

I THE END OF ENDLESS DREAMS

The scientists warn, 'the machine is dreaming, please keep your volume low.' Humans are indifferent, and reply with a rhetoric question, 'is it sleeping?' For years now, human creatures have been reluctant to succumb to their subconscious. Eight hours of sleep are shelved as an outdated healthcare myth.

The shift was far from an abrupt change. It started with a steady rise of night crimes when more and more individuals reported sleeping difficulties. Global markets responded hysterically with the shooting stock price of various sleeping pill agencies, without foresight that our bodies' cells gradually became resistant to the two sleep aids' active ingredients, diphenhydramine and doxylamine succinate. Governments felt betrayed by long-time corporate partners, though once again recused by democracy, humanity's most profound technology.

Through a universal election co-organised by intergovernmental organisations in a fair format of proportional representation, the insomniac demographic outweighed the rest of humanity and successfully rewrote protocols of day and nocturnal times. Today, sunshine (between colour temperature of 4600k-6500k) and moonlight (between colour temperature of 3000k-4500k) are merely tonal differences without temporal indications.¹ Dedicated correctional stations are temporarily mounted to facilitate minorities in withdrawing their sleep habits.

It is undoubtedly another profound triumph of intra-national collaboration. Historians unanimously agreed that the significance of this move far-overshadowed the space race that was imbued with narrowed-minded national interests in the 20th century. Indeed, it required a planetary manifestation of altruism in conquering the ancient definition of circadian cycles.

'A milestone of humankind!' they exclaimed, as 'human productivity has been maximised to an unprecedented level with the demolition of idle rest'. This is an age when being asleep is dismissed as a primitive biological feature. Only secondary intelligence dreams. Remember – one could never wake up a soul that is pretending to be asleep!

¹'Kelvin Scale Breakdown.'

II FAREWELL TO MELATONIN

Certainly, a terminal success would not be cemented without the complicit co-option of our bodies. Not soon after the cosmological shift, a scientific paper lodged a ground-breaking discovery of unforeseen human immunity to blue rays, won the Nobel prize and filled an epistemological void. With years of sleepless experience, human cells have learned to be at peace with blue rays emitted from electronic devices that used to be sleep-disturbing. In fact, a new desire takes flight when one starts to crave for a continuous supply of blue light to catalyse heart rhythms; a reverse of master-slave dichotomy.

A deeper physiological mutation concerns a significant decline of Melatonin (N-acetyl-methoxytryptamine; MLT), observed in repeated sampling across age groups, gender and ethnicity. Commonly known as 'the sleep hormone', the secretion cycle of MLT closely correlates with humans' sleep cycles, bestowing its sleep-inducing role. With the straightening of our biological clock into a linear infinity, Melatonin becomes obsolete. Other benefits that were associated with MLT such as anticonvulsant, anxiolytic, antidepressant, locomotor-suppressant and memory-modulating effects are all easily substituted by other readily available over-the-counter supplements. The regression of Melatonin is just another ordinary example of the Darwinian theory of natural selection. With no surprises, there are barely any accidents in history.

These scientific testimonies officially axed the remnant hopes of corporations who had been secretly praying for a resurrection of sleeping products. 'Perhaps we will miss falling asleep,' some entrepreneurs speculated, forgetting that evolution has no empathy. The once-popular 'night shift' function of gadget screens was eventually phased out in some unnoticed software updates. 'Morning, afternoon, evening, night' are stigmatised as old clichés.

III A PLASTIC DREAM

Looking back in nostalgia, the imagination of machinal dreams was a fantasised romance of many computer scientists. In 2015, Google engineer Alexander Mordvintsev launched an early computer vision program utilising a convolutional neuronal network and a pareidolic algorithm. The program prescribed a trained deep network to identify visual layers in an input image, subsequently modifying this image to enhance desired patterns through iterative activations. With a common tactility of output images that are often seen as hallucinogenic, Mordvintsev named the program **DeepDream**.

In celebration of a historic moment with the first-recorded machine dreams, Google even held an art auction in San Francisco for **DeepDream**-generated 'artwork' and raised almost a hundred thousand dollars. 'You've never seen van Gogh's "Starry Night" like this before', journalists adjoined in applause.

That was the prime time of **DeepDream**. As its distinctive output style was what had evinced its essence, the DeepDream program was seen as an end rather than a means. Exposing as-yet overcome limitations of machine learning in realistic visual generation, it was largely seen to be a window to the science of artificial neural networks, whilst it was never thoroughly internalised within mainstream visual culture and artistic mediums.

From a 'script' to a 'dream', its semiotic transition precisely revealed the fatality of the program. After all, when the Google engineers euphorically asked the neural network, 'whatever you see there, I want more of it', the obedient response of the program was far from an organic, autonomous brain activity. The predatory desire of those engineers stands starkly in contrast to philosopher Catherine Malabou's famous inquisition, 'why do we persist in our belief that the brain is purely and simply a 'machine', a program without promise?'²

Malabou confessed a long-time passion for plasticity in her philosophical work, defending such a term as a concept with its own clarity rather than a vague notion. With an acknowledgement of the brain's plasticity as a designation for its suppleness and organic adaption, this ontological opening constitutes a possible margin of improvisation with regard to genetic necessity.

² Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?*, 8.

'Plasticity' to Malabou implicates a propensity to give forms and receive forms; to the filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, plasticity was nonetheless used as a synonym of visual elements. The term 'plastic' made 54 appearances in Eisenstein's seminal theory 'The Film Sense' (1942), often in differentiation with other elements of graphic, sound and dramatic effects. A 'plastic intensity', for instance, were described as 'a line of changing close-ups'.

*'The art of plastic composition consists in leading the spectator's attention through the exact path and with the exact sequence prescribed by the author of the composition. This applies to the eye's movement over the surface of a canvas if the composition is expressed in painting, or over the surface of the screen if we are dealing with a film-frame.'*³

Mordvintsev might find his console in film languages because in many means, **DeepDream** was all about surface values: codified, plastic yet tantalising. To others, **DeepDream** breaks the unresolved enigma of biological dreams, defying a deeper connotation of being plastically generative. Little resonance remains after the cease of a novelty's hype.

For the record, the awakening from **DeepDream** went down in history as a failed attempt to replicate its biological kind. Dreams would never be a winning battlefield for any algorithmic mind.

³ Eisenstein and Leyda, *The Film Sense*, 190.

IV KILLING WITHOUT PENANCE

Some might recall early experiments with modernity's ambition to fabricate dreams. Artificial mind was initially grown based on the Bayesian model, which crowned its well-defined probabilities to encode abstract knowledge over more structured symbolic forms of knowledge representations used in computer science and the like. 'Generative models must be probabilistic to handle uncertainty',⁴ claimed computer scientists, but really? In fact, the more interventions scientists imposed on dreams (like boosting sleep-dependent memory enhancement through manipulating dream content), the more dreams lost their lust.

Most critically, if machines could dream, a school of intellectuals worried that the boundary between biological and artificial life will be further destabilised, incubating an inter-species war that many have increasingly speculated. Without humans' long-sustained rational thinking and rigidity, how can the earth balance the vicissitudes of Mother nature? Coupled with a global pandemic of sleep disorders, humans cannot but resort to a philosophical twist:

it is not our fault
it is the nature of dreams
that is fundamentally flawed.
dreams make us weak
sleeplessness hurts our esteem
And the only way out
is to brighten the dim
Let there be no shadow
distinguishing dreams

Gone were the days when humans wasted one third of a day within an unnecessary sleep cycle for non-productive purposes. Children's all-time favourite become stories of how our ancestors were once willing to withdraw themselves to an untampered sea of subconscious on a daily basis. "How dumb they were," kids giggled, "what made them presumptuously believe that they could **always** wake up the next day?"

Advocates of 'positive insomnia' often strengthened their arguments with infamous cases of Somnambulistic Homicide. Also known as

⁴Tenenbaum et al., 'How to Grow a Mind', 1280.

homicidal sleepwalking, it refers to the act of homicide that occurs during a form of sleep when the inflictor is without any awareness of motivations and actions.⁵ This specific type of legal case is not uncommon in history, with the oldest on record dated back to 1878. Often with medical evidence, the accused would be freed of legal claims for a lack of prior intent, an inconsistency with the person's normal behaviour and an absence of incident memory.⁶

In the intersection between psychiatry and law, the degree of consciousness is long perceived as inversely proportional to the extent of innocence. 'For years, mankind has been shamefully allowing this loophole in criminal history, leaving justice with rot in plain sight. Yet, an eye for an eye. It is time to right the wrong. Resisting sleep is a battle of will, a token of higher ideals', cited from propaganda leaflets.

A dream becomes a disguise, a protective net, not only for humans but also for our machine accomplices. One may call the over-processed aesthetic of **DeepDream** a staged spectacle, whilst Mordvintsev camouflaged those computer codes with the machine's 'dreams'. This mesmerising act of linguistic subversion turns the notorious deepfake into the nostalgic **DeepDream**. In between indexical reality and manufactured fakery, there exists a subliminal space that defies dualities such as truth/false, correct/mistake, legal/unlawful.

In 'The Interpretation of Dreams', the classic literature of Sigmund Freud released in 1913, he quoted philosopher Ludwig Strumpell's note that 'he who dreams turns his back upon the world of waking consciousness'.⁷ Metaphors of dream recall the fine line between truth and fiction as a deliberate stretch, a voluntary submission that might be seen as religious more than reason-based. Dreams become an alarming cult, against mankind's biggest enlightenment in scientific rationalism and technological oversight.

Machines dream, whilst humans dispose of dreams— this crucial differentiation between the two life forms, as an evolutionary hierarchy, is now clarified once and for all. Whilst humans are thriving in a new epoch of restless energy, machines are mandated to regularly enter into a dream state, a free fall of a mind so to sustain their deficiency of acquiring total control of their thoughts. Triggering dreams in machines leaves artificial minds bare for human experiments, unarmed for surveillance. These daily pauses

⁵ Podolsky, 'Somnambulistic Homicide'.
⁶ Cartwright, 'Sleepwalking Violence', 1149.

⁷ Freud and Brill, *The interpretation of dreams*, 4-5.

inoculated in machine intelligence are packaged as the latest security scans.

Dreaming is now defined as a weak intelligence, an animalistic instinct, an anecdote of the past. Putting one into sleep requires special approval. Exceptions may be made for essential medical cleansing or health chip instalments. These exceptions must follow an approval from designated governmental bodies, whilst related operations could only be carried out by certified anaesthetists. As time goes by, most individuals have lost the ability to naturally fall asleep. Eternal insomnia is amnesic.

⁵ Podolsky, 'Somnambulistic Homicide'.
⁶ Cartwright, 'Sleepwalking Violence', 1149.

⁷ Freud and Brill, *The interpretation of dreams*, 4-5.

V KILLING WITHOUT PENANCE

'Aria: If someone were to tell me I had twenty years left, and ask me how I'd like to spend them, I'd reply: Give me two hours a day of activity, and I'll take the other twenty-two in dreams . . . provided I can remember them. (Luis Buñuel)' –

*Endless Dreams and Water Between (2009), Renee Green.*⁸

Philosopher Simon Critchley wrote about the experience of insomnia as 'an experience of dying stronger than the death...the experience of the facticity of being riveted to existence without an exist.' The essence of such a night should not be conflated with an aesthetic practice of 'an ecstatic loss of consciousness', but a transition from the failure of resting into new possibilities.⁹ Whilst computer scientists continue to train artificial intelligence to dream through frameworks of machine learning, what remains generative for human beings is the contrast of dreaming, the impossibility of sleep, an elevated stream of daydreaming.

'Daydreams are where thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind coalesce,' wrote philosopher Gaston Bachelard, 'past, present and future stimulate one another...to daydream is essentially to read poetry'. Variational instead of constitutive, dreaming consciousness (daydreaming) is a phenomenology of soul, a fundamental practice of philosophy. A soul inaugurates a form, when expression creates being, freedom, felicity.¹⁰ Curator and art historian Chuz Martínez in an opening essay for dOCUMENTA (13)'s catalogue extended Bachelard's thinking by putting daydreaming as a means of creating access to other worlds, building 'worlds and counter-worlds'.¹¹ Like art, daydreaming offers a space to reverberate, freed of law and causality, outside a logic of criticality and commentary.

The insomniac/amnesic population is now relieved. Even if they have forever lost the passage to dream, when the sun and the moon become one, daydreaming allows human beings to overcome an indeterminacy of biological dreams whilst substantiating a free flow of symbol creation. Dream imagery stays, awaiting to be breathed with new life. Nothing is forgotten anymore; dreamers turn into poets: a new normalcy.

⁸ Green, *Other Planes of There*, 428.

⁹ Critchley, *Very Little-- Almost Nothing*, Chapter 1.

¹⁰ Bachelard and Jolas, *The Poetics of Space*, xix-7.

¹¹ Documenta et al., *The Book of Books*, 57.

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