mother's annual 2016

Yuri Pattison *sunset provision*
November - January

Since present-day man, as soon as he opens his eyes to life, finds himself surrounded by a superabundance of technical objects and procedures forming an artificial environment of such compactness that primordial nature is hidden behind it, he will tend to believe that all these things are there in the same way as nature itself is there without further effort on his part: that aspirin and automobiles grow on trees like apples.[i]

In 2014, British Airways trialled a new device, the so-called 'Happiness Blanket'. Comprising a fibre-optic blanket attached to a headset worn by the passenger, this somewhat infantilising device recorded how the passenger was feeling: it would glow red if they were anxious, and hum indigo blue when content, for example when asleep or eating. By this, BA could then ascertain how to make flying more pleasurable for its passengers. Harmless enough, you would think: through this simple technology, our happiness becomes visualised, readable, and tangible; subsequently, however, it is of course capitalised. The productive data it mines keeps the passenger, though happy, in a state of somnolent, unwaged labour.

In *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (2013), Jonathan Crary describes one of the most insidious conditions specific to late capitalism as: *a general inscription of human life into duration without breaks, defined by a principle of continuous functioning.*[ii] One of the dominant obstacles to this mode of life is, quite obviously, sleep: it is difficult to make the sleeping subject either work or buy anything. As Crary says: *sleep will always collide with the demands of a 24/7 universe…The stunning, inconceivable reality is that nothing of value can be extracted from it.*[iii] But if sleep cannot be made fully productive, it can certainly be made malleable. Studies have suggested that before industrialisation, and with the ubiquity of electric light, in particular, humans went about the business of sleeping quite differently: it in fact usually comprised two distinct periods of sleep, with a break in the middle for visiting neighbours, eating, or sex.[iv] Modernity and its eight-hour working day, then, brought about a particular remodelling of sleep; as a result, a modern idea of sleep has always been shaped in technology's image. What differentiates the contemporary moment is that the standard working day is breaking down; sleep is atomised, in turn. And so if we can only grasp a few minutes of it before we must work again, it must be infallible, bulletproof sleep.

Consequently, inroads are being quite forcefully made. Becoming remade in work's likeness, sleep transforms into a kind of pre-work: transforming, quite literally, into something that is laboured - no longer a question of just shutting down, a domain apart. This is happening in two ways: firstly, the messy unpredictably of sleep — its humanness — is curtailed on a metabolic level, either through sleep-inhibiting 'smart' drugs (Modafinil, Ritalin, Adderall, Piracetam), or natural chemicals that conjure sleep, nearly unwarranted, like 5 HTP[v] or Melatonin. Secondly, the body's unruliness is further diminished through incessant technological monitoring; mobile devices like the FitBit, alongside applications like Flux or the iPhone's Bedtime, and even 'smart' *beds*, serve to monitor our sleep patterns, to track and administer our human foibles: they tell us how many steps we take each day, and how many more we should take; paternalistically, they 'nudge'[vi] us when it is time to 'wind down' and when it is time for sleep; they even assess how good or useful that sleep really was. Taken together, these tactics conspire towards a definition of the human that is almost dispensed with sleep as a biological function, regimenting it into something approaching a machine ideal. Its repudiation begins to look like a mark of distinction. Sleep becomes a system of calculation, preferably something no longer natural at all. The ideal end is, of course, to be at all times productive. 'Sleep mode' means that we are always available, never really off.[vii]

To sleep in this new dawn, seemingly means to be surrounded by things: expensive, invasive things. These things are becoming increasingly necessary: several life insurance providers now provide discounts if sanctioned to assess personal FitBit data, an association that is surely to become the norm. In this way, a technology that was, up to very recently, non-existent, comes to determine even the body's viability. In Yuri Pattison's *sunset provision* we can get a sense of this new arrangement with two spaces, ostensibly for sleeping: *memory foam memory* (2016), and *memory foam remembers* (2016).[viii] Within the broad, deep space of the gallery, these two sleep-pods seem unmoored, not at all recognisable with a shared vocabulary of sleep. Part accelerationist capsule hotel, part laboratory, the

two setups are, nonetheless, designed for rest; but to make it the very best that it can be, in the interests of work. In each of them, a memory foam mattress sits on the floor. These two mattresses are encircled by the sophisticated accoutrements of contemporary sleep. Two light therapy devices, like a pair of high-tech death masks, sit atop two scarcely comfortable-looking pillows: where the sleeper should be. In *memory foam memory*, a disquieting haze of vaporised melatonin seeps out into the air from an upturned bottle; in *memory foam remembers* a computer tablet is strewn across the bare mattress, still plugged in, as though the sleeper had been using it until just now. Above the two sleep-stations, LED panels output controlled levels of light, in much the same way as the computer application Flux sets the level of screen brightness in concert with the real sun. A panoply of other objects, among them adapters, USB chargers, white noise sound conditioners, ear plugs, and so on, sit, pregnant, all within arm's reach of the one purportedly in repose; who can of course switch back on, in an instant. The at-times abject, human body is nowhere to be seen. No warmth, no natural oozes, no swathes of crumpling sheets; here the task of sleeping has been fully rationalised, various technologies working to place the sleeper in a fully technological torpor.

When techno-capitalism colonises the dream-space like this, it takes on a tinge of autopoiesis: its inevitability begins to look like that of the natural world; businesses, on failing, are 'sunsetted,' a phrase that inflects human decisions with all the determinism of the waning sun. Cast in this pseudo-mystical light, technology becomes a place of dreams, even transcendence; we can see this, for example, in Pattison's *(infinite corridor, infinite) Sunset Provision*, a video projected on to a provisional-looking dust sheet, suspended from one of the many Unistrut vertices that have been installed to crisscross the gallery space above head height. In the video, a corridor fills with blazing light, receding back as far as the camera's, and our, eyes, can see. Filmed in the longest corridor of the venerable Massachusetts Institute of Technology, it pictures what has come to be known as the MIThenge, whereby the sun's rays fully envelop it, in a manner akin to its less contemporaneous reference points. The event, which transpires on particular days in January and November, is a jostling, eager, affair; supplicants crowd the hallway, which is only so long and so wide. It lasts a matter of minutes, and so no one is greedy. A few seconds are all anyone takes, one person gasping out from the adjoining rooms to bathe in the warm light as another leaves, suffused with all the redemption of the sublime.

Technology, it would seem, has become as beguiling and as natural, as religion: the symbolic birthplace of the Internet, a kind of techno-Bethlehem. This techno utopianism stretches back at least to the sixties, where at MIT J.C.R. Licklider sketched his ideas for a 'Galactic Network' of computers; soon after the advent of the web in 1989, techno-evangelist John Perry Barlow staked out a new 'civilization of the Mind in Cyberspace'.[ix] This civilisation has not come to pass: now, Silicon Valley engineers have become prophets; they drop LSD at Burning Man,[x] or 'microdose' it on a daily basis, not to situate themselves outside of capitalism — as their hippie precursors sought to do — but to work more efficiently: to channel and make themselves conduits for capitalism's vital forces. As a result of this shift, transcendence itself has become productive, and monetised. Pattison's MIThenge makes this apparent; like a pilgrimage, it is dependent on a subsequent declaration of experience: *I was there, man*. And, if many have claimed that we are in Anthropocene, the geological era in which humans play the primary role in the geological and ecological makeup of the planet, *(infinite corridor, infinite) Sunset Provision* seems to suggest that the laws of time itself are becoming technological: that second nature (capitalism) is quickly coming to assume first nature, 'like clockwork,' as Bruno Latour put it.[xi]

On the gallery's floor lie a trio of small sculptural forms: *dust, scraper, fan 2.7 (winter)*; *dust, scraper, fan 2.8 (productivity)*, *dust, scraper, fan 2.9 (stack) (broken)*. These are recognisable in form, if not purpose. Three transparent perspex cases, two of which are stacked, inside of which there is a strange panoply of items. Gluts of computer cables are interspersed by a packet of Modafinil, and other, rogue tablets — apparently 5 HTP and Piracetam - are strewn within the perspex surface. Blue and yellow cable ties perform an indistinct act of fastening. Thick black line-in cables extend out from the cases towards a power source in the gallery ceiling, but towards what end, is unclear. Each of the three resembles a computer taken apart, splayed in transparency; there is a fan, a server, in each, but these do not work - or at least not in any traditional way. Stunted, cyborg machines: bodily acceleration alongside technological ineptitude, neither one nor the other. Their fans suck in air rather than spit it out. We are now all used to the terminology of data: it mines, it sweeps, and it collects. Here, the technological apparatus enacts these on a metabolic level; not content with data, it gorges on our air, our dust particles, even our sebum. Pattison shows us the increasing proximity between the human and non-human, on which contemporary technology depends: technology does not simply become more human, but we also grow more technological in turn. For Donna Haraway, and many other feminist theorists, this melange presents a new dawn for human society. The cyborg is a figure of radical possibility. Being fundamentally split — neither fully human nor fully technological — it has no past to

speak of; thus it cannot cling on, or seek a return to, any idealised state of affairs.[xii] Outside a teleology of patriarchy, it represents a node of possibility for its undoing. *sunset provision* shows us, however, just how accommodating techno-capitalism really is: becoming cyborg-like does not imply a radical undoing of the status quo, but simply its further calcification. As nature becomes more technological, technology looks more natural in turn; and, as the human becomes subject to processes of techno-capitalist rationalisation, those changes do not seem ideological, but as routinely anticipated as the leaves that drop each autumn.

Sunset *provision*, though: this gives away the lie. The sunset, here, is dependent on access, on who does the providing, to whom, and at what cost. It can be rescinded at any point. Outside, the natural sunset is not provided, and so cannot be taken away: it is simply a fact. *Human* decisions, both material in form and consequence, determine the perceived autopoiesis of contemporary technological form. Pattison's work figures the heightened dreamscape of late capitalism: where sleep, no longer natural, only becomes achievable alongside an arsenal of expensive, intimate commodities; better still, where we have done away with sleep altogether; where technology usurps religion; where the boundary that separates the human, from the non-human, has become moot. These individual elements coalesce into something exceedingly close to dystopia. For, as second nature takes the place of first nature, and first nature grows increasingly constructed and vitiated in turn, what remains? The MITHenge as site of devotion; even our dreams become a question of provision. Those dreams, surely, will be scarce; if not, they will be, by necessity: the natural order of things.

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[i] José Ortega y Gasset, in David Nye, *Technology Matters: Questions to Live With* (Cambridge, Mass & London: MIT Press, 2006), pg. 190
[ii] Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (London & New York: Verso, 2013), pg. 8
[iii] Ibid, pg. 10-11
[iv] Stephanie Hegarty, 'The myth of the eight-hour sleep,' *BBC News*, 22 February 2012
[v] 5 HTP (5-Hydroxytryptophan) is a naturally occurring amino acid and precursor to the neurotransmitter serotonin, which is said to play a role in happiness. The drug, typically marketed as a supplement, can be bought in heath food stores or online, with no regulation, and is said to improve mood and sleep quality. Its efficacy in treating clinical depression is, however, doubtful.
[vi] Richard H. Thaler and Cass R. Sunstein, *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness* (London & New York: Penguin, 2009)
[vii] Ibid 3, pg. 13
[viii] All works 2016, unless stated.
[ix] John Perry Barlow, 'A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace' (1996). Barlow was once, curiously if not surprisingly, a member of the Grateful Dead.
[x] Burning Man is a weeklong festival that has taken place in the remote Nevada desert every August since 1986. Ostensibly counter-culture – famously, no money is supposed to be exchanged, with each visitor instead being encouraged to bring items to barter – recently it has become popular with Silicon Valley workers looking to unwind and network. Some of these have brought staff to make their stay there more comfortable, even private chefs.
[xi] Bruno Latour, 'On the affects of capitalism' (2014)
[xii] Donna Haraway, *The Haraway Reader* (New York & London: Routledge, 2004), pg. 9