

PROXY: an Experiment in Flexible Urbanism

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In today's early-twenty-first century world, the ubiquitous nature of connected culture seems to have always existed. We are awash in digital content, streaming through our various personal technology devices. Forty years ago, architects such as Archigram and Superstudio forecasted a radical change in the cultural landscape that would have vast implications for the way we communicate and live with each other. Archigram's Instant City (a deployable system of media frameworks that bring people together both digitally and physically) and Superstudio's Supersurface (a ubiquitous communications grid that unites humankind across the surface of the Earth) both foresaw the potential of, and the need for, a more connected culture created through constructed media frameworks.

Although current manifestations of digital culture have come about less through architecture than through technology, these developments have dramatically increased the speed of society itself. The speed at which digital culture operates affects how quickly our society adapts to change and perhaps even how much change it requires. Yet, the city of today as a physical construct seems frozen. The fact that content is now delivered immediately and changes effortlessly reframes the city as something that has ossified: a durable construct that is slow to adapt or respond to contemporary culture.

Maintaining the relevance of the city as a place that embodies our current cultural condition requires re-imagining the surfaces and spaces of the city as an active, flexible and dynamic cultural interface. The atomization of digital technology, the ubiquitous nature of information access and increased personal mobility untethers currently fixed programs from their spatio-temporal conditions. Working, eating, and playing are already beginning to happen "at-large" in those unplanned places where we want to spend more time. The new city will intensify and extend our interface with the existing resources and produce conditions for a wide range of performative and experiential conditions, while allowing for heterogeneous programmatic elements to occupy flexible territories of both space and time.

PROXY is a temporary two-block project that creates a centralized, ever-changing experience in the heart of one of San Francisco's most popular neighborhoods. Transforming vacant lots on



Octavia Boulevard (formerly the site of the elevated Central Freeway before the Loma Prieta earthquake caused its demolition), PROXY is a placeholder for a more permanent development designed to generate a four year progression of food, art, retail and cultural activity in San Francisco's Hayes Valley. PROXY is a new model for urban development—a more flexible urbanism—temporarily transforming underused but high-value urban areas into a thriving cultural experience.

PROXY is a content machine tied to the pace of contemporary culture, where content constantly changes on our computers, televisions and mobile devices. Here events, retail spaces, art and even food offerings will rotate through PROXY's open framework of temporary structures, invoking a flexibility between people, architecture, and the city. PROXY embraces the vast diversity of the city and encourages the rotation of new ideas, start-up business, and innovative art installations, which come and go like new visitors to the site.

PROXY is a space for thoughtful experimentation to occur: changing public perception of what is possible, allowing the city to become a more open and playful construct. Conceived with the knowledge of its short lifespan on the site and operating under the motto HERE FOR NOW, PROXY is an investigation into the potentials of impermanence: stressing the importance of presence, heightened engagement and of seizing the moment in our lives.

