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The Waking Revolution

The average person has four to six dreams each night, forgetting between ninety-five and ninety-nine percent of them (National Sleep Foundation). Dreams can be elusive—not just to remember, but also to understand. *The Oxford English Dictionary's* first entry for *dream*, defining it as "joy, … mirth, … music, … noise, [f]renzy, delirium, … [or] demonic possession," reveals that the confusion extends to the word itself ("dream., n.1"). This definition is neither relevant nor recognizable alongside the modern term, which has its own ambiguities. Today, *dream* can mean anything from "images, thoughts, and emotions, often with a story-like quality … during sleep" to "a prophetic or supernatural vision, … a daze, … [or] an ideal or perfect example of something" ("dream., n.2 and adj."). *Dream* can be a noun, an adjective, or a verb. But, *dream* cannot be traced. The relationship between the definitions is unknown; its origin, whether Germanic or early Scandinavian, is disputed ("dream., n.2 and adj.").

In this light, it might be fitting that the author of the "Sleep-Worker's Enquiry" is unknown. The essay comes with no context besides that which can be surmised from the text itself. Provoked by recent work-related dreams, a post-Marxist techie, likely within Germany, the United States, or the United Kingdom, struggles with his role and agency in capitalist society, his relationship to others within that society, and his relation to his own labor ("Sleep-Worker's Enquiry"). After several pages of deliberation, he concedes that "It must surely appear foolish to

place any hope — at least in an immediate sense — in the nature of this mental work and its products, in the internet or in 'immaterial labour'" ("Sleep-Worker's Enquiry"). However, it seems that those very dreams which have subjugated him may be the keys to freedom and true "recalcitrance."

To understand how this might be the case, it is important first to understand what exactly the sleep-worker means by a *dream*. From the start of his enquiry, the sleep-worker describes *dreams* in general as his "unconscious mind's meanderings" ("Sleep-Worker's Enquiry"). However, he seems to be haunted by something slightly more specific: "dreaming *inside the logic* of [his] job … [when] the very movement of [his] mind is transformed … hardwired [to that of his job] … [like] someone rapidly becoming acquainted with a new language" ("Sleep-Worker's Enquiry"). This fear is centered on the dissolution of that barrier which separates the worker's personal life from his work-life, both ideologically and practically.

The sleep-worker hints at the ideological significance of this melding between work and life. While he never blatantly develops these thoughts, the sleep-worker's words easily lend themselves to the imagination of a future dystopia. In a *1984*-esque turn of events, this new "wiring" poses the imminent danger of becoming one's own natural language—possessing the whole mind and turning into the very framework of the conscious and subconscious mind—such that the mind loses the ability to "scan across [these] processes with a pseudo-objectivity… [and eventually loses] awareness of the particularity of one's own thought" ("Sleep-Worker's Enquiry"). The thought-dominating world of internet-age capitalism threatens to become everything, such that it is impossible to distinguish the thought from code, the dream from reality, or the worker from the human. Once thoughts become code, thinking equates working, even in a dream. The worker becomes less free than a machine since he is not separated from the

commodity he creates. In this extreme scenario, Marxist theory itself disintegrates—the fetishization of the commodity ceases as the base (means of production) and superstructure (ideology) merge into one.

But the sleep-worker seems more concerned by the immediate, much more physical implications of the *dream*. Suddenly, by dreaming in code, not only is he spending his free-time (in terms of responsibility and compensation) thinking about work, but he is also performing real labor. He wakes up having come up with the solution to some bug that he had missed in his waking hours of work, but due to the intangible nature of the code he creates in his sleep, present only in his mind and then on the internet, he cannot expect anything in return. Even his labor becomes nothing more than an illusion. In the hypothetical case that the worker would be compensated for his sleep-work, how would he begin to measure the time he worked? How would he confront his boss to explain that he wants to get paid for a dream? For him, everything in a sense becomes a dream—his labor-time, his exchange-value, even the use-value of his illusory commodity on the internet.

It is this same amalgamation of the tangible and intangible under the umbrella of the *dream* which makes it as much of a tool for freedom and revolution as it is for subjugation. Just as the worker "moderate[s his] social life in order not to make working life a misery," the dream enables the worker to moderate his working life to make his personal life more pleasant ("Sleep-Worker's Enquiry"). In fact, the coder's own language of thought is capable of imposing itself on his code. This is the first example of revolution the sleep-worker displays. He pushes against his superiors in order to advocate and implement "moralistic 'best-practices', of the freedom of information" ("Sleep-Worker's Enquiry"). In this sense, by turning his work into his revolution, the sleep-worker does not shoot himself in the foot the same way he does with his other micro-

revolutions, like reading during the workday or conversing with friends online. However, this revolution is ultimately in vain. It is nothing more than a paradox as "The systematic normativity with which [his] working practice is shot through is merely a universalisation of capital's own logic" ("Sleep-Worker's Enquiry"). The key to breaking this cycle is to do it within the *dream*. As he sleeps, he is just as likely to invent new code to fit personal values as he is to fix a random bug. In this manner, he stands for his values without doing actual work. Still, he has not done much to free himself from the chokehold of capitalism.

If the *dream* is to allow for meaningful revolution its context must change. Instead of dreaming during one's own free time, creating meaning out of what is not there, the exact opposite must take place: the worker must find a way to dream while awake, creating meaning out of what is there. Daydreaming does not suffice in this respect. Dreaming *on* the job is only a slightly better alternative to dreaming *about* or *in* one's job. It proves no different than wasting time that must be made up elsewhere, in stress or unpaid work. It also fails to have any impact on the real world. Instead, one must *dream* in a different sense of the word. One must become obsessed. One must become possessed. One must become sick. For "It is only when sickness comes, and [the worker] is rendered involuntarily incapable of work, that [he] really regain[s] any extra time 'for [him]self' ("Sleep-Worker's Enquiry"). By having a *dream* and a related *dream*-job, an aspiration for which the mode of labor is just as fulfilling as the final product, one revolts against the idea of work itself. One becomes incapable of work because that work is inseparable from one's enjoyment. Work becomes play and work becomes personal life such that play and personal life equate capital. In this model, capitalism flourishes at no expense to the worker. Instead of being bothered by work invading one's dreams or paradoxically partying to the point of incapacitation in a futile attempt to make up for the fun one missed during the work-

week, life becomes a homogenous endeavor of pleasure in labor. This begs the question if such a condition is possible.

"Sleep-Worker's Enquiry" makes it seem like there is no way for the laborer to escape becoming a victim of his own labor. And yet, a closer examination reveals that the *dream* which can accentuate this oppression also maintains the ability to destroy the idea of work. While the sleep-worker fails to realize or address this hope within his enquiry, the "Sleep-Worker's Enquiry" in itself can be viewed as an example of just that. The piece is a symbol of hope and a symbol of victory against the oppression of capitalism, despite all it suggests. In its most basic form, the "Sleep-Worker's Enquiry" is nothing more than some internet code. It is by definition *work* in that its creation required labor and time which was compensated monetarily. In fact, it can be ordered online for $15 (including shipping). The author, presumably the sleep-worker, found time to write it in his free-time, which he usually spends getting wasted in an attempt to enjoy the portion of his life that he controls. This suggests that he enjoyed writing it, found it worthy of his own time even. Still, the piece has no reference to an author at all, not even as "Anonymous." This could be interpreted in a few ways: either the title is enough to refer to the piece and the author simultaneously (the labor and the laborer) because of their unity, or the work was made in a dream, such that it can't legitimately be claimed as labor or attributed to a laborer. In both cases, it proves a tangible and meaningful form of revolt in pursuit of a personal aim, a personal *dream*.

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