, but to be able to stay at home in bed. Now the bed is no longer something exclusive or even royal at all, but it continues to be associated with luxury and glamor. The bed, however, is by no means the place where we can lazily lie around to rest from work or even avoid it. Today the bed is the workplace for knowledge and creative work. Like the workers' quarters, the bed has to be understood as having always been part of the modern capitalist logic of production and reproduction. In an economy in which forms of immaterial labor become dominant, however, the bed becomes a symbol for the place of the unbounded labor society of Western, post-industrial nations. Whereas the bed was still the production site of reproduction in modernism, today reproduction has become part of production. Even idleness and inactivity have today become part of the so-called 'factory of society' (Tronti, 1974).

In an extension of the term 'working poor,'[1] I regard the creative and knowledge workers in bed as the 'working glamor.' They make the increasing proletarianization of formerly bourgeois forms of labor evident and allow us to analyse the work of the entrepreneurial self in the digital economy and the space of this work.[2] The workplace bed enables us to grasp the constitution of immaterial labor, which has become increasingly dominant since the 1970s, through its subjects and their spaces and architecture. The architecture theorist Beatriz Colomina noted, for example, with reference to a 2012 report in the *Wall Street Journal*, that eighty percent of all young New Yorkers regularly work from bed.[3]

1 The term *working poor* is used in different ways in the relevant literature, but it generally means a group of employed people whose income is below the poverty line despite working multiple jobs.

2 Ulrich Bröckling, *Das unternehmerische Selbst, Soziologie einer Subjektivierungsform* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2007)

3 Beatriz Colomina, "The Century of the Bed," in: *The Century of the Bed (Nürnberg: Verlag für modern Kunst, 2014), 18–24.*

In the figure of the worker in bed, the need for performance from every single working subject becomes visible. Yet the isolation and atomisation of the working individual in bed also becomes tangible. Even though working in bed may seem pleasurable and privileged in the imagination, in reality it is also pure exhaustion, which sometimes becomes manifest in depression. As an architect, I am especially interested in the concomitant modification of working spaces and the effects on architectural practice that become visible in the example of working in bed.

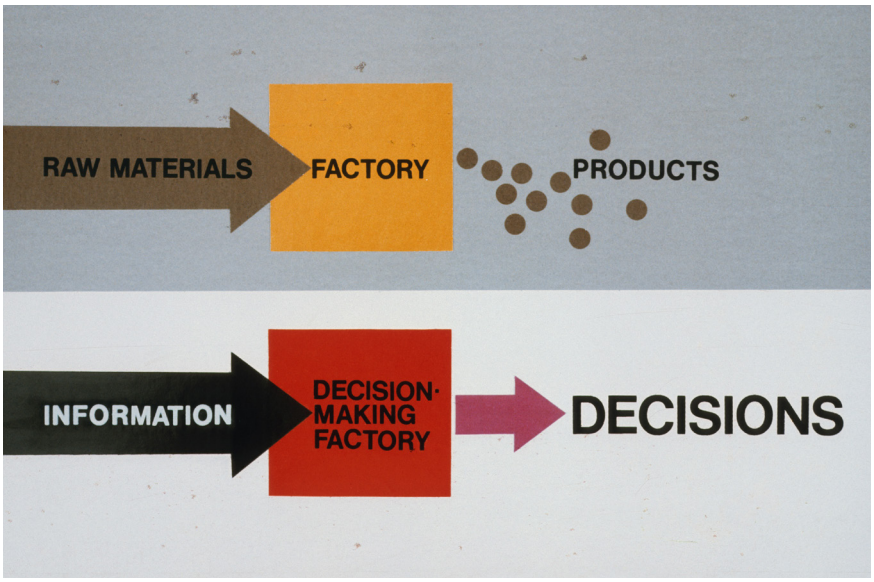
## IMMATERIAL LABOR AND THE DISSOLVING BOUNDARIES OF SPACES

In this context, the study of *Playboy* architecture recently published by the Spanish queer theorist Beatriz Preciado is noteworthy. At the teleological end of this research, the bed stands as the paradigmatic site of labor. Preciado's feminist-queer reading understands the designs of bachelor apartments published since the 1950s and Hugh Hefner's media self-portrayal in pyjamas in his rotating bed as an extension of Michel Foucault's analyses. For Preciado, the transition from the disciplinary regimes of the nineteenth century to the control and production forms of the late twentieth century becomes visible in the example of *Playboy*. It constructs a consumption-oriented heterosexual bachelor who works in bed and whose apartment functions as a machine luring women in to later dispose of them. In the Playboy Penthouse, the typologies of the office overlap with those of the love hotel.[4] Preciado regards Hefner's rotating bed itself as the post-industrial device par excellence. The mechanically rotating bed with multiple multimedia connections is thus more than merely a piece of furniture. As a kind of space capsule, it is also a prosthesis of the white, heterosexual man who no longer leaves his self-constructed interior space.

The specific analysis of *Playboy* architecture opens up a look at the "consolidation of new sexual identities, new forms of masculinity and femininity."[5] However, Hefner continues to embody the figure of the feudal lord in bed. The example shows the extension, modification, and stabilisation of a certain male-dominated social power structure within a newly emerging power regime over the course of the twentieth century. This makes it possible to better understand and criticise the contemporary representation of power. In this sense, however, neither Hefner's practice as a prototypical horizontal worker and his love of technological gadgets, nor the *Playboy* architecture itself evinces the beginnings of an emancipatory practice.

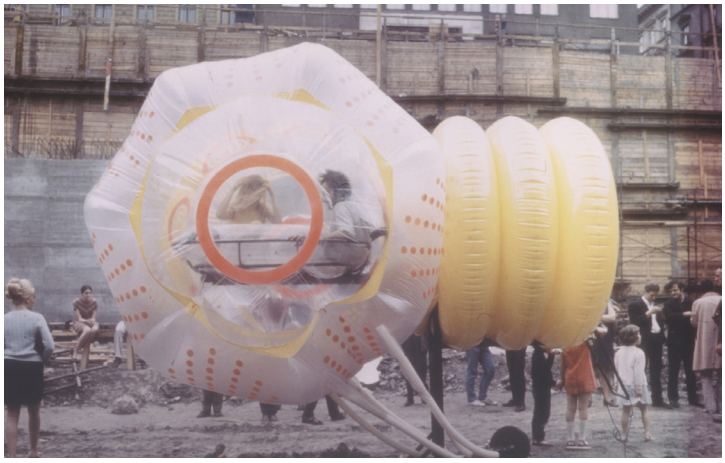
The temporal framing of the *Playboy* example in itself obscures the view of the proletarianization of this feudal form of working glamorously, which began in the late sixties and is relevant today and which is closely linked with the radical reorganization of our societies in Europe ever since. The emerging dominance of a new mode of work so-called immaterial labor – coincides with the increased outsourcing of industrial production processes, with the popularization of cybernetic ideas for a new horizontal organization of society, with the introduction of computing machines not only in the factory but also in administrative work processes, as well as with a shift towards communication and performance at the core of work itself. Hence immaterial labor is associated with art, creativity, and research. And the emergence of immaterial labor goes hand in hand with the promise of leisure society through the soon-to-be-realized total automation. This would allow us all, so they promise, to stay idly in bed.

4 Beatriz Preciado, *Pornotopia (Berlin: Verlag Klaus Wagenbach, 2012), 62.*
5 Ibid., 35.




From Factory producing Goods to the Decision-Making Factory. Dia Positiv by Quickborner Team, ca. 1965. From QT Archive Andreas Rumpfhuber.

The promise of a coming leisure society can be read in a number of avant-garde architecture projects from the 1960s. Here, the bed, or at least the mattress, played an important role. People lounged around in covers, cuddling in soft-porn-like manner in whirling bubbles, letting themselves be synced into rhythm by the machine for the coming society. Or they organized free time in horizontal structures following grassroots principles in now flexible and airy forms above the lithic city, where day and night have already been abolished. These were projects that affirmed the popular promise of the European welfare state and fantasized about a future without labor that had, as popularly believed, already begun.



Left: Yellow Heart installation by Haus-Rucker-Co in the excavation pit of the Federal Police Headquarters in Vienna, 21 June 1968. From Andreas Rumpfhuber, *Architektur immaterieller Arbeit* (Vienna: Turia und Kant, 2013), 171.
Right: Final sequence of David Greene's Suit-Home Performance at the 1968 Triennale in Milan. (The project is based on Michael Webb's Suitaloon Project). From Andreas Rumpfhuber, *Architektur immaterieller Arbeit* (Vienna, Turia und Kant, 2013), 162.

These projects mirror how diffuse the concept of labor has already become, and how labor permeates all aspects of human activity. But it also points to an emancipatory aspect at the moment of its emergence that

could be discussed on the basis of many examples:[6] the invention of the office landscape by the German management consultants Eberhard and Wolfgang Schnelle (1959/60), Joan Littlewood and Cedric Price's Fun Palace (1962–66), Herman Hertzberger's Centraal Beheer (1967–72), not to mention Hans Hollein's Mobile Office (1969), Haus-Rucker-Co's Yellow Heart (1967/68), and not least John Lennon and Yoko Ono's use of space in their two Bed-Ins in Amsterdam and Montreal (March and May, 1969). These are all examples of workspaces, most of which were created parallel to and in conjunction with the emancipation movements of the 1960s. Taken as models, they illustrate how immaterial labor can be portrayed and which possibilities architects and artists come up with to deal with the new work paradigm by using architectural means. In the movement toward immaterial labor, spaces of production undergo a number of convergences: human and machine, house and city, living and working, private and public, architecture and mechanical emotion machines, art and commercial, outside and inside.

## WORKING IN A LUXURY HOTEL

Yoko Ono and John Lennon's appropriation of the hotel room—during their two one-week Bed-Ins, first in the Hilton in Amsterdam, then in Montreal—can be seen as a template for the contemporary form of 'working glamor.' The Bed-In is a foil for a life in which working in bed and from a hotel as the most extreme workers' fantasy—as the most extreme fantasy of freedom—increasingly becomes reality. As working, leisure, and life are more and more intertwined, the tipping points into a seemingly glamorous way of working become visible, presenting themselves between an unbounded claim to space and its limited realization. The Bed-In performance is thus less interesting as a protest performance. However, it is significant for understanding a generalized form of working in bed that is no longer the privilege of the bourgeoisie and their children. In their Bed-In performance, Lennon and Ono appropriate the generic node of a worldwide trade network—Hilton Hotels—by performatively reorganizing the space.

They operate in an entrepreneurial way for their own agenda. Their work consists of communication, and it is only made possible by being connected and distributed via mass media. At the same time, the Bed-In performance should be divided into three sections to illustrate the paradox of entrepreneurial and/or alternative action in the contemporary economy. In the first section in Amsterdam, the total exhaustion and depressive state of the protagonist and her partner become visible. Then, there is an emancipatory turn achieved through idleness and the subsequent reorganization of the hotel room. In the third section, the iterative performance in Montreal, the emancipatory moment of the performance is returned to conventional stereotypes. In this last moment of the performance, Lennon and Ono's production of added value is exploited by third parties.

Living space and working space converge in the staging of the Bed-In. It is not arranged on the stage of a theatre or in a stadium, nor in a museum or an art gallery. Instead, the performance takes place in rooms where Lennon and Ono live.[7] The spatial framing differs fundamentally from the sites of Ono's art, the music studios where they both worked, or the concert arenas where Lennon performed. While the art space, the studio, or the stage space are traditionally separate from living spaces, the couple's everyday living space becomes a temporary working space during the Bed-In, and their working space conversely becomes their liv-

6 See Andreas Rumpfhuber, *Architektur immaterieller Arbeit*, Bd. 1: Kollektive Gestalten (Vienna: Turia & Kant, 2013).

7 After becoming a couple, they lived in the London luxury hotel The Inn on the [Hyde] Park. In May 1968, they were only briefly guests in Paul McCartney's house and in Ringo Starr's former apartment.

ing space: they live in the space of their performance and work in their living space. Apart from the press conferences and the visits, apart from the telephone interviews, Ono and Lennon reside in these rooms and eat and sleep there.

The Hilton Hotels, where Lennon and Ono reside around the time of the Bed-In performance, are all modern grand hotels of US American provenance, democratic architectural machines imagined as signs of a free and peaceful world, an open, transparent, and capitalist society. These modern luxury hotels of the post-war years are all built in the International Style. They are coolly functional and modern building structures with clearly readable constructions made of exposed concrete, with large glass surfaces, and thematically designed spheres, exclusive rooms, restaurants, and shopping areas.

The luxurious lodgings, which guaranteed usual U.S. standards and a princely atmosphere, are spatially mixed forms: bourgeois resorts and leisure architecture on the one hand, and on the other, bases for business travellers, that is, workplaces. The rooms in which the Bed-In were staged establish exclusive private interior spaces of a higher class. Admission is only granted to like-minded paying guests (be it business travellers or tourists). Most of all, it is conversation among these paying guests that distinguishes the productive sphere of the luxurious hotel.[8] Like in eighteenth century clubs, conversation, the exchange of information, is the work. The architecture of the grand hotels, their representation and more so, their programmatic order inside, construct, again similarly to the London Clubs, an intimate space of personal and *private* relationships, which has a public character similar to the second living room borrowed from aristocratic society. This guarantees the permanent social visibility of the members within the interior space.


Left: Entrance to the Amsterdam Hilton with Shell petrol station in the foreground. From Michelle Provoost, *Hugh Maaskant: architect van de vooruitgang* (PhD thesis, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 2003).
Right: Central space on the ground floor of the Amsterdam Hilton. The main attraction is the open fireplace. From Michelle Provoost, *Hugh Maaskant: architect van de vooruitgang* (PhD thesis, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 2003).

After WWII, it was primarily the hotel complexes of the Hilton Corporation, usually developed in connection with or parallel to the official representation of the United States, which were financed and constructed as part of the Truman containment policies. The designs of US American

8 Conversation is the fundamental practice of being able to act with sovereignty in the bourgeois sense; see Reckwitz 2006, p. 188.

architectural companies such as SOM or Pereira and Luckman followed the Hilton motto "to achieve world peace by world trade and travel,"[9] and buildings were located at strategically important foreign commercial posts. A total of seventeen luxury hotels were built between 1949 and 1966 in Europe and the Middle East, including Istanbul, Cairo, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Athens, London, Berlin, and Rome.

The Hilton Hotels were conceived as autonomous building complexes within any urban structure. They must look similar, function the same, and have the effect of an island in the respective city. The internal organization of the stately hotels is marked by maximum optimization of the facilities and a strategic consumption arrangement. Multilevel entrance areas, shopping zones, cafes and restaurants are placed around the reception. Routes and staff rooms of the hotel service personnel are functionally strictly separated from the representative guest areas of the hotel. The individual rooms are furnished according to identical standards and made into consumable space, the most flexible minimal space that can be rented for the highest possible price.[10]

In fact, the interior spaces of the hotels are the controlled fictions—planned carefully down to the last detail—of a formerly outside world. Taking up Peter Sloterdijk's metaphor of the Crystal Palace, the interior space of the Hilton Hotels can be regarded as "a hot house that has pulled everything inside that used to be outside."[11] The grand hotel does not only represent a space of the programmatic convergence of workplace and living space. With the space of the American-style luxury hotels, a consumption space as perfect as possible is constructed as part of a worldwide network that suggests security and comfort to its members. The Hilton in Amsterdam is opulently decorated with historical scenes; an open fireplace is the main attraction of the thematically designed sequence of rooms on the ground floor: Holland's Glory, the Seven Seas, Gateway to Europe. The materials are dark wood and brick, which continue into the hotel rooms. These can be seen in the first performance in Amsterdam.

## THE ENTREPRENEURIAL SELF IN BED

Often forgotten pictures of the Bed-In show Yoko Ono and John Lennon lying peacefully and lost in the oversized bed of the Amsterdam Hilton. The pictures reveal an aspect of entrepreneurial action that the French sociologist Alain Ehrenberg (2004) calls 'the exhausted self.' It is a latent exhaustion that can become depression that Ehrenberg associates with the disappearance of the boundaries between what is allowed and what is prohibited, between the possible and the impossible, and which alters and irritates the mental order of every individual. With the blanket pulled up to their chins in the room that seems darkened by the Hilton decoration, Ono and Lennon appear completely exhausted, as the "Ballad of John and Yoko," which Lennon recorded with Paul McCartney in London shortly after the Amsterdam Bed-In, also recounts: "Drove from Paris to the Amsterdam Hilton / Talking in our beds for a week / The newspeople said / 'Say, what're you doing in bed?' / I said, 'we're only trying to get us some peace.'" The last line of the song—"to get us some peace"—can be interpreted in two ways: on the one hand, one can read it, in keeping with the intention of peace activism, as the desire to gain peace for the world. On the other hand however, the line can also mean that Lennon yearns for peace for himself and his wife. The one undisputed interpretation follows the conventional narrative about effective media work for peace through refusal. The other interpretation emphasises the reverse side of the activist acting from within himself: exhaustion, the desire for non-confrontation, harmony, and personal peace.

9 Hilton Magazine, 1963, 35.
10 Donald Albrecht and Elizabeth Johnson, *New Hotels for Global Nomads (New York: Merell Publishers, 2002).*
11 Peter Sloterdijk, *Im Weltinnenraum des Kapitals, Für eine philosophische Theorie der Globalisierung* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2005), 30.

Depression in Bed. John Lennon and Yoko Ono in the first phase of their first bed-in at the Amsterdam Hilton. From David Leaf and John Scheinfeld, *The U.S. vs. John Lennon* (2006), timecode 23:50.

John Lennon is less of a working class hero in the traditional sense, who rebels against the system, than he is portrayed in countless biographies. In the Bed-In he reveals more contours of a new type of worker that must be called, following Ulrich Bröckling, the entrepreneurial self.[12] Lennon works creatively and entrepreneurially, as an active and independent subject; he is innovative and uses imagined opportunities for gain, bearing the risks of these endeavors and closely cooperating as a team with his wife. Lennon calls the Bed-In an advertising campaign for peace. It is an event that makes use of media attention on their wedding to play with public expectations: What could top the scandalous record cover of *Two Virgins* (1968), where Ono and Lennon are depicted naked?

Yoko Ono performing *Cut Piece* at Carnegie Recital Hall, New York, March 21, 1965. From *Cut Piece*, filmed by Albert and David Maysles, 16mm black-and-white film, 9 minutes 10 seconds.

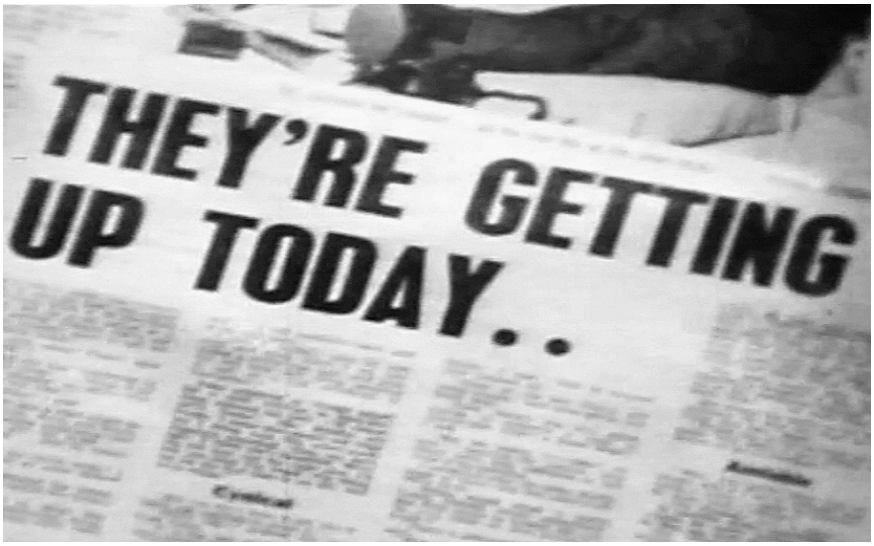
With the Bed-Ins, Ono and Lennon disappoint the expectations of the journalists and initially do nothing or simply conduct absurd conversations with those present. In keeping with Ono's art practice, they frame a setting of astonishment, in which expectations are disappointed. Initially in Amsterdam, the Bed-In is also an artistic performance outside an art space that borrows from Ono's artistic practice. Without realizing it, all the journalists wanting to report on the event became viewers of an art form taken from the avant-gardes of the time, causing first pure confusion

12 Ulrich Bröckling, *Das unternehmerische Selbst, Soziologie einer Subjektivierungsform* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2007).

and misunderstanding. It is only after this that the initially depressive atmosphere, the passivity, and the absurdity generated by Lennon and Ono through their performance is exchanged through the reorganization of the space for an active and seriously-meant work towards the essentially unachievable concern of 'world peace.'

The use of the hotel room thus changes from passive insertion into the existing structure to actively arranging and taking action. The couple set themselves up in the hotel room: the bed is moved in front of the window, only white sheets are used, and many flowers are set up around the bed. In addition, instructions for attaining world peace are written in block letters on paper and attached to the window and the walls for everyone to see: "Hair Peace," "Bed Peace." Lettering is even scribbled directly on the window of the hotel room.


The adaptation of the Amsterdam hotel room. Yoko Ono still has a voice here and is interviewed. From David Leaf and John Scheinfeld, *The U.S. vs. John Lennon* (2006), timecode 24:01.




Headline of a Newspaper reporting on the Bed-In in Amsterdam. From David Leaf and John Scheinfeld, *The U.S. vs. John Lennon* (2006), timecode 27:10.

Here Yoko Ono and John Lennon arrange their voluntary staying-in-bed as promotion for an alternative way of living against war. They appropriate the bourgeois typology of the grand hotel, the figure of the aristocrat in bed, and the romantic figure of the artist for the purpose of exemplifying instructions on eluding social compulsions. Ono and Lennon are equal partners in Amsterdam. Both give surreal and confusing answers to the journalists' questions. Headlines like "Married Couple Are in Bed" or "They're Getting Up Today" provide clear evidence of the perplexity in assessing this emancipatory moment.

At the same time, the active entrepreneurial action and the beginning of the attempt to communicate already include the failure of this alternative and elusive way of living. To achieve the personal enterprise, the personal initiative, Ono's art practice has to converge with the commercial. As advertising with avant-garde artistic means, it promises an alternative better life. It promises freedom through a solipsistic experience of every individual and an alternative life within the framework of the world that is expanding without boundaries. In this third turn of the Bed-In—an art commercial for peace in which interviews are readily given and that the Canadian television appropriates through meticulous choreographies—the enterprise for peace is tied back into familiar storylines and traditional stereotypes like the male hero wanting to save the world but also protecting his vulnerable from-then-on-mute wife from evil provocateurs.


Advertisement for the Queen Elizabeth Hotel in Montreal, circa 1950s.
From Carlem Collections, eBay.

The public TV broadcaster CNBC used the format of the Bed-In and invited guests such as the right-wing liberal cartoonist Al Capp or the comedian and civil-rights activist Dick Gregory to Lennon and Ono's bed. In the film material that was broadcast, the television company assigned unambiguous roles to the guests as well as the hosts, which became part of the emerging myth: the angry male, perhaps a little naïve hero (Lennon), who works seriously for world peace with strong emotion and passion; the

devoted, beautiful, and exotic woman (Ono), who adores the hero; and the brutal, unfeeling, arch-conservative provocateur and villain (Capp), who accuses the musician and the artist of just staging the whole show for money.


Left: Adaption des Hotelzimmers in Montreal, film still.
From *John and Yoko Meet the Opposition* (CBC, 1969).
Right: Carl Spitzweg, *Der arme Poet* [*The Poor Poet*], 1839, 36.2 × 44.6 cm.
Neue Pinakothek, Munich, Germany.

Nevertheless, in the Bed-In, the outline of the activity of working glamor becomes visible in two ways: on the one hand, it is the activity, the working process, the contours of which become evident here, that consists solely of communication. Following the Italian philosopher Paulo Virno, this is not labor in which "an object is produced, an opus which can be separated from action."[13] On the other hand, it is production as a service that approaches the cultural industry and the virtuosity of a musician, whose work "needs a publicly organised space."[14] In other words, the paradigm of working is structured in the Bed-In as both a service and a political action, and it presupposes the presence of others.

The site of this practice is the bed and the mattress: the absolutist king held court in bed as the center of the world, and Carl Spitzweg's oblivious *Biedermeier* artist-poet sits on a mattress, clinging to his fantasies. To be able to stay in bed means to enjoy certain freedom, or at least to not have to go to work every morning. Within the given situation that necessarily turns the couple into subjects, John Lennon and Yoko Ono's spatial practice is interested in living an alternative practice that eludes the predominant idea. For Lennon and Ono, the space's lack of direction and boundaries—in other words what is generic about the Hilton architecture, the public character of the hotel, the convergence of living and working, but also their own self-discovered self-reliance, and their new responsibility as public figures—are a quality and a challenge at the same time, to which they give form through the Bed-In, even though the choreography of the Canadian television ultimately tied this practice to what is familiar and rendered it as added value.

13 Paolo Virno: *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life* (Los Angeles: semiotext(e), 2004), 52.
14 Ibid., 53.

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